

An Emergency Report in Response to Threats to the Setting of Heritage Assets Subject to Byrga Geniht Research

BRAXTED ROAD AND BRAXTED PARK ROAD



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report constitutes an objection to proposed quarrying and industrial processing works in the vicinity of Braxted Road and Braxted Park Road.

This report asserts that emerging professional research by Byrga Geniht Ltd., consultants in cultural and heritage interpretation of English country houses, indicates that the heritage importance and context sensitivity of the Braxted Park group of assets has been understated in the official Registrations, and that greater protection of their setting is merited.

Under contention is the interpretation of Heritage Impact of Candidate Site Reference A49, pp. 17-19 of the paper 'Review of Essex Minerals Local Plan 2014: Assessment of Candidate Sand and Gravel Sites: Appendix D: Historic Buildings Detailed RAG Assessment Methodology and Results'.

Under contention is the assessment 'The Site would be visible within the setting of the Grade II listed wall of Braxted Park, particularly in kinetic views when travelling along Braxted Road, resulting in a moderate impact and a low level of less than substantial harm. The significance of the Registered Park and Garden of Braxted Park itself would not be impacted, other than the impact on its boundary wall, as described above.'

The twin contexts of the road-based Grand Tour of England and the military heritage of Essex extend the interpretive and contextual value of the Setting of Braxted Road and Braxted Hall Road far into the landscape as Substance rather than simply amenity, in line with the NPPF, interpreted through a parallel example presented by Historic England, 'The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3' (Second Edition), 'The location and setting of historic battles, otherwise with no visible traces, may include important strategic views, routes by which opposing forces approached each other and a topography and landscape features that played a part in the outcome', p. 5, which may be taken as precedence for the value of specific strategic topography to Setting.

Academically, the pre-publication research context expressed in this report has high relevance for heritage research, access and participation to culture and heritage, and amenity in Essex, with additional national and international relevance and importance.

Economically, the cultural suite of Heritage Assets at Braxted matters as a complete set because its connections to the Grand Tour of England and to regional military history constitute irreplaceable components of strategies capable of delivering unique economic benefits to the UK and to deprived communities in Essex.

Consequently, the RAG decision must either be upgraded to RED, or an adequate consultation process involving academic research input to heritage stakeholders must be implemented to determine what research and public presentation mitigations would need to be funded and implemented to preserve the strategic importance of this landscape.

[End of Executive Summary]

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relevant Registrations are referenced towards the end of this report. The narratives within these Registrations are intended to explain or justify the protected status of heritage assets in a way that aids identification of value within the assets. This process is analytical rather than propositional – that is, the text describes what is present, but does not step into questions of how heritage is presented to the public, or to what policy ends this activity would be directed (a cultural commissioner's work).

Registrations identify Robert Taylor (1714–1788) and John Johnson (1732–1814) as key architects, following what is established from documentary primary evidence.

The status of Braxted as Taylor's first country house commission is not salient within the Registrations for the reason that the purpose of listing is to establish preservation, not to direct value judgements after protection has been secured. Likewise, the Registrations do not discuss art-historical grounds for proposing the advice-level involvement of other architects (Sanderson Miller, Robert Adam, John Soane) within the design processes of various listed assets. There are more aspects of Braxted's story that are of interest to culture and the economy than those formally entered into the Register.

Braxted is rendered vulnerable to undervaluation due to its absence from a number of reference gazetteers, notably Hussey (1955). Aside from the ordinary processes of editorial discipline and luck, a key reason for the omission is the multi-phase nature of the mansion and the park. Another reason is that the salience of the house within stakeholders' social historiography encountered the following three obstacles:

1. The mansion and its grounds are of exceptional interest to the history of Corpus Christi College Cambridge, which acquired the Living of the parish in a will of 1719 and installed its first fellow as rector in 1762. The (continuation) college history had only one edition, Lamb (1831), curtailing wider appreciation of this history.
2. The Ducane family interests included shares and directorships in the Muscovy Company, East India Company, and the Bank of England. The ironic effect of a full and diverse business portfolio is to deny corporate historians a clear enough grasp of biographical history to be able to champion heritage stakeholdership.
3. All the stylistic choices determining the design of visible eighteenth and nineteenth-century phases at Braxted are demonstrably connected to Freemasonry, however the elite status and London and Westminster business of the Ducanes meant that Essex Provincial Grand Lodge archival resources (see Gorman and Wright (2006)) miss the records outlining Duncane memberships, connections and activities, that were national and international rather than local in scope.

Additionally, there are two main fields of context which have yet to be collated and published, but are outlined in the following two report sections.

GRAND TOUR OF ENGLAND

Whilst the English (already familiar with England) chose educational travel in Italy, the Grand Tour for other Europeans centred upon England as the birthplace of a stable Protestant state, the Agricultural Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. This is outlined in Stobart (2017), and evidenced through the European social history of Freemasonry in Curl (1991). The impact of the European visitor economy on the route of the Grand Tour in the eighteenth century is seen in grand hotel construction at Kedleston (Harris and Jackson-Stops (1987)) and Hawkstone (Bowley Rodenhurst (1840)).

During the age of sail, the Grand Tour route started in Essex as ships from the Rhine found easier passage to the Haven Ports than to London (noting the south-westerly prevailing wind). At Mistley Richard Rigby the younger, a member of Corpus Christi, Cambridge, employed the Adam brothers to construct a country house and a distinctive church – along with designs for a guest spa complex similar to the ones Robert Adam completed at Kedleston – to greet visitors. The house was demolished in the mid nineteenth-century, and only the two pharos towers of the church and one gate lodge survive of Adam's work. Part of the reason for this loss at Mistley was the availability of seagoing steamships by 1840.

The Grand Tour route was the Roman road from Colchester to London via Chelmsford. This road has largely been obliterated by the modern A12. Braxted Park was one of the country houses acting as elite stopping points on the Grand Tour route, and is thus contextualised in a distinctive set including Kedleston (on the leg between the Potteries and the Dukeries) and Hawkstone, Shropshire – the farthest point of the Grand Tour's core itinerary, written about extensively by German royalty (Bowley Rodenhurst (1840)).

Braxted constitutes the only (surviving/complete) country house cultural suite in the Essex portion of the Grand Tour route that can be proven to have been designed for a Grand Tour audience. This is established through explicit design references:

- Robert Taylor's main block of the mansion directly references Sanderson Miller's remodelling of Farnborough, Oxfordshire (Jackson-Stops and J. Haworth (1981, revised 1999)). Farnborough was on the Grand Tour leg from Oxford to the Black Country industrial heartland, and its garden of allusion connects to English and European Freemasonry (for an aid to interpretation, and wider context, see Curl (1991)).
- The lake sequence at Braxted topographically intentionally mimics the lake sequence at Kedleston, another Grand Tour visitor attraction (Harris and Jackson-Stops (1987)). It has been established through archaeological observations of the lake construction that the shape was crafted expensively to be so using buried brick revetments, and was not accidental. Plans for Kedleston lake were held by Adam (1728-1792) and acquired by John Soane (1753-1837), who succeeded Robert Taylor as architect to the Bank of England (patronage connected to Ducane directorships).
- John Johnson's arcades and rectangular relief panels on the stairwell at Braxted connect explicitly with his work at the Shire Hall in Chelmsford – the first major public / civic building on the Grand Tour route. This puts Braxted into a coordinated architectural scheme including the Stone Bridge at Chelmsford (where visitors from all possible Essex ports and landing places would first converge on the itinerary).

The Grand Tour route into London followed Roman Road in Bethnal Green before turning towards the City. John Soane built a church dedicated to St John referencing Adam's church at Mistley and the antiquarian research of Corpus Christi College alumnus William Stukeley (1687-1765) at this important road intersection in 1826-8. The monument next to the Lake at Braxted also references this research (see Byrga Geniht online content). By the 1820s this work was decades old, and so the three separate substantial connection points with Corpus Christi imply that Soane was working on a project bringing him into contact with the College Fellowship at that precise time. These dates coincide with the construction of the park wall and lodges at Braxted, and lend weight to a potential stylistic attribution of pedestrian gate piers at Witham and Kelvedon Lodges to the studio of Soane or to advice rendered by him. This possibility requires further investment in archival research.

MILITARY HISTORY IN ESSEX: A KEY ASSET CONTEXT

As a coastal county facing continental Europe and adjoining the capital city, the strategic military context of Essex is a key theme in the heritage of the county and the region. Between the forts of Harwich Redoubt in the north, and Tilbury Fort (English Heritage) protecting the port of London in the south, Essex holds a string of defensive Martello Towers: A, C, D, E, F and K. The positionality of Essex's heritage offer in contrast with other areas is highlighted by two summation paragraphs in the comprehensive global guide to Martello Towers (Clements (2011), p. 55),

'On the east coast Tower A at St. Osyth, near Brightlingsea, is now the home of the East Essex Aviation Museum while Tower C at Jaywick has been the subject of a most innovative conversion. Essex County Council has fully renovated the tower and converted it into an arts venue for visual and digital arts. On the first floor there is a multi-media space for exhibitions, events and workshops using the latest technology, including interactive, 3D and VR projectors. The tower is managed by Bishops Park College, a local secondary school, and the Friends of Jaywick Martello Tower. [...] To complete the story of the south and east coast defences it is perhaps worth mentioning the fate of the three redoubts and Sandgate Castle which were an integral part of the line of towers. All three redoubts remain today and the Eastbourne and Harwich redoubts are in the hands of local trusts which maintain them and open both to the public. The Eastbourne redoubt is now the Redoubt Fortress Military Museum and the Harwich redoubt has been restored by the Harwich Society.'

Some of the areas of Essex facing greatest deprivation (IMD) and low-POLAR scores (access to Higher Education) are situated next to the military heritage assets described. In particular, strategic work by Essex County Council at Jaywick/Seawick alongside third sector partners including the Essex Cultural Diversity Project has been directed towards growing social and economic opportunities for Essex people through culture and heritage connected to the Martello towers. The eighteenth and nineteenth-century histories of the Essex Regiment, the Yeomanry and their precursors form a significant part of the deployed museum assets of Chelmsford City Museum. The Combined Military Services Museum in Maldon is also a critical heritage and amenity asset for the county.

The estate wall and lodges at Braxted directly connect with this social history owing to the labour employed for their construction being a deliberate economic stimulus supporting retired soldiers of the Napoleonic Wars, and the military builders who had completed work on the Martello towers. Another example of country house building projects tying philosophy and local economic stimulus is West Wycombe (Dashwood (1987)), and the economic and political history of such interventions is discussed in Lubbock (1995).

It is notable that the annular brick vault and the two domes within the monument by the lake utilise contemporary eighteenth / nineteenth-century military building technology.

The design of the very deep 'pedestrian' openings in the gate piers at Witham Lodge and Kelvedon Lodge are read as sentry boxes, and the walling of the estate in itself creates a defensible compound and was intended to be read as such. A later comparator is the gate to Chesterton House in Cirencester, residence of the White Rajah of Sarawak, where sentry box sized niches signal that an armed guard is to be expected. In both cases, the simple austerity of the design is intentional. In the case of the four lodges around the entrance to the avenue at Braxted, the L-shaped lodges are intended to be read as square

buildings of three bays by three bays. Like the ceiling coffers of the Hall in the mansion (as altered by John Johnson, connected to his tetrastyle lobby in the Shire Hall in Chelmsford), this creates geometry meaningful to an educated European and English visiting elite (with Freemasonic familiarity) in the early nineteenth century. The austere brick style again references military barracks, somewhat concealing the symbolic sophistication of the design from the uninitiated observer.

The standard work on gate lodges (Mowl and Earnshaw (1985)) approaches lodges from a civilian perspective, and so makes negative value judgements about austere lodges ('contemptible boxes', p. 99) by Robert Adam at Mistley Hall and Saltram House. These lodges are slightly inflated sentry boxes rather than cottages, and would have provided a more than adequate berth for a bachelor or shift-work guard who ate and bathed elsewhere. Mowl and Earnshaw expected to see the dwelling place of staff rather than military posts, but both Mistley and Saltram were houses whose estates connected to imperial ports, and in the case of Mistley, the actively occupied location of a national military asset – 'In June 1768 Rigby was rewarded with the post of Paymaster of the Forces, a lucrative role which he held for twelve years. With the half-a-million pounds of public money entrusted to the post Rigby was seen to spend liberally, and Mistley Hall became the centre of lavish entertainments held for his society friends.' (See online resources). Note that the Ducane family's interests in the two lenders of choice financing the Paymaster (the Bank of England and the East India Company) puts Braxted into the same financial and military system as – and at the same level as – Rigby's Mistley.

Braxted's post-Napoleonic wall and lodges strongly connect to an under-appreciated strain of military input into country house design in the British imperial period, which is thus a field of active original research whose assets require enhanced protection.

SYNTHESIS

The cultural suite of mansion, park, wall and lodges at Braxted constitutes a unique and powerful heritage asset beyond the importance implied by existing Registrations. The ability of Braxted to connect strategic heritage assets in Essex is a unique opportunity. The Grand Tour of England links heritage assets across England and Europe, and the connection between Braxted and the eighteenth and nineteenth-century military heritage of Essex means that the main sources of cultural wealth locally available to the most deprived communities in this county may (through Braxted) be connected to wider avenues of cultural wealth.

Both parts of this contextual connection depend upon the experience of visitors on Braxted Road and Braxted Park Road as a representative section of the Grand Tour route that is otherwise obliterated by modern routes such as the A12. The Military story of the wall and lodges is only appreciable from these roads, and the Grand Tour, as a travel itinerary, demands experience of roads and bridges as a characteristic component of its ontology (e.g. John Johnson's Stone Bridge in Chelmsford, where a visitor can stand where the Grand Tourists stood).

STATEMENT OUTLINING NEGATIVE IMPACT OF EXTRACTION / INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

As outlined above, the most socially, culturally and economically valuable connections through heritage made by the cultural suite of listed heritage assets at Braxted (given the present strategic climate of Essex heritage management) depend upon the quality of heritage experience available as kinetic views from Braxted Road and Braxted Park Road.

Consequently, any development that endangers the experience of the road, and the kinetic views from the road in any direction, damage the Setting of the Registered heritage assets:

- Explicitly, dramatic changes in the topography, geography, ecology and traffic on, around or visible from these roads would adversely impact aesthetic experience (amenity value) of the heritage assets, harming the economic viability of visitor presentation and thus negatively impacting access and participation into culture and heritage for people from communities of access and participation interest in Essex, as well as funds available for critical conservation and preservation.
- Considering that the symbolic or actual defensibility of Braxted is a core component of the Substance and Significance of the Registered wall and lodges, radical change to local topography (extraction and subsequent creation of bodies of water) would also obliterate meaningful academic analysis of the strategic corporate defence intentions of the Ducanes (and thus the Bank of England, East India Company and Muscovy Company) by future visitors and researchers.

As such, it is the opinion of the author, James D. Wenn, and of Byrga Geniht, that mineral extraction and industrial development anywhere within the Zones of Theoretical Visibility from the roads encircling Braxted Park would constitute destruction of irreplaceable cultural wealth in Essex, cut off social policy opportunities for the county, as well as unacceptably negatively impact heritage assets of international significance.

AUTHOR CREDENTIALS

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- Consultant, Byrga Geniht Ltd., cultural/heritage consultancy specialising in country houses, Company No. 14729339, Director since 14 March 2023 (one year +).
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- 2018-23, Secretary to the Access and Participation Group, Writtle University College, Essex.
- Master of Arts, University of Cambridge.
- Master of Arts, Leicester University, Centre for the Study of the Country House.

AUTHORITIES, COMPARANDA AND FURTHER READING

Affected Registrations:

UID 1111073 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1111073?section=official-list-entry> – WALL ENCLOSING BRAXTED PARK, BRAXTED PARK ROAD.

UID 1000455 – Grade II* Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000455?section=official-list-entry> – BRAXTED PARK (park and garden).

UID 1111110 – Grade II* Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1111110?section=official-list-entry> – BRAXTED PARK HOUSE.

UID 1337342 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1337342?section=official-list-entry> – WITHAM LODGE AND ENTRANCE GATES.

UID 1166087 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1166087?section=official-list-entry> – KELVEDON LODGE.

UID 1337345 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1337345?section=official-list-entry> – ENTRANCE GATES ADJACENT TO KELVEDON LODGE.

UID 1111075 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1111075?section=official-list-entry> – PUNDICTS LODGE.

UID 1165933 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1165933?section=official-list-entry> – NO. 1 ENTRANCE LODGE.

UID 1111074 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1111074?section=official-list-entry> – NO. 2 ENTRANCE LODGE.

UID 1165966 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1165966?section=official-list-entry> – NO. 3 ENTRANCE LODGE.

UID 1337343 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1337343?section=official-list-entry> – NO. 4 ENTRANCE LODGE.

UID 1337318 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1337318?section=official-list-entry> – GREAT BRAXTED HALL.

UID 1111108 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1111108?section=official-list-entry> – APPLEFORD BRIDGE.

UID 1317172 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1317172?section=official-list-entry> – APPLEFORD BRIDGE COTTAGE.

UID 1400105 – Grade II Listing – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1400105?section=official-list-entry> – 1&2, SCHOOL HOUSE.

Published Print Media

Adam, R., and J. Adam, *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam, Esquires* (1778–1822, repr. Mineola, New York, 1980) – Related work by Adam at Mistley, Essex, at the start of the Grand Tour route.

Bowley Rodenhurst, W., *A Description of Hawkestone: the seat of Sir R. Hill* (Shrewsbury, 1840) – Grand Tour comparanda spanning the Napoleonic/post-Napoleonic period.

Clements, B., *Martello Towers Worldwide* (Barnsley, 2011) – a comprehensive contextualisation of the Essex Martello Towers both historically and geographically.

Curl, J.S., *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry* (London, 1991) – gardens of allusion and importance of Germans' Grand Tours in England.

Dashwood, F., *The Dashwoods of West Wycombe* (London, 1987) – for an example of country house building projects tying philosophy and local economic stimulus.

Gorman, I.B., and B.C. Wright, *The Master's Chair* (London, 2006) – the official history by the Provincial Grand Lodge of Essex (Freemasonry).

Harris, L., and G. Jackson-Stops, *Robert Adam and Kedleston: the making of a neo-classical masterpiece* (London, 1987) – the lake at Kedleston is topologically related to the form of the lake at Braxted, implying some level of involvement of Adam or Soane at Braxted.

Hussey, C., *English Country Houses* (series) (1955, repr. Woodbridge, 1988) – comparanda and references.

Jackson-Stops, G., and J. Haworth (ed.), *Farnborough Hall* (1981, revised: Swindon, 1999) – National Trust guidebook collating the description and history of a house worked upon by Sanderson Miller that contains Freemasonic allusions and upon which the design of the mansion at Braxted was directly based.

Lamb, J., *Masters' History of the College of Corpus Christi and the Blessed Virgin Mary in the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1831) – this rare book in one edition is only available in private collections; a transcript of the relevant passages is linked in Online Resources below.

Lubbock, J., *The Tyranny of Taste: the politics of architecture and design in Britain 1550–1960* (New Haven and London, 1995) – extensive discussion of the use of strategic economic stimuli in the form of country-house projects, and treatment of more general political uses of design.

Mowl, T., and B. Earnshaw, *Trumpet at a Distant Gate: the lodge as prelude to the country house* (London, 1985) – the canonical authority for English country-house gate lodges.

Somers, S.M., *The Sibbys of London: a family on the esoteric fringes of Georgian England* (Oxford, 2018) – scholarly treatment of the intersection of Freemasonry and parliamentary politics in Suffolk and Essex in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Somers, S.M., *Thomas Dunckerley and English Freemasonry* (2012, repr. London, 2018) – scholarly treatment of the intersection of Freemasonry and the British military in Essex in the late eighteenth century.

Stobart, J., ed., *Travel and the British Country House: cultures, critiques and consumption in the long eighteenth century* (Manchester, 2017) – constituent essays present evidence of the Grand Tour of England.

Online Resources

<https://collections.soane.org/ARC10667> – The Soane Collection. History and catalogue entries relating to Mistley Hall, Essex, seat of Richard Rigby the younger, constructed by Robert Adam.

<https://byrga.co.uk/cccc-resources> – the history of Great Braxted Living, transcribed from Lamb (1831).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdCG16peYa4> – Byrga Geniht documentary video explaining some of the background of the monument next to Braxted Park Lake.