

**BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL
CRESSING**

**CRESSING TEMPLE
WALLED GARDEN**

TL 799 187

Creation of a C16-style garden within the C16 garden walls of the demolished Greate House at Cressing Temple. Some features are based on information discovered during archaeological excavation at the site, and some elements of the C19 and early C20 planting have been retained.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1137 Matilda, wife of King Stephen, granted the manor of Cressing to the Order of the Brotherhood of the Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, more commonly known as the Templars. After the order was suppressed in 1312, Cressing Temple was transferred to the Order of St John the Baptist of Jerusalem, otherwise the Hospitallers. The manor was leased by Sir John Smith in 1539 and became Crown property following the Dissolution of the Hospitallers in 1540. It is uncertain exactly when in the later C16 the Smiths became the owners of the manor. Whilst the two great C13 barns survive from the Templar period, nothing remains above ground of the great brick house built by the Smith family in C16 except the walls of their garden. In 1657 Henry Nevill, a descendant of the Smiths, sold the estate. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the Greate House was demolished in the early C18 when Herman Olmius, a wealthy Dutch merchant of London, acquired the property and it became a tenanted farm. The walled garden at this point changed from being the enclosed pleasure ground for a mansion, to a kitchen and flower garden serving the farmhouse occupied by a tenant.

In the early C20 Cressing Temple was bought by the prominent Essex seedsman, Mr F J Cullen. On the retirement of Mr A L Cullen in 1987, the property was sold, and the house, barns, farmyard and adjoining field were purchased by Essex County Council as a focus for the county's heritage and to make the historic buildings and grounds available for public use. Excavation, prior to the creation of a garden in C16 style, revealed traces of former layouts including a wide brick pavement round the west and south sides, and the revetment wall of a raised walk on the east side, both dating from C16.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Cressing Temple is 4km (2.5 miles) north-west of Witham and 6.5km (4 miles) south-east of Braintree. The walled garden is about a ¼ ha (½ acre) in extent and lies on flat ground between the site of the former Greate House, the present farmhouse, and the Templar barns. The historic site, which is bounded to the north and south by the remains of possible fishponds or moat, and to the west by the main Witham/Braintree road, is surrounded by the gently undulating arable farmland of the plateau to the east of the Brain valley.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The present entrance, the former farm entrance which was upgraded c 1987, is off a small lane on the east side of the main Witham/Braintree road (B1018). The former entrance was directly off the main road.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The two Templar C13 barns are listed grade I, and the C17 farmhouse (which was the main residence on the site after the demolition of the Greate House) is grade II. It is thought that two timber-framed service buildings were erected in the early C17 on one side of the main approach to the house, somewhat similar to those at Blickling Hall in Norfolk; only one of these survives, the granary/malthouse, listed grade II. A C18 stock barn and a C20 visitor centre lie near the site of the Greate House and walled garden.

GARDEN

A garden in C16 style has been laid out within the C16 garden walls of the former mansion, the Greate House. It incorporates an early C20 raised terrace that was built on the site of part of the C16 terrace, and several items of C19 and early C20 planting including a walnut tree, a fig tree, a medlar, a mulberry and a number of fruit trees have been retained. A wide brick pavement replicates the one located during the excavations. The fountain, rill, cistern, knot gardens and raised beds are all features known to have been common elements of Tudor gardens, and most of the plants are those which would have been found in gardens of this period.

REFERENCES

- D Andrews *et al.* 'The Granary at Cressing Temple' in *Essex Archaeology and History* 25, 1994, pp 79-106
- S Nicholson, 'Researching the Plants of Cressing Temple Walled Garden' in *Essex Gardens Trust Newsletter* No. 3, Autumn 1997

T Robey, 'The Archaeology of Cressing Temple' in *Cressing Temple: a Templar and Hospitaller Manor in Essex*, ed. D D Andrews, 1993, pp 44-50

T Robey, 'The Story of the Walled Garden at Cressing Temple', in *Essex Gardens Trust Newsletter* No.8, Spring 2000

P Ryan and D Andrews, 'The Walled Garden at Cressing Temple' in *Cressing Temple: a Templar and Hospitaller Manor in Essex*, ed. D D Andrews, 1993, pp 105-116

P M Ryan, 'Cressing Temple: its History from Documentary Sources', in *Cressing Temple: a Templar and Hospitaller Manor in Essex*, ed, D D Andrews, 1993, pp 11-24

Maps

Chapman and André, *Map of Essex*, 1777

Estate map of 1794 (Essex Record Office: T/M 529)

OS 25" to 1 mile scale first edition, surveyed 1875

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