

## ENGLISH HERITAGE REGISTER SITE GRADE II

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT**  
**BOBBINGWORTH**  
**TL53 05**

**BLAKE HALL**

A late C18 park, possibly laid out following advice from Humphry Repton, with an early C19 woodland garden, mostly replanted in the late C20.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the C12 the manor of Blake Hall was held of the Honour of Boulogne by Pharamus of Boulogne but after the C14 it passed through many hands. In c 1700 a survey of the grounds within the manor records the existence of a hall at that time but in the early years of the C18 this house was demolished and rebuilt in brick during the ownership of the Clarke family, who held the manor from 1709 to 1770 (Muilman 1770). The 1777 county map (Chapman and Andre) shows the new house with a double avenue approach off the road and an extensive walled garden. In 1789 the estate was purchased by Capel Cure. By 1804 Capel Cure had extended the house, rearranged the gardens, and laid out a small park (estate map, 1804), possibly under the direction of Humphry Repton (1752?1818) since an engraving of Blake Hall appears in the 1799 Polite Repository. A further suggestion that Repton was involved in the laying out of the landscape is offered in A History of Stondon Massey which records the designer of the parsonage grounds to have been 'one of the most famous landscape gardeners of the period ... who was responsible ... for the grounds and surroundings of Blake Hall' (Reeve 1915). Work on the house continued for much of the first half of the C19. In 1820 the house was remodelled by the architect George Basevi. In 1884 the property was put up for sale but was not sold and remained in the Capel Cure family. During the First World War Blake Hall was taken over and used as a military hospital. Later, between 1940 and 1948, it was again requisitioned, this time by the RAF for use as an Operations base which was set up in the gutted south wing. After it was returned to the family, Mr Nigel Capel Cure began to restore the Hall. He was succeeded by the present owner (2000), who has continued the work on the Hall and has developed the gardens. The site remains in single private ownership.

### DESCRIPTION

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

Blake Hall lies c 2km to the north-west of the town of Chipping Ongar, on the north side of the main A414 Harlow to Chelmsford road and immediately to the south-east of Bobbingworth village. It occupies a site of c 56ha in a rural setting, the Hall being situated on a slight spur with gently falling ground around it from north-east to south-west, offering views

out over the surrounding countryside. The northern and eastern boundaries are made up of farmland, while to the west Stony Lane runs along the edge of the park. To the south the boundary is formed by the A414.

#### ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

There are two entrances to Blake Hall. The main entrance leaves the southern end of Stony Lane and passes the mid C19 Blake Hall Lodge (1860, listed grade II), a painted brick cottage with ornate bargeboards under a slate roof. The serpentine drive rises gently north-east through the park and the wooded pleasure grounds to arrive at the gravelled forecourt below the north-west front of the Hall. The second entrance is situated in the north-west corner of the park, beside Bobbingworth village. It is marked by mid C19 gates comprising two pairs of rusticated pillars surmounted by ball finials, linked by low curved walls topped with iron railings (all listed grade II). The drive runs south-east through a narrow boundary plantation and divides c 250m short of the Hall, one fork leading to the stable block and the other continuing south-east to arrive at the gravelled forecourt. The drives, although not the lodges, are shown in these positions on the 1804 estate map and are therefore presumably contemporary with the creation of the park.

#### PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Blake Hall (listed grade II\*) lies towards the centre of the northern half of the park. It is a large country house built of stuccoed brick under hipped slate roofs set behind a balustraded parapet. The three-storey central block stands slightly forward of its two-storey flanking wings and has a central porch with four Doric columns. Blake Hall was built in the early C18 by the Clarke family and remodelled in 1820 for the Capel Cures by the architect George Basevi when the south wing was added. The northern, service wing was added in 1834 and in the middle of the C19 George Capel Cure commissioned the addition of the third storey to the main block and the south wing.

Beyond the north-east front is a small group of estate buildings, including an early C18 granary (listed grade II), two C17 barns (both listed grade II), and two C17 garden cottages (listed grade II).

#### GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The c 10ha gardens surround Blake Hall to the south and east and have been laid out in the late C20 within the historic boundary of the early C19 gardens. To the west, beyond the main drive is a lawn, divided from the park by a fence. Beside the fence is an early C20 row of pampas grasses, which now (2000) partly obscure the view from the Hall across the park. From the south-west end of the Hall, a lawn leads past a newly created (late C20) Japanese garden into the pleasure grounds which are known as Ice House Wood. Paths lead through this ornamental woodland garden, planted during the late C20 on the early C19 framework,

with its many varieties of trees and shrubs around several mature survivors from the C19. Within the area is the C18 icehouse (listed grade II) located c 120m south-west of the Hall. The path returns through the woodland garden to the Hall and emerges on the lawn below the south-east front. Here, a long mid C19 terrace is retained by a low wall, with central steps leading down onto the lawn. Rose beds run along the base of the retaining wall. An C18 ha-ha (listed grade II) borders the lawn c 65m south-east of the Hall and divides the gardens from the park. At the northern end of the terrace is a Dutch rose garden enclosed by mature yew hedges, a feature which was described in the 1884 sale particulars along with 'lawns, flower beds, gravelled walks and stone steps'. From the Dutch Garden a path leads north-west through a gateway in a low wall to a long herbaceous border planted along the outside of the south-east wall of the kitchen garden. The path leads beyond the border to a late C20 wild garden set within a framework of mature C19 trees. On the north side of the large barn in the estate complex, a pond has recently (1999) been dug c 110m to the north-west of the Hall.

#### PARK

The c 46ha park at Blake Hall is enclosed by perimeter plantations to the north, east, and south-east, all these being shown as established plantations by the mid C19 (Tithe map, 1840). To the west of the Hall the park is retained under grass and contains a scatter of mature oaks, while the remainder has lost its individual parkland trees and is under arable production. The park was laid out at the end of the C18, possibly following advice from Humphry Repton, when the kitchen garden was resited, a new approach made, and the fields to the west of the Hall designated as park. An illustration of the Hall in Peacock's Polite Repository shows a curving approach leading to the Hall in place of the straight avenue which had been recorded on the earlier county map (Chapman and Andre). No record has been found however in the family archives to confirm the Repton connection.

#### KITCHEN GARDEN

The walled kitchen garden (listed grade II) covers just under 1ha and lies on the north-east side of the Hall. It contains one large compartment reached via wooden gates hung in the centre of each of the four boundary walls. Some mature trained fruit trees survive on the walls, but the remainder of the ground is not currently (2000) cultivated. Outside the north-west wall is a range of frames and garden stores beside a modern (1980s) tropical house containing an extensive collection of exotic species. The walled garden and its associated buildings date from the late C18 when they were relocated here as part of the laying out of the grounds and park.

## REFERENCES

### Published secondary sources

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Peacock, *Polite Repository* (1799)

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*Victoria History of the County of Essex IV*, (1956), pp 12-14 N Pevsner and E Radcliffe, *The Buildings of England: Essex* (1979), pp 90-1

*Garden History XV*, no 1 (1987) pp 34-6

### Maps

*Survey of the several grounds ... appertaining to the manors of Blake-Hall and Bilsdens*, c 1700 (photograph: T/M 210), (Essex Record Office)

J Chapman and P Andre, *A map of the county of Essex from an actual survey ...*, 1777 (Essex Record Office)

*Survey of the Manors of Blake Hall and Billsdons*, 1804 (photograph - T/M 213), (Essex Record Office)

Tithe map for Bobbingworth parish, 1840 (D/CT 38), (Essex Record Office)

OS Surveyor's drawings, 1799 (British Library Maps)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1874 2nd edition published 1895

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1874 2nd edition published 1896

### Archival Items

Sale catalogue, 1884 (D/DCc E3) (Essex Record Office)

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