

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

GUNTON PARK

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Name: GUNTON PARK

County: Norfolk

District: North Norfolk (District Authority)

Parish: Antingham

County: Norfolk

District: North Norfolk (District Authority)

Parish: Hanworth

County: Norfolk

District: North Norfolk (District Authority)

Parish: Suffield

County: Norfolk

District: North Norfolk (District Authority)

Parish: Thorpe Market

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.856521
Longitude: 1.3133686
National Grid Reference: TG 23168 33924
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000331
Date first listed: 18-Sep-1987

Details

A large country mansion with mid C19 gardens designed by William Teulon, a wooded pleasure ground of late C17/early C18 origins for which Charles Bridgeman prepared designs, set within an extensive C18 landscape park embellished in the early C19 partly following advice from Humphry Repton and extended in the mid C19 by William Sawrey Gilpin.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Gunton estate has been owned by the Harbord family since 1676. John Harbord was succeeded by his nephew Harbord Harbord and in 1742 it passed to his nephew William Morden, who took the name of Harbord after his uncle (CL 1997). Sir

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
GUNTON PARK

William commissioned Matthew Brettingham the Elder to build a new Palladian mansion on, or close to the site of the earlier house (Williamson 1998). An undated plan of c 1730, attributed by the Bodleian Library (where it is held) to Charles Bridgeman (d 1738), shows an area of ornamental woodland north of the house known as The Grove, whilst a further estate map of 1754 (NRO) gives an indication of the layout of the park at this time, extending to more than 150ha and including the two lakes. In 1769 Robert Adam (1728-92) was commissioned to replace the medieval church of Gunton beside the Hall with a chapel, designed to resemble a garden temple. Sir William Harbord died in 1770 and was succeeded by Sir Harbord Harbord Suffield. From c 1774 onwards he employed Samuel Wyatt to make alterations and additions to the Hall and to add the main Hanworth Lodge. Following a Road Order of 1776 the park to the west of the lakes was extended, although Faden's county map of 1797 shows few other changes to the landscape since 1754. Around 1800 a saw mill, intended as a picturesque embellishment to the park as well as a practical building, was constructed below the retaining dam on the southernmost lake, and a new bridge was added over the watercourse linking the two lakes in 1812. Between 1797 and 1835 when the next estate survey was made the park was extended to south and west and a continuous belt of perimeter trees planted, encompassing an extensive area of farmland to the north called North Park. Sir Harbord's eldest son William Assheton Harbord succeeded as second Lord Suffield in 1810, using Gunton only as a shooting box, although he did consult Humphry Repton (1752-1818) in 1810 who, by his own admission, only supplied suggestions for 'trifling improvements' at Gunton including a design for an ornamental greenhouse and a proposal for a large circular clump in the west park (Williamson 1998). William's younger brother Edward succeeded him in 1821 as third Lord Suffield and took more interest in the estate, completing the building of Gunton Tower in 1830 and commissioning William Sawrey Gilpin (1762-1843) to design the east park in the late 1820s and early 1830s, as well as adding several new lodges. The estate fortunes declined under Edward Vernon Harbord, fourth Baron (1835-53) but recovered under Charles, fifth Baron who held the title from 1853 to 1912. During this time the gardens were developed to national acclaim under the head gardener William Allen within a balustraded design drawn up by William Teulon in 1870. At its peak in the mid C19 the estate covered c 17,000 acres (c 7083ha) and ranked with the greatest estates in the county. In 1882 much of the Hall was gutted by fire and in 1895 a substantial amount of park and plantation timber was destroyed in a storm. The estate deteriorated in the course of the C20 and much of the park was put under the plough. In 1979, on the death of Doris Harbord, the estate was broken up and sold into divided ownership. The Hall and immediate grounds were purchased by Kit Martin and an ambitious restoration scheme for residential use undertaken: in the course of the 1990s the majority of the park has been returned to pasture and a tree-planting programme instigated. The site remains (2000) in divided private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Gunton Park lies on the west side of the main Norwich to Cromer road, c 9km south of Cromer. Although close to the north Norfolk coast it sits in a rural area dominated by farmland. Originally one of the most extensive landscape parks in Norfolk, Gunton is roughly rectangular in shape and the area within the boundary here registered covers c 475ha of parkland, woodland, and arable land. It is completely surrounded by late C18 and early C19 boundary plantations, now substantially altered in character by Forestry Commission replantings of conifer and poplar. The village of Suffield lies midway along the southern boundary, with Thorpe Market just to the north-east of the site. The ground is gently undulating with the Hall situated on slightly higher ground to the west of centre. Gunton Tower c 1.4km north-east of the Hall occupies one of the highest points in the park from where a fine view of the east park is offered. Other main views focus on the Hall from across the Saw Mill Lake and from the Hall south over the gently rolling parkland.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are numerous approaches and drives entering the park from each of its boundaries. The main entrance is c 800m to the south-west of the Hall. The late C18 Hanworth Lodge (listed grade II*) by Samuel and William Wyatt comprises an archway linking twin single-storey lodges of gault brick with stone dressings under lead roofs. The drive winds north-east through the park and over a single-span bridge (listed grade II), dated 1812, which crosses a causeway between the two lakes. It then divides, one drive running round to the north front and stables, the other passing the south front and giving access to the church. The drive continues through the park, past Dairy Farm, and leads north-east through the archway of Gunton Tower to exit at the mid C19 picturesque Thorpe Lodge, c 2km north-east of the Hall. From the south, the park is entered at the mid C19 Suffield Lodge, c 1.7km to the south-east of the Hall, from where the drive runs through Carr's

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
GUNTON PARK

Covert and Suffield Wood into the open park to join the main Hanworth/Thorpe drive south of Dairy Farm. The mid C19 flint, brick and pantile Elderton Lodge lies c 1km to the east of the Hall, its drive running due west to link with the main drives by Dairy Farm. The Old Lodges lie on the eastern boundary c 1.6km east-north-east of the Hall.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Gunton Hall (listed grade II*) is a substantial country mansion of gault brick and brick, with slate and lead roofs, built in an irregular plan for Sir William Harbord to a design by Matthew Brettingham the Elder in c 1742. The south, garden front is of five bays, in two storeys, with a nine-bay colonnade running out to projecting pavilions to east and west added by Samuel and William Wyatt in c 1785. The service wing range and stables to the north are also by the Wyatts, plans for alterations by Adam never having been executed. The Hall was derelict by the 1980s since when it has been completely restored and converted to individual private dwellings within the original outer fabric of the buildings, retaining the centre bay unrestored. The service wing, brewhouse yard, and game larder (all listed grade II) are built of gault brick under slate or pantile roofs, the octagonal free-standing game larder standing in the centre of the brewhouse yard. These are all now converted to private dwellings. The late C18 enclosed stables courtyard (listed grade II*) lies immediately to the north of the Hall and is square in plan with corner pavilions and entrance archways to the centre of the east and west ranges.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens at Gunton lie principally to the west and south of the Hall. On the south front is a formal garden of lawns, gravel walks, and clipped topiary, a restoration of the 1870 design by Teulon, all within the original balustraded terrace boundary wall (listed grade II). On the south-west boundary of the formal garden is a Victorian arboretum with a mount of much earlier, C18 origin (Carter 1987). To the east of the Hall the land has been divided into small individual private gardens. These share a boundary with a further area of C19 wooded pleasure ground, possibly by Gilpin, which is interrupted by the walled garden before extending as far as Dairy Farm. Within this wood, c 150m east of the Hall, stands the church of St Andrew (listed grade I), built in 1769 of gault brick with stone dressings in the style of a temple by Robert Adam for Sir William Harbord.

About 150m to the north of the Hall lies The Grove, a formal woodland pleasure garden of oak and sweet chestnut cut through with wide grass walks lined with lime and beech, focused on a central open circular grove. A c 1730 plan for the design of The Grove survives at the Bodleian Library, which the Library attributes to Charles Bridgeman. A mount and icehouse (listed grade II) survive from this, or possibly an earlier period (Debois 1990). The octagonal building shown on the Bodleian plan at the summit of the mount is no longer extant. Traces of three low terraces running widthways across the main approach to the mount survive but are located c 20m south-east of the position of a terraced feature shown on the plan; indeed recent reports have suggested that what survives are natural rather than man-made features (ibid). A late C20 swimming pool has been constructed in one segment of The Grove.

PARK Gunton Park is very extensive, lying to the east, south, and west of the Hall. By the mid C20 all was under arable production but since the mid 1980s there has been a progressive return of the pasture and associated tree planting south and east of the Hall, together with the reintroduction of several herds of deer. In addition, the park to the south of the Hall retains some mature oak, beech, and sweet chestnut which have been augmented with much restoration planting (1990s). The West Park and a small pocket south of the Hall remain under the plough.

The park contains two extensive mid C18 lakes connected by a canal, covering c 60 acres (25ha) in total. The partly silted-up (1999) Great Water lies c 1km to the north-west of the Hall and is managed in accordance with its SSSI nature reserve status. Saw Mill Pond lies c 1km to the south-west of the Hall and has been dredged and restored (late C20). On its south bank lies the early C19 timber and thatch saw mill (listed grade II*), a practical and aesthetic park building. Between here and Hanworth Lodge are the remains of an oak avenue which lined the old drive to the south front before the drives were realigned in 1812. The South Park, newly (1990s) reverted to parkland, includes an avenue of quincunx oaks planted in 1902 and aligned on the south front to extend the surviving remains of an oak avenue which dates from the mid C18.

The East Park includes the early C19 model Dairy Farm (listed grade II) and carpenter's yard designed by Samuel Wyatt and lying c 700m east of the Hall, and Park Farm c 1.1km south-east of the Hall. Both complexes have been restored and are used as private dwellings. Some 1.4km north-east of the Hall stands Gunton Tower (listed grade II*) on high ground in the corner of the open park, facing south. It comprises a three-storey central tower with flanking single-storey curved wings which straddles

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
GUNTON PARK

the north-east drive from Thorpe Lodge. The Tower was built as an observatory in 1830 for the second Lord Suffield and looks over the East Park which was added to the estate the same year, when it was embellished with tree clumps to a design by William Sawrey Gilpin. The East Park has recently (1990s) been returned to pasture and the Gilpin clumps restored.

Chapel Park to the north of the pleasure ground has also been returned to grass (1990s), and is backed along its northern boundary by Great Wood. Beyond this to the north, and outside the boundary of the site here registered, is North Park, an area of farmland traditionally retained under arable production. The entire park to north and south is surrounded and enclosed by late C18 and early C19 boundary plantations, famous in their time and frequently referred to in county histories and directories. **KITCHEN GARDEN** The walled kitchen garden (listed grade II) is built of red brick with stone dressings and is divided into three compartments, covering a total of c 6 acres (2.5ha). It lies c 200m to the east of the Hall and is contemporary with the building of the Brettingham house. Bothies on the outside of the north wall have been restored (late C20) and converted to private dwellings. Internally, the orchard in one compartment survives whilst the others are laid to grass with a small area of vegetable production. A range of C19 glasshouses survive on the south-facing side of the north wall and these have also recently (1990s) been restored.

REFERENCES

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Maps Plan of The Grove, nd (c 1730), attributed to Charles Bridgeman (Gough Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford) Estate survey of Gunton Park, 1754 (Norfolk Record Office) H A Biedermann, *Survey of the Gunton estate, 1784* (Norfolk Record Office) W Faden, *A new topographical map of the county of Norfolk, 1797* (Norfolk Record Office) A Bryant, *Map of the county of Norfolk, 1826* (Norfolk Record Office) James Wright, *Survey of the Gunton estate, 1835* (Suffield M38 C), (Norfolk Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1891 1950 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1905

Illustrations Humphry Repton, *St Andrew's Church, Gunton* [in Armstrong 1781] *Gunton Hall*, early C19 engraving (private collection) Pencil drawings of Gunton Park, 1822 (private collection) *Nursery, The Observatory Tower, Gunton, 1863* (private collection)

Archival items Design by Humphry Repton for a greenhouse at Gunton (National Trust Collection, Blickling Hall, Norfolk)

Description written: September 1999 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: February 2001

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.