

**MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL
GREAT TOTHAM**

MOUNTAINS

TL 862 129

One of the earliest Japanese gardens in Great Britain, created in the late C19/early C20 by the Hon. Lady Georgiana Du Cane and her daughters, the Misses Florence and Ella Du Cane.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Until the late C19 Mountains was a working farm. Archives sources show that Peter Du Cane III of Braxted Park was negotiating the purchase of Mountains Farm from a Mrs Scott in 1832. Together with Stowupland Wood, the asking price of the 197 acres was £8,000 which Du Cane felt was rather more than it was worth. Nonetheless the purchase was eventually completed, although the price paid is not known. The farm remained in agricultural production and became one of the outlying farms of the Du Cane estate.

Nearby Braxted Park had been the principal residence of the Du Cane family since 1751. Charles Du Cane II had inherited the Braxted Park estate in 1850, and with it came Mountains which had been purchased by his grandfather.

Charles Du Cane II, his wife the Hon. Georgiana Du Cane (née Copley, a daughter of Baron Lyndhurst) and family lived in Tasmania from 1869 to 1874 when Charles was acting as Governor. Florence and Ella were born during this posting. The unchaperoned girls were subsequently to travel extensively (remarkable at the time) and went on to have a significant influence on the creation of the garden at Mountains, for which they brought back several plants and ornaments from their travels in Japan. Their influence also extended further afield through the publication of several popular books, written by Florence and illustrated by Ella, about gardens in some of the countries that they had visited. One of the most popular, which was reprinted several times, was *The Flowers and Gardens of Japan* (1908). There is no specific mention of Mountains in Morant and no specific description in late C19/early C20 trade directories. A deed of 1750 refers to a messuage called 'Mouchstone alias Mountains and Stovers' together with 'all barns, stables, buildings, gardens, orchard lands, two meadows pasture and hereditaments'. By 1800 cartographic evidence suggests that, although a working farm, Mountains Farm (as it was then called) was a residence of some status. Immediately to the SW of the house lay a small area of parkland running across to an extensive area of woodland on the valley slope beyond. The park covered about 10 acres (4 hectares), lying in three fields subdivided by hedgerows. The fields are named on estate surveys of c.1800 and 1838 as 'Little Park' of 2 acres, and Upper and Lower Great Park, each of about 4 acres.

The first edition of the 25" OS map of 1874 shows the house bordered by a small orchard at its SW corner, adjoining a small formal garden divided into three sections abutting the SE façade of the house. Beyond the orchard lie the Little and Upper Great Park fields with scattered clump planting of mixed conifer and broadleaf, enclosed by a border of scrub/rough ground. Lower Great Park field has been cleared and converted to arable by this period. A small orchard lies immediately SW of the house. A track leads from the main approach to the house, across Upper Great Park past a large pond and on through Mountains Grove. The pond appears to be spring fed, the overflow running in a SE direction

beyond the house. This feature was later incorporated into the overall design of the garden by the Hon. Lady Du Cane.

It is probable that Lady Du Cane left Braxted Park around 1892 as that house was leased to the Lawrence family from 1892 to 1898, though the exact date of her move to Mountains is uncertain. In 1897 the architect, F.A. Ward, was commissioned to draw up a plan for alterations to the house at Mountains. It is not known if these plans were implemented. Kelly's Post Office Directory of 1898 records the Hon. Lady Du Cane being in residence at Mountains. Florence is also listed there, with her sister Ella at the nearby Beacon Hill House. Further extensions/alterations were drawn up and implemented in 1921 by the architect Gambier Parry who had previously worked on Beacon Hill House for Miss Ella Du Cane.

The second edition 25" OS map of 1897 shows the garden extended to the SE beyond the orchard, with additional planting enclosing the NE boundary of the gardens. This had been further enlarged and augmented with conifer when the third edition of the map was published in 1923.

Christopher Hussey visited Mountains and wrote about the garden in an illustrated article published in *Country Life* (14 March 1925). A sketch plan shows the layout of the garden which he describes as having been worked on by the Hon. Lady Du Cane for thirty years but extended over the last four years. Hussey describes it as 'an excellent example of how a small garden made with comparatively small expense, be made to give the utmost of colour, fragrance and variety'. The mature apple orchard had been retrained forming a division between the old and the more recently extended gardens. The author describes how Lady Du Cane utilised the combe or valley created by the brook to create a series of pools and waterfalls in what was known at the time as the 'Valley Garden', subsequently to be known as the Japanese Garden. The valley planting was illustrated in the *Country Life* article. Japanese iris brought from the Hori-Kiri gardens in Tokyo, along with other shrubs and rock plants, were planted throughout this area. Hussey commented that 'Lady Du Cane has had the good judgement not to push the requirements of a rock garden too far, so that the nature of the combe is still predominant.'

A thatched garden house built in Japanese style was built on the NW edge of the formal gardens affording views 'not quite centrally down the double border and as you sit beneath its shade, beyond the tulips and beneath the apple boughs you see the grey-blue levels and the silvery estuary' of the Blackwater. Japanese maples and cherries, under-planted with daffodil, were planted at the eastern extremity of the garden in a clearing cut into the earlier wooded garden boundary feature shown on the OS maps of 1897 and 1923.

Kathryn Bradley-Hole included Mountains in her *Lost Gardens of England* (2004). Here a previously unpublished view of the Valley or Japanese garden from the Country Life archive is included showing a gentle slope clad in azaleas, rhododendrons and well established maples.

Lady Du Cane died in 1926; her daughter Ella continued to live at Mountains. Burke's *Landed Gentry* records Ella Du Cane's death in November 1943 and then Florence living at Mountains. The house was purchased in 1998 by Mr and Mrs Mackenzie-Smith who restored the Japanese Garden after a long period of neglect. Research on the garden was included in the doctoral thesis of Dr Jill Raggett of Writtle College.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, BOUNDARIES, AREA, LANDFORM & SETTING

Mountains House stands on a ridge at an elevation of about 68m AOD. The ridge continues at more or less the same height to the south west, except for a narrow valley created by the brook, part of which is the site of the Japanese Garden. To the south east the land falls gently to Great Totham Lane at about 43m AOD. During the early part of the C21 a lake and extensive woodland planting were set into former agricultural land in this area, extending the amenity land beyond the formal gardens and meadows.

The formal gardens occupy approximately 1 hectare to the south of the house; the wider estate covers about 20 hectares. To the north it is bounded by Mountains Lane, to the west by Mountains Grove (Local Wildlife Site MAW 36), to the east by agricultural land and to the south by the amenity land.

ENTRANCES & APPROACHES

The house and grounds are approached by a gravel drive running south from Mountains Lane. There is no lodge and no entrance gate.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The house and the garden wall at its south east corner are listed Grade II*. The oldest part is timber framed C15/16 (now faced with red brick) with C18 and early C20 additions, also in red brick with peg tile roofs. There is a mixture of outbuildings to the north, some built by the present owners.

REFERENCES

- Bradley-Hole, K., 2004 *Lost Gardens of England*, Arum Press, 119-121
Burke, Sir B. & Pine, L.G., 1952 *A Genealogical & Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry, Burke's Peerage*
English Heritage Listed Buildings online, accessed 2/1/2010: Mountains LB no: 118969
Hussey, C., 1925 'Mountains, Essex' in *Country Life*, 14 March 1925, 395 (with sketch plan)
Kelly's *Post Office Directory for Essex*, 1890, 1895, 1898 & 1902

Maps and Images

- 1777 Chapman & Andre's map of Essex, sheet XIII
1839 Tithe Apportionment map ERO D/CT 368B
1874 1st edition 25" OS map, sheet 45/6
1897 2nd edition 25" OS map, sheet 45/6
1923 3rd edition 25" OS map, sheet 45/6
1925 *Country Life* photographs in Hussey 1925 and Bradley-Hole 2004
c.1990 photographs by Dr Jill Raggett of Writtle College
2006 Google Earth image accessed 2/1/2010

Archival Items

- 1624-1832 deeds of a messuage called Great Cockells & estate called Mountains ERO D/DDc T42
1750 deed of a messuage called Mouchtone ERO D/DMA/T79

1800 plan of a farm known as Mountains (surveyor unknown) ERO T/M 420

1838 map of a farm called Mountains, property of P Du Cane Esq., surveyor C. Fuller, ERO T/M 429

1897 plan of alterations to house, Mountains, Gt Totham by F.A.Ward ERO D/RMa Pb1/57

1906 plan of alterations and additions, Beacon House, Gt Totham by Gambier Parry ERO D/RMa Pb2/400

Notes

The following books were not examined but may be useful for further research, particularly for the sort of plants that interested the Du Canes.

Du Cane, F. & E., 1908 *The Flowers and Gardens of Japan*

Du Cane, F. & E., 1909 *The Flowers and Gardens of Madeira*

Du Cane, F. & E., 1911 *The Canary Islands*

Todd, J.A., 1913 *The Banks of the Nile*, illustrated by Ella Du Cane, with notes on the plates by Florence Du Cane

Research by Fiona Wells. Site visit by Fiona Wells and Michael Leach on 19 January 2010.