

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

MELFORD HALL

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Name:	MELFORD HALL
County:	Suffolk
District:	Babergh (District Authority)
Parish:	Long Melford
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.083696 Longitude: 0.72424325 National Grid Reference: TL8675746317 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000228 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

C16 moated gardens and fishponds within the grounds of a moated hall, with a mid C16 summerhouse and crinkle-crankle wall built in 1793, set in the remains of a medieval deer park extended in 1613.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

From the reign of Edward the Confessor (1005-66) until the Reformation, the manor of Melford belonged to the Benedictine abbey of Bury St Edmunds. The hall and manor were reserved for the abbots alone. In 1547 following the Dissolution, William Cordell was granted the hall and manor by Henry VIII. Cordell, an influential lawyer who became Master of the Rolls, built a new hall in 1559 on the site of the old one and laid out elaborate formal gardens, including the octagonal summerhouse which still survives. Here he entertained Elizabeth I in 1578. Dying without an heir the manor passed to Sir William's sister Jane Arlington who was succeeded by her daughter and subsequently by her grandson Sir Thomas, Viscount Savage, in c 1612. The Hall was ransacked in 1642 and the deer removed from the park (guidebook 1998). The estate had been mortgaged to Sir John Cordell, a relative of the original builder, and thus in 1649 Melford returned to the Cordell family. Sir John restocked and planted the park and the property stayed with the family until purchased by Sir Harry Parker, sixth Baronet, in 1786. In the early years of the C19 the Hall was remodelled. During the Second World War the Hall was under military occupation and following a serious fire was restored by Sir William Hyde Parker, eleventh Baronet. Following his death, the Hall, gardens and 54ha of park were transferred to the National Trust in 1960. Sir Richard Hyde Parker, twelfth Baronet currently (1998) administers the site on behalf of the Trust.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Melford Hall is situated at the north end of the village of Long Melford, opposite the old village green. The village High Street forms the west boundary and along its northern section the village houses back onto the park whilst the southern end is composed of the high garden wall. The east boundary of the registered site is enclosed by a long plantation with farmland beyond, cut through by the new (late C20) village bypass. To the north the boundary is composed of village housing along the road with farmland further east, whilst to the south a stream and thin woodland plantation divide the site from the village beyond. The landform of the c 64ha site is undulating, with the Hall

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at the low point in the south-west corner and the park rising to a high point which continues as an east/west ridge with the land falling away from the ridge to north and south. This topography gives views of the rising ground in the park from the forecourt and the main drive, and a panoramic view looking north through west and south from the ridge, taking in the Hall. The setting is one of a country village surrounded by agricultural land, now affected by the modern bypass.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The registered site is entered on the west boundary 100m north-west of the Hall through an Elizabethan-style arched gateway of red brick (listed grade II*) built 1838, which has octagonal towers with an ogee domed roof and decorative wrought-iron finials. The arch is flanked by two single-storey, gabled Victorian lodges with tile roofs. The drive runs east between a newly planted (late C20) oak avenue, with clipped Irish yew and pampas grass to the south along the top bank of the dry moat. The drive turns south to approach the east front courtyard and sweeps into the Hall court. A straight gravel walk from the Hall runs east towards the park terminating at a sundial. To the north and south of the Hall is a curved brick ha-ha inside the dry moat. A small, unmarked entrance lies 200m north of the main entrance on the west boundary, beyond a C16 brick conduit (listed grade II*).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Melford Hall (listed grade I) sits in the south-west corner of the registered site, surrounded by its gardens. It is a substantial red-brick house with turrets and a long gallery, ranged round three sides of a square and open to the east, although a mid C16 plan by John Thorpe (Soane Museum) suggests it was closed off. The west (garden) front has three-storey outer blocks with domed towers and a three-storey centre block flanked by smaller domed towers. The north and south wings, extending east, are of two-storeys and also have massive domed towers, whilst the east front has a central semicircular arched doorway with Doric and fluted pilasters, added during the C16. William Cordell's house, built in 1559, incorporated part of the earlier abbot's manor house, evidence of which still remains inside. A gatehouse in front of the east forecourt was demolished in C18. The Hall itself was altered in 1813 when the Georgian features were added and a new stable range was added to the south.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens and pleasure grounds lie to the north, south and west of the Hall and cover c 6ha, part of which is enclosed by massive, buttressed red-brick walls (listed grade II*). To the north lies the dry moat with ha-ha wall at its base. Beside it is a raised walk (known as the Bowling Green) lined with Irish yew which runs parallel with the north face of the Hall. The walk is terminated in the north-west corner of the gardens by an octagonal, two-storey brick summerhouse (listed grade II*), the upper storey of which is reached by a straight, external flight of steps on the east face. The summerhouse and wall are contemporary with the Hall, c 1559. The west garden consists of lawns with scrolls of clipped yew and box, planted with fine specimen trees including oriental plane, beech, Tree of Heaven, black mulberry and Indian bean tree. A Blush Boursalt rose raised before 1857 grows on the west wall of the Hall. On the outside of the garden wall, along the village street, is further yew topiary. The west lawn is bounded to the south by a crinkle-crankle wall (1793, listed grade II*) beyond which lies the kitchen garden. Map evidence shows the extent to which the detail of the layouts in these areas changed up to 1885, whilst their distinguishing features have remained unaltered since the C16.

South of the Hall is a small, private walled garden with a second crinkle-crankle wall, together with the stable courtyard and working ranges built in the early 1800s. South of these buildings and the kitchen garden lie two fishponds (shown in existence on the earliest map dated 1580), one square and covering c 0.4ha, and the other a larger, rectangular one with a central island. Travelling east along the south boundary from the bottom of the larger pond runs Hyde Walk; this ornamental woodland of mixed trees and shrubs is of mid C19 origin and has been added to by each successive generation of Hyde Parkers (cf Rackhams Grove at Campsea Ashe, qv).

PARK The park of c 58ha lies to the east and north of the Hall. It has a thin scattering of trees with a denser group of ancient oaks (some of which are pollarded) in the south-east corner, and a second large group of younger trees in the north-west section. Pairs of oak and pine (mid C19) stand on the prominent rise in view of the Hall. Three new (1990s) oak avenues have been planted: one extends from the main drive east; a second runs east/west from the lower to the upper fields; and the third, originally known as the Harvest Way, crosses the park from the top fields to the Hall. These follow the lines shown in Samuel Piere's survey of 1613. The north-east quarter is currently under arable and devoid of trees, whilst the remainder is under pasture. The eastern boundary plantation contains mixed broadleaves with a few mature oaks on the perimeter. The ditch and bank which marked

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the boundary of the old deer park (which lay further to the east) is still evident in this plantation. The park at Melford was first mentioned before 1400 (Hoppitt 1992) and is shown on the 1580 estate map, but it was extended and re-licensed in 1613 when it is recorded in detail on the Pierse survey. It was larger than it is today and surrounded by a wooden pale. By 1783 it had contracted in size and the Tithe map suggests that it had reached its current size by 1839.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden of c 0.4ha lies within the main walled enclosure in the south-west corner of the gardens. It is divided from the gardens by the crinkle-crinkle wall to the north and is mainly laid to grass. This has been newly planted (1998) with a pattern of yew hedging to mirror the layout recorded on the Pierse map of 1613. There is also a hard tennis court and a small area of herbaceous planting in the north-east corner. A wide pedestrian gateway leads through the south wall to the fishponds beyond.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 10 (19 October 1901), p 496; 82 (31 July 1937), p 116; (7 August 1937), p 142; 133 (25 April 1963), p 919 N Pevsner and E Radcliffe, *The Buildings of England: Suffolk* (1975), p 350 G S Thomas, *The Gardens of the National Trust* (1979) R Hoppitt, *A study of the development of parks in Suffolk from the early C11 to the C17*, (unpub thesis, UEA 1992) *Melford Hall*, guidebook, (National Trust 1998)

Maps Israell Amyce, Estate map, 1580 (private collection) Samuel Pierse, Estate map, 1613 (private collection) J Hodkinson, *The County of Suffolk, 1783 Tithe map for Long Melford, 1839 (T/145,1 & 2)*, (West Suffolk Record Office) Sketch of the gardens for a church fete, 1936 (MS20), (West Suffolk Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885 2nd edition published 1905 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1904 3rd edition published 1926

Archival items Drawing of Melford Hall (unsigned), c 1840 (HD1378/1/77/2), (West Suffolk Record Office) Most of the Melford Hall archives, including the maps by Amyce and Pierse, are in a private collection.

Description written: December 1998 Amended: June 1999 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: December 1999

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.