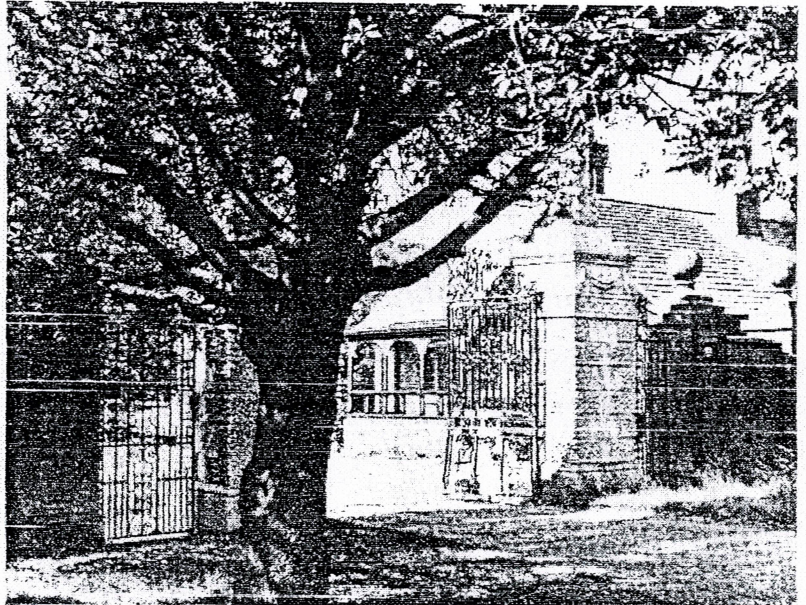


The impressive entrance and Lodge at
Sudbrooke Park.
Photo: Michael Curtis

The Changing Face of Sudbrooke Park

by APRIL CALTHORPE



YESTERDAY it was, to quote the Notice of Sale of 1919, "a noble residential and sporting estate of nearly 2,000 acres, with a finely undulating park sudded with splendid forest and specimen trees." Tomorrow it will become a superior residential area with architect designed homes of quality—but today, it is still in the nostalgic transition stage.

A few choice sites have already been built upon; there is an unobtrusive pumping station and some overhead electric cables; but for the most part it remains park land. Wild growth has hidden the paths and crowded the fine shrubs, but the great copper beeches and cedars still stand sentinel around the older cottages and buildings, the site of the original mansion of Sudbrooke Holme can be traced, and enough of the magnificent old environs are left to enable one to recapture the past in a walk around what used to be known as the Square Mile.

In Weir's account of Lincolnshire (1828), Sudbrooke Holme is described as being situated 5 miles east from Lincoln upon the turnpike road leading to Horncastle. Anyone travelling between Lincoln and the coast on the A.158 will pass the wrought iron gates surmounted by stone lions and the arms of the Sibthorp family, and flanked by two handsome Holme oaks. Originally the seat of the Beresfords, Sudbrooke Holme later became the home of the Ellison family. On the death of the last male Ellison, who was childless, it passed partly to Mrs. Humphrey Walde-Sibthorp and her daughter Mary, and was finally purchased by its last owner, Coningsby Charles Sibthorp, in whose affluent lifetime it reached the peak of its splendour.

28 MAIN BEDROOMS

The great house itself, famous for its library of Adam bookcases, had 28 main bedrooms, and throughout, every door and much of the woodwork was of solid mahogany. A staff of fifty was kept, half of whom were outside workers. The gardens were as splendid as any in the land, and because the recommendation was so highly regarded, garden workers would apply to come to Sudbrooke Holme for two years' practical experience before applying for higher positions in other stately homes.

The estate had three artesian wells, each 160 ft. deep, the main one of which still supplies local residents; a shooting area which included 120 acres of woodland well stocked with pheasants, partridges, rabbits and hares, and a spacious Gas House with a double acetylene-Gas Plant. Nearly an acre of glass houses included a house for cucumbers and melons, another for ferns and carnations, a peach house, and a great range of vineries.

Except perhaps for the ornamental and Italian gardens, with their stone pergolas and herbaceous walks which terminated at sculptured statues of *Bacchus*, *Venus*, and the Goddess *Athena*, the most picturesque feature of Sudbrooke Holme was the great lake. It is there still, in what has become known locally as the Lake Field. It is overgrown with water weeds and great reed mace, and inhabited by wild fowl, but still beautiful, and one can just make out the three wilderness islands around which visitors to the mansion would row their boats.

It was in the lake area that several great pageants were held before the First World War. The men of the Ellison and Sibthorp families held high public office over a long period, being representatives of Parliament for the City of Lincoln, High Sheriffs, Recorders, and Chairmen of Quarter Sessions, and the pageants were held to swell the funds of the Primrose League. These were open to the public and generally took the form of important scenes from history. Mr. Arthur Good, who lives in the house which was *The Bothy*, where bachelor gardeners lived and were looked after by a housekeeper, well remembers the exciting pageant of King Canute, when the boats of actors in period costume sailed in splendour down the lake. Other memorable pageants depicted King John at Runnymede signing Magna Carta, and the touching story of Pocahontas, the Indian Chieftan's daughter who came to England as a bride.

TREE SPECIMENS

Inside the park the West Drive runs parallel to the A.158 (Weir's Turnpike road). To the left it leads past the old pheasant rearing lands, much of it now denuded of trees and let for sheep grazing. Where the drive meets Southern Lane are the sturdy houses once allocated to the gamekeeper, and the man in charge of gas



Sudbrooke Holme as it was in 1919.

Photo: J. H. Walter

Blue tits now nest in the mouth of the old fountain.

Photo: Michael Curtis

house maintenance. In the opposite direction the drive leads to Langworth, passing a small group of staff houses. The author lives here, in the erstwhile home of the Head Coachman, one of a small group of old estate houses. One was occupied by the head butler, the single storey Garden House was used as a Bothy until the erection of the later one opposite, and nearby, adjacent to the glass house area, is the Bailiff's house.

The copper cupola and weather cock of the Gas House look down on the specimen trees which still tower above the tangled garden area. Despite the cutting down of the trees during World War II, particularly fine examples of Cedars of Lebanon, Scotch pine, Yew, Thuja, and Portugal laurel are to be seen where once the Eastern gardens splashed the park with colour.

The great herbaceous border led off from the Italian gardens. It ended in a lovely sylvan setting which is now known as the Boy Scouts Wood, as it was bequeathed to the Scouts by its late owner, Miss Emily Gilbert. The young campers are tidying it up and reopening the centre ride, and the smoke from camp fires curls at weekends around the remains of the Grecian Lodge, or Stone Dog, one of the estate's several elaborate summer houses. Its giant piece of sculpture in the form of a dog was sold at the great Sale.

People in outlying villages have a great affection for Sudbrooke Park, and find it comforting to know that this area at any rate will remain green and wooded, and occupied for the most part by a family of squirrels, a pair of Tawny owls, and the small warbler birds whose singing is the background music to Sudbrooke Park.

SOLD IN SMALL LOTS

Although at different times in the Ellison and Sibthorp families as many as five, six, and three sons were born, in 1896 there was not one male Sibthorp in the youngest generation. The name was perpetuated into the female line, and Coningsby Charles Sibthorp was destined to be the mansion's last owner. Many people have wondered why the great house was not sold as it stood. The truth was that it fetched a good deal more money by being stripped and sold in small lots, which included fireplaces, doors, windows, gates, and the lead on the roof as well as furnishings. One hundred copies of the Sale Notice were printed, and even in 1919 these illustrated catalogues cost one guinea each. The sale



included the mansion—"an imposing and restful pile of considerable character," manor houses, and farms within neighbouring parishes.

The signs of affluence and skilled care have gone from Sudbrooke Park, but for a little while longer, until the projected schemes get under way, the atmosphere of a great home and the vegetation of parkland remains to be enjoyed. The magnolia trees still flower in May; the widely naturalised daffodils grow in profusion in Spring, and the leaves of a solitary fig tree still shade the crumbled terrace. The great lake is the habitat of Canada geese and their goslings, and every year a blue tit raises her family in the mouth of the statue at the fountain.