

BRENTWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL
SOUTH WEALD

ROCHETTS
[see note below about its Historic England
Register status]

Grid Ref: TQ 565941

Late eighteenth century house (largely destroyed by fire in 1975) with nineteenth century additions. Probable Humphry Repton involvement in surrounding park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

An unnamed house on the site of Rochetts, in the ownership of Sir Thomas Parker (?1695-1784), chief baron of the Exchequer, is shown on Chapman & Andre's 1777 map of Essex. It was a small house with a short straight approach drive from Weald Road, lined with an avenue of trees and a small wood immediately to the north. A similar layout is shown on a 1788 plan of South Weald. On Sir Thomas's death, the property passed to his daughter who had married John Jervis (1735-1823), a naval officer who was later promoted to admiral and knighted and created earl St. Vincent in 1797 after his victory at Cape St. Vincent. After the first part of his naval career, he was elected a Member of Parliament in 1783, but then returned to active service in 1793. It is not clear when he started to make improvements to the grounds, but a footpath was diverted away from the park in 1801 (ERO Q/RHi 3A[13]) and he was arranging to purchase trees from Thompson's Nursery, Mile End in September 1805 (NRO H(K) 245). It is also possible that the lake was under construction in 1805 (Cowell & Green, 2000). Apart from a few gaps, he remained on active service until 1807 and then spent his retirement at Rochetts, until his death there in 1823 (Crimmin, 2004).

At an unknown date he rebuilt (or extended) the house, using a timber framed construction clad in mathematical tiling to simulate brickwork, an expedient which was allegedly devised by the un-named architect to meet the earl's six month completion date (*Essex Review*, xlv, 8). He also commissioned improvements to the grounds which were considerably extended. These alterations which post-date the first edition 1" ordnance survey map of 1801 include a lake, a re-aligned gently curving approach drive and an open fronted Green House on the edge of woodland north east of the house. The Green House, with a short flank wall on each side containing an open arch, was illustrated twice in *The Polite Repository* (in 1797 and 1803); this is strongly suggestive of Repton's involvement, though no other confirmatory evidence has come to light. The circular thatched lodge (listed Grade II) on Weald Road is not shown on Chapman and Andre's map of Essex, or the first edition 1" ordnance survey map of 1801, but is of early nineteenth century appearance. It is possible that it could have been part of a Repton plan. By 1824, the open fronted Green House had been enclosed with a lean-to semi-circular glass house, illustrated in *The Green-House Companion* of 1824. This was supplied by W. and D. Bailey of Holborn, possibly under the influence of J C Loudon who was the advocate of the 'glazed semi-globe'. At the same time the open arches in each flank wall were closed with a window. (Gloag, 1970).

In 1849, it was noted that 'the garden walks are going to decay, & the hothouses are in a very bad state'(ERO D/DTw E2/17). The 1866 6" ordnance survey map shows a large lawn with a sundial and

peripheral paths immediately to the south of the house. To the east is a mixed plantation containing the glazed Green House and a gasometer (presumably the house had its own gasworks). West of the house are farm buildings and/or stables, and (immediately to their north) a walled garden with a greenhouse against its northern wall. There are additional glazed structures outside the northwest corner. Further north and west open parkland falls to the lake which has a long narrow tail running to the west and is aligned with the two lakes in the adjoining grounds of Weald Hall on the other side of Weald.

In 1865 the property was purchased by the brewer and MP, Mr. O.E. Coope, for £28,000 (ERO D/DSa 1322/10). By this date, the grounds contained boat and summer houses, an icehouse, a finely timbered park of 22 acres, and a kitchen garden with vinery, pinery and conservatory. The semi-circular glazed greenhouse had been replaced by a long rectangular building. Coope made alterations and extensions to the house designed by the architect George Devey in 1866-73. There is no record that Devey was a garden designer, so it is possible that the garden and grounds shown on the 1866 ordnance survey map had been little altered since St Vincent's time. Coope added a farm and two worker's cottages designed by E.C. Lee in c.1875, sited about 800m north-west of the house (Bettley & Pevsner, 2007).

The estate was sold again in 1910 and the sales catalogue is supplemented by photographs and a plan based on the 1896 25" OS map (ERO: D/DTw/E7). Adjacent to the road near the lodge was a Phoenician column brought from Leptis Magna by the earl and erected in 1818. The croquet lawn immediately to the south of the main house had been converted to a 'full sized tennis lawn' but was still separated from the park by a sunken fence. The 1.5 acre walled garden contained a range of vineries, and (since 1865) additional glass houses had been provided outside to the west. A brick built gas house with gasometer is on the site of the former glazed Green House but, bizarrely, had a semi-circular glazed conservatory on its south wall, similar to the structure shown in *The Green-house Companion* of 1824. The outflow at the west end of the lake appears to have been bridged by a cast iron bridge.

In 1935 the house was owned by Colonel R.C. Oxley Parker (*Who's Who in Essex*, 1935). The much reduced house and its grounds remain in private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM & SETTING

The small park covers about 22 acres and lies to the south and west of Weald Road. The other boundaries are not clearly defined. The land falls away to the west and the north, on the latter side to a small lake, aligned with the two lakes in the adjoining Weald Park. There is a model farm in the northwest corner of the park.

ENTRANCES & APPROACHES

The entrance is into the south-east part of the park from Weald Road. Close to the road is an early nineteenth century circular thatched lodge with later unattractive extensions. The entrance gates date from improvements made by O.E. Coope. The original drive ran WNW in a gentle curve to the house. There is now an additional drive running west and then curving north, presumably to a property in separate ownership.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

A fire in 1975 destroyed most of the timber framed part of the house, but Coope's brick-built nineteenth century extensions survived.

[Note: most of the grounds of Rochetts, including its lake, are included within the boundary of Weald Park in the Historic England Register. The reason for this is not clear because, for the significant part of its history, Rochetts was not owned by Weald Hall or the Tower family]

REFERENCES

Books and Articles

Bettley J & Pevsner, N, 2007 *Buildings of England: Essex*, Yale UP

Cowell, F & Green G, 2000 *Gazetteer of Sites in Essex associated with Humphry Repton*, Essex Gardens Trust publication

Crimmin PK 2004 'John Jervis, naval commander and MP' in *ODNB Essex Review*, xlv, 8

Gloag, J, 1970 *Mr Loudon's England*, Oriel Press

Powell. W R (ed) 1983 *Victoria County History of Essex*, viii, OUP

Maps

1777 Chapman & Andre's map of Essex

1788 Plan of the manor & parish of South Weald ERO D/DTw P3

1801 First edition 1" ordnance survey map, published 1801

1831 Froggett's 'Thirty Miles round London' 1" map

1866 First edition 6" ordnance survey map, published 1866

1893-96 Second edition 25" ordnance survey map LXVII

Archival Items

ERO sales catalogues: 1910 D/DTw E7, 1813-1910 D/DTw/E17, 1865 D/DSa/E2/17, 1949 SALE/13777/G

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