

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

AUCKLAND CASTLE PARK

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Name: AUCKLAND CASTLE PARK

District: County Durham (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Bishop Auckland

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Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 54.670428
Longitude: -1.6664773
National Grid Reference: NZ2160830646
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000727
Date first listed: 07-Oct-1986

Details

A medieval deer park associated with the residence of the bishops of Durham, Auckland Castle, which has C12 or earlier origins, with landscaping of C18 date. Walled gardens around the Castle are of late C17 or earlier origin, as is the kitchen garden.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The park originated as a deer park, probably in the C11 or C12. A reference of 1153 states that the 'The early Bishops of Durham were mighty hunters. At home there was a park of Auckland of a much greater extent than at present' (Bolden Buke, quoted in DCC 1983). The park had a herd of wild cattle until the C17 and there are records of successive restocking with deer. Leland wrote of 'the faire parke by the castelle' in 1538 (quoted in DCC 1983), and in 1627 it was described as a 'dainty, stately park' by Sir William Brereton (ibid). The park fell into decline during the Interregnum at which time the trees were cut down, but it was restocked and the fishponds renewed by Bishop Cosin during the period 1660 to 1671. In 1750 Bishop Butler described the park as being 'too bare of wood'. He extended it to take in areas of woodland and began renewing the pale and planting, operations which were interrupted by his death in 1752. He was succeeded by Bishop Trevor, who continued with the improvements, spending more than £8000 on the Castle and park during the period 1752 to 1771. A map of the Castle and park was prepared by Jeremiah Dixon for Bishop Egerton in 1772, and apart from the creation of a golf course in 1894 the basic structure has remained the same. Ewan Christian undertook a refurbishment of Castle and park during the 1880s for Bishop Lightfoot. The site remains (1998) in the ownership of the Church Commissioners for England.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The gardens and park occupy an area of c 120ha and lie immediately north-east of the town of Bishop Auckland, on land which falls eastwards to the River Gaunless before rising to a plateau east and north of the river. The confluence of the Gaunless and the Wear is on the west side of the site, and the land falls to the north and the valley of the Wear. The boundary is largely walled, with stretches of fencing where the walls have disappeared. The park is set in agricultural land with the exception of the south-west side which adjoins the town.

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ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance is from the Market Place in Bishop Auckland, where there is an archway flanked by pedestrian entrances surmounted by a clock tower (listed grade I) constructed in 1760 by Thomas Robinson for Bishop Trevor. A lodge adjoins the south side of the entrance. A wide drive, with a broad grassed verge and the battlemented walls of the Castle gardens on the north side, and the battlemented north wall of the kitchen garden and cast-iron railings on the south side, leads east to the Castle entrance. A painting of c 1700 (CL 1972) shows that the south side of the drive had a battlemented wall for the whole of its length at that time, and this wall may have been partially removed to open up views of the park, perhaps in the late C18. The drive continues to the park entrance at the south-east edge of the Castle garden where there is a gate which replaces an entrance with an opening in a battlemented wall shown in a view by Buck of 1728 (ibid).

A second entrance on the north side of the park is reached by a track across fields. A lodge, called Middle Lodge, shown at this entrance on the 1st edition OS map (surveyed 1854-7), was demolished C20. The drive leads south-west and south through the park to a bridge over the River Gaunless (1765, listed grade II), and on towards the Castle with views through trees of a pinnacled deer shelter (see below) which foreshadows the view of the Castle on high ground to the south. The drive continues to the park entrance at the east end of the main entrance drive.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Auckland Castle (listed grade I) stands on a spur overlooking the valleys of the Gaunless to the east and the Wear to the north. The Castle is the official residence of the bishops of Durham and probably originated as a manor for Bishop du Puiset in the C12 although reference is made in the Bolden Buke to earlier ecclesiastical occupation of the site, perhaps from the late C11 onwards. The Castle was successively enlarged, with substantial rebuilding taking place c 1660-5 for Bishop Cosin and 1767-72 for Bishops Trevor and Egerton. The medieval great hall, on the east side of the building, was converted into St Peter's Chapel for Bishop Cosin, 1661-5. The residential and state rooms are centrally placed and an elongated wing called Scotland extends west from the main building. The Castle remains in use as the residence of the Bishop of Durham and parts of the building are in use as diocesan offices and private flats (1998).

Some 30m west of the Castle there is a U-shaped range of buildings around a yard (listed grade II) which consists of rebuilt medieval buildings of unknown function which were altered and adapted to form a carriage house and garden stores and for other ancillary uses during the C18 and C19.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The main entrance to the gardens is on the south side of the Castle where there is a battlemented screen wall with a canted entrance which has three pointed-arch openings flanked by octagonal battlemented turrets (James Wyatt c 1795 for Bishop Barrington, all listed grade I). The walls on each side have a range of eight open pointed arches to the east and seven to the west, with railings within the openings. On the west side the screen terminates with a turret from which point the wall continues westwards alongside the drive as a crenellated rubble wall, of lower height than the screen and possibly the wall shown in this position on a painting of c 1680 (CL 1972). On the other side the wall continues around the east and north sides of the garden. A drive from the entrance runs north between lawns to a gravel turning circle in front of the chapel. The eastern part of the garden consists of a central sunken lawn, marked Bowling Green on the 1st edition OS map, with a terraced perimeter walk following the garden walls around the south, east and north sides of the garden and continuing along the west side of the lawn. There are views over parkland from the walls, and there are two arched doorways into the park at each end of the north wall. At the end of the north walk steps lead up to a platform with a battlemented parapet on the south side which is attached to the east end of the chapel from which views over the gardens and parkland can be obtained. This part of the garden is as shown on a plan of 1826.

On the west side a wall divides the garden from a courtyard in the angle formed by the Scotland wing. A cobbled path leads north from an entrance with a gate off the drive, and from this two paths lead diagonally north-east across lawns to entrances to the Castle, as shown on the 1826 plan. At the north-west side of this area a path leads between the Scotland wing and the service block to a third enclosed garden which has inner walls lined with brick and a simple pattern of borders with cobbled paths. A further walled compartment lies to the west, where the west wall has an attached medieval tower (listed grade I) at the north corner. Six circular stone piers (C17, listed grade II) are ranged c 3m east of the wall, probably representing the remains of a barn or store.

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The painting of c 1680 shows that Wyatt's walls partially replaced existing walls around the garden, and that there was an additional wall running south from the east end of the chapel. A centrally placed gazebo is shown in the east wall. Buck's view of 1728 shows the same layout, though by this time the roof of the gazebo had been raised and there were railings in front of the Castle's main entrance. It is possible that the walled gardens were formed as part of Bishop Cosin's later C17 improvements to the Castle, which the c 1680 painting may have been commissioned to reflect.

PARK The park extends to the north and east of the Castle. It is divided into three distinct areas: the inner or Near Park encompassing the area between the Castle and the Gaunless; High Park to the north and north-east, and High Plain to the east. Near Park consists of open grassland with scattered trees and clumps, and the wooded valley of the Gaunless. A path called Broad Walk leads south-eastwards from the main park entrance down to the Gaunless, to the site of a footbridge shown on the 1924 OS map. This led over the river to a folly called the Temple, c 400m south-east of the Castle, which was built in 1810 and demolished in 1961. There is an entrance to the park opposite the main garden entrance where a cast-iron gate leads to a double flight of steps, ruinous on the east side, which descend on either side of a stone shelter with an arched head, from which views of the river can be obtained. This entrance gives access to a doorway into the kitchen garden and to a path which leads down to the riverside as shown on the 1st edition OS map, when there was another footbridge over the river.

A number of commemorative trees, including an oak planted by Bishop Barrington in 1794, were planted at various times on the banks of the river.

Some 250m north-east of the Castle there is a large deer shelter (listed grade I) which was built in 1760 for Bishop Trevor. The shelter is on land overlooking the Gaunless and it is of rectangular plan with a pinnacled tower and arcaded sides with crocketed pinnacles at the angles. There are views over to the steep wooded east side of the river. The land drops eastwards to the riverside where there are grassed hollows which may have originated as fishponds, though the irregular outlines suggests that they may have been remodelled for ornamental purposes. Fishponds in the park are mentioned in records of the C12. The land on the west side slopes down north-westwards as open grassland with scattered trees, and there is a rectangular pond in the western corner of the park, c 180m north-west of the Castle. This is shown, with another smaller pool south of it, on the 1772 plan.

North of the Gaunless the wooded sides of the Coundon Burn, which flows into the Gaunless at a point between the drive bridge and the western boundary, extends north-east and east in High Park. Paths lead through the area and there are three C18 stone bridges over the Burn (all listed grade II). An icehouse c 50m north-east of the drive bridge is set into a bank overlooking the Burn. To the north the land rises in an area of grassland and thin woodland called Hazel Bank Plantation. A small stone pyramidal structure lies c 950m north-east of the Castle. Its purpose is obscure though it may be a well-head, or possibly a shooting butt.

The eastern part of the park, called High Plain, is an area of open land with scattered planting mainly of C20 date used as a golf course, which is divided from the side of the valley of the Coundon Burn by a fence. A disused railway line runs through the eastern tip of the park.

The 1772 map shows planting along the eastern banks of the Gaunless and along the valley of the Coundon Burn, as well as in the area south of the deer shelter. Clumps shown in High Park do not appear to survive, but the basic pattern conforms broadly with current (1998) tree cover.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden is on land which slopes steeply down to the south-east towards the river from the entrance approach behind the lodge and c 100m south of the Castle. It is of sub-rectangular plan enclosed with stone walls (listed grade II) which have brick inner faces. The west wall was realigned in the C20, probably when Durham Road carrying the road bridge over the Gaunless was improved. The garden is divided into three unequal compartments with a wall running north/south forming a narrow compartment on the west side and a wall running east/west which divides the remaining garden area into two unequal parts, with the smaller compartment to the north. Brick footings for glasshouses lie between parts of the inner faces of the north boundary wall and the parallel subdividing wall to the south. These probably represent the remains of glasshouses shown on the 1962 OS map. There are two entrances: the first is in the north wall immediately east of the lodge, and the other is at the north end of the east wall where there is an opening with a door which leads out into the park and to steps

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leading up to the drive (see above). A walled garden is shown in this position on the painting of c 1680 and on Buck's 1728 view. The 1772 map shows it divided into rectangular compartments. It is currently (1998) in use as a commercial market garden.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 151 (27 January 1972), pp 198-202; (3 February 1972), pp 266-70; (10 February 1972), pp 334-7 Auckland Park Management Plan, (Durham County Council 1983)

Maps R Morden, County Map, 1689 T Jefferys, County Map, 1770 J Dixon, A Plan of the Park and Desmesnes at Auckland Castle..., 1772 (in DCC 1983) Plan of the Castle and gardens, 1826 (in CL 27 January 1972)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1924 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1854-7

Archival items Bolden Buke, A survey of the diocese compiled by Bishop de Puiset in 1153 (quoted in DCC 1983).

Description written: April 1998 Amended: March 1999 Register Inspector: CEH Edited: September 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.