

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

EXTON PARK

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Name:	EXTON PARK
District:	Rutland (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Cottesmore
District:	Rutland (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Exton and Horn
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.699914 Longitude: -0.62221447 National Grid Reference: SK 93201 12250 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000960 Date first listed: 27-Feb-1986

Details

Gardens and an extensive park, the latter with medieval origins and with probably later C17 as well as late C18 and C19 features and buildings, associated with a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the Middle Ages the manor of Exton belonged to the de Brus family. It remained with their descendants, the Culpepers and Haringtons, until 1613 when it was sold by John, second Baron Harington, to Sir Baptist Hicks, merchant and money lender. On his death in 1629 Exton passed to his elder daughter Juliana, wife of Sir Edward Noel, Lord Noel of Ridlington, who was the son of Mabel Harington. It then passed from father to son: to Baptist Noel, third Viscount Campden; Edward Noel, created Earl of Gainsborough in 1682; and Wriothesley Baptist, second Earl (d 1690). The last-mentioned left no son, and his estates passed to his cousin Baptist Noel, and since that date the descent has followed the earldom of Gainsborough. Exton remains (1998) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Exton Park stands in its grounds west of Exton village. This lies 7km east of Oakham, on local roads north of the A606 from Oakham to Stamford. The east, south and west sides of what is here termed the inner park are bounded by roads, the last extending north to bound the whole of the west side of the landscape. Otherwise the park boundary follows field edges, although its north-east extremity, Horn Lane Spinney, abuts the A1 'Great North Road'. The area here registered is c 575ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The house is today approached off the road down the west side of the park, along a drive which passes the north side of the kitchen gardens before swinging south-east to approach the forecourt of the west side of Exton. The main formal approach is from the south-west, via the 1.5km long, straight, Barnsdale Avenue, and a final, curving, 750m long approach drive past the east end of the fishponds 200m west of the house. At the north end of the Barnsdale Avenue is a pair of ashlar lodges (listed grade II) of c 1850 in the Jacobean style, possibly by Henry Roberts.

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Another drive, put in for a coming of age in 1851 but not used within living memory, loops south and west of the parish church from gates at the south-west end of Exton village before joining the last-mentioned drive at the Fish Pond dam. No 2 Lodge (listed grade II), which stands next to the gates, is also an ashlar building of 1867 in the Jacobean style; C A Buckler may have provided the design. Running north-east from the lodge, up the west side of the village street, is a 4m high and 300m long section of park wall (listed grade II).

Longer drives and tracks through the park approach the house from the north-west, north and north-east.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Exton Park was built around a pre-existing building in 1811 to a design by John Linnell Bond (d 1837). The centre of the building was rebuilt 1851-2 by Henry Roberts (d 1876), while in 1868-9 a Roman Catholic chapel was added to its east side by C A Buckler (d 1905). Adjoining the north-east corner of the house is a former dairy (listed grade II), an octagonal, ashlar structure with a thatched conical roof, probably of the late C18.

On the north side of the house is a late C18 stable block (listed grade II), of limestone ashlar on a limestone rubble plinth. This is ranged around three sides of a court, open to the south, in the middle of which is a circular riding school (listed grade II), possibly early C19.

The ruins of the Old Hall (listed grade II; scheduled ancient monument) stand 180m south of Exton Park. The oldest portion probably dates from c 1600, and in the early C17 it was enlarged and provided with a frontage of c 50m. This building was nearly destroyed by fire in 1810, when the present house was constructed to serve as what was apparently seen as a temporary replacement during repairs. Another fire, in 1915, finally brought an end to the use of the Old Hall.

Some 100m south-west of the Old Hall is the large parish church of St Peter and Paul (listed grade I), within which is an especially notable group of monuments to the Haringtons and their descendants, including the Noels, by Grinling Gibbons and Nollekens. It has a spire, and forms one of the key elements of the view from the main, south front of the Hall.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the south of the house and chapel is a 120m long terrace. South of that are extensive formal, C19, lawns with steps down to a central path. About 1870 large parterre beds or 'geometrical flower gardens' (J Horticulture and Cottage Gardener 1872, 312) were laid out either side of the path to a design by Henry Brandling of Irton, but these no longer survive. Down the east side of the lawn is a balustraded wall, overlooking the Pool Garden with its small swimming pool and cottage-style changing room. Leading south-east from that are pools, adapted from formal canals shown in a view of Exton of c 1700 (private collection), set among a shrubbery with specimen trees, a continuation of the pinetum north, west and east of the house.

The Old Hall ruins are largely screened from the house by planting. They stand on an extensive informal lawn with mature specimen trees including a cedar. Some 75m south-east of the ruins is an 80m square, yew-hedged enclosure with early C20 tea house and rose garden and a hard tennis court. South-east of this are grass terraces, elements of the formal gardens shown on the c 1700 view of Exton.

This view and others of the earlier C18 show geometrically arranged gardens with terraces, wilderness and canals, a scheme carried on in the park with rides cut through woodland. This landscape, especially around the house, was replaced by an informal 'Brownian' one in the C18, although how and when this took place is unclear. Lady Elizabeth Noel (d 1801) was a botanist and botanical artist; her brother, Henry, sixth Earl of Gainsborough, became an Honorary Member of the Linnaean Society in 1788. There was a hothouse at Exton by the 1760s and before the end of the century a botanic garden and herbarium.

PARK The house lies in the south-westernmost section of an extensive park, 4km from east to west and 1.8km from north to south. The park falls naturally into two parts: firstly an inner park south of a line roughly between the house and the kitchen garden, at least in the later C19 considered as pleasure grounds, and secondly the extensive and more open parkland to its north and east.

The inner park is shielded to west and south from the world beyond by plantation belts. Towards its north side are two fishponds which run between the surrounds of the house and the south side of the kitchen garden. An octagonal, coursed rubble-stone dovecote (listed grade II), built to a design by William Legg of Stamford (d 1806) in 1792-3 stands midway along the south bank of the more easterly pond. There is a projecting loggia around its four southerly sides, beneath which are cattle troughs. Although built to be seen from the Old Hall, this nevertheless forms the main focus of the view from the west side of the present

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house. Along the north side of the ponds is a walk through ornamental planting. Many of the trees were put in c 1870, and in 1872 the area was spoken of as a pinetum. This planting, incorporating older trees, continues north and east of the house.

The ground falls slightly to the east but is generally level, open, parkland with scattered trees. Apart from the shelter belt down the western boundary of the park there are two main areas of woodland: Cottesmore Wood and Westland Wood, which occupy the north-west corner of the park, and Tunneley Wood, which effectively marks its centre. The last (and to a lesser extent Westland Wood) is cut through with radiating and concentric rides including a main vista aligned on the Old Hall, an arrangement shown on a c 1730 view of Exton (Badeslade and Rocque 1739). There is also an area of woodland around the north and west banks of the Y-plan Fish Pond in the east part of the park; this has been planted since 1739.

At the north end of that pond is Fort Henry House, a large dwelling converted in 1972 from three gothick cottages of c 1800 with a crenellated south wall. It adjoins a boathouse. On the wooded west bank of the pond stands Fort Henry (listed grade II*). This, named after the Earl of Gainsborough, is a small pleasure house or folly of c 1785-90 by William Legg. It is an ashlar building with a central block of three bays with flanking pavilions, all with crenellated parapet and gothick details as have the retaining walls to its terrace. It occupies the site of a cottage-like building shown on the view of c 1739, and replaced a boathouse built in 1741 by George Portwood (d 1742) of Stamford. In the centre of the wood, at the top of a slope 100m west of Fort Henry, is the small remaining section of the arcaded Bark Temple (listed grade II), built in 1846 for a family celebration and in 1872 described as a band house. The south end of the Fish Pond is retained by a dam, on which stand the remains of an arch, part of a cascade and other works constructed in the 1750s and 1760s. To the south is a smaller, 200m long, pond. Both ponds were present by c 1739. Immediately south-east of the smaller pool are the earthwork remains of the medieval village of Horn (scheduled ancient monument).

There was a deer park at Exton by 1185, and its boundary with Burley park was in dispute early in the next century. 'Todingley Park', recorded in the C15, may have been centred on Tunneley Wood. About 1630 Viscount Camden was enlarging the park. By 1739, when a view of the park was published (Badeslade and Rocque), the principal modern boundaries seem to have been established. That view shows the geometric scheme of rides cut through Tunneley Wood to be but a part of a wider scheme of rides incorporating the other woods in the park to its north and north-west. A visitor in 1829 was unimpressed with the park, which he thought 'extensive, but dreary' (Gardeners' Magazine 1829).

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled kitchen garden lies 600m north-west of the house, close to the west boundary of the park and on the north bank of, and open to, the most westerly of the fishponds in the chain which run south-eastwards to the Pool Garden. The garden is roughly square and 150m from east to west by 100m from north to south, and there is an early C19, ironstone, pair of gardeners' houses at the south-west corner. The glass within the garden is modern. An avenue of Wellingtonia approaches an entrance in the east garden wall, which here is stone-faced. There are slips with sheds along the west and north sides of the garden. An enthusiastic description of the kitchen garden was published in 1872 (J Horticulture and Cottage Gardener, 313-14). Immediately south-west of the walled garden are C19 kennels.

In c 1700 the kitchen gardens lay in the vicinity of the present hall.

REFERENCES T Badeslade and J Rocque, *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1739), pls 59-62 *Gardeners' Magazine* 5, (1829), pp 673-4 *J Horticulture and Cottage Gardener*, (11 April 1872), pp 311-15; (18 April 1872), pp 330-2 *The Victoria History of the County of Rutland* 2, (1935), pp 127-9 B Jones, *Follies & Grottoes* (1974), pp 18-20 M Binney and A Hills, *Elysian Gardens* (1979), p 47 L Lambton, *Beastly Buildings* (1985), pp 82-3 *Rutland Record* 13, (1993), pp 118-24 L Cantor and A Squires, *The Historic Parks and Gardens of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1997), p 52 J Clark, 'Extons and the Noels', *Rutland Record* (forthcoming) *Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: Rutland sheet 5 SE*, 1st edition published 1889 *Rutland sheet 5 SE*, 2nd edition published 1905 *Rutland sheet 5 SE*, 1931 edition *Rutland sheet 6 NW*, 1st edition published 1889 *Rutland sheet 6 NW*, 2nd edition published 1905 *Rutland sheet 6 NW*, 1949-50 edition *Rutland sheet 6 SW*, 1st edition published 1889 *Rutland sheet 6 SW*, 2nd edition published 1904 *Rutland sheet 6 NW*, 1950 edition *OS 25" to 1 mile: Rutland sheet 5.12*, 1st edition published 1885

Archival items *View of Exton c 1700* (private collection)

Description written: June 1998 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: July 1999

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.