

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL
ELSENHAM

ELSENHAM HALL

TL 543 248

Development of the Elsenham estate in the early C19 into landscaped parkland and formal pleasure gardens.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Philip Morant writing in 1768 relates how 'soon after the conquest this Lordship belonged to a noble Family surnamed De Abrincis, or D'avranches, Barons of Folkestone in Kent.' The estate passed to the 'ancient family of Walden in C14/15'. By the mid C15 the Barley family were in possession until William Barley forfeited his great estate for supporting Perkin Warbeck. Henry VII subsequently pardoned Barley in 1500 and restored the estate, which remained in the Barley family until purchased by Sir Thomas Adams in the mid C17. The estate was passed to, and through, various sons of Adams until Sir Robert, the eighth son, succeeded his brother Charles, the sixth son, in 1726. In 1730 it was bought by William Dawkins and on his death given to Bailey Heath (eldest son of Thomas Heath of Stansted Hall), as Dawkins was without heirs. Around this time an estate map of 1727 surveyed by John Ham, 'Teacher of Mathmatiks', shows the grounds before any improvement, with the house surrounded by fields and the old orchard.

In 1760 the estate passed into the Rush family when William's daughter Kitty Heath married George Rush of Farthinghoe. The Chapman & Andre map of 1777 shows a modest property set beside the church and at this time an unimproved landscape.

It was in 1819 that permission was sought by George Rush II, through a road diversion order, to take the highway away from the southwest corner of the house in a wide sweep in order to create parkland. An estate map of 1823 shows a very obviously landscaped pond, with head and tail disguised in carefully arranged plantations with a smaller pond behind the house next to the pleasure ground that has shaped flowerbeds of typical Regency outline. Collier writing of Elsenham in 1861 in his *People's History of Essex* mentions 'delightful grounds and gardens and a beautiful sheet of water, the residence of the widow of George Rush, Esq.' The 1864 September issue of *The Florist and Pomologist* carries a descriptive piece on the gardens of Elsenham Hall concentrating mainly on the planting. Mention is made of a 'gigantic Tulip Tree...grand specimens of the Fern-leaved Lime, a Fern-leaved Beech...a splendid and healthy specimen of *Picea nobilis*, some 20 feet in height, *P. excelsa*, and in marked contrast *P. pygmaea*.' and a detailed description of the summer planting. This garden design was not recorded in 1875 on the 25" Ordnance Survey map, but the two water features and the park kept their form.

After the death of the last Rush in 1879, Elsenham was bought by the Gilbeys, under whom the grounds were 'well known for their beauty and the exquisite manner in which they were kept' (Rush, *Seats in Essex*, 1897). Pike's *Essex in the Twentieth Century* (1909) tells us '[Elsenham] is pleasantly situated in large and beautiful grounds and in the park surrounding it, which is seventy acres in extent, there is much fine timber, the trees being allowed to grow quite naturally; and within the park are

two lakes of considerable size.' A more contemporary account of the history of Elsenham village written by J. Sayers in 1999 recounts how Sir Walter Gilbey Bart. 'had the Hall made larger by extensions...followed by extending the ornamental gardens around the Hall...1890 saw the beginning of a large fruit growing holding at Elsenham, set up by Walter, which resulted in a jam factory being built ..'. Sir Walter Gilbey was also a keen horse breeder and instrumental in founding the Shire Horse Society, the Hackney Horse Society and the Hunter's Improvement Society. On 10 January 1891 the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* carried a print of Elsenham Hall showing separate sketches of 'The Stud Farm, Pleasure Gardens, Coachman's Cottage, Elsenham Hall, The Stables, The Pavilion and The Lake.'

Sir Henry Walter Gilbey inherited the estate in 1914 when Elsenham Hall, with its extensive paddocks, was commandeered by the War Department for the preparation of horses for war. Sir Henry never returned to the Hall and in 1922 it was sold and split up. The Pathfinder map shows the parkland and the water features still in evidence and very little change is discernible on the 1990 and 2000 aerial surveys.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Not available. A sales catalogue of 1973 describes a walled garden with four heated greenhouses, tool sheds and cold frames. There is reference to a parkland setting with wooded grounds and three railed paddocks. The grounds contained a three acre lake on the north side, with some fine specimen trees, including oak, ash, conifers and sycamore. Part of the area was subject to a tree preservation order.

REFERENCES

- Morant, P., 1768 *History and Antiquities of Essex*, ii, p.570
Coller, D W., 1861 *A People's History of Essex*, p.528
The Florist and Pomologist September 1864 p.202
Rush, J A., 1897 *Seats in Essex*, p.78
Pike, W T., 1909 *Essex in the Twentieth Century*, p.41
Barker, G., & Sayers, J., *A History of the Village of Elsenham*, p.89-113

Maps

- John Ham *Map of the Estate of Elsenham Hall 1727*: ERO D/DBi P1
Chapman and Andre *Map of Essex 1777*
Surveyor unknown *Map of Elsenham Hall Estate 1823*: ERO T/M 437
O.S. 25" to 1 mile, 1st edition surveyed 1875 sheet 23-1
Pathfinder 1074

Archival Items

- Reproduced print from *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* January 1891: ERO I/MP 133/1
Road diversion order: ERO Q/Ri 4/20

Aerial Survey, 1990: Run 26 Ref 4860. 2000: 2721 of 329

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