# Heritage campaigner attacked amid controversy over Singleton Gardens demolition



A heritage campaigner has reported being attacked amid a contentious planning dispute at Singleton Gardens, a historic 150-year-old walled garden in Torquay, Devon, known for its association with Agatha Christie. David Redman, aged 62, a member of the local campaign group Save Singleton Gardens, claims he was assaulted by a man wearing a high visibility jacket near the garden, resulting in a lost tooth. The incident reportedly occurred on 22 April, just days after a local development firm commenced demolition work on the site over the Easter bank holiday.

Singleton Gardens, part of the conservation area that includes Singleton Manor—a Grade II listed building owned by a horticulturalist and local businessman—is considered a cultural heritage asset. The garden holds notable historical significance, frequently visited by famous author Agatha Christie, who would walk through it on her way to Meadfoot sea beach. Campaigners have highlighted the garden as "the beating heart of the community" and have opposed development plans for over five years.

The dispute centres on OJ Developments’ permission to partially renovate an existing gardeners' cottage on the site. While Torbay Council granted approval in March of the previous year for "a modest development on the existing structure," locals contend that the firm demolished the entire cottage during the Easter holiday, exceeding the scope of the permission. Photographs from the site show extensive rubble, prompting the council to issue a day stop notice to investigate potentially unauthorised work.

David Redman expressed his concerns about the loss of heritage and its impact on the local community and tourism. He said, "If we lose our heritage buildings, we are in danger of losing what it means to be British... They have ruined our lives with this and have destroyed future generations' heritage... It is an oasis of paradise here, but now, a significant part of it has been destroyed—and it has created an eyesore for tourism."

The campaign to protect Singleton Gardens has garnered support from notable figures, including Sir Tim Smit, founder of the Eden Project, and individuals associated with the royal household. English Heritage has described the gardens as "an unusual survivor," with Sir Tim expressing astonishment at previous planning proposals. The campaign group is working alongside the English Riviera Tourist Board and Torquay Museum to develop an Agatha Christie Heritage Trail in which Singleton Gardens will play a prominent role.

Following the reported assault, Devon and Cornwall Police confirmed they responded to calls about the incident on 22 April at Meadfoot Sea Road, Torquay. A spokesperson noted that "counter claims regarding the incident have been made against the reporting person," and that the case is under investigation. Mr Redman has reported the assault but has chosen not to press charges.

David Redman also stressed the importance of the site for educating younger generations about nature and food origins, indicating broader concerns about community and environmental preservation. He is collaborating with the Save Singleton Gardens group and an emerging movement named "Shame on You" to raise awareness of what they describe as an injustice and the council's alleged tolerance of illegal development activities.

In response to the unauthorised works, Torbay Council officials from planning enforcement and building control teams have taken action. They have visited the site multiple times, met with the developer and their engineers, and secured an agreement to restrict further work to minor repairs protecting a neighbouring building while investigations continue. The council stated, "A multi-disciplinary team including members of our Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health and Legal departments will be working to consider the next steps under planning and environmental law, including the possibility of enforcement action to control activity at the site."

Cllr Martin Brook, Chairman of the Planning Committee, emphasised the council’s firm stance on planning permission breaches, noting recent strengthening of the enforcement team to address such issues more effectively. He expressed hope that the actions taken would reassure residents and deter developers from undertaking unauthorised activities.

OJ Developments has been contacted for comment but has not yet responded.

The Daily Mail is reporting on the ongoing tensions between heritage campaigners, local authorities, and developers at Singleton Gardens, highlighting concerns over conservation, planning compliance, community impact, and safety following the reported assault of a campaigner during the dispute.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/devon/outdoors/walks/agatha_walk.shtml> - This archived BBC article details the Agatha Christie Mile in Torquay, a walk that includes landmarks associated with Agatha Christie, such as Beacon Cove, where she bathed as a young woman.
2. <https://www.englishriviera.co.uk/be-inspired/agatha-christie/agatha-christie-literary-trail> - This page provides information about the Agatha Christie Literary Trail in Torquay, highlighting sites like All Saints Church in Torre, where Agatha was baptized, and Beacon Cove, a favorite bathing spot for her.
3. <https://www.englishriviera.co.uk/be-inspired/agatha-christie/agatha-christie-mile> - This resource outlines the Agatha Christie Mile, a trail in Torquay that includes landmarks such as the Agatha Christie Memorial Bust and The Strand, where Agatha shopped with her mother.
4. <https://www.torquay.com/eat-drink-shop-play/agatha-christie-mile> - This page describes the Agatha Christie Mile in Torquay, marking 11 specific locations along a one-mile route around the seafront, each marked by a centenary plaque.
5. <https://melbahousetorquay.co.uk/agatha-christie-torquay/> - This article provides a detailed guide to the Agatha Christie Mile in Torquay, including descriptions of landmarks such as the Agatha Christie Memorial Bust and The Strand, where Agatha shopped with her mother.
6. <https://agathachristietorquay.co.uk/agatha-christies-torquay> - This website offers information about the Agatha Christie Mile in Torquay, including landmarks like The Grand Hotel, where Agatha and Archie Christie spent their honeymoon in 1914.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14665131/Moment-heritage-campaigner-attacked-developer.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data