



a family home

TREWITHEN HOUSE, NEAR GRAMPOND, HAS BEEN IN THE SAME FAMILY FOR 10 GENERATIONS

Words by **Alice Westgate**, photographs by [westcountryphotographers.com/Sam Morgan Moore](http://westcountryphotographers.com/SamMorganMoore)



“This is still a family home, and that makes it special,” says Michael Galsworthy, owner of the glorious Trewithen estate and guardian of all its treasures. “It is marvellous that the house continues to live and breathe.”

As you take in the beautiful Palladian facade of Trewithen House, you sense that little has changed here in the 300 or so years since it was built. And inside, the feeling remains the same, as family possessions accumulated over the years are still as lovingly tended as they were when they were first acquired.

The reason for this is quite simple, but also quite astonishing: this estate has remained in the possession of the same family since it was established in the early 18th century. It has passed down through nearly 10 generations but, incredibly, everyone along the way has looked after things so beautifully that the interior is a flawless time capsule.

Michael Galsworthy first lived here when he was three years old and, after many years abroad, returned to Cornwall in 1974. He is as enthusiastic about the house and his heritage as he is knowledgeable, full of anecdotes about his ancestors. A tour of Trewithen in his company encompasses tales of derring-do from characters such as Raffles, his five-times great-uncle and founder of Singapore, to asides about portrait painters with a soft spot for the married woman they were painting.

Trewithen lies near Grampound, six miles from Truro. Its roots can be traced back to 1086 when it was mentioned as a smallholding in the Domesday Book. By Elizabethan times it had become a more substantial dwelling, and the labyrinthine

cellars from that era still survive. But twice in later years, that Elizabethan core was surrounded by increasingly more complex building plans.

The first of these redesigns was in 1715 and was the brainchild of Philip Hawkins, an ancestor of Michael Galsworthy, who used granite from his quarry in Pentewan, near St Austell, to build a grand dwelling designed by London architect Thomas Edwards. The stone has a peculiar ability, thanks to a bloom of lichen, to appear pink when the humidity in the air increases. “It’s more reliable to look at the stone than listen to the weather forecast,” quips Galsworthy.

The second change came in 1745 when Philip’s nephew, Thomas Hawkins, was in charge of Trewithen. He decided to redevelop the house along more sophisticated London lines to impress his potential father-in-law, a wealthy merchant who was unwilling to hand over his beautiful daughter, Anne Heywood, to live in a building “in that rude and distant place of Cornwall” unless it was made more glamorous. Thomas appointed fashionable architect Sir Robert Taylor of Greenwich to make the necessary changes.

The result is something quite out of character for Cornwall, and the grandeur of the main flying staircase in the centre of the house, with bowed doors opening off it and a huge oval-domed roof-light above it, comes as quite a surprise.

“I don’t think that in strictly architectural terms, there is much else like it in the county,” says Galsworthy as he throws open doors to surprise visitors with sights such as the achingly grand rococo dining room, known as the Grand Saloon, with

PREVIOUS PAGE: KNOWN AS THE GRAND SALOON, THE DINING ROOM IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE LONDON SOPHISTICATION BROUGHT TO TREWITHEM BY THOMAS HAWKINS. THE GALSWORTHY FAMILY STILL USES IT STILL AT CHRISTMAS AND AS A VENUE FOR CHARITY FUNDRAISING CONCERTS
THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE: TREWITHEM IN ALL ITS GLORY; AN OIL PORTRAIT OF SIR CHRISTOPHER HAWKINS; A SPINET WHICH BELONGED TO THOMAS HAWKINS’ WIFE ANNE, AND WAS MADE BY THE FAMOUS HARPSICHOARD MAKER THOMAS HANCOCK



its decorative plasterwork and colonnaded arcades at either end.

Galsworthy’s enthusiasm is equally infectious when it comes to the stories surrounding the portraits of his ancestors that line the stairs. “They are all members of the Hawkins family,” he says, “painted by portrait painters of the time including Allan Ramsay, Opie and Sir Joshua Reynolds.” Moving into the drawing room, he points out six Chippendale chairs with embroidered seat pads that were a present from Anne Heywood’s father, who wrote in a letter that he wanted her to embroider them to keep her away from “routs and gaming parties”. Galsworthy is clearly tickled by the idea.

Next, Trewithen passed to Anne and Thomas’s son Christopher Hawkins, a successful barrister in London and vice

Christopher Hawkins extended the estate so he could ride from the north Cornish coast to the south on his own soil

chairman of the Stannaries who used his wealth to extend the estate because he wanted to be able to ride from the north Cornish coast to the south “without setting hoof on another man’s soil”. Sir Christopher, as he became known, was given a baronetcy for services to the House of Commons and was a great philanthropist and businessman; he opened a

successful tin mine at Newlyn East (East Wheal Rose) and later some china clay pits, building a railway line and a harbour at Pentewan in order to transport the output to his customers; he also founded numerous schools and village halls.

Subsequent members of Galsworthy’s family were no less illustrious, including his grandfather, George Johnstone, who laid out Trewithen’s famous gardens and helped to bring electricity to central Cornwall. The family’s library is filled with volumes on mining, politics and law, testament to the learning and interests of generations past, and includes many fascinating first editions. Intriguingly, John Wesley’s personal copy of *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A Kempis sits among them, signed on the flyleaf in his own hand.

Michael Galsworthy continues to add layers of his own family’s history to the rich mix at Trewithen, including photographs and portraits of his own children, giving a sense that the long tradition of guardianship will continue. “There’s a tremendous sense of history to the place,” adds Galsworthy, “and yet a sense of intimacy, too.”

It’s a fascinating combination, one that he hopes will inspire more and more visitors to come and see the delights of Trewithen for themselves. **1**

Trewithen, Grampound, near Truro TR2 4DD. Tel. 01726 883647, www.trewithengardens.co.uk. The house is open on Mondays and Tuesdays until July 31, from 2 to 4pm. Tours take approximately 40 minutes. Adults, £5.75; groups (20 plus), £4.75 per person. Prices are discounted if combined with garden entry

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THIS PICTURE OF TREWITHEM, PAINTED ON SILK, WAS COMMISSIONED BY MICHAEL GALSWORTHY AND IS THE WORK OF THE SWANBOROUGH SISTERS FROM ST MARY’S ON THE ISLES OF SCILLY; THE DRAWING ROOM IS PAINTED YELLOW, A COLOUR BASED ON THE ORIGINAL DECORATIVE SCHEME SPECIFIED BY ARCHITECT SIR ROBERT TAYLOR, AND RECREATED WITH THE HELP OF NATIONAL TRUST PAINT EXPERTS; MICHAEL GALSWORTHY WITH PURDEY; JOHN WESLEY’S PERSONAL COPY OF THE IMITATION OF CHRIST BY THOMAS A KEMPIS; THE LAST CLOCK MADE BY 18TH CENTURY CLOCK-MAKER THOMAS MUDGE, AN ANCESTOR BY MARRIAGE MICHAEL GALSWORTHY; THE SMOKING ROOM CONTAINS MANY FIRST-EDITION BOOKS