



A history of Brickendonbury

In 1974, the Association started a new phase of its life by moving to purpose-built facilities at Brickendonbury. Although much valuable work had been carried out during 35 years in the 'temporary' premises in Tewin Road, Welwyn Garden City, better accommodation had become badly needed by the 1970s. When it was acquired in 1971, the Brickendonbury estate consisted of extensive and attractive grounds containing a pleasant but neglected Georgian mansion, a block of Victorian farm buildings allowing scope for redevelopment, and a few cottages. Modern laboratories, to house the wide range of scientific and technological activities of the Tun Abdul Razak Laboratory, were constructed behind and alongside the farm buildings. The mansion, parts of which date from the 1690s, was restored and the rooms converted into office and laboratory accommodation.

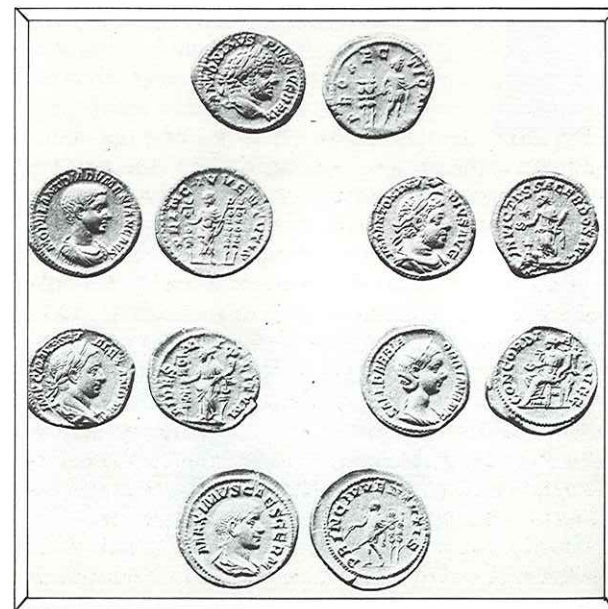
The Brickendonbury estate, some 2km south of Hertford, has a long and colourful history. Little is known about it until Saxon times, when the hill site was claimed by the Saxon, Brica. The word don means hill — the bury was added in mediaeval times and indicates the site of a manor house: hence Brickendonbury, a fortified manor house standing on Brica's hill. It is probable that Brica's land extended from the River Lea to the north, where he would have been able to build a mill, back to uncleared land to the south which would have provided timber for construction and fuel, together with game. Perhaps Brica merely claimed an earlier site, although the only evidence for this is the 'Brickendonbury Hoard', consisting of some 430 Roman coins dug up from the moat in 1893 when the gardens were being renovated. All the coins

date from the same period, which may indicate some form of Roman settlement. An L-shaped part of the moat still exists on the south and west sides of the mansion. It was probably a dry moat until the construction of the present mansion.

LEFT Sir Edward Clarke, owner of Brickendonbury from 1682 to 1703 (photo courtesy of the Guildhall Library).

BELOW Part of the collection of Roman coins found in the moat in 1893. Unfortunately the coins were later stolen from Hertford museum.

RIGHT Domesday entries for 'Brichendene'. FAR RIGHT An early drawing showing the front of the Brickendonbury Mansion in 1834 (taken from Views of Hertfordshire Vol. III, by J.C. Buckler).



There was of arable land eight caracutes, three hides and half were in the desmesne; and there are two caracutes or ploughs there and a third may be made.

'Nine villanes have four caracutes there and a fifth may be made; there are nine borders there and twenty four cottagers, two bondmen and a mill worth eight shillings.

'Of meadow land there are two caracutes and pasture for the cattle of the vill.

'The whole value is and was one hundred shillings, being in Edward the Confessor's time eight pounds.

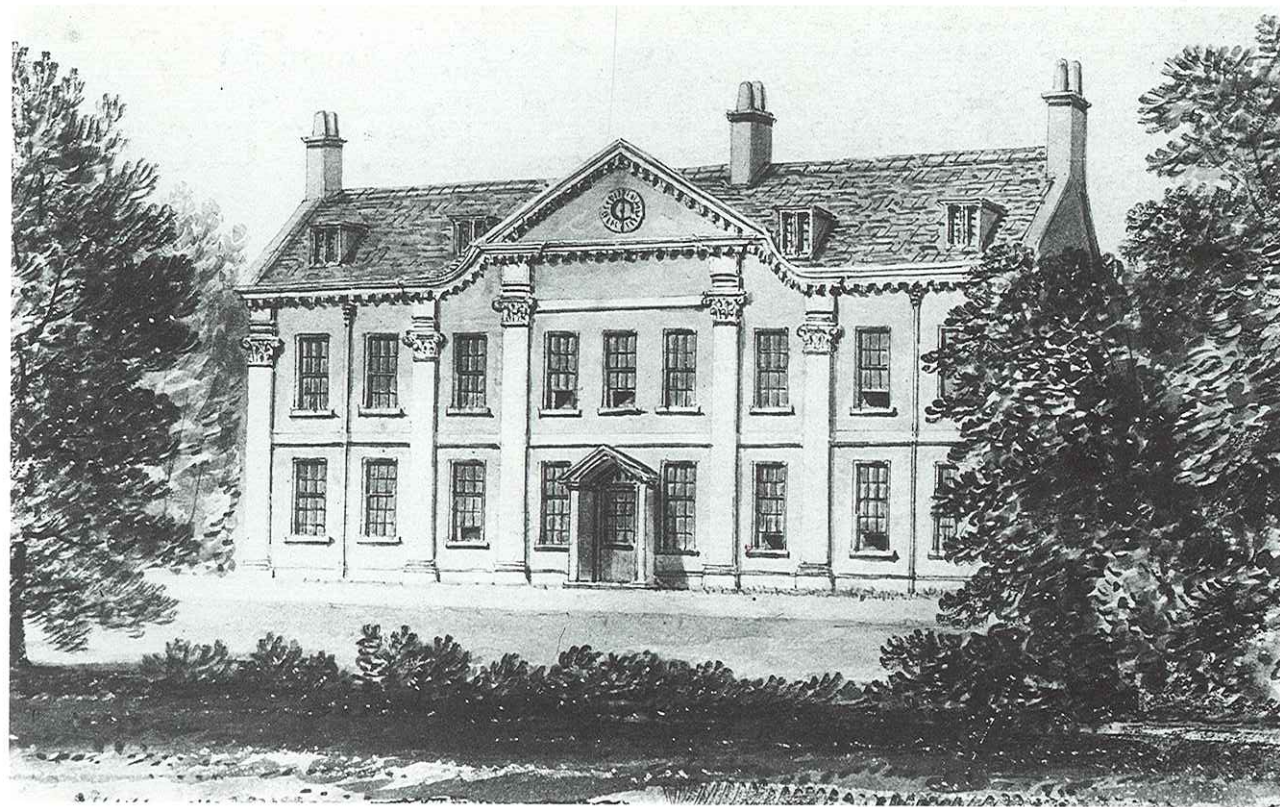
'This Manor lay and lies in the demesne of the Church of the Holy Cross at Waltham.

'Walter holds of Geoffrey de Mandeville one virgate of land in Brichendene; arable is half a caracute and it is and was worth five shillings.

'Isenbard holds in Brichendene of Geoffrey de Bech five virgates for one manor; arable is one caracute and it is there and meadow one caracute. It is and was worth ten shillings.

'Baldwin a certain servant of the King holds three virgates of land in Brichendene; this land is and was worth ten shillings.'

By 1016 the estate was held by the Canons of what was to become Waltham Abbey, and this was subsequently recognized in 1062 by Edward the Confessor and also by Harold II shortly before the Norman Conquest. The activities of the inhabitants around this time are recorded in the Domesday survey, giving a glimpse of 11th century rural life centring on working the land, either for arable crops or as pasture for cattle. Later still, Henry II confirmed the manor of Brickendon to the Abbey as part of his expiation for the murder of Thomas á Becket. By granting certain privileges concerning taxation and the non-forfeiture of criminals, the Liberty of Brickendon was established. This ancient name is still used: on local maps Brickendon Liberty describes the area surrounding the present TARK site.

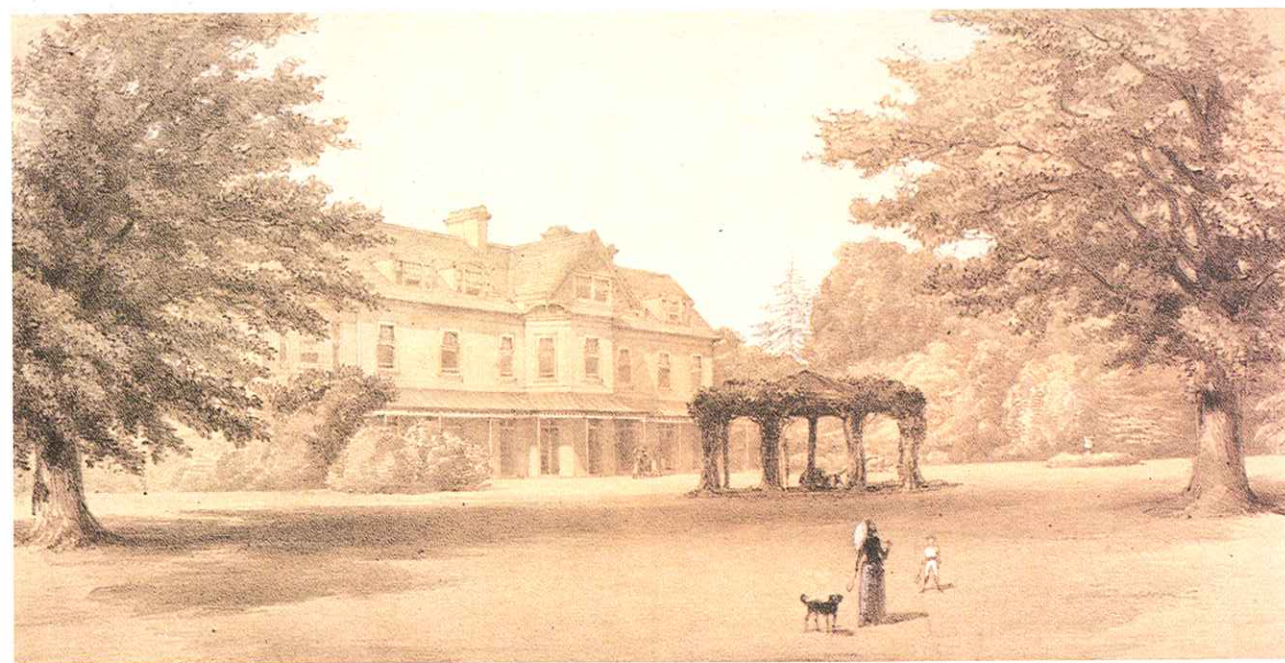
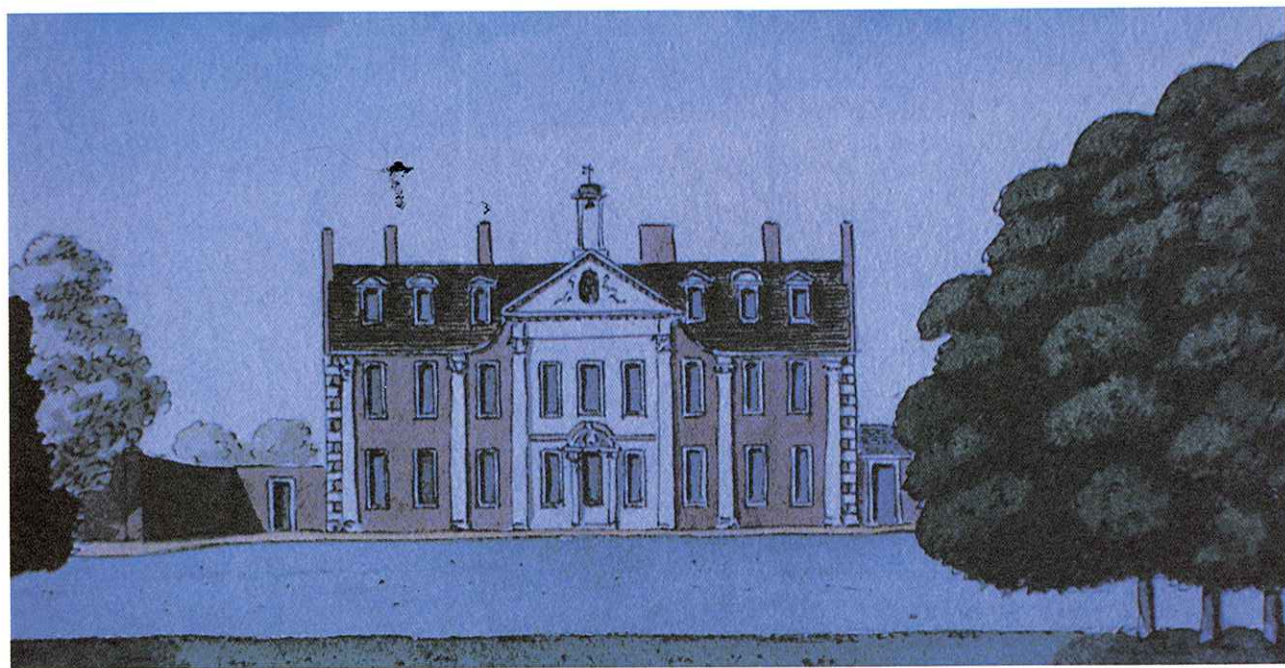


At the dissolution of the monasteries during the reign of Henry VIII the estate passed first to Thomas Knighton of Little Bradbury in 1542 and subsequently to Edmond Allen who, in 1588, sold it to Stephen Soame or Soames and his son William of Suffolk, for the sum of £1000. Over the next three centuries the estate changed hands many times and a succession of owners and tenants came and went.

In 1682, Edward Clarke purchased the estate from the Soames' family. Clarke was a successful merchant, who moved to London from Leicestershire at a time when the City was recovering from the dual devastations of plague and fire. He was knighted in 1689, became Master of the Merchant Taylor's Company from 1690-91 and

eventually Lord Mayor of London in 1696. A vivid portrait of this powerful businessman now hangs in the Guildhall Art Gallery. His importance in terms of Brickendonbury is that he was probably responsible for the first, and what has remained the most imposing, part of the mansion.

Sir Edward died in 1703 and the estate passed via his son to his grand-daughter Jane Morgan. She in turn left it to her daughter, also called Jane, who had married Charles Gould, the Judge Advocate General and Judge Martial of H.M. Forces. Charles Gould changed his name to Morgan upon his wife's inheritance. As befits such an eminent man, his picture was painted by the leading portrait painter of the time — Gainsborough — leaving a permanent



LEFT The Gainsborough portrait of Charles Gould Morgan (photo courtesy of the Equitable Life Assurance Society).

FAR LEFT The water colour dates from about 1800 and possibly shows the house as originally built. By 1834

(previous page) the cupola, dormer windows, chimneys and door had been altered. BELOW LEFT The sketch of the south front of the house appeared in the sale documents of 1881.

RIGHT A group of servants assembled at the front of the mansion in the Pearson's time. The two pictures below show the south front of the mansion before and after the addition of the banqueting hall (bottom picture, far left).

record of this imposing figure. The Morgan family appear to have been responsible for many of the extensions to the mansion. They also laid out the fine avenue of trees which connects the mansion with Hertford, known as Morgan's Walk. The last Morgan to have lived at Brickendonbury was George Gould Morgan who died there in 1845.

For the next 40 years or so the estate appears to have been leased or let to a series of tenants, the most notable of whom was Russell Ellice, who died at Brickendonbury in 1873. Ellice was Chairman of the East India Company in 1853 and a Director from 1831 until his death; his position in this company provides a first link between the estate and South East Asia.

By the 1870s the Morgans had clearly lost interest in the estate and disposed of it in a series of sales between 1878 and 1883. Not only did the estate shrink in size during this period and no longer extend to the whole Liberty, but it also lost its Lordship, which was sold at this time.

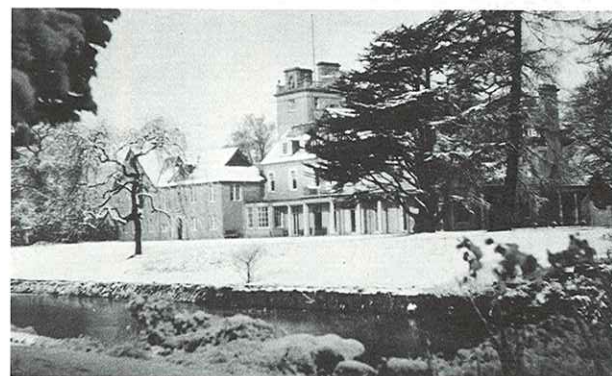
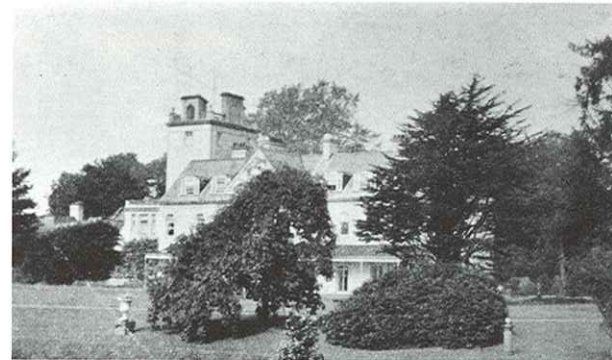
A Nottingham lace merchant, Charles Grey Hill, then purchased the estate, but died before taking up residence. In 1893 George Pearson acquired the mansion, with an estate extending to over 1000 acres, for £30 000; it seems likely that by this time both the house and the estate had fallen into poor condition. Both George and his son Sir Edward were associated with the major civil engineering contractors S. Pearson & Sons, who built the Great Northern and City underground railway. This line forms the City end of the present railway line from

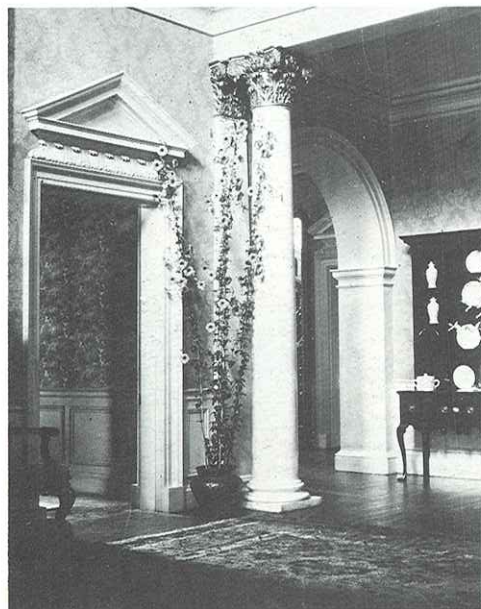
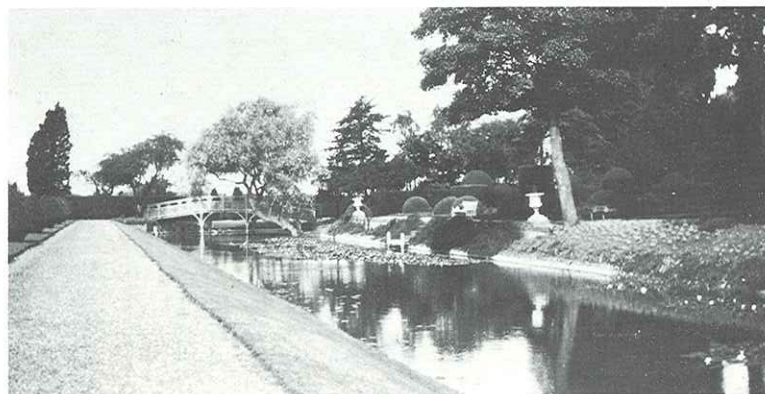
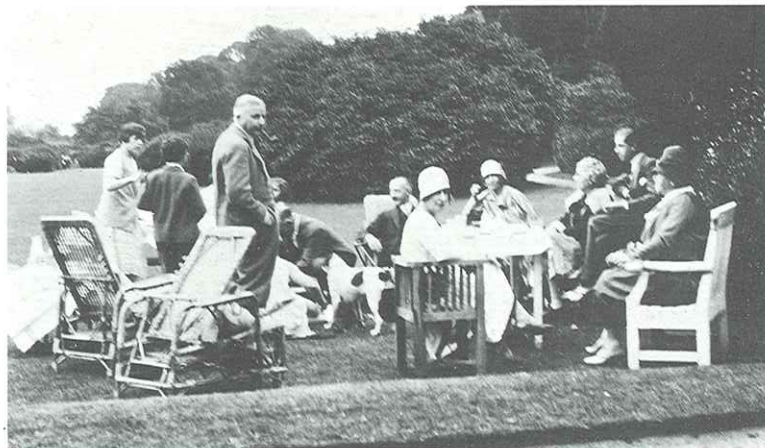


Moorgate to Hertford North: the line from Hertford cuts across land which used to form the western side of the estate.

On George Pearson's death in 1902 the estate passed to Sir Edward, a civil engineer who was also a Justice of the Peace of Hertfordshire and High Sheriff for the County in 1909. While living at Brickendonbury, Sir Edward did a considerable amount of work on scientific farming, which involved soil analysis and intensive culture of plants as well as breeding a fine stud of Shire horses and a first-class herd of Shorthorn and Devon cattle. The cattle provided dairy products for the house and estate *via* a dairy, built in 1900 to a design based on the dairy at the Queen's residence in Sandringham. Later the estate lodges, cottages and much of the home farm were redeveloped. Part of the home farm subsequently formed the site for the laboratories — an appropriate conversion given Sir Edward's leaning to scientifically based farming.

The Pearsons were also responsible for extending the mansion, rebuilding the west end of the south front, adding an extra storey and, in 1919, a Jacobean style banqueting hall, which now serves





LEFT Sir Edward Pearson (picture courtesy of Lord Cowdray) and some scenes of life at Brickendonbury in the late 1920s. The attractive bridge across the moat no longer exists but the Dutch garden can still be seen (opposite page, bottom picture). RIGHT The Malaysian flag flies over the well-kept present day mansion. FAR RIGHT Underneath the clock is an archway leading to the laboratories. The timbered facade here is the original front of Pearson's model farm.

as MRPRA's conference room. The gardens were redeveloped to include a rock garden based on concrete, a material for which the family business was renowned. The Pearson's gardener, R. Smith, was one of the foremost fruit growers in the country at the time, and a feature in *Gardeners' Magazine* in 1909 describes Brickendonbury as enjoying 'considerable fame for the extent, beauty, and high keeping of its gardens'.

After her husband's death in 1925, Lady Pearson moved from Brickendonbury and the Mansion was eventually used by Stratton Park School, a preparatory school for boys. Two reminders of this function remain. The conference room, which then served as a gymnasium, has hooks for ropes, and there is a swimming pool in the grounds, which has been renovated by the Association's staff. In the late 1930s the estate was sold again; no details have been found of the new owner, except that he was a retired butcher from Hoddesdon. Lady Pearson herself survived until 1973.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Brickendonbury was requisitioned by the Special Operations Executive, European Theatre of War, and became Station 17, specializing in training for industrial sabotage. Vital operations such as the daring raid to destroy the Norwegian heavy water plant (part of Germany's nuclear bomb programme) and the bombing of the Renault engineering plant in France were launched from the estate. A recent television documentary *The Secret War* showed archive film of parts of the estate being used for rehearsing such raids. A reminder of these activities was found during building work after MRPRA had acquired the estate, when unexploded hand grenades and live mortar shells were discovered in the drained moat.



After the war, Brickendonbury took on a peaceful role once more. The mansion was used by the Highways Department of the County Council and by the National Agricultural Service as a local headquarters. During this time the grounds were neglected and government beige was applied liberally on all internal walls. Immediately before being rescued by the Association in 1971, it was used as the setting for a children's television series *Catweazle*.

Today, Brickendonbury's role as home to a busy research laboratory has seen the estate revived to a thriving condition. The mansion, both inside and out, has been restored to provide elegant working accommodation, and the grounds are now well cared for. The purpose-built laboratories, mill room, library and development areas, housing the practical work of the Association, are in part concealed behind the facade of Pearson's model farm, which still retains the family motto, just as appropriate for the endeavours of a large rubber research laboratory as it was for the Pearsons, 'Do it with thy Might'.

