

**BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL
STEEPLE BUMPSTEAD**

MOYNS PARK

TL 695 407

Late Victorian manor house garden, incorporating remains of a complex moated site of C13 or C14 date. Vestigial avenues dating from at least C18.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

According to Morant, the estate of Moyns takes its name from the family of Le Moign (Moynes) who were holding the manor by the middle of C13. The daughter and heir of William Moynes married William Gent of Wimbish in the mid C15, but as a widow bought back the manor in 1494 from Richard Martin. Her descendant Thomas Gent achieved great success under Elizabeth and, among other positions and honours, was created a Baron of the Exchequer by her in 1588. He was responsible for adding the main façade to the mansion, which sits in front of the older house, and also remodelled the south-west wing 'with the addition on the outer side of a connecting gallery corridor, extensively glazed and looking out over what was probably a newly formed garden' (Michael Leach, *Essex Archaeology & History News*, Spring 2001). In the late 1590s the north-west wing was also completely reconstructed, and through the following centuries the house was adapted to the changing needs of the family.

The Gents owned Moyns Park until 1879, when it was bought by Major-General St. John Ives, in whose family it remained until 1952, with the house being used during the Second World War as a military hospital. The estate was then sold to Ivar Bryce, a great-nephew of the Major-General, and on his death in 1985 it passed to sons of his cousin, Janet, Marchioness of Milford Haven. Moyns was sold by Lord Ivar Mountbatten in 1999 to Baron Bentinck.

The manor lands in the mid C17 amounted to less than 40ha (100 acres), and even in 1762 the Gents were occupying only the mansion itself and garden. The Chapman and André 1777 map clearly shows three avenues and the formal layout of the walled garden, tactfully described in the *New and Complete History of Essex* (1769) as 'laid out in a genteel taste'. The land which later became the park was added sometime after 1827 from a holding called Coots, and the Tithe Survey of 1841 lists Moyns mansion with gardens of 5 acres, and the park (described as 'meadow') of 74 acres. In the 1950s the estate extended to about 350ha (850 acres) and is now about 167ha (414 acres). The three early editions of the 25" OS (1874, 1896 and 1920) show the west avenue virtually complete, although the other two remain only as vestiges. The moat is recorded in more detail than on Chapman and André, the inner one as parts of two sides of a rectangle, with portions of the thinner outer rectangle still remaining. These pieces of water constituted a small portion of the original complex moated site of the C13 or C14.

The sale catalogue of 1879 briefly describes the gardens within the walled enclosures, but also comments on the gravel walks to Arbour Grove Wood, the Mount, and the water beyond it. This is the earliest description of ornamental grounds outside the garden areas.

The estate lies on flat ground, but by the skilful use of artificial grass slopes and mounds this is not apparent. The gardens, which lie to the south-west of the house within the original area enclosed by the moat, were featured in a *Country Life* article in 1902 with descriptions and photographs of the bowling green, the south garden promenade, the goldfish pond, the south garden, the east end of the

south walk and the remains of the moat. Emphasis was put on the quaintly cut shrubs and the lack of formality in the garden, and the beauty and simplicity of the grounds were again praised in a later Country Life article in 1931. A recent description of the garden in Essex Countryside in 1994 mentions ancient yew hedges, and the herbaceous borders and roses.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Moyns Park lies on a flat plateau, midway between the villages of Birdbrook and Steeple Bumpstead, about 6 km south east of Haverhill. It is surrounded on three sides by perimeter plantations of varying depth but is open to the west where the land falls away to give views over open countryside. C20 stables and estate offices are north east of the mansion, and the kitchen garden lies to the south east. The present area of the estate is 167 ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance is from Birdbrook to the east where there is a small early C20 lodge. The eastern half of the drive is straight, with linear woodland on each side flanked with the remnants of mature limes. Normal woodland colonisers and a few younger limes line the roadway. The western half runs through parkland, curves gently south to the mansion and is partly lined with young beech trees. The drive curves sharply south after the house to join an old road between ditches, lined with overgrown hawthorn and woodland colonisers. Mature limes and horse chestnuts have been planted on the west side of this road. There is a lodge (Pheasant Cottage, ?C19, but using older materials) at the south end at its junction with the Finkle Green-Steeple Bumpstead road.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The mansion is U-shaped, enclosing a paved courtyard with two large mulberry trees. The courtyard is closed to the south east by two glazed bird gages with elaborate lead roofs. These, and the brick and stone paving of the courtyard, date from the 1950s. The earliest part of the building, a range of lodgings on the south west side of the courtyard, dates from about 1540. There was a complex series of alterations through the C16, including the addition of a first floor gallery on the south west side (perhaps to overlook a newly laid out garden) and the rebuilding of the north west block on a grand scale in about 1590. A ground floor loggia on the north east side was added in the early C17, facing onto the moat. The thatched garages, stables and estate buildings on the opposite bank were built in the 1950s.

REFERENCES

- P Muilman, *A New and Complete History of Essex*, ii, 1769
J A Rush, *Seats in Essex*, 1897
C Holme, *The Gardens of England*, 1908
Country Life, 1 Nov 1902 and 28 Nov 1931
Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, i, 1916
W F D de Langdale, *History of Steeple Bumpstead*, 1924
G C Harper, 'Baron Gent of Moyns' in *Essex Countryside*, May 1965
B W Glover, *Steeple Bumpstead – evolution of the Parish through Twenty Centuries*, 1990

Maps

- Chapman and André, *Map of Essex*, 1777
OS 6" to 1 mile scale, first edition, 1874
OS 25" to 1 mile scale, second edition, 1897

OS New Series, 25" to 1 mile scale, third edition, 1920

Archival Items

Sales particulars and catalogue, 1952 and 1953 (Essex Record Office: B1186 and B5249)

Pictorial Evidence

Engraving by Virtue in T Wright, History and Topography of Essex, 1836

Photographs in RCHME, as above, showing south-west wing and gardens.

Photographs in Country Life articles, as above.

Photograph of west front and borders in Gardens of England, as above.

Photographs from Essex Countryside, as above.

Personal Information

Mr Gibson, gardener from 1954

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