

**BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL
GREAT YELDHAM**

SPENCERS

TL 758 394

A multi-layered landscape, developing from a modest C18 layout, through aggrandisement in C19, to its present form with design by Tom Stuart-Smith.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manorial history of Spencers is not given in Morant, but a mortgage of Jan. 1740/41 (D/DU 204/20) refers to 'a messuage and land called Lynsted of 16 acres, copyhold of the Manor of Tilbury with Nortofts and Skeyts, in Great Yeldham'. A conveyance of 1841 (D/DU 204/63) provides the information that Lynsted was subsequently known as Spencer Farm and was at that date still described as a 'copyhold messuage or tenement'. The property was called Spencer Farm in 1845, but by 1861 in Collier's People's History of Essex is described as Spencer Hall. On the first edition OS maps of 1876 it had become Spencer Grange. This name was retained for some decades, but since 1937 when it was bought by Mr and Mrs Augustine Courtauld, it has been known as Spencers.

Morant (Vol. ii, 1768), followed by Muilman (Vol. ii, 1770) and Wright (1836), states that Spencer Farm was a 'fine mansion' built about 1760 by Lady Anne Bateman, widow of the 1st Viscount Bateman and daughter of Charles Spencer, 5th Earl of Sunderland, later 3rd Duke of Marlborough. It is generally assumed that the name of the property derives from this family (the information in The Place-Names of Essex is unreliable as the generations of the Spencer family have been confused). The earliest recorded layout of Spencers, which was acquired after the death of Lady Bateman in 1769 by Mrs. Sarah Chambers, is on Chapman and André of 1777, showing an irregular T-shaped property approached by a long drive from the Great Yeldham-Tilbury road. Before reaching the entrance, the line of the approach passed what appears to be a series of kitchen gardens arranged in a straight line; it then curled round the house to gain access to the stables. What appears on the map to be a straight walk running south-west and ending half-way down the hill on which the house stood, is shown on later OS maps to be the parish boundary between Great Yeldham and Tilbury.

In 1783 Mrs. Chambers sold Spencer Farm for £1400 to Gregory Lewis Way, a barrister with a literary turn. A letter (quoted in History of the Way Family by H Way, 1914) written to Way as a prospective purchaser, describes Spencer Farm as 'one of the seats of Viscountess Dowager Bateman deceased, wch. she built in the midst of about 18 acres of ground, that is copyhold of Inheritance at a fine certain, and wch. is pleasantly disposed round the house. The remaining 5 acres about 100 Rod from the outer Gate is leasehold ... this might be made free at a trifling expense. Out of the high road ... you drive down a gravel road through the grounds to the house, wch. stands environed by its own gardens and fields. ... Green ho. full of fine myrtles etc etc'. Way bought Brook Farm (Spiltimbers) in 1787 but does not seem to have made any attempt to bring it within the landscape of Spencer Farm.

By 1799 (the year of Gregory Way's death) some change is recorded on the Ordnance Surveyors' Drawings. The land to the south of the approach has been taken into the garden area, with four clumps of planting within the section by the road. Spencer Farm was inherited by Rev. Lewis Way in 1799, while his brother John acquired Spaynes Hall a short distance away. Lewis died in 1835 but his

widow Caroline Elizabeth lived until 1882 and appears on the Tithe Award as the owner/occupier of Spencer Farm.

The remnants of the 1799 layout are still visible on the first edition 6" OS (1876), but the grounds have been considerably enlarged and improved by that date. This may reflect improvements by Lewis Way, as the Tithe Map (although earlier) gives no landscaping detail and would accord with the improvements and alterations made to the house in the early C19. Perimeter plantations run along the entire northern boundary, and the pleasure grounds to the south of the house have been deformed and extended. A second approach has been made, running south-south-east to join the Great Yeldham-Tilbury road near Brook Farm. This approach is a partial avenue, made through land described on the Tithe Award (1840) as a pasture and an arable field. Not until the third edition 6" OS (1919) does the avenue appear to be continuous. A photograph of Spencer Grange in 1909 was published in Essex in the Twentieth Century.

The long ownership of Spencers by the Way family ended in 1920 when the property was purchased by Andrew Duncan. The 1924 edition of the 6" OS shows little difference from the 1874 edition, apart from the completion of the avenue. A small block plantation has been made north of the walk to the brook, and some extra land taken into the park and the south-west boundary.

From 1937 Spencers has been associated with the Courtauld family with a short break in 1960 when it was bought by Lord and Lady Denham. The sale catalogue of that date describes the two drives, one with entrance lodge and the other with an arch-like avenue of walnut trees. The park surrounding the house contained a number of fine trees, and the large lawn to the south-east and west of the house was also well timbered. The walled kitchen garden contained a brick-built potting shed, three greenhouses and a range of cold frames.

In 1978 Spencers became the home of Lord and Lady Butler (previously Mrs Courtauld). The present owners commissioned garden designs from Tom Stuart-Smith, who has now worked intermittently at Spencers for some years.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

Spencers is 1km (just over ½ mile) north of Great Yeldham, on the road to Tilbury-juxta-Clare. The mansion stands on a platform overlooking steeply sloping land to the south-west down to the River Colne on the west boundary. To the north-east the ground rises to Tilbury Hill. The east boundary is formed by the Yeldham to Tilbury-juxta-Clare road, and on the north-west the parish and estate boundaries run together. Perimeter plantations have been made along all boundaries but the south. The landscaped grounds amount to twenty four ha (60 acres), excluding the two fields which flank the south avenue.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The original approach was the east drive, which curves through the north-east part from the east lodge to approach the entrance front of the mansion. The south drive, which enters the property by Brook Farm, is initially straight as it runs through the walnut avenue, recently interplanted with sweet chestnut, but curves to enter the pleasure ground/woodland south of the mansion. The two drives meet in front of the house at a gravelled turning area.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Spencers (registered grade II) is a mid C18 house restyled at the beginning of C19 when a Doric portico was added. The house is aligned north-west to south-east near the north limits of the designed

landscape. Service buildings to the north of the house follow the same alignment with a return wing to the north-east of the main block, partially enclosing a courtyard.

REFERENCES

N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England – Essex*, 1954
1960s Sale Catalogue (ERO B5400)
A Corder-Birch, *A History of Great Yeldham*, 1994
English Heritage, *A list of buildings of special architectural and historical interest*
H Way, *History of the Way Family*, 1914
Spencer Farm, with some account of its owners, 1845

Maps

Chapman and André, *Map of Essex*, 1777 sheet
Ordnance Surveyors' Drawings, 1799
Tithe map and award for Great Yeldham, 1840 (D/CT 415)
Tithe map and award for Tilbury, 1839
OS 6" to 1 mile scale first edition, surveyed 1874
third edition, surveyed 1924
OS 25" to 1 mile scale second edition, revised survey 1897
Site plan from sale catalogue, 1960 (Essex Record Office: B5400)

Pictorial Evidence

Engraving from Spencer Farm etc. 1845
Photographs from sale catalogue, 1960
Photo of Spencer Grange from Essex in the C20, 1909
Photo of Spencer Grange from *A History of Great Yeldham*, 1994

Archival Items

D/DU 204/63-69. Settlements and mortgages of Way family 1841-1869
D/DU 747/5. Sketches, prints etc.

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