

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

THORPE HALL

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Name:	THORPE HALL
County:	Essex
District:	Tendring (District Authority)
Parish:	Thorpe-le-Soken
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.851859 Longitude: 1.1672010 National Grid Reference: TM 18224 21772 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000521 Date first listed: 01-Jul-1987

Details

Early C20 shrub and water gardens developed by the owner, Lady Byng, from 1913 onwards.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Thorpe belonged to the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's until the Dissolution. In 1551 the Crown granted the manor and the park of Thorpe (marked as two distinct properties on Chapman and Andre, 1777) to Sir Thomas Darcy, whose descendant in the 1660s sold the house and demesne lands of the manor to Thomas Wharton, secretary to the dowager Queen Henrietta Maria. He was succeeded by his son Andrew, who mortgaged the estate which was conveyed on his death to Henry Nurse of Mile End. When Henry died it was 'sold by degree in Chancery, in order to be divided' (Morant 1768) and was bought in 1723 by Stephen Martin, also of Mile End, who assumed the name and arms of Leake upon inheriting an estate from Admiral Sir John Leake. He was succeeded by his son Stephen Martin Leake. In 1769 a fire destroyed a barn just north of the Hall and nearly burnt the house with it, the barn being rebuilt south of the Hall. After four successive Leakes had lived at Thorpe Hall, it was leased in 1802 to William Gorsuch. During his tenure a new drive was made and trees planted 'along the old drive and elsewhere in the park' (Wood c 1970). Some twenty years later John Martin Leake decided to return to Thorpe and in c 1822 he rebuilt the Hall as a small Georgian-style villa. During the 1830s Thorpe Hall was inherited by John Leake's nephew, who was settled elsewhere. Thus Thorpe Hall was leased by a series of tenants until it was put up for sale in 1913. It was purchased by Julian Byng, later first Baron Byng of Vimy, whose wife, Lady Byng, laid out new gardens with advice received from Robert Wallace, a landscape gardener from Colchester. Lord Byng died in 1934 and his wife remained at the Hall until her own death in 1949. During the Second World War the Hall was occupied by the Ministry of Defence. On her death, Lady Byng left the estate to her companion, who in 1951 sold it to Sir George Nelson for use as a Lady Nelson Convalescent Home for employees of English Electric. It remained as such until 1988, run by the Electrical and Electronics Industries Benevolent Association, when it was sold to the Ryan Group. The Hall has not been used since this date although the gardens laid out by Lady Byng continue to be maintained (2000). In the summer of 2000 the Ryan Group sold the estate to another developer, Tangram Leisure. It remains (2000) in single corporate ownership.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Thorpe Hall lies on the south side of the village of Thorpe-le-Soken which is situated c 16km to the east of Colchester and c 5km to the west of the Essex coast at Walton-on-the-Naze. The c 12ha site is bounded to the west by Station Road, to the south by a public footpath bordering arable land, to the east by farmland and Hall Lane, and to the north by the gardens of houses running along Abbey Street. The relatively flat land is set on the edge of the village in a busy rural part of the county.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Thorpe Hall is approached from the north-west, off the northern end of Station Road. The entrance is marked by gates hung on red-brick gate piers set beside a mid C20 lodge cottage. The drive, with a line of oaks along its western edge, curves south-east through a small area of parkland (now, 2000, arable) to a second set of gates hung on piers topped by urn finials, beyond which it turns east through the gardens to reach the north front of the Hall. The line of the drive appears unaltered from that shown on the 1874 OS map (6") and is said to have been laid out at the beginning of the C19 (Wood c 1970).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Thorpe Hall is a large country mansion of two-and-a-half storeys with white rendered walls and a tile roof, built in the Georgian style with early C20 additions. It sits in the south-east corner of the park, surrounded on all sides by enclosed gardens. The entrance front faces north and consists of seven bays with an asymmetrical columnar porch, with extensive service ranges to the east. The garden front to the south has bow windows and a four-storey tower at the western end (added to take a lift during the mid C20). The present Hall was built between 1822 and 1825 by Mark Graystone Thompson for John Martin Leake. It was renovated and enlarged by the Byngs in 1926.

To the east of the Hall and separated from the gardens by a high red-brick wall lies the service area which includes a stable yard, a gardener's cottage, a small barn, and the walled kitchen garden (see below).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens surround the Hall, with the principal areas lying to the north, west, and south. Below the south and west fronts are broad paved terraces which lead onto a series of formal garden compartments, defined by low red-brick walls and each having a summerhouse within. To the south, a sunken lawn flanked by trees and shrubs runs close to the southern boundary of the garden where the compartment is extended by a narrow walk defined by brick walls, leading to an open summerhouse looking back across the lawn towards the Hall. On the south-west corner of this area is a small informal lily pool, backed by trees. The gardens below the west front fall in three very gentle terraces, the first containing a formal lawn overlooked by a summerhouse in the red-brick northern boundary wall; the second laid out as a sunken rose garden and a red-brick summerhouse decorated with tiles on edge built into the southern boundary wall, facing north; and the third, reached through red-brick gate piers either side of shallow brick steps, containing a small woodland pool surrounded by shrub planting which marks the beginning of the informal areas of the garden.

Paths lead through woodland planting from the rose garden past a large oblong lily pool on the south-west boundary of the garden, then turn north along the banks of a second pool fed by a stream running under the drive. On the north-east side of the drive the stream meanders through a secluded bog garden, cut through by grass paths and glades and planted with exotic as well as water-loving species. The stream is connected to the third of the three large pools by a cascade which runs under a small footbridge. Some 50m north of the Hall the lake, entirely edged with stone, runs east from the cascade for c 75m towards the eastern boundary of the garden and is surrounded by a great variety of tree planting, which Lady Byng referred to as the Wilderness (CL 1913). Another small summerhouse overlooks the lake at its south-west corner, close to the main entrance to the Hall. A straight walk from the eastern boundary along the south bank of the lake back towards the Hall is edged by evergreen planting and is terminated at its eastern end by a wooden tea house.

The present gardens were all laid out by Lady Byng, with advice from Robert Wallace, in the early part of the C20, but there is a longer history of gardens existing on the site. A series of garden compartments are recorded as accompanying the house leased to William Gorsuch in 1802, while the lakes which form the centrepiece are shown in existence on the Tithe map of 1842 and are probably earlier. Although Chapman and Andre's county map of 1777 is at too small a scale to record the lakes, accounts of the 1769 fire suggest that water from a fishpond within five rods of the mansion made it possible to save the Hall (Wood c 1970).

PARK A small area of parkland is attached to the grounds at Thorpe Hall, presently (2000) all under arable. An open field to the south of the gardens gives views from the boundary across the landscape, where a railway line is sunk into a cutting.

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To the north-west of the gardens, parkland flanks the drive on either side. Although this has been returned to arable with no free-standing trees (2000), it is still surrounded by shelter belts along the road boundaries. The landscape was described in the sale particulars of 1913 as 'secluded and beautifully timbered grounds ... Whilst in full view of the house is the miniature park studded with grand old Oaks and other Forest Trees'. According to Wood (c 1970) the park was greatly improved by William Gorsuch at the start of the C19, suggesting that it already existed in a smaller form by the end of the C18.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden and orchard lie to the south-east of the Hall, separated from the gardens on the south front by a high red-brick wall and bounded to the north by the service yard. A vista from the south, garden terrace runs through a short conifer avenue to an archway through the wall. The kitchen garden area is laid to grass while the orchard contains a number of mature pear trees. At the southern end of the western boundary wall is an early C20 glasshouse overlooking an area of forcing beds and frames. These have not been used for many years and now (2000) only partly survive.

REFERENCES

P Morant, *The History and Antiquities of Essex I*, (1768), p 481 *Victoria History of the County of Essex II*, (1907) *Country Life*, 48 (18 December 1920), pp 833(4 E A Wood, *A history of Thorpe-le-Soken to the year 1890* (c 1970) *History of Park and Garden and appraisal of golf course proposal*, (Sell, Wade and Postins 1991) [copy on EH file]

Maps J Chapman and P Andre, *A map of the county of Essex from an actual survey ...*, 1777 (Essex Record Office) Tithe map for Thorpe-le-Soken parish, 1840 (D/CT 352), (Essex Record Office) Map to accompany Sale catalogue, 1913 (GC38), (Essex Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1874 2nd edition published 1898 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1874 2nd edition published 1896 3rd edition published 1921

Illustrations M G Thompson, *Watercolour of Thorpe Hall*, 1822 (D/DHf T92/77/2), (Essex Record Office)

Archival items Sale catalogue, 1913 (GC38), (Essex Record Office) The archives for Thorpe Hall are held at the Colchester branch of the Essex Record Office under the main heading of D/DHf.

Description written: October 2000 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: September 2001

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.