

ENGLISH HERITAGE REGISTERED GRADE II

BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL
BELCHAMP WALTER
GD 1729

BELCHAMP HALL

TL825 406

Late C18 parkland enclosing a garden containing formal elements contemporary with the building of the house in 1720.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The lordship of the manor of Belchamp Walter was, at the time of the Domesday survey, in the possession of Alberic de Vere, in whose family it remained until the C17. Under the de Veres it was held by a number of families until in 1539 it came to Sir Roger Wentworth. Sir Roger's grandson, John Wentworth, commissioned the surveyor Walker to prepare a map of his estate, which was completed in 1605 and showed that the house was surrounded by a garden with an orchard, a rectangular pond, and a dovecote, and was enclosed to west and north by a ditch. John Wentworth sold the manor (still officially held by the de Veres) to John Raymond in c 1611. The C16 manor house was replaced in 1720/21 by John Raymond III and map evidence suggests that the layout of the gardens most probably dates from this period (Walker, 1605; Chapman and André, 1777). In c 1741 outlying parts of the estate. Together with the lordship of the manor, were sold to Thomas Ruggles but the manor house was not included in the sale. The Rev Samuel Raymond, who succeeded in 1767 and married Margarett Brooke Bridges in 1780, laid out the little park to the south-west of the gardens with small clumps of trees (OSD 1799). When Rev Raymond died in 1825, Samuel Millbank Raymond inherited and lived at Belchamp, where he was known as Squire Raymond, until his death in 1863. He was succeeded by his second son, Rev John Mayne St Clere Raymond, who in c 1865 recovered the lordship of the manor and in 1871 extended the house with the addition of a new wing. At around this time a sham castle folly was built beyond the park to the south-west, to act as an eyecatcher from the gardens (CL 1959). The large, late C19 extension to the house was reduced in the 1950s by the Rev M St Clere Raymond's grandson, Samuel Philip St Clere Raymond who, together with his wife Mabel Astell, created intimate gardens enclosed by yew hedges close to the house. The site remains (2000) in single private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Belchamp Hall stands in the little Essex village of Belchamp Walter, in a secluded rural setting c 6km south of Sudbury close to the Suffolk/Essex border. The c 9ha site sits on the north side of the Belchamp Brook valley, the ground falling slightly from west to east. It is bounded to the north-west and north-east by Hall Road, and to the south-east and south-west by farmland.

ENTRANCE AND APPROACHES

The Hall is approached from the east-south-east, through late C18 stone and rubble gate piers (listed grade II) set opposite the village church of St Mary. The piers are flanked by short curving walls capped with wrought-iron railings. The c 80m long straight drive leads to a circular carriage drive below the south-east front and surrounds a lawn set with a central sundial. A second drive enters the grounds from the road, c 100m to the north-east of the Hall, where the boundary is formed by a brick and rubble wall. Gate piers surmounted by iron heraldic emblems (listed grade II together with the boundary wall) flank the drive which passes the stable block before turning south-east and south to join the main carriage drive below the south-east front.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Belchamp Hall (listed grade II*) is a small country mansion built of red brick with a gabled peg-tile roof. The Hall has two storeys with attics, the entrance front on the south-east having a nine-bay façade with a central stone porch, surmounted by urns and added in the late C18, projecting over the door. The garden front to the south-west has a two-storey canted bay window, all that remains of a larger extension added during the late C19. Belchamp Hall was built of John Raymond in C 1720 to replace an earlier, possibly timber, C16 manor house. The late C18 stable and coach house lie c 70m north-north-east of the Hall, beside the entrance off Hall Road. The two building, of red brick with blue headers, are linked by a single-storey block. In the centre of the stables' peg-tile roof is a painted timber open-arched cupola with pyramid roof. These buildings were converted in the late C20 for office and commercial use.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The entrance façade to Belchamp Hall looks south-east over lawns which flank the main drive. The parish church of St Mary (of C13 origin) lies c 100m to the east of the Hall (outside the site here registered), forming an important visual part of the landscape scheme. Beyond the lawn, c 150m to the south-east of the Hall is a raised terrace, beyond which lies a sunken garden. This garden, planted with water-loving species around a brick-lined rectangular pool, is shown in this position on Walker's map of 1605. The land rises from the pool to the south-

east boundary and is planted as a shelter belt, this small area having been taken into the garden following a road diversion sometime before 1777 (Chapman and André). The south-west boundary of the gardens is marked by a raised terrace walk running from north-west to south-east for c 200m. The walk runs north-west/south-east c 40m to the south-west of the Hall, the area in between having been enclosed by yew hedges in the late C20 and laid to rose and herbaceous gardens. The terrace walk is terminated at each end by a building: to the south-east is a small octagonal rubble and stone garden room (listed grade II) with domed ceiling, while at the north-west end the remains of a pavilion built of brick and knapped flint stand on a mound probably made from the rubble of a demolished wall. Slightly to the north-west the site of the icehouse is marked on the first and second editions 25" OS maps. A ditch is marked on the 1605 Walker survey in a similar position to the raised walk, the terrace itself, from the cartographic evidence, probably being created as part of the garden work undertaken when the present house was built in 1720. To the north-west and north of the Hall the gardens are laid to lawn whilst to the north-east a further small, late C20 herbaceous garden has been created.

PARK

The small park at Belchamp Hall surrounds the gardens from the south-east to north-north-west and is mainly composed of woodland with an area of open parkland to the south-west of the raised terrace walk. Beyond the boundary of the park, c 440m south-west of the Hall, is a flint and rubble sham castle (listed grade II), built in the late C19 as an eyecatcher from the terrace walk, to be seen through a controlled gap in the park's perimeter plantation. Late C20 growth in the woodland has closed this gap.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The walled kitchen garden lies on the north-west side of the stable block, which forms one of its enclosing walls. The garden contains a rectangular brick-lined pool running from north-east to south-west across the centre, dividing vegetable growing areas to the north from an orchard and tennis courts to the south. The date of construction of the walled garden and pool are not clear from cartographic evidence; although both are certainly shown on the 1839 Tithe map, they may be contemporary with the building of the house in 1720.

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