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LAND OF THE FANNS

# Teacher Briefing

Weald Country Park

*From, Land of the Fanns Online Resource*

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## Weald Country Park

South Weald,  
Brentwood CM14 5QS

<https://www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go/find-whats-near-me/weald-country-park>

## Summary

- 500 acres (202 hectares)
- Weald Country Park began as a medieval deer park in the 12th century.
- The landscape today is still based on the 18th century parkland designs with lakes, the tree-lined avenues, and large parkland trees.
- Woodland, lakes, meadows, open grassland
- Spectacular views
- Wildlife including fallow deer, cattle, herons, mallard ducks and other water birds.
- Stick Man play trail.

## History

- From the 11th century until 1540, the manor of South Weald was in the possession of Waltham Abbey.
- Weald originated as a medieval deer park during the 12th century and is likely to have been associated with a manorial centre near St Peter's Church.
- When the abbey was dissolved under Henry VIII, the manor came to be owned by Sir Antony Browne.
- Browne was a regular at the court of Henry VIII and founder of Brentwood School. He assisted Thomas Cromwell in organising the downfall of Anne Boleyn and during the reign of Mary Tudor assisted with the persecution of Protestants.
- The estate was sold in 1668 to Sir William Scroggs. Scroggs fought for the Royalists during the Civil War, and became a lord chief justice. According to his entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, he had 'a reputation for debauchery, loose living and love of drink'.
- In 1685 the property was sold again, Erasmus Smith, a merchant. The Smiths improved the house and grounds.

- In 1738 plans were drawn up by the French landscape designer Bouginion, to improve the hall that was now on the site and its estate. The 1738 plan for the park was formal and geometric but was only partly executed. It shows the house surrounded by formal walled gardens and an extensive landscaped park, with Belvedere tower on a mount surrounded by a wilderness.
- The property next changed hands in 1752 when it was purchased by the Tower family. Christopher Tower purchased more land to extend the park and changed its design to a more natural appearance to keep up with 18th century fashions. He also commissioned famous architect Robert Adam to make changes to the hall's interiors.
- The estate passed through several generations of the Tower family, the last of whom to own it was Christopher John Hume Tower. Census records provide an interesting snapshot of his life at Weald Hall; in 1901 the family were attended by 15 live-in servants.
- CJH Tower was to experience much tragedy in his life. His first wife died in childbirth and their daughter died a month later. He remarried and had two sons, Christopher Cecil and Hugh Christopher, who were both killed during the First World War.
- During the Second World War the house and park were under military occupation between 1943 to 1945 and suffered considerable damage.
- The hall suffered a fire and was then demolished in 1951.
- In 1953 the park was purchased by Essex County Council to save it as open space for the public.

## **What historic features you might see**

- Little trace of the house remains but about 150m north-west of its site is a 16th century red-brick and peg-tile building known as Queen Mary Chapel.
- Also surviving beside the site of the hall is a red-brick and peg-tile granary built in about 1800. There is also a 19th century barn nearby that is now used as the visitors' centre.
- The garden and pleasure grounds lay to the east of the site of the hall and survive today as archaeology and one set of brick steps. This used to be a 19th century terraced formal garden.

- Belvedere Mount is about 100m to the east of the hall, edged by a ha-ha wall on its eastern boundary. The raised mount was created in the early 18th century by Samuel Smith at which time there was a Belvedere tower on top, but now only the base of the tower remains. The mount originally had a complicated arrangement of paths and planting.
- Views from the Belvedere Mount look north towards along a chain of lakes designed in the 18th century from an earlier rectangular formal water feature. (In addition to the lakes there are several small ponds located throughout the park.)
- The area immediately to the north-east of the hall site is known as the Deer Park and is where the 12th century deer park was located. It is well scattered with trees, retaining the character of an ancient deer park.
- The area to the north of the hall site, covering the western half of the park, has a more open character and has trees mainly from the 19th century.
- The north-east quarter of the park is heavily wooded and known partly as The Forest. The Chestnut Avenue runs through the Forest, and survives from the early 18th century.
- The entrance to Weald Park off Lincoln's Lane at the southern end close to South Weald village follows the line of the late 18th century drive.

## Archive material:

- Maps Bouginon (attrib), A plan of Weald Hall in Essex, seat of Samuel Smith, 1738 (D/DTW P1) - Essex Record Office <https://www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk>
- J Chapman and P Andre, A map of the county of Essex from an actual survey ..., 1777- Essex Record Office <https://www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk>
- A survey of Weald Hall, the estate of Christopher Tower, 1788(9 (D/DTW P3) - Essex Record Office <https://www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk>
- Tithe map for South Weald parish, 1838 (D/CT 388/2B) - Essex Record Office <https://www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk>
- Essex Life 27 February 2017)
- OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881 - <https://maps.nls.uk/os/>
- OS 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1915 - <https://maps.nls.uk/os/>

## **Plants and Trees**

- Mature ornamental trees

## **Landscape and Habitat**

- Woodland
- Lakes
- Meadows
- Open grassland

## **Wildlife and Insects**

- Fallow deer
- Cattle
- Water birds including mallard ducks and herons
- Peacocks