

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

GUY'S CLIFFE

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

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**GUY'S CLIFFE**

Name: GUY'S CLIFFE

County: Warwickshire

District: Warwick (District Authority)

Parish: Leek Wootton and Guy's Cliffe

County: Warwickshire

District: Warwick (District Authority)

Parish: Old Milverton

County: Warwickshire

District: Warwick (District Authority)

Parish: Warwick

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.305224  
Longitude: -1.5780707  
National Grid Reference: SP 28866 67540, SP 29233 66796  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1001602  
Date first listed: 10-Apr-2002

## Details

Early C19 gardens and pleasure grounds in part designed by Uvedale Price, which were developed from C17 riverside walks and mid C18 rococo gardens.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Tradition claims that Guy's Cliffe was occupied by St Dubritius, and that subsequently the legendary Guy, Earl of Warwick passed his last years as a hermit in a cave near the river (Dugdale 1730). Hermits lived at Guy's Cliffe in 1334, and in the early C15 Henry V announced his intention of founding a chantry (VCH 1969). This scheme was adopted by Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick and a chantry chapel was founded in 1423. At the Dissolution of the chantry in 1547 the property was granted to Sir Andrew Flammock, whose family later sold it to William Hudson of Warwick. Hudson's daughter married into the Beaufoy family of Emscote, who remained in possession until 1701 when Lady Charlotte Beaufoy sold it to William Edwards. In 1743 Edwards' son let the property to Samuel Greatheed, the son of a St Kitts plantation owner, who in 1747 was elected MP for Coventry. In the same year Greatheed married Lady Mary Bertie, daughter of the Duke of Ancaster. In 1750 Edwards agreed to sell Guy's Cliffe to Samuel Greatheed, and between c 1748 and 1758 a programme of improvements costing £6000 was

undertaken. A report written in 1758 (WCRO) notes some 6 acres (2.5ha) of grounds enclosed within a wall with an entrance in the form of a triumphal arch, while in 1754 Thomas Gray described the construction of gardens incorporating gravel walks and a grotto decorated in the rococo taste (Tyack 1994). Samuel Greatheed died in 1765, and the following year his eldest son, Peregrin, died from consumption while at Eton. Lady Mary continued in residence at Guy's Cliffe until her death in 1774, when the estate passed to her second son, Bertie.

Bertie Greatheed moved in artistic and literary circles, and his only son was a talented amateur artist. This son died during a family visit to Italy in 1804, leaving an infant daughter by a young Italian woman. The child, Anne Caroline, was adopted and brought-up by her grandparents in England. The French and American Wars had a severe effect on Bertie Greatheed's income but the sale of building land at Leamington from c 1808 replenished his finances and enabled him to embark on improvements to the House and grounds in 1810 (Journals, WCRO). These changes were intended to heighten the existing picturesque qualities of the site and were, in part, inspired by a series of tours in Herefordshire and Shropshire where Greatheed visited many estates which had recently undergone picturesque improvements. These included Ferney Hall and Oakley Park, Shropshire (qqv), and Eyewood, Garnons, Foxley, Moccas Court, and Whitfield, Herefordshire (qqv) (ibid). Greatheed's improvements at Guy's Cliffe included the remodelling in 1813 of a watermill in a Swiss or 'Saxon' style to serve as an eyecatcher from the House. In 1819 Viscount Milsington, heir to the fifth and last Duke of Ancaster died, leaving a considerable fortune to Bertie Greatheed. This enabled him to make further improvements. In 1821 an ornamental plantation was formed on Blacklow Hill as a setting for a cross to commemorate the execution of Piers Gaveston on that spot in 1312, while Loes Farm, purchased in 1824, was laid out as parkland. In December 1823 Uvedale Price (1747-1829) visited Guy's Cliffe and advised Greatheed on the 'dressing' of Well Meadow and the river bank (ibid).

Bertie Greatheed died in 1826, leaving the estate to his granddaughter and her husband, the Hon Charles Bertie Percy, a nephew of the Duke of Northumberland. Lady Anne Percy made various minor changes to the property, and continued to live there after her husband's death in 1870. When she died in 1882, Guy's Cliffe passed to Lord Algernon Percy, younger son of the sixth Duke of Northumberland, who was succeeded in 1922 by his daughter and her husband, Capt J R Heber-Percy. In the late C19 and early C20 Guy's Cliffe was described in articles published by Country Life (1897, 1900); these noted the picturesque qualities of the site, including the mill, riverside walks, and cattle with bells around their necks in the park (CL 1900). After 1922 the House was only occupied on an occasional basis, and during the Second World War it was requisitioned for use as a school and hospital. The House and pleasure grounds were sold in 1946 for conversion into a hotel, but this scheme was not realised. In 1952 the fittings were sold by speculative builders who sought, but failed, to gain permission for the development of the site. The House and a portion of the pleasure grounds were purchased by Aldwyn Porter in 1955, who let the chapel for use as a Masonic temple in 1974. The shell of the House was consolidated following fire damage in 1996-7. Today (2001) the site remains in divided ownership.

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Guy's Cliffe is situated c 2km north of the centre of Warwick, to the east and west of the A429 Coventry Road. The River Avon flows from north to south-east through the site. The c 56ha site is bounded to the south by late C20 domestic properties in Blacklow Road, Oakwood Grove, and Millbank, while to the south-east it adjoins agricultural land. To the north-east the site adjoins properties in Old Milverton, and the parish church of St James; to the north it is bounded by agricultural land from which it is separated by hedges. The House, pleasure grounds, and former Dairy Farm are separated from the A429 Coventry Road by rubble-stone walls. Land to the west of the A429 Coventry Road which is included in the registered site adjoins agricultural land to the west, and is bounded to the south by a minor road leading from Coventry Road west to Woodloes. To the north-west, Blacklow Hill is separated from the historic core of the estate by the mid C20 A46 Warwick bypass. The site is generally level with the exception of the steep north-facing cliff and slopes above the River Avon, and the more gentle south-west-facing slope on the north bank of the river below the village of Old Milverton. To the north-west the site rises to Blacklow Hill, a prominent south-facing hill c 0.75km north-west of Guy's Cliffe House.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Guy's Cliffe is approached from the A429 Coventry Road at a point c 0.5km north of its junction with Spinney Hill. The entrance is marked by an ornamental timber and wrought-iron gate supported by tall stone piers

surmounted by stone urn finials (all listed grade II). To the south of the entrance stands a two-storey picturesque Tudor-gothic stone lodge (listed grade II); this was constructed for Lady Anne Percy to designs by John Gibson in 1835 (date stone). Beyond the entrance the drive sweeps north-east through the pleasure grounds to reach a mid C18 monumental stone triumphal arch (listed grade II). This boldly rusticated baroque arch was built for Samuel Greatheed c 1750 to the designs of an unidentified architect. To the east of the arch the drive continues below the south facade of the House to reach a stable court enclosed to the south and east by sheer rock into which is cut a series of entrances leading to subterranean stores and stables. At the eastern end of the court a monumental archway cut into the rock leads to a further large cavern. The storerooms and stables were constructed in the mid C18 for Samuel Greatheed who had stabling for twenty horses and standing for four carriages hewn from the solid rock (Report 1758, WCRO). These appear to have been developed from existing subterranean stores shown on the mid C17 engraving by Hollar (Dugdale 1730). Today (2001), there is a late C20 gravelled parking area to the west of the House; this occupies the site of the early C19 formal flower garden, known as the French Garden or Blackamoor Garden.

Immediately south of the lodge a further entrance leads from Coventry Road giving access to a service drive which extends c 150m east to reach a junction. From this point a short drive leads north to the mid C18 stable yard, while another drive leads south-east for c 150m to reach the early C19 Dairy Farm. The stables were built in Gothic style for Samuel Greatheed c 1750, while the picturesque Tudor-gothic Dairy Farm was constructed for Bertie Greatheed c 1820.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Guy's Cliffe House (listed grade II) stands on an artificially levelled terrace above a north-facing cliff which descends to the River Avon. Today (2001) the House is in a ruinous condition, with only the service quarters and chapel (listed grade II\*) to the east of the main house remaining in use. The principal portion comprises two wings, one of which faces west along the avenue aligned on the Coventry Road, while the other wing extends east with facades facing south, and north towards the river. The west wing comprises a pair of canted bay windows flanking a Tudor-gothic loggia surmounted by a pair of ogee gables; it assumed its present form in 1819-20 when an existing early C18 range was remodelled by Bertie Greatheed, apparently to his own design (Tyack 1994). The east wing retains a mid C18 Palladian entrance facade to the south; this was constructed for Samuel Greatheed in 1748 (inscription). The river facade to the north is irregular in design with projecting bays, oriel windows, and ogee gables. The chimneys are massed to form a picturesque tower-like structure which may have been intended to recall the style adopted by Vanbrugh at Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincolnshire (qv), seat of Lady Mary Greatheed's father, the Duke of Ancaster (Tyack 1994). The river facade was remodelled by Bertie Greatheed from an existing mid C18 Palladian structure between 1810 and c 1815. The single-storey service quarters to the east of the House are constructed in a picturesque Gothic style. Rebuilt by Bertie Greatheed c 1820, the service wing connects the House to the C15 chapel, the tower of which was rebuilt in Gothic style by Samuel Greatheed in 1764.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens and pleasure grounds extend to the north-west, west, and south-east of the House, with walks extending along the bank of the River Avon.

To the south-west of the House the entrance drive passes through an area of informal pleasure grounds comprising lawns and groups of evergreen shrubbery and specimen trees. The Coventry Road to the west is screened by an earth embankment similarly planted with trees and shrubs which extends c 170m north from the entrance to the southern end of the clairvoie at the west end of an avenue of mature pines which is aligned on the west facade of the House. The clairvoie comprises a central ha-ha wall flanked by tall stone piers surmounted by ball finials. The opening is adjoined to north and south by higher stone walls in which are set a pair of arched doorways closed by timber doors. The avenue appears never to have served as an approach to the House, although trees which may correspond to an avenue on this alignment are shown on the mid C17 engraved view published by Dugdale (1730). The avenue assumed its present form in 1824 when Bertie Greatheed acquired the land to the west of Coventry Road; in his Journal for 2 November 1824 (WCRO) he noted that the hedge, planted c 1773 at the western end of the avenue, was removed to open-up the vista. To the east the avenue is terminated by the gravel car park below the west facade of the House. Set at a slightly higher level than the avenue, this area corresponds to the early C19 flower garden or Blackamoor Garden, named after a lead sundial in the form of a kneeling slave. The sundial, which does not survive in situ, occupied the focal point of the garden, from which segmental box-edged flower beds radiated. The flower garden was probably constructed c 1810 (Journals, WCRO); it was described by Prince Puckler-Muskau in 1826 as 'a very pretty French garden,

in which gay porcelain ornaments and coloured sand mingled their hues with the flowers' (Bulter 1927). This formal garden was shown in late C19 and early C20 photographs published by *Country Life* (CL 1897, 1900). The flower garden appears to have replaced an area of lawn known as the Blackamoor Green, which in the early C19 was the starting point for tours of the grounds (Field 1815).

To the north of the avenue, c 50m north-west of the House, Guy's Well (listed grade II) is set into the slope below the avenue. Guy's Well comprises a round-arched opening surmounted by a carved stone shield. The opening leading to the well or spring is closed by late C19 gates. Guy's Well corresponds to the medieval well visited by Henry V in the early C15. It was remodelled as a grotto by Samuel Greateed in the mid C18, and repaired and partly rebuilt by his son, Bertie Greateed, in 1824 (Journals, WCRO). The area to the north of the avenue and Guy's Well comprises an informal lawn enclosed to the west by mature trees and shrubbery through which a serpentine walk passes, while to the east the lawn is bounded by the River Avon. Some 100m north-north-west of Guy's Well stands a mid C20 house which is approached by a mid C20 drive leading south-east from a C19 entrance at the north-west corner of the site. The lawn is planted with mature specimen trees including cedars. The lawn, formerly known as Well Meadow (Report 1758, WCRO), was developed as pleasure grounds by Bertie Greateed from c 1806, with drainage works taking place in 1814. It assumed its final form under the supervision of Uvedale Price in December 1823. To the north the lawn is enclosed by a stone wall and shrubbery which separate it from a drive leading east from the Coventry Road to Guy's Cliffe Mill, known today (2001) as The Saxon Mill Restaurant (listed grade II). The mill has a steeply pitched roof with overhanging eaves and an arcaded balcony on its south facade; the existing structure was remodelled in a picturesque Swiss style by Bertie Greateed, probably to his own design, in 1813 (Journals, WCRO). The mill forms an eyecatcher at the northern end of the pleasure grounds and was designed to be seen from the principal rooms of the House. Below the east facade of the mill a terrace planted with mature London planes has a parapet constructed from monolithic rocks. The terrace extends east to reach two late C20 timber footbridges which cross the River Avon to give access to a footpath leading to Old Milverton; these bridges replace similar structures shown in a late C18 engraving (Ireland 1795).

From the mill a riverside walk extends south, passing below steep stone walls retaining the terrace below the west facade of the House, and the steep slope below the north facade. This slope now (2001) supports extensive areas of naturalised bamboo, but some specimen ornamental trees and shrubs survive from the C19 and early C20 gardens. The walk continues along the river bank south-east of the House, passing below a rocky cliff face which is planted with mature specimen trees and evergreen shrubbery. The riverside walk is indicated as the 'Lower Walks' on Hollar's mid C17 engraving of Guy's Cliffe (Dugdale 1730). Some 50m south-east of the chapel a cave, known as Guy's Cave, is cut into the cliff. This cave is traditionally held to have been the residence of the legendary Guy, Earl of Warwick, who retired to live as a hermit at Guy's Cliffe. It is indicated on Hollar's mid C17 engraving, as well as being mentioned in Nehmiale Wharton's account of Guy's Cliffe written in 1642 (CL 1900) and John Evelyn's late C17 description (Heber-Percy 1943). In 1754 Thomas Gray described the 'Cell' as a grotto 'with cockle-shells and a looking-glass' (Tyack 1994), while in the early C19 Bertie Greateed claimed to have discovered a 'Saxon' inscription in the cave referring to Guy of Warwick (VCH 1969). The walk continues south-east along the river for c 200m beyond the Cave, passing after c 180m the site of an early C19 boathouse (OS 1886), which probably corresponds to the bathing place and 'rude bench' constructed by Greateed in 1822 (Journals, WCRO). The riverside walk extends c 200m east and south of the site of the boathouse to reach a former quarry c 500m south-east of the House. Used as a source of stone for Leamington Bridge in 1806 (ibid) and for work on the House in 1819?20 (Heber-Percy 1943), the quarry, known as Dick Ward's Hole after the quarryman, was developed as an ornamental feature in 1822 with evergreen planting and a statue of the eponymous Dick Ward (Journals, WCRO). Today (2001), the statue does not survive and the quarry is partly filled in; some of the shrubbery remains. At a junction south-east of the site of the boathouse a walk ascends the north-facing slope to give access to a further walk which returns to the carriage court south of the House along the top of the cliff. This walk, which has been known since the early C19 as Fair Felice's Walk after the wife of Earl Guy, is noted on Hollar's mid C17 engraving as the 'Alley over the Cave' (Dugdale 1730). In the early C19 this walk afforded views south-south-east towards the tower of St Mary's church in Warwick, and Warwick Castle (Field 1815). A further walk c 40m south of Fair Felice's Walk leads north-west towards the stables, before turning north to emerge adjacent to the triumphal arch south-west of the House.

**PARK** Three separate areas of parkland are associated with Guy's Cliffe. The west- and south-facing slopes to the north and east of the River Avon north of the House are today (2001) in mixed agricultural cultivation, with scattered mature trees, some being former hedgerow trees, corresponding to those shown on the late C19 OS map (1886). Samuel Greatheed acquired land in Old Milverton in 1747, and it appears that this agricultural land was developed as parkland by Bertie Greatheed in the early C19 to improve the prospect from the rooms on the north and north-west facades of the House. It remained parkland in 1926 (OS). A second area of parkland lies to the south of the House and pleasure grounds adjacent to the Dairy Farm. Remaining (2001) pasture with scattered mature specimen trees, this area is bounded to the west by the Coventry Road and to the south by a public footpath which separates it from mid C20 houses which encroach on the early C19 park. Late C20 post and rail fences divide this area into paddocks and gallops. Towards the eastern boundary of the park the early C19 Tudor-gothic buildings of the Dairy Farm form a picturesque group, while to the north the park is enclosed by trees and shrubbery in the pleasure grounds, and to the east by Patten's Grove. The parkland around the Dairy Farm was developed by Bertie Greatheed c 1820.

A further area of parkland is situated to the west of Coventry Road. This area remains (2001) pasture with scattered mature specimen trees set among extensive areas of ridge and furrow. To the north it is bounded by a mixed ornamental plantation which contains a shallow marshy depression known as the 'Como Pit'. The dam at the eastern end of the depression, formerly retaining a stream to form a pool, has been breached. This feature was constructed by Bertie Greatheed in 1824 and may have been named after a superficial resemblance to the outline of Lake Como, Italy. To the west of the park (and outside the area here registered), the early C19 Tudor-gothic buildings of Loes Farm form a picturesque incident, while to the south the park is terminated by the kitchen garden. The parkland to the west of Coventry Road was developed by Bertie Greatheed in 1824 following the purchase of the land from the Earl of Warwick. This acquisition and its development as parkland allowed Greatheed to open a vista from the avenue and west facade of the House across Coventry Road (Journals, WCRO).

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen garden is situated to the west of Coventry Road at a point opposite the lodge and principal entrance to the House. The garden is today (2001) a commercial nursery and is approached from Coventry Road by a track which corresponds to a drive shown on the late C19 OS map (1886). The garden is approximately rectangular on plan and is enclosed by brick walls under stone copings. To the north-west a group of brick buildings, bothies and cottages survive together with scattered mature fruit trees. The kitchen garden appears to be C18 in origin, and was improved by Bertie Greatheed in 1806-7 (Journals, WCRO) when fruit trees supplied by James Weare (fl 1790s-1830s) of Coventry were planted. Further new varieties of apples given to Greatheed by Thomas Andrew Knight (1759-1838) were planted in 1811 (Journals, WCRO; Plan, 1806/11).

**OTHER LAND** Some 400m north of the Como Pit, and separated from the western parkland by the mid C20 A46 Warwick bypass, the south-facing slope of Blacklow Hill is planted with mixed woodland. Within this woodland, c 800m north-west of the House, a tall stone cross (listed grade II) set on a stepped base and four tall stone piers is surrounded by mature specimen trees and evergreen shrubbery. The cross bears an inscription commemorating the execution of Piers Gaveston, favourite of Edward II, on this spot in July 1312. It was erected as an eyecatcher to be seen from Guy's Cliffe House by Bertie Greatheed c 1822, probably to his own design. Greatheed had acquired the site under the Leek Wootton enclosure in 1821, and began ornamental planting the following year (Enclosure map, 1821).

#### REFERENCES

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Maps B Greatheed, *Plan of the kitchen garden at Guy's Cliffe*, 15 December 1806 with additions 1811 (CR1707/116), (Warwickshire County Record Office) Enclosure map for Leek Wootton parish, 1821 (QS75/135), (Warwickshire County Record Office)

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OS Old Series 1" to 1 mile, published 1834 OS 6 to 1" mile: 1st edition surveyed 1885, published 1886 1926 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition, published 1888 2nd edition published 1905 3rd edition published 1925

Illustrations W Hollar, The Prospect of Guye's Cliffe from the meadow on the north east thereof, c 1656 (published in Dugdale 1730) W Wing of Guy's Cliff with the Chapel, 1788 (Gough maps 32, f14, Bodleian Library) S Ireland, engraved view of Guy's Cliffe and the mill from the north-west (published in Ireland 1795) W Rider, Guy's Cliffe Mill from the south-west, 1826 (W430), (Warwickshire County Record Office) Guy's Well, engraved view, c 1840 (Warwickshire County Record Office) Guy's Cliffe from the mill terrace, engraved view, c 1840 (Warwickshire County Record Office) Guy's Cliffe and Courtyard, Warwick, postcard view, c 1890 (private collection) Late C19 and early C20 photographs (Country Life, 13 February 1897; 10 February 1900)

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## 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.