

**UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL
HATFIELD BROAD OAK**

DOWN HALL

TL523 130

GRADE II

A late C19 mansion with the remains of gardens laid out in the same period by Alfred Parsons, surrounded by a park for which Charles Bridgeman prepared designs in 1720, altered at the end of the C18, possibly by Humphry Repton.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Down Hall was held by Hatfield Broad Oak Priory from the 1320s to the Dissolution and the messuage of Down Hall was mentioned in 1420. The manor was acquired by the Glascock family and remained with them, later by female descent, until it was sold in 1720 to Edward Harley, later Earl of Oxford (VCH). Harley lent half the purchase price of Down Hall to his friend Matthew Prior, the poet, on condition that the property reverted to him after Prior's death. Prior commissioned James Gibbs (1682-1754) to design a new house although his ideas were not executed. At the same time, Charles Bridgeman (d. 1738) was employed to lay out the grounds and the progress of this work, which was carried out, is well documented (British Library; Boddleian archives). Matthew Prior died in 1721 before the gardens were completed, but the work was continued by Edward Harley, to whom the property reverted. His extravagance eventually ruined him and he was forced to sell Down Hall to William Selwin, a London merchant. Between 1777 (Chapman & Andre map) and 1799 (OSD) much work was undertaken in the grounds to soften the formal lines of Bridgeman's design and towards the end of the C18 the Hall was rebuilt in a plain Classical style for Mrs. Jane Caygill (nee Selwin). The new Hall is included as an illustration in the 1802 edition of the *Polite Repository* and it is possible therefore that Humphry Repton (1752-1818) was responsible for this phase of the development. In 1806 Mrs. Caygill left the estate to her grandson Charles Ibbetson, who took the name Ibbetson Selwin. In 1825 his younger brother John Ibbetson Selwin succeeded. During his lifetime the landscape remained little altered, the 1838 Tithe map showing the survival of some elements of the Bridgeman design (including a hornbeam avenue) together with the late C18 softening and the addition of a new wilderness. When John died in 1869 the estate passed to his son Sir Henry Selwin-Ibbetson, later Lord Rockwood who, in 1871, commissioned F. P. Cockerell to replace the house with a new one in the Italianate style. Lord Rockwood also laid out an Italian water garden beside the new Hall, for which Philip Burne-Jones is said to have designed a garden temple. Lord Rockwood died in 1901 and was succeeded by his nephew Captain Horace Calverley. Captain Calverley and his wife entered correspondence with Alfred Parsons between 1902 and 1905 during which time he provided advice and designs for the gardens. During the First World War the Hall was used as a hospital but in 1920 the estate was broken up and sold. During the 1930s the Hall became a girls' school and in 1967 was converted into a residential management training centre. In 1986 the present owners purchased and restored the property, since which time it has been open as a hotel, in which use it remains (2000).

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM & SETTING

Down Hall occupies a rural setting midway between the towns of Harlow and Bishop's Stortford, just to the south of the A1060 Chelmsford to Bishop's Stortford road. The c. 60ha site is enclosed along most of its irregular northern boundary by Pincey Brook, and to the west by a minor country road. Farmland forms the south and east boundaries. The Hall is set in the north-east corner of the park, on a spur with gently falling ground to the west, north and south. The heavily wooded nature of the site precludes long views from the Hall over the park.

ENTRANCES & APPROACHES

Down Hall is approached from the east, past a lodge situated c. 300m from the Hall, along a straight drive partly lined with hornbeam, which survives from the Bridgeman period (*VCH*), and partly with mixed C19 plantings. After c. 170m the drive turns north-west past ornamental woodland, to arrive at the circular gravelled forecourt below the east front of the Hall. This drive is shown in its present position on the 1777 county map (Chapman & Andre), although the lodge is of a later date. A second drive enters the park c. 600m to the west of the Hall, the tree lined drive running east past two lodges, Sheering Lodge c. 430m from the Hall, and the second (Keeper's) c. 120m east of Sheering, after which the drive curves through the open park, skirts the southern boundary of the gardens and then turns north to arrive at the east front. The west drive is no longer in use, the two lodges having been sold into private ownership. It is of later date than the east drive, being of early C19 origin (Tithe map, 1838).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Down Hall (listed Grade II) is a large country mansion, built of poured concrete in the Mannerist Italianate style. The main rectangular block has two storeys under a hipped slate roof, surmounted by a centrally placed clock tower. The main façade faces east, with projecting bays to north and south and a central single-storey porch with a domed roof. The walls are heavily decorated with friezes. A lower two-storey service range projects east from the northern end of the main block. The garden front faces west and has three-storey pavilions with pyramid roofs on each corner, linked on the ground floor by a colonnaded loggia. The Hall was built by F. P. Cockerell in 1871-3 for Lord Rockwood, incorporating a flat-roofed conservatory, all that survives of the late C18 Hall. In the late C20 the Hall was converted to a hotel and a large new wing was built, in similar to the main Hall, to which it is connected by a single-storey addition off the north-west corner.

On the north side of the Hall, within a small service yard, stands the late C19 Dairy/Game Larder (listed Grade II) which is built of gault brick under a pyramidal scalloped slate roof.

GARDENS & PLEASURE GROUNDS

The main area of gardens lies below the west front of the Hall. Wide gravel terraces lead onto a large lawn area, crossed by paths aligned on the centre of the Hall and the new wing. These converge on a central circular basin, while c. 75m to the south-west of the Hall terrace stands a small garden temple, decorated with shells and tiles, said to have been designed by Philip Burne-Jones at the end of the C19 (*VCH*). The clump of trees behind this temple screens a mid C20 swimming pool. This and the circular

basin, which was initially set within a complex bedding scheme, are all that survive of the late C19 formal gardens.

Further garden features to the north of the Hall and new wing, including a long walk to a sunken rectangular pool shown on the Bridgeman design plan, have become completely overgrown with woodland and are now (2000) divided from the gardens by a wire fence.

To the east of the entrance forecourt is a small late C20 formal garden beside tennis courts enclosed by tall hedges.

PARK

The majority of the park at Down Hall is covered by woodlands. To the north is the large Downhall Wood, developed in the late C18 partly over the site of the formal Bridgeman layout. The central section of the park is more open with large areas of grass flanking the west drive. The fringes of the open park, where it joins the woodland blocks, are planted with a range of exotic trees including a number of very mature cedars of Lebanon.

South of the open park further blocks of woodland enclose a stream which runs from east to west through the park. This stream marked the extent of the park in 1838 (Tithe map). By the end of the C19 further woodland planting had been added to the south bank of the stream.

At the western end of the park, beyond the Keeper's and Sheering lodges, trees are confined to boundary plantations and those lining the old west drive. The open areas of parkland are now (2000) under the plough. This area was added to the park at the end of the C19 when existing fields were embellished with clumps of parkland trees.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The walled garden lies c. 100m to the north-east of the Hall. It is now (2000) in separate private ownership and forms the gardens to Down House which stands on its southern boundary. Within the walls are garden areas, a swimming pool, and a garden pavilion. Down House and the garden are both shown on the 1777 county map (Chapman & Andre)

REFERENCES

Peacock, 1802 *Polite Repository*

Building News, 4 July 1873, illustration

Pevsner, N. & Radcliffe, E. 1979 *Buildings of England: Essex*, Penguin, 235

Willis, P., 1977 *Charles Bridgeman*, 72-76, 89, pls 66, 67, 68 & 69

Powell, W R.(ed), 1983 *Victoria County History of Essex* viii, OUP

Maps

Chapman & Andre, 1777 *Map of Essex*

Tithe map, Hatfield Broad Oak 1838: ERO D/CT 166

OS surveyor's drawings, 1799 (ERO facsimile)

OS 6" to 1 mile; 1st edition published 1874, 2nd edition 1898 & 3rd edition 1923

OS 25" to 1 mile; 2nd edition published 1895

Archival Items

Designs for the grounds by Charles Bridgeman; one in BL Loan 29/357 [Portland papers] set 2; three in Boddelean, Gough Maps, 45, 114r & 115t;46.

Selection of postcards c. 1920 in ERO

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