

**CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL
DANBURY**

DANBURY PARK

TL 76626 04984

GRADE II

Park and woodland originating in the C16, with mid C19 gardens and C20 developments, all surrounding a mid C19 mansion.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1589 Sir Walter Mildmay purchased the Danbury estate from William Parr, brother of Catherine Parr, sixth wife of Henry VIII and decided to build himself a new house there which he called Danbury Place. The house was set within a deer park at this time (Rigby 1993). Sir Walter was succeeded by his second son who died in 1613, at which time the estate passed to Sir Walter's third son, Sir Humphrey. Through family succession, the estate passed to Colonel Thomas Fytche who, in 1758, commissioned an estate map which shows the park planted with several avenues aligned on the house, a further series cut through the woods on Stubbers Hill, formal gardens enclosed by a moat on two sides lying to the east of the house, and a walled kitchen garden. Thomas died in 1777 and was succeeded by Mr Disney Fytche, in the same year that the Chapman and Andre county map was published, showing that the site had not been modernised since 1758. By 1829 the house had fallen into disrepair and the following year the estate was sold to John Round, Member of Parliament for Maldon. The catalogue prepared for this sale records that in contrast to the poor state of the house, the park was 'very beautiful' and filled with 'stately trees' (ERO). John Round pulled down the C16 house and commissioned the architect Thomas Hopper to build a new one on a new site slightly to the east. He also built an icehouse at the western end of the lakes (J Round diaries, ERO). In 1845 Round sold the estate to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for use as an episcopal palace, resulting in the name of the mansion being changed to Danbury Palace. During the mid C19 the bishops laid out elaborate formal gardens to the east of the mansion and an American Garden to the south. The bishops sold Danbury in 1892 to Seth Taylor who quickly resold it to Hugh Hoare. During the early years of the C20 Danbury became the seat of Colonel Alwayne Greville before being sold in 1919 to General Wilson. In 1947 much of the estate was purchased by Essex County Council who set up a youth camp in part of the park and in 1974 designated the southern area around the lakes as a country park, while the house and its associated buildings became part of Anglia Polytechnic University. The site remains (2000) in divided private and public ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Danbury Park lies on the western boundary of the Essex town of Danbury in an urban-edge setting. The mansion stands in the centre of a generally level park which slopes gently from north-east to south-west. The c 100ha site is bounded to the north by the A414, to the east by Well Lane, and to the south partly by Woodhill Road and partly by farmland which extends round to enclose the west boundary. The fall in the land allows views out of the park from the mansion over the farmland to the west.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main approach to Danbury Palace is from the centre of the northern boundary, past Main Lodge (listed grade II), an early to mid C19 red-brick turreted building in the Tudor style which lies c 500m north of the mansion. The slightly curving drive runs south to arrive at the west front. Prior to the building of the Hopper house in the early C19, the northern approach to the earlier mansion consisted of two parallel straight drives lined with groups of trees. The drive was realigned by John Round when the new house was built. Other mid C19 lodged entrances are no longer connected to Danbury Palace. Lower Lodge, a single-storey, red-brick cottage lies c 800m to the north-west of the mansion, at the north-west tip of the park, while c 400m to the south-west a further mid C19 lodge now marks the entrance to Cedar Cottage, a mid-C20 private dwelling erected immediately to the west of the stable block. Woodhill Lodge lies on the south side of Woodhill Road c 300m to the south-east of the mansion.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Danbury Palace (formerly Place) (listed grade II) is a large, red-brick country mansion built in the Gothic style for John Round by Thomas Hopper in 1832. The main block has two storeys and parts which rise to three and four storeys, with mullioned windows and a two-storey entrance porch on the west front. The house has castellated parapets and an octagonal turret on the north-east corner. At the south end is an attached chapel added by Bishop Wigram between 1860 and 1868. The present house was built to replace an earlier mansion which was erected by Sir Walter Mildmay in 1589 and stood slightly to the west. It currently (2000) forms part of Anglia Polytechnic University who have also taken over the former stable block and service buildings which lie to the south-west of the Palace. Late C20 buildings have been added to the complex by the University.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The garden lies to the north, east, and south of Danbury Palace, enclosed to the north and partly to the east by high red-brick walls. The north garden, which is laid to lawn, is entered through a gate beside the north-west corner of the house and is divided from the north drive by a screen wall composed of decorative iron panels between red-brick gate piers which forms the western boundary of the north garden. Beyond the lawn there are mixed borders at the base of both boundary walls.

The lawn extends round to the east front where it is planted with several mature specimen conifers. A brick path from a garden door runs east through the lawn to a set of brick steps, c 6m from the east front, which lead up to a series of garden compartments enclosed by clipped yew hedges and topiary. These compartments include a rose garden, a long walk, a pool garden with a pair of small formal lily pools, and a mid C20 tennis court. Although most of the planting is late C20, the form of this garden dates from the mid C19, following the rebuilding of the house.

A path before the east lawn, running north/south parallel with the east front, leads south beyond the house to a small yew-enclosed C20 herbaceous garden planted below the outer east and south walls of the C19 kitchen garden. The path then continues south through the site of what was, in the C19, an American Garden (now lost), to the lakes in the woods along the southern boundary of the site.

Beyond the entrance drive below the west front a large open lawn is bounded by a low curved brick wall, with central wrought-iron gates hung on brick piers surmounted by urns, which is aligned on the west avenue, giving views out of the park across the surrounding countryside. This arrangement, along with the planting of the west avenue, was completed between 1897 and 1924 (OS).

PARK

Danbury Park in the late C20 has a very mixed character. The north-west quarter, where some mature oaks survive, is mainly fenced and used as horse pasture although part of it is under arable cultivation. By contrast, the east park remains under grass and is heavily treed, with a diversity of species and ages including some very mature cedar and oak, although none of the mid C18 avenues in this area survive. The north-east section is now (2000) used as a youth camp and some late C20 buildings have been erected. This area is enclosed by dense boundary woodlands which have developed since the late C19 and extend beyond Main Lodge into part of the west park.

The south and south-east sections of the park are entirely wooded and contain a string of three ornamental lakes, running from north-east to south-west c 250m south of Danbury Palace. Both the wood, known as Stubbers Hill, and the lakes are recorded on the 1758 estate map which shows a mount in the south-east corner of the wood upon which a series of paths and all lakes are aligned. By 1829 this formal arrangement had been removed.

The south-west quarter of the park is now (2000) open arable land with no surviving parkland trees or boundary plantations. It is divided from the north-west section by the early C20 lime avenue aligned on the main entrance to the mansion.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The former walled kitchen garden lies on the south side of the stables and service buildings and is now (2000) used as a car park by the University. Map evidence suggests that the walled garden dates from the C18 and was retained by Round when he built the present house in the early C19.

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