

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ROCKINGHAM CASTLE

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Name: ROCKINGHAM CASTLE

District: North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Cottingham

District: North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Rockingham

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.503954
Longitude: -0.73040549
National Grid Reference: SP8627490319
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1001038
Date first listed: 25-Jun-1984

Details

Formal gardens and pleasure grounds of C17 and later date around a medieval and later castle, set in a landscape park with medieval origins.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Castle was built by William I and used regularly by the kings of England and their queens as a royal hunting lodge and administrative centre of Rockingham Forest until the C15 when it fell into disrepair. In 1544 Edward Watson (d 1584), whose father was Surveyor to the Bishop of Lincoln, obtained a lease of the Castle and park. Over the next forty years he built a large but architecturally simple house based on the old banqueting house in the north bailey incorporating the structure of the medieval hall range. That building campaign was completed in 1631 by his grandson Lewis (d 1653), who bought the freehold of the Castle and park in 1619. During the Civil War the Castle was occupied by Parliamentary troops under Col Horseman, and much of the north and north-west wings were destroyed. At the end of the war the curtain wall was demolished together with the keep, leaving only the drum towers and eastern section of the wall intact. Lewis' son Edward (d 1689) carried out major restoration works, restoring the gallery wing to two-thirds of its original length and building Walkers House on the foundation of an earlier building. It is probable that he also created the terraces and mount out of the rubble of the walls and keep. He was succeeded by his son Lewis (d 1724), who was created Earl of Rockingham in 1714 and whose younger brother Thomas was the rebuilder of Harrowden Hall (qv). Little was done at Rockingham Castle however until Richard Watson, youngest son of the third Earl Sondes, inherited the Castle and brought in Anthony Salvin to refurbish it in 1836. He built a modest three-storey tower onto the Gallery wing, a two-storey gable on the south-west range, and added passages and staircases to improve the accommodation. Richard was succeeded by his eldest son George who built a square tower as bachelor quarters on the eastern end of the south-west range; a lack of funds prevented further work. Rockingham remains (1998) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Rockingham Castle stands south of Rockingham village, on the west side of the A6003 Corby to Oakham road. The northern outskirts of Corby lie only 1km to the south, and this urban scene contrasts vividly with the historic environment of the largely C17 estate village of Rockingham and the panoramic rural expanse of the Welland valley which village and Castle overlook. The registered area is bounded to the north-east, and partly to the south-east, by the A6003, the remainder of the long south-east boundary running parallel with the A6003 and one field distant from it. Field boundaries largely form the south-west and north-west boundaries of the registered area, although in both instances short sections of the boundary extend to abut roads which circumscribe the modern estate core: the A427, and the B670 Rockingham to Cottingham road. The area here registered is c 192ha

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The two main approaches to the Castle are from North (or Bottom) Lodge (listed grade II), 100m south of the end of Rockingham village, from which a drive curves uphill to the twin towers of the gatehouse, and from South (or Top) Lodge (listed grade II), from which a drive runs north-west to the Castle past Home Farm and via the Hollow Drive, until 1618 the main road through Rockingham. Both lodges were designed by Anthony Salvin c 1840, and are Tudoresque stone cottages. A third approach is from the south-west, off the A427 and up a 200m long mature lime avenue to Keeper's Lodge, also of c 1850 but far plainer. From here an estate road, probably the new road in the park mentioned in 1851, runs north-eastwards following the high ground through the park to join the drive from South Lodge east of Home Farm.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Rockingham Castle (listed grade I) was founded by William I on a promontory overlooking the Welland valley, and in its earliest main phase comprised a motte with two baileys. The most visually striking element of the Castle is the late C13 twin-towered east gateway, through which the Castle's east courtyard is entered. Running down the south side of that courtyard, and connecting with the gatehouse range, are the hall and great parlour. The north end of that parlour is abutted to north and south by long ranges which complete the H-plan house. Some medieval fabric other than the gatehouse survives. Otherwise the buildings largely date from the rebuilding programme put in hand by Edward Watson, who leased the largely derelict Castle in 1544. Repairs and additions were made after the Civil war by Edward, second Lord Rockingham (d 1689), who inherited in 1653. Thereafter, little work was undertaken until the 1830s when Anthony Salvin (d 1881) was brought in to modernise the building.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The Castle's main courtyard, entered via the C13 gatehouse, is partly paths and parking areas and partly lawned. From its north-west corner a gateway gives access to The Terrace, the more northerly of the two, roughly triangular, garden compartments along the west side of the Castle. The Terrace is laid to lawn, with around its perimeter a broad path first mapped in 1815. Down the west side of The Terrace there are panoramic views across the park and the Welland valley beyond over its stone retaining wall (listed grade II*), restored and embellished with stone balls after the Civil War. The Terrace is bounded to the south by an ancient double yew hedge, the Elephant Walk, believed to have been planted in the 1670s by Edward Watson, second Lord Rockingham. A path between the hedges leads west to a tall C19 gate in the perimeter wall which gives access to the Grove. South of the Elephant Walk is the second terrace known as The Cross, quartered by lavender-lined rose beds. There are paths around its edge while in its centre is a sundial. The Cross is first mapped in detail in 1815, although its basic plan may be C17. Photographs of the C19 and early C20 (CL) show elaborate bedding patterns. Those were removed when the present scheme was devised by John Codrington c 1914. Immediately north-east of The Cross, adjoining the house, is a sunken rockery, devised from an excavation of 1936 which was not backfilled.

Rising up to the south-east of The Cross is the north-west sector of the low motte known as the Keep, ascended by steps off the south-east corner. These steps give access to a projecting stone bastion, built in the C19 (probably on one of the Civil War 'Flankers') to afford views over the gardens and to the Welland valley. The pergola on top was constructed in 1909.

South-east of The Cross, and within the surviving (but much rebuilt) sector of curtain wall (listed grade II*, the so-called Keep) around the motte top, is the Rose Garden. Probably planted in the early C19, this comprises a 30m wide circular compartment surrounded by a 2m high clipped yew hedge. Ten, 3m high, battlemented doors pierce the hedge, paths from them subdividing the garden interior where there are symmetrically arranged rose beds. The layout of the Rose Garden replicates a plan of the Keep made during the Civil War.

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Extending 150m south-east from the Rose Garden is a 100m wide lawn, the Tilting Ground. This occupies the Castle's south bailey, and the raised, tree-lined walks along its south-west (limes) and south-east (sycamores) sides presumably represent at least in part its defences, perhaps remodelled in the C17. Bisecting the lawn is a shallow south-west to north-east depression, south of which is denuded ridge and furrow.

In the valley along the south-west side of the Castle, below The Cross and the Tilting Ground, is the Grove, or Wild Garden. A path, lined with ancient yews, descends into this from the gate at the end of the Elephant Walk. The Grove is planted with native and exotic trees and shrubs. In the valley bottom are two small fishponds, from the dams of which there are views north-west across the Welland valley. Already wooded in the early C19, the area was planted as a wild garden in the 1840s by Richard Watson. Since 1967 selective felling and replanting has been carried out with advice from RBG Kew.

Sweeping around the outside of the north and north-west walls of the Castle, in permanent pasture, are broad terraces. The flat walks along them provide panoramic views over the Welland valley, and it would seem probable that they represent post-Civil War remodellings of defensive earthworks into garden features.

Of the medieval gardens at Rockingham virtually nothing is known, although in 1279 walls were made around the grass plot (viridarium) near the Chamber of the Queen. A vineyard mentioned in 1130 and 1440 may have lain immediately north of the park rather than in the vicinity of the Castle. The present gardens probably incorporate garden features of the later C17 (perhaps the terraces north of the Castle, the Elephant Walk and the garden compartments to either side, the raised walks around the Tilting Ground and the yew walk to the Grove) remodelled and enhanced in the early C19.

PARK Rockingham Castle lies towards the north-east end of a roughly oval park, whose northern half drops down the side of the Welland valley. While most of the higher, level ground down the south-east side of the park, as well as a large part of its north-west sector, are normally under arable cultivation and are rather bare, most of the rest is permanent pasture with mature parkland trees. The park has no wall or other very visible boundaries, although along its south-east side, parallel with the A6003, there is a narrow shelter belt.

From the C13 Castle gateway there is a view east, across the small valley up which the drive climbs from North Lodge. On the east side of the valley, permanent pasture with mature specimen trees, and especially in Front Park, west of the A6003, are numerous pillow mounds, presumably the rabbit warren recorded in use in the early C17. The longest pillow mound, c 100m, runs parallel with the A6003. It is flanked by a lime avenue of the later C17 or C18, at the north-west end of which is a roughly level area, perhaps a turning circle or viewing platform affording views to the Castle and over the valley beyond. The warren remains overlies ridge and furrow. Between the lime avenue and the road is a shelter belt planted originally 1815-22, its older trees including Turkey oak and lime.

North and north-west of the Castle, immediately below the terraces which skirt its walls, is St Leonard's, Rockingham's parish church. West of this, below the Castle in Castle Close, are the slight earthworks of houses removed c 1618 when the park was enlarged and deep-scoured hollow-ways leading west. East of the church is a ruinous icehouse. The next compartment to the west is Fish Ponds, which comprises the lower, north-west section of the shallow valley occupied by the Grove. Running uphill through it is a deep ditch, in 1615 the eastern boundary of the park. South-west of Fish Ponds is the Fir Grounds woodland, south of which is Big Park, sloping rough pasture which probably represents the core area of the medieval park. There are areas of ridge and furrow and some ancient quarry hollows.

A second shallow valley, Great Hollow, runs north-west in the south-west section of the park. It is permanent pasture with numerous specimen trees, mostly planted in the early C19. Above it, to the east, is Little Coppice. This contains a moated lodge site, believed to be that constructed at the end of the C15. Presumably this was the 'New Lodge' where Edward Watson and his family lived after 1544 while building went on at the Castle. James I was put up here in 1604 and a temporary 'dining room' erected. The lodge was demolished c 1827.

In the north-east corner of the park and crossed by the drive from South Lodge is a 300m long moat or canal. No date or function can be ascribed, although the feature was already present in 1615. Some 400m west of South Lodge is a cricket pitch.

A park was created at Rockingham by the mid C13, which probably corresponded to the 13ha enclosure shown on a plan of 1615 as 'Lyme Kiln Quarter', roughly the present area of Big Park. Straddling the parish boundary with Cottingham, this occupies

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a natural amphitheatre on the edge of the Jurassic escarpment and has several springs within it. Its pale bank survives on the south-west side. This was enlarged c 1485 to 105ha, the bounds broadly corresponding to the south and west with those of the registered area, and New Lodge erected. Ridge and furrow recorded here (but now largely ploughed out) suggests that the park extension may have taken in former arable land. In 1603 the park was said to contain 89 acres of pasture, 160 acres of wood and 1080 large trees. In 1618 Lewis Watson moved the main road 200m east from Hollow Drive on the east side of the Castle to its present line, and soon after removed the northern part of Rockingham village. Those actions enabled the park to be enlarged to include the areas now known as Front Park, Castle Close and the eastern part of Fish Ponds. Thereby the Castle was placed within its park, rather than lying outside and east of it. In 1638 Rockingham was disafforested and the park further enlarged to the west. The various lime and elm avenues, both extant and documented, may have first been planted after the Civil War. In the winter of 1824 there was a great deal of activity in the park including much planting, and this may represent the main phase of landscaping within the park. Deer ceased to be kept in the 1930s.

KITCHEN GARDEN A kitchen garden, constructed c 1840 south-west of an early C19 stables court, lies beyond the south-east end of the Tilting Ground and the Grove. Its brick walls are largely faced with ironstone where visible from the pleasure grounds. The main compartment, c 80m square, slopes markedly down to the south-west. At the top (north-east) of the garden is a row of ironstone cottages of c 1800 which form the south-west side of the stables court and some glasshouses rebuilt in the 1990s on old bases. Abutting the south-west end of that compartment is a narrower one, originally an orchard. Little of the kitchen garden interior was cultivated in the 1990s.

REFERENCES

C Watson, Rockingham Castle and the Watsons (1891) *Country Life*, 8 (21 July 1900), pp 80-3; (28 July 1900), pp 112-14; 50 (9 July 1921), pp 44(51); (16 July 1921), pp 76-82 *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 9, (1974), pp 68(79) *Roy Comm Hist Mons Engl Inventories: Northamptonshire* 2, (1979), pp 126-30 J Anthony, *The Gardens of Britain* 6, (1979), pp 137-9 *Rockingham Castle: Restoration Management Plan*, (Elizabeth Banks Associates 1995) J Heward and R Taylor, *The Country Houses of Northamptonshire*, (RCHM(E) 1996), pp 290-5

Maps The Northamptonshire Record Office holds a series of maps including: 1615 (2328), 1806 (3706), 1815 (3704A), 1822 (3704B), 1822 (3705A).

OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1901 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886 2nd edition published 1900

Description written: 1998 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: January 2000

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.