

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ASCOTT PARK

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Name: ASCOTT PARK

County: Oxfordshire

District: South Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Newington

County: Oxfordshire

District: South Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Stadhampton

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.678975
Longitude: -1.1181863
National Grid Reference: SU 61067 98169
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001086
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

Earthwork remains of complex C16/C17 multi-phase formal gardens and park surrounding the site of a manor house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Sir Michael Dormer acquired the manor of Ascott in 1518. A description, c 1600, of the manor house survives in the Dormers' Rousham (qv) archives, indicating at least twelve bed chambers, a gatehouse chamber and a long gallery. This substantial house seems to have been attacked during John Hampden's raid on Ascott in 1642, during which it was severely damaged. Sir William Dormer, known as 'William the Splendid', embarked upon rebuilding the house in 1660, but it burnt down in 1662 before its completion. Some or all of it was rebuilt and it seems to have been used as a dower house until at least 1728. Sir Charles Cottrell-Dormer sold the estate in 1784, and by 1797 (map, Davis) some kind of house remained in the park, together with the associated medieval chapel (VCH 1960). The house disappeared in the early C19, and the park and most of the gardens are now (1997) either under pasture or wooded.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Ascott Park lies 1km east of the village of Stadhampton, on the west boundary of the small settlement of Ascott. The rectangular, c 16ha site is bounded to the north by the B480 Stadhampton to Chalgrove road, to the east by a lane leading south from this road and its extension south as a public footpath, to the south by agricultural land, and to the west by a narrow block of woodland. Most of the boundaries, except those to the south, south-east and south-west, are marked by limestone walls, in varying states of repair. The site, in a largely agricultural setting, occupies fairly level ground, with gentle slopes down to the south and west, and views north over agricultural land towards Little Milton.

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Inventory of Great Britain
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ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach enters the park towards the centre of the north boundary, off the B480, and is marked by two tall, square gate piers (C17, listed grade II) set back off the road in a curved wall. The limestone ashlar piers, one of which retains a ball finial, are placed 10m apart, forming part of a broad entrance screen, flanked by two further pairs of lesser piers in similar style (C17, listed grade II) standing 25m to west and east. These are connected by a low, limestone wall, seemingly built at a later date. The entrance stands at the north end of the main central axis, which runs through the site to the south boundary, and on which many of the designed features are aligned. A broad, straight grass ride runs south from the central gateway for 200m, flanked by two avenues of mature lime trees aligned on the outer pairs of gate piers. The ride, terminated by a raised garden bank, is crossed at right angles 150m from the north entrance by the remnants of a further avenue of limes, of which only the west arm remains standing, possibly the remnants of another double avenue.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Part of Sir William Dormer's manor house, burnt down in 1662 before completion, was subsequently rebuilt as a dower house, although little is known about its appearance, and the building had gone by the early C19 (estate map, 1838). Ascott Park farmhouse, a timber-framed fragment of what may have been associated stables or outbuildings, stands 250m south of the main entrance, subsequently used as a farmhouse and now a private residence.

Neither the site of the C16 manor house, nor that of the 1660s' house have been accurately ascertained. It is likely however that in such a formally designed landscape, the C17 house would have stood towards the centre of the great north/south axis around which the whole park and garden pivots. It is possible that it stood c 200m south of the main entrance, close to two remaining C16 octagonal garden buildings which stand to east and west just outside the north/south avenues of limes. The western building, a dovecote (C16, listed grade II), is built of red brick with vitrified headers forming diaper patterns, with a corbel table of moulded bricks forming trefoiled arches below a tiled roof. The doorway, a later insertion, lies on the south side, and the building is now used as a cattle shelter. The eastern building, a thatched granary (C16/C18, listed grade II), in similar style to the dovecote, seems to have been rebuilt in the C18 incorporating the C16 features. The basement has an octagonal, brick saucer dome, and is thought to have functioned as an icehouse.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The garden features lie south of the approach ride. A raised, level garden terrace, 50m wide and 75m long, runs south from c 225m south of the main entrance. It is bounded on the north edge by the narrow raised bank or terrace which terminates the approach, immediately to the north of which lies a semicircular depression in the ground (possibly containing the foundations of the house, or being the remains of a pond). Parchmarks on the terrace, visible in hot weather, are said to indicate the remains of stone-walled enclosures (Woodward 1982). The terrace is flanked to the east by the walled garden, and to the west by pasture sloping down to the remains of a line of lime trees continuing the line of the northern avenue. West of the trees lie two sub-rectangular ponds, separated by a central raised earth bank running north/south. The easternmost pond is now silted up with trees growing in it, but the west pond still holds water. The south boundary of the ponds is formed by a tall, earth retaining bank standing above an area to the south used (1997) as a paddock. South of the level garden terrace the ground slopes down (probably part of further terracing) to the woodland now enclosing the main water feature which lies at the south end of the main axis.

The rectangular water garden, enclosed in places by iron park fencing, is bounded to the west and east by canalised drainage ditches, to the south by the canalised stream, and to the north by an extension of the earth bank which dams the two ponds above to the north-west. The marshy remains of a long, narrow canal with bulbous west and east ends, which still contains some standing water, run below the earth bank. South of this are the remains of several largely dry ponds with many trees now (1997) growing throughout. These include a central oval pond, said to retain a central stone structure (Mr Osborne, tenant, pers comm 1997), flanked by two rectangular ponds, each of which is divided north/south by a low earth causeway. These ponds are in turn flanked by level areas above the normal ground level. Flat arable land and pasture extends south, and 100m to the south-west is Newell's Pond, a fishpond with an island and a line of mature limes along the south boundary, past the north side of which the garden water system runs out of the site.

PARK Much of the site, including garden features, is now pasture or woodland, but the park probably originally occupied the north half of the site, and the land to west and east beyond the garden features. A barely visible terrace runs west and east along the north boundary, from the north end of the lime avenues. The terrace, which runs parallel with the B480, terminates

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150m to the west in a depression in the ground, and 120m to the east at Piccadilly Cottage. The cottage, based on a C17 stone garden pavilion (listed grade II), stands at the north-east corner of the site, where the lane leads south from the B480. It has been extended in the C19 and C20 but the pavilion element is still obvious, with its pyramidal roof and, on three sides on the first floor, large stone-mullioned windows.

A medieval chapel related to the manor stood in the north-east corner of the site, close to the garden pavilion. This is shown enclosed within a graveyard on a map of 1797 but no visible remains survive. The field in the south-east corner of the site, lying east of the water garden, is now isolated from the main area by woodland but seems to have been part of the formal garden layout, retaining, as it does, many low undulations, with some level plateaux.

KITCHEN GARDEN A rectangular walled garden remains adjacent to the east side of the main garden terrace, enclosing Ascott Park farmhouse (C16 and later, listed grade II), a timber-framed and rendered house lying 250m south of the main entrance and probably originally an ancillary building. The largely brick garden wall (C16 and later, listed grade II) with some limestone stretches, encloses on the west, north and east sides an area of semi-mature oak woodland, the south side opening onto the east end of the water garden. The woodland may conceal further garden features. An C18 wrought-iron gate and an early C17 stone gateway, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, are thought to have been removed from the west garden wall.

REFERENCES

Victoria History of the County Oxfordshire 7, (1960), pp 121-2, 132 N Pevsner and J Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), p 776 F Woodward, *Oxfordshire Parks* (1982), pp 12(14

Maps R Davis, *A New Map of the County of Oxford ...*, 1797 A Bryant, *Map of the County of Oxford ...*, surveyed 1823 Tithe map for Stadhampton Parish, 1838 (in Parish Records)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880 2nd edition published 1901 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: November 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR 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.