

**BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
RIVENHALL**

**RIVENHALL PLACE**

**TL 819 190**

A medieval deer-park overlaid by alterations round the house suggested by Humphry Repton.

### **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

Until C16 the manor house for Rivenhall (one of the five manors in the parish) was Rivenhall Hall, replaced as the principal dwelling of the manor by Ralph Wyseman (or Wiseman), who bought the estate in 1590 and built a red-brick mansion known as 'Wyseman's Hall'.

Rivenhall Park is first mentioned in 1295, although it is likely to be older in origin. The boundary and extent changed a number of times between C13 and C20 and included a period from the late C17 when the park began to be laid out in an imposing formal design, recorded on a survey made in 1716 by Benjamin Fallowes (D/DFg 1/18). (A detailed and scholarly account of the development of the park and its extent at various stages can be found in Warwick Rodwell, 'Rivenhall Park' in Chelmsford Archaeological Trust Report 42, 1993).

After the failure of the male line of the Wysemans in 1692, the estate was sold to Thomas Western, in whose family it remained until the extinction of the baronetcy in 1917. The intricate design of the park layout had not been fully implemented when Thomas western acquired Rivenhall, and rather than complete the plan he actually started reducing the extent of the park. It is likely that what had already been laid out of the grand geometrical design was retained through the main part of C18, probably slowly running down, and the property was described by Muilman in 1770 as 'a good ancient mansion-house and gardens, imparked'. Coller describes in his People's History of Essex (1861) seeing traces on the ground of the walled parterre garden of C17.

Charles Callis Western, who inherited Rivenhall estate in 1771 while still a child, commissioned Repton in 1789 to suggest improvements to the grounds. Repton's ideas, published in Sketches and Hints (1795), included building new stables in a better position, for which William Wilkins produced designs; cutting down the trees in front of the house and in their place making a piece of water incorporating the old pond; and making a bridge (also designed by Wilkins) to give the water a focal point. At the same time the park was extended to the south, so that the house and lake lay at the centre instead of near the south boundary. The wider setting for the house is not mentioned in Sketches and Hints but may have been suggested in the missing Red Book; it is certainly according to Repton's principles. The reduction of the house was probably made by Callis Western's brother, the Revd. Thomas Walsingham Western, who moved into Rivenhall in 1795 when Charles made nearby Felix Hall his residence. In 1796 the road which ran parallel to and just south of the new lake was closed, and a new road made through the park north of the house, giving the landscape the layout which it still retains, although the present grounds of Rivenhall Place now comprise 28ha (70 acres) round the house, within the C19 boundaries. Rivenhall Place had a variety of owners through C20 and has recently been acquired by new owners who are restoring house and grounds.

## SITE DESCRIPTION

### LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Rivenhall Place lies within a virtually flat agricultural setting about 2km north of Witham, just south-east of Silver End. It is bounded on the north by Western Road and the east by Park Road, with deep perimeter plantations screening the property from these roads and obscuring vistas out in these directions. The stable block and kitchen garden, now in separate ownership, lie near the west boundary, and the south is contiguous with farmland. The present extent of the property covers 28 ha (70 acres), representing a portion of the historic parkland.

### ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The principal entrance is from the south east corner of the property and is a continuation of the line of Church Road, which was diverted in 1796 when the park was extended south. The approach curves north down to the three-arch brick bridge (designed by William Wilkins as part of Repton's suggestions, listed grade II) which spans the lake and leads up to the house. A secondary approach, recently planted with an avenue of limes, enters from the north-east corner and follows a straight line to the house.

### PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The original brick mansion, known as Wyseman's Hall, was built mid C16 by Ralph Wyseman, and is illustrated in Repton's Sketches and Hints shortly before it was reduced in size c 1796. It was 'repaired, improved and embellished' in the mid C19 by the Rev. Sir John Page Wood, who held the property on a long lease. The entrance front of the present house (listed grade II\*), which has been known as Rivenhall Place since the mid C18, represents the east façade of the larger version, with the south wing refronted to harmonise with the style. The house is depicted on an engraving from Excursions through Essex (1818) and was illustrated in Peacock's Repository for 1791.

Until late C18, the house was located near the south boundary of the park, but shortly after Repton's involvement, part of the road between Braintree and Rivenhall was closed and the park was extended to the south, so that the house and lake were more centrally positioned. Repton advised rebuilding the stable block to designs by Wilkins in its current position to open up the view from the house to the new lake.

## REFERENCES

- P Morant, History and Antiquities of Essex, Vol. 2, 1768
- P Muilman, A New and Complete History of Essex, Vol. 1, 1769
- H Repton, Sketches and Hints, 1795
- T Wright, History and Topography of Essex, 1836
- D W Collier, The People's History of Essex, 1861
- D Stroud, Humphry Repton, 1962
- F Cowell and G Green, Repton in Essex, 2000

### Maps

- B Fallowes, An Exact Draught of Rivenhall Park, 1716 (Essex Record Office: D/DFg 1/18)
- Surveyor unknown, Rivenhall Place Park, c 1835 (D/DFg P9)
- Chapman and André, Map of Essex, 1777
- Tithe map, 1839 (D/CT 290(b))
- OS 6" to one mile, first edition surveyed 1874/5

OS 25" to one mile, first edition surveyed 1874/5  
second edition surveyed 1897  
third edition (new series) 1921

**Archival Items**

Repton's account book for 1789: Sept. 10-13 'The Plan Drawings etc. £6.6.0; Do. Plan of Stables etc. paid by me £3.3.0.' Also 'Dr. to Mr. Willm. Wilkins: Plan and stables for Mr. Western. £3.3.0. 1790 Apr 25 Elevation etc. Bridge Mr. Western £3.3.0'

**Pictorial Evidence**

Engraving in Peacock's Repository, 1791  
Illustration with two overlays in H Repton, Sketches and Hints, 1795  
Engraving after J. Greig in Excursions through Essex, 1818

Researcher: Fiona Cowell