

ENGLISH HERITAGE REGISTERED GRADE II

BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL

GOSFIELD HALL

GOSFIELD

GD1255

TL773 296

The remains of a mid C19 garden set within an extensive C18 park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Gosfield Hall was originally built in the 1540s by Sir John Wentworth as a quadrangular house ranged around a courtyard. Three of the fronts were subsequently remodelled. The east front was altered by Sir Thomas Millington sometime after 1691; he was probably also responsible for remodelling the south front, although further modifications were made to it in the C18. John Knight, who acquired the estate in 1715, rebuilt the north front in a Palladian style. Following his death, his widow married Robert Nugent, first Earl Nugent, in 1736 and he carried out further work on the house, included heightening the centre of the south range and adding a 'Tudor-style' corridor. Robert Nugent also carried out work on the landscape and created a mile-long lake as a key element in his new design for the park. The estate passed by inheritance to the Marquis of Buckingham in 1788, and in 1807 Gosfield became for a while the home of the exiled Louis XVIII of France during which time the west front was reworked. In 1825 the estate was sold to E G Barnard who almost immediately became insolvent, allowing the Hall and its landscape to fall into disrepair. When Barnard died in 1851 the estate was purchased by Samuel Courtauld who spent the ten years prior to his death renovating the Hall, laying out a formal geometric garden around it, and generally improving the park and estate. His adopted daughter continued to live at Gosfield until the 1930s. Following the Second World War Gosfield was bought by Essex County Council and subsequently passed through several changes of ownership and division of the site, the Hall being purchased by the Country Houses Association Ltd, part of the park being returned to farmland, and the remainder being developed as a golf course. It remains (2000) in divided use and ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Gosfield Hall is located c 8km north of Braintree, on the west side of the village of Gosfield which straddles the A1017 Braintree to Haverhill road. The c 115ha site occupies a rural setting which is bounded to the north by farmland, to the south-west and south-east by a minor country road between Gosfield and Finchingfield, and to the east by the village of Gosfield. The ground around the Hall is generally level with a fall towards the south-west where the lake is situated. The ground rises again gently beyond the lake to the south-west boundary.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main approach drive enters the park from Gosfield village, c 700m east of the Hall beside the early C19 two-storey, red-brick North Lodge (listed grade II). South Lodge, which occupied a position on the south side of the drive was demolished in the mid C20. The concrete drive runs west, with the park on its south side and a woodland known as The Grove on its north side, past the mid C20 Wentworth Lodge. It curves around the north of the Hall, past the stable courtyard, and then turns south to arrive at the west front. Beyond the stables the drive continues north-west to the walled kitchen garden and the Home Farm located on the northern boundary of the park. A C19 drive from the western boundary at Lake Wood no longer survives.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Gosfield Hall (listed grade I) is a large quadrangular C16 mansion, built of red brick with blue diaper work by Sir John Wentworth in the 1540s. The two-storey Hall has stone mullion windows and pairs of octagonal red-brick chimney stacks. The west face, which was remodelled by the Marquis of Buckingham in the early C19, contains a central entrance gateway of moulded brick with a four-centred arch set in a square head with clock face and bellcote above. The south and east fronts face the gardens and both have seventeen symmetrical bays. They were given sash windows by Sir Thomas Millington at the beginning of the C18 at which time the south front was stuccoed (Pevsner and Radcliffe 1979); it was later given additional height by Robert Nugent. The north front, like the south, is stuccoed, having been remodelled in the Palladian style by John Knight after 1715. The internal courtyard is laid to grass and gravel with a central fountain pool, statuary, and C19 gas lamps (listed grade II).

The former C18 stable block (listed grade II) is located c 150m to the north of the Hall. The red-brick buildings are ranged around three sides of a courtyard and enclosed to the south by a red-brick wall with central wrought-iron gates. The buildings are now (2000) used as a girls'

school. Between the stables and the Hall is a service yard containing a C19 horse gin and well house (both listed grade II), located c 20m north-west of the Hall.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gravel entrance front below the west face of the Hall is bounded by lawns planted with mature yew and other trees and is divided from the park by a white metal park fence. The formal gardens to the south of the Hall are laid to lawn into which are cut small beds filled with roses and herbaceous planting, and are decorated with clipped yew, urns, and sculptures of stags (listed grade II). The terrace immediately below the south front has a central set of shallow steps leading down to the lawn, in the centre of which is a circular fountain pool edged with clipped box hedging. The lawn is edged by gravel paths and is bordered to the south by a curved mid C19 ha-ha wall (listed grade II), beyond which lies the park, now returned to arable production.

The gravel terrace continues round to the east front which looks onto a lawn planted with mature yew and cut with rose borders. It is bounded to the east by an iron park fence with a gate that led onto a path across the park to the church which can be seen from the gardens. The path is now (2000) ploughed out. The gardens represent the simplified remains of a formal scheme laid out by Samuel Courtauld in the mid C19.

Running north-east from the Hall is a large block of mixed ornamental woodland known as The Grove. Shown as woodland on Chapman and André (1777), by 1874 (OS) it had been cut through with rides and paths and a ha-ha/ditch running along its northern boundary.

PARK

Gosfield Park is now (2000) mainly under arable production to the south-east, north-east, and south-west beyond the lake. The core of the park has, since the latter part of the C20, been developed as a golf course, with a clubhouse built to the south of the walled garden c 300m north-west of the Hall. This area of the park has thus been retained under grass and is scattered with mature trees, including Wellingtonia and oaks, several of which are grouped together in close circles of planting. Traces of a triple avenue extend west from the Hall towards the southern edge of Brakes Wood (which lies beyond the north-west boundary of the site here registered). It is not clear from which period these mature oaks date since they are not recorded by Chapman and André in 1777 but are recorded as only partly surviving in 1874 (OS). This would suggest that they are early C19 features. Gosfield Lake crosses the park c 350m south of the Hall and is c 500m long. When it was constructed by the first Earl Nugent in the mid C18 it extended for 1.2km from north-west to south-east.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The walled garden (listed grade II) lies c 400m to the north-west of the Hall, on the northern boundary of the park. It has recently (late C20) been partly restored by the golf club and is currently (2000) used by them as a storage area. None of the glasshouses survive. The walled garden is contemporary with the building of the C16 Hall, with some later brickwork.

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Maps

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Tithe map for Gosfield parish, 1843 (D/CT 151), (Essex Record Office)
Estate map of Gosfield, 1855 (D/Dbm/P18), (Essex Record Office)
OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1874
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3rd edition published 1923
OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1897

Archival items

The main Nugent archive is in the Huntington Library, California, USA; copies are held at the Essex Record Office (T/A368).

The Stowe Collection, also held in the Huntington Library, California, USA, contains 2700 items for the period 1777-1825, chiefly relating to Gosfield Hall

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