

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Wotton House

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Name:	Wotton House
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Brill
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Kingswood
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Woodham
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Wotton Underwood
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.840137 Longitude: -1.0066883 National Grid Reference: SP 68532 16192 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000608 Date first listed: 30-Aug-1987 Date of most recent amendment: 26-Aug-2016 Statutory Address 1: Wotton Underwood, Aylesbury Vale, Buckinghamshire, HP18 0SB

Historique de la conservation

Although Wotton Underwood manor house is not mentioned until 1618, the Grenville family owned land at Wotton from the C12 throughout the Middle Ages, as knights and sheriffs of the county. Between 1704 and 1714 Richard Grenville, the sixth in a succession of fathers and sons of this name, built a house on a new site; there is currently no firm evidence regarding the site of the original manor house. The House was surrounded by formal garden enclosures, and Grenville seems to have laid out a landscape, with avenues radiating from the house, and from Windmill Hill to the north-west and The Junction to the south-west. George London and Henry Wise, from whom Grenville commissioned some work (correspondence in Huntington Library, cited in Phibbs, 1999), were probably employed on this enterprise. Grenville's son, also Richard (d 1727), consolidated the family fortunes in 1710 by marrying Hester Temple, the sister and heir of Viscount Cobham of Stowe, introducing to Wotton the influence of Cobham's gardening activities at Stowe, where James Gibbs worked from 1726, and Charles Bridgeman from 1734, with William Kent employed from the early 1730s and Lancelot Brown in the 1740s. William Pitt the Elder, first Earl of Chatham (1708-78), who married Richard and Hester's daughter Hester in 1754, is claimed to have helped plan 'the enchanting two miles of water scenery still to be seen' (Garden Hist 1996), possibly as early as the 1730s (J Phibbs pers comm,

1998). Wotton became the responsibility of Hester and Richard Grenville's second son George (d 1770), later Prime Minister, following the death of Lord Cobham in 1749, when Hester inherited his estates, with Stowe becoming the main residence of the Grenville family; it was for George Grenville that the works of the 1750s and 1760s were undertaken. An Enclosure Act of 1743 made possible the ambitious landscaping project that was to come. The village of sixty-five or more houses, largely lying along the line of the north avenue, was probably removed during the 1750s, some housing having already been cleared for the building of the house; the village is shown on a map of 1649 extending north from the church for circa 1km through the site of the house. There is evidence that Brown worked on landscaping the park at Wotton over a long period, probably in phases, though the nature of his involvement is not fully understood. Small payments made to Brown in the 1740s may relate to works at Wotton during that decade; thereafter, four payments of £100 each are recorded in 1750, and 1757-9, with further payments made during the 1760s. Brown's principal water engineer, Benjamin Read, also received payments during the 1750s and 1760s, as did John Williamson, the nurseryman who supplied many plants for Brown (Grenville account books in Huntingdon Library, cited in Phibbs, 1999). Sanderson Miller contributed designs for some of the garden buildings, and George Grenville's wife, Elizabeth Wyndham, was also involved in this aspect of the work. A description of the effect of the pleasure grounds at Wotton is provided by Thomas Whately's account in his 'Observations of Modern Gardening' (1771), and many of the features were recorded in the illustrations to Daniel Lysons's 'Magna Britannica' (1813). The landscape remained largely undisturbed after the mid-C18 except for some work undertaken in the park in the C19, including the addition of the Rustic Summer House and some islands in The Lake. The estate was sold by the Grenvilles circa 1929 – shortly after Stowe was sold – subsequently having several owners in succession until 1957, during which time nearly all of the standing timber was felled. The estate is currently (2016) in divided ownership, the majority of the designed park and pleasure grounds being in a single ownership, together with the house, which is a private residence; since 1957 the house and grounds have been the subject of an ongoing programme of restoration. A number of the garden buildings, originally constructed of wood, have been partially or wholly rebuilt, on surviving stone foundations.

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716-83) was England's leading and most influential landscape designer of the mid to late C18. His first employment as gardener was at his birthplace of Kirkharle (Northumberland), where his duties extended to laying out the grounds. In the late 1730s he began to work on improving parks elsewhere, and by 1741 his reputation was such that he was taken on as head gardener, clerk of works and paymaster for Lord Cobham at Stowe (Bucks). From 1745 he worked on successive major commissions, at first mainly in the midlands, then further afield, designing houses as well as transforming landscapes. In 1764 he was appointed Master Gardener at Hampton Court, and in 1765 as his practice expanded still further he took on various assistants, several of whom became well-known designers in their own right. At the peak of his success, in the 1760s and 1770s, he had an annual turnover of £15,000 (around £1M today), and overall worked on well over 200 estates. He died, suddenly, in 1783.

Developing on a much grander scale the idea of the naturalistic landscape promoted by William Kent (circa 1685-1748), Brown's signature features - 'Capability' referring to his ability to realize the capabilities, that is the inherent possibilities, of landscapes - included gently rolling parkland (separated from the house by a ha-ha), clumps of trees, a sinuous lake in the middle distance (typically contrived by damming a river or stream) and shelter belts around the park edge screening the world beyond. His ideas were generally conveyed through site visits, a large site plan and by staking out, and unlike Humphry Repton, his successor, he left no writings, theoretical or practical, which set out his vision or working methods. But it is clear that by large-scale yet subtle earth moving, drainage and water management and by planting, Brown was able to create landscapes that were pleasing to the eye, with often subtle yet very successfully controlled views both within the park, and outward from it. There is still much to learn, however, about his achievements, both in terms of individual sites and about his working methods. This List amendment was made in 2016, Lancelot Brown's tercentenary year.

Details

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING: Wotton House lies at the north-west corner of Wotton Underwood village, in the Vale of Aylesbury, 10km north of Thame and 13km west of Aylesbury. The 190ha site is bounded largely by agricultural land, with the Ludgershall lane on the west boundary and the lane to Kingswood running north close to the north boundary. The house is prominently set on a small rise, at the south end of a spine of land which runs north as marked by the north avenue. The surrounding land slopes gently down to the west into the park and east along the east avenue, and more sharply down along the south drive into the largely level village below. The setting is largely agricultural and wooded, with the registered late-C19 wooded landscape of Waddesdon Manor prominent on Lodge Hill 5km to the east, with surrounding hills, including Ashendon and Dorton Hills, visible in views to the south, and Wotton village lying 200-400m south-east of the house. Tittershall and Grove Woods, to the north and east respectively, seem to have been aligned with the landscape design.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES: the main approach is from the south, entering 1km south-west of the house, off the lane to Brill, past the two-storey rendered and white-painted Thame Lodge, along the lane to the village which runs straight initially, along the course of one of the early-C18 avenues (gone by 1997) aligned on the south-west corner of the house. The lane turns sharply east, off the line of the avenue, arriving at the village green, through which it runs north along a 150m lime avenue, with a view of the church to the east. The lane becomes the drive where it passes between a pair of early-C18 brick piers with stone ball finials (listed at Grade II), with a single-storey C19 brick lodge in Tudor Gothic style, extended to the west. From here it continues up a short rise to arrive at the east side of the forecourt east of the house. The forecourt is bounded on the west by the house, to the north by the Clock Pavilion – originally the kitchen – and to the south by the South Pavilion – originally the coach house – both pavilions being connected to the house by curving, ashlar quadrant wings with oval windows (the Pavilions are both listed at Grade I; the quadrant walls are also Grade I, as part of the house). The forecourt, laid out with a circular panel of lawn surrounded by a gravel turning circle, is closed by an early-C18 composition of a wrought-iron screen, gates and overthrow supported by stone gate piers and walls (listed at Grade I). It has been suggested that the ironwork was created by Thomas Robinson (Lister, 1957), but an attribution to Jean Montigny may be more likely (Saunders, 1999). A small brick gazebo with stone quoins stands in the garden of the Clock Pavilion, attached to the north end of the screen wall.

The south drive continues north past the forecourt, a spur west leading between further stone piers, past the Clock Pavilion, and into the gravelled north courtyard adjacent to the north front of the house. This court is bounded to the west by a C20 low brick wall with early-C18 wrought-iron railings and gate (listed at Grade II), moved from the west end of the fishpond 75m north of the house. The main drive continues in a straight line north, past Brewers Yard north of the Clock Pavilion, along the brick boundary wall of the yard, and arriving at a group of six piers 60m north of Brewers Yard (listed at Grade II). The four inner, brick piers are of the early C18, rebuilt in the C20, with C20 cast-iron railings and gates; the two outer, ashlar piers are early C19. Adjacent to the east is a single-storey brick lodge in similar style to that on the south drive, forming part of the old estate yard, where the remains of the former ice house are still visible. The piers and lodge flank the southern end of the north avenue, probably planted initially by London and Wise, and largely replanted in the C20. The north drive runs straight along the avenue, turning north-east 1km north of the house to lead straight to Middle Lodge and beyond to Ham Lodge on the A41. This drive is no longer in use.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING: Wotton House (1704-14, listed at Grade I) stands towards the southern edge of the park, a rectangular red-brick building with ashlar dressings. The architect is unknown, though names suggested include that of John Fitch (Colvin, 2010). Following a fire in 1820, the attic storey was altered and the interior remodelled by John (later Sir John) Soane. The house is joined by quadrant walls to two early-C18 brick service wings also with ashlar dressings, now converted to houses. The two main fronts of the house have panoramic views to the west and east respectively, through the park in both directions, the eye being drawn by broad straight avenues to west and east, aligned on the fronts, and beyond the park to the hills.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS: the gardens lie close to the house to the north, west and south. Adjacent to the west front, a large, open lawn is bounded 100m west of the house by an early or mid-C18 brick and rubblestone arcaded ha-ha, which has a central semicircular projection into the park and recessed flanking bays. The original walls were covered in the late C19 and early C20 by an ashlar wall, removed in places (late C20) to expose the earlier work. A rectangular pond (part of the early C18 scheme) lies 75m north of the house, surrounded by trees. South of the house, at a lower level, the rectangular,

brick-walled formal garden (early C18, listed Grade II) is thought to be part of the London and Wise design. It is reached from the house by an arcaded stone terrace and double staircase with wrought-iron balustrade, with an orangery set into the space under the west side of the terrace and a shell niche between the arms of the staircase (all early C18, and listed at Grade I as part of Wotton House). A pavilion, listed as part of the garden wall, and restored circa 1980, is set into the south wall of the garden, with Ionic stone piers at the front supporting the entrance arch, flanked by two further stone piers; the urns are early-C21 additions. The garden is largely laid to lawn with a gravel perimeter path and low, clipped hedges in a late C20 pattern. The pleasure grounds lie west of the house, encompassing two roughly circular paddocks with a smaller paddock to the south, and a string of water features enclosed by ornamental woodland underplanted with flowering shrubs in places and fringed by parkland. This is the setting for walks and rides, with various buildings, features and views as incidents along their course, believed to have been developed by Lancelot Brown, with the involvement of William Pitt, first Earl of Chatham, during the 1750s and 1760s, some work possibly being begun in the 1740s.

The large, irregularly shaped Lake lies at the north end of the pleasure grounds; the eastern half of The Lake appears to have been dug by circa 1750, being extended to its present size in the 1760s. The Lake contains a number of islands, the largest of which is Grotto Island towards the southern end, on which stands the Grotto (originally constructed circa 1767, with late-C19 or early-C20 alterations, largely reconstructed in the 1990s, and listed at Grade II). In the north-east corner of The Lake is the Battery, a later-C19 gun emplacement constructed for the 1st Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, for mock naval battles. South of Grotto Island, The Lake narrows to run south as a curving canal, crossed by a wooden Palladian bridge (late-C20 reconstruction, now known to differ significantly from the mid-C18 original). At the south end is the stone-faced Fivearch Bridge (late 1750s, listed at Grade II), modelled on Kent's Shell Bridge at Stowe, which disguises a dam with an overflow from the canal. Below the bridge, on the east side, the dam has matching stone facing with blind arches flanking the central overflow arch. The water flows into The Warrells, a symmetrical lake naturalised – by Brown, in the 1750s – at its west corners into narrow channels, with Fivearch Bridge terminating the south-west corner and the north-west corner terminated by China Island. Two Tuscan Pavilions (1750s, repaired and largely reconstructed in the 1980s, listed Grade II) stand one at either corner of the east end, each taking the form of a small temple with a pedimented wooden portico at either end. They are set at a slight angle to the wide west avenue along the main axis of the house, so that the northernmost looks south-west towards Fivearch Bridge and the southernmost looks north-west towards China Island, whilst standing above a small cascade down into The River to the east. China Island was formerly the site of a Chinese Tea House, brought circa 1752 from Stowe, where it stands at present (2016). The River, lying below The Warrells, terminates at the south-east corner of the pleasure grounds where the water is channelled into a small stream which runs out into farmland.

The main circuit walk leads north from the house along the east edge of the largest of the three paddocks ('Great Ground'), along a raised stock terrace backed by woodland, designed for viewing livestock in the context of the landscape beyond. The walk leads to the Turkey Building, a wooden garden pavilion in oriental style, open to the west (1750s, but much rebuilt, most recently circa 2000, and listed at Grade II), lying circa 600m north of the House. From here both short and long views open to the west and south-west over the park and The Lake towards the distant Muswell Hill with its prominent clump of trees. The path curves north to Windmill Hill, a mound planted with a circle of mature yew trees, which was the site of a windmill before the C18. It offers views along former avenues to the north and north-east (along the north drive), and south-east; the longest of these views, that to the south-west, across The Lake, and along the site of the former early-C18 avenue through woodland to The Junction at the south-west corner of the park, is currently (2016) being opened up. The path runs west to The Rotunda, a pavilion in the form of a circular temple with ten columns and a shallow domed roof (1750s, largely rebuilt circa 1990; listed at Grade II), which stands above the north edge of The Lake. From here there are views south across The Lake, and south-east back towards the Turkey Building. The path continues around the northern tip of The Lake, returning south along the western edge past the high-curved, or crescent, wooden bridge; a 1990s reconstruction of a circa 1770 original, the bridge was intended to conceal the termination of the water, a characteristic device of Brown's. From the bridge there is a view south towards the main front of the Grotto. At the water's edge to the south is the Statue of Neptune, thought originally to have formed part of a group, placed at some time between 1771 and 1789; the surviving fragment (listed at Grade II) appears to have been part

of a composition representing a boy on a dolphin, perhaps Arion or Palaemon. Continuing south along The Lake's western edge, past the wooden Rustic Summer House (probably early C19, though much rebuilt; listed at Grade II), several mounds occur close to the path which may have had small ornamental features on them or may have been viewing points. South-west of Grotto Island stands the Octagon (rebuilt 1990s), an open, octagonal pavilion which has a gravel path running through it from north to south and a view through the tree belt on the south-east side of The Lake to the house. The path continues to curve south along the west bank of the canal, with a parallel path on the east bank linked by the Palladian Bridge and Fivearch Bridge, and formerly by a boat kept in the boathouse (disappeared mid/late C20) on the east bank at the south end of The Lake. The walk on the east bank is also reached from a path to the north-east, which spurs off the main path east of the two larger paddocks, giving more direct access from the House to the east bank of The Lake. The path runs through the narrow belt which divides the two main paddocks, associated views to north and south roughly marking the mid-way point. The paths flanking the canal join at Fivearch Bridge, continuing east as one path along the south bank of The Warrells, passing a boathouse, probably C18, built of brick and stone beneath a mound; no man-made structures are visible from this rustic setting. The path reaches the southern Tuscan Pavilion, with a spur north to its northern companion. From here the path continues east along the south bank of The River, returning north along the top of the ha-ha and so back to the lawn below the west front of the house.

PARK: areas of parkland, largely pasture, fringe the garden and pleasure grounds. East of the house the park extends for 1.3km; across this runs the site of the east avenue (west end replanted late C20), aligned on the east front, with a sunk fence running north/south circa 100m east of the House. West of the house is the west avenue (replanted with lime in the late C20), a double avenue running west from the ha-ha on the west lawn to The Warrells (replanted 2004-6), and lying in an area of parkland planted with several ornamental specimen trees which links the house with the pleasure grounds. South-west of the pleasure grounds lies the park, an area of parkland largely surrounded by woodland, visible in the view west from the upper storeys of the house. A long, narrow view eastwards to the west front of the house occurs at the prominent curve in the road adjacent to the gap in the woodland at the west edge of the park.

KITCHEN GARDEN: the kitchen garden lies to the south of the walled formal garden on the south front of the house, surrounded by red-brick walls and laid to lawn, with a narrow compartment at the south end. The north wall is shared with the walled garden and incorporates the rear of the restored early-C18 alcove. A series of ponds, formerly running through the kitchen garden from north to south, and used for watering, is shown on maps between 1789 and 1920; these are still sometimes visible as parchmarks. A number of features have been introduced to this area in the early C21, including a tennis court, a small pool house and, in the south-west corner, an enclosed sculpture garden; a small brick building has been constructed in the south-east corner, replacing a lean-to on the same site.

Summary

The historic designed landscape surrounding an early-C18 country house, with a contemporary layout, probably by George London and Henry Wise, developed into an extensive mid-C18 park for George Grenville by Lancelot Brown; William Pitt, later first Earl of Chatham, is credited with significant input with regard to the design.

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.

Reasons for Designation

The Wotton House landscape is registered at Grade I for the following principal reasons:

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* Date and rarity: as an outstanding example of a C18 country house landscape, the with two major phases combining to create a design of exceptional interest; * Designers: the early-C18 phase is believed to be the work of George London and Henry Wise; Lancelot Brown was employed on the mid-C18 landscape design, in which William Pitt the Elder is known to have played a part, whilst Sanderson Miller contributed to the design of some garden buildings; * Historical association: the landscape lies at the heart of a network of cultural, political and design influences, being created for the Grenvilles, a significant family in later C18 politics, through whom the estate is linked with nearby Stowe, where Brown also worked; * Design and engineering: the mid-C18 landscaping demonstrates the invention and technical expertise for which Brown was known, particularly in the complex management of water, and the structure of planned views; * Survival: the landscape has survived largely undisturbed since the mid-C18; * Documentation: our understanding of the landscape is enriched by documentary sources, including evidence regarding its creation, and later accounts and depictions; * Group value: exceptionally strong group value with Wotton House and its pavilions gates and screen listed at Grade I, with other associated Grade-II structures; the pleasure grounds contain a number of listed garden buildings and features, which form part of the historic design.

Bibliographie