

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

FERNEY HALL

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

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Name: FERNEY HALL

District: County of Herefordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Leintwardine

District: Shropshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Onibury

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.392769
Longitude: -2.8358914
National Grid Reference: SO 43215 77523
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001122
Date first listed: 01-Dec-1986

Details

C17 to C20 gardens and parkland, the latter including a sweet chestnut grove of c 1700, associated with a country house. Repton's proposals for the site in 1789, although probably unexecuted, were instrumental in fuelling the picturesque controversy.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Ferney was purchased in 1787 by Samuel Peckham Phipps from F W Cornwall. Two years later Phipps brought in Humphry Repton to improve the Hall's surroundings, but died in 1790 before anything had been done. The estate passed to Francis Hurt, who assumed the name Sitwell. He died in 1793 and was succeeded by his son, also Francis Hurt Sitwell (d 1803). The Sitwells remained at Ferney until the earlier C20. After the Second World War the Hall fell into disrepair, and it remained uninhabited in 1998. Ferney is in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Ferney Hall lies c 8km north-west of Ludlow and 3km south-west of the village of Onibury. The park lies on high ground between the rivers Onny, Teme and Clun, on the north lip of one of a number of dingles whose streams drain east to the Teme. It is partly bounded to the south by the county boundary with Herefordshire, the registered area extending into Herefordshire to include Stonepits Coppice. To the north the park boundary follows the minor road west from Duxmoor to Shelderton. In all the landscape extends to c 38ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Ferney Hall is approached by a straight, 500m long drive from the north-east which ends at the service courtyard on the north side of the Hall. At the drive gates is a lodge in the same style as the Hall, presumably by S Pountney Smith and of the 1870s. A second, shorter drive approaches from the north through a shrubbery. Its brick lodge, which is slightly plainer, is dated 1873. It too may be by Pountney Smith. Close to the lodge the drive is followed by some of the sweet chestnuts in that part of the park, suggesting that this approach may have been in use since the C17.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Ferney Hall, a late C18 building, was pulled down in 1858 by W Hurt Sitwell. John Norton (d 1904) designed a new hall but this burnt down in 1875. The present Hall (listed grade II) was built in 1878 to a design by the Shrewsbury

builder-architect S Pountney Smith. It is a red-brick building in a neo-Jacobean style, with on its north side a tower with an ogee cap and an open top storey with diamond rusticated pillars. A C19 stables court lies against the north-west side of the Hall. **GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The Hall stands on a marked grass platform which c 5m from the Hall ramps sharply down to the south and east. An elaborate arched seat with niches to either side, part of Pountney Smith's work of the 1870s, is set into the wall immediately north of the Hall, looking along its east front and south-east across the lawns to the Dingle. From the front of the Hall there are extensive views east over the gardens and park to Titterstone Clee 20km to the east. An outer terrace ramp, lower than the first, lies 40m east of the Hall. Eastward of this the ground falls gently eastward across an outer grass compartment, in the centre of which, on the line of a former axial path, is a C19 Italianate fountain basin (infilled). The east boundary of this compartment, 150m from the Hall, is marked by a broad ha-ha. A 2.5m high stone wall runs along the inner edge of this to north and south, although the central, 80m long, section, running between tall brick piers, is only c 0.5m high, allowing an uninterrupted view across it from the gardens to the park and the landscape beyond. The east lawns are bounded to the north by a wall screened with shrubs and specimen trees including, at the east end, a large Portuguese laurel. South of the Hall a formal lawn extends to the path along the Dingle top. At its west end is a shrubbery (with C19 and C20 pets' graves) which screens the kitchen garden beyond.

About 60m south-east of the south-east corner of the Hall, close to the Dark Walk along the lip of the Dingle (see below), is an east-facing brick summerhouse with central arched door, two round-headed windows and a hipped tile roof. Inside is a corner fireplace. About 5m to its south is a brick plunge, 5m long from east to west and 3m wide and with steps down into it from the centre of the east side. The summerhouse is possibly one of those mapped in the 1770s (see below); at that time it was probably fairly new. The plunge, similarly, is probably late C18.

Repton's Red Book of 1789 mentions the existing formal terraces east of the Hall. His views of the east garden show a formal lawn with broad, central gravel walk and hip-roofed summerhouses at its north-east and south-east corners. Eastward of this the gravel walk, here flanked with tall topiary hedges along its north and south sides and with a statue or sundial at its end, continued through a compartment extending up to the edge of the pleasure grounds.

PARK Ferney stands within a small park which falls away to the east towards the River Onny, along the south edge of which is the wooded Ferney Dingle. This was extensively quarried in the past (hence the name of the woodland on the south side of the Dingle, Stonepits Coppice), but by the 1780s, when Repton was called to Ferney, extraction had ceased and the Dingle was reckoned capable of being included in the designed landscape. Today (1998) it is closely planted with deciduous woodland, much of it recently established. Running along the top of the north side of the Dingle, immediately south of (and down a slight terrace from) the east lawn, is a terrace walk known as the Dark Walk. This begins below the south-east corner of the lawn, where two brick walls against the north/south wall across the end of the garden remain from a seat or summerhouse of c 1800 looking west along the Walk. The Walk is straight, c 4m wide, and is revetted on its south, down slope, side by a drystone wall. About every 5m there is a mature yew or holly tree on the south side of the walk. The yew planting extends for 200m westwards to roughly level with the east front of the Hall, although the Walk continues west as a more functional track on the same line along the south side of the walled garden. It seems possible that the two were laid out together, c 1800, although it may be that the Dark Walk is considerably older; already in 1891 the yews were described as 'large' (Leach 1891). Various terraced tracks run through the steep-sided Dingle, the main one entering it via a gate on the south side of the former seat at the east end of the terraced walk along the top of the Dingle. As this gradually descends towards the stream along the bottom of the Dingle it passes dense plantings of rhododendrons on its north side. In the later C19 and early C20 there was a pool with boathouse in the bottom of the Dingle, south-west of the C19 home farm which stands west of the kitchen garden.

The parkland east, north-east and north-west of the Hall is grassland with very few parkland trees. In the north-west area of the park, however, west and south-west of the lodge north of the Hall, are large numbers of veteran sweet chestnuts. Some of these, notably on the west edge of the registered area, are in north/south rows. These would seem to represent a sweet chestnut grove, probably of c 1700, despite the fact that until 1822 (see below) they lay not on demesne land but on the south-east edge of Ferney Hill Common.

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It was in 1788 that Humphry Repton (d 1818) determined to become a landscape gardener, and Ferney Hall was one of his first commissions. He visited twice, in September and October 1789, and produced a Red Book in October 1789. The Hall's formal terraces were to be swept away and an informal landscape created which appeared to extend east to Duxmoor Common and encompassed the distant views beyond. To the south of the Hall the main feature was the 'rocky dell' (for this and following quotations see Trans Woolhope Naturalists 1992) of Ferney Dingle, where in the Red Book Repton suggested some thinning of the trees to open a view to a new pool and bath house. Repton consulted Richard Payne Knight (d 1824), the owner of Downton (Herefordshire, qv), 4km to the south, about the treatment of Ferney Dingle, and at least to begin with the intention was apparently for the two of them to produce a joint scheme revising the Red Book proposals about which Knight was highly critical. At the same time Repton was introduced to Uvedale Price (d 1829) of Foxley (Herefordshire, qv) who was impressed by his diffidence and his willingness to enhance the principles of his 'art of landscape gardening' by a study of the 'higher arts'. In the event disagreements between the three, embodied in Repton's statement doubting the 'affinity betwixt painting and gardening', crystallized and then entered the public arena in 1794 with publication of some of the key texts in the picturesque controversy: Knight's poem *The Landscape*, Price's *The Essay on the Picturesque* and at the end of the same year Repton's reply, *Letter to Uvedale Price Esq. On Landscape Gardening*. At Ferney, where somewhat ironically Phipps had expressed himself 'highly satisfied' with the original Red Book, his death in 1790 had left the treatment of the site unresolved, and Repton's bill not fully settled. Some work was undertaken in the next generation - the Dark Walk along the top of the Dingle and the new kitchen garden - but works associated with the Victorian rebuildings of the Hall make a full assessment difficult. The present park was enclosed in 1822 when the commons of Shelderton manor were inclosed and the Ludlow to Shelderton road constructed.

KITCHEN GARDEN Ferney's walled kitchen garden lies immediately west of the Hall, on the north lip of the Dingle. It is c 55m square (although the north-east corner cuts around service buildings) and probably of c 1800. The walls are internally of brick, with stone used externally on the north, south and west sides. The inside remains partly cultivated, and against the north wall are two small, lean-to glasshouses of late C19 date, albeit much altered. That to the west is a vinery.

Repton's plan of Ferney in 1789 shows a large rectangular fruit garden, apparently walled, within a plantation screen or shrubbery to the north side of the east lawn. This he wished to be removed and replaced by a new, small walled garden north-west of the Hall, to the north of the kitchen garden established some years later.

REFERENCES

F Leach, *County Seats of Shropshire* (1891), pp 125-7 D Jacques, *Georgian Gardens* (1983), pp 135, 146 Trans Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club 47 (ii), (1992), pp 217, 233 *Garden History* 22, no 2 (1994), pp 162-74 P A Stamper, *Historic Parks and Gardens of Shropshire* (1996), pp 58, 62, 67

Maps J Rocque, *Map of Shropshire, 1752* *Map of Several Farms at Shelderton ...*, (1141, box 90.10), (Shropshire Records and Research Centre) Maps showing intended inclosures and exchanges at Shelderton, nd and 1821 (1141, box 90.11, 12), (Shropshire Records and Research Centre) R Baugh, *Map of Shropshire, 1808* C and J Greenwood, *Map of Shropshire, 1827* Clungunford field name map, 1848 (Shropshire Records and Research Centre)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1883, published 1889 2nd edition surveyed 1902, published 1904 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1883-4, published 1884-5 2nd edition surveyed 1902, published 1903

Archival items Repton's Red Book for Ferney is in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

Description written: November 1998 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: February 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.