

**BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL
COGGESHALL**

HOLFIELD GRANGE

TL 833 234

A layout typical of a mid C18 manor house, with important connections with one of the leading plant introducers of that time.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Holfield, or Oldfield, Grange was originally one of the granges of Coggeshall Abbey, and grew the grapes for the abbey wine in the area still known as Vineyards. Only in about 1810 were the last of the vines rooted up (Coller, 1861).

After the Dissolution the manor of Holfield Grange was granted in 1544 to Clement Smith of Little Baddow (d.1552), whose son John sold it in 1561 to Robert Gurdon. From the Gurdons, the Grange was acquired by the Osgoods, but there is some confusion in the authorities over the names: Morant says that Henry Osgood bought it from Gurdon and 'converted the house into a good seat, and made a Park about it'; Burke's Landed Gentry (1937 edition) calls him Obadiah; while an estate map of 1709 shows 'The Mannor of the Grange' in the possession of John Osgood, gent. Whatever his name, this Osgood was survived by an only daughter Hannah or Anna, who married John Hanbury, 'a rich Virginia merchant'.

The estate map of 1709 was presumably made for Hannah's father (John?) as she was born in 1705, but there is no sign of 'a park about' the house, which is closely surrounded by fields. Morant (1768) states that John Hanbury 'cased the house with brick, and by other great improvements made it an elegant seat'. This must be the state of the house as shown on the engraving in A New and Complete History of Essex (Vol. vi, 1772), and possibly further improvements were made by Osgood Hanbury after he inherited in 1757, as recorded on a pen and ink sketch (hanging in Holfield Grange) very similar to the engraving but taking in a little more land to the left of the picture, and including an elegant summer house or green house.

A single surviving account book kept by Osgood Hanbury between 1757 and 1777 shows that between 1760 and 1776 he bought garden supplies, mainly seeds, from James Gordon, totalling £106. The entry for October 1764 specifies orange trees, which may have been destined for the green house. Gordon was one of two nurserymen whose gardens 'dominated the second half of the 18th century', and who together 'were responsible for the introduction to Britain, or the effective cultivation, of an enormous proportion of the new plants which streamed in from 1740 onwards' (Harvey, Early Nurserymen, 1974). Hanbury was a Quaker, and a firm friend of Peter Collinson, who arranged many of the plant introductions of that period from America. A memorandum of 1768 stuck on the back of an engraved portrait of Collinson hanging in Holfield Grange, records the gift by Collinson to Hanbury of one guinea with which to buy, from James Gordon, two cedars of Lebanon to plant in the gardens to commemorate their friendship. These cedars still survive. Hanbury was sufficiently interested in gardening to buy Philip Miller's Dictionary in 1759.

A feature of the landscape at Holfield Grange, which is not shown on the 1709 map but is recorded on Chapman and André and is still part of the layout, is an avenue centred on the front façade of the house but apparently never part of the entrance approach. Ring counting of the elms, which

succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease in the 1980s, showed that the avenue was planted 1710/1715. It comes to an end at the boundary of Great Hassels Field, later Dove House Park, and was presumably a device to provide an impressive visual sweep from the garden façade of the house. The concept of this deliberate purpose is further suggested by the fact that it would not have been difficult to cut a driveway from the end of the avenue to the road, about 200 metres away. The dove house also dates from the mid C18, and from its position in relation to the house, and the fineness of its brickwork, was clearly intended to be decorative as well as functional. The unusual ha-ha, of thirty concave bays in red brick, borders the road from the south corner of the garden north-westerly for about 150 metres.

The grange as altered by John Hanbury was demolished and replaced by 1888 by an impressive mansion on the same ground plan. Probably at the same time, but anyway before 1897, the old outbuildings were also pulled down, and the present range built to the north and slightly east of the house.

Although the first edition 25" OS of 1875 records perimeter plantations virtually surrounding what looks like a park boundary including a large pond on the west used for fowling, the 6" edition of the same date does not show this whole area shaded as 'the park'. Only the field north of the house (Wood Stack Park) and the one on the south containing the avenue are shaded. By the 1920s (see third edition 25" OS) this emphasis on the land near the house is more apparent; the garden has been elaborated, with paths cut through the lawns, and a sunk garden laid out in front of the west façade of the house.

The kitchen garden, which on Chapman and André is shown as a projection of land on the far side of the road from the rest of the property, by the mid C19 was well within the park boundaries.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

Holfield Grange lies about 1.5 km (2.5 miles) west of Coggeshall, 1 mile north of the Braintree/Coggeshall road A120. The area of historic park and garden which immediately surrounds the house covers approx. 21 ha (53 acres), although at the extent recorded in 1777 on Chapman and André the park included a further 32 ha (80 acres). The estate is now a little over 800 ha (2000 acres). On the west the park is bounded by the lane north from the Braintree road towards Greenstead Green, including 150 metres of crinkle-crinkle ha-ha (listed grade II) along the edge of the garden. The north boundary is defined by the plantation at the top of Wood Stack Park, while on the east the boundary follows the hedgeline containing the park, down to the outbuildings, house and garden. The south and south-east boundaries enclose the pastureland through which the ornamental avenue runs. There is a slight rise in the land towards the north. The property lies within agricultural land, with conspicuous woodland belts to the west.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The single existing approach, off the lane, enters the property from the north-west corner of the garden enclosure, with a lodge on the south that was built to serve the new house in 1888. The drive runs almost due east before turning south past the stable block and curving round to form a turning area in front of the house. Before the house was re-orientated when rebuilt in 1888, this approach was the service entrance, and the main drive to the house, now disused, entered the grounds at the south-west corner of the avenue pasture. A third approach, recorded on Chapman and André, entered the park from the east, well set back from the road down a track. Park Lodge was built here during the building programme of 1888 and still survives; before this, no lodge is recorded in this position.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Holfield Grange is in the north portion of the site, well positioned at the centre of the garden. The substantial building is of red brick, gabled, with stone mullions to the many large windows. The garden front faces south, focused on the avenue, beyond which the land falls away to the River Blackwater about one and a half miles distant. The coach house and stables, which were relocated when the house was rebuilt, are now adjacent to the house to the north-east.

REFERENCES

P Morant, History and Antiquities of Essex, Vol 2, 1768
P Muilman, A New and Complete History of Essex, Vol 6, 1772
T Wright, History and Topography of Essex, 1836
P Coller, A People's History of Essex, 1861
G F Beaumont, A History of Coggeshall in Essex, 1890
A Hills, 'The Hanbury Armorial China', in Essex Review, Vol 49, 1940
Essex in the Twentieth Century, Pike's New Century Series, 1909

Maps

W Cole, A Discription of the Mannor of the Grange, 1709
Chapman and André, Map of Essex, 1777
Tithe Map, 1853 (D/CT 87)
OS 6" to 1 mile scale first edition, surveyed 1875
OS 25" to 1 mile scale first edition, surveyed 1875
second edition, revised 1897
New Series, surveyed 1920, published 1923

Archival Items

Account book of Osgood Hanbury, 1759-77 (Essex Record Office: D/DCm A1)
Memorandum relative to Peter Collinson's two Cedars of Lebanon at Mr. Hanbury's at
Coggeshall...planted anno 1768 (Private Collection)

Pictorial Evidence

Engraving in P Muilman, New and Complete History etc. 1772
Drawing similar to above, with extra detail. (Private collection.)

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