

ENGLISH HERITAGE REGISTERED GRADE II

**BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL
HATFIELD PEVEREL**

HATFIELD PEVEREL PRIORY

TL7910

A park designed by Richard Woods in 1765 with late C20 additions.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

At the Dissolution, the manor of Hatfield Peverel Priory was acquired by Giles Leigh who soon afterwards disposed of it to the Alleyn family. They lived in the timber-framed old priory adjacent to the church until 1762 when Mrs Chambers (nee Alleyn) died. It was sold in 1766 to John Wright, a coachmaker, who had married well and had returned to his native county to join the gentry, having rented the old priory since 1764. In 1765 he commissioned the landscape designer Richard Woods to prepare a plan for improvements to the park surrounding Hatfield Priory. In 1769 he demolished the old building and started a new mansion on a site slightly to the south-west, of which an engraved view was published in 1771. The Tithe map of 1841 shows the new house with the park layout mainly as suggested by Woods. When John Wright died, the new Hatfield Priory was inherited by his son, John Wright II, who died childless in 1796. The estate then passed under the entail to Peter Luard, son of John I's daughter who took the name and arms of Wright. He had five surviving children and seems to have been the first Wright to live permanently at the new Priory, adding land to the estate but making few changes to the house or its landscape. Peter Wright's eldest son, John Wright III died while his father was still alive so the estate passed to John Wright IV, who survived until 1882. Following his succession in 1882, John Wright V lost much of the family fortune and retired to the Old Vicarage in the village, subjecting the Priory to a series of short tenures. In 1912 it was let to Charles Tennant who bought it in 1928 on the death of John V's widow. He retained the estate for only seven years, selling it in 1935 to the Marianhill Mission, a Catholic lay brotherhood needing a European headquarters. During their period of occupation the gardens and park fell into decay. The Mission moved in 1972 and the property was sold to Dolph Claydon, a property developer who failed to obtain permission to build on the park and sold it on to Derek Marriott who opened a school. This closed in 1979 and the Priory, together with its park, were purchased in a semi-derelict state by Adrian and Fiona Cowell who began a restoration and creation programme. The site remains (2000) in single private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Hatfield Priory lies c 8km north-east of Chelmsford, on the south side of the village of Hatfield Peverel which straddles the A12 Colchester to Chelmsford road. The c 15ha site is bounded to the north by Church Road and the grounds of St Andrew's church, to the south by Sportman's Lane, and to the east and west by farmland. The ground at Hatfield Priory slopes gently from north-north-east to south-south-west towards a slight valley and stream running in this direction in the south-west quarter of the park. The house, standing on the high ground, enjoys views south over the Chelmer valley in which the grounds are set.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance to the Priory is from the northern boundary, off Church Road. The drive passes through a pair of late C19 octagonal stone gate piers surmounted by urns located c 260m from the house, and runs south, passing the west side of St Andrew's church, to arrive at the gravelled forecourt below the north front.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Hatfield Priory (listed grade II*) is a large two-storey house with cellars, built as a near-square double pile of gault brick under a slate roof, which stands in the centre of its grounds. The five-bay entrance front faces north, the central porch reached by two flights of stone steps with scrolled tread ends and wrought-iron railings. The garden front faces south and has a central garden door which leads onto a terrace with flights of steps down to the lawn. The house was built between 1769 and 1771 for John Wright. The architect is not known although the house has been compared on stylistic grounds to the work of Sir Robert Taylor (*CL* 1996). Since that time there have been few changes to the house although it had fallen into a state of semi-dereliction by the 1970s. Since 1979 Hatfield Priory has been the subject of a careful restoration.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

From each corner of the raised glass platform on which the house stands, dense blocks of evergreen shrubs planted with mature trees mark the extent of the pleasure grounds, while the gardens lie to the east and north-east of the house. From the east front a lime avenue (planted late C20) runs east to the boundary plantation and is terminated by an alcove seat, designed by Ben Pentreath (late C20) using the portico from the derelict icehouse by Richard Woods for Wardour Castle, Wilts (qv). Evergreen shrub planting on the north side of the avenue divides this area from a tennis court and lawn edged with mixed shrub and flower borders. The flower garden has been created in the late C20, in the style of Woods. A lawn planted with a variety of trees and shrubs leads to the Dell, c 100m to the north-north-east of

the house. This sunken garden, enclosed by tall clipped yew hedges, has a circular fountain pond with a brick surround in the centre and was mentioned in the sale catalogue of 1935 when the Tennant family sold the property. Although Richard Woods' plan shows the Dell pond incorporated in a long thin canal, there is no evidence that this canal was created and it does not appear on the Tithe map (1841) which shows the Dell in its present form. To the east of the Dell lie the remains of the old priory stew ponds, that immediately to the east having been drained while the one beyond it still holds water. Lawns on the north side of the ponds occupy the site of the 1930s kitchen garden and are bounded to the north by the red-brick wall of the kitchen garden associated with the old priory. During the 1930s this area also contained a rock garden (Sale catalogue, 1935).

PARK

The park, which was laid out by Richard Woods in the late 1760s, extends south, west and north-west from the house and is enclosed on all sides by boundary plantations, through which walks have been created (late C20). The south park is scattered with clumps of mature and young trees, on ground which slopes gently towards the south boundary where a gothic temple, originally designed by Richard Woods and salvaged from Wardour Castle, has been erected (late C20) as an eyecatcher. Within the boundary plantation along the south-west edge of the park is a watercourse fed by the ponds in the north park. One of the posts of the gate into the wood, marked on Woods' 1765 plan, survives.

In contrast to the south park, the north park has a more open character, with the rolling landform characteristic of Richard Woods' work. It contains a string of three ponds, on the banks of which the main areas of tree planting are concentrated. The middle pond is a late C20 addition, following a swell in the stream shown on the 1765 plan, while the upper and lower ponds are as shown on Woods' 1765 plan for the grounds. There are fine views across the ponds east towards the church and south to the house.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The former kitchen garden, which was used by the old priory as well as the present house, lies c 150m to the north-east of the house. Since 1975 it has provided the private garden for a new vicarage built within its walls. In 1935 the sale catalogue mentions it still in use as a walled kitchen and fruit garden.

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Maps

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Tithe map for Hatfield Peverel parish, 1841 (Essex Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1874

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Archival items

Engraving, in Muilman 1771

Engraving from *Excursions through Essex* 1818/19

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