

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

THE HOUSE, MARSH LANE

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THE HOUSE, MARSH LANE

Name: THE HOUSE, MARSH LANE

County: Essex

District: Epping Forest (District Authority)

Parish: Sheering

County: Essex

District: Harlow (District Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.792059
Longitude: 0.14981820
National Grid Reference: TL 48362 12564
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001299
Date first listed: 09-Feb-1995

Details

Gardens laid out by Frederick Gibberd from 1956 to 1984 as the setting for his own house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1956 Frederick Gibberd (later Sir Frederick), the architect/planner of Harlow New Town, purchased c 8ha of land on the edge of the town. On it sat an early C20 building, now known as 'The House', surrounded by a minimal and fragmentary garden scheme including a gazebo, formal pool, and lime avenue. Over the next twenty-eight years he developed extensive gardens which became home to a large collection of sculptures. On his death in 1984, The House, together with the gardens and art collection were willed to Harlow District Council for the recreation and education of the people of Harlow. However, the will was contested, making the estate a debtor through litigation. This forced the sale of the site, which was purchased as a short-term measure by an anonymous benefactor, allowing time for the Gibberd Garden Trust to be established and to raise funds for its permanent preservation. The site remains (2000) in the hands of the trustees.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The House, Marsh Lane, which stands in c 2ha of garden, is set in farmland in the Stort valley, on the east side of Harlow, separated from Old Harlow by two fields. To the north the land falls to the Pincey Brook, which forms the northern boundary of the site, while a track to the south of The House forms the southern boundary.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Access to The House is off Marsh Lane which runs to the east of the gardens. The entrance is at the south-east corner of the site, where gate piers surmounted by a pair of cast concrete eagles lead to the forecourt beside

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The Bungalow. From here, a straight walk leads to the south side of The House, the surface treatment of the path, like all the hard landscaping, being carefully detailed, here with small precast concrete slabs infilled with cobbles, flints and tiles.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The House stands in the south-east corner of the site. It is essentially a small early C20 building which forms part of the landscape scheme.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The House stands on high ground to the south of the garden. Surrounding it are formal gardens, linked integrally with views from the main windows, the windows being designed to frame contrasting views of the valley, walled garden, and conservatory. To the east of The House is a paved court, to the west of which is a small canal. To the north of The House is a terrace, the focus of which is a rectangular pool. At its northern end stands a concrete gazebo, below which is the Grotto; both the gazebo and the pool predate Gibberd's involvement although the pool was much changed by him. The terrace lies to the west of the lawn sloping down from The House to the Lime Walk, a closely planted avenue of limes, predating Gibberd's ownership of the site. At the northern end of the vista stands Mary Gorarra's Swan and Cygnet (concrete). The main lawn slopes up towards the eastern boundary, to the site of a planned Labyrinth on the former tennis court.

West of the main terrace is an informal area of lawns divided by shrub planting. This leads north from the round pool at the west end of the conservatory, past Antanas Brazdys' stainless steel fountain, to Gerda Rubinstein's statue Lucinda (fibreglass cast), to the west of the Lime Walk. At the western corner of the site is The Temple, formed of a set of Corinthian columns saved from the old Coutts Bank in The Strand, London.

Beyond a line of pools, an informal area of rockwork and winding paths leads down to the Pincey Brook. The latter is widened to form a pool on the banks of which are boulders from the site of Llyn Celyn Reservoir, for which Gibberd was the landscape architect. Further downstream is a waterfall.

A vital element of the garden is the collection of sculpture, each piece having been carefully selected and positioned so as to enhance the surrounding garden, while the setting in turn compliments the work. The garden has been highly praised: writing in the *Concrete Quarterly* (1979) for example, George Perkin referred to it as 'about the most fascinating garden I had yet visited, representing as it does a fertile imagination and a special eye for what used to be called 'a pleasing prospect'.' Gibberd himself wrote about the garden and lectured on its laying out, 'a selfish, intense and completely absorbing pleasure' (CQ 1979). He emphasised that garden design, like architecture, is the art of space, and explained that the garden was intended to form a series of informal rooms with an alternating sense of enclosure and space. The site was developed gradually, working from The House downwards. The improvements made use of the existing landform to provide a series of rooms, each with its own character, from small intimate spaces to large enclosed prospects interconnecting spaces loosely divided up by screens of planting or walls. There are sequences of spaces in all directions. A focal point on one area draws you on into the next. The design is a cellular one to be explored ...While all the rooms have their own character they are not self-contained like a rock garden or a white garden. The plants that enclose the space contribute to those adjoining, and the spaces lead imperceptibly into each other (Lees-Milne and Verey 1982).

REFERENCES

House and Gardens, (June 1963), p 35; (December 1982), pp 128-30 *Gardeners' Chronicle* 161, (22 March 1967), pp 16-18 *Sunday Times Magazine*, 10 October 1971, pp 73-5 *Concrete Quarterly* 122, (July-September 1979), pp 12-16, 18-9 *Transactions*, (RIBA 1982) A Lees-Milne and R Verey, *The Englishman's Garden* (1982), p 68 *Heritage Outlook*, (1984), pp 102-5 *Country Life*, 176 (16 August 1984), pp 440-2

Description written: September 2000 Register Inspector: EMP; amended April 2003 Edited: September 2001

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.