

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT  
WALTHAM HOLY CROSS  
TL383 007**

**ABBEY GARDENS, WALTHAM ABBEY**

Site of C17 garden, for which a plan exists by De Caus, attached to the Abbey House in the grounds of the dissolved Waltham Abbey. Enclosed by medieval and post-medieval walls (listed Grade II).

### **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

Waltham Abbey was originally founded in 1030 as a collegiate church of secular canons. It was rebuilt by King Harold and consecrated in 1060. In 1177 it was re-founded as an abbey for the Augustinian canons by Henry II, who spent lavishly to atone for the death of Thomas Becket. It was the last abbey to be destroyed under Henry VIII. Following the dissolution of the monasteries, the site and much of the lands of the abbey were leased to Anthony Denny, a gentleman of the bedchamber of Henry VIII. A map of 1594 shows Denny's house amongst the few monastic remains. A plan of the garden by De Caus exists in Worcester College Cambridge, unfortunately not dated, but is inscribed with 'Lord Deny Wallton abby' [sic.]. It shows the house fronted by lawns with a formal garden to the south side and to the east, within direct view of the house a large rectangular area surrounded on all sides by a wide moat and planted regularly with trees or possibly vines. To the rear of the house is what looks like a kitchen garden with regular lines of planting amongst which there is a small, probably, dipping pond and an avenue of trees.

The site remained in the Denny family until the late C17 when it was sold to Samuel Jones, who gave it to Samuel Wake. Wake changed his name to Jones in honour of the gift and *The History of the Ancient Parish of Waltham Abbey* (Farmer 1735) gives us an interesting description of the house and particularly the garden:

'This Abbey is a curious large and antique structure. It hath two Wings on each side of the Front; the whole Front being lately re-built with large stones after a modern, most exact and beautiful Form by the said Charles Wake Jones. It is beautiful to behold, and leads down to a spacious fine garden; a fine canal compassing the same with plenty of all kinds of fish. There are the most curious evergreen hedges, walks, groves, and for variety of fruit 'tis scarcely to be equalled by any private gentleman's. There are also fine kitchen gardens, vineyards, and a bowling green, nay in short, everything else that is commendable and praiseworthy. But above all, I must not forget the Tulip-Tree, the largest and biggest that ever was seen; there being but one more in Great Britain, (as I am informed) and that at the Lord Peterborough's. It blows with innumerable flowers in the months of June and July. Here a Person may walk and all his Senses be employ'd with every thing that is agreeable and delightful; so that it may be said, while you are in these Gardens of Paradise, (if I may so call them) that the Eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the Ear with hearing, by reason of the sweet melodious Songs

of the little enchanting [sic.] Birds. The Garden is exceeding well managed and kept in great Order and Exactness by the Diligence and Care of Mr. Michael Patterson, the chief Gardiner [sic.], and skilful in his Profession.' This extract is accompanied by an engraving of the much-lauded tulip tree.

In *Histories & Antiquities of Essex* (Morant 1768) we learn that Charles Wake Jones died in 1740 and in Britton & Bailey's *Beauties of Britain* (1774) that the house was pulled down in 1770 and the garden let out to a gardener.

Chapman and Andre's map of 1777, which bears the inscription 'The Abbey Sir W Wake Bart.', does not record any detail of the garden, except to show an avenue of trees that lies to the east. By 1799 the Ordnance Survey shows a garden divided into four by dissecting paths with possible evidence of an avenue to the north. A print published in 1814 of the Waltham Abbey Church shows the garden divided from the church by a wall. Here we see two gardeners working with spade and wheelbarrow. The garden contains trees, low shrubs and a square bed planted in rows suggesting a vegetable plot. On the O.S. map of 1870 (inscribed 'Abbey Gardens'), there is no evidence of the garden as depicted in the plan by De Caus except for the moated area that shows as a well-regulated orchard. The moat is clearly depicted, showing the north-western corner forming a second spur of water so that there is at this point a double moat. The O.S. of 2000 shows the site still surrounded by a moat, but only three trees are shown within the garden to indicate sparse planting.

The moat prompts speculation as to its origins: evidence from C15 documents held in the ERO (D/DJg T47) confirms that this area, which was then 'the new cemetery', was contained by a wall, therefore presumably not a moat. Excavations at the back of No 40 Sun Street in 1984 revealed a watercourse of 21 metres in width, which it was felt to be too wide to have been an overflow from the moat. The material in this watercourse suggested that it had been filled in by 1490. There is no evidence of the moat on the 1594 map and so we come to the garden plan by De Caus for Lord Denny where the moat clearly shows as part of the scheme and it is tempting to conclude that this was the moat's origins. To quote once again from Farmer: 'a spacious fine garden; a fine canal compassing the same with plenty of all kinds of fish'.

The Lee Valley Park now manages the Abbey Gardens for English Heritage. The Waltham Abbey Historical Society takes great interest in this supremely important historical site and has recently planted a new tulip tree to replace the incomparable one of the C18.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM & SETTING**

The former house (which incorporated parts of the walls of the cloister, the slype in its north-east corner, and the chapter house) and its gardens lay to the east of the monastic ruins of Waltham Abbey, bounded on the west by Crooked Mile Road, on the south by the gardens of the properties on the north side of Sun Street (the line of the monastic precinct wall) and on the north by the Abbey Gardens car park. The moated enclosure, 120 metres by 180 metres, was the most easterly part of the garden. The site covers about 4 hectares and is flat.

## ENTRANCES & APPROACHES

The position of the entrance to the former house is not clear, though it is likely to have been by the bridge over the Cornmill stream and through the monastic gateway at the north-west corner of the site. The access to the moated enclosure is over a modern brick bridge, aligned on the west east axis of the former house. An earlier plan shows this bridge in a different position, centrally placed on the long axis of the moated enclosure. There is another entrance from Crooked Mile Road into the south-east corner of the moated enclosure, but the opening in the perimeter wall appears to be modern and the timber bridge over the moat rests on concrete piers.

## PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The house was demolished in 1770, but a few complex scars and a probable fireplace are visible on the standing wall of the chapter house. There is no visible evidence of the other domestic offices.

## GARDENS SURVIVING ABOVE GROUND & PLEASURE GROUNDS

There is no evidence in the following areas: a) the walled enclosure to the east of the house (apart from the chapter house wall, pierced by a C17 or 18 opening with fine piers of rubbed brick – extensively and crudely repaired - with hinges for a high double gate) b) the formal parterre to the south of the house c) the supposed bowling green between (a) and (b) and the moated enclosure and (d) the garden with a small avenue to the west of the house, apart from excavation evidence of the remains of a small pond just west of the entrance to the slype.

The moated enclosure is mostly surrounded by walls. The east wall is mainly in C16/17 red brick with no clear bond. Near the gate into Crooked Mile Road, it is over 2 feet thick at the base, markedly battered on the inner face, possibly enclosing a mediaeval core (as seen in an area of precinct wall just north of Sun Street, currently under repair). At the north end, it has been rebuilt in C18/19 red brick on a rough base of broken brick and lime mortar. The south wall is very overgrown but appears to be mainly modern. The north wall is a mixture of stone and red brick in its lower part, with red brick of various periods above. The west wall is incomplete – the north end is a similar mix of stone and red brick, a very short central section in red brick shows part of a round headed opening, with the surviving jamb built with red rubbers, and the south section with a very battered face, enclosing a mediaeval flint and stone wall. These walls vary between 2 and 3 metres in height.

Inside the enclosing walls is a broad moat about 9 metres wide. In the north-west corner, there is a narrower pond, about 50 metres long, close to and parallel to the moat. On the 1870 OS map, this is clearly connected at each end to the moat.

There is no evidence of paths inside the enclosure, and the area contains numbers of apple and pear trees, planted in lines. Old maps suggest that there was room for a path between the moat and the enclosing wall, but there was no clear evidence of this was seen.

Although there is little evidence above ground of the garden, other than the moated feature and remnant walls, the site has been included in the inventory as the area has not been disturbed by later building development and it is thus probable that below the surface archaeological evidence of a sequence of garden layouts remain. These archaeological features would be of particular importance due to their connection with the designer de Caus.

## REFERENCES

- Farmer, J *The History of the Ancient Parish of Waltham Abbey*, (1735), p159/6  
Mee, A *The King's England, Essex*, (1966), p 281-286  
Morant, P *History and Antiquities of Essex*, Vol 1, (1768), p 42-44  
Pevsner, N *The Buildings of England, Essex*, (1976), p 400

## Maps

- Map of Waltham, 1594 (part of larger map housed in Hatfield House Library) reproduced in *Waltham Abbey* by K.N.Bascombe (1995)  
Chapman and André, *Map of Essex*, 1777 sheet 16  
Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing, 1799, sheets 7 & 10  
Ordnance Survey Map, surveyed 1870, 1<sup>st</sup> edition 25' to 1mile scale, sheet 57.2  
Ordnance Survey Map, revised 2000, 1:25,000, Explorer 174  
Garden plan by De Caus. Undated. Drawing held at Worcester College, Oxford University. Also reproduced in *Harris & Tait* 1979 Fig 89 Neg. B69/297

## Archive Items

- 'Deeds of message on north side of 'Eststrete' alias Sun Street' D/DJg T47

## Pictorial Sources

- Print of 'N.E. View of Waltham Abbey church, Essex. Drawn & engraved by J.Greig, pub. J&J.Curdee, Albion Press, London, 1814. Essex Record Office, Mint Binder, Waltham Holy Cross 1/14.

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