

**CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL
WRITTLE**

HYLANDS PARK

TL 68438 04206

GRADE II*

A public park since 1966, these late C19 gardens are set within a park of early C18 origin for which Humphry Repton produced a Red Book in the early C19 and which was further enlarged in the mid C19.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The earliest reference to the place-name Highlands is in 1500 when Thomas Hawkin died, leaving Highlands Field to the Vicar of Writtle. Sometime between 1723 and 1726 John Comyns bought the manor of Shackstones in Writtle and c 1728 built a house on a site south of the old farm/manor house, which he called 'Highlands' (Morant 1768). The layout of the grounds around it were recorded by Chapman and Andre in 1777 and show a park of c 100 acres (c 41ha) with simple formal gardens and a walled kitchen garden beside the house. These are described in sale particulars of 1795, prepared when, after three generations of Comyns, John Richard sold Hylands in 1797. The purchaser was Cornelius Henrickson Kortright, a Danish merchant. He added c 150 acres (c 62ha) to the park and commissioned Humphry Repton (1752-1818) to transform both house and park. An article in the Chelmsford Chronicle in 1839 refers to the Red Book which was produced for Hylands, but this has subsequently been lost. An estate map of 1814 however probably records the work of Repton, showing changes to the approach roads, extensions to the park, a new site for the kitchen garden, and a serpentine lake along the new north boundary. In 1814 the estate was purchased by Pierre Caesar Labouchere, a Dutch-born banker. When he moved to Hylands permanently in 1821, he extended the park further and commissioned the replacement of the C18 greenhouse with a magnificent 280' (c 86m) long conservatory, possibly designed by the architect William Atkinson. Atkinson was paid to design glasshouses for the new kitchen garden which was developed from 1824 onwards by Francis Nieman on the eastern boundary of the park. A fruit cage was also designed but its exact location is uncertain. In the pleasure grounds, Labouchere turned the walled garden into a flower garden. Following Pierre's death in 1839, his son sold Hylands to John Attwood, a wealthy industrialist from Birmingham and it is at this time that Repton's Red Book appears to have left the house. Between 1842 and 1845 Attwood commissioned John Buonarotti Papworth to embellish and enlarge the house, while he greatly enlarged the park and built a brick wall all along the eastern boundary. Failing finances forced Attwood to attempt to sell Hylands in 1854, but no buyer was found until 1858 when Arthur Pryor bought the core of 843 acres (c 351ha). He demolished part of the wall of the flower garden and reduced the size of the conservatory but otherwise maintained the gardens well, leaving the estate to his son in 1904, who let it to Sir Daniel Gooch. Sir Daniel purchased the property in 1907 and commissioned Frederick Chancellor to make improvements to the house. In 1923 the house and its park were purchased by Mr and Mrs John Hanbury, Mrs Hanbury remaining at Hylands until 1962. During this time she altered the gardens, built a tennis lawn and east terrace, and made a ha-ha in front of the house. Following her death in 1962 Hylands was left to three nieces and the house was damaged by fire. In 1965 the executors put Hylands up for sale and the following year it was purchased by Chelmsford Borough Council. The park and gardens have since been made available for public use

while the house has been subject to a major restoration scheme since 1985. The house remains in public ownership (2000).

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Hylands Park lies just beyond the west-south-west edge of Chelmsford, on the south-west boundary of Widford. The c 233ha site occupies an urban-edge setting, with farmland extending away to the south and west. Hylands is bounded to the east by the A12 which links Chelmsford to the M25. This boundary is marked by a brick park wall, originally erected in the mid C19 but moved to its present (2000) position, along with its gates, in 1939 when the A12 was made. The southern boundary is formed by a stream with a golf course beyond, while the west is bounded by farmland. To the north the park is enclosed by the late C20 Writtle bypass which has isolated Writtle Lodge from the body of the park. The undulating ground falls gently from Hylands house which stands in the centre of the park on a slight platform. The main slope is to the north-east towards the course of the River Wid which flows through the north-east corner of the park, beyond which are views to Widford church spire.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are two gated entrances to Hylands Park along the A12 boundary. The main entrance, in the centre of the east wall, is marked by tall iron gates hung on stone gate piers. Known as the Widford Gate, it was created after c 1841 to replace the earlier Widford Gate, which was located c 400m to the north, linked to a drive (now lost) proposed by Repton. The east drive runs west and then turns north-west to arrive at the gravelled forecourt below the south front of the house. At the southern end of the eastern boundary wall a second pair of iron gates, known as the London Gate, are hung on red-brick gate piers and lead to the south drive (after c 1815 but following advice from Repton) which runs north through the park to meet the east drive c 220m south-east of the house. In the north-west corner of the park, c 1.4km north-north-west of the house, stands Writtle Lodge which was built in the mid C19 when John Attwood extended the park. The Lodge is now detached from the drive and is connected to the park by an underpass beneath the Writtle bypass. The drive, partly lined with oak, runs south and south-east through the park along the line of the pre-1841 Writtle to Ingatestone road. It then curves east around the southern boundary of the pleasure grounds to arrive at the south front.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Hylands (listed grade II*) is a large, cream, stuccoed winged mansion in the Neoclassical style. The imposing south front has a two-storey, seven-bay central block with a great Ionic portico and columns rising through two storeys (rebuilt 1986). The lower five-bay flanking wings both have ground-storey Ionic colonnades. The seven-bay central section was built as a red-brick Georgian mansion by John Comyns in c 1728. In the early C19, following advice from Humphry Repton, Cornelius Kortright added the portico and the east wing and covered the whole house in white stucco. The architect who detailed this work is not known, but it may have been J A Repton. In 1815, following its purchase by Pierre Labouchere, the balancing west wing was added. In 1842, the architect J B Papworth produced plans for John Attwood which resulted in the east wing being rebuilt, as well as the north wall of the west wing. Both wings were increased to two storeys and a further storey added to the central core. A new

porte-cochère and servants' quarters which connected the house to the stables were added. During the late C20 these mid C19 alterations were removed, the house being restored to its early C19 form. Immediately to the west-north-west of the house are the early C19 red-brick stable buildings and coach house, which form three sides of a courtyard, open on the south side and with a central clock tower on the east range. These were built at the beginning of the C19 by Labouchere, presumably as part of the Repton proposals.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gardens surround the house to east, north, and west and are almost entirely enclosed by a tree belt and in part by a ha-ha. The ha-ha was constructed in the early C19 and was added to in the early C20. Beyond the gravelled forecourt below the south front a lawn is divided from the park by a curved ha-ha added by Mrs Hanbury in the 1930s. Below the east front a small 1920s terraced rose garden, remodelled in 1998/9, leads to a flagstone bridge over the ha-ha.

A lawn extends from the north front and is bounded to east and west by informal shrub borders, those to the east enclosing a tennis lawn built in the early C20 by Mrs Hanbury and now bounded by a low stone wall added in the late C20. At the north-east boundary of the lawn are large rhododendron borders planted in the early C20, which now (2000) obscure the view into the park and to the water. The main body of the gardens and pleasure grounds lies to the north-west of the house. Paths cut through mixed species evergreen shrubs and trees lead to glades. The largest compartment is laid to lawn with an ornate bedding scheme, set beside a raised lily pool flanked by wisteria arches. This open area also represents the position of the earlier kitchen garden, possibly moved here by Repton at the beginning of the C19 when the shrubbery was created and subsequently developed as a flower garden with the building of the conservatory in 1824. The walls and most of the conservatory were demolished by the beginning of the C20. The pleasure grounds also contain a small informal pool c 200m to the north-west of the house, shown in its present position on the 1814 estate map.

PARK

The extensive park at Hylands is heavily planted with trees of varying species and ages, with more open areas of grass to the north and south of the house. It is enclosed on all sides by plantations, which have been increased in depth during the C20. There are several large woodland blocks, many of which, including Lake Plantation and Icehouse Plantation (within which stands the ruin of the pre-1795 icehouse) to the north and Pond Plantation to the south, contain pools and ponds, while midway along the western boundary stands South Wood, an ancient woodland shown on the 1777 county map (Chapman and Andre). A serpentine lake with two small islands lies c 650m to the north-east of the house, now (2000) obscured by C20 tree growth along its banks. Beyond this, meadows flank the path of the River Wid which flows across the north-east corner of the park.

The early C19 flint estate cottage (originally thatched) and the Home Farm lie c 300m to the west-north-west and west of the house respectively, on the edge of what was the boundary of the earliest part of the park which dates from the early C18. Following advice from Humphry Repton, Cornelius Kortright and Pierre Labouchere extended the park in the early C19, firstly to the north as far as the River Wid and then to the south-west as far the London to Chelmsford road. Presumably under Repton's instruction, the drives were rearranged, trees were planted, and the small lake created (estate map, 1814). During the middle of the C19 John Attwood made further extensions, to the south, west and north.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The walled kitchen garden lies on the eastern boundary of the park, c 400m to the south-east of the house. It is divided into two walled compartments which are currently (2000) not cultivated. No glasshouses survive although archaeological excavations in 1996 revealed foundations. The walled kitchen garden was moved to this position by Pierre Labouchere sometime around 1824 when he invited Francis Nieman from Haarlem to lay them out and to practise the Dutch method of forcing. A cherry orchard was also laid out at that time although its precise location is uncertain. When the A12 was built in 1939, the eastern part of the walled gardens was lost, and the boundary wall rebuilt.

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Description written: December 2000 Amended: April 2001 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: September 2001