

workings of this great English country house and estate' ... 'For the first time, the Hall and its setting are treated as an integrated whole. The creation, development and use of the park are examined. New research also reveals how, over a period of 350 years, intervention by the Coke family transformed the two original villages at Holkham and the coastal landscape of marshes, dunes and creeks'.

The book is a joy to read and should occupy a prominent place on the bookshelf of all those interested in the

history of a great Norfolk estate whose Palladian Hall is a masterpiece of C18 architecture. Each time I visit Holkham I never fail to be inspired by the landscape and can now return home to the book to prepare me for the next visit. For me it is essential reading. But the thousands of visitors who visit Holkham Hall each year are also urged to delve into this book to learn more about the history and the people who have made this the estate the jewel of the north Norfolk Coast. They will not be disappointed - it is a fantastic account.

Review by Peter Woodrow

### *Secret Gardens of East Anglia – a Private Tour of 22 Gardens*

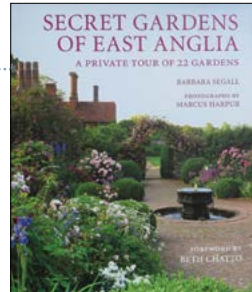
By Barbara Segall with photographs by Marcus Harpur.

Publisher: Frances Lincoln. (2017) Price £20.

In her foreword, Beth Chatto writes about the wide views and huge skies that we enjoy in the four counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire. Our painters, Constable, Gainsborough and Cotman were preoccupied with the big skies that made their paintings so luminous. By contrast, the practical gardener, with feet firmly planted on the ground, tends to be more concerned with the lack of shelter from scouring winds or with the belt of sandy soil that runs across the region or with our comparatively dry summers. As the author and editor of *The Horticulturalist* Barbara Segall notes, these 22 East Anglian gardens appear to have overcome the climatic difficulties for they manage to exhibit "every sort of garden illustration". The book provides

beautiful examples of how the personality of a garden is as much a property of the gardener's ingenuity as the flatness of the sometimes inhospitable landscape. It also shows how each generation reinterprets the landscape.

Our own county is well represented with 7 of the 22 gardens, ranging from long-established gardens to the contemporary. East Ruston Old Vicarage is only decades old and – just two miles from the North Sea – the owners soon learned that, "If there is a breeze in Norwich, you can be sure there is a gale here." However, the



introduction of shelter belts allowed the owners to make intimate garden rooms close to the house and more sweeping, expansive areas further away. Some of the East Ruston experience helped the owners of *The Lighthouse at Winterton-on-Sea* to overcome conditions at Norfolk's most easterly point. The resulting contemporary garden, which echoes the architecture, is surprisingly lush – its lines of silver birch and cloud-pruned box hedging complemented by flowers that tend towards the cooler shades.

The landscape of Hoveton Hall provides a larger canvas that Repton is thought to have worked on in the C18. But the landscape is a palimpsest and the current custodians have not been afraid to reflect current concerns by making changes that led to an RSPB award for 'best garden for wildlife'. Raveningham Hall, home of RHS President Sir Nicholas Bacon also has a sweeping prospect from the front of the house protected by a Brownian ha-ha. In turn, the original private pleasure grounds were replaced in the late C19 by an Arts and Crafts garden. There is also a new Elizabethan-styled Herb Garden made in honour of ancestor Sir Francis Bacon – an early practitioner of the scientific method.

In producing the English Landscape Garden, Capability Brown brought the landscape up to the house, sweeping away the formal knot gardens of previous generations. But the owners of C18 Hunworth Hall have reversed the trend for, in sympathy with the Hall's Dutch gables, they have restored the kind of formal pleasure garden popular in the

reign of William of Orange. Symmetry is restored with formal lines and clipped planting. A folly raised on a supportive portico allows them to look down upon a late C20 canal, affording them a view that, as we know, is not normal for Norfolk. Dutch formality has also inspired George Carter's garden at North Elmham. His background as a sculptor finds expression in a series of elegant rooms framed by beech or hornbeam hedging, punctuated by witty sculptural pieces. This is very much a contemporary and creative take on the formal garden.

A much more ancient form of scene-shifting can be seen at Pensthorpe Natural Park near Fakenham, which is based upon pingos – mounds created in the Ice Age. The Park is now famous as the first example in this country of public prairie-planting by the renowned Piet Oudolf. The Millennium Garden was started by the previous owners but in 2008 the Jordans engaged the designer to revitalise his concept that now draws gardeners keen to see waves of Oudolfian ornamental grasses anchored by clumps of herbaceous perennials.

The book is richly illustrated. It is also beautifully written and I found my tendency to riffle through the photographs arrested by the fascinating story behind each garden. Somewhat artificially I have concentrated on Norfolk gardens but one of the delights of this book is that readers will find themselves seduced into visiting inspiring gardens in neighbouring counties. I wholeheartedly recommend this volume, which is a steal at £20.

Review by Clive Lloyd