

**EPPING FOREST
SHEERING**

THE OLD RECTORY

TL 508 136

Remains of C19 garden possibly developed from former C18 layout, surrounding relatively high status Rectory.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Formerly known as Sheering Parsonage, the Old Rectory was, according to Morant, appendant to the Manor of Sheering Hall and in the gift of those who owned it, including the noble families of Fitzwalter, Ratcliffe and Hewit. This continued until Lady Arabella Wiseman, Viscount Hewit's executrix, sold the advowson c1689 to a gentleman who intended it for his son. From him it was bought with money left by Bishop Fell for Christ Church College in Oxford and a house near the church was given for the reparation of the church. The rectory was still in the gift of that 'noble seminary of learning' when Morant was writing in 1760s.

It was valued at 15 marks in 1254 and £13 13s 4d in 1535. Davids' 'History of Nonconformity in Essex' (1863) mentions one of the Sheering incumbents, Mr Leonard Solme M.A. (rector 1572-1612), in a list of Essex clergymen c1585 as: '*... a hunter, a gamester and preacheth not, yet a Master of Arts.*' Fisher's 'The Harlow Deanery' (1922) refers to a more pious Sheering incumbent John Warde (rector c1648-1670), presented by Sir Thomas Hewit, Knight and Patron, who was mentioned in the Lansdowne MS of 1650 as '*an able, preaching godly minister*'. Smith's 'Ecclesiastical History of Essex' (c1934) reports that during Warde's incumbency the living, in addition to the dwelling house, comprised about 24 acres of glebe and two of woodland worth £12 p.a. plus tithes worth £80 p.a. Smith also includes mention of a complainant in 1662, who had been ejected from the living, stated that he had been fined £25, a fifth of his annual income. These entries all serve to suggest that this was a rich living by the standards of the time. This is further supported by documentary evidence (ERO: D/P 370/3/1) dated 1807 in which the incumbent, Francis Tutte M.A. (rector 1778-1824) was appealing against the payment of £26 tax based on the capital stock of the rectory grounds and approximately 33 acres of glebe land quoted as £953 6s 8d. Incidentally it was Francis Tutte who, in 1816, was responsible for helping to set up a Trust, financed by dividends from investments, to provide basic education for twelve poor children per annum. This later developed into free school provision for children of the parish.

There appear to have been links between the rectories of Henham and Sheering during 18C when both were held within the estates of the Feake family. In 1796 Francis Tutte was granted a dispensation on strict conditions, to hold Sheering in plurality with Henham (D/DA Q3). This wasn't an isolated occurrence as the VCH (Vol 8) states that many of the Sheering incumbents were pluralists from mid C15. Not all the incumbents were resident at Sheering but the VCH (Vol 8) specifically mentions three rectors that were during C18: Edward Hinton M.A. (1712-1745), Samuel Payne M.A.

(1745-1754) and Richard Hinde D.D. (see below). Fisher refers to Edward Brown M.A. (1824 – 1843) as a resident rector and implies that Canon Edward Hill M.A. (see below) also resided at Sheering when not on his travels.

It was Richard Hinde (rector 1754-1778) who is thought to have remodelled the south-west corner of the rectory c1770 and he may have been responsible for the garden layout as shown on Chapman & Andre's map of 1777 with what is probably a fairly large curved pond plus paths and an orchard. Muilman (1771) comments: *'The present incumbent is making great improvements in the parsonage and lands belonging to it.'*

Another incumbent who may have played a significant part in shaping the rectory grounds is Edward Brown (rector 1824-1844). He re-fronted the house in Tudor Gothic style, and he is reported (VCH, Vol 8) to have spent £1,000 on the house 1835-1837. Therefore it seems reasonable to suggest that the garden may have been improved too during this period. Certainly by 1870s the first edition 25' OS map shows the grounds well-furnished with mature trees, with an almost circular perimeter walk and, possibly, a kitchen garden in the north-east corner. No pond corresponding to that suggested on the Chapman and Andre map is shown, although the area where the water would have been appears as an open space.

Wight's Directory of Essex (1863) mentions that the rectory had been valued in 1831 at £435, was in the patronage of Christ Church, Oxford and the incumbent (in 1863) was Canon Edward Hill M.A. *'who has 22 acres of glebe, and a handsome modern residence, in the Elizabethan style.'* The tithes were commuted in 1840 for £507 per annum.

The VCH makes the comment that for much of its long incumbency Sheering rectory was served by curates. This might help to explain why the basic layout of the grounds appears to have undergone just two main phases of development which seem to have occurred during the incumbency of resident rectors Rev. Richard Hinde (C18) and Rev. Edward Brown (C19). Furthermore from 1849 until 1899 there was just one incumbent, Canon Edward Hill M.A., whose long incumbency is commemorated by a new aisle in the church, commenced soon after his death. He was Diocesan Inspector of Schools and, according to Fisher, although his work took him considerable distances from Sheering, Canon Hill always went on foot. He also held the office of Rural Dean and these occupations together with his probable involvement with various work carried out on the church during his incumbency may explain why he doesn't appear to have made significant changes to the layout of the rectory gardens other than possibly having planted some trees (see below). Similarly his successor, Herbert Alban Williams M.A. (rector 1900 -1936) *'soon after entering upon his duties there set to work to restore and beautify the old church.'* (Fisher). It would seem that he and future inhabitants of the rectory were happy to enjoy the garden without the need to alter it drastically and so its basic C19 layout has survived. An aerial photograph of the site (www.multimap.com) confirms this.

The Old Rectory was sold in 1952 when a new rectory was built on the glebe to the north of the church. The present owner bought the property c1978 from Mr Fielden, now deceased.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

The Old Rectory is situated in Church Lane, a narrow road between Sheering and Matching Tye. It is located to the south of St Mary's Church and the rectory grounds border the churchyard along the northern and part of the western boundaries. Church Lane forms the boundary to the west and partly to the south whilst the remaining boundaries (east and south) abut farmland. The site lies on undulating land and slopes gently towards Pincey Brook which meanders approx 1 km to the south. The rectory grounds cover approximately 1.25 hectares although the estate includes agricultural land to the west of Church Lane. According to the first edition 25' OS map (1874), the field immediately opposite the garden included two ponds, the larger of which is still extant.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

A white wooden six-bar entrance gate is located in the north-west corner of the site and the short gravel drive ends in a wider rectangular gravelled area north of the house. A gravel path leads from this along the east and south sides of the house. A smaller white wooden paling gate on the boundary immediately to the north of the house leads into the churchyard from which an overgrown footpath runs north-east to south-west to the drive. This path and the drive layout correspond to that shown on the first edition 25' OS map. A much older and taller solid wooden gate is just discernable within the hedge on the western boundary at the point where a path is shown on the same map.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The present Grade II listed rectory, dating from C18, is timber framed and plastered with a peg tile roof. It is of two storeys, with attics and a central chimney stack. Parts have later refacing and extensions in gault brick, probably of early C20 date. The house was extended to the east in the early C19 in the 'Gothick' style, with crenellated parapets and panelled octagonal corner turrets, all faced in Roman cement. It is embellished with decorative details, such as coats of arms and winged imps.

The stable block, with its back wall forming part of the boundary along Church Lane, is situated to the west of the house. The south half of the stable block is timber framed and weather boarded (one storey with loft), the north half is single storey in gault brick. Three wells exist within the stable yard.

REFERENCES

- Coller, D.W. *People's History of Essex* (1861) p318
Davids, T.W. *History of Nonconformity in Essex* (1863) p102
D of E *Listed Building Schedule for Epping Forest* (1984) p73
Essex Review, Vol LVI (1947) p138
Fisher, J.L. *The Harlow Deanery* (1922) p242 - 247
Forestry Commission *Estimating the Age of Large and Veteran Trees in Britain* (1998)
Morant, P. *The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex Vol II* (1763-8) p501
Muilman, P. *A New and Complete History of Essex Vol IV* (1771) p107-8
Salmon, N. *History and Antiquity of Essex* (1740) p82
Smith, H. *Ecclesiastical History of Essex* (1933) p107, 275

Victoria County History of Essex, Vol VIII (1983) p247 -8
Venn, J.A. *Alumni Cantabrigenses* Part 1 to 1795 Vol IV (1947) p119
Wright, T. *History of Essex* Vol II (1836) p307
Wight's *Directory of Essex* (1863) p338 on microfiche 2

Maps

Coach Roads Within Six Miles of Harlow T. Kitchin Sculp ERO: T/M 132 (1741)
J. Andrews & A. Dury (1776-1777) ERO: County maps 3(J)
J. Chapman & P. Andre *A map of the county of Essex from an actual survey.* (1777) Sheet 11
Surveyor's Drawings 1790s Sheet 14
Tithe Map c1840 (ERO: D/CT 313B)
OS 6' to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880s Sheet 41
OS 6' to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1898 Sheet 41
OS 25' to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1874 Sheet 41.4
OS 25' to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1897 Sheet 41.4
www.multimap.com/bx793/gmp/550/213/X550750Y213500S5000W700H410.j...

Archival Items

ERO: D 583 Sales Particulars 1978
ERO: D/CT 313A Tithe Award c1840 – Edward Brown rector
ERO: D/DA Q3 Dispensation granted to Francis Tutte re tax (1796)
ERO: D/DPn/E1 Wills & Settlements of Glyn family (1803 - 1880)
ERO: D/DPn/F1 Wills & Settlements of Feake family (1757 - 1803)
ERO: D/P 370/3/1 Tax charged to Francis Tutte (1807)
ERO: D/P 370/1/6 Parish records includes list of some Sheering rectors (c1567 – 1936) on microfiche
ERO: D/P 370/25/1 Details of share investment for education Trust (1816)
ERO: T/A 547/2 Xerox copy of entries of all parishes from 1700 taken from Newcourts Repertorium Vol II (Essex) (1710) compiled by George Hennessey (c1910)

Pictorial Evidence

Line drawings of the garden found in a scrap book dating from 1880s by the present owner:
A view across to the east side of the house showing the undulating lawn and mature trees entitled 'Sheering Rectory, May 17, 1851 JCL, Jany 1857 G Hill'
A view across to the south side of the house showing the undulating lawn and mature trees entitled 'Sheering Rectory, May 1851 JCL 1857 G Hill'
A view from below south-east corner of house across garden towards north-east showing mature trees and a gardener pushing a wheelbarrow across the lawn. Not signed.

Researcher: Sally-Ann Turner

Site visits:

Dr Twigs Way and Sally-Ann Turner 17/06/04

Dr Michael Leach and Sally-Ann Turner 1/07/04

Tree dating: Robert Adams

Edited: Twigs Way 08/09/04