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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

FOXLEY

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Name:	FOXLEY
District:	County of Herefordshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Brinsop and Wormsley
District:	County of Herefordshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Mansell Lacy
District:	County of Herefordshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Weobley
District:	County of Herefordshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Yazor
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.109131 Longitude: -2.8625975 National Grid Reference: SO 41022 45996, SO 41228 47184 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000880 Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986

Details

Foxley was home to Sir Uvedale Price (1747-1829), leading proponent of the Picturesque. The surrounding wooded valley landscape was modified to reflect his views, and was much visited and highly influential.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Foxley came into the Price family through the marriage in 1679 of Robert Price (1653-1732) to Ann Rodd, one of the Foxley heiresses. Later members of the Price family including Robert II (1717-61) and Uvedale (1747-1829; cr bt 1828) added considerably to the estate by purchase and exchange. After a period of indebtedness the estate was sold in 1855 to the Davenports, in which family it remained in the late C20.

The Foxley landscape was largely the result of the policies of Robert Price (d 1761), and to a lesser extent his son Uvedale (d 1829). The former undertook a Grand Tour beginning in 1738. Returning to Foxley he was joined by Benjamin Stillingfleet (1702-71), a friend from the Tour, who took a cottage nearby. While there Stillingfleet undertook botanical research and together with Price made excursions to seek out Picturesque scenery. A scheme of improvement began at Foxley in or soon after 1757, which eschewed artificial pretensions and grottoes in place of an amplified and glorified natural landscape.

Uvedale Price came of age in 1768, seven years after his father's death. At the time he was abroad on the Grand Tour, which he subsequently extended to embrace Switzerland with its dramatic scenery. During his long tenure of Foxley the estate

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was considerably extended and consolidated by purchase including lands in Mansell Lacy (1771-1816), Yazor, and Ladylift (1773-1814). The Picturesque concepts which he developed over this period and applied at Foxley were first published in 1794 in his *Essay on the Picturesque* (revised edn 1798) and enlarged upon in subsequent publications.

Price died in 1829 aged eighty-two. From 1818 parts of the estate had been mortgaged, and in 1855 the Foxley estate was sold to John Davenport of Westwood (Staffs), elder son of a china manufacturing family. He died in 1862 and was succeeded by his second son the Rev George Horatio Davenport (d 1919), during whose time extensive improvements to the estate buildings were undertaken.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Foxley House lay 10km north-west of Hereford in a secluded, wooded, horseshoe-shaped valley. This, 4km long and 1.5 km wide, runs north-west to south-east, and as well as the site of Foxley contains the hamlets of Yarsop and, at its south-east end, Mansell Lacy. The ground rises from 73m at Mansell Lacy to c 290m at the highest point of the valley top. A small stream runs south-eastwards down the valley bottom.

Although but a part of a wider aesthetic and estate landscape Foxley as here treated (689ha) is well defined by the local topography, notably the outer edges of the valley, and comprises the essential Picturesque core.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach is via a 1km long drive from Mansell Lacy which runs along the lower, west side of the valley. Commercial, later C20 woodland now hems in the drive on either side, whereas originally the approach was entirely through open parkland to give views up and across the valley. A two-storey Italianate stone lodge of 1858 lies at the start of the drive. From Foxley House a secondary, west drive was contrived in 1887 to replace an earlier route nearer to the house, the new route passing through a cutting at the top of the valley en route to Yazor church. The 1887 Jubilee Bridge road was built by G H Davenport to allow the public road from Yazor church to Yarsop to be moved further west. Previously the road had passed very close to Foxley House. Yazor Lodge was built opposite the church in 1872 to plans by Chick of Hereford.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Foxley House, built in 1717 in the style of Smith of Warwick, lay midway between Yazor and Mansell Lacy on the west side of the Yarsop valley. Extended in the C18 and C19, it was demolished in 1948. In 1996 its site was rough, open grassland. On the north side of the house site is a stables court of 1860 incorporating a brick dovecot of c 1700 (listed grade II).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Some C19 stone and iron terracing and railing survived in 1996 on the edge of the commercial woodland surrounding the house site, notably before the site of the main, south-east front. Behind (west and south of) the house site the rising ground is mixed woodland with yews, Wellingtonia, and other specimen trees of C19 and earlier date.

Formal gardens with terraces around the house of 1717 were removed by Uvedale Price in 1780.

PARK In the late C20, as in the late C18, the Foxley landscape comprised two main elements: the woods with rides on the upper valley sides; and the valley bottom farmland, pools, and settlements.

Apparently from the time they acquired the estate, the Prices were extending the existing woodlands on the upper slopes of the valley with plantations which tended to emphasise the closed topographic character of the Foxley landscape. Much of that planting took place in the time of Robert Price (d 1761), and in 1757 a scheme of improvement was said to be imminent which led to the creation of six or seven miles of carriage rides and wooded walks from the house all 'diversified with different prospects'. Those rides were mainly through the woods on the upper slopes of the valley, woods planted with oaks, chestnuts, ashes, beeches and larches and managed as much for pleasure as for profit. As Uvedale Price extended his estate additional rides were constructed to incorporate the new holdings. More generally, in connection with his head gardener James Cranstone, he did much in the way of minor improvements to the woods through planting and selective lopping intended to provide both 'extensive distances' and more intimate 'near views' to the visitor.

Although extensively replanted and now run on modern commercial lines the woodlands in the late C20 still contained many specimen trees likely to have been planted between the mid C18 and the early C19, notable among which were beeches, larches, planes, limes and especially cedar of Lebanon, whose profiles form a recurrent linking theme across the Foxley landscape. Similarly, although the precise lines of the original rides are difficult to trace they are largely followed by modern forestry

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tracks. Those enable the effect of the original rides to be fully enjoyed as they ran from the house through Darkhill Wood, past a cold bath (not extant; site near old quarries 500m west of Yazor now occupied by C19 reservoir), and on to Ladylift Clump, a group of Scotch firs on a high knoll with extensive panoramic views, notably south and west towards Hay-on-Wye and the Black Mountains. The rides then ran around the head of the valley through Walks Wood before returning along the north side of the valley via Shukes Bank, Minehill Wood, and Bache Wood, from where extensive views of north Herefordshire are enjoyed. From here the route of the rides skirts Pole Wood and Merryhill Wood before entering Mansell Lacy village. It is assumed that the rides would then have passed west, taking in Nash Wood and the Ragged Castle before dropping down to Foxley House. The Ragged Castle was built c 1743 and is a castellated stone structure with principal room on the first floor from which there are panoramic views. The structure was enlarged by Uvedale Price, in whose time the Policy Wood below was laid out or improved, with tentrical paths (some terraced traces remain) giving access to the different planting blocks. Ragged Castle was restored in 1975.

The slopes below the woods were given over in the mid C18 to sheep walks, while near Yarsop hedges were removed to give more ground for cultivation. The valley bottom in the late C20 was divided between commercial woodland, mostly planted after the Second World War on land blighted by the foundations of two troop hospitals built in 1944 and demolished in 1962, and arable farmland. The latter lay principally in large fields bounded variously with hedges and with wrought-iron and wire fences. Scattered across the valley bottom, although largely removed from the arable land, are various specimen trees including sweet chestnut, cedar, plane and evergreen oak. Many of those seem likely to have been planted by the Prices.

In the middle of the valley, c 500m north of the site of Foxley House, is the hamlet of Yarsop. Here is Yarsop Saw Pond, long, narrow and serpentine, one of a chain of some seven ponds created or improved c 1800 by Uvedale Price along the valley bottom between Yarsop and Mansell Lacy. The last of those pools provides a setting for Mansell House, built in the 1780s on the edge of Mansell Lacy hamlet for William, Uvedale Price's younger brother.

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled kitchen garden (listed grade II; now Westmoor Gardens), probably early C19, lies outside the Yarsop Valley on the A44 Hereford to Kington road, c 750m south-west of the site of Foxley House. A two-storey, hip-roofed gardener's house stands at the centre of the north wall.

REFERENCES The Oxford Companion to Gardens (1986), pp 199-200 *J Garden History* 7, (1987), pp 244-70 *Rural History* 2, (1991), pp 141-69 S Daniels and C Watkins, *The Picturesque landscape* (1994), pp 12, 35, 40-8 Foxley Estate, Herefordshire: Heritage Land Management Plan (1996) [contains as appendices all main published articles to 1996 and thereby copies of various maps and drawings in private collections]

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: Herefordshire sheet 25 NE, 1st edition published 1886 Herefordshire sheet 25 SE, 1st edition published 1886 Herefordshire sheet 26 SW, 1st edition published 1886 OS 25" to 1 mile: Herefordshire sheet 25.16, 2nd edition published 1903

Archival items Records of Foxley estate (B47); Sale catalogue 1884 (M5/35/9), (Herefordshire Record Office)

Description written: 1997 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: August 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.