

Alan's garden tip!



THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW
ALAN TITCHMARSH
NATIONAL TREASURE



Pictures: TIM MERRY



A STEP UP:
 Alan's tales
 are fascinating

HOW cool is this? I'm showing off my garden to the actual Alan Titchmarsh, TV icon and national treasure.

Well, I say "showing off". Really I just mean "showing". My garden is a tip. What sort of person, I ask him, lets them get into this kind of state? Alan smiles that comforting Titchmarsh smile. "A busy one, Mike," he reassures me. "You're clearly more of a wordsmith..."

Now, I should point out we're not in my garden as such. I'm just showing Alan a picture of it on my iPad. We're actually chatting at Fenton House in London's Hampstead, a fittingly handsome location for what this interview is meant to be about. Namely, Secrets Of The National Trust, Alan's Channel 5 show that's back soon for another run.

But I couldn't resist. Come on, if you get the chance to meet Alan Titchmarsh you're bound to want to quiz him on the thing he's most famous for, right?

But anyway, down to business: the National Trust. A bunch of old buildings, right? Popular with visitors aged 100-plus?

"It's not just about houses and gardens," Alan reminds me. "It's about the people who've lived in them, the personalities, how they lived, the fascinat-

Trust Titch homes in on history

ing stories they tell. My role as presenter isn't to show off my own knowledge. It's to open doors for the viewer, open windows and... open minds, really."

Alan adds: "Those living in centuries past led very different lives from ours. "That's what makes it so interesting. It enriches our lives to come across people who had different thoughts, different ways of living. And it points up the absurdity of today's generation apologising for things that happened 200 years ago. We weren't there. We don't know what it was like."

Even attitudes to slavery, Alan feels, should be seen in their historical con-

text: "One place we visit in the series is Penrhyn Castle where they'd made a lot of money in the sugar trade. They had about 700 slaves, which is obviously appalling to us now. But you have to look at the times."

The National Trust also looks after thousands of miles of coastline. "Its motto," Alan points out, "is 'For ever, for everyone'. It's about accessibility. It's OUR National Trust."

But is its work appreciated by all generations? "I don't have a downer on the younger generation," Alan insists. "They're very bright. They're aware of custodianship and stewardship, which

is what the Trust is all about. It does tend to be older people who visit these places because they have the time."

It's schoolkids who Alan is particularly keen to nurture an interest in the great outdoors.

"I've worked a lot with the RHS on their school gardening campaign. It's about encouraging kids to connect with the soil."

"They'll go away in their teens, but as soon as people get a house with a bit of garden they want to do something."

So anyway, back to my own backyard tip. "OK, what you need to do is to measure it up," says Alan, reaching for a pen and paper and sketching a few shapes for me. "Draw a little. You could do it on the back of a fag packet."

"You can always change it if it's not right. It's not set in granite."

Well, I must say that's a relief.

And, er, do I owe Alan a consultancy fee for this?

"Yes, of course," he chuckles. "I generally charge in guineas."

● **Secrets Of The National Trust with Alan Titchmarsh returns to Channel 5 tonight at 8pm.**

ALAN'S FAVOURITES

FILM: Gosford Park
BOOK: *The Wind in the Willows*, by Kenneth Grahame
TV SHOW: *Vera*; **COMEDIAN:** Rob Brydon, right
SPORTSMAN: Andy and Jamie Murray
SONG: Night And Day **SINGER:** Ella Fitzgerald
BAND: The Temptations; **DRINK:** Gin and tonic
CITY: Venice; **HOLIDAY DESTINATION:** Cornwall
GADGET: Secretours; **APP:** WeatherPro
FIGURE FROM HISTORY: Jane Austen