

**BRENTWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL
STONDON MASSEY**

**STONDON MASSEY PARSONAGE
(now Stondon Massey House)**

Grid Ref: TL574 011

Humphry Repton is thought to have advised on the laying out of the gardens c1800.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Reverend John Oldham (1761-1841) was Justice of the Peace for the County for about thirty years as well as fulfilling his pastoral duties in Stondon Massey: he was rector from 1791. Oldham was a man of means and of taste and rebuilt the rectory (c1800) entirely at his own expense. The old house at this time was in a bad state of repair and the design of the new house was said to have been inspired by architecture Oldham saw on a tour of Switzerland. The Reverend Oldham wrote to *The Gentleman's Magazine* in February 1805 describing the old house, which he had pulled down a few years earlier, as 'a sort of architectural curiosity'. He also submitted a drawing of the old house as he was 'anxious to secure a representation of it'. In his article the Reverend included a description of the old house as it appeared in a Terrier of the year 1618: 'the rectorie hath a mansion-house newly builded and repaired by John Nobbes, then incumbent, a fair Barn and Orchard, and 60 Acres of Glebe, Arable and Pasture'.

The Reverend E.H.L. Reeve's *A History of Stondon Massey* (c1915) attributes the entire remodelling and remaking of the grounds to Oldham with the help of 'Capability' Brown, which is impossible as Brown died in 1783. Reeve writes 'Capability Brown did his share of the work cleverly and well. Perceiving that the Glebe round the [new] Rectory House formed at this point the boundary of the parish, he created a pretty avenue of beech trees to fringe it, and in the enclosure provided an excellent vegetable and pleasure garden, and a veritable park in miniature to rejoice the eyes from the windows.... In addition to orchards for the serviceable apple and pear, a substantial brick wall was erected round two sides of the garden, whereon peach, apricot and nectarine trees were planted in judicious order'. One apricot tree, Moor Park, was a very heavy cropper producing 55 dozen of fruit one year. The Reverend Reeve describes the Rectory as having 'an imposing approach of one hundred yards and sweet reminders of the flower garden of any predecessors appear in the meadow every spring opposite my window when bulbs of the narcissus put forth their blooms from the growing haycrop.'

The landscape design may have been carried out by Humphry Repton as in the *Return of expenditure on glebe houses 1796-1833* (Archdeaconry of Essex) the Reverend John Oldham writes in 1833 that 'I... set about building a new Parsonage, within few Rods of the old one' This was ready 'a few weeks before Michaelmas 1800. The House itself was built on contract, the offices and Garden Wall etc. by

Piecework – As far as my recollection serves me, I laid out, with assistance of Repton (as to Site & Aspect etc) of Nash (as architect) and J. Wyatt (as builder), something more than 4000£.’

The Chapman & André’s 1777 map shows the situation of the house, but no designed landscape is defined. The 25” to the mile ordnance survey map surveyed in 1873 shows the estate bordered by trees with a footpath from the formal garden running along the outer edge of the parkland: both sides of the path bordered by trees.

In 1956 the rectory was a private house, renamed Stondon House, with the land being farmed. A new rectory had been built c1939 on a different site. A 21st century sales advertisement describes the house as ‘an elegant period house in mature wooded grounds with paddocks’. The house, stables, outbuildings, grounds, tennis court, woodland, and paddocks amounted to 19.5 acres.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM & SETTING

Stondon Massey is about two miles south-east of Chipping Ongar and four miles north-west of Brentwood. It is one of the smallest parishes in the hundred, having an area of 1,127 acres. In shape it is roughly like a reversed L, of which the short arm lies along a ridge about 300 ft. high above the Roding and the long arm extends north-west down to the river, containing the valley of a small stream which flows into the river near Hallsford Bridge, and also a spur extending north-west from the left bank of the stream.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The entrance drive to Stondon Massey House is from the Ongar Road. A curving gravelled drive leads to the house and divides with a spur leading to the range of red brick outbuildings at the side of the house.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Stondon House, formerly the Rectory, is Grade II listed and was built in c1800 for Rector John Oldham (1791-1841). The house is built of red brick, Flemish bond, slate roof. It has Palladian symmetry retained both outside and within the building to an unusual degree. The house is orientated south-west and south-east.

REFERENCES

Books and Articles

Reeve, Reverend E.H.L. c1915 *A History of Stondon Massey* pp 45,49,51
Essex Gardens Trust 2000 *Repton in Essex* p147-148

Maps and Images

1777 Chapman & André sheet 17
1848 Tithe map Essex Record Office D/CT 337
1871-73 6” to the mile ordnance survey map sheet LIX

1893-96 25" to the mile ordnance survey map sheet LIX/2
c1873 Photo of Rectory House and Gardens

Archival Items

1805 *Gentleman's Magazine* Vol 97 February p105-106

1833 Archdeaconry Records: *Return of money spent on Glebe Houses since 1750* Essex Record Office
D/AE M2/6

1919 Sales catalogue Essex Record Office SALE/A228

1997 Sales catalogue Essex Record Office SALE/D1756

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