

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

AYNHO PARK

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

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**AYNHO PARK**

Name: AYNHO PARK

District: West Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Aynho

County: Oxfordshire

District: Cherwell (District Authority)

Parish: Souldern

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.988174  
Longitude: -1.2479826  
National Grid Reference: SP5173832458  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1001025  
Date first listed: 25-Jun-1984

## Details

Later C17 country house whose extensive formal gardens were largely removed after 1760 during improvements to the park by Lancelot Brown. Humphry Repton probably worked here in the 1790s.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Richard Shakerley, a London mercer, bought the manor of Aynho in 1545. On his death it was divided between his daughters. Partly reassembled by his son-in-law Thomas Marmyon, it was reunited by Richard Cartwright, a lawyer, who bought the greater part in 1615. He probably began work on his new house there soon after. On his death in 1637 Aynho passed to his son John (d 1676). In 1645 the house was burnt by Royalists; repair work began in 1660. John's son also died in 1676 and Aynho passed to the former's grandson Thomas (1671-1748), who in the first years of the C18 began the remodelling of the house. It was his son William (1704(68) who in 1760 employed Lancelot Brown (1716-83) to lay out the park. A half-century later William's grandson and namesake William Ralph Cartwright (1771-1847) brought in John Soane to make further alterations. Few alterations were made to the house after 1804. Most of the estate was sold by the Cartwrights in 1940, the remainder in 1959 into divided ownership. The parkland remains in private hands in 1997, the house in the occupation of the Country Houses Association which purchased it in 1960.

### DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The village of Aynho lies 10km south-east of Banbury on the A41 from Banbury to Bicester (the Bicester Road), which bounds the park to the east and north. Aynho Park stands on the south side of the village, west of St Michael's church, on a ridge overlooking its park to the south. To the west the park is bounded in part by a turning off the A41, the boundary then running south by field edges to turn east along the north side of the village of Souldern. The area here registered is c 200ha.

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**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Aynho Park's north forecourt, divided in two by a low stone wall, is entered off the street called Roundtown via early C18 limestone gate piers (listed grade II). Before the forecourt was created in the early C18 the approach was down the east side of the house to the Coach Yard, which adjoined the south-west corner of the churchyard. From here there was access to the main forecourt, which then lay on the south side of the house.

The main approach was formerly via a 1km long drive from an entrance at the north-east corner of the park, where stands Park Corner Lodge, a mid C19 stone building with gothic detailing. The associated gate piers (listed grade II) are C18. This approach, with the drive swinging across Ryeland Hill before turning to run along the Lime Walk, may have been designed in 1796(7 by Humphry Repton. It was truncated in the later C20 when the north-east corner of the park was built over and the boundaries of houses in Cartwright Gardens carried south across its line to the edge of the ha-ha.

Another drive, along the east perimeter wall from the Souldern Gates to Park Corner Lodge, was made in the early C19. Sections remain, remade in concrete during the Second World War.

There are also entrances into the park from Souldern village, on its southern edge.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Aynho manor house was burnt out in 1645 following the battle of Naseby. The present house, Aynho Park (listed grade I), represents successive rebuildings and additions to the core of this building. After the Restoration Edward Marshall (c 1598-1675), Master Mason to the King from 1660 to 1673, made Aynho habitable once more, filling in the space between the projecting wings of the old, south-facing, U-plan house. Between 1707 and 1714 Thomas Archer (c 1668-1743; attribution on stylistic grounds) reworked the north front, which has a five-bay centre with pediment flanked by slightly lower three-bay side pieces. On the south he contrived the present, central entrance, added the top storey to the house and built seven-bay, single-storey wings which continue the line of the south facade. The west wing contained a library, that to the east an orangery. Between 1800 and 1805 a second storey was added to both those buildings by Sir John Soane (1753-1837), who also rebuilt the west end. In the late C20 the former orangery was used as a dining room.

North of the house, early C18, detached, eleven-bay, two-storey brick stables and offices, again probably by Thomas Archer, flank the entrance courtyard. These were joined to the house by Soane in 1800-5, with a triumphal arch on the east side.

On the east side of Aynho Park is the largely early C18 church of St Michael (listed grade I), which forms a part of the built ensemble at the head of the park.

To the east of the house, just beyond the churchyard, is a fine, well-preserved icehouse.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** Lawns and pleasure grounds lie west and south of the house, extending overall for c 600m east/west. Immediately west of the house is a C20 rose garden. This, and the terrace on its north side, employs many concrete slabs, also used as flat stones for the low walls which define the west lawn which lies beyond the rose garden, and for an exedra-like screen on its north-west side. The lawn, on which there are several very large trees ( beech, lime and Lucombe oak ) occupies a fairly level terrace, from which there are spectacular views both south over the park and especially west over the Cherwell Valley (although sadly marred by the M40 which runs across it). Projecting from the south-west corner of the lawn is a bastion, already present by 1790. Set on this is a squat concrete rotunda (listed grade II), a 1947 replacement of an earlier rustick building. On the north side of the lawn running down into Friar's Well is a small wooded dingle, with a concrete basin in its bottom.

Along the south front of the house is a broad gravel path, below which the South Lawn runs gently down for 50m to a 2m deep ha-ha. To east and west of the lawn the ha-ha, overall 500m long, swings southward to give a broader pleasure ground, embracing The Wilderness to the west and the Lime Walk and the shrubbery with mature specimen trees on Ryeland Hill to the east.

The triangular Wilderness area south-west of the house was mixed trees and shrubs until 1947, but in that year it was cleared of everything but yews. Since then there has been some replanting. Running along its southern edge to the south-west corner is the Yew Walk, said to have been planted at the time of the Restoration rebuild. It lies on The Mount (before c 1900 known as The Bastion), a 50m long, straight raised walk. This Walk in the past has been said, improbably, to be part of the Civil War defences of the house and, erroneously, to mark the burial place of those killed during the attack thereon in 1645. At the west end of the Walk, here 10m above the park, is a semicircular bastion viewpoint, with low walls of C18 brick capped with a well-cut limestone. From this there are again views across the park and the Cherwell Valley. Another short length of mature yews

runs north from the west end of the Yew Walk, and there is also a line separating the east end of The Wilderness from the South Lawn. The Mount and yews (probably outgrown from hedges) are probably relict elements of the later C17/early C18 gardens. Certainly the refurbishment of Aynho after 1660 extended to the gardens. Christopher Kempster (d 1715) of Burford, a master mason who worked for Sir Christopher Wren, was contracted to make ornamental columns for the garden, while Edward Marshall's designs for garden gates were entrusted to a joiner in Banbury. In 1696 the garden lay south of the south forecourt. In the years after 1700 grand new formal gardens were laid out around the house, probably to a design by Mr Guillam. They are shown in a 1721 view of Aynho Park from the south extending across and beyond the south front, in all some 300m wide from east to west. A series of walled terraces can be seen, with a curved projection to the centre. Next to the house a formal parterre with clipped trees or bushes is illustrated. Accounts mention fountains, and by 1758 there was a canal at the bottom of the garden parallel with the south front of the house. It was probably also in the early C18 that houses on the north side of Aynho Park were removed to allow the creation of the forecourt. The formal gardens were mostly removed by Lancelot Brown in the early 1760s. What if anything was done to the gardens after Repton's visits in 1796/7 is unknown. The formal rose garden before the west front may however have originated at about this time.

A new garden layout, with large numbers of formal beds, was made after 1850. This was removed after the First World War. The development of the gardens in the later C19 and C20 are well documented in the published writings of Aynho's then gardener, Ted Humphris. The concrete walls and other features west of the house are of c 1947.

**PARK** Aynho Park lies at the head of a roughly square park, extending 1.5km south up to the edge of Souldern village, and eastward to the A41 Bicester Road. From the house almost all of the park is visible, falling gently away into a shallow, wooded valley before rising again to Souldern village which stands on the skyline. Aynho Park is almost entirely surrounded with a limestone wall, up to c 3m high along the Bicester Road. Running down the eastern perimeter of the park is a shelter belt of mixed beech and larch. This was planted c 1950 to replace over-mature avenues of beech flanking the carriage drive. The park was returned to cultivation in the mid C20 and in 1998 was almost all under the plough. After disparkment almost all the individual parkland trees, a few of them survivors of the avenues planted c 1700, were felled or succumbed to disease. In the later 1990s some replanting took place. The one area which remains as permanent pasture with parkland trees, mainly oak but with a mature cedar, is Friar's Well, in the north-west corner of the park, west of, and overlooked from, The Wilderness.

Imparkment of former arable land took place c 1701, creating a walled park extending 1.5km south from the bottom of Aynho's gardens to the village of Souldern. Until the mid C20 ridge and furrow survived over much of the park. In 1700(1 the Elm Walk to Souldern, a double avenue aligned on the two wings of the house, was planted running roughly north/south across the park. This survived until the mid C20. The Lime Walk, leading east from the east side of the formal gardens and lining the drive, may also have been planted at this time. Along its south side and north of the ha-ha, overlooking the park, was the Sunny Walk, while a bridleway from Aynho village to Souldern (the former Port Way) was carried under the Lime Avenue via a tunnel. This tunnel was screened from the house by evergreen oaks, still extant and an important feature of the skyline, imported from France in the late C19 or early C20.

In 1760 William Cartwright commissioned Lancelot Brown to produce a design for landscaping the park. He proposed extending the park east to the Bicester Road; creating a lake in the valley; removing most of the elm avenue; levelling the terraces in front of the house; and adding a circular carriageway around the perimeter of the park. By 1763 over £1000, and possibly nearer £1500, had been paid to Brown for carrying out a modified version thereof, chief amongst the omissions being the lake and carriageway, while the eastward extension of the park was not undertaken until the 1790s. What Brown did do was remove the formal gardens to the south of the house and fill in the canal, replacing them with a flat lawn divided from the park by the ha-ha. In the park the elm walk may have been broken into clumps, with other groups of trees being planted informally. The view from the house was framed by plantings to either side.

About the time William Ralph Cartwright came of age in 1792 enclosure enabled the park to be extended along its eastern side, from the Port Way to the Bicester Road, down which the present 3m high stone wall was built. To the west of the house the Deddington road was re-routed and some thirty buildings demolished, leaving only Friar's Well, occupied by the agent.

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Humphry Repton (1752-1818) spent ten days at Aynho in 1796/7 and prepared two plans (which do not appear to have survived); the Corner Lodge approach drive may have been his idea.

In the Second World War the park was used as a fuel dump, the largest in the midlands.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** In 1696 the kitchen garden occupied a compartment to the south-west of the house. By 1758, (and probably after 1721), new gardens had been built 400m north-east of the house. In the early C19 vegetables and most of the flowers for the house were grown in the larger garden, while the smaller contained the glasshouses. The kitchen gardens were built over in the 1960s. Adjacent is the cottage known as The Bothy, in the late C19 and early C20 the home of the head gardener.

**REFERENCES**

T Humphris, *Garden Glory* (1969) N Cooper, *Aynho* (1984) T Humphris, *Apricot Village* (1987) E Cartwright-Hignett (ed), *Lili at Aynho* (1989) H McKee and P McCulloch, *Aynho Park 1696*(1996, (Architectural Association dissertation 1996) J Heward and R Taylor, *The Country Houses of Northamptonshire*, (RCHM(E) 1996), pp 72-9 B A Bailey (ed), *Northamptonshire in the Early Eighteenth Century: The Drawings of Peter Tillemans and Others*, *Northants Record Soc* 39 (1996), p 4

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1889 3rd edition published 1923 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1923

Description written: 1998 Register Inspector: PAS 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.