

**UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL  
STANSTED MOUNTFITCHET**

**STANSTED HALL**

**TL 525 245**

C18 timbered landscape on which Repton had given advice and produced a Red Book.

### **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

In 1615 Sir Thomas Middleton, Lord Mayor of London, bought Stansted park and built Stansted Hall, where the Middleton family lived for seven generations before the male line died out in 1715 and the estate was sold to Thomas Heath, a captain of the East India Company. It was William Heath, grandson to Thomas, who consulted Humphry Repton in December 1790 on improvements to the park and house. Repton spent three days at Stansted, and his bill for this, together with his travelling expenses, amounted to £14 3s 6d.

Repton suggested changes to the access road to enhance the views of approach to the house, and the building of a lodge at the entrance to the park. The park boundary would be pushed south-west in a graceful curve, while the new approach would skirt the vicarage (hidden by plantation) before revealing the house. He felt that emphasis should be given to the foreground, rather than to distant views, as the setting of the house stood on an eminence 'so broad, that in looking from the house very little irregularity of grounds is seen; and consequently the views should be treated in some degree the same as if we were considering a flat; in which distant views are seldom worth obtaining'.

The pond was objectionable because it was on high ground, and 'Water on the top of a hill will always appear unnatural' but should remain, as it was useful, and could not easily be replaced by a lake in the meadow. The house was described as 'very large without any room', and in its current state looked like the ruins of a palace. To remedy this, and to enable an architect to make the house comfortable, the low tower, which had originally been designed as the centre of the façade, should be raised to correspond with the others, and 'finish the house at this place'. Repton concluded that the house would be much improved by a stucco wash: 'From a full conviction how much more important as picturesque a stone coloured building appears than one of red bricks...'.

Although Repton's advice regarding the house was not acted upon, it appears that the landscape was developed along the principles set out in his Red Book as field evidence, pointing to considerable improvements to the planting c.1795, is mentioned in a report by Nick Owen of Debois Landscape Survey Group (1999). A surprising aspect of the commission is that the road diversion suggested by Repton was carried out, but not until 1867, eight years before the Hall was rebuilt. This results in a confusing series of maps, where Repton's plan is consistent with the first edition Ordnance Surveys of the 1870s, while the tithe map of 1843 shows the road as it remained until 1867.

After William Heath died in 1797 the property passed to his brother Bailey. On Bailey's death, c.1800, the estate was acquired by Ebenezer Fuller Maitland, bought by his new wife's trustees at the time of

their marriage. However, Mrs. Fuller Maitland did not like the house, and it was 'in turn deserted and demolished, save one of the towers, which still picturesquely crowns the height' (Coller, *People's History of Essex*, 1861), and which throughout the nineteenth century was 'a favourite resort for picnic parties, owing to its romantic situation' (Rush, *Seats in Essex*, 1897). By the middle of the century, the Fuller Maitlands were living in a new residence, Stansted House, which had been built on the northern boundary of the park.

Stansted Hall was rebuilt in 1875 in the Tudor style, on a site slightly to the north-east of the old hall but was sold by the Fuller Maitlands in 1922. The subsequent owner, J. A. Findlay, bequeathed the house to the College for the Advancement of Psychological Science, which still occupies it today.

**SITE DESCRIPTION** (from public rights of way only, and the Dubois report)

#### **LOCATION, AREA, LANDFORM, BOUNDARIES AND SETTING**

The park is on the south-east edge of the town of Stansted Mountfitchet and now covers about 80 hectares. The southern part, where the hall is situated, is level but the land falls away gently to the north and north-west, with views over the valley of the Stansted Brook and the town (including the motte and bailey castle). It is bounded to the south and west by the Stansted Mountfitchet to Burton End road, and to the east it is truncated by the deep cutting of the M11 motorway. The north boundary has no distinguishing features, though it formerly extended to the Bishops Stortford to Cambridge railway line.

#### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

- a) The south-east entrance from the Stansted Mountfitchet to Burton End road has been considerably altered by the M11 and its associated bridge work. A new access on a curved embankment joins the old drive (lined with horse chestnuts on the north) near the stable block. No lodge survives.
- b) The north-west entrance, just south-east of Stansted Mountfitchet railway station, passes through an arched gatehouse with wrought iron gates, and a small lodge on its south side. Both are in red brick with slate roofs, of late C19 appearance. Before entering the open parkland, the first part of the drive is a hollow way, with cedars planted on the north side. There are the remains of a park post and wire fence on the south side of the drive.
- c) A little further south, the old Stansted Mountfitchet to Burton End road survives as a public footpath, lined on each side with relics of hedge and mature hedgerow trees, possibly retained as a parkland drive or a private route from the rectory to St Mary's church.

#### **PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

Stansted Hall (Grade 11) is a symmetrical neo-Jacobean house in red brick with stone dressings, shaped gables and a slate roof. There is a balustraded terrace on the west front and a single storey building (probably a conservatory) projects from the south-west corner. The stables (Grade 11), in an identical style, lie to the south, on the north-east corner of the walled garden. The architect was Robert Armstrong.

## REFERENCES

Coller, D W., 1861 *People's History of Essex*

Carter, G., Goode, P., & Laurie, K., 1982 *Humphry Repton – Landscape Gardener 1752-1818*

Rush, J A., 1897 *Seats in Essex*

Pevsner, N., 1954 *Buildings of England: Essex*

Harper, G C., June 1965 *Essex Countryside – The Manor of Stansted Hall*

Owen, N., 1999 *Stansted Hall, Report on the Historic Landscape for Dubois Landscape Group*

## Maps

Tithe map, 1843: ERO

OS 6" to 1 mile, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, surveyed 1876

OS 25" to 1 mile, 1<sup>st</sup> edition surveyed 1876

## Archival Items

Repton's account book for 1790 (see p. 38 New Ledger)

Red Book for Stansted Hall, 1791: ERO D/DQ 29; copy T/A 229

Road diversion order, 1867: ERO Q/So 46 p. 56)

## Images

Essex Record Office Mint Binder, Stansted 1/11

Photographs, *Essex Countryside* June 1965

Researcher Gloria Hammond. Site survey by Michael Leach 17 September 2005