

**MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL
LANGFORD**

LANGFORD GROVE

TL 844 102

The garden and park (designer unknown) of a house (designed by John Johnson) built in 1782.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Langford was acquired by the Wescomb family in 1680. Langford Grove, designed by John Johnson, was built for Nicolas Wescomb in 1782. It is not clear if this was the first building on the site. Chapman and Andre's map of 1777 shows a complete absence of any buildings in the park. However, this evidence cannot be relied upon; the home farm (just to the north of the house) was in existence when this map was surveyed, as it contains structural evidence of C16 date. There is also a short length of ha-ha to the west of Langford Grove, the line of which is hard to interpret, but it might have been truncated by the 1782 house, rather than contemporary with it. It is clear that the 1782 improvements were comprehensive and involved a new mansion, with a coach house in the same style, as well as various features in the landscape such as lakes, bridges and a temple. Two gouaches by Thomas Sandby (1721-1798), which are probably referred to in a letter of May 1794 to Nicolas Wescomb, show the house in its parkland setting. The coach house, the lower lake, the temple, the decorated pillars near the house flanking the south drive, and a scattering of mature parkland trees are all shown. Whether these images illustrated a design, or represented what had already been created, is not clear, though Sandby had created a lake elsewhere (Virginia Water) and had also designed bridges, including one built over a convex weir.

A subsequent owner, J.E. Wescomb, died intestate, the property passing to three nieces, one of whom, Mary Jane Wescomb, married the Hon. Frederick Anson Byron (1822-1861) in 1851. Collier, in his book of 1861, noted that the house was occupied by Major Wardlaw, presumably a tenant. H.J. Tennant was resident from c.1875 to 1882 and employed Frederic Chancellor who drew up plans of the house, though it is uncertain what (if any) work was executed. From about 1844, and up to the death of the 9th lord in 1917, the Byrons resided here intermittently. The second edition of the 25" OS map showed a path along the W bank of the three lakes, with conifer planting on each side of the water. There were two clumps of conifers ESE of the house and a mixed broad leaf and conifer tree belt along Maypole Road.

In the inter-war period the house was let to Mrs. Elizabeth Curtis and was used as a girls' boarding school (Langford Grove School). This necessitated the erection of an additional single storey building adjoining the house on the W side. The property was requisitioned by the army in WWII and subsequently left unoccupied. In 1952 the main house was demolished, leaving only the west pavilion. This was subsequently repaired and modernised and is now occupied by the present owner.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM & SETTING

The site is 1.5 km NNE of Langford parish church and covers about 40 hectares. It is bounded to the E by Maypole Road, on the W by Eastland Wood, to the N by Maypole Wood and to the S by a bridleway

between the White and the Red Lodges. The house is on high ground which falls to the S with fine views to Maldon and the Blackwater estuary. On the W side is a shallow valley carrying the stream which feeds a series of three lakes.

ENTRANCES & APPROACHES

The main entrances were at the White Lodge on Maypole Road, and the Red Lodge on the B1018 (Witham Road). The drive runs E to W, crossing a brick bridge (listed Grade II, now in very poor condition), built over a convex weir which retains the lowest of the three lakes. The S face of the bridge is mainly red brick but includes some random gaults, with the voussoirs alternating three red stretchers to three gaults. The N face of the bridge has been largely lost due to invasive shrub damage. Each side of the bridge carries a 1.5m high curved wrought iron railing, and each upright is bolted to a substantial wrought iron bar running across the bridge to connect with the opposite upright. This bar is buried in the road surface. To the E of the bridge are traces of another drive running N (over what is now open farmland) up to the site of the house. Further N off Maypole Road, there is a third entrance (with no evidence of a lodge) leading to the home farm and the stables at the N end of the park. It extends S to the house and connects to the main drive running S to the lodges. White Lodge is shown on the 1871 map, and was rebuilt, or extensively reconstructed, in the second half of the C 20. Red Lodge is not shown on the tithe map and has also been considerably altered and extended, but its core is of late C19 or very early C20 appearance, in red brick with a plain tile roof.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The main house of 1782 was demolished in 1952, leaving only the flanking two storey W pavilion (listed Grade II) in gault brick. The two storey stables and coach house to the N are of the same period, in a similar brick. (listed Grade II).

PARK

Much of the park is now farmland. Some had been cleared for fruit and Christmas tree cultivation after the school was closed. No evidence of this planting remains, apart from a concrete block pump house by the middle lake for the irrigation of the orchard. Part of Eastland Wood was planted with poplar in the post WWII period. Maypole Wood and the shelter belt along Maypole Road contain native broadleaf trees. A single isolated clump of Scots pine remains on farmland to the S of the surviving pavilion. Nearer the top lake, rising through holly undercover, is a group of mature beech, copper beech and false acacia. The ice house, shown on C19 maps to the N of the mansion, has been filled in. Little Park, to the W of the lower lakes, is now farmland but has several substantial oaks, two of which are probably ancient pollards. There is no sign of the structure shown on the N edge on the 1871 map, though a group of semi-mature oaks project from the line of the wood in its approximate position.

REFERENCES

- Coller, D.W., 1861 *The Peoples' History of Essex*, Chelmsford
Colvin, H M, 1954 *Biographical Dictionary of English Architects*, John Murray
Kelly's Directory 1882, 1899, 1906, 1910, 1912, 1914, 1926 & 1937
Wright. T., 1835 *The History of the County of Essex*, London

Maps and Images

c.1790 photos of Thomas Sandby gouaches in ERO I/Mb/ 207/1/3,4 (whereabouts of originals unknown)

1871 plan of Langford Grove, ERO D/DZI 31A & B

1874 2nd edition 25" OS map, surveyed 1874, revised 1895

c.1840 tithe map, ERO D/CT 204B

no date Gwen Raverat: undated wood engraving of lake at Langford Grove (for sale at Broughton House Gallery, 2007)

Information from owner, Mr. W. Cant.

Research by Nancy Edwards. Site visit by Nancy Edwards and Michael Leach on 31 January 2007 and by ML on 17 April 2007.