

Grid Ref: TQ 541 984

The Hall, pleasure grounds and park were constructed *de novo*, probably in the second decade of the eighteenth century (and were certainly completed by 1726). The formal layout of the pleasure grounds and park was considerably modified by Lancelot Brown over nearly two decades from about 1763. The house was demolished in 1811 and much of the parkland returned to agricultural use. The pleasure grounds continued to be used by the family (by then living in nearby Dudbrook Hall) until towards the end of the nineteenth century.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

EARLY OWNERSHIP

The manor of Navestock was owned by the dean and chapter of St Paul's cathedral from the eleventh century and possibly earlier. In 1544 it was surrendered to the king and remained in royal hands until 1554 when it was sold to Sir Edward Waldegrave. The medieval manor house and farm of Navestock Hall, near the church, were let to tenants throughout the Waldegrave ownership.

CREATION OF THE NEW MANSION AND PARK

In the second decade of the eighteenth century, baron James Waldegrave (1685-1741) who was created the first earl in 1729, built a new mansion on a virgin site on higher ground to the NE of the old manor house, and created an area of formal parkland to the NW of this new house. The registration of Papist estates (ERO Q/RRp 1/51) suggests that both were in existence by 1717. The architect of the house, and the designer of the landscape are unknown, but the shape of the hammerhead formal canal is reminiscent of work elsewhere by Adam Holt (?1691-1750). The main feature of the park, shown on a plan of 1726, was a double-planted avenue running about 2 kms NW from the mansion to the Ongar/Passingford Bridge road (now A113). The pleasure gardens contained a bowling green, and a new and old orange walk on each side of a 'dwarf and fruit garden.' The adjoining canal ended in a hammerhead which contained two small islands. At the other end of the pleasure grounds there is a raised knoll planted with yew which could have been a vantage point from which to view the park, probably dating from this first phase of landscape design. As James Waldegrave spent most of his time abroad on diplomatic missions from 1725 till his death in 1741, it seems probable that most or all of the work on the new park had been completed by 1725, leaving his agent James Underhill to run the estate.

The second earl, also James (1715-1763), was an ambitious courtier and politician and his memoirs (which admittedly focus on his career) make no reference to his Navestock seat, other than as a place for entertainment. Horace Walpole visited in 1759 and commented 'it is a dull place, though it does not want prospect backwards. The garden is small consisting of two French allées of old limes that are comfortable, two groves that are not so, and a green canal'. This would suggest that the grounds were little changed since their creation earlier in the century.

LANCELOT BROWN'S IMPROVEMENTS

The second earl was succeeded as third earl by his brother, John (1718-1784) who had served with distinction as a soldier overseas in 1758-9, and in 1765 was appointed master of the horse to Queen Charlotte, and filled various other offices including lord lieutenant of Essex in 1781. It was he who engaged Lancelot Brown whose first bill he paid in 1765. Over the next 17 years, he spent £5151 on Brown's improvements. He also purchased the manor of Bois Hall which enabled him to extend the park to the SE, incorporating Fortification Wood into a linear enclosing tree belt. Recent work suggests that the earthworks within Fortification Wood were not part of a prehistoric camp but the remains of a moated medieval manorial enclosure.

Brown's works, as the expenditure would suggest, were extensive. Lady's Pond was a substantial work, originally over ½ km long before silting up reduced its length by one third. Its construction was made difficult by the lie of the land which made it impossible to dam the valley end. The expanse of water had to be formed by building a massive embankment along the length of the lake on its W side. This would have required a considerable quantity of good quality subsoil, some of which may have been obtained from a deep linear excavation to the NE of Fortification Wood. Unusually the overflow was placed halfway along the side of the lake, with the relief channel running along the bottom of the embankment. An island (now lost to silting) was made at the south end of the lake and there was a smaller one (also now lost) at the northern end.

It can be deduced that Brown's other substantial works in the park included

- a) the removal of the long double avenue
- b) the creation of a peripheral tree belt, partly using and modifying existing woodland (Broom Wood, Little and Great Aspen Wood) and partly by new planting or thickening up of existing hedgerows (Hollingford Spring and Red Wood)
- c) the construction of a carriage drive through this peripheral tree. The SE section of this appears to follow the line of the old road to Ongar which was diverted via Shonks Mill Lane.
- d) building a sunken fence along the NW side of the pleasure grounds where they bordered on the park.
- e) the construction of a new walled vegetable garden adjoining the old manor house near the church
- f) evidence provided by a sequence of maps suggests that he also extended the parkland to the SE of Lady's Hill, and enclosed it with peripheral tree belts. He may also have altered Fortification Wood to make it more accessible as a feature, and provided the central deeply cut rectangular pond.

Maps show an unexplained regular circular feature between the southern tip of Broom Wood and Lady's Pond, though its original form or purpose is obscure.

Within the pleasure grounds it is likely that much of the formal layout was softened or removed by Brown but two centuries of abandonment, and the absence of a contemporary plan, make it impossible to know exactly what he did. It is surprising that the Holt-like canal, with its hammerhead containing two islands, was left unchanged, though its right-angled corners may have been rounded. Brown favoured 'framing' the mansion with evergreens, and an evergreen oak and a yew have survived on the edge of the house site; these might be survivors from his planting scheme. He also favoured Portuguese laurel and cedar of Lebanon, and dead or living remains of each of these species

can be found in the overgrown area of the pleasure grounds. Portuguese laurel and holly may also have been planted to screen the walled vegetable garden from the pleasure grounds.

ABANDONMENT

The family's fortunes declined in the last decades of the eighteenth century, and the mansion was demolished in 1811. Most of the park returned to agricultural use, though the pleasure grounds must have received some degree of maintenance as a summer house was built in 1855 for Frances Countess Waldegrave, close to the site of the demolished mansion. It survived till at least 1895 and, after the countess's death in 1879, the site was marked by a Portland stone monument bearing a portrait medallion and an inscription. The surrounding farmland has retained most of the features of Lancelot Brown's design, apart from a breach in the peripheral woodland belt that he planted between Hollingford Spring and Aspen Wood.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM & SETTING

The medieval manor of very approximately 80 hectares was bounded on the W and N by the River Roding or its tributaries, to the E by Lady Hill/Dudbrook Road and a now abandoned road to Beacon Hill, to the S by Shonks Mill Road. During the eighteenth century, the park was extended W to the Ongar/Romford road, and as well as to the E of Lady Hill, and towards the abandoned road which survives as a track and leads to Beacon Hill. The mansion was sited near the top of the hill with the land falling away on all sides, but more markedly over the former parkland to the NW and W.

ENTRANCES & APPROACHES

There are traces of the crescent shaped access drive which led to the east side of the mansion, accessed from Lady Hill at each end. There is no visual or cartographic evidence of a lodge, but there is a milestone (a modern replacement of the original) on Lady Hill giving the distance to London.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Navestock Hall and all the service buildings were demolished in 1811 but a marked depression indicates the site of the mansion. Estate cottages to the north are of C20 construction. An intact icehouse in poor condition survives at the west end of the serpentine sunken fence which runs NW and W of the mansion site.

GARDENS & PLEASURE GROUNDS

These are now very overgrown. The canal with the hammerhead containing two islands (one of which is planted with yews) is visible SW of the mansion site, and it still holds some water. Surviving holly, Portuguese laurel, horse chestnuts (one line of which appears to have been close planted in quadruplicate), London planes and holm oak are probably relics of deliberate planting. The surviving ditch of a sunken fence follows an irregular line NE to SW, and near the N end is a raised knoll planted with three yews. The undergrowth is too dense to reveal any other features, but the Portland stone monument commemorating Frances Countess Waldegrave has survived, though its inscription is now illegible. There is no trace of her summer house.

PARK

The main park lies NW of the mansion site, with a probably later extension SE of Lady Hill. The main park, S and E of the River Roding is enclosed by peripheral woodland, much of which is hornbeam coppice predating the layout of the formal park (both Hollingford Spring and Red Wood contain significant ancient wood banks). The link between Aspen Wood and Hollingford Spring has been removed by modern agriculture, and much of both these woods have been replanted with conifers, though oak, sycamore, horse chestnut and ash trees are scattered through the woodland belts. Another ancient wood bank runs along the E side of Broom Wood, then turns W separating the hornbeam coppice from what is presumably a later S extension which is planted with oak. A carriage drive (with several substantial low red brick single arch bridges without parapets and about 3.5 metres in width) can be traced through most of the surviving peripheral woods, from Red Wood in the NE to the southern tip of Broom Wood to the SW.

The central area of the park, which would have been overlooked by the house, contains a few scrappy hawthorn hedge remnants and three irregular water-filled pits, all of which probably date from its reversion to agricultural use. A shallow pool in Aspen Wood may be due to gravel extraction after the park was abandoned. There are no remaining traces of the long linear avenue from the mansion to the Ongar/Romford road.

Though it could be natural, there is a wide gently concave cut leading the eye from the pleasure grounds to the southern part of the lake. This is now partly obliterated by ploughing but may have been created to provide a better view of the water from the mansion or its gardens.

The most striking surviving feature of the park is the lake, a substantial engineering feat (originally over $\frac{1}{2}$ km in length) constructed on the side of a gentle slope on the line of the Little Rivulet, a small tributary of the River Roding. A massive earth embankment (at least 5 metres high at its northern end) runs the entire length of the lake which has a surviving island at the N end, and probable traces of another (planted with two horse chestnuts) in the silted-up area at the S end. Halfway along this bank there is a spillway (now concreted) which discharges onto two red brick tunnels which pierce the embankment. The run-off flows over a boulder-floored riffle with curved abutment walls (both in poor condition) into a relief channel which runs N along the foot of the embankment under one of the carriage bridges, emptying into what appears to be a purpose-made straight cut running NW to join the River Roding. There is another spillway at the north end of the lake, probably of modern construction. Clay for the construction of the substantial lake embankment may have been obtained from a now overgrown deep linear excavation NE of Fortification Wood.

There is another brick carriage bridge similar to the others across the Little Rivulet at what was originally the head of the lake (now silted up). To the east of the bridge is a short avenue of London planes. A faint depression is discernible in ploughland between the southern tip of Broom Wood and the lake, corresponding to a circular feature shown on older maps. It is not clear if this is the remains of an eyecatcher, or the result of agricultural activities.

The parkland extension to the SE of Lady's Hill is, like the original park, surrounded by a woodland belt, probably formed by linking groups of ancient woodland with new planting – Fortification Wood is linked to Twostile Wood, then there is a small gap before Redgate Wood completes the enclosure. A large rectangular pond in Fortification Wood is almost certainly part of the C18 landscape design,

though the other earthworks in the wood are thought to be a medieval manorial enclosure. There are no visible remains of the former avenue or any other parkland features in this extension.

KITCHEN GARDEN

This is sited near the old manor house (now Navestock Hall) and is surrounded with red brick walls. It was not possible to examine it closely as it now forms part of the private garden of the former manor house.

REFERENCES

Books and Articles

- Anon, 1771 *Gentleman's History of Essex*, iv, 48, Chelmsford
Lewis, W.S. (ed.), 1970 *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ix, 243, Yale University Press
Sharp, P.D.R., & Leach, M., 2011 'Fortification Wood, Navestock – Reviewed' in *Transactions of Essex Society for Archaeology & History*, 4th series, ii
Stroud, D., 1975 *Capability Brown*, Faber & Faber
Turner, R., 1985 *Capability Brown and the 18th Century English Landscape*, Rizzoli

Maps and Images

- 1615 Survey of the manor of Navestock ERO D/DU 583/1
1726 Plan of the manor of Navestock ERO D/DZn 3
1777 Chapman & André's map of Essex plate XVII
1785, updated to 1835, Manor and parish of Navestock ERO D/DXa/24
1870-3 6" to the mile ordnance survey map sheets 58 & 59

Archival Items

- 1580, 1586, 1617, 1641 & 1677 Essex Quarter Sessions bridge repair presentments ERO Q/SR 73/62, 98/19, 218/29-30, 314/62 & 436/36
1717 Registration of Papist estates ERO Q/QRp 1/51
1760's-1780's Lancelot Brown's account book, RHS Lindley Library page 43
1766 Highway diversion order ERO Q/RHi 2/8
1995 June, Dubois Landscape Survey of Navestock Park for English Heritage, typescript

Researcher Michael Leach: whole site visited April 2002, partial visits subsequently.