

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Croome Court

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

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Croome Court

Name:	Croome Court
County:	Worcestershire
District:	Malvern Hills (District Authority)
Parish:	Croome D'abitot
County:	Worcestershire
District:	Malvern Hills (District Authority)
Parish:	Severn Stoke
County:	Worcestershire
District:	Wychavon (District Authority)
Parish:	Pirton
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.100708 Longitude: -2.1955794 National Grid Reference: SO8670044726, SO8850444750 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000458 Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986 Date of most recent amendment: 23-Mar-2021 Statutory Address 1: Croome Court, near High Green, Worcester, Worcestershire, WR8 9DW

Historique de la conservation

The Coventry family became established in Worcestershire in the late-C16, and were created earls in 1697. The sixth Earl, who inherited in 1751 and died in 1809, was foremost among the noblemen who developed their estates under the influence of classical philosophies and the Grand Tour. His long tenure of the Croome estate saw the full development of the landscape park around a rebuilt house, and Croome's recognition as one of the greatest landscape creations of the age.

After the early-C19 there were few additions or alterations at Croome, the landscape of which matured and then decayed through neglect. The family remained here until 1948 when the house was sold for institutional use. In 1996 the National Trust purchased 271ha of the park and began its restoration. Since 2007 the house has been owned by The Croome Heritage Trust who lease it to the National Trust.

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Pirton Park, 2km to the north-west, was landscaped by Lancelot Brown for the Earl of Coventry in the 1760s. Although here registered as a separate site for reasons of clarity, Croome and Pirton were intervisible and essentially elements of the same scheme of landscaping.

Details

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING: Croome Court lies around 10km south of Worcester, on a relatively low-lying plain between higher ground to the east and west, onto which its park extends. The same corridor is followed by the M5 motorway, which cuts through the western side of the outer park. Parts of the park are bounded by minor public roads, whereas elsewhere plantation belts or other planting define the edge. Some stretches (for example along the southern perimeter in the area of the Park Seat) are followed by a blue lias stone wall, probably C19 and replacing one of the 1790s.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES: the nearest entrance to the house is the Pershore (or London) Lodge and gates (listed Grade I), 400m north-east of it. Comprising a Triumphal Arch with two-storey lodge (rebuilt 1877) on the north side, all in Bath stone ashlar, the entrance is of 1779 and was probably designed by Robert Adam (1728-1792) and altered by James Wyatt (1747-1813) around 1800. From here the drive, which continues the old line of the public road which was diverted around the outside of the park by Brown in the early 1750s, runs in a straight line across a lawn for around 150m. The drive then dips and sweeps south towards the north front of the house, successive views being obtained across the park of the Panorama, the Temple Greenhouse, Brown's church, Croome Court itself and further afield to May Hill, the Malverns and Bredon Hill.

Worcester Lodge (listed Grade II), standing on the minor road 1.5km west of Croome Court, is of about 1800 and was probably designed by James Wyatt. Originally one of a pair, it is a two-storey Bath stone ashlar building with gates to one side. From here a drive runs due east, past the north end of the lake and along the Croome River, before following its curve southwards to the north front of the house. Roughly midway along the west drive, at the north end of the lake, are the Punchbowl Gates (listed Grade II). Of the 1760s and rebuilt in 1794 by James Wyatt, these comprise a pair of ashlar gate piers linked by shallow arches topped with Coade stone urns (in store 1999).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING: designed in 1751-1752 by Lancelot Brown (1716-1783) with advice from Sanderson Miller (1717-1780), Croome Court (listed Grade I) is a limestone ashlar Palladian mansion. It incorporates substantial parts of the preceding, C17, mansion. The main north and south fronts are of eleven bays, with a basement and two storeys and three-storey end pavilions. The interior includes work by Brown, Robert Adam, G Vassalli, and J Rose Jnr.

On the east side of the house is Brown's stables court of around 1752 (later rebuilt by Adam) with, attached to the east, a mid to late-C18 grooms' house (both listed Grade II).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS: Croome Court faces north and south onto gently mounded lawns with, to the north of the house, a cricket pitch. West of the house the grounds fall gently away to the derelict remains of a mid-C19 bridge across the Croome River about 150m to the south-west. This bridge occupies the site of the Chinese Bridge of the 1750s. East of the house, a shrubbery, contained within a brick ha-ha, extends around the walled kitchen garden and beyond. At its summit, 100m south of the garden's south-east corner, and contained within the ha-ha, is the Rotunda (listed Grade I), a circular Bath stone building with shallow dome begun in 1753 and designed by Lancelot Brown. From outside the Rotunda are views to the Panorama, the Malverns, Bredon Hill, May Hill and probably Dunstall Castle and Bourton Tower.

PARK: extending roughly north/south for around 1.5km down the centre of the park, with Croome Court to its east, is the artificial lake called Croome River. Some 50m wide, the River has carefully designed meanders, and sweeps west at its north end before broadening into an irregular lake with three islands. The lake is bounded by the Lakeside, Temple Greenhouse and Evergreen Shrubberies (the last curtailed in the 1860s when views were opened from the house), bounded by a ha-ha. Yew and holm oak survive from the original planting. Within and around the Shrubberies a network of paths connects the principal concentration of garden features. These include at the north-east corner of the lake the Dry Arch Bridge (listed Grade II), which carries the west drive over the garden walk. Built to Brown's design in 1765 this was extensively rebuilt and decorated about 1797 by James Wyatt in Bath stone with Coade stone vermiculated masonry arch faces with bearded mask keystones to either

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side. Midway along the lake's north side was a monument (removed for restoration 1997) to Capability Brown, erected by the sixth Earl in 1797, which recorded how Brown's 'inimitable and creative genius' had 'formed this garden scene out of a morass'. At the north-west corner of the lake stands a vermiculated stone grotto (listed Grade II). Begun by Brown in 1765-1767, 'Derbyshire petrifications' or spars were added in the 1780s; the nymph Sabrina added in the 1780s and a Coade stone plaque of 1810 were both restored in the late 1990s. Linking the island at the south end of the lake with the shrubbery to either side are two iron bridges (both listed Grade II) of 1790s which replaced earlier ones by Brown. A 1970s bridge echoing their design crosses the Croome River immediately east of the lake on the site of the Rope Ferry. At the south end of the lake are the remains of a boathouse, present by 1765. North of the east bridge is a Wyatt pedestal with urn (listed Grade II) of about 1800 (restored in the 1990s). On the island itself is the Island Temple, of Bath stone ashlar, of 1776 and by Robert Adam. On the west side of the garden walk, which leads north-eastwards from the north-east corner of the lake, is a Coade stone statue of a Druid on a plinth of 1794 (both listed Grade II; Druid restored in the 1990s) by James Wyatt. Finally, in the shrubbery 250m north-east of the lake, is the Bath stone Temple Greenhouse (listed Grade I), designed c 1760 by Robert Adam. This is intervisible with the house, 500m to the south-east.

The walk through the Shrubbery continues, with gates (possibly 1780s) and on the south side a ha-ha, for c 500m beyond its eastern end, climbing uphill to Croome church (listed Grade I). This was designed as an eyecatcher from the house by Capability Brown, begun in 1758 and finished in 1763. Its interior is by Robert Adam. South of it, in the Shrubbery, is an icehouse.

The ridge on which the church lies and which runs down the east side of the park has on its top three 'eyecatcher' buildings, linked by walks: the church itself, 500m north of the house; the Rotunda (see above) 350m east of the house; and the Park Seat. This last (often known from the C19 as the Owl House; listed Grade II), is a Bath stone temple or seat 100m east of and above the south end of the Croome River, looking down the River and across the park to the house 1km to the north. It was designed in 1766-1767 by Robert Adam. From it a footpath leads north-west, with the plantation belt and park wall to the west, to Westfield Farm (incorporating C18 'cow shades'), and thence to complete the circuit walk to the south end of the lake.

Another eyecatcher, the Panorama (listed Grade I), lies on the high ground of Cubs Moor 2km to the west of the house, ground added to the park by enclosure and exchange 1763-1773. Of 1801-1807 and designed by James Wyatt, it is a two-storey circular tower of Bath stone from which views are obtained both over the park and to the whole of the surrounding landscape. There are two other main eyecatchers. Dunstall Castle (listed Grade II*), 1km south of the Park Seat, was built in 1766 to a design by Robert Adam in his Roman military style, of which it is an outstanding example. Pirton Tower, 2.5km to the north-west in Pirton Park, also laid out by Brown for Lord Coventry, was built in 1797 to a design by James Wyatt.

The historical sources, which are notably full, suggest that only some statues and an obelisk (perhaps pasteboard) have been lost from the C18 landscape.

A park south of the house was enclosed about 1712. Home Park, known from the 1740s simply as 'the Park', was apparently ornamental; deer were kept and hunted elsewhere, in Pirton Park 2.5km to the north-west, and the Red Deer Park 2km to the south. The Park was incorporated in Brown's larger landscape park.

Croome was Brown's first major independent commission, given to him in, or just before, 1750. His initial task, a major one which to some extent predetermined the plan of the new landscape, was to drain the land around the house preparatory to its rebuilding, the culverts serving his new serpentine lake. The house went up without delay and in 1758 was painted by Richard Wilson (died 1782) in a setting which included the lake, Brown's bridge across it and the hilltop church, the last still under construction. Brown's surviving account book begins too late to record the first decade's work at Croome. After 1760 it records a few payments, and shows that Benjamin Read was the foreman in charge.

Map and other evidence shows that from the mid-C18 the landscape park was enlarged on several occasions, reaching its maximum extent in the 1930s. The vast majority of the registered area is now farmland (1990s), although large parts of its eastern part are occupied by the installations of DERA Defford (formerly a Second World War airfield).

KITCHEN GARDEN: the mid to late-C18 walled kitchen garden (listed Grade II), remodelled in the mid-C19 with a heated wall, stands immediately east of the stables court, and lies within the ha-ha around the house and pleasure grounds. It measures

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a maximum of 200m east/west by 150m north/south. A gardener's cottage stands in the north-west corner of the garden; of C18 date it was remodelled in the mid-C19.

About 1800 Croome was reckoned by Arthur Young to be second only to Kew as a botanical showpiece, and Croome's glass was an especial feature.

Summary

A mid-C18 landscape park by Lancelot Brown, his first independent commission associated with a country house; features include parkland buildings of the highest quality by Brown, Robert Adam, and James Wyatt.

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.

Bibliographie

Books and journals

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Dean, W, Hortus Croomensis, (1824)

Stround, D, Capability Brown, (1975), 57-60

Other

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6" to 1 mile: Worcestershire sheet 40 SE, 1st edition published 1884-1885; Worcestershire sheet 41 SW, 1st edition published 1884-1885; Worcestershire sheet 47 NE, 1st edition published 1884-1885; Worcestershire sheet 48 NW, 1st edition published 1884-1885; OS 25" to 1 mile: Worcestershire sheet 41.13, 1st edition published 1885

Archival items: For guide to the substantial body of archival materials see Beresford 1996

R Lockett, A Survey of Historic Parks and Gardens in Worcestershire, (Hereford & Worcester Gardens Trust 1997)