

**UTTLESFORD DISTRICT
BROXTED**

HILL PASTURE and ASHGROVE HOUSE

TL 582 175

A modern landscape gardens designed by Humphrey Waterfield in 1936. He created Hill Pasture out of a field, in what has been described as a conscious work of art.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Humphrey Waterfield began his search for a house in Essex in the autumn of 1935. All were too big or too small, but he eventually found a site at Broxted, a field of five acres, at one time the village rubbish dump. It was a mass of couch grass and nettles but in a lovely position looking west across a valley with a little spinney sheltering it on the east.

In 1936 when Humphrey commissioned the young architect Gerald Flower to design the house, but it was Erno Goldfinger, for whom Gerald worked, who took on the project. From a number of plans of varying modernity and unsuitability for an Essex landscape one was finally chosen, which Goldfinger came to consider as a little masterpiece and Humphrey was to love and enjoy all his life.

In the same year, Humphrey set about turning the land into a work of art, which was to be described by Paul Miles, the National Trust Organiser for East Anglia in 1972 as 'the most beautiful small garden in England'. Waterfield had studied at the Slade and exhibited with the New London Art Group, but he achieved much greater recognition as an amateur designer of gardens. With his friend Nancy Tennant, Humphrey put into practice his theories on garden design and began to plan the garden before the building started in 1937. He was much influenced by the garden at Hidcote in Gloucestershire, designed by Lawrence Johnston.

In his obituary on Humphrey Waterfield, Edward Fawcett wrote about the makings of Humphrey's garden and how the first visible sign of it was the planting of a yew hedge, leading straight up the hillside, centred upon the view from the sliding plate glass window of the living room. It became known as 'Chatsworth' and is the backbone of the whole composition. Edward Fawcett wrote that 'The first parts of the garden were those made round the house; a courtyard garden where a covered way led from the garden gate to the front door, this was filled with irises while on the walls climbing roses. At the back Humphrey added a camellia court and an enclosed garden of tree peonies. Surprise was the other principle upon which Humphrey planned. There was always only one way in which to see the garden and he had devised an itinerary that all must follow. It started from the cherry glade, past magnolias, to the cherries themselves, under planted with triflorum rhododendrons in soft colours, and the ground covered with hellebores and periwinkle. This is the most natural part of the whole garden, and from it we are led by the dark grandeur of the Thuja hedge to the grey garden, the forget-me-not valley, the lily pool, the temple, the Bacchus fountain, and finally the swimming pool, surrounded by shrub roses and clematis, supported on a cast iron trellis, where past grey willows we once again gaze over the fields. The termination of the vista from the house, along the length of

'Chatsworth', into the top garden and out across the countryside had long remained an unsolved problem. Finally, Humphrey discovered an C18 lead figure of a young gardener, holding in his left hand a bunch of flowers. Placed in position it proved to be right, the inevitable solution, long sought and suddenly found.'

During the second world war Jack Crawshaw, an adjutant at Debden, had rented Hill Pasture, and but for a local man, Mr. Reynolds, it is possible the garden would not have survived the war years. But sometime late in 1945 Humphrey came home and concerned himself with fighting weeds and planning the future. Due to the death of his parents during the war, Humphrey was in addition involved in saving the family home at Clos du Peyronnet, Menton, where he also contributed to the garden layout.

Around 1957 Humphrey started to build the upstairs studio for which he had always longed, and some years later the swimming pool was built. Nancy Tennant wrote that she would never forget the magic of swimming there surrounded by the pergola with its sweet-smelling tumbling roses. In 1956 Nancy Tennant bought Ashgrove, a small house with garden and paddock on the east side of the spinney, which Humphrey had acquired earlier. Humphrey started work on the paddock, up went mysterious unrelated walls, *Cupressus leylandii* soon linked the walls together and in their midst he built the moon gate which became such a feature of the Broxsted scene. Here he could grow different and more tender plants and latterly he enjoyed this part of the garden more than any other.

Humphrey Waterfield was beginning to acquire a reputation as a landscape gardener and about 1958 the de Ramseys asked him to plan a new development, the grey garden, in their already lovely garden, Abbots Ripton Hall, Huntingdonshire. He also advised Sir Felix and Lady Brunner on the planting of their gardens at Greys Court in Oxfordshire. The winter months were always spent at the Waterfield family home, Le Clos du Peyronnet. He continued to paint all his life; his gardens, and the landscape of Essex and the Alpes Maritimes were sources of inspiration to him as an artist.

An article written by Lanning Roper in *Country Life* in 1961 described the Hill Pasture house and gardens as 'like those on the Riviera, taking the maximum advantage of the out-of-doors, the garden and house being literally built into each other. There is a delightful seclusion about Hill Pasture; there is no drive, only a woodland path with exciting vistas of wild gardens and shrubberies to the right. At once it is apparent that here is a plantsman's garden as well as an artist's, for there is discrimination not only in the choice of plants and in the fine forms that have been obtained, but in the artistry of their careful juxtaposition. Already we see one of the charms of Hill Pasture. It is a series of separate gardens, each providing special conditions for plants, and each different in character and atmosphere. From the house there is a long central yew-bordered grass avenue that runs down the slope to a flight of steps leading to a walled garden and up again to a Japanese garden that is now in the process of being constructed. To the east of this axis there is a series of bays in the yew hedge, creating a series of four separate gardens, each different in character, in design, colour scheme and plant material. Below to the left of the main axis there is a series of different gardens, each definite in character but all cleverly integrated into the whole. There is a grey and silver garden, with a curving path winding through borders of flowering shrubs. The tour de force is the iris garden, ending in a long rectangular stone-paved reflecting pool at the bottom. From the end of the pool a winding grass path leads past a huge octagonal lead tank with a central fountain beautifully placed beneath the drooping branches

of the silvery willow. Beyond at the rise of the hill to the east of the house is a Temple of Love and another pool with a vista over the delightful countryside'. Lanning Roper also wrote that Humphrey maintained the garden himself with the aid of one gardener for three and a half days a week and occasional part-time labour.

The contrived theme at Hill Pasture is held to be of remarkable artistry and interest. A description of the garden in an article in *Essex Countryside* in 1968 emphasised that the most outstanding feature was the moon gate which formed part of a specially built decorative length of wall, approached from one side by a round pond. It had been designed in the shape of a largish circular opening let low into a wall to allow a pathway through, the moon gate thus provided an inviting glimpse of the view beyond when approached from either side. The siting of the moon gate at Hill Pasture caused a design problem for Humphrey. His friend Nancy Tennant remembers moving cardboard cut-outs of a moon gate into different positions in the garden to position it exactly right. On one side of the gate a large circular pool, crossed by stepping-stones, mirrored the moon-shaped gate above it.

Moon gates are believed to have come about when the Chinese style of gardening was introduced by travellers back from visiting the East in the 19C. William Leslie, the enterprising 11th Laird of Warhill in Aberdeenshire, went to Canton in 1833 to work for a trading company. When Leslie eventually returned to Scotland, he enlarged his house, developed the garden and built a moon gate. This was the first of a chain of moon gates which eventually extended from Aberdeenshire to the south of England. Moon gates in the gardens of old China had an important significance in the culture of the country. In Beijing the siting of these openings was planned with precision, so vistas of landscapes or gardens seen through the circles created a harmonious picture. By night, the gateways, associated in China with moon worship, framed the rising moon. Moon gates in this country were quite the vogue during the 19C but only a very few remain. Essex has the distinction of having a modern moon gate which was set at an angle to catch the moon in its curves; by night the moon gate would reflect the moon shining in the heavens and people liked to meditate and watch the moon's passage through its circle.

Humphrey Waterfield annually opened his gardens to the public under the National Gardens Scheme and in the autumn of 1971 a representative of the National Trust came to see 'the best small garden in England'. Shortly afterwards Waterfield tragically died in a road accident and Hill Pasture was bought by John Scott Marshall. In October 1973 Mea Allan included Hill Pasture in her article for *This Essex* entitled *Beautiful Gardens of Essex*. She wrote that 'the new owner of Hill Pasture, Mr. John Scott-Marshall, is carrying on Mr. Waterfield's work with a sense of dedication, restoring what was neglected after his death and creating a new garden on a piece of old woodland'.

C. Gordon Glover visited Hill Pasture shortly after John Scott-Marshall had moved in and wrote that Marshall intended to preserve and restore the Waterfield features to their original character, while adding some ideas of his own. Glover writes about the thirty feet high evergreen Thuja; the left-hand of the wall being dead straight, but the right hedging being planted to create four rectangular alcoves. In alcove number two are two giant climbing roses trained down upon low wooden staging; the new shoots stand vertically upwards from their horizontal main stems. In late June the staging will be roofed with blooms, brilliant yellow against its bottle-green walls. Glover describes the winged cupid

who stands in the centre of the pillared Temple of Love with its fretted dome of wrought iron, and upon a light upland of greensward an isolated stone balustrade to lend an illusion of protection to the pool, temple and house. He also mentions the enormous eight-sided lead cistern from Italy which stands between garden and farmland by a pair of rare maples, paper-bark and snake-bark.

In 1974 a summerhouse was erected at the head of the swimming pool; it was designed by Richard Tyler and erected in memory of Humphrey Waterfield. One of his paintings and an inscription hang inside.

The gardens were eventually divided when the cottage, Ashgrove, was sold. The cottage, now known as Ashgrove House, retained the moon gate and the sunken patio, although the steps leading outside to a seating area and a viewing platform are retained in the Hill Pasture garden, as are the swimming pool, lily pond, Temple of Love, yew avenue and lake.

In September 1997 when Ashgrove House was for sale, the agents emphasised the garden as a feature, the grounds extending to approximately 0.85 acres. In 1997 the Ashgrove garden comprised a variety of walkways between mature planted flower and shrub borders. A particular feature mentioned was the Yorkstone seating area with stone pathway flanked by flower borders leading to a circular pond with stepping-stones and leading through the moon gate to a further area of garden.

The current owners of Hill Pasture have respected Humphrey Waterfield's design layout and the current owners of Ashgrove House, have created a lovely garden around the moon gate.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, BOUNDARIES, AREA, LANDFORM AND SETTING

Hill Pasture and Ashgrove are situated north of Broxted on the B1051. The site is undulating, with land falling away to the east, north and south. Further south, the land rises again to the site of Ashgrove House.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Hill Pasture is reached by a short drive off the Thaxted Road, very overshadowed by trees. At the end of the drive, down some steps, a door is visible in a wall, apparently the original front door of the house. However, this door opens, not into the house, but into an open walled space with a path running under a covered walk on timber posts to the front door proper. This space is open to the south, designed as the outer courtyard, giving the first unexpected view of the garden from the terrace, with its low retaining wall of brown flint pebbles. To the left of the wall containing the 'front' door is an ornamental wrought iron gate leading through a yew hedge into another open space, the inner courtyard, enclosed by hedge and wall. On the left of the path is a brick pillared pergola with beds for tender plants and two small lily tanks, now dry. The path passes through the return of the yew hedge before reaching the back door.

Ashgrove House is reached by a long gravelled drive flanked by trees, further south off the same road.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Hill Pasture, the original house, designed by Erno Goldfinger, was in the 1930s a 'modern' style and single storied. A flat roofed first floor and a studio extension to the north of the same style were added in the 1960s, the design for which he entrusted to Gerald Flower. The external finish is painted brickwork and render, with large plain window openings.

Ashgrove House, originally built in the 1950s, which appears to have been enlarged, is of painted brickwork under a concrete pantile roof. A detached garage is a later addition.

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