MENTMORE CONSERVATION AREA
Designated 12th July 1978

Mentmore is a small rural settlement substantially rebuilt as a model village in 1877 by Hannah Rothschild. Whilst based on the layout of the original settlement, this was much modified, and only a few of the original buildings were retained. However, much of the ‘new’ village remains intact and in good condition, a notable exception being the now derelict glasshouses.

Mentmore Towers, later to become the seat of the Earl of Roseberry, was built some years earlier between 1851 and 1857 for Baron Meyer de Rothschild. The house, set in the pastoral surroundings of Mentmore Park is detached from the main part of the village, although the main entrance, west of the green, is a dominant feature of the village centre. Recognised as an outstanding example of Victorian architecture, the house was designed by Sir Joseph Paxton who also responsible for many other buildings in the village. He was noted for his glass structures, examples of which are found both the house and other parts of the estate.

The village, located some 4 miles south-west of Leighton Buzzard, sits atop a small hill in the Vale of Aylesbury commanding extensive views over the surrounding countryside. The road approaching from the north-east rises steeply before entering the village, with the quadrangle of buildings comprising Manor Stud on the left. This approach culminates in a view of the main entrance to Mentmore Towers, comprising an iron gateway supported by impressive stone pillars and an ornate lodge built of stone with a tiled roof. The two large firs which flank the gateway are important features of the entrance.
A more modest thatched lodge terminates the first element of the approach from the south along a wide avenue of Wellingtonia. The lodge marks a fork in the road and a secondary entrance to the estate. The public road swings away to the right along another avenue, this time of chestnuts, providing glimpses of Mentmore Towers before climbing uphill in more dense woodland to the village. To the right are glimpsed Home Farm and the Dairy. The road steepens significantly between flanking brick walls marking the entry to the village. Set well back behind the wall on the left is one of the original village buildings, the impressive eighteenth century Queen Anne Manor House, built of brown brick with red dressings.

The approach from the west is particularly interesting and affords fine views over undulating countryside to the north as it ascends to the village. A group of buildings comprising the stables, the vicarage and estate workers cottages clustered about the church, itself substantially rebuilt in 1858, are set in trees at a sharp bend in the road and constitute an important, detached part of the village.

An attractive group of estate cottages are clustered around the green in a seemingly contrived ‘rustic’ manner which contributes considerably to the character of the village. Some are privately owned, but have been altered little. The Stag, public house, formerly the estate manager’s house built in stone to a style reflecting his importance, the village hall, post office, forge and former school are all located around the green.

Apart from the obvious cases, Mentmore’s buildings are not individually outstanding from an architectural point of view. Indeed, a wide variety of architectural styles and features are apparent but most display the uniformity of scale and appearance usually associated with the concept of estate villages. The materials employed are generally the same deep red brick for domestic buildings and stone for the more important ones, roofed with either red clay tiles or grey slates. A major unifying force is the use of small paned windows, some leaded and black and white paintwork.

Seemingly each building was required to reflect not only its function, but also the status of its occupier, and standard patterns conceived by a variety of designers were employed. However, such patterns were modified in their execution and this explains why unity should prevail over such diversity of style.

It is therefore as much from an historical point of view in the collation of these styles modified to suit local circumstances in the building of an estate village, as with the intrinsic connection with the estate itself that the importance of Mentmore lies.

A major tree planting programme constituted an integral part of the plan for the village and estate, and its present day character owes much to the densely planted areas and to individual groups of trees. Good hedges to properties fronting the green add interest by enclosing garden areas.

Three buildings are represented on the Statutory list of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest: Mentmore Towers (Grade 1), the Manor House and the Church of St. Mary.

There has been very little recent development in the village. A new estate bungalow situated on the former allotments to the north-east of the green is visible neither from the village itself nor its approaches.

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