

**MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**MALDON**

**BEELEIGH ABBEY**

**TL 840 077**

Former monastic site. Part of the monastic buildings converted to residential use in early C20 by Basil Ionides and Wykeham Chancellor. Both or either may have designed the garden, including pools and sunken courtyards adjacent to the house.

### **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

The abbey was founded about 1180 by the migration of Premonstratensian canons from their site at Great Parndon, Essex. It was dissolved in 1536. What is known of its monastic history is detailed in the Victoria County History, but this account gives very little information about the buildings or the surrounding precinct. A detailed room-by-room inventory of the abbey was made on 6 June 1536 and shows that the majority of the contents, as well as cattle, horses, sheep and pigs, were sold to Mr Gate for £31 15s. However the commissioners retained silver plate worth £17 2s 10d. In 1537 the monastic buildings themselves, and also the mill, were leased to John Gate of Garnetts, High Easter, and granted to him three years later, together with a considerable acreage of properties in neighbouring parishes, for £300. The church and the majority of the buildings were allowed to decay (there were still some standing ruins in the C18), but the chapter house, calefactory, dorter and a fragment of the refectory in the SE corner of the cloister were retained and converted into a house, with a timber framed addition on the south end, probably on the site of the reredorter. In 1549 it was alienated to William Marche whose son died in possession in 1552. It then passed to Thomas Francke of Hatfield Broad Oak, whose descendants owned it for two generations. It then passed through various owners, most of whose occupations, or principal properties, appear to have been outside Essex. It is likely that the abbey was tenanted for long periods. In 1778 it was bought by Abraham Shuttleworth of Maldon Hall, who settled it on his daughter Frances on her marriage into the Baker family, whose successors owned, but did not occupy it, until its sale in 1920. All the monastic buildings, apart from those incorporated in the present house, had been removed by the end of the C18, if not earlier. By the mid C19 the chapter house (mistakenly described as a 'chapel' in various historical accounts) was being used as a pig sty, and part of the grounds were given over to market gardening 'in which the spade has at times turned up stone coffins with skeletons of former inhabitants of the abbey, ancient coins and even hidden treasures'. By the beginning of the C20 the house had fallen into a desperate condition, but in 1912 it was leased to Capt F W Grantham who consulted the architect Basil Ionides about its restoration. Plans were drawn up in 1912 and 1913, and the restoration was completed by new owners, Mr and Mrs R E Thomas who bought the house in 1920. The Chelmsford architect, Wykeham Chancellor, was responsible for alterations to the cottage attached to the barns in 1919 and was involved again in February 1930 when he drew a plan of the east front.

A map of 1777 shows an enclosure, presumably a garden, to the east of the house. A plan drawn in 1805, lacks any details, but an enclosed area (with probably identical boundaries to the present garden walls) is marked as 'garden' in the key. The '6 inch to the mile' OS map, surveyed in 1873/4, shows rows of trees on the southern part of this enclosure (the present orchard and rose garden), and a larger area (without trees) immediately to the north (the present great lawn). The 25 inch map, revised

in 1895, shows the same outline with a stream or drain running down the west side of the property into the River Chelmer from a pond south of the bridleway. No ponds are shown within the garden, or to the north of the house. The third edition of the 25" OS map, revised in 1920, shows the canal (between the entrance) and the circular pool to the south of the house, but not the pond to the north. A small rectangle of land, NE of the barn, has been incorporated into the garden. Since that survey, a large pond has been excavated to the north of the house, and some of the land down to the river bank has been added to the garden.

Though the broad outline of the garden, and its three main compartments, have not changed for at least 200 years, various pools and a pond were added in the C20, perhaps designed by Ionides or Chancellor. The latter's drawing of 1930, showing the pool on the east side of the house, does not make it clear if this was a proposal, or a record of what already existed. The long narrow water channel, running the length of the frontage, has either been removed or was never installed. The OS map surveyed in 1920 suggests that most, or all, of the pools were already in existence by that date but the pond on the north must have been added subsequently.

## **DESCRIPTION**

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

Beeleigh Abbey is 1km west-norwest of Maldon, on the south bank of the tidal reaches of the River Chelmer which forms its northern boundary. A lane called Abbey Turning lies to the west, and a bridleway on the south runs through to Maldon. Evidence from maps suggests that this bridleway is a modern creation, rather than the original main access from Maldon. Generally the site is level but falls gently on the northern side down to the estuary where it is prone to flood at very high tides.

### **ENTRANCE & APPROACHES**

The present entrance is off the bridleway. There is no evidence of a lodge or gatehouse, or a mediaeval precinct wall. The original entrance may have been from Abbey Turning lane through the now lost western range.

### **PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

Beeleigh Abbey is listed Grade I and incorporates the C13 chapter house, parlour, calefactory (with dormer above) and a fragment of the frater. On the south end is an early C17 timber-framed extension. Facing the west side of the house across the drive are a variety of brick and timber framed buildings, (none of which are shown on the 1805 plan) with pantile roofs (probably of early C19 date). There is also a brick cottage, shown on the 1805 plan and reconstructed by Wykeham Chancellor in 1919.

### **SOURCES**

- Bettley, J., & Pevsner, N., 2007 *Buildings of England: Essex*, Yale UP, 127-128  
Coller, D. W., 1861 *People's History of Essex*, Chelmsford, 586-587  
Hussey C, 1922 'Beeleigh Abbey, Maldon', in *Country Life*, lii, 406-412  
Fowler, R C, 1905 'Inventories of Essex Monasteries in 1536' in *EAT*, ns, ix, 335-40  
Fowler R C & Clapham A W, 1922 *Beeleigh Abbey* (in ERO library)  
Leach, M., 2004 'Report of visit' in *Essex Archaeology & History News*, 142, 7-8  
Morant, P., 1768 *History of Essex*, i, 334-336

Page, W., & Round, J.H. (eds), 1907 *Victoria County History of Essex*, ii, London, 172-181  
Report of meeting, 1899 in *EAT*, ns, vii, 410  
Report of meeting, 1920 in *EAT*, ns, xv, 326  
Report of meeting, 1928 in *EAT*, ns, xix, 218  
*Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of Essex* 1921, ii, HMSO, 172-181

#### **Maps and Images**

1777 map of Essex, surveyed by Andre & Chapman  
1799 OS surveyor's drawings (2" to one mile)  
1805 sketch of lands belonging to Beeleigh Abbey, ERO D/DMb/P17  
1873/4 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6" OS map  
1895 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 25" OS map  
1920 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 25" OS map

#### **Archival Items**

1912/3 plans for restoration and additions by B Ionides. ERO D/B 3/22/177 & 186  
1930 plan of east side of house & adjoining terrace by W. Chancellor. ERO D/F 8/704

Research, and site visit on 26 November 2008, by Michael Leach