



ABBOT'S HALL
WALLED GARDEN
STOWMARKET
SUFFOLK

SUFFOLK GARDENS TRUST
WALLED KITCHEN GARDENS
RECORDING GROUP

ABBOT'S HALL, STOWMARKET
LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA: MID-SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL
TM 0470 5834

Owners: Held in trust by the Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL)
Surveyed: April 2005 to October 2006
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Daffodil Survey by Sally Kington, Daffodil Registrar RHS
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Survey report written and produced by Tina Ranft, January 2007

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FRONT COVER: Recording the walled garden

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Front elevation of Abbot's Hall – viewed from the north-west, across the fish pond

ABSTRACT

The walled garden forms part of a wider complex of formal gardens which surround the early 18th century Abbot's Hall in Stowmarket. The remains of a 19th century conservatory, once attached to the Hall, are visible and there is evidence of a summer-house type structure (now demolished) in the south-east corner. An extant early 20th century glasshouse plus potting shed are both attached to the north wall.

The third of an acre garden consists of three brick or brick and flint walls. It was originally slightly larger and extended to the east elevation of the Hall, but became smaller with the planting of a yew hedge, which now forms the western boundary.

Probably standing on the site of earlier formal gardens, the enclosure walls appear to date to the early 19th century and may have been constructed in two phases: first the north and east brick and flint walls, followed later by the lower solid brick south wall. All the evidence suggests that the enclosure was originally intended to keep livestock out and primarily used as a small, private, pleasure

garden – a use which has continued until the present day.

Today, the Abbot's Hall complex is part of the Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL), which is conducting a limited programme of repair and maintenance of the walled garden while it secures funding to embark on a major restoration project, that will ultimately see the gardens open to the public.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

SITUATION

Once a fine Queen Anne country residence, Abbot's Hall today lies in the centre of Stowmarket and is part of a complex comprising formal gardens, canals, raised walk and walled garden, forming part of the Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL). In total the museum covers some 70 acres and also includes the historic stables and agricultural buildings of Home Close to the north-west and an area to the south, once estate agricultural land and wetland meadow, which forms an open-air site for displays of rural life and reconstructed historic buildings.

LOCATION

Located in the central clayland belt of Suffolk (also known as The Woodlands), the market town of Stowmarket developed on the alluvial soils of the River Gipping valley. In the mid 14th century the town became a centre for the woollen industry and continued to flourish well into the 1600s. During the following century it began a steady decline in importance until, in 1798, the River Gipping was made navigable to Ipswich and Stowmarket's industrial and commercial wealth was once again restored. The town continued to expand even when the railways superseded barge transport and today is a pleasant Mid-Suffolk town with a population of some 15,000.

SETTING AND BOUNDARIES

The walled garden lies to the east of the Hall and is bounded to the north by an area of rough grassland and mature mixed planting, including beech and yew, once known as 'Camping Land' (see page 7). The slip garden to the east is planted with conifers, mainly yew, which probably date from the first half of the 20th century. To the south is an area of grassland with a small modern glasshouse towards the western end.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES TO THE HALL AND WALLED GARDEN

Public access to the museum site is through a supermarket car park to the north-west with entry beside Home Close, the original farmyard for the Abbot's Hall estate. Wrought iron gates from Crow Street to the north lead to a driveway which sweeps into an oval shape at the front of the Hall. This drive appears not to have changed in shape since 1858.¹

TOP RIGHT: The deluxe 1870s stable block and western access gate to the south gardens.

RIGHT: Access to the gardens from the north, showing brick and flint wall and brick infilled doorway which originally gave access to the conservatory, since demolished.

The main gardens to the south and walled garden to the east are accessed via a wrought iron gate in a brick and flint wall, which extends from the walled garden and abuts the Hall at its east elevation. Another, now infilled, entrance gave access to a conservatory, which was once attached to the east elevation.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Abbot's Hall is an example of a typical Queen Anne country house. It dates from c.1700, and despite being substantially extended during two phases in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it retains much of its external integrity.² Built of red brick it has five bays, with two full storeys and a hipped roof with five dormers.³

ASSOCIATED BUILDINGS

Home Close, to the north-west of the Hall, was the original farmyard for the Abbot's Hall estate. Amongst its various buildings are a superb 14th century tithe barn and a deluxe 1870s stable block built by John Haywood (see page 7).



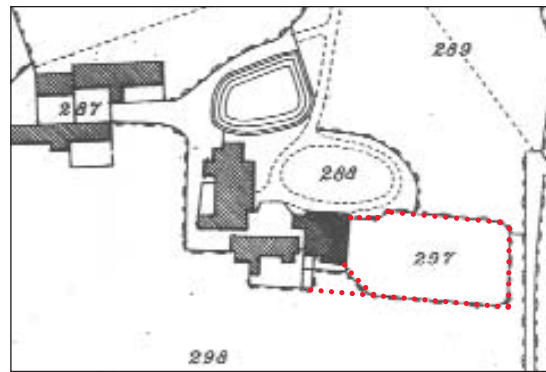
HISTORIC CONTEXT

Abbot's Hall stands on the site of Stow Hall, a grange of the Abbots of St Osyth, Essex, who were granted the original estate in the 12th century. After the dissolution of the Abbey the estate passed through various owners until 1561, when it belonged to John Howe, a wealthy local clothier. The Howe family were to continue to own Abbot's Hall for more than a century, during which time, c.1660, the manor and Hall were separated.

In 1681, Alice Howe brought Abbot's Hall with her when she married Charles Blossie (died 1724), the youngest son of Thomas Blossie Esq of Belstead Hall, who was himself a highly successful cloth merchant in Ipswich. Around 1700, Charles completely rebuilt the Hall in the style of a typical gentleman's residence and developed the gardens in the formal style of the time, including the extant rectangular canal and surrounding raised terraced walk.

By 1750, Abbot's Hall had been acquired by John Bayley, who sold it c.1750 to Samuel Rout of Stowmarket. After Samuel's death in about 1772, the Hall appears to have passed to his son, Richard Rout (bap. 1734), who is recorded as living there in 1773. Through marriage and sometime before 1836, Richard's daughter, Ann Sarah (1767–1851), brought the Hall to her husband, John Edgar Rust Esq (died 3 Mar 1840). The 1839 Tithe Map for Stowmarket clearly shows the walled garden (Tithe Apportionment 297).⁴ A year later, in 1840, John Rust died and the trustees of his estate, including one James Oakes, became the owners of the Hall, although John's widow, Ann Sarah, is recorded as still resident in 1840 and some six years later, in 1846. James, and therefore by association John Rust, were known to have been in the social orbit of a number of wealthy landowners and agricultural innovators of the period, including the Rev Richard Moseley who developed the walled gardens at Rectory House, Drinkstone in 1791.

John and Sarah had a son, Edgar (1794–1852), who was to continue this connection by becoming the Rev. Edgar Rust (later to become Rev. Edgar D'Eye), Rector of

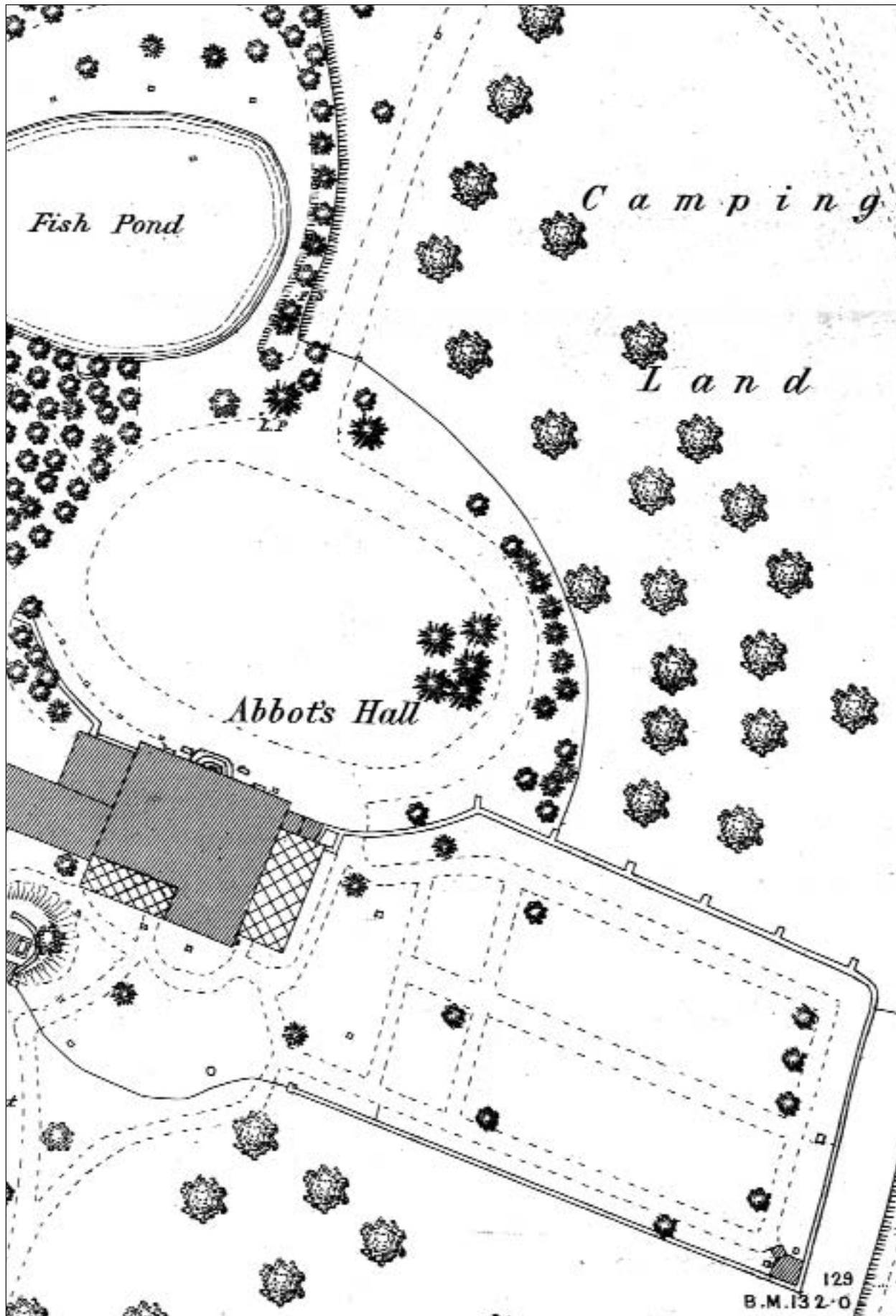


The map that accompanied the Sale Particulars, 25th June 1859. Overlaid in red is the shape of the enclosure as seen on the 1839 Tithe Map. The walled garden is numbered 297; 288 represents the oval drive; 289 is the area known as Camping Land, now used for pasture, and 298, the former formal gardens, also pastureland.

Drinkstone, between 1824–52. Edgar is known to have had substantial glebe land and also to have owned Rectory House, which he rented to a tenant in 1841.⁵ Some ten years later, and although still Rector of the parish, Edgar is recorded as not being resident in Drinkstone.⁶ It is likely that after his father's death in 1840, Edgar and his wife lived with his widowed mother in the family home at Abbot's Hall. Ann Sarah was to reach the age of 84 when she died in 1851, and her son was to die without an heir in the following year.

Abbot's Hall is recorded as unoccupied in 1855 and was advertised for sale in 1858 as "Formerly the residence of John Edgar Rust, Esq". This suggests that the trustees continued to own the property during the intervening years. Included in the sale were the Hall and garden, ornamental grounds with a vinery, orchard and fish ponds, agricultural buildings, five cottages, agricultural land and tolls and dues.⁷

The map that accompanied the sales particulars is similar in layout to the 1839 Tithe Map, although it appears to show the enclosure formed by hedges and with two rounded corners at the east end. A comparison with the later detailed 1885 OS Map makes it clear that many features are shared with the 1839 map, such as solid enclosure walls and only one rounded corner at the east end. This suggests that the accuracy of the sales map is questionable and may be based on inaccurate interpretation of the earlier Tithe Map at the



time. However, it is clear that the garden was fully enclosed by 1839 and bounded by pasture to the north and, on the site of the former formal gardens, by pasture and orchard to the south, extending very close to the south elevation of the house. The 1839 Map shows the southern boundary extending to form an almost complete rectangle around the Hall, with a subsidiary division to the south-east corner of the house. The northern area is referred to as 'Camping Land'. These were grass fields set aside from at least the 14th century for communal recreation and, in the eastern counties, for the game of 'camping' or 'camp-ball' – a cross between football and handball. By the mid 17th century most of these fields had ceased to be used for the game of 'camping', but their names often survived well into the 19th century.⁸ It is likely that this area of land became part of Abbot's Hall at a relatively early date, possibly at the time of the rebuilding of the Hall and development of the formal gardens by Charles Blossie c.1700. Both the 1839 and 1859 maps show the 'Camping Land' pasture to be separated from the front of the Hall by a fence or hedge, which ran east of the fish pond and curved around the oval driveway before joining the north wall of the walled garden. What appears to be a further fence/hedge extends from the outside north-east corner of the garden wall to the outer eastern boundary ditch, thus fully enclosing this area of pasture. By this time productive agricultural and pasturelands had dramatically encroached onto the former gardens, leaving only the fish pond and oval drive to the north and walled garden to the east with no specific agricultural use. It seems highly unlikely that a property such as Abbot's Hall would have been left with no garden space at all, which suggests that the walled garden was used for pleasure purposes at this time. Abbot's Hall was sold that year to the Hon. William Robert Hewitt for £3,725.

By the 1860s, photographs held by MEAL

LEFT: The detailed OS Map of 1885, 1:500.

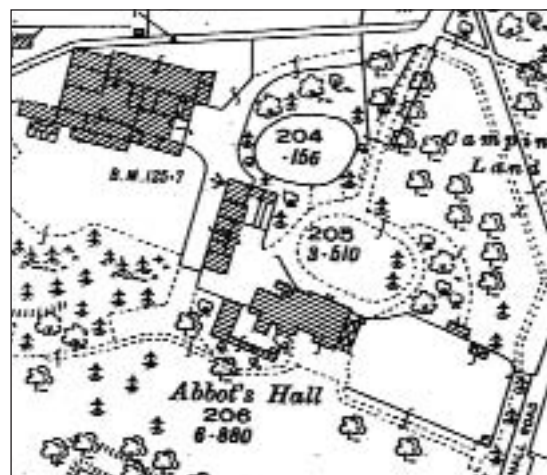
Note the addition of the conservatory; buttresses to the outside north wall; summerhouse in south-east corner and fenced areas of pasture to the north and south.

RIGHT: OS Map of 1926, 1:250.

Note the addition of the potting shed and glasshouse and that the conservatory and summerhouse are still shown.

show the Prentice family living in the Hall. William Prentice was an important local businessman. In 1877 John Hayward, a local solicitor, bought the property and replaced the maltings near the house with a new stable block and added the west wing to the house. The detailed OS Map of 1885⁹ also shows the addition of a conservatory to the east elevation of the Hall and that the extant buttresses had been added to the outside of the north wall of the garden enclosure. By now, although the areas to the north and south appear to still be used for pasture, the gardens south of the house have been extended slightly into the pastureland, and, by the removal of a section of enclosure which previously joined the house at its south-east corner, have been combined with the walled garden. Seats are shown in the southern pastureland and paths lead from the Hall to the raised walkway and garden canal beyond.

By 1900, a Mrs Brook was the owner and by 1904 the Longe family had taken on the Hall and gardens. The 1926 OS Map¹⁰ shows the addition of the glasshouse and potting shed to the north wall, with the conservatory still in position. The Misses V.M. and E.T. Longe were well known local figures who had a strong interest in the traditional agricultural life of the region. In the 1960s they placed 70 acres of farmland and Abbot's Hall in trust for the development of the Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL), which was officially opened in 1967. The museum is now working to restore both the walled and formal gardens to their previous splendour so they may be open to visitors in the future.



PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION USING SURVEY AND DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

DATE OF SURVEY(S)

During the period April 2005 to October 2006.

PRESENT CONDITION OF WALLED GARDEN

Although generally in good repair, there are signs of previous remedial repair works, particularly in the curved section of the north wall which is otherwise in good repair with only a small amount of loose mortar at copings level.

The east wall has obviously suffered badly from weathering in the past, with the top four



courses of brickwork having been replaced using cement mortar. This weathering continues today in some areas of the wall, with erosion of a number of bricks and potting of the mortar. Repair and replacement will be required in the near future to guarantee the integrity of the structure. Some of the bricks have lost up to half their thickness revealing that they were made without frogs (recesses in the centre of bricks which reduced the amount of clay required in manufacture and also resulted in a stronger bond in use). In Suffolk, frogs were first introduced in the 1780s, and although a lack of frogs could suggest a late 18th century date for this wall, this is by no means conclusive as frogless bricks were still in use during the early 19th century.

Although structurally sound, the glasshouse requires some minor restoration work in the near future to protect the woodwork and cast iron guttering and detailing.

LEFT: Remedial repair work in the curved section of the north wall, probably required because of subsidence.

BOTTOM LEFT: Badly weathered bricks in the east wall reveal the bricks were made without frogs. Note also the hand-forged, square-headed nail to the right.

BELOW: Rusting iron guttering and brackets on the glasshouse.





SHAPE

Situated east of the Hall, the walled enclosure is an irregular rectangular shape with the north and south walls being slightly off parallel. Today it covers approximately a third of an acre. It is on an east–west axis to the house, a feature introduced in the 18th century to achieve longer warm, south-facing walls for the more tender plants that were increasingly being introduced. Brick, or brick and flint, walls form three sides of the garden approximating to the

north, east and south sides. The western side, nearest the house, is today formed by a 2.5m high yew hedge.

In the north-east corner the wall is curved, and towards the western end of the north wall it describes a concave arc to join the house. During the early 19th century curved south-

ABOVE: The walled garden looking towards the east elevation of the Hall. Note the yew hedge in the background.

BELOW: The curved section of the north wall, showing the entrance gate to the garden from the north.





facing walls became popular for fruit growing and this feature takes advantage of the convex curve which forms part of the oval entrance drive to the north of the house. The 1858 map¹¹ (see page 5) suggests that the garden originally extended further towards the house, taking in the curve of the north wall. This feature can still be seen on the 1885 OS map¹² (see page 6). This would have created a slightly larger enclosure

than we see today – at nearer half an acre. Even so, this is relatively small for a productive walled garden during the Georgian and Victorian periods, which were nearer to 1.5 acres for the average family.

ABOVE: The central axis path lined with low box hedging, looking towards the east wall.

BELOW: Plan of the walled garden today.

