

**MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL  
WOODHAM WALTER**

**WOODHAM WALTER HALL**

**TL 813 064**

The site of a high status mansion abandoned since its demolition in the late C17, with extensive and unusually well preserved earthworks of ponds, moats and other features from various phases of medieval and Tudor landscaping.

### **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

The proximity of the original manorial church (the advowson of which was donated to the Knights Hospitaller in the latter part of the C12), as well as finds of mediaeval pottery sherds, show that the site of Woodham Walter Hall was occupied from the very early Middle Ages. The deer park was in existence by 1237 and was enlarged, nearly half a century later, by Robert FitzWalter's enclosure of 100 acres of heathland. The FitzWalters owned the 'capital messuage and park' at Woodham Walter in 1329 and 1362, and it remained in this family's ownership until the male line failed in 1431, when it passed by marriage to the Radcliffe family. In 1496, when John Radcliffe was convicted and beheaded for his part in a plot to overthrow Henry VII, there is reference to a park and stanks (or fish ponds) at Woodham Walter. Nine years later, the estate was restored to his son, Sir Robert Radcliffe (d. 1542) who added more land to the park in 1511. He was created Viscount FitzWalter in 1525, and Earl of Sussex in 1542. The second earl, Henry, was a supporter of the Catholic Mary Tudor and died in 1556. The third earl, Thomas, a soldier, statesman and staunch supporter of Elizabeth I, was rewarded with the grant of New Hall at Boreham in 1573 which he made his main country seat, though he retained ownership of the Woodham Walter estate. The fourth earl is said to have resided mainly in London. He sold New Hall in 1622 and disparked Woodham Walter which was let out in several sections. The leases indicate that there had been a Great Deer Park and a Red Deer Park, a reflection of the normal practice of keeping fallow and red deer separately. There were also references in the leases to fishponds, and part of the rent of one tenant was to be paid in fish (carp, pike and bream). Permission was given to remove 'the old post, pales and rayles of the park pale', as well as the construction of one or more mills, and the extraction of soil for brick and tile making. The mansion itself was sub-let to Sir Edward Radcliffe. However the family appears to have been encumbered with debt and the property passed, as a security for loans, to Sir Henry Mildmay of Moulsham, who sold it on to Sir William Fytche in 1638. Towards the end of the C17, his descendant William Fytche acquired Danbury Place through marriage, and Woodham Walter Hall was demolished. The family retained the manorial estate until the C19 when it was split up and sold.

It is not clear when the mansion was built, but it was substantially altered or re-built (probably by the first earl, to reflect his social and political importance) in the first half of the C16. The diaper pattern of burnt headers in the surviving brickwork is typical of this date in Essex. There is also probable evidence of a second phase of Tudor construction at the north-west bastion, which is not bonded in to the adjoining brickwork. In 1562 the parish church, which was immediately to the west of the

mansion, was taken down and a new one built to the northwest, nearer the village. This may have been because further improvements were planned, or because greater privacy was required. As already mentioned, within a decade the third earl had moved to Boreham where he embarked on major improvements to New Hall.

No documentary evidence describing the garden layout has been found. The construction of artificial lakes and a circuitous approach to the mansion (described below) is characteristic of high status late mediaeval landscaping. There is also a possibility that in the C17 John Tradescant, the famous royal gardener and plant collector, might have been involved at Woodham Walter Hall as he had two connections with the locality; he was employed by the Duke of Buckingham at New Hall, Boreham from 1624 to 1628, and he also leased an unidentified property in Woodham Walter itself.

In the 1820s the Duke of St Albans (the last hereditary Royal Falconer) built a single storey cottage for his falconer on the dam to the north of the house platform; this building was destroyed by fire in 2004. The house platform and surrounding moats were rough grazing until 1973 when there was an abortive attempt to plough the area for an arable crop. Since then, it has become increasingly overgrown. The whole site is believed to be in single ownership and for sale, with planning permission granted in 2007 for a substantial new house on the north dam, on the site of Falconers Lodge.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING.**

The site is about 0.75km southeast of the village of Woodham Walter, just north of the old road from Maldon to London, and immediately south of the drive to Falconer's Lodge which is built on the northernmost dams. The house platform, moats and the surrounding pond earthworks occupy about 10 hectares. The original park was extensive and covered the majority of the southern half of the parish (where the park pale and the parish boundary were concurrent). A small stream runs from south to north in a shallow valley near the eastern edge of the site of the mansion. The house platform slopes gently downwards from west to east.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

There may have been an entrance from the old Maldon to London road. There is no surviving evidence of this, apart from the existence of a public right of way running north from the road to the east of the site of the mansion and its garden. The main entrance was probably from Oak Farm Road to the west, running along the line of the present drive to Falconer's Lodge, and continuing along the top of the northern dam. This dam is flat-topped and about 10 metres wide, much wider than would have been necessary for retaining water. This raised causeway would have provided approaching visitors with an impressive view of the mansion across the lake, as well as a reflection of the house on the surface of the water. On reaching the end of the north dam, the approach route would have turned south along the east side of the valley, and then west to reach a bridge across the moat onto the house platform, probably through a gatehouse.

### **PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

Nothing of the house is visible above ground, apart from the lower courses of a multi-faceted external wall on the north side of the house platform. There is more brickwork on the west side, some of which

shows diaper patterning. At the northwest corner is the base of a bastion, possibly either the base of a tower or a viewing platform looking out over the deer park. This is not keyed into the adjoining brickwork, so may be a later addition. Its core contains fragments of worked stone, septaria, clunch, yellow bricks of early C14 date, and red Tudor bricks. There is a brick-built cellar to the southeast. The site is scattered with fragments of brick but no other intact brickwork is visible.

Falconer's Lodge, a single storey brick structure, formerly thatched, with slate roofed extensions, is sited on top of the north dam, and is now a burnt-out shell. It is a mixture of C19 and C20 construction.

#### REFERENCES

Newcourt, R., 1710 *Repertorium*, ii, 684

Oswald, A., 1999 'Indiana Jones and the Gardens of Woodham Walter' in *Essex Gardens Trust Newsletter*, vii.

Ryan, P., 1999 'Woodham Walter Hall – its site and setting' in *Essex Archaeology & History*, xxx, 178-195

#### Maps and Images

RCHM survey of Woodham Walter Hall (undated) [NMR no: TL 80 NW 15]

Research by P. Ryan; site visit on 11 June 2007 by P. Ryan, T. Way, M. Leach and others (and on numerous previous occasions by P. Ryan).