

**BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
COGGESHALL**

**MARKS HALL ESTATE  
AND ARBORETUM**

**TL 841 255**

An arboretum being created by the Thomas Phillips Price Trust on the site of a C16 park, C17 house and ponds and C18 walled garden, which were possibly 'improved' by Richard Woods in the 1770s.

**HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

No evidence has been found to suggest that the deer park was created at Markshall in the middle ages, but Norden records a park here on his map of c 1594. In 1605 Robert Honywood purchased the estate and enlarged the house. According to local tradition his son Thomas, a Parliamentarian, is reputed to have employed his troops in digging the ponds at the time of the Siege of Colchester. General Philip Honywood commissioned Timothy Skynner to survey his estate in 1764. The resulting map shows an impaled park to the north of the house, an avenue of trees, three rectangular ponds and a garden, walled on three sides and bounded by the largest pond on the fourth side. The church is shown as a hexagonal building standing close to the house, and the surviving remains suggest that the medieval church was rebuilt in white brick in the mid C18. In 1785, the general stipulated in his will that if any of his successors felled timber other than for repairs on the estate they were to forfeit the property. Richard Woods visited Marks Hall twice in 1779, but no account survives of any work that he may have done here. Three ponds are shown on the Ordnance Surveyors' Drawings of 1799, but by 1838 the two smaller ones had been combined to form a single piece of water. The church was encased in red brick in the later C19.

Following the death of Mrs Honywood in 1895 and the bankruptcy of the heir, Philip Courtney Honywood, Marks Hall was sold to Thomas Phillips Price in 1897. The sale catalogue describes the pleasure grounds as 'Charming and Inexpensive to maintain, laid out with Gravelled Walks, Flower Beds, Ornamental Trees, Rhododendrons and Shrubberies of luxurious growth', and the 120 ha (300 acres) park as 'Beautifully Timbered with Magnificent Specimen Oaks of Great Size and Antiquity'. In addition to the walled kitchen garden there were two pheasantries and numerous glasshouses including vineries, peach-house, cucumber and tomato houses, rosary green-houses, and full supporting service buildings. Dying childless at the age of eighty-eight in 1932, Thomas Phillips Price left the estate to his third wife for life,

and then in trust to the nation to be held and used for the advancement of agriculture, arboriculture and forestry. He particularly specified that 'as the timber had been preserved with great care for centuries and was of exceptional size and beauty it was his wish that no timber should be cut except from dead trees and in the woods where the timber was to be dealt with in a due course of forestry'. The demolition of the church had been arranged shortly before Thomas Phillips Price's death.

The Second World War was to bring many unforeseen changes to Marks Hall. Earls Colne airfield was built on estate land to the north of the park; the mansion house was requisitioned to serve as area headquarters for a number of airfields in the vicinity, and many military buildings and installations were constructed in the grounds and park. After the war the hutments were used by Braintree District Council to house displaced persons. The house became a target for vandalism and was demolished in 1950. In 1956 the deer park was leased to the Forestry Commission, but Mrs Phillips Price retained the right to fell the trees prior to the planting of conifers. She died in 1966 at the age of ninety years.

After much debate, Thomas Phillips Price's bequest to the nation was accepted, and finally, in 1971, a charitable trust named after the benefactor was set up to administer and manage the estate and establish an arboretum. Faced with the results of many years of neglect, the trustees initiated a programme for refurbishing and modernising the farms in order to establish a sound financial base for the project. When this was accomplished, the second phase of the plan was put into operation and the area round the mansion house site and the walled garden was cleared and landscaped; the ornamental ponds cleaned out and the brick lining of the banks and cascades reinstated; the Iron Bridge was restored and a C15 barn rebuilt as a Visitor Centre. The third phase of the programme, the planting of the arboretum is now in progress.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION**

The Marks Hall Arboretum is situated 5 km (3 miles) south-east of Braintree and 3 km (2 miles) north-north-west of Coggeshall. It comprises over 80 ha (c 200 acres), the greater part of the old deer park which was cleared of most of the ancient trees in the 1950s and planted with conifers by the Forestry Commission. It includes the sites of the medieval church, the manor house, its surrounding pleasure grounds, kitchen garden and ponds. The old house stood in a prominent position next to the church on the rim of the Robin Brook valley with wide views over the surrounding parkland.

#### ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The entrance to Marks Hall is from the south by a lane which turns off the west side of the Coggeshall to Earls Colne road (B1024) about half a mile north of Coggeshall and terminates in the drive to the site of the church and house. A former farm track off the western side of the drive has been upgraded to provide a vehicular entrance to the car park and Visitor Centre, which are located in the bottom of the valley and just outside the southern edge of the C19 park.

#### PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The surviving C18 coach house (listed grade II) and other ancillary buildings have been converted into offices, living accommodation and a lecture room. The cottages are also listed grade II; probably part of the C16 or early C17 building, which were altered in the C18. A C15 barn (listed grade II), which was moved from Bourchiers Grange and rebuilt, is now a Visitor Centre.

#### GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The ponds, cascades and kitchen garden which lie to the west and north of the house site, form the centre feature of the arboretum. The intervening areas are grassed. Recently a rose garden has been laid out to the north of the former coach house.

#### PARK

Although most of the trees in the park were felled after the Second World War and the area was replanted with conifers by the Forestry Commission, some specimen trees survive including a very large oak and a fine Wellingtonia. Much of the avenue shown on the estate map of 1764 was replanted with horse chestnuts in the early C20, but some oaks from the original avenue survive. As the maturing conifers are cleared, planting of the arboretum progresses. While largely 'exotic' in content, this will be structured to enhance the existing wildlife habitat and strengthen the value of the native and ancient woodland on the estate.

#### KITCHEN GARDEN

The mid C18 kitchen garden is walled on the north, west and south sides and bounded by a side of one of the rectangular ponds on the east. It is now being laid out as a C21 garden.

#### REFERENCES

P Morant, *The History and Antiquities of Essex*, ii, 1768

*Country Life*, 'Marks Hall, Essex – gardens', xi, 1902

F Cowell, 'Richard Woods (1716?-1793): a preliminary account' in *Garden History*, xv, 1, 1987

P M Ryan, *A History of Marks Hall*, 1994

C Fell Smith, 'Markshall and the Honywoods' in *Essex Review*, vii, 1898

*Marks Hall Estate and Arboretum Newsletters*, 1999, 2000

### Maps

T Skynner, *a Survey of the Capital Messuage called Markshall*, 1764 (Essex Record Office: D/DCm P14)

Chapman and André, *Map of Essex*, 1777

Ordnance Surveyors' Drawings, 1799

Tithe map, 1838 (D/CT 234b)

OS 25" to 1 mile scale second edition revised 1897

### Archive items

Will of General Philip Honywood, 1785 (PRO PROB 11 1127)

Sale catalogue 1897 (Essex Record Office: B2311)

Will of Thomas Phillips Price, 1927

### Pictorial Evidence

Engraving by J C Armitage, 1833

Photographs from sale catalogue of 1897

Photographs in *Country Life* articles, as above

Researcher: Pat Ryan