

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL
GREAT HALLINGBURY

HALLINGBURY PARK (formerly PLACE)
with HATFIELD FOREST

TL 516 187

A Capability Brown landscape (now degraded); the garden redesigned by Robert Wallace; pond designed by Brown in Hatfield Forest, with earlier C18 shell house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The estate of Hallingbury, for many years the seat of the Lords de Morley, was acquired in 1729 by the trustees of the young Jacob Houblon, heir to the fortune of several brothers. The mansion had been built in the 16C and a written survey of 1652 (D/DB M46) refers to 'one orchard and one garden together with one large Moate', still known as Morley Pond. By 1700 there was also a wilderness and a bowling green.

The estate included the ancient royal forest of Hatfield, which was used by the Houblons as an extension of their grounds in spite of a complicated division of forest rights. The 18C was peppered with acrimonious debates with the Barringtons of nearby Barrington Hall, about which of them had the right to what in the forest. Jacob Houblon, who owned the soil, in about 1746 dammed Shermore Brook to make an 8-acre ornamental pond 'and built a small House there for himself and Friends to drink Tea in and a little Garden round it'. In 1757 Brown made 'A Plan for the Alteration of the Water adjoining to Cottage Coppice', with an island and leaving alternative tails to the pond, pointing in different directions. It is not certain whether the shell house or grotto was built at this time or was already standing, but it certainly appears on an estate map of 1757, which shows the pond before Brown's alterations. Jacob Houblon Jnr. enquired about the improvements in letters home while on the Grand Tour in 1759: 'How does Mr. Brown's plan succeed? By what Mr. Lipyeatt tells me it must be very pretty...'. Brown received his second and last payment for this work in 1762.

The grounds of Hallingbury Place itself look unimproved on Chapman and André (surveyed by the end 1773), but Muilman says that Jacob Houblon 'has already made very considerable improvements in the grounds about [the house], and which when finished will render it a delightful seat' (1771). Brown in 1772 charged for 'A Survey of Hallingbury...by Mr. Spyers, and a fair Drawing. A General Plan for the Alteration of the Place - Plans for the Lodge' which earned him a complimentary letter from Houblon. It is not at present known whether this plan has survived. The bill was not delivered until 1778, when presumably the alterations had been implemented. A view engraved in 1832 from Wright's *History of Essex* shows the effect of the piece of water in relation to the house, which had been modernised during the same period as Brown's improvements, but as Hallingbury is illustrated in Peacock's *Repository* for 1803, it is also possible that the lake was Repton's design, executed for Houblon's son John Archer. This view is supported by the absence of the lake on the Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing of 1799.

In 1909 the estate was leased to the Lockett Agnews, who undertook major modernisation of both interior and gardens. Mrs. Lockett Agnew 'sought the help of Messrs. R. Wallace, who put her ideas into practical shape' (*Country Life*, 19 Sept. 1914) – (Robert Wallace also provided a design for the gardens of Welford Park, the Berkshire seat of the Archer Houblons.) The gardens of Hallingbury after this transformation are described in two *Country Life* articles, of 19 September 1914 and 4 October 1919, as well as in *The Garden* of 29 November 1913. In the process of remodelling, Morley Pond 'was transformed into a beautiful natural water garden' by 'the removal of some thousands of tons of earth, creating long, sloping valleys between giant Oaks right down to the water's edge'. The other main features were a Sunk Garden and Lily Pond, a Rose Garden with pergola, and a Wild Garden.

In 1923 the Hallingbury estate of 3,140 acres was sold. Hallingbury Place and Hatfield Forest were bought together, but shortly afterwards the house was demolished and Hatfield Forest given to the National Trust. Three residences were created in the gardens: the converted 16C stable block; 'Morleys' built slightly to the west using some materials from the Place, and a third called Ladywell. These three properties all contain elements of the Wallace garden, while the avenue and site of Hallingbury Place belong to Lodge Farm.

In spite of its present fragmented ownership, Hallingbury/ Hatfield Forest has been included in the *Inventory* largely for the historic value of the old estate. Although the forest is National Trust, Brown's pond and Cottage Coppice are managed by the Wildlife Trust and from the point of historic landscape need restoration and more sympathetic treatment. The erstwhile park of Hallingbury Place is still just recognisable as such, although now farmed, with the outlines of Brown's piece of water obscured by scrub and willows. Parts of Wallace's garden survive in the grounds of the three houses built on the estate.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Not available.

REFERENCES

- Muilman, P., 1771 *A New and Complete History of Essex*, iv
Excursions through Essex, ii, 1819
Houblon, Lady A A., 1907 *The Houblon Family*
Rackham, O., 1989 *The Last Forest: the Story of Hatfield Forest*
Musson, J., 1994 *The Shell House, Hatfield Forest*, (ms)

Maps

- Hollingworth and Landers, '*Takely Forest Belonging to Jacob Houblon Esqr*', 1757: ERO D/DB P37)
'*A Plan for the Alteration of the Water adjoining to Cottage Coppice, 1757*': Berks RO
'*Plans of Essex estates*' n d, but pre Brown: No.1, Hallingbury: Berks RO D/EAH 6073-73
'*Plan of Hatfield Park belonging to John A. Houblon, Esq.*' c.1825: ERO D/DZ1 49
Plan of Hatfield Forest, showing rides, pond and grotto, c.1850: ERO D/DZI 36
Large map of Hatfield Forest, faint but shows good detail, 1853: ERO D/DZI 51
Chapman and André, *Map of Essex*, 1777

O.S.6" to 1 mile, 1st edition, surveyed 1874
Pathfinder 1074 and 1097, (1993 and 1992)

Aerial photographs Runs 18 – 5357 / 5359 and 20 - 5342 / 5343

Archive Items

Essex Record Office: D/DU 1597

D/DB M28ff

D/DWv *passim*

D/DKw M1-8 and T10

Sale catalogue 1923 (A316)

Berkshire Record Office: D/EAH 6061; 6073; 6090; 6116

Images

Engraving in *Excursions through Essex*, 1819

Engraving in Thomas Wright, *History and Topography of the County of Essex*, 1836

Photographs in *The Garden*, 29 November 1913

Photographs in *The Garden*, 31 January 1920

Photographs in *Country Life*, 4 October 1919

Researcher: Fiona Cowell