

CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL
MARGARETTING

PEACOCKS

TL 669 017

Regency Grade II brick-built, stuccoed house likened by Pesvner to a 'Cheltenham Villa', standing in a small park with restored lake and restored temple. Plans for a model farm, designed by Frederic Chancellor in 1885, were marked as for Peacocks but on land now probably belonging to Eweland Hall.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Although described variously as being from the Hanoverian, Georgian or Regency periods, Peacocks may be an example of a more modern house built upon older foundations. In *Margaretting, The village with a beautiful name*, Miss G.M. Baker states that "Lord and Lady Chelmer think that it has some features which point to it having been erected originally in the time of Elizabeth I. Its name of 'Peacocks', as a fact, was given to it very much earlier than that as testified by the following from Lord Petre's archives deposited in the Essex Record Office." The relevant manorial document (ERO D/DP M709) refers to manorial deeds, relating to Margaretting, of the Petre Family, listing tenants and properties with details of rents and services. This indicates that in 1421 there was a man called Lawrence Swetynges who rented a dwelling house with stables, cowsheds etc. together with 25 acres called Pecokkes in Margaretting.

Chapman and André's map of 1777 shows Humphrey Sidney Esq. at 'Peacock'. The site is depicted as being almost rectangular with an avenue, presumably lining the drive, running north, north-west from the house to the main road. To the south-east of the house, a square section of possible ornamental garden is shown with paths forming an upright cross and long thin rectangular beds within each quarter.

Baker suggests that a "branch of the family of the Elizabethan hero Sir Philip Sydney came from West Hanningfield during the reign of Charles II to live at Peacocks for a son of the family, Henry Sidney was baptised in 1689 in the local church and as late as 1833 the late baptism of a Sydney (Robert) at St Margaret's took place so this family appears to have resided at Peacocks for roughly 150 years." According to David Williams in his *Essex Journal* article 'The Sidneys – zenith and decline', Humphrey Sidney (1669 – 1731) and then his eldest son, also Humphrey (1705 - 1787), were squires of Margaretting from 1700 until the latter's death in 1787. In his will, Humphrey Sidney II left substantial amounts of cash and stock together with properties in various parts of Essex but he chose to be buried very simply in Margaretting churchyard with no tombstone nor inscription but to have his grave turfed 'and brambles put over the same as soon as I am buried'. Charles William Sidney (1756 – c1823) was his son and heir and Williams suggests that he may have been responsible for the rebuilding of Peacocks in the latest style and speculates on a possible connection between the improvements and the estates, both Peacocks and at West Hanningfield, becoming heavily mortgaged. Correspondence with a local solicitor at Copland & Sons, suggests that C.W. Sidney was considering selling Peacocks in 1809, presumably to raise funds. In 1822 Peacocks was given to his son, Charles Algernon Philip Sidney

(1783 – 1864) and at that time the estate was mortgaged for at least £3000. Peacocks was sold to John Disney in 1833 for £6300.

Research has yet to discover whether or not the gardens were improved when the house was rebuilt but, prior to that, it would seem that some slight changes may have been made to the grounds during the time of Humphrey Sidney II. A map of Lord Petre's estate (1779) includes Peacocks, although not mentioned by name, and shows the straight drive, although the avenue (clearly shown on C&A 1777) isn't specifically indicated, plus what appears to be an extended garden incorporating the original square and an additional rectangular area to the south-west of the house, the whole forming a larger square with the house completing the fourth quarter and each quarter of garden being dissected by a path, one being an extension of the drive. It is difficult to categorically specify changes to a site when comparing maps drawn by different cartographers with no scale given and the above suggested alterations to the site are based on the location of the pond, to the north-west of the house, which is shown clearly on both maps.

The Tithe Award of 1838 lists Peacocks as being owned by John Disney and occupied by George Straight who is given as the owner of the adjacent Parsonage House. Although the lodge is listed as being early C19 it does not appear on the 1838 Tithe Map which shows a strip of woodland where the lodge would be situated. However, it is shown on the OS first edition map of c1873 by which time the drive had been moved making the entrance near the north-eastern corner – its present location. This would suggest that the grounds were improved to include the park, present driveway and lodge between 1838 and the early 1870s.

Whites Directory lists George Straight at Peacocks in 1843 and 1863. It is not known when he died but his wife, Charlotte, continued to live there until her death in 1871 (Baker). By 1874 Francis Lewis Shaw Merewether is in residence; followed in 1887 by Mr. and Mrs. Longbourne; in 1894 by Edward Strangways Neave Esq. and in 1898 by Walter P. Tyser Esq. (Principal Seats in Essex). It is thought that Colonel and Mrs. Elton moved to Peacocks after Walter Tyser who was still there in 1901 according to the Census. Baker lists some Twentieth Century residents of Peacocks: "When WWI took place Mr. & Mrs. E.W. Rudd lived there and they were followed by Mr. & Mrs. Dalzell and Mr. & Mrs. Cooper in that order." An article in the *Essex Chronicle* confirms that Mr. & Mrs. T.W. Cooper were living at Peacocks in February 1941. It has been suggested to the present owner that parts of the garden were professionally landscaped during 1930s and this may have been when the Dell and Rill were created. However, no specific mention was made of either garden feature in the Sales Particulars when Peacocks was to be auctioned on 6th July 1933 so perhaps it was the new owners who initiated the garden improvements.

Baker continues, "Lord & Lady Chelmer, the present occupants (1984) of Peacocks have been there several years". Eric Cyril Boyd Edwards (born 1914) was knighted in 1954 and created Baron Chelmer in 1963. He was a solicitor and became a very successful fundraiser for the Conservative Party. He married Enid Harvey, an accomplished ballet dancer, in 1939. Lord Chelmer is thought to have bought Peacocks c1955. In 1952 he had bought a quantity of stonework from the Italian Garden at Copped Hall, near Epping, at an auction for his family home at Borewood, Hockley, and he brought some of that stonework to Peacocks. Four stone columns were used when Chelmer built the temple and a short stretch of balustrade was added to the wall adjacent to the entrance of the turning area at the

front of the house. However, the other stonework has since been returned to The Copped Hall Trust by the present owner whose information sheet suggests that Lord and Lady Chelmer lived at Peacocks for over forty years. It is assumed that Lord Chelmer still owned Peacocks when he died in 1997 as the property was for sale in 1998 and was subsequently bought by the present owner.

The Essex Record Office holds plans for a new homestead for Colonel Disney dated 1885. These comprise twelve ground, block, elevation and section plans by Frederic Chancellor, a local architect. This documentary evidence has the SMR Number 15438 and the Monument Name of Peacocks Homestead. However one plan indicates that this 'new homestead' and model farm were on the opposite side of the road from Peacocks on Eweland Hall land. The description in the sales catalogue for Eweland Hall Estate, dated 19 November 1927, includes details of a small farmery consisting of a substantially built timber & tiled cowshed for 4 cows, calves' place and meal house, open cattle shed, two pig courts and enclosed yard. The location suggests that the 'small farmery' was probably Chancellor's model farm and its only connection with Peacocks may have been that the two sites were owned at the time by Colonel Disney.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM & SETTING

Peacocks is located on the south-west edge of Margaretting which is approximately four and a half miles south-west of Chelmsford and two miles north-east of Ingatestone. Despite its close proximity to Chelmsford, the village of Margaretting sits in a rural setting. The land is fairly flat but slopes slightly downwards south towards the River Wid (approximately ½ mile at the closest point) which follows a diagonal course from the south of the village towards the north-east.

The sales catalogue of 1998 for Peacocks states that the principal house, lodge, immediate outbuildings, gardens and meadows comprise approximately six acres with a further sixty-three acres of park/agricultural land. The present owner confirms that the total estate comprises seventy acres. The 1998 sales catalogue map shows that the Peacocks site is irregular in shape: From the entrance to the drive due north of the house, the boundary follows a south-westerly direction adjacent to the south side of the main road to Ingatestone (B1002) until it reaches a row of houses where there are double metal field gates giving access from the road. At this point the boundary turns south; south-west and then south-east following a field boundary and then the line of the brook (which later flows into the River Wid) until just north of the railway line at which point the boundary goes north-east until Parsonage Lane. It continues north-west and then north-east around the site of Parsonage Farm before continuing in a north-easterly direction towards Margaretting. It turns north-west adjacent to the back gardens of the houses along the Maldon Road, back to the main road (B1002) and south-west past the lodge, back to the main entrance. From limited observation, it appears that most of the boundary is marked by hedging and some wooden fencing in places such as alongside the B1002. Much of the land surrounding the site seems to be agricultural.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance to Peacocks is situated on the south side of the B1002 a short distance from the crossroads with the Maldon Road. Set back from the road, with a white painted brick lodge to the

east side, the entrance drive is flanked by stone gate posts, topped by stone urns, supporting modern wrought iron gates which have scroll work depicting the tail of peacock when closed. The drive, which is gravelled over a hard surface, curves gently south, south-west to the entrance courtyard in front of the house at which point there is another pair of gate posts, this time of whitish brick topped by weathered terracotta urns. The entrance courtyard provides a turning area for vehicles and is surrounded by low brick walls on the north-east and west sides with much of the north-west section (immediately opposite the front of the house) comprising low brick pillars with low ornamental iron railings between, offering a view over the parkland and towards the lake and temple. There is a stone urn upon a low plinth in the centre of the courtyard. From the entrance courtyard there is access by the north corner of the house to the stable yard with a range of outbuildings.

A secondary entrance from Parsonage Lane, north of Parsonage farm, to the south-east corner of the stable yard is shown on various maps. The old C18 drive is no longer in evidence although the oak gate was remade and marks the location of the former entrance.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Pevsner likened the house to a "Cheltenham villa". The listing information describes Peacocks house as "An attractive Regency house with stuccoed walls. It is set back from the main road and stands in a small park. The north front has a parapet, modillion cornice and a central modillion pediment. There are recessed panels between the cornice and the first storey windows. Two storeys. The main block has 5 window range, double-hung sashes with glazing bars, in moulded architraves. The centre part breaks forward slightly, with three window range and the pediment above. The ground storey has a tetra style portico with fluted columns and cornice. The main block is flanked by small wings of one window range, with a blocked window on the first storey and a semi-circular headed recess on the ground storey. Roof slate with four symmetrical chimney stacks to the central block."

The Lodge to Peacocks, which is located on the east side of the main entrance, is described in the listing information as "A small early C19 painted brick lodge with corner pilasters. The centre part breaks forward with a tetra style pilastered front, a pedimented gable and a central doorway. The windows are double-hung sashes with glazing bars, in plain reveals. Roof slate, hipped at the north and south ends and with a central chimney stack with two octagonal shafts."

To the east of the main house is the stable yard which includes garages, a stable block with clock tower, old granary/workshop and stores. There was stabling for up to eight horses.

REFERENCES

Books and Articles

Baker, Miss G.M. 1984 *Margaretting, The village with a beautiful name* Vol III, Acors Press, Billericay Pages 133-134

Bentley, James & Pevsner, Nikolaus, 2007, *The Buildings of England, Essex*, Yale Uni Press, P592
Department of the Environment List of Buildings of Special Architectural of Historical Interest District of Chelmsford – Rural June 1975

Essex Chronicle 24 February 2011 'U-Boat scare on steam ship's Atlantic crossing'

Morant, Philip (1768) reprinted 1978 *History and Antiquities of the County of Essex* Vol II, EP Pub. Ltd, pp 52-55

Pigot's Essex Trade Directory 1832-3

Whites Trade Directory 1848, 1863, 1874

Williams, David 2011 *Essex Journal* Vol 46, 1, pp21-27

Wilson, John Marius c1866 *The Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales*

Maps and Images

1777 Chapman, J. & Andre, P. *A map of the county of Essex from an actual survey..* Sheet 17

1779 Map of Margaretting showing certain estates belonging to Rt. Hon. Robert Edward Lord Petre and several other persons. Surveyor unknown.

1838 Tithe Award map ERO D/CT 233B

c1872 OS 25" first edition sheet 60.2

1873 OS 6" first edition sheet 60

c1884 Maps of Margaretting showing tithe apportionments etc. Peacocks shown (with water in blue/buildings in red) and on a larger scale than D/CT 233B but otherwise details are the same. Gives owner as John Disney and occupier as George Straight. Park given as c 24acres

1896 OS 25" second edition sheet 60.2

1897 OS 6" second edition sheet 60

1923 OS New Series sheet 63SW

1998 Map with sales catalogue ERO C1536

Archival Items

1421 Manorial deeds, relating to Margaretting, of Petre Family, listing tenants and properties with details of rents and services. ERO D/DP M709

1707 Deeds mention Humphrey Sidney of Margaretting ERO D/DU 18/32/3

c1711 Lists Humphrey Sidney of Margaretting as a juror on 7th March 1711 ERO T/A 418/243/37

1756 – 1833 Deeds of Disney Family of The Hyde, Ingatestone with some mention of a 'croft called Thedams (the properties being also known as messuage and mansion house called Peacocks and land thereto belonging) and also 'Tenement called Peacocks' ERO D/DDs T30

1786 Will of Humphrey Sidney II ERO D/DDs T30

1809 Letter book of Chelmsford solicitors Copland & Son including correspondence with Charles William Sidney ERO D/DDw B1/4

1823 Margaretting Parish records listing death of Humphrey Sidney in 1788 and mentioning his son Charles William Sidney (died c1823) and his son Charles Algernon Phillip Sidney ERO D/DDs T34/7

1833 Deeds of Disney Family of The Hyde, Ingatestone. Lease of mansion house called Peacocks in Margaretting ERO D/P 235/25/1

1838 Tithe Award for Margaretting ERO D/CT 233 AD/DDW/B51

1885 Plans for a new homestead for Colonel Disney ERO D/F 8/634 Ground, block, elevation, section plans (12) by Frederic Chancellor: [SEAX: SMR Number 15438 Peacocks Homestead model farm]

- Several sheets showing plans with side elevations of model farm with accommodation for pigs, cows, horses plus arable (hay, straw, granary, roots) cart shed
- One sheet (no date) shows present plan of part of first floor to Peacocks (house?) for Norton Disney

- One sheet (dated 5th Aug 1895) shows proposed alterations to part of first floor to Peacocks (house?) for Norton Disney
- One sheet for John V. Longbourne for Peacocks dated Aug 1885 coloured plans and side elevations of stable block? Plus letter attached from J V Longbourne
- One sheet for John V. Longbourne for Peacocks dated Sept 1885 (not coloured) incorporating suggestions made in letter above?
- One sheet for Colonel Disney (dated Jan 1886) showing coloured plans for new homestead and cottage. Shows road to Chelmsford and compass point suggests it's on Eweland Hall side (west of road)
- Sheet No 7 for Norton Disney Esq shows ground plan "as at present", with lots of pencilled notes etc. of Peacocks house – no date
- Sheet No 3 for Norton Disney Esq (no date) shows present plan of basement of Peacocks
- Many sheets very fragile and not looked at!

1900 - c1914 Working papers of the staff of the Victorian County History of Essex comprising notes on individual parishes ERO A12376 Box 17 includes research notes for Margaretting

1927 (19 November) Sales Catalogue for Eweland Hall Estate

1933 Sales Catalogue for Peacocks – in private ownership

1994 Thesis in two volumes on Frederic Chancellor by Anne Holden (Student thesis for the Postgraduate Diploma in Building Conservation The Architectural Association ERO T/Z 561/26/4

1998 Sales Catalogue for Peacocks ERO C1536

Websites

Principal Seats in Essex listing owners/occupiers of mansions sourced from variety of trade directories and other publications <http://deadpubs.co.uk/EssexPubs/Directories/Seats.shtml>

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With thanks to the present owner for all his help