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Let’s Stop Calling This a Crisis and Start Building More Homes

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Michael Heseltine’s legacy

Michael Heseltine left his mark on British politics, and he also has had a lasting effect on the Northamptonshire landscape. He and his wife, Anne, show Rachel de Thame around their arboretum.

POLITICIANS are, it seems, people upon whom legacy is bestowed as much as it is pursued. There are those who breathe fire as they are swept to power; there are those whose impact on history is more subtle and more permanent. For Heseltine there was the legacy of a love of trees, of a respect for landscape and of a commitment to planning. It was an influence that spread over the past 40 years at Thame House, near Thame in Oxfordshire, the family seat of Heseltine’s mother and sister. An influence that would continue to work even after Michael, his only brother, died in 1993. The Heseltines buy shares in plants, and exchange them with friends and family, finding satisfaction in the percentage of the seed that comes true. But for Anne, who also runs the grounds, the success of the arboretum is largely due to the care and attention the family has given to it. The care and attention has paid off. The garden has been awarded the Royal Horticultural Society’s Gold Medal – the highest award for a garden in the UK.

The garden is also a tribute to the man, a living museum of tree and shrub. The garden was started in the 18th century by Michael’s great-grandfather, Sir Erleigh, who provided much of the stock. The garden was then maintained by his mother and sister, and it continued to evolve with help from the designer George Carter-Campbell. There’s no doubt that it is a testament to the Heseltines, yet both agree they wouldn’t initially be looking for a garden, but for a certain sort of house. When they moved to Thame in 1972, they found themselves with about 40 acres of land, much of which was originally commercially managed from plantations to the south. The garden was originally a gilded 18th-century estate, and it was then taken over by Michael’s sister. The garden was then replanted with rhododendrons and azaleas, and was “Anne Heseltine’s”, the second owner. “The garden is a gardener’s garden,” says Anne. “It’s an area that’s just made up our minds.”

Over 40 acres of land, they have a collection of over 1,000 varieties of trees and shrubs. Alex, the couple show Rachel the grounds.

The smaller you plant it, the taller it will grow. It’s a starting point for the future, and it’s a great way to get started. The garden is also a testament to the Heseltines, and it is a garden that is now surrounded by trees, which will help to cement that legacy. A garden is not just the space where you can grow things, but it’s also a space where you can make a contribution to the community. It’s a space where you can make a difference.

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