



TL 64 NW 7 Cambridgeshire South Cambridgeshire

TL 6227 4735 Horseheath Hall

Summary

Horseheath, 12 miles southeast of Cambridge, was the seat of the Alington family from the end of the 14th-century until 1700 when the estate was sold to John Bromley. Around 1663 Sir William Alington commissioned the influential architect Sir Roger Pratt to build a new hall (TL 6227 4735). In the early eighteenth century this house was modernised and the formal gardens of the Pratt house replaced by a landscape garden including work by William Kent. Extravagant spending by a member of the Bromley family in the second half of the 18th-century forced the sale and demolition of the house in 1777.

Today no upstanding remains of the house survive on the site. However by using a combination of earthwork survey and soil marks, supported by cartographic and aerial photographic evidence, it is possible to identify traces of the garden associated with the Pratt house and elements of the Kent layout.

Historical Background

A detailed history of Horseheath manor and its owners has been documented by C.E. Parsons (1948). This account will therefore restrict itself to the details of the family histories pertinent to the development of the house, garden and park. The earliest reference to the Alington family holding land in Horseheath occurred in 1397. In 1448 William Alington created the park, which was subsequently enlarged by Sir Giles Alington in 1550 (VCH 1978, 72). The medieval manor house was probably sited in the field known as Hall or Hallgate field close to Horseheath village (VCH 1978, 72). Something of the form of this hall may be reconstructed from documentary sources. Family papers describe a large house including a chapel, parlour, kitchens, a dairy, bedrooms and stabling. Also associated with the house was a farm along with dove, dog and coach houses. It was clearly a substantial house which was large enough to accommodate Elizabeth I and her retinue in 1578 (Parsons 1948, 14; Lyson 1808, 216).

By the seventeenth century this hall is known to have been in a dilapidated condition. Around 1663 William, Lord Alington, the first English peer in the family, commissioned the influential architect Sir Roger Pratt to rebuild Horseheath Hall (Colvin 1954, 473). Pratt although not a prolific architect, was a pioneer of renaissance architecture in England. Indeed only 6 houses have been directly attributed to him, of these only two remain standing; Kingston Lacy, Dorset (RCHME 1975, 46-7) and his family home at Ryston Hall, Norfolk and both are heavily altered (Colvin 1954, 473). He was however appointed as a Royal Commissioner to oversee the rebuilding of the capital after the Great Fire and has the distinction of being the first Englishman to have received a knighthood for his skill as architect (Gunther 1928, 14).

Horseheath Hall was one of his largest commissions, it was 140 feet (42.67m) in length, aligned from north to south. The hall sat at the centre of a domestic range 600 feet (182.88m) long with stables and offices to either side. The hall was symmetrical with eleven bays. The central 3 bays were set forward and further emphasised by a pediment.

The hall in red brick with Ketton stone dressings was of 2 storeys set over a basement 9 feet (2.74m) in height. Above the attic storey with its dormer windows was a steeply angled roof, the central flat central was surrounded by a balustrade, its stout chimneys within this enclosure. At the centre of the roof was a lantern surmounted by a cupola and capped by a ball brought back from the siege of Bologne in 1544. Inside the great hall was 40 feet (12.19m) in length and 48 feet (14.63m) deep and equal in height to the first and second storey, with a gallery at one end. 'All the apartments are very good, the offices spacious and commodious, the windows in two stories are dressed with architrave, frieze and cornice' (Campbell 1725, 11). The hall was illustrated in the early eighteenth century, probably still in its original form in Campbell's Vitruvius Britannicus, though he erroneously ascribed the house to Webb.

John Evelyn dined at Horseheath Hall soon after its construction and recorded the visit in his diary. 'We went to dine at my Lord Alingtons, who had newly built a house of great cost (his architect Mr Pratt) I believe little less than £20, 000, seated in a park, with a sweet prospect and stately avenue, water still defective: The house also has its infirmities (de Beer 1954, 553). Lyson was later at odds with this estimate putting the cost of the works at £70, 000 (Lysons 1808, 217). The quality and expense of the work at Horseheath is however beyond doubt. Named craftsmen associated with the house included the mason Anthony Deane, who was contracted to execute the stone-work, Edward Pearce was recorded working as a mason in 1665 and Thomas Locke a master carpenter in 1666 (Colvin 1954, 174, 368, 455).

In 1685 on the death of William, Lord Alington the estate descended to his son Giles. He died while at Eton, a minor without issue and was buried at Horseheath in October 1691. The English peerage became extinct with his death (Gibb 1910, 108).

After a long chancery suit the estate was sold in 1700 to John Bromley a sugar planter from Barbados for £42, 000. After 10 years of probable neglect the hall and gardens were redesigned at a cost of £30, 000 (Lyson 1808, 217). His son (also John) inherited the estate in 1707 continued the work on the gardens, specifying in his will written shortly before his death in 1718 that the garden 'be finished according to plan, unless they would be better contrived with garden walls, iron gates and all other things necessary' (Parsons 1948, 29). His socially aspirant son Henry employed William Kent to remodel the interior of the hall and redesign the gardens. Work may have been under way around 1733, when Henry gave a gate from the hall to Trinity College Cambridge (RCHME 1959, 215). Henry was created Lord Montford in 1741, however financial difficulties led to his suicide in 1755. His son Thomas continued to spend money on the same lavish scale as his father. This included further expenditure on the gardens for around 1762 he added a greenhouse or orangery (VCH 1978, 72). The declining fortunes of the family forced the sale of the furniture and removal of valuable portraits in 1775, the remaining contents were disposed of in 1777 when the hall was sold for building materials (Lyson 1808, 217). By 1794 the house had been nearly levelled to the ground. Further robbing of the brick walls, in part to build The Lodge at the west end of the parish (Parsons 1948, 47-8) reduced the site of the hall to a large hollow forming a convenient dump for farm refuse.

Horseheath Hall lay at the centre of a large park bounded to the south by the Linton to Haverhill road. It was roughly bi-sected by the Roman road, Worstead Street, aligned approximately east to west marking the parish boundary between West Wickham to the north and Horseheath to the south. The original park created by William Alington in 1448 covered 320 acres (Parsons 1948, 2) in the parishes of Horseheath, West

Wickham and Balsam. This park was enlarged by Sir Giles Alington in 1550 when he received licence to convert 400 acres of enclosed meadow, pasture and woodland in Horseheath, Wickham, Balsam and Withersfield into a deerpark (Cal Pat Rolls 1925, 402). This extension was known as the great park, in contrast to the old park. This figure had apparently risen to 880 acres when the estate was mapped by a Prussian Engineer in 1746-7 (Parsons 1948, 31). This figure was also quoted by Lyson (1808, 217), who also noted that the estate had been disparked. Although a figure of 740 acres quoted in 1770 (VCH 1978, 72) may equate better with the known licences to empark and with the acreage of the former parkland transcribed onto modern mapping, discussed below.

One of the most useful guides to the topography of Horseheath Hall and its park is an estate map of 1769/70 (Parsons 1948, op 34), surveyed only eight years before the hall was demolished. The hall was approached from the north and south along a curving drive to the west. A straight drive also approached the hall from the south. This may however have been intended to provide a separate entrance to the Game Keepers Lodge and Menagerie on the site of Horseheath Park. The hall lay at the centre of a rectangular block 500.0m x 78.0m, to its immediate north and south were stables and offices. Sinuous boundaries adjacent to garden pond probably represent closes or garden walks in the woodland now called 'The Wilderness'. To the west of the Hall on the Lawn two small rectangular shapes may represent buildings or garden features. Around Acre Pond a number of irregular closes are shown and to their north a building with a curving frontage. Isolated from the Hall to the east, and curiously placed away from the ponds was the Ice-house. Most of the trees depicted in the park appear to be randomly scattered. To the south of the hall a straight avenue of trees leads to the Hall along with a small block of trees which may mark a diagonal avenue. Immediately to the east of Horseheath village a block of six trees may represent the remnants of a formal avenue leading up to the Hall.

In 1777 the estate was sold to Mr Stanlake Batson, in whose family it remained until 1925, during in which time the estate was farmed from Horseheath Park to the southeast of the old hall. In 1925 the estate was sold to a local farmer Mr Wayman Parson, he proceeded to sell large parts of the estate in the following year. More was sold after his death in 1942. His 2 sons died in 1950 and 1965 respectively. In 1975 the largest part of the estate belonged to Mr Cornish of Horseheath Park Farm (VCH 1978, 71-2). The estate is now owned by Mr Covey.

Site Description (figure 1,2)

The site of Horseheath Hall (A) lies in a field known as Hall Meadow. It lies at 110.0m above O.D. on chalky till deposits (BGS 1957) over cretaceous chalk. The house sat at the highest position within the park dominating the undulating landscape of its locality. From this position it enjoyed uninterrupted views in all directions, except to the north which was screened by Hare Wood.

Today the hall (A) is marked by a shallow open ended trench 70.0m in length by 30.0m in width and up to 1.0m in depth. A slight bank in the southern part of the basement may represent a spine wall, while northwards farm yard refuse has masked the remainder of the basement area. The ground floor of the hall opened onto terraces to the west and east. The western terrace may be seen to fall away sharply at its northern and southern ends in line with the end walls of the hall. The western terrace is also bi-sected by a shallow ramp leading down into the cellar. This feature may have in part

been created by the removal of the ornate staircase and may also have been used as an access-way into the cellar to rob away the foundation walls. To the east was a slighter garden terrace about 15.0m in width, historic mapping shows a Lebanon cedar tree at either end of the terrace. The terrace was delimited on its eastern edge by a spread of fragmented brick, mortar and stone. Fragments of Ketton stone from the house included pieces of balusters, a scrolled bracket probably from the cornice and part of a door jamb comparable with the dressings described by Pratt (Gunther 1928, 119). Unfortunately none of the stone fragments from the site could be dated more closely than the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Other finds included fragments of contemporary pottery and a part of a glass bottle seal bearing the Alington family arms.

To the east of the house the lines of formal garden were progressively revealed as the topsoil was removed. The garden was arranged around a large central compartment 96.0m x 70.0m projecting from the ends of the hall platform. This was flanked to the north and south by rectangular compartments, the southern one 30.0m in width and the northern 33.0m. In the northern compartment smaller divisions were suggested by shorter brick spreads. In the central compartment two curving brick spreads may indicate internal divisions or paths. To the south of The Wilderness recent deep under draining has brought lines of brick and chalk spreads to the surface, probably marking the line of former paths. Perhaps indicating that the formal garden extended a considerable way to the south of the house.

To the north and south of the hall were stables and offices. To the south these could be traced as earthworks and spreads of building material in the plough soil. The spreads of material exhibited little coherence, except to the south where a linear spread of brick, mortar and tile lay on the line of an out-building. The roughly rectangular shaped mound (B) lay within the yard area of the complex, and may indicate that the buildings had been dug out leaving the yard area standing proud. Finds from area VI were mixed exhibiting a date range from the late seventeenth to late eighteenth century. After the re-excavation of the rectangular pond to the south of the hall a short section of brick foundation remained exposed, marking the southern edge of the range. A path from the southern approach to the house to the stables was marked by a spread of flint, brick and mortar. To the north of the house little survived of the ranges. A shallow ditch aligned north-south marks the western boundary of the range and a subrectangular mound indicates the position of the stable block (C), although this is truncated to the east.

In 1762 the second Lord Montford added a greenhouse or orangery to the north of the domestic ranges. It was positioned on the north to south alignment of the house with a bowed front on its western side. Its site (D) in the ploughed field is marked by a level area of ground covered by a scatter of broken Ketton stone. To its west is a filled circular hollow, the site of a pond shown on nineteenth century maps.

The formal gardens to the east of the house were bounded by a Ha-Ha. The entire length of the scarp is crowned by a hawthorn hedge. To the north of the gateway leading into the Hall Meadow the ditch has been filled. If the bank continued northwards its line would now lie beneath a modern farm track and within an arable field. To the north of the grotto site (E) is a hawthorn lined walk 4.0m in width, connecting the walk around Acre Pond to the Menagerie to the north.

Acre Pond to the northeast of the house is oval in shape, 110.0m x 55.0m, with a small inlet on the north side and a small section of the bank projecting into the pond. The

pond was surrounded by hawthorn hedging and along its northern bank are three Cedar of Lebanon trees. The pond was formerly surrounded by a path, mapped in the nineteenth century and exposed as flint hard core by the contractors machinery. Wine bottle necks and bases found in the make-up of this path, area VII, suggest that this path was laid after 1750. At the eastern end of the pond a small mound (E) marks the site of a grotto. A design for a grotto by William Kent (VCH 1978, op 64), showed an octagonal structure with a round arched opening set over three round headed arches. A number of architectural fragments recovered from the pond silts, including Ketton stone baluster fragments probably derived from this structure. Originally there were two boathouses on the pond (Parsons 1948, op 34), one may be equated with the grotto and the inlet on the north side of the pond may mark the location of the other. A boat house was shown on the southeast corner of the pond in the nineteenth century, however its proximity to the grotto probably indicates it was a late feature.

To the north of the ?greenhouse (D) the second Lord Montford established a Menagerie in Hare Wood (Parsons 1948, 33). Hare Wood retains its original shape today. The eastern boundary a continuation of the Ha-Ha and the western boundary a sinuous hedgerow. Within the woodland a shallow curving ditch to the north of an oblong pond probably marks the eastern edge of the Menagerie. At the southern edge of the wood is a small building (F), now reduced to a few brick courses. This building was mapped throughout the nineteenth century and was latterly used for game breeding.

The hall could be approached from a number of directions. The main approach from the north and south was along the curving track to the west of the house. This survives today partly as a hedgerow and to the north as a stone spread and low bank. At its northern end adjacent to the hamlet of Steetly End the track is visible as a soil mark where it formed a continuation of the road to West Wickham. Soil marks parallel to the track may represent the line of a tree lined avenue or alternatively former field boundaries. A hedge line to the west of the house (G) may lie on the line of a former avenue, creating an imposing view of the house from the village. The avenue also formed the most direct route to the village church. A straight drive or avenue leading to the hall from the south and a parallel avenue of trees to its west may still be traced from the air. Aerial photography reveals that the closes around Garden Pond and Acre Pond survived as earthworks in pasture fields at least into the late 1940s.

Interpretation

By utilising the figures given for the extent of the park (quoted above) depicted on the 1769/70 plan of the Hall Demesne (Parsons 1948, op 34) it is possible to attempt to reconstruct the bounds of the park. The area of the old park of 320 acres corresponds remarkably well with an area bounded by the Worstead Street to the north, Horseheath village to the west and the curving road to the south. Although this may appear to conflict with the original licence which included land outside Horseheath parish. The extension of 400 acres in 1550 may be equated with the area to the north of the Roman road including Hare wood and Lawn wood to the northeast and presumably a small parcel of land within Horseheath parish. The precise location of the medieval hall within this park is unknown, although it probably lay to the west of the new hall adjacent to the village. The absence of any medieval finds from the ploughsoil around the new hall (A) reinforces this supposition.

The most significant discovery made during the survey was the partial recovery of the plan of the Roger Pratt garden surrounding the house. The new house of the 1660s was

a large impressive building in red brick at the centre of long domestic range. To the east of the house were formal, compartmentalised gardens surrounded by brick walls and divided internally by gravel paths. It is probable that these gardens were laid out by Pratt. His interest in garden design is later documented in the laying out and planting of his own garden at Ryston Hall (Gunther, 1928, 305-7). Pratt has been regarded as one of the first Englishmen to show an appreciation for the natural scene (Gunther 1928, 15). Many of his principles for the siting of country houses described in his notebooks are illustrated in the siting of Horseheath Hall. The new hall was placed at the highest point in the park, both to give a pleasant aspect to the house and to keep it dry. The house was approached from the west along a sweeping and climbing drive leading off from the public lanes. That Evelyn was able to speak of 'a stately avenue' so soon after the construction of the new hall suggests some elements of the planting scheme were retained from the medieval parkland. The existing parkland also ensured that 'the surface of the earth always being green, will accordingly be pleasant' another feature of the setting that Pratt thought was so important (Gunther 1928, 55).

Though John Bromley certainly began to remodel the gardens soon after he purchased the estate in 1700. It was probably his grandson Henry Bromley who swept away the earlier gardens. For he commissioned William Kent to remodel the interior of the hall and to create a fashionable landscape garden. Unlike the garden associated with the Pratt house many components of the Kent garden may be reconstructed from historic maps. The garden he designed was a naturalistic landscape garden, replacing the hard landscaping of the earlier generations. The compartmentalised garden to the east of the house was levelled and replaced by lawn. The Ha-Ha would also be in keeping with a garden of this date, to give an uninterrupted view across the parkland. The curve of the Ha-Ha although slightly misaligned in relation to the earlier compartments may nevertheless mimic part of an underlying layout. Acre Pond with its curving outline, boathouses and an eye-catching grotto or temple surrounded by trees may also be seen as typical of a Kent composition. Also at this date the parkland was probably opened out and the formal avenues removed except for odd stands. To the south of the hall in the area now known as 'The Wilderness' were woodland walks, probably in an area of 'wild' garden. Few elements of the planting from this garden remain except perhaps for a number of Lebanon cedar (a known favourite of William Kent).

Further work was carried out in the garden by the second Lord Montford, who constructed the secluded greenhouse or orangery in 1762 (D) to the north of the house. He was also responsible for establishing the Menagerie in Hare Wood. The dump of wine bottles found in the path surrounding Acre Pond would also be consistent with this date, perhaps suggesting a wider refurbishment of the gardens. The expenditure on the gardens represented just one example of the lavish spending of the second Lord Montford which ultimately forced the sale of the estate and the demolition of the house in 1777.

Appendix - The Finds

No systematic attempt was made to field walk the areas of the plough soil adjacent to the house. However all the finds seen during the survey were collected. The areas from which the finds were recovered have been marked on Figure 1 in roman numerals.

Area I

Flint.

Scraper, plough soil near orangery.

Area VI

Coins/tokens

George I copper half penny, 1723.

Copper token/coin, diameter 27.0mm, worn smooth.

Glass

Clear lead glass knob and ring, with pontil mark on base. Knob diameter 38.0mm. English wine/sweatmeat glass early-mid 18th century.

Fragment of dark green wine bottle Alington family seal, diameter 40.0mm. A bend engraved between 6 billets (only upper 3 survive) with a barons coronet over shield (Burke J.B. 1883, pl.1, 5).

Sir William Alington had been raised to the Irish Peerage in 1642 as Baron Alington of Killard. His son the third Lord Alington was created an English baron in 1682, he was succeeded by his son Giles who died in 1691 aged 11 and with him the English title. The house had passed into the hands of John Bromley by 1700.

Wine bottle neck, rounded trail with flattened top and bottom, dark green, 60g. Hume type 2 1655-65.

Wine bottle neck, V tooled trail, iridescent, 58g. Jones fig.17 p51 1737-81.

Wine bottle base, rounded conical push-up, iridescent, 245g. Base dia. 98.0mm, Rest point dia. 80.0mm, indent height 42.0mm. Hume type 20 1750-70.

Wine bottle base, shallow domed push-up, iridescent, 138g. Base dia. 101.0mm, rest point dia 43.0mm, indent height 16.0mm. English late 18th-century.

Area VII

Glass

Wine bottle neck, rounded trail flattened top and bottom, iridescent, 49g. Hume type 10 1720-30.

Wine bottle neck, V tooled string rim, iridescent, 38g. Jones fig.17 p51 1737-81.

Wine bottle neck, V tooled string rim, iridescent, 31g. Hume type 12/13 1725-45.

Wine bottle base, rounded conical push-up, dark green, 336g. Base dia. 124.0mm, rest point dia. 95.0mm, indent height 35.0mm, pontil mark dia. 65.0mm. Hume type 6 1761.

Wine bottle base, bell shaped push-up, dark green, 311g. Base dia. 118.0mm, rest point dia. 104.0mm, indent height 47.0mm, pontil mark dia. 55.0mm. Hume type 19 1750-70.

Wine bottle base, bell shaped push-up, iridescent, 208g. Base dia. 107.0mm, rest point dia. 87.5mm. Hume type 19 1750-70.

Wine bottle base, bell shaped push-up, iridescent, 360g. Base dia. 109.5mm, rest point dia. 94.0mm, indent height 50.0mm, pontil mark dia. 53.0mm. Hume type 19 1750-70.

Area VIII

Glass

Wine bottle base, shallow push-up, iridescent, 258g. Rest point dia. 66.0mm, indent height 10.0mm. Hume type 3 1655-70.

Area IX

This group of finds was recovered from the NW corner of Garden Pond during machine excavation of the pond. The finds may be dated to the first decade of the 19th-century and were probably derived from Park Farm.

Pottery

1 fragment of mocha ware mug base.

3 fragments of blue floral transfer ware on white earthen ware.

1 fragment grey glazed earthen ware.

1 fragment of ?porcelain cup base

Glass

1 octagonal bottle base. Late 18th/early 19th century.

1 wine bottle neck. 1790-1820.

Architectural Fragments

A number of architectural fragments were also recovered during the survey. They were identified by Robert Taylor RCHME Cambridge, brief descriptions of the stones appear as photographic captions on the relevant photographs.

All the material of stone is of a Ketton-type rock (almost certainly Ketton Stone). No accurate dates can be assigned to the material. It all falls generally in the period of the late 17th to early 18th century.

Below the negative numbers are correlated with the areas (see figure 1) from which the architectural fragments were recovered.

Area A The House

BB91/15477

Area II Spoil tips at Acre Pond

BB91/15475, BB91/15474

Area I Site of Orangery

BB91/154771, BB91/15472, BB91/15473

Area IV The Grotto

BB91/15476

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