

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

DROPMORE

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	DROPMORE
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Burnham
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Hedsor
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Taplow
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.559824 Longitude: -0.66931503 National Grid Reference: SU 92343 85388 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000599 Date first listed: 30-Aug-1987

Details

A late C18/early C19 landscape park, ornamental woodland and a formal garden surrounding a late C18 country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Lord Grenville, Prime Minister to George III, began work on the Dropmore estate in 1792, having bought 15ha of land complete with a small labourer's cottage, which he demolished, then employing Samuel Wyatt to build the south range of the present house. Grenville wrote to his future wife, Anne Pitt, 'I think you will be pleased with the situation when you see it, though I know Lord Camelford will think it a great deal too exposed. I do not think that a great objection, being compensated, as it is, by the advantage of air and prospect' (CL 1956). Grenville began landscaping Dropmore immediately after he built the house, and his improvements are said to have included the removal of a hill that blocked the view of Windsor Castle 12km to the south-east (ibid). He was a keen botanist, and planted many trees, some supplied by his brother Lord Buckingham from Stowe (qv), including, in the 1820s, a 25ha pinetum west of the house, around the lake. Grenville died in 1834, leaving his widow, also a keen botanist, who continued to develop the estate and gardens, constructing the alcove by the lake, and probably the Italianate features in the walled garden. Following Lady Grenville's death in 1864, aged ninety-one, the estate was inherited by the Fortescue family, and bought in 1943 by Lord Kemsley. Following its occupation by the Army during the Second World War, and consequent deterioration of the house and grounds, the Kemsleys restored the estate and planted many more trees to complement the existing planting. The majority of the house burnt down in 1990, and has not been rebuilt, although there are plans to do so (1997). Much of the garden has subsequently been vandalised and many structures have been stolen. The site remains (1997) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Dropmore lies in the Chiltern Hills, 4km south of Beaconsfield and 3km north of Burnham. The 270ha site is bounded by lanes: to the west Cliveden Road, to the north Heathfield Road, to the east Dropmore Road, and to the south Nashdom Lane, the land generally sloping down to the south-east, with the house near the top of a hillside overlooking Slough and Windsor in the distance to the south-east. The setting is largely agricultural and woodland, with the designed landscapes of Cliveden (qv), Hedsor House and Nashdom (qv) adjacent, Hall Barn (qv) 1km to the north, and Burnham Beeches woodland 1km to the east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance, off Heathfield Road, 250m north-west of the house, enters through iron gates, following the drive through woodland underplanted with rhododendrons, crossing the Cedar Drive, and curving south-east to a gravel carriage sweep by the north front of the house. Several other entrances formerly gave access from the Cliveden Road, Nashdom Lane and Dropmore Road, including that marked by stone gate piers and iron gates at the north-east corner of the estate, to the north of which stands Oak Lodge, built in the mid C19 and clad largely with Renaissance wooden panels. The drives leading from these entrances, now mostly overgrown or lost, led through the woodland and park to converge north of the house.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Dropmore house (listed grade I), built for Lord Grenville by Samuel Wyatt 1792-5, with alterations in 1806-9 by C H Tatham, lies towards the north end of the site. Of two storeys, it is built in Classical style of rendered and colourwashed cement, with a central single-storey portico on the north, entrance front, and on the south, garden front three bays with shallow domed roofs. The ground floor garden front supports a wooden trellis-work pergola at the west end, with arched openings in front of each window; it used to support an enclosed verandah in similar style at the east end (now (1997) gone). The house was seriously damaged when burnt out in 1990, leaving only the west portion standing. Next to the west elevation of the house stands a modern house on the east side of a walled service court, with, on the south wall of the court, a small lean-to building with an overhanging slate roof, supported on decorative iron trellis work pillars. The severe, early C19 red-brick stable court closes the west end of the service court, with two low towers flanking brick gate piers separating the two courts, the main entrance from the rear drive entering through a tall arch on the north side.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens lie south and west of the house. South of the garden front an open, largely level lawn is bounded by rhododendron clumps in front of woodland to the south-west and east, with a long view south-east towards Windsor Castle 12km away. The base of a semicircular stone seat (early C20, listed grade II) lies at the south-west corner of the house (stone structure stolen 1997).

The formal gardens lie west of the house, divided into two main areas, to the north and south, by an angled brick wall running from west to east which supports a c 200m long pergola on its south side and bothies on the north. The south garden, laid out with formal gravel paths dividing it into rectangular sections of lawn, contained various stone features, now stolen (1997). One path runs parallel with, and adjacent to, the south side of the wooden pergola (C19, listed grade II), the main feature in this garden, which is punctuated by the wire aviary (early to mid C19, listed grade I) which lies next to the wall, 50m west of the house. The east end of the pergola is constructed of painted wooden trellis work, continuing the arched pattern begun against the garden front of the house, punctuated by two brick and slate-roofed garden lodges with Doric columns, entablature and pediment all applied in wood. The east end of this c 50m long section of the pergola is marked by a low wrought-iron fence and gate dividing the south garden and the south lawn, while at the west end of the section there stands the aviary. This is a cast-iron cage, with ceramic tiles imported from China around the base, these also forming the uprights and frieze, with three projections with cupolas, the central of which is higher than the other two. West of the aviary, running along the remainder of the wall for c 150m, are the remains of the west section of the pergola. In different style to that east of the aviary, the upper structure is largely lost except for three pavilions, two in the central section and one marking the west end and the entrance to the Pinetum. At the east end of the south garden lies the circular Grotto (C19, listed grade II), built of large blocks of broken concrete with an entrance arch of large stones, possibly material from the old London Bridge, with a small central pond, now much overgrown. Close to this is the Dog's Tomb (C19, listed grade II), a carved stone sarcophagus with decoration and an inscription, containing the remains of Lord Grenville's dog Tippo.

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North of the garden wall, the walled, or Italian, garden, runs parallel with the south garden, divided from north to south by a central path aligned with a pedimented archway in the garden wall giving access from the south garden. This path is flanked by yew hedges, with the remains of stone balustrade at the north and south ends, aligned on a ruinous raised stepped feature at the north end, which had a small pool within it (vandalised 1997). This stepped feature lies at the centre of the broad straight path running along the north side of the Italian garden on a terrace above the rest of the garden, with a three-bay Italianate loggia at the east end, and at the west end the entrance to the Pinetum (terraces, gates, balustrade and loggia C19, listed grade II). The walled garden is largely laid to lawn, with an informal oval pond dominating the eastern half; much of its former ornamental stonework is missing. This area appears to have been the kitchen garden in the C19, surrounded by the ornamental structures and borders. Lady Grenville's gardens and conservatories were noted for their collection of exotics. When John Loudon visited her in 1827 her flower garden outside the library was famous, consisting of a geometric parterre, each bed planted with a separate strong colour achieved by massed planting with a succession of species (Jacques 1983). Loudon praised Dropmore where Philip Frost, the innovative head gardener of the 1830s and 1840s, seemed to have best demonstrated 'the advantage of placing beauty in masses' (Gardener's Magazine 1827).

PARK The park lies south of the house, on lower ground, and retains some clumps and belts of trees, bounded to the west and north by woodland. It contains a golf course (late C20), with a new drive c 1km south-east of the house to give access to the club house within the park.

OTHER LAND The remainder of the site consists of ornamental woodland with rides and drives through it. The Pinetum lies west of the house, begun in the 1820s (CL 1956) by Lord Grenville and an early example of the genre. Now much overgrown, it contains an irregularly shaped lake 400m west of the house, and a smaller pond close to its north-west edge. Lord Grenville was a member of the Horticultural Society, with immediate access to the seeds being collected by David Douglas, and the Dropmore conifers were famed throughout the C19 for their exotic origins, size and beauty of form. A stone alcove (listed grade II) from the old London Bridge was rebuilt close to the lake by Lady Grenville c 1839. Cedar Avenue runs parallel with the north-west boundary, retaining many of the original C19 cedars, and its central grass path in places. The woodland north and west of the house is underplanted with shrubs, particularly rhododendrons, many of which, like the exotic conifers, were planted in the 1830s by Philip Frost in order to compliment the native woodland.

REFERENCES

C Holme, *The Gardens of England (The Studio)* (1907-8), pp 46-8 *Country Life*, 120 (11 October 1956), pp 772-5; (18 October 1956), pp 834-7; 140 (4 August 1966), p 263 D Jacques, *Georgian Gardens* (1983), pp 192-3 J Morgan and A Richards, *A Paradise out of a Common Field* (1990), pp 166-7 J C Loudon, *In Search of English Gardens* (1990), pp 95-6 N Pevsner and E Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (1994), pp 289-91

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1882 2nd edition published 1914 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881(2 2nd edition published 1899

Description written: 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: June 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.