



CAMBRIDGESHIRE GARDENS TRUST

NEWSLETTER No. 29 OCTOBER 2007

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CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

I am pleased to report that at long last the 25 year lease has been signed with Cambridgeshire County Council for the Ramsey Abbey Walled Kitchen Garden. This has been a very protracted hurdle which has now been overcome. I would like to thank everyone who gave encouragement to both the Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust and the RAWKG Trust. Now RAWKGT can obtain the necessary planning approvals for the new apple tunnel, the new gateway in the east wall and the bridge over the stream near Ramsey Rural Museum. I would also like to thank Mr Graham Riley, architect of Freeland Rees Roberts who has interpreted the Trust's requirements to enable drawings for the proposals to be presented to the local District Council Planning Department. It is hoped that all this will be finalised and in place by next Spring. I would also like to thank Peter Reynolds (CGT member), who is now advising RAWKG Trust on horticultural matters, for agreeing to help the volunteers during this important stage.

This year the visits to gardens in Cambridgeshire have been well attended, especially the evening when the head gardener of Peterhouse led a tour of the garden which began in atrocious rain conditions. But our members are not put off by such inclement weather, nor by the grid locked streets in Cambridge. Many arrived soaked to the skin. With that in their minds your committee has decided to change the booking arrangements for visits next year. Those who wish to come on every visit will be able to book at a reduced price and the price for each visit will also be reduced. It was felt that those who attended the visits contributed a substantial amount to our funds and this would be a way of thanking them and encouraging them for their support. This gives me the opportunity of thanking all the garden owners in Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire who so very kindly allowed members to be shown their gardens this year.

We have obtained an estimate for printing of the book on Wood & Ingram, and are now in the process of collecting photographs to illustrate the text. Three members of the Trust have kindly proofread the text. The final task is to complete an extensive index, which will list every person, place, plant, nursery and garden society mentioned.

The Trust was asked by David Adshead to attend the launch of his book which catalogues all known drawings of Wimpole. David is the National Trust's Head Curator and an Architectural Historian, and the CGT had helped David with his research. This pleasant launch took place at the Mellon Centre, Russell Square, London and it was a pleasure to meet Graham and Olga Damant who were both so supportive of the Trust at our inaugural meeting several years ago. This is the first book I have seen where an accompanying compact disc is included inside the cover which contains images of all the drawings in the catalogue displayed in full-screen format. The evening was introduced by Sir William Proby who is the Chairman of The National Trust; he was accompanied by his wife Lady Proby who is one of the CGT's Patrons.

I would like to thank Gemma Watts who is retiring as our treasurer this year. She valiantly agreed to become our treasurer and has helped the Trust to obtain Gift Aid money. I hope that by the AGM we will have found a member who will be able to carry on her good work. I would also like to thank all the members of your committee who have been so helpful this year.

I look forward to seeing you all at our AGM when Tom Stuart Smith, the well known garden designer, will be speaking on Saturday afternoon November 3rd at 2.00pm in the Gilmour Building at Cambridge University Botanic Garden.

*John Drake
Chairman*

Old Court

In the thirteenth century the nucleus of this court was the two hostels on Trumpington Street serviced by the Hall on the south side dating from c1290, which was constructed of clunch. By the 15th century it was faced with brick and then, by 1755 ashlar faced by Ketton stone; its original appearance is best viewed from the Fellows' Garden on the south side. The north range of the Court was added in 1424–5 and the west range with the Old Library above in 1430–1. These were ashlar faced by James Burrough, 1754–5, and given oblong sash windows; then in 1870 a new facing with Gilbert Scott's restoration. Between 1868–74 the interior of the Hall gained a William Morris window, stencilling and tiled fireplaces. A major change in this Court was made by the Master, Matthew Wren, who instituted the building of a Chapel dividing Old Court to the east, above a perpendicular window and polygonal corner turrets. The Classical arcades and galleries, flanking the west end, were added by Robert Grumbold, 1709–11.

In 1688, Loggan's map and view shows four grass plots centred on the Chapel entrance and unusual tree planting in rows running east-west. The outer side of the plots have fastigiated trees forming four rows and between these a further two rows of conifers in the centre of the grass plots. All are eight feet high. By 1755 Old Court was simplified, omitting cross paths but lamp posts were installed on the four corners of the lawn. The new lamps of 1830 were later electrified and these were replaced in 1985 after the removal of the earlier ones during World War II. For some fifty years the Court had window boxes planted with Pelargonium 'Galilee'. With ageing this variety has now been replaced with 'Wilco', which gives bright colour to Old and First Courts for some five months of the year.

First Court

Matthew Wren's Chapel and other changes created a First Court divided from Old. He was, perhaps, influenced by Dr John Caius who had created a three-sided court at Gonville and Caius College in 1655. A clause in that College's re-foundation statutes states, "We decree that no building be constructed which shall shut in the entire South side of our foundation lest for lack of free ventilation the air should become foul, the health of our college, and still more the health of Gonville's college, should become impaired and disease and death be thereby rendered more frequently in both". In the early 17th Century plague was endemic and Wren ordered the demolition of Peterhouse's original two hostels, "ancient and ruinous chambers" which ran along the street front and at right angles against the churchyard. Between 1738–42 Burrough's Building, a Ketton stone Palladian building formed the north side of the Court, while the brick Perne Library, 1590–4 enclosed the south side. In 1751 the College had new gates towards the street; two stone gateways with round headed archways, flanking Tuscan pilasters and pedimented entablatures.

Gisborne Court

We progressed westwards from Old Court, perhaps into the former cook's garden, which is Gisborne Court, 1825–6.

Replacing former outhouses this Neo Gothic building was by McIntosh Brooks. In this court is a central, octagonal lawn with a Mediterranean crab apple of vertical habit offering less shade and damage to the lawn. There are shrubberies and a large Mediterranean olive tree, echoing a biblical theme with reference to the College's foundation. From this Court to the South is a small walled herb garden with a raised central bed and a copper sundial as the focal point. Here, adjacent to the western boundary wall, was a Tennis Court, first recorded in 1571–2, which by 1707 was "now fallen down". The site was later that of the Deer Shed. To the north west is Fen Court, 1939 designed on the site of former stables by the architects, Hughes and Bicknell. In this area, to the north, the former Museum of Classical Archaeology, now incorporated in the College, was a converted granary.

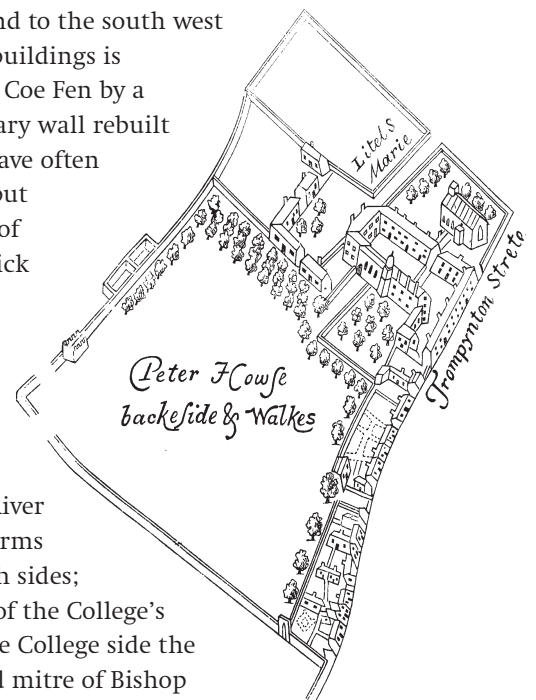
The Grove, now the Deer Park

We entered the Grove from the herb garden. Another entrance is from the Screens' passage. Hammond's map, 1592 shows numerous trees and here are the oldest gardens of the oldest college. Thomas Gray, 18th century poet and scholar of Peterhouse, wrote:

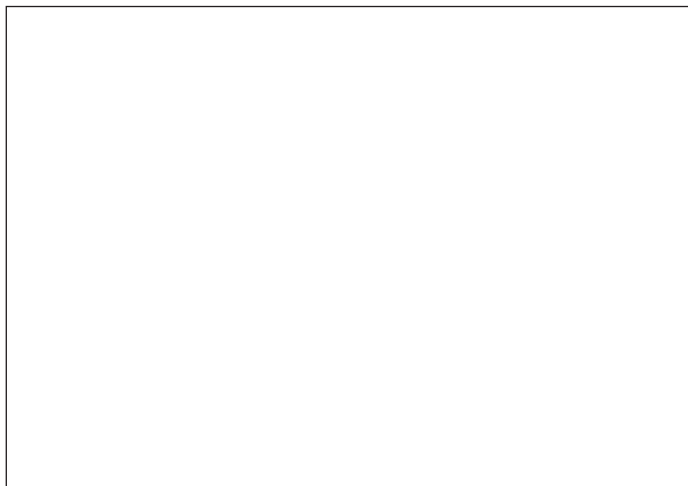
*"Ye brown o'er arching Groves,
That Contemplation loves,
Where willow Camus lingers with delight".*

This parkland to the south west of the College buildings is separated from Coe Fen by a western boundary wall rebuilt 1501–2. Parts have often been repaired but original bands of clunch with brick lacing courses survive. One survival is the blocked Watergate,

once fed by a branch of the River Granta. It has arms above it on both sides; they are those of the College's Visitors – on the College side the three cocks and mitre of Bishop Alcock of Ely, 1486–1500 and on the Fen side those of Bishop John Hotham, 1316–37. A shallow tunnel inside the grounds used to lead from the gate to the Screens' passage. In earlier times shallow boats might have brought in provisions and in later years scholars used to leave to skate on a frozen fen. Above the Watergate there was a Spectaculum 1544–5 of freestone with an upper floor to look out over the fen wall. No trace remains but this had been demolished in 1859. (In the later 13th century the Carmelites owned 3 acres across the waters in Newnham and they used to worship in St Peter's–Little St Mary's. The 'Rotuli Parliamentorum' records that they "suffered in winter many great inconveniences, on account of the inundation of the waters, so that the scholars could not have access to hear



divinity, nor could they go to town to obtain their victuals". This testifies to the marshy nature of the land beyond Peterhouse's western perimeter.) Moving along this wall southwards to the Scholars' Garden opposite the Fitzwilliam Museum, is the site of the former College Bath, "much frequented of the students" until the 19th century. It was fed by a brick culvert from Hobson's Conduit in Trumpington Street, just outside the Museum. Continuing eastwards near the 19th gate to the Scholar's Garden is the probable site of a former Dovecot from which an earlier Bursar developed a thriving trade in "pigeon pullets".



In earlier centuries the Grove was probably in use as arable land, but Loggan's map, 1688 shows trees around the boundary and copses in the NW and NE angles. After the building of the Fitzwilliam Museum on Peterhouse land, the College commissioned William Sawrey Gilpin, a famed landscape gardener, to plan the grounds. The intention, as today, was to achieve parkland with shrubberies at the perimeter. Deer were introduced, possibly by Gilpin, and remained until 1935. The Park has also lost its elms, gradually replaced by limes and planes. In 1940 the College turned it into a vegetable garden and the lime avenue along the path running from the Screens to the Scholars' Garden was felled. Apple trees planted in 1949 have reached the end of their fruiting life and have been inter-planted with new ones. The Gardeners face a problem of honey fungus but specimen trees like Persian Ironwood and a sweet chestnut survive with drifts of daffodils, aconites and crocuses planted between them for flowering in the spring. Richard Harris believes that it is important to achieve maximum flowering and impact during Full Term and his aim is to introduce more winter garden plants. Behind the Fitzwilliam Museum is an escalonia hedge and a row of limes leading towards the Fellows' Garden.

Fellows' Garden

Passing from Old Court through the Screens passage the clunch wall of the Hall is revealed with the Fellows' Garden to the east. Hammond's map, 1592, shows a garden enclosed by walls with 8 trees; Loggan's map, 1688, shows 4 plots with trees and an arbour but the Custance plan, 1798, has no arbour. In 1841 Gilpin extended the garden southwards into the Grove. Today there is a splendid lawn, specimen trees and an herbaceous border.

Scholars' Garden

Despite the rain we moved to land south of the Grove and beyond its wall, which now forms the Scholars' garden. Loggan's map, 1688, shows a large vegetable garden divided into four parts by wide cross paths filled with orchards and rows of vegetables. In the 19th century it was called the Master's Close or Far Garden. The land includes the Fitzwilliam extension, Grove Lodge and the former gardens of St Peter's Terrace, bounded on the east by Trumpington Street, on the west by Coe Fen Ditch and extending to the boundary of the Engineering Laboratories. The garden opens out around the 1963 Grade II listed 8 storey brick building, the William Stone Building. The work of Sir Leslie Martin and Colin St John Wilson, it is the largest brick load-bearing building in the world. The top of this tower affords a view of wisteria trailing from large trees and giving the impression of a waterfall when in full bloom. This wisteria receives minimal pruning. Within the garden are many old yews, a feature of Peterhouse, numerous clumps of paeonies on the south face and lawns leading to old shrubberies. The rear gardens of St Peter's Terrace have been removed and laid to lawn but two fine copper beech trees remain. Throughout the garden some forty species of birds have been recorded.

We are indebted to Richard Harris for making this visit so enjoyable in such unpromising conditions.

Charles Malyon

NB: Professor Kenny, member of the College and a member of the CGT, informed members present that members of the public are permitted to walk through the gardens when the College is open, particularly in the spring when all the bulbs are flowering in The Grove. The head gardener at St John's College has also contacted to the Trust to visit that garden in the spring.

Margaret Risbeth (CGT Member) brought along a photograph when the Trust were shown round the gardens. It shows her approaching a deer in The Grove at Peterhouse when she was a young girl. A copy of this photograph has been given to the College as it is the only record they have of deer in The Grove.

Lady Cynthia Postan (CGT member) planted a Sweet Chestnut Tree (Castanea sativa) in The Grove in memory of her husband.

Editor

APPENDIX TO ARTICLE ON LECKHAMPTON HOUSE AND GARDEN IN NEWSLETTER No 19, SEPTEMBER 2005:

One of our members, Margaret Risbeth, remembers Louis Clarke living at Leckhampton. He allowed her mother to have an allotment in Leckhampton's paddock during World War II. Andrew Croft, an Arctic explorer, lived with Clarke for a time and brought the two huskies with him. Margaret, occasionally, used to exercise the lead dog, Dupilek.

She believes that the herd of reindeer in the Cairngorms was the result of Ethel John Lindgren's meeting in Lapland and later marriage to Mikel Utsi. He came to Great Britain, found that the Cairngorms were similar to Lapland environmentally, and brought over a herd of reindeer. The government insisted upon quarantine indoors and they died. A second herd, allowed to live in an outdoor pen, survived.

During the war, Margaret recalls that the gardener was Mr Sproulton, who had to cope on his own. Her brother, John Risbeth, Fellow of Corpus and a botanist, was in charge of the garden for a period.

From Wood & Ingram ledgers the following order for shrubs for the garden at Leckhampton House was noticed dated 9th November 1933:

L H Myers Esq., 9th November 1933
Leckhampton House, Grange Road, Cambridge

1 Ceanothus 'Gloire de Versailles'	5s 0d
1 " " veitchianus	5s 0d
2 Gum Cistus	5s 0d
1 Euonymus Sargentii	3s 6d
1 Lonicera fragrantissima	2s 6d
1 Viburnum tomentosum mariesii	5s 0d
1 Erica carnea	1s 6d
1 Lilac 'Belle de Nancy'	5s 0d
1 Lilac 'Leon Simone'	5s 0d
1 Lilac 'Edouard Andre'	5s 0d
6 Butchers Broom	9s 0d
1 Cornus alba	1s 0d
1 Crataegus double pink bush	5s 0d
1 Crataegus scarlet bush	5s 0d

1 crate and packing 4s 0d

Carriage 5s 3d

£3 11s 9d

RECTORY FARM HOUSE GARDEN – ORWELL

(Two accounts about this garden, by members of the Trust)

MAKING A GARDEN – “VISION, COLLABORATION AND HARD WORK”

Rectory Farm, Orwell, is a typical C19 Cambridgeshire 'new farm', carved out of the parish's open fields by the Enclosure Act of 1836. The farm was later purchased from the Orwell benefice by the Wimpole Hall estate, which was then bequeathed to the National Trust by Mrs Bainbridge in 1976. By the 1960s the farmhouse was abandoned and by the 1980s completely derelict.

Paul and Margaret Pinnington acquired the property in 1997 and proceeded to restore and extend the house and, at the same time, to create a new garden of about an acre and a half. John Drake has asked me for a few words on how the garden was made. I put the question to Maggie Pinnington who replied, without hesitation, "vision, collaboration and hard work". (To this might be added "commitment, enthusiasm and strong coffee").

I had worked with the Pinningtons on their garden in Huntingdon Road and was interested to hear of their proposed move to Orwell. My first impression of Rectory Farm was not inspiring: it was a cold and miserable day; the site was bleak and exposed, devoid of any features of horticultural interest, save one old ash tree and a few pollard willows around a pond

overgrown with briars. The house looked near to collapse; a vast arable field swept right up to the walls on three sides. If this wasn't bad enough the soil appeared to be the most appalling heavy clay.

So the first thing was the vision, which was, first and foremost, Maggie Pinnington's, something she saw the moment she first looked out from the windows of the decrepit house. The garden she envisaged was to fit into the surrounding landscape but at the same time to provide shelter, enclosure and privacy. The objective was to provide a haven of peace and tranquillity for family and friends. House & garden were to be integrated as far as possible. It was to be a traditional English romantic country garden with old roses, lavender, box and yew. There were to be lots of colour, fragrance and flowers for cutting. A key word for Maggie is 'abundance'. (So is 'fun').

The successful realisation of a project of this scale entails collaboration between a number of people. My job as a designer and horticulturalist was to help make the vision real. After discussion the basic plan was arrived at fairly quickly; having a blank canvas made this easier. To the north, east and south of the house there were to be a series of square or rectangular enclosed spaces, each with distinct characters, divided by hedges and connected by paths in a strong, formal structure. To the west, deliberately in contrast, the garden was

to consist of a large open lawn with trees on its periphery. The site sloped almost imperceptibly towards the south but enough to leave the new extension two or three feet above ground level: here a terrace was to be constructed, taking advantage of views over the fields towards Wimpole and Orwell. Of course, there were other collaborators, above all Paul and the family. Richard Hule, the farmer next door, provided assistance from time to time, and I was helped by Nigel Burgess, master of all trades.

The formative work on the garden at Rectory Farm took place in late 1997 and early 1998. Builders and sub-contractors carried out most of the hard landscaping. But for the rest of the work much of the labour was supplied by the Pinningtons themselves. Many long days were spent in improving the soil: all the borders were double dug and tons and tons of pea shingle, compost and manure were incorporated; where necessary levels were made up with screened topsoil from local sources. This back-breaking effort has certainly paid dividends, and mulching remains very much part of the annual programme here.

The first planting was of native hedging right round the garden and adjacent paddock. Within, hornbeam and yew were used. Box balls were placed round the courtyard and front paths. Next were a good number of trees, nearly all of the Rosaceae: ornamental hawthorns, plums, cherries, crab apples and pears. These were chosen not just for their ornamental properties but because they fit well into the landscape, and because they are happy in heavy, alkaline clay. They were all very small two-year-old bare-root specimens ("sticks" as Maggie described them) but have established quickly. Shrubs, climbers, roses, perennials and bulbs followed. Inspiration for planting schemes came from various sources: the 'claret and gold' herbaceous border, for example, was derived from a fabric used in the adjacent living room. Suitability for aspect and soil conditions was always paramount.

Of course, with any garden the work never ceases, and this was certainly not conceived as a low-maintenance project. There have been differences of opinion and there have been some mistakes and failures. For example, the oil tank wasn't located correctly; the black mulberry turned out to be a white one; it took three or four years to arrive at the lavender planting for the parterre, after trying peonies, irises and Penstemons; the arbour blew down only last year. One or two areas have yet to be fully resolved but, as H E Bates said, 'the garden that is finished is dead'.

Peter Reynolds

WHAT I LIKED AND WHY

When John Drake asked me to write a short piece on our visit with the Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust, I had to go back for a second look on the Yellow Book open day a couple of weeks later. During the CGT visit, I had been browsing around in my usual happy daze, and couldn't actually remember enough about the garden to write anything more perspicacious than "really beautiful" or "loved the mixture of formality and informality" – neither of which, I felt, was adequate for this newsletter!

Rather than describe the garden and its plants section by

section (which I am sure can be done better by others more knowledgeable) I decided to take three aspects of the garden I found particularly appealing, and try to analyse why they worked so well.

Firstly, the mixture of formality and informality. Many of the plants were what we often describe as "cottage garden": lavender, hesperis, thalictrum, scabious, densely planted and mingled together. I do like dense plantings, with lots of different things to look at, and little treasures hidden by bigger treasures, but admit that this style can be rather messy and "dotty". However, here the typical cottage-garden disorder has been given definition by being contained within strongly-defined boundaries, and punctuated by living structures of hornbeam, holly, box and yew. Another feature which helps to avoid muddle is the vibrant but restrained colour scheme – for example, the deep purple clematis and iris is set off by the gentler hues of lavender, oregano and solanum.

Secondly, the garden is "a series of rooms". All too often I have seen this rather hackneyed design concept used to chop a large garden up into an uninspired group of smaller ones, and you wander through, wondering what the point of it all is. At Rectory Farm House, each 'room' has a definable reason for existence, with its own character and sense of place. The suntrap garden, with its open situation, sundial and inviting bench, has a completely different atmosphere from the garden at the front of the house, with its deep, darker theme, and upright yews and box balls. The layout is such that you tend to lose direction as you follow the gardens through, and entering each new section gives you a sense of venturing into the unknown. However, certain themes are repeated to give you a satisfying sense of continuity: hardy geraniums seem to follow you everywhere, as do the magnificent climbing roses and clematis, rampaging through the fruit trees.

That brings me to my third point, the rose garden. I usually feel depressed at the prospect of a Rose Garden – stiff, spindly bushes spaced with geometric precision in an expanse of bare earth; an uncontrolled bonanza of colour and scent for a couple of months every year, and pretty boring the rest of the time. Why do so many gardeners feel it necessary to group roses all together, like vegetables? I am sure it makes them more susceptible to pests and diseases. Here at Rectory Farm House, the rose garden breaks all those tedious conventions. Primarily, it contains much more than just roses: lilies and geraniums grow amongst them in profusion, and the centrepiece is a gorgeous sheltering silver hawthorn (*Crataegus orientalis*), encircled by a bench. The surrounding wooden trellis is only just visible through the abundant planting – truly a garden after my own heart!

I hope this very personal view has been of some interest to other members; writing it was a valuable exercise, as it made me think so much more deeply than usual about what makes a garden work. I should do it after every garden visit, whether or not for publication!

Miriam Pender

I thank Dr Gill Cremer for suggesting the above idea, which has been written for those members who were unable to visit the garden at Rectory Farm House.

Editor

An Appreciation of a Victorian and Edwardian Landscape at Houghton

The stretch of the Great Ouse valley between St Ives and Huntingdon is well known as a beauty spot. The river and its various backwaters meander through broad expanses of flood meadows. There are delightful walks and cycle rides in the pretty villages of Houghton and Wyton on the northern bank, and Hemingford Abbots and Hemingford Grey on the southern bank of the river. Tourists have been attracted to the area since the late 19th century; today its popularity is undiminished. Its charm is a complex combination of three main factors; firstly topography - the juxtaposition of hill, meadows and river- secondly the built environment and thirdly the developed landscape. Within recent years the area has been fortunate in that a considerable amount of its architectural and landscape heritage escaped the demolition hey-day of the late 1950s to the 1970s; not surprisingly the villages are now desirable places to live. However, being within the 'Cambridge sub-region', they are subject to considerable developmental pressure. The policies of the Planning department of the Huntingdon District Council have, so far, played a fairly effective role in balancing conservation values with the need for housing development and amenity facilities.

Members of the Garden Study Group of the HDFAS have been examining the historic garden landscape on both sides of the river. Not only have they been researching the past, but also making a record of the present. They hope that their information will provide an archive for garden study and also a useful tool for the bodies involved in the conservation and future development of the area. This article is a very brief overview of their research in Houghton.

Until the early 19th century the riverside villages had few substantial houses – the business men of the area lived in either Huntingdon or St Ives and the aristocracy kept to their country estates. Local prosperity grew slowly, Huntingdonshire being a rural area subject to agricultural depressions. But as wealth accumulated so did the desire to enjoy and display it in the building of houses and gardens in favoured spots in the country. The open land between Houghton and St Ives attracted its first developer in 1841; Gilbert Ansley bought the best site, 89 acres of Houghton Hill and its south facing slope. He built his comfortable house at the top of the hill from where, in the best traditions of the Picturesque, he could enjoy commanding views for miles over the river valley. In about 1854 there was another new house; this was 'The Elms' and was built, not on the hill but close to Houghton village by Potto Brown a wealthy local miller. For some years George Brown, Potto's second son, lived there but in 1868 George employed the architect William Edis to design a new villa across the road in the lofty Florentine Renaissance style. George took the name of 'The Elms' to his new home and the old house became known as 'The Cedars'.

However, in the 30 or so years between the building of these three houses, the perception of the landscape around St Ives had changed; the non-industrial countryside was valued as a place for leisure. And by the end of the century, Houghton and the Hemingfords had become quite a special place – largely due to the Victorian passion for all things watery. The advent of the railways had released the river from commercial barge traffic and it became a fashionable playground that was enjoyed by all classes of society. Fishing

was widely advertised and membership of the local clubs was taken very seriously. Artists discovered the pretty riverside villages – a bit of old-world England – and their views of the Ouse were frequently displayed in the Royal Academy and other exhibitions. Village regattas, water-sports and carnivals were jolly affairs. Tourists came to enjoy rowing, punting and houseboat holidays – St Ives was only an hour away from London by train.



Houghton Grange

For those who could afford it there then followed a building boom of splendid new houses on both sides of the river with the complement to each house being an equally splendid garden. Thirty nine acres of land on the eastern side of the enviable site of 'Houghton Hill House' were sold following the death of Mr Ansley's widow in 1897 and here 'Houghton Grange', a large country house in the Elizabethan Revival style, was designed by James Ransome in 1897 for Charles Harold Coote, a coal merchant of St Ives and also Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire. Three years later Houghton had a new vicar who was also a trained architect; the Reverend Frederick John Kingsley Brackenbury Oliphant designed three large country houses in the Arts and Crafts Vernacular Revival style. Two were in Hemingford Abbots and the other, in Houghton, was 'The Manor' for Colonel Pelly in 1905. Charles Whymper, the artist (who had married George Brown's daughter) designed his own house in the centre of the village in 1902, and also the thatched Clock Tower on the 'Green' in memory of his father-in-law. In 1911 James Fraser, the new owner of 'The Elms', built 'Thicket Lodge' in the eastern end of his garden as a wedding present for his sister-in-law and her husband the artist Arthur Beckingham. A later subdivision of land from the western side of 'Houghton Hill House' allowed 'Houghton Bury' to be built, also in the Vernacular Revival style, in the 1920s.



Houghton Manor Photo: Kenneth Matthews

What has happened to these houses and their gardens? In the centre of the village, Charles Whymper's house – now known as 'Whympers' – has had its garden somewhat reduced in size by the sale of some plots for building, but it is still of a good size for the Arts and Crafts style house. Interestingly it has a rockery with a replica of the Matterhorn built by Charles' brother Edward, the first man to climb the Matterhorn in 1865. (This was on his seventh attempt but the success was



The Matterhorn at 'Whympers'

marred by the tragic loss of four of the party on the descent.) Beneath the mountain is a pond which the brothers named the Nile after Charles' best known book 'Egyptian Birds'. 'The Cedars' has retained about an acre of its once very large garden. Some of the land was sold in 1914, more in 1950 and the 1990s yet much of its high perimeter brick wall has been kept. There is a magnificent cedar to the north of the house. Potto Brown's original garden was not designed for leisure; this was characteristic of the man, for he was a notoriously staunch Non-conformist who worked and prayed equally hard. However the fruits of the garden brought enjoyment as described in a late 19th century family history: it had a very large garden with hothouses in it, which he built in 1856 and which he engaged Mr Tilbrook to manage with the purpose of supplying his own and his sons' families, friends and various institutions with vegetables, fruits etc. The fact of Potto Brown's table being well supplied all the year with hothouse grapes, melons etc did much to mitigate the fact of its being rigidly teetotal.

'The Elms' has recently been converted into apartments for the over 55s. There were initial local concerns followed by strong protest that the development was too large and insensitive; compromise was achieved, the plans reduced and a scheme implemented to ensure the garden will be preserved. Its first owner and designer George Brown was a keen gardener and filled his eight acres with masses of specimen trees, all now with Tree Preservation Orders; 22 Wellingtonias as well as mature cedar, monkey puzzle, Himalayan birch, chestnut, copper beech, lime, yew and many more besides. The Norris Museum at St Ives has his garden diary for 1901 and in it he records daily inspections, noting the weather, flowering dates and planting records. For the last twenty years the garden has been neglected, which has made it all the more enchanting. A walk along the Thicket Path in spring sees first a vast carpet of aconites, followed by snowdrops, bluebells, narcissi, wood anemones and wild garlic beneath the old trees. 'Houghton Hill House' has retained 15 acres of wooded garden with a grand Cedar of Lebanon. 'The Manor' is a dignified mature garden with formal clipped evergreens, whilst at 'Houghton Bury' there is an enormous resurgence of new planting in an arboretum and in the replacement of old shrubs.

'Houghton Grange' is about to undergo major change. We have a good picture of the place from estate agents' particulars of 1920 which describe it (as only estate agents can) 'nestling amid spacious and exquisitely tended grounds, it leaves little to be desired as an ideal country house. Two lodge gatehouses lead to a carriage drive with a 300 yard double avenue of elm and lime trees. Gardens comprising 48 acres with tennis and croquet lawns, a broad gravel terrace along the south front of the house, formal flower and rose gardens, a sunken pool garden, turf walks through long herbaceous borders, choice shrubberies and plantations, a sunken Dutch garden enclosed by high yew hedges, quaint rose gardens with red-tiled paths to a pretty tea house with wide spreading thatched roof and tiled verandah, a rose pergola, a lovely rock garden with pools, productive fruit and vegetable garden, espalier and well-planted fruit walks, asparagus and strawberry beds, 2-division span glasshouse, cucumber and melon houses, range of 3 peach houses, thriving orchards, and [finally!] undulating park land, well planted with clumps of trees and a pretty dell'. From 1948 'Houghton Grange' was used as a Poultry Research station for the Animal Health Trust. Gardening was not a main priority. Over 200,000 sq ft of laboratory space was constructed in utilitarian buildings, unsympathetic extensions added to the main house and several small houses built on the site for workers. It has been vacant since 1992 and various Planning Applications have been made for its future use, one of which was for a Business Park which was refused. Now outline planning permission has been granted for residential development. The developers are aware that the house is Listed Grade II and should be restored appropriately. There are 88 single and 9 group Tree Preservation Orders. Detailed plans for the new housing design and density are yet to be agreed. The site is well screened by its trees from both Houghton Hill Road and the river valley; and the planned development promises to retain this.

In the space of about 60 years the Victorian and Edwardian developers transformed Houghton Hill with their ambitious houses and gardens. Fortunately a significant amount of the architectural heritage has survived – the two largest houses could easily have gone; now they are adapting to 21st century living by being split up into flats. The garden heritage has in some ways been less fortunate. The gardens are not what they once were – much of the detail has been lost – but importantly the gardens have not disappeared into dense housing estates. They are still there and as a collection they are very important. For as the gardens and, in particular their trees, have matured they have changed from being individual plantings into a unified landscape. Some sense of this is gained from the Thicket Path but, delightful as it is, from there you are almost within the gardens. The best view and appreciation is from a distance. Look north across the river from Hemingford on a winter's day and you are immediately struck by the coniferous tree-scape on Houghton Hill – over a stretch of about one and a half miles the collection of magnificent pines, cedars and Wellingtonias is evidence of the fashions and passions of those Victorian and Edwardian gardeners.

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