

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HEATHFIELD PARK

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Name:	HEATHFIELD PARK
County:	East Sussex
District:	Wealden (District Authority)
Parish:	Heathfield and Waldron
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.965280 Longitude: 0.26744582 National Grid Reference: TQ 59317 20876 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000203 Date first listed: 25-Mar-1987

Details

A landscape park created in the C17 on the site of a possible medieval deer park with improvements by Humphry Repton in the late C18 and with formal terraced and ornamental gardens added by Sir Reginald Blomfield in the late C19.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1610, the Dacre family were granted a licence to enclose 600 acres (243ha) of wood and pasture at Heathfield, known as Bayley Park. It was purchased in 1676 by James Plummer who began a new mansion on the site of the present house. The park was acquired by the Fuller family of iron-masters in 1708 and then by Raymond Blackmore in 1721 who altered the house. It was sold on his death first to the O'Keefe family and then in 1766 to Lieutenant General George Eliott, who was ennobled as Lord Heathfield for his role at the siege of Gibraltar. Eliott enlarged the estate and commissioned the architect Sir Robert Taylor to rebuild the interior of the house.

Francis Newbery bought the estate in 1791, changing its name to Heathfield Park. He built the Gibraltar Tower to commemorate General Eliott and in 1793 called in Humphry Repton (1752(1818) to advise on improvements to the park, Repton producing proposals for the approaches and setting of both the house and the Tower and for the park and lakes in a Red Book dated April 1794. J M W Turner painted the park in his view *The Vale of Heathfield*, in c 1815. The estate was purchased in 1819 by Sir Charles Richard Blunt who enlarged it and enclosed the park within a stone wall. In 1890 the Blunt family sold the estate in lots and in 1895 the house and park were purchased by William Cleverly Alexander for whom the architect Sir Reginald Blomfield modernised the house. After wartime use by the military, the park was purchased in 1964 by the Moore family. They developed the western half as a wildlife park open to the public and then sold it to a development company. In 1993 the Ugland family purchased the house and the eastern half of the park, reuniting it with the western half through purchase in 1995. Heathfield Park remains (1997) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Heathfield Park lies south of the A265 to the immediate east of Heathfield town. The c 130ha registered site comprises 7ha of formal and ornamental gardens and an adjacent 123ha of wooded parkland. It is entirely enclosed by a c 5.6km long, sandstone park wall, erected by Sir Charles Richard Blunt between

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1833 and 1836 (Pryce 1996) and is bounded along all sides, except for an intervening belt of woodland and occasional buildings along the north, by roads or lanes. Park Road and the built-up area of Heathfield abut the whole of the west boundary while to the east, the buildings and grounds of Heathfield Community College and the linear village of Old Heathfield separate the park from a landscape of farmland and small woods which surround it to the north-east, east and south.

The park lies on the crest and south-facing, undulating upper slopes of an east to west ridge of the Sussex Weald which falls southwards towards the Pevensey Levels and which is cut by several narrow, steep-sided, south-flowing stream valleys or ghylls.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the site is from the lane on the extreme eastern corner of the park. The drive enters through gates between stone gate piers (listed grade II) beside the South or Gate Lodge and the adjacent Riding School (1766, listed grade II) and follows a short curving course through shrubbery to terminate in the forecourt on the principal, north-east front of the house. An entrance from the east (the present C20 lodge replaces a smaller one shown on William Figg's map of 1819) appears to have served the house up until the late C18 when Humphry Repton's proposed new approach drive was constructed c 1794 (Red Book; Gardner and Gream map surveyed 1793-6). This entered the park near its most northerly point beside the North Lodge (John Crunden 1792, listed grade II, as the North-east Lodge with its gates and piers) and ran south-eastwards in a gentle curve across the park to the south-west front of the house. Repton's entrance and drive remained in use up to the mid C20, access reverting to the present gates and drive on the sale of North Lodge in 1963. There is a second entrance to the park, shown established by 1819 (Figg map), marked by stone gate piers 600m west of North Lodge at the south end of Tower Street.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Heathfield Park (listed grade II*) lies close to the eastern boundary of the park, on the level crest of the ridge and with extensive vistas over the park and the distant landscape. It is a two-storey building with an attic and semi-basement and a hipped, tiled roof. It is built of red brick with stone window dressings, a string course and panels below the first-floor windows and with a six-columned verandah along the south front. Begun as a classical red-brick mansion with a similar verandah on the south front, and probably complete by 1682 as illustrated in a painting attributed to Gerard van Edema (Pryce 1996), it was altered to an unknown extent in the early C18 (Lucas 1910) and its interior completely rebuilt in 1766 by the architect Sir Robert Taylor (1714-88) for General Eliott. In 1896-7 the house was completely remodelled for William Cleverly Alexander by Sir Reginald Blomfield (1856-1942), given an eastwards extension of five bays and the addition of an attic storey and a Venetian window on the north front. The verandah was replaced further east along the south front and the stucco stripped to reveal the brick and stonework (Nairn and Pevsner 1965; Pryce 1996). Further minor alterations made in the C20 include the repositioning of the porch after 1931 (photograph of 1905; OS 3rd edition) and the conversion and extension of the east elevation in the 1990s.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The formal and ornamental gardens occupy an oblong area largely to the south-west and south of the house and are enclosed from the park by a sunk fence, shown established on Figg's map of 1819, and by a post and wire fence on the garden side.

The north-east front of the house opens onto a broad, gravelled forecourt enclosed by a low stone wall surmounted by stone ball caps, built between 1910 and 1931 (OS maps) and giving access through a central opening onto a lawn enclosed from the north-east boundary by a belt of mixed exotic trees and shrubs containing a walk. Several pieces of sculpture are dotted over the lawn. Some 75m west of the forecourt, the drive from North Lodge to the house enters the gardens through wrought-iron gates between stone gate piers; to its south, a small, walled lawn on the west front links the forecourt with the series of four descending terraces on the south front which are connected to the raised verandah by central flights of stone steps. The topmost, 14m deep terrace, built between 1899 and 1910, extends some 18m to the west of the house and 65m to the east. It is lined by a north-west to south-east gravel walk, flanked by borders and lawns on the house side and enclosed by a stone retaining wall to the south. The south-east end contains several large mature trees. The second terrace, retained by a similar wall added between 1910 and 1931, is laid to a gravel walk with flanking border and lawns which are enclosed at the north-west and south-east ends by stone walls and gate piers and by two matching, pitch-roofed, stone and brick-panelled gazebos, built in 1912 (date on keystone over entrances). The third and fourth terraces, also added 1910 x 1931, are laid to grass, the lowest one forming the

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principal lawn. This is framed with shrub beds and enclosed to the north-west and south-east by yew hedges established after 1931 (OS) and cut to form a *clairvoie* on the axial view from the house into the park.

Some 20m east of the south-eastern gazebo, a straight path leads south-westwards from the terraces, passing between the principal lawn and further lawns to the east which are dotted with trees and contain an oblong lily pool, shown established as an oval pool on Figg's map of 1819. The path continues south-westwards through light woodland along the north-west side of the kitchen garden and past a C20 swimming pool, towards the sunk fence on the south boundary. A second walk, established by 1878 (OS 1st edition), runs south-west from the terraces along the south-east side of the kitchen garden, through a belt of exotic conifers and shrubbery glades.

PARK The park lies to the north-west, west and south-west of the house. It is largely wooded, although a high proportion of its mature trees has been replaced by scrub following damage by the storm of 1987, and it is threaded with a network of drives and paths. The centre of the park is cut by a north/south stream valley or ghyll, fed by several smaller streams, which is dammed to form a chain of five large lakes, the uppermost one silted up since 1931 (OS) and two or three smaller ponds. These lakes, which are shown in a similar form on Figg's map of 1819, are spring-fed and were built as holding or 'pen' ponds, probably in the early C18 by the Fuller family who had established a new iron forge in Heathfield in 1693 (Pryce 1996). Repton's proposal for combining the two southernmost lakes appears not to have been implemented. The lakes are held by c 3m high earth dams, the topmost connected to the second by a stone waterfall now (1997) in ruins. The southernmost lake contains two islands and, on the west shore, a boathouse and remnants of balustraded terraces laid out as part of the wildlife park after 1964.

The lower, western slopes of the valley, shown as woodland in 1819 (Figg map) have a dense cover of pioneer tree species and a few surviving mature oak and beech. A main park drive, also shown on Figg's map, runs north to south along the top of the valley side, partly following the line of a former park pale (field evidence). The parkland west of the drive, which was added to the estate in the late C18 (Pryce 1996), rises more gently through scrub woodland and the remnants of mature trees established on ground previously open between 1875 and 1899 (OS 1st and 2nd editions) to the three-storey, stone Gibraltar Tower (1.2km north-west of the house and listed grade II*), the setting of which formed part of Repton's proposals. The Tower stands in open grass and is surrounded by an apron of paving approached by a balustraded staircase, built after 1964 and now (1997) in a ruinous state.

The eastern half of the park, on and above the slopes of the stream valley, developed its present extensively wooded character in the mid C20 (OS). It was open parkland in the late C18, the northern part imparked from fields between 1781 and 1819 (John Fuller's cropbook plan; Figg map) and shown by 1819 as dotted with occasional clumps and individual trees, the southern part being more extensively planted (it is shown as part of Bayley Park Wood on Fuller's plan).

Eastwards from the valley, towards the formal gardens and the northern site boundary, the woodland becomes slightly more open in character with grassy glades and a significant number of mature oak and beech; clearance of C20 scrub woodland has also created more open areas since the mid 1990s. Extensive replacement planting has taken place, also in the 1990s, on the north-east boundary, along the line of the late C18 Serpentine Walk (Red Book 1794). The present grazed, open area on the south-east boundary (containing the cricket ground, established 1910 x 1932) has changed little in appearance since it was imparked from fields in the late C18 (Fuller plan)

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden, an oblong some 130m x 40m, lies 150m to the south of the house. It is enclosed by brick walls on the west, north and east sides with entrance gateways in each and by a timber fence with three gateways, erected in the 1990s, along the south side. The garden is laid to rough grass with a few orchard trees at the east end and with a range of largely early C20 glasshouses, restored in the mid 1990s, at the west end. The garden enclosure is shown on Fuller's plan of 1781-90 and as surrounded by paling by 1819 (Figg map). It appears to have been walled by 1878 (OS 1st edition).

REFERENCES

P Lucas, *Heathfield Memorials* (1910) *Victoria History of the County of Sussex IX*, (1937), p 200 I Nairn and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Sussex* (1965), p 531 C Aslett, *The Last Country Houses* (1982), pp 3-9 R A Fellows, Sir Reginald Blomfield (1985), pp 48-9 *Garden History* 17, no 2 (1989), pp 175-6 Dr R Pryce, *Heathfield Park: a private estate and a wealden town* (1996)

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Os 6" to 1 mile 1st edition published 1878 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1911 1932 edition OS 25" to 1 mile 1st edition published 1875 2nd edition published 1899 1931 edition

Archival items [all held in East Sussex Record Office] Sale particulars, 1791 (ACC 5281/962 Box 1) Francis Newbery's exercise book on plantations around the tower (ACC 5281/962 Box 1) H Repton, Red Book for Heathfield Park, 1794 (AMS 6310) Sale particulars, 1963

Description written: August 1997 Amended: July 1998 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: March 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.