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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

DAVENPORT HOUSE

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Name:	DAVENPORT HOUSE
District:	Shropshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Worfield
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.560216 Longitude: -2.3684210 National Grid Reference: SO7512195884 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001120 Date first listed: 01-Dec-1986

Details

Formal courts associated with a country house of c 1727, with in the parkland beyond remains of a rococo landscape with buildings created in the 1750s and painted by Thomas Robins.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the later Middle Ages Hallon, or Haune, was the seat of the Bakers, passing by marriage to Sir George Bromley (d 1588), Chief Justice of Chester. His granddaughter, Jane Bromley, married William Davenport of Chorley (Ches) in 1602, and it was their great-grandson, Henry, who is said to have made his fortune in India, who commissioned the present house and called it Davenport. Henry died in 1731 and was succeeded by his son Sharington (sheriff 1735, d 1774), a fashionable and cultured figure. During his time, with much work being carried out in the early 1750s, a series of structures was constructed in the park, notably overlooking the River Worfe. Thomas Robins the Elder painted the improved landscape, and may even have had a hand in its conception. Sharington was succeeded by William Yelverton Davenport (d 1832), and he by his nephew the Rev Edmund Sharington Davenport. Son followed father for two further generations, during which time, the later C19 and early C20, the house was usually let. The estate remained in private ownership in the late C20.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Davenport lies c 4km north-east of Bridgnorth, immediately south and west of the village of Worfield and its subsidiary hamlet of Hallon. The house and much of the park lie on a level, 400m wide promontory on the north side of the valley of the River Worfe, across which there are spectacular views. The park is bounded to the north-east by the unclassified road from Wyken to Hallon. The area here registered extends to c 55ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES One approach is from a gate at the north-east corner of the park, via a drive along the grassed and treed east side of the subsidiary valley which leads south from Springhead Coppice to the Worfe. A second drive begins at a gate at the east corner of the park, at the south end of Worfield village. From here it runs south-west, along the edge of the flood plain, before turning to climb towards the House from the south. This section of the drive is tree lined, and follows the line of the main C18 avenue through the park.

Both approaches were created after 1839, in the mid to late C19. Before that the main approach was from Hallon, on the north edge of the park, via the main north/south avenue.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING Davenport House (listed grade I) was built to a design of Francis Smith (d 1738) of Warwick; it was completed c 1727, the rainwater heads being dated 1726. Of brick with stone dressings, the House has a nine-bay facade of two-and-a-half storeys and a hipped roof. Four service pavilions are linked to the main house by short curved walls. As built, the two to the north were stables, that to the south-west the laundry and the last the kitchen and servants' rooms.

The earlier house is said to have stood a little to the north of the present one.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the north of the House is its entrance forecourt, grassed and with a gravel sweep. Rails form the north boundary, allowing a view over the park. To the south of the House is a grass court 70m wide and 85m long from north to south, defined to the south by a 2m high ha-ha with a demi-lune centre. Within the centre of this court is a circular basin, c 25m in diameter. From the court there is a spectacular view south, over the valley of the Worfe. Court and basin are both shown on Robins' paintings of 1753 and were presumably constructed about the time the House was built, c 1727, although they do not appear on the estate map of that date.

The 1727 estate map shows a complex parterre garden c 300m north of the newly completed House. Possibly this related to the old house, situated hereabouts. The garden had disappeared by the time Robins painted Davenport in 1753.

PARK The parkland north of the House is level, and mainly in arable cultivation apart from the village cricket ground on the north-east edge of the park and along its western edge where it drops steeply away and is grass. Parkland trees, including Wellingtonia, stand around its edge. About 75m south-east of the gateway at the north-west corner of the park is an icehouse, of C18 or C19 date. Opposite the gateway, across the public road along the edge of the park (parts of a sandstone boundary wall remain, in poor condition), is a grassy valley, running uphill, with a pool known as The Mere. This is the site of the Long Water painted by Robins in 1753 (see below). Pool Cottage (listed grade II), on its west side, is the timber-framed cottage he depicts; the gothic facade to the gable is no longer extant.

Leading north-east from the north forecourt's north-east gateway is a short avenue of limes. The main avenue ran north/south down the centre of the park to the east of this. Its line is followed by the present tree-lined approach from the south, while some veteran limes remain on its line c 200m north of Chempshill Coppice. From the east side of the House there is a view across the parkland, level pasture well planted both with mature parkland trees, predominantly oak, and with probably early to mid C19 coniferous specimen trees. Visible c 350m east-north-east of the House, close to the edge of the park's high ground, is a large, circular, battlemented, tower-like brick pigeon house (listed grade II), probably C18. This is presumably the Gothic Pigeon House mentioned in 1759 (see below).

Running north from the north-west corner of the walled kitchen garden for c 150m is a cluster of veteran sweet chestnut trees. Some appear to respect a common north/south alignment, and may relate to an avenue shown by Robins in 1753 and by Calvert in 1831. South-west of the House, on a bluff overlooking the valley of the Worfe, is Rotunda Coppice. OS maps of the late C19 and early C20 mark several seats in and around this area of mixed woodland while on the edge of bluff is a platform, possibly for a building.

One of the main groups of features, probably intervisible, occupied the series of bluffs above the River Worfe c 250m south of the House, running between Rotunda Coppice to the north-west and Chempshill Coppice to the south-east. From them there was a panoramic view over the broad, flat, valley bottom and the winding course of the river to the countryside beyond. Still extant, although semi-ruinous, is the grotto painted by Robins. It comprises a brick shell, c 2.5m in diameter and about the same deep, its interior slag encrusted. To either side of its front corners are 1m high boulders, while behind are two mature yew trees. No trace can be seen of the cascade from it down the valley side shown on the painting. On the next bluff to the north-west, c 100m away, is a splayed ashlar statue plinth. Two of the other buildings painted in the vicinity of the grotto by Robins were apparently demolished in the 1940s.

The estate map of c 1727 shows two avenues. One was aligned on the north front of the House, and ran roughly north, up the east side of the parterre garden. Another, c 100m to its east, ran south from Hallon on a straight line to the north-west corner of Chempshill Coppice. Under the fashionable Sharrington Davenport the parkland was enhanced, possibly in two phases. In 1732 he bought 'of Rysbrack [John Michael Rysbrack, d 1770, sculptor] a Watergod' (CL 1952, 1999). The main phase of improvement however apparently began in the summer of 1753 when he was said to be 'laying out his environs' (Harris 1978,

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22). Also in 1753 Thomas Robins the Elder (d c 1770) was producing four paintings of the park. By 1759 (list in Knight's Pocketbook, 10) the attractions included an Ionic Rotunda [?'in Rotunda Coppice']; another, thatched, rotunda 'with six trees'; a witches' temple; a Shepherd's Seat and urn; a root house; an urn to Milton; a Doric seat with two pillars; a Gothic Seat '& view of abbey in Ruins, Water and Cascade'; Flora's Seat; Shenstone's Seat; the Gothic Pigeon House; the grotto, supplied with water from the Worfe by 'an engine' (Tithe map of 1839 names the meadow below the grotto as 'Engine Meadow' and marks and names the Engine House on the river bank); and a statue of Venus, apparently concealed in a recess within the grotto. Immediately north of the present north-west gate to the park was the canal-like Long Water. One of Robins' 1753 views looks south down this, showing a timber-framed cottage with a battlemented, gothick, gable facade to its west and a gothick temple looking northward along it from just within the park. The latter, marked as 'Summer house' on the Tithe map but apparently demolished by the end of the century, occupied the knoll above the gate, just above the extant icehouse. These, collectively, may be the 'Gothic Seat & view of abbey in Ruins, Water and Cascade' mentioned in the Knight Pocketbook. One of the paintings also shows how either side of the avenue aligned on the north front of the House there had been planting, with an avenue aligned on Worfield church and paired plantations in the north part of the park. A pedimented statue faced the House in front of each plantation. Those statues were probably moved south of the House in the C19, with the site of one being represented by the statue base described above.

In the late C19 William Shenstone (d 1763) of the Leasowes (qv), who was a friend of Sharrington Davenport, was said to have been responsible for the creation of the park, dedicating inscriptions in the woods there to Gratiana, Mrs Davenport. However, Shenstone's own letter of 15 July 1753 which mentions Sharrington Davenport's work 'laying out his environs' makes no claim for his own involvement.

In 1851 (Bagshaw) it was said that 'several of the eminences in the park are ornamented with sculptured figures.'

KITCHEN GARDEN Davenport's walled kitchen garden lies immediately west of the western pavilions and is c 90m square. The brick walls, which include high quality, tightly jointed work, survive to full height (c 2.5m), and there is a broad entrance in the centre of the west side. Along the south side is a slip. The interior of the garden is grassed and used as a horse paddock. Shown on one of Robins' paintings of 1753, with the interior divided into rectangular beds edged with low, clipped bushes, the garden is presumably broadly contemporary with the house of 1727.

REFERENCES

C Calvert, Picturesque Views ... in Salop (1831), opp p 124 [View of Davenport] S Bagshaw, Directory of Shropshire (1851), p 492 S B James, Worfield on the Worfe (1878), fig opp p 41 M Williams (ed), The Letters of William Shenstone (1939) Country Life, 111 (27 June 1952), pp 1996-9; 112 (4 July 1952), pp 40-3; (11 July 1952), pp 114-17 C Hussey, English Country Houses: Early Georgian, 1715-1760 (1955), pp 104-8 J Harris, Gardens of Delight (1978), pp 22-7 D Watkin, The English Vision (1982), pp 32-3 G Williams, English Country Houses: Shropshire (in preparation)

Maps An Exact Survey of Haune [Hallon]', nd (c 1727) [reproduced in CL] Tithe map for Worfield, 1839 (Shropshire Records and Research Centre)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1882, published 1891 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1882, published 1883

Illustrations Paintings by Thomas Robins, 1753 [reproduced in Harris 1978 and Watkin 1982]

Archival items Pocketbook of Edward Knight 1759-61 (no 294), (Kidderminster Library)

Description written: December 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.