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The Gardens at Mackerye End

There was a rare opportunity to visit a much-loved corner of Hertfordshire on the afternoon of **Sunday 7th April 2002** when the gardens at Mackerye End House were to be open for public viewing. The event was in aid of the **Friends of St Helen's Church, Wheathampstead** who work to raise funds for the upkeep of their own ancient building.

There follows, below, the essence of some notes provided by the owners for the occasion.



The earliest records of a house at Mackerye End date from **1307** when the Manor of Makeriesend was held by **William Makary**. Makarys lived in the house through to the early part of the fifteenth century. The house passed to the **Bostocks** when young **Thomas Makary** died without an heir and the house was left to his sister, Margaret and her husband **Hugh Bostock** - parents of the celebrated Abbot of St Albans - **John of Wheathampstead**. The oldest surviving parts of the house are around the massive south chimney stack dating from the reign of **Henry VII**. The main structure is **Elizabethan**, and the **tulip tree** (see inset picture) - originally one of a pair - was planted at that time and is now one of the finest in the country.

The 'dutch' gables, the main feature of the beautiful east elevation, were added in **1665**. The windows were altered to their Georgian form in **1760** by **Thomas Garrard**. The delightful ceilings of the **Drawing Room** and **Morning Room** were put in during **1720**. The **Dining Room** was completed by the Victorian architect, **Norman Shaw**. Modernisation and repairs, including complete reproofing, were carefully carried out in **1988** in order to both preserved the character for the past and create a comfortable family home with a delightful atmosphere.

The features of the gardens, which are set within the framework of formal yew hedges are; the **carpets of miniature daffodils, lent lilies**, specimen **camellias** in the spring and the wide main Summer border. The sweet **chestnut trees** in the North Paddock are of enormous



age. Work carried out since August **1988** when the present owners moved in to Mackerye End, has included extensive clearance; the walled courtyard has been levelled; the small pond relined; yew hedging, the framework of the formal front gardens is being cut to level; the mixed hedges to the boundaries have been cut and are now starting to thicken; shrubs and climbers have been heavily cut back and selective pruning carried out to restore shape; the paddock areas to the west of the house are now enclosed by distinctive cross braced fencing. The enclosed vegetable garden had been cleared and a mass of **Delphiniums** 'cleaned' and replanted. **Peonies** were moved in autumn 1989.

Two symmetrical areas have been formed to either side of the central walkway, which is itself being replanted to provide additional flowers for cutting throughout the year. These areas are now laid out to form a **path maze** to the west 'a passage of thyme' and a 'tranquil' garden to the east.

The **Edwardian** setting for the **swimming pool** has been retained and the pool itself has been completely remodelled to an 'original' design of a formal pattern. The pool-house is a small **Romanesque Villa** set in the woods. A beautiful mature **Wisteria** has been retained to dress the facade of the building and over planted with **clematis**. These areas of work fully absorbed our energy from 1988 to 1991 when the next projects commenced; the levelling and enclosure of an area to the north of the house within a pergola walk of vines and 'old fashioned' roses and laying a village cricket square.



Projects commenced in the **Millenium** include the **formal sundial** at the front of the house and the planting of a **double avenue of maples and chestnuts** in the new parkland to the east. The main borders, badly invaded by ground elder, are being cleared and then replanted & the badly decayed Elizabethan chimney stacks are being rebuilt.

Introduction about the Gardens at Mackerye End
by Ruth Jeavons
to publicise the event in aid of the Friends of St Helen's Church.

The gardens are famous for their display of **Lenten lilies** and **carpets of miniature daffodils** in the front two pastures, also for the **ancient tulip trees** planted either side of the front entrance. The oldest is said to be one of the finest in the country and the same age as that part of the house, both dating from **1665**.

Records of Mackerye End go back to **1307**, though the **massive chimney stack** at the back of the house is the **oldest part of the present building**, dating from the time of **Henry VII**. The main structure is Elizabethan and the **dutch gables** at the front of the house are a distinctive and attractive **seventeenth-century feature**.

St Albans Abbey's famous abbot **John of Wheathampstead** was born at Mackerye End. Images of his parents, **Hugo and Margaret Bostock**, may be seen in brass in **St Helen's church** with the inscription composed by their famous son.

John was a great prince of the church during the **Wars of the Roses** and a **generous benefactor to the abbey**, building chapels, installing windows and donating elaborate vestments, silken hangings and chalices for the mass. It is said that he sheltered a wounded King Henry VI on his flight from the enemy during one of the battles of St Albans

About three centuries later the writer and essayist **Charles Lamb's** earliest and fondest memory was of a childhood walk with his sister through the fields to **Mackerye End Farm**. His aunt **Gladman** was housekeeper to the farmer there. The warmth of the welcome he received on arrival remained with Charles as a happy memory until the end of his life.