

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Briggens

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Briggens

Name: **Briggens**

County: **Essex**

District: **Epping Forest (District Authority)**

Parish: **Roydon**

County: **Hertfordshire**

District: **East Hertfordshire (District Authority)**

Parish: **Hunsdon**

County: **Hertfordshire**

District: **East Hertfordshire (District Authority)**

Parish: **Stanstead Abbots**

label.localisation: **Latitude: 51.781202**
Longitude: 0.045193229
National Grid Reference: TL 41181 11149
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: **Heritage Category: Park and Garden**
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001705
Date first listed: 23-Mar-2009

Details

Briggens is a C18 and later house surrounded by parkland which retains features designed by Charles Bridgeman in c.1720. The extant pleasure gardens date principally from the Edwardian period and were designed by Lord Hunsden in c1908. The house is currently a hotel and some of the surrounding park is in use as a golf course.

HISTORY In the C17, Sir Thomas Foster (d. 1616) lived at Briggens. The origins and configuration of his house is not certain, but a substantial dwelling is indicated on John Seller's map of Hertfordshire in 1676. The extent and form of the pre-C18 designed landscape is equally unknown, but it is said that two pollarded sweet chestnuts immediately to the south-west of the house may be part of an earlier park. Fosters son sold the land to the Crowley family and thence the estate passed to Robert Chester (1675-1732) in 1706. It is likely that Chester, a director of the South Sea Company, either substantially reworked, or entirely rebuilt any earlier building on the site. Chester commissioned Charles Bridgeman in c.1720 to design the pleasure gardens and wider landscape.

In 1723 the estate is described as having a walled kitchen garden of 2.5 acres and a large walled pleasure garden with a park beyond of some 60 acres. In 1728 Nathaniel Salmon noted that the `avenue to it hath at the entrance a large basin, through which

a small stream runs' and its features included 'graceful plantations of trees with a variety of slopes adorned with statues', (History of Hertfordshire). The 'slopes' probably refer to turfed ramps and terraces which were familiar elements in Bridgeman's designs and the statues were probably the works of Andrew Carpenter who is documented as being paid over £70 for 'vauzes'. Water features were also important elements of the scheme, the Juicy Brook being infilled to form a canal, engineered by Richard and William Cole, who installed a pumping house at the terminal of the canal containing the water engine which harnessed the water power from the stream and probably pumped water to other features.

After the death of Chester and his immediate heirs, the estate was owned by the Blackmore and Phelips family from 1740 until 1907. The last Sir Thomas Blackmore (d.1823) was probably responsible for remodelling the house and grounds in the late C18 or early C19, introducing softer more naturalised planting in the informal fashion of the mid C18. Elements of the early C18 design remained however as illustrated in an estate plan of 1781, which indicates the principal late C18 changes including the de-formalisation of parkland and the introduction of the ha-ha to the front of the house. The formally planted terraces of the early C18 pleasure gardens had been largely removed and the walled kitchen garden remodelled. In the wider park, both the circular lake and canal remained, but at this point or later in the C19, the engine house was removed. Substantial parts of the formal avenues survived into the C19, but some were softened by additional and altered planting regimes. In 1855 Charles Phelips created an island in the circular lake.

In 1907 the house was sold to H. Gibbs (later Lord Hunsdon) who developed the grounds before 1914, leaving notes and sketches of the work he designed. Edwardian pleasure grounds were established to the south and west of the house, including a sunken garden, and a new drive with two lodges was constructed past the canal leading to Roydon station. Additional planting in the wider parkland included some specimen trees.

Since 1979 the house has been used as a hotel and conference centre. A golf course has been formed in the north-east portion of the park, but much of the early C18 designed landscape remains.

SITE DESCRIPTION LOCATION, SETTING, LANDFORM, BOUNDARIES AND AREA The house and designed landscape lies to the north-east of Roydon and west of Harlow new town. It is situated on a prominent slope overlooking the valley of the river Stort to the south and east, and the Juicy Brook to the west and north and covers an area of c 39 hectares.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance to the Briggens estate is from the north, where the mid C19 Tudor-style lodge and early C19 Neo-classical iron gate piers are both listed at Grade II and lead to a tree-lined drive of c.1720 date, largely replanted in the C20. In the Edwardian period, an additional drive lined mainly with sweet chestnuts was added leading from the mansion to the south-west to connect with Roydon station. Iron ornamental gates, brick built piers adorned by vases flanked by classically styled brick lodges of 1914 mark this entrance and are all listed at Grade II.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The mansion was built by Christopher Cass for Robert Chester in 1719 and extended by Thomas Blackmore in 1770, altered in 1899 and further remodelled by H Gibbs (Lord Hunsden) in 1908. The three storey house is constructed of grey brick with stone dressings and has a hipped slate roof, but the interior is said to be thoroughly of the C19. It is listed at Grade II and is part of an immediate group of outbuildings, including the C18 two-storey grey brick stables with central cupola, and an element in the wider designed landscape.

ORNAMENTAL GROUNDS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Bridgeman's pleasure gardens were levelled in the later C18. The designer of this later C18 scheme is unknown, but remaining elements include the shrubbery planting to north-east and south-east of the stables and the remains of the ha-ha between the stables and the kitchen garden. Much of the ha-ha was removed in the C20 reworking and although the Edwardian pleasure gardens are overgrown many of H Gibb's features remain to the south-west of the house including the listed west terrace, sunken garden, specimen trees and shrubs. These later structures are constructed in purple-red brick and the terrace, some 80m long, has a seat in the recess at the west end and two flights of semi-circular steps near to each end.

PARK Early C18 features designed by Bridgeman survive in the park including, to the west of the drive, the circular basin of 63m diameter with central island and canal to the south aligned north-east to south-west and measuring 280m long and 30m wide. The latter is substantially silted up and hidden behind overgrown trees. Extensive earthwork terraces lead from the basin up to the mansion and to the south of the mansion is a large riverside terrace with surviving chestnut trees. In the

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wider park, terracing and trees north-east of the kitchen garden, remnants of the original avenues, mature trees in the south-west of the park and earthworks which may be indicative of a park pale on the southern boundary are likely also to be part of Bridgeman's scheme.

KITCHEN GARDEN To the south-east of the house lies the now disused walled kitchen garden, measuring c 110m x 54m and listed at Grade II. The kitchen garden has C18 brick walls, curved on the west and a central sundial pillar. There are 2 wrought iron gates of 1908 and the remains of glasshouses on the west side. Although remodelled when the ha-ha was inserted in the later C18, it remains largely intact, although in need of repair.

SOURCES Andrew C Skelton, The development of the Briggens estate, Hunsdon since 1720, Hertfordshire Archaeology vol 12. 111-28 (1994-6) Anthony Wogens, Hertfordshire Gardens (1970) Peter Willis, Charles Bridgeman and the English Landscape Garden (2002) Nathaniel Salmon, History of Hertfordshire (1728)

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION The designed landscape at Briggens is included on the Register of Parks and Gardens at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * It retains many features commissioned by Robert Chester in 1720. * The design is attributed to Charles Bridgeman, a landscape gardener of national importance with many highly graded registered parks and gardens to his name, who became Royal Gardener between 1728 and 1738. * It is an example of an evolved designed landscape with subsequent later C18 and early C20 phases of note.

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.