

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL  
LITTLE DUNMOW, FELSTED

BURGATES

TL 656 217

The garden was developed by John Hedgecoe during the 1960s-1980s.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

From 1960 onwards, John Hedgecoe, Professor of Photography at the Royal College of Art, developed the garden from a potato field and nettle patch. He worked on the basis that the garden must have sculpture, old stonework and trees and be principally green. He preferred to plant all the flowering things away from the house. Initially there was only a small amount of land on the west side of the house and the first step was to make a boundary with the field beyond, using balustrading rescued from the Turkish baths at the Russell Hotel, London. He started the planting with a 30ft avenue of almond trees – placed with the lines converging and with each successive tree planted closer together to create an effect of distance.

Between the house and balustrade he laid a lawn. At one side of it he placed a sculpture by Bernard Meadows and in the centre a statue of St. John beneath a mulberry tree. To the south of this lawn he used Thuja to make the first of his garden rooms. This small rectangle contained a large ornamental urn until 1986 when he changed the setting to accommodate a circular pool and a fountain. He made a small patchwork garden near the southern end of the house and built a round shell covered house at the back of it, with beds divided by brick paths and planted with herbs and small perennials.

Beyond the patchwork garden he laid out an enclosed rose garden in a star shape and this small garden contained an assortment of memorabilia which Professor Hedgecoe acquired from the old Clapham Railway Museum. More land was gradually acquired on three sides of the garden.

Hedgecoe then planted a long avenue of *Salix matsudana 'Tortuosa'* and built a pool with a grand fountain at the far end as a focal point. On the southern side of the willows, a narrow lake was excavated, with an island in the middle. At one time there were said to be 120 different kinds of willows in the garden. At the far end of the lake a stone grotto overlooked the water. Inside there was originally a statue beneath stalactites made from the children's nappies dipped in cement. At the end of the lake nearest the house there was a small and secluded paved corner enclosed by iron railings and entered through gates guarded by stone eagles perched on pillars.

To the south of the lake, a plantation of alders, planes and maples and a bank created from the excavated soil screened two simple green enclosures. One of these had a grass platform at one end and a life size figure by Gabriel Cibber at the centre with a pair of *Liquidambar styraciflua*. The other had a single walnut tree shading a circular seat. Beyond was a long herbaceous border with traditional perennials such as wormwood, masterwort, sedums, phloxes, thalictrum, St. John's wort and acanthus as well as a series of lime trees. At the top end of the border there was a vegetable garden and nearby

a re-assembled C12 tithe barn which was once part of the nearby Little Dunmow Priory. A short canal in front of the barn was filled with rushes and water-lilies.

On the west side of the lake Hedgecoe then put 10 short wings of beech to frame an elegant temple containing a statue of St. George. Further west, an opening in a line of poplars revealed another area where a laburnum avenue, designed to become one long tunnel, led northwards to a distant statue of a cardinal. Eighteen varieties of flowering cherry formed another avenue at right angles to the laburnums. Within this space Hedgecoe designed a flag garden. Six wedge-shaped segments of clipped *Thuja plicata* are planted in a rectangle. The grass spokes between them converge on a circular pool and urn at their axis. Each segment was planted with shrubs and small trees according to themes of colour, season, berry or scent. Columns, stone ornaments, and statuary were added to this area which was intended to have been screened from the house by an evergreen hedge.

Cobbles were laid down round many of the statues, specimen trees and pools. The trees were often shaped by clipping. John Hedgecoe was good friends with Sir Frederick Gibberd and admits to a 'friendly competitive attitude to each other's gardens'.

In the early 1990s there were new owners and some of the garden to the south was sold separately. Most of the statues had gone but the grotto, flag garden, most avenues, shell house, patchwork garden and some specimen trees were still there. Most of the contorted willow trees were dead or dying. Nevertheless the framework was not unlike that of the original design.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING; ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

Burgates is in the village of Little Dunmow and lies on the west side of the road from the Flitch of Bacon pub to the old A120, about 100m. from the pub. It now has an area of about 2 hectares.

### **PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

The main house has been extended and a cottage is contained in the grounds. The Shell house is losing several scallops but seemed in good condition,

### **REFERENCES**

Chivers, S. & Woloszynska, S., 1987 *Gardens of the Heart*, Chatto and Windus Ltd  
Shepherd, Rose, 2004 'The man who shot the Queen' in *Night & Day*, March 5.

### **Images**

Hedgecoe, J., 1993 *John Hedgecoe's Basic Photography*, Collins and Brown  
Wildig, A. Private collection 1991, 2006

### **Personal Communications**

Professor John Hedgecoe  
The current owners

Researcher Ailsa Wildig; Site visit with Michael Leach 28 March 2006