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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BROCKHALL PARK

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Name: BROCKHALL PARK

District: West Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Brockhall

District: West Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Norton

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.258168
Longitude: -1.0772843
National Grid Reference: SP 63078 62623
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001383
Date first listed: 03-Apr-1998

Details

A landscaped park of c 1800, laid out, probably with the advice of John Webb, to replace formal gardens, the creation of which in the 1720s is well documented.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor at Brockhall was purchased from Robert Tirwhit in 1581/2, by Laurence Eyton of Norton. His son Edward, who rebuilt the Hall, inherited in 1607. The estate was purchased in 1625 by Thomas Thornton and remained in that family until the later C20. Extensive garden works were undertaken in the 1720s and 1730s by Thomas Thornton III (d 1783), followed in the 1740s by extensive alterations to the Hall. Further alterations to the Hall were made c 1800 by Thomas Reeve Thornton (d 1862), who inherited in 1790. He later landscaped the grounds, probably with advice from John Webb. In 1998 there were plans for subdivision of the Hall and stables into smaller residential units.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Brockhall Park lies west of the village of Brockhall and south of the largely deserted settlement of Muscott, 12.5km north-west of Northampton. The Hall stands towards the top of the east side of the valley of the River Nene, the site offering views out west across the valley over the parkland which falls quite steeply from the south-west front. The park shares its valley with the M1 motorway which forms the boundary of the registered area (historically the park extended further west). It causes significant visual, but more so audible, intrusion. Elsewhere the 54ha site adjoins the neighbouring fields.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Since the mid C20, with the coming of the motorway, the main approach has been that from the south, the drive branching westwards off the public road into the south end of the village, at a point 270m south-east of the Hall. From here it leads along the west side of the wooded strip which lies between it and the site boundary, to approach the tarmacked area below the south-east front. The landscaping works of the first years of the C19 presented the principal approach as the drive which led east off Watling Street, which runs north/south roughly parallel with the western edge of the

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park and 600m from it. Its line is still clearly visible although the surface is now turfed. From the public road the drive leads down the west side of the valley, crossing the canal and railway which post-date it by a couple of decades, then crossing, by a footbridge, the motorway, and entering the park via a bridge across the river. Once in the park, the drive leads east to an ironstone ashlar bridge (listed grade II) over the lake, then turns sharply to run south-eastwards, traversing up the valley side before taking a sharp curve back to an easterly course which directs it, through an iron gate, to the hard standing below the entrance (south-east) front of the Hall.

Prior to the changes of c 1800, the Hall was approached by an axial tree-lined drive, orientated on the south-east facade, which branched off the old road to Dial House, 200m south of the Hall, leading across the well-treed Home Close to arrive at the turning circle which then lay between flanking buildings (no longer standing, 1999), below the south-east front (drawing of 1721 by Peter Tillemans). A map of 1672 (Muscott) shows this approach leading to a sequence of two enclosed courts before the Hall. **PRINCIPAL BUILDING** The Hall (listed grade II*) stands immediately to the south-west of the parish church on the west side of the village of Brockhall. Built c 1610(20 by Edward Eyton, it was extensively reworked in the 1740s, probably by William Smith of Warwick (d 1747), and again around 1800 when Thomas Reeve Thornton acted as his own architect. From the Hall the crenellated wall (c 1800) of the churchyard curves eastwards; a gateway (listed grade II) connects churchyard and Hall grounds. A stable block of 1799 (listed grade II) stands at the east end of this wall.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the west of the Hall lies a terrace, and below, a levelled lawn divided from the park beyond by a stone-faced ha-ha.

From the terrace, a walk leads north into the pleasure grounds, leading down the west side of the Hall lawns which are inset with a small sunken garden. On the village side of this is an enclosed area screened from the gardens by a stone wall and mature yews, within which is a swimming pool of late C20 date set in an area of raised paving.

The walk continues north along the west side of a narrow wooded strip of ornamental grounds, separated from the park to the west by iron fencing. It leads to the south-east corner of the walled kitchen garden, here dividing such that paths encircle the kitchen garden before rejoining in the wooded area to its western side. The walk then continues west to the western drive which it meets a little to the east of the ironstone bridge over the lake.

PARK The rectangular park, planted with a generous scattering of parkland timber, mostly oak, stretches some 300m up the north-east valley side, lying parallel to the river which formerly formed the c 1.3km long western boundary, now in part marked by the motorway. Parallel to the southern boundary, c 350m into the park, runs a pronounced hollow-way, this having been the public road to Dial House, and the boundary of the park, until closed in the C19 (post 1827, Bryant) when the park was extended to its current limits. To the west of the Hall, beyond the formal lawn, the sloping ground is broken by a series of earthworks; elsewhere in the park is ridge and furrow from the open fields of the medieval village of Brockhall, inclosed c 1610.

Extensive accounts of Thomas Thornton III (1698-1783) record work in the grounds between 1725 and 1731 including tree felling, levelling ground, building walls, constructing ponds and a canal, planting of the elm avenue, creating a parterre, and laying out of walks (NRO: TH2034). It is presumably those gardens which are depicted on the estate map of 1787. This shows a rectangular garden enclosure below the line of the present ha-ha west of the Hall with, to the north and south, further square enclosures: that to the north perhaps a kitchen garden, that to the south associated with the service buildings on the west side of the entrance front.

Discernable today on the shoulder of the hillside below the Hall are the depressions remaining from a set of ponds which formed part of the early C18 landscaping. In line with the south-west front of the Hall are the archaeological remains of a T-shaped pond; south of this lay a slightly larger, rectangular pond, with the third in the sequence being a longer, narrow, curving canal. The T-shaped pond lay on the main axis of the garden layout on this front, a double avenue, the Elm Walk (now gone, 1999) taking the line through from the south-west garden, across the pond, down the hillside, and extending on the far side of the Pond Pool into the park beyond.

The northern end of the park is partially divided off from the larger area to the south by the line of the pleasure grounds walk, along with its strip of light woodland which joins the ironstone bridge and the kitchen garden, the line continuing on from here to pick up the parish boundary along Gazewell Spinney. This planting marked the northern limit of the park when it was formed

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from Bell Close, Upper and Nether Pond Leas and Home Close, sometime after 1672 (Muscott) but before 1779 (Eayre) and presumably in the 1720s when much work was being done in the grounds. It remained the extent of the imparked area until after 1803, Bryant's map of the county of 1827 suggesting that the extension had either by then been made or was under consideration. A main feature of the park, although now (1999) much silted, is the long narrow lake which lies parallel to, and c 150m to the east of, the river, extending the length of the park from the ironstone bridge at its head to its tip at the southern limits of the imparked area. It was created as part of the c 1800 landscaping from two rectangular ponds, the Mill Pond to the north and Pond Pool to the south. These ponds, developed from the mill leat and mill ponds present by the mid C17 (Muscott, 1672), had formed a major feature of the early C18 landscape. With the extension of the park southwards once the road to Dial House had been closed, an additional short tail was added to the lake to give it its final form. The 1926 edition of the 6" OS map marks two boathouses, one south-west of the Hall on the eastern bank of the lake, the other to the south of this on the western bank; neither is extant.

Thomas Reeve Thornton 'landscaped the grounds with the advice of Mr Webb' (Northamptonshire Heritage 1977), that is, presumably, John Webb (1754(1828), the Staffordshire architect and landscape gardener. His work may have included the creation of the lake.

The mid 1820s saw the arrival of the Grand Union Canal through the far, west, side of the valley in which the Hall stands. Alongside the western bank of the canal as it passes Brockhall Park is a wooded strip known as Canal Lower Belt, and alongside the eastern bank, the Canal Upper Belt: it seems likely that both were planted to screen the canal from the park. A few years later the canal was joined on its west side by the London and Midland Railway. Running on an embankment between lake and river, alongside the western edge of the park and cutting across its south-west corner, is the M1 motorway, opened c 1960. Visually, but particularly audibly, it is intrusive; block planting within the park has been put in (late C20), in an attempt to help screen the noise and sight of the road.

KITCHEN GARDEN The brick-walled kitchen garden and associated icehouse, laid out as part of the early C19 phase of landscape improvements, lies 300m north-west of the Hall to which it is connected by the pleasure grounds walk. A house has been built (late C20) within its northern half, which looks south across the lowered southern wall of the garden.

REFERENCES

D Hall, *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire*, Northants Record Soc 38, (1995), pp 1, 5/6, 217-21 B A Bailey (ed), *Northamptonshire in the Early Eighteenth Century: The Drawings of Peter Tillemans and Others*, Northants Record Soc 39, (1996), p 35 Brockhall Park, Northamptonshire, (Northamptonshire Heritage report 1997)

Maps Henry Muscott of Flore, *Map of the Lordship of Brockhall, 1672* (Thornton 3659), (Northants Record Office) T Eayre and T Jefferys, *The County of Northamptonshire...*, 1779 (2nd edn 1791) S Davies, surveyor, *Plan of the estate, 1787* (3682), (Northants Record Office) *Map of the estate, 1803* (v 908 (uncat) Box 18), (Northants Record Office) *Estate of T Thornton, 1821* (Thornton 2833), (Northants Record Office) S Smith, surveyor, *Brockhall estate, 1821* (Thornton 2833), (Northants Record Office) A Bryant, *Map of the County of Northamptonshire, surveyed 1824(6), published 1827*

OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition surveyed 1925, published 1931

Archival items Accounts of Thomas Thornton III (Northants Record Office)

Description written: June 1998 Amended: January 1999 Register Inspector: HJ/PAS Edited: January 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.