

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Norris Castle

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

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
Norris Castle*

Name:	Norris Castle
District:	Isle of Wight (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	East Cowes
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.761864 Longitude: -1.2712070 National Grid Reference: SZ 51498 96061 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000927 Date first listed: 09-Jan-1987 Date of most recent amendment: 07-Oct-2016 Statutory Address 1: Norris Castle, New Barn Road, East Cowes, Isle of Wight, PO32 6AZ

Historique de la conservation

During the reign of King Edward I, land in Whippingham Parish was held by Richard le Noreys, the spelling changing over subsequent centuries through Norreys and Norres to Norris; the place name of a house that appears on C18 maps. In 1795 Lord Henry Seymour (1746-1830), a retired politician, purchased what was then a small farm. Plans for a villa estate were probably being drawn up the following year when it was noted that the grounds ‘will shortly be ornamented with the house of Lord H. Seymour’ (Tomkins 1796 in Ettwein Bridges Architects 2016, 25). The architect James Wyatt (1746-1813) was appointed to design a castellated model farm, and the main house, Norris Castle, constructed from c1799 at a cost of £190,000. The house was built just to the north of the earlier farm which was subsequently demolished. It is shown in a sketch of 1804 overlooking the Solent (Ettwein Bridges Architects 2016, Appendix A). A landscaped park covering 124 acres with an oval loop of carriage drive was created from former fields and is shown on the 1810 OS map. It was among the earliest marine villas on the island, taking advantage of a position which offered spectacular views across the Solent and Spithead. The inclusion of a watercolour view of Norris by Humphry Repton in the 1805 edition of Peacock's *Polite Repository* suggests his likely involvement in the design (Carter et al 1982 and Daniels 1999). A similar view, published in the edition of 1800, of the adjacent East Cowes Castle (built in 1798 for Repton's then partner, the architect John Nash) supports the view that Repton was already working on the island (Basford 1989). His son, George Stanley Repton, who worked in Nash's office, also made several drawings of Norris Castle in a sketchbook of c1795-1805.

Lord Henry Seymour and his younger brother, Robert Seymour (1748-1831), shared an interest in farming and gardening, and, after 1790, a substantial income provided by sinecures in Ireland. This subsequently funded building work and agricultural improvements upon their estates (Robert's estate was at Taliaris, near Llandeilo, Wales). In 1802 a Board of Agriculture report on the Isle of Wight praised Lord Henry for his improvements, including using seaweed as a fertilizer: ‘The coast abounds with Kelp but this valuable manure is not used except by Lord Henry Seymour at Norris, his Lordship is making experiments upon a small Estate, and using a variety of manures’ (Bell 1802 in Phibbs 2016, 12). The model farm at Norris housed livestock with the resultant manure being used to fertilise the attached kitchen garden and heat the hot beds. Manure was also possibly transported to the Seymour family's nearby estates, with straw being brought in the opposite direction to provide bedding for

livestock at the farm. Engravings indicate that the surrounding parkland served as pasture for cattle, sheep, and a muster of peacocks. Although small in scale, the estate had both an agricultural function and picturesque parkland setting, combining beauty and utility so that the agricultural aspects, such as the model farm, were also pleasing to the eye.

Norris Castle hosted numerous royal visits during the C19. The Prince Regent visited in 1819 and Princess, later Queen, Victoria stayed at the Castle with her mother, the Duchess of Kent, in 1831 and again in 1833. The Queen was even considering its purchase in 1839 and 1843 but instead bought the neighbouring property of Osborne House. She continued to visit Norris and mentioned it in her journals. For instance, in June 1845, the Queen noted: 'After our luncheon...we drove over to Norris Castle. We have got it for lodging the King of the Netherlands, who is coming here tomorrow. We walked through all the rooms & I recognised with pleasure my old room & Mama's & my bedroom' (Ettwein Bridges Architects 2016, 22). It continued to accommodate the family in the later C19, and in 1881 the Queen wrote: '[Myself,] Bertie, Alex, & the children... took tea out on the battlements [of the terrace]...it was so pleasant, the view over the sea lovely, & all the fine trees in the foreground'.

Lord Henry Seymour had a reputation for eccentricity and benevolence when he died, unmarried, in 1830. Norris Castle passed to Lord George Seymour before being bought by a newspaper tycoon, Robert Bell, in 1839. He added an area of boundary wall at the south-east of the estate and possibly at the north-east corner (including a gateway), and may also have planted a pinetum. It was purchased in 1880 by the ninth Duke of Bedford, *Country Life* referring in 1898 to Norris being 'a favourite home for the late Dowager Duchess of Bedford'. The Castle continued to serve as a place for royal relations to stay, often accommodating Kaiser Wilhelm (Queen Victoria's grandson). After the Bedfords, the estate passed to Lord Amptill; it was offered for sale in 1898, was sold to a syndicate in the early C20. It was later owned by Major Arthur Birkbeck to whom, in 1924, the Office of Woods sold the piece of Osborne estate land lying between the east boundary wall and Pier Road, including the Landing House (Grade II* listed) and Queen's Tea House (Grade II listed). (This area forms part of the Grade II* Register entry for the Osborne estate). Norris Estate changed hands again in 1951 when it was bought by Mrs C A Briscoe George, later passing to her daughter, Mrs Lacon, and thence to the trustees of her will. In 2015 it was sold and possible plans were drawn up for redevelopment; it remains in private ownership (2016).

Details

Ornamental pleasure grounds and park laid out from c1799, possibly by Humphry Repton, as a landscaped setting for a marine villa built in the form of a Gothic castle designed by James Wyatt, and a castellated model farm following the traditions of a *ferme ornée*.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Norris Castle is situated at the northernmost tip of the Isle of Wight, on the east side of the River Medina and immediately north-east of the A3021 and the town of East Cowes. The south-western half of the 143 acre site occupies level ground which falls north-eastwards, gently at first and then, from the site of the Castle itself, precipitously to the Solent, the shoreline of which forms the entire north-eastern site boundary. A high rubble-stone wall encloses the western and part of the southern boundary from scattered houses on the edge of East Cowes while to the east, the woodland and meadowland of the Norris estate merge with that of the neighbouring estate of Osborne. These two estates form a large part of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The elevated position of Norris Castle affords impressive views out towards the Solent, as well as a commanding and dramatic presence when seen from passing boats or ships in the sea.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main drive describes a great oval loop through the park. The principal approach begins to the west, at a junction with Old Road. It then passes an open field and leads along an avenue of trees before reaching the western boundary of the park. This is guarded by stone gate piers and a lodge, Fort Norris (formerly known as West Lodge, Grade II listed), built by James Wyatt in c1800 possibly on the site of, or incorporating, the remains of a windmill. Constructed in stone rubble, it consists of a small, circular three-storey tower with a castellated parapet and a single-storey C20 addition to the west. From here the approach, which is currently overgrown and inaccessible (2016), curves to the north-east, passing between plantations before offering a glimpse across the park to the castellated model farm. It sweeps eastwards and arrives at

the forecourt on the south-west entrance front of the Castle. Along the approach the Solent is screened so that the first sight of the sea is after passing through the entrance of the Castle into the main hall and out onto the terrace.

The drive is a symmetrical loop and there is thus a second approach, past the farm (the 'farm approach'), which may originally have been used by heavy goods and services. This is currently the only accessible driveway. It begins from New Barn Road at the southern tip of the estate, entering between gate piers beside South Lodge; a two-storey early or mid-C20 building faced with imitation (cast) rusticated stone and surmounted by a crenelated parapet. The drive passes through an open field and then between a second set of gate piers in a boundary wall. It continues along an avenue and curves north-east to pass the principal, north-west front of Norris Castle Farm (Grade I listed), a vast oblong ensemble. Built in the tradition of a *ferme ornée* by Wyatt in c1799, the principal front of the model farm contains a central bailiff's house flanked by an embattled wall, then a pair of squat towers with round-headed cart archways, further lengths of embattled wall, and two more towers. From the farm the drive curves to the west and the Castle bursts into view against the backdrop of the Solent before reaching the main entrance.

A third approach (the 'landing approach') was provided from a landing quay on the coast at the north-east corner of the estate. It led up a slope to meet the main drive and may have been used by visitors or tradesmen bringing goods over from the mainland. The most imposing view of Norris Castle was from the Solent, with the Castle battlements commanding the upper slopes, framed by trees, and the sea wall in the immediate foreground.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Norris Castle (Grade I listed, NHLE No.1437975) stands centrally and towards the north-east edge of the park, its garden front overlooking lawns which plunge straight down from the Castle towards the sea. The Castle was designed by James Wyatt as a marine villa and built in c1799 in stone rubble with flint galleting. It is laid out to a linear plan, orientated north-west to south-east; the building is far longer than it is wide in order to maximise the impression of the Castle from the Solent. The main residential portion stands at the south-east and is dominated by a great four-storey round tower with a castellated parapet. This rises on a terrace retained by a high wall which projects as a rounded bastion. Attached to the north-west are a service wing and then an enclosed service yard. The building terminates on this side in a vast projecting bastion and includes several square turrets along its length. The main entrance is on the south-west front beneath a porch with a Gothic doorway.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The residential wing of Norris Castle, with its round tower, opens east and north onto the paved surface of its top terrace, the parapet walls of which are overgrown with the remnants of ornamental planting. Below the terrace walls, the whole castle complex stands on a further broad grassed terrace extending along its entire north-east elevation and around each end and from which fine views are gained over the Solent. The grassed bank supporting the terrace is now (2016) partially overgrown with clumps of bramble and thorn. Below the terrace bank, a lawn of meadow turf, dotted with islands of encroaching scrub, slopes away north-eastwards, gently at first and then more steeply, towards a belt of scrub woodland which cuts off the lawns from the shore. An engraving of the upper slopes made by William Cooke in 1808, soon after the Castle was completed, shows the lawns open in character with occasional small trees and an island shrubbery. The upper slopes are enclosed on the west side by a loose belt of ornamental trees which survive from the extensive planting on this side of the lawns shown established by the 1864 OS map. Among the surviving historic plantings are poplars, conifers and beech trees. This belt screened the sight of the Solent on the principal approach. It contained a drive ('Solent Drive') which curved seawards to connect with, and branch off into, two areas of woodland; West Copse and East Copse, which frame the lower slopes of the lawn. The drive survives as an earthwork terrace and the tree species include poplar, lime and beech within West Copse, and crab apple, horse-chestnut and robinia within East Copse. This woodland is shown established as a continuous shoreline belt on Andrews' map of 1769 and on the 1810 OS map. It was opened up beneath the Castle to allow the lawn to run down to the shore (Ettwein Bridges Architects 2016, Appendix A). This arrangement, and an accompanying summerhouse, survived into the C20 (1908, 1938 OS maps). The summerhouse was a rustic circular building, which appears to have been built of timber with a steeply pitched thatched roof. A view by George Brannon, taken from the sea in 1844, also shows a walk laid out along the raised sea wall.

On the south-west, entrance front, the Castle opens onto a gravelled forecourt and beyond it into the remnants of pleasure grounds. These are framed by the curving arms of the drive and enclosed at their south-western limit (some 150m from the

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
Norris Castle

Castle) by a line of fencing. The grounds are laid to rough-mown lawn dotted with the occasional ornamental tree. Within the south-western half of the pleasure grounds, the lawn merges into a loose belt of mature trees which includes a number of exotics and, on the eastern side, remnants of shrubberies planted beneath the trees. The 1864 OS map shows the grounds covering the same extent but more open in character and planted informally with trees and with two large enclosed planted areas on the south-western boundary; one surrounding the Pump House and marked as a 'rookery', and another on the site of the old Norris Farm. This layout still appears to survive within the undergrowth. The Pump House (Grade II listed) is a rubble stone building with a hipped slate roof and sash windows. It appears to have served as a cart house and engine house where water was pumped from a well to the Castle and surrounding estate.

THE PARK The park comprises largely open grazed grassland interspersed with belts and copses of trees. Beyond the pleasure grounds to the west, south, and east, occasional individual parkland trees and a few small clumps survive from the pattern recorded on the 1864 OS map, although even at this date, the parkland was not densely or extensively planted. Views of the park can be obtained from the pleasure grounds and main drive to their west and east, the view to the east open to the wooded boundary of the Osborne estate. A high rubble-stone wall encloses the park along its western boundary and to the south of Norris Castle Farm, both walls being lined intermittently within by a narrow perimeter belt of mature trees depicted on the 1864 OS map. The stone wall forming the southern boundary runs from the south-west corner of the park as far as the model farm, some distance inside the present south boundary of the park which extends to South Lodge. The area to the south of the wall is an open field, crossed by the farm approach, which is shown on estate plans of 1879 and 1916, as well as C19 maps. There is an additional section of boundary wall at the north-east corner of the estate, next to Norris Woods. Along the west boundary wall of the park, which is up to c3.5m high, are two cattle shelters (Grade II listed). The southern shelter has a hipped slate roof and is entered via a later square-headed opening but that to the north is now roofless with two round-headed arches.

A north to south belt of connected copses runs parallel and c.100m to the east of the west boundary wall. This screen would have hidden the Solent on the early part of the principal approach, just beyond Fort Norris. It largely contains oak trees but there are some ornamental species, such as lime and hornbeam. Near the north end is a substantial C-shaped pond constructed of coursed rubble with a watering slope for livestock on the east side. There are further stone-lined watering ponds and ornamental ponds across the estate; the 1864 OS map shows nine ponds of which at least seven survive (four of the best preserved stone-lined ponds are Grade II listed). At the south end of the looping drive, between the principal approach and farm, is a further plantation. A set of buildings is shown immediately south of this plantation on the 1845 Tithe map. These are likely to be workshops mentioned in the 1830 sales particulars but demolished by 1864; 'An open stable for farmhorses, with yard; cart lodges; sawing house with pit; Carpenter's shop; store room; Blacksmith's shop; shed for coals; timber yard' (Phibbs 2016, 13). There are now two late C20 steel-framed agricultural buildings in this location (2016). On the north side of the plantation is a driveway bounded by an avenue of trees which connected the two approaches.

The west boundary wall of the estate terminates at its most northerly point, where it meets the East Cowes Esplanade, in a tall square stone tower; the 'Bathing House' (Grade II listed). According to the 1830 sale particulars it included, amongst several rooms, a plunging bath and sea water pump, with stairs leading to the water's edge and a landing stage. The building is now roofless but the walls survive almost to full height. Extending eastwards from the Bathing House is a substantial sea wall built of squared and coursed quarry-faced stone with a battered outer edge. It is described in 1830 as: 'a grand and delightful terrace walk, nearly a mile in length, embanked, at a very considerable expense, in a most substantial manner; near to which, vessels of considerable burden may lay' (Phibbs 2016, 15). The first 50m remains intact and is Grade II listed but thereafter the wall has suffered erosion, landslips and storm damage. A stone-built landing quay was originally situated at the east end of the wall, near the original boundary with the Osborne House estate. Next to it was a small tower marked as a summer house on the 1864 OS map; the remains of a south wall, part of the return walls and part of an arch survive in this location. A small pinetum was created between the Landing Approach and model farm probably in the mid-C19 but was cleared away in the early C20.

KITCHEN GARDEN Norris Farm and kitchen garden form a single castellated Gothic complex 300m to the south of the Castle, all Grade I listed (NHLE No.1223182). The embattled wall of the farm continues around the perimeter to form the garden wall, which is embellished with tall, square, corner turrets. It forms an extensive enclosure, c120m by 28m, backing on to the south-

east side of the farm. The arrangement is highly unusual; although walled gardens are occasionally attached to stables, this is the only known example attached to a model farm in England. It lies on a slight south-east slope with side walls that therefore increase in height until they meet the south wall, which is lower to avoid casting too much shade.

The garden is currently (2016) not in use and is considerably overgrown. It was entered on its north-east side through a gateway formed of a round-headed arch, containing double doors, flanked by turrets. A set of 1839 sale particulars describe it as: ‘an excellent kitchen garden, well stocked and cropped, with lofty stone walls, clothed fruit trees, in high perfection; pinery and melon pits’ (Ettwein Bridges Architects 2016, 41). The Tithe map indicates that there was an additional area, south-west of the walled garden, under cultivation in 1845, although it had been converted to pasture by 1864. The OS map shows the garden divided by paths into rectilinear plots and containing three glasshouses in 1864. The largest glasshouse is a vinery attached to the south-east wall of the farm. It has ornamental cast-iron columns decorated with leaf-foliage supporting the lean-to roof and cast-iron floor grills covering subterranean hot-water heating pipes. The other two glasshouses are a pair of heated pit houses situated in front of the vinery. These served as the pineapple and melon pits, each with sloping beds and a boiler. On the north side of the garden are back sheds, including a tool room, potting shed and furnace/boiler room. In 1896 the kitchen garden is recorded as containing greenhouses, a vinery house, cucumber house, two furnace houses, two manure pumps and extensive tanks, as well as a pump and hoses for watering (Ettwein Bridges Architects 2016, 41). The corner towers have been used to store fruit; trained fruit trees covered the garden walls and included peach, apricot, pear and apple trees in c1916.

A raised terrace bounded by iron railings runs the full length and exterior of the south wall. It was recorded as a ‘gravelled terrace walk’ in 1830 and is accessed from a doorway in the centre of the wall (Phibbs 2016, 9). In 1898 *Country Life* described it as ‘the feature which captivates the wanderer the most’ with herbaceous and fruit borders on each side, and ‘unmatched views...the very ideal of a sheltered walk’.

The entry was subject to a Minor enhancement on 12 December 2016.

This List entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 01/02/2017.

Summary

Ornamental pleasure grounds and park laid out from c1799, possibly by Humphry Repton, as a landscaped setting for a marine villa built in the form of a Gothic castle designed by James Wyatt, and a castellated model farm following the traditions of a *ferme ornée*.

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.

Reasons for Designation

Norris Castle, a landscaped park and pleasure grounds laid out from c1799, is registered at Grade I for the following principal reasons: * *Rarity*: as an exemplar of a Regency marine villa estate; * *Architecture*: as the contemporary landscaped setting for an architectural ensemble of outstanding significance, including a Gothic Revival castle, castellated model farm and lodge by one of England’s most notable architects, James Wyatt; * *Authenticity*: as a well-preserved, essentially single-phase, designed landscape; * *Degree of survival*: the overall layout remains largely in its entirety and there have been few changes or alterations; * *Designer*: Humphry Repton, one of England’s greatest late C18 and early C19 landscape designers, is likely to have been involved in the design of the landscaped park; * *Walled garden*: as one of the grandest examples of a late C18 castellated walled garden in England; * *Vistas and external views*: for the manner in which the landscape appropriates the natural topography,

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
Norris Castle

and for the controlled views along the approaches, as well as the commanding view of the Castle, in its setting, from the sea;
* Historic interest: as a landscape laid out according to picturesque principles, which also encapsulates late C18 agricultural improvements during the Napoleonic Wars; * Historic association: as an estate closely linked to the C19 royal family in which The Prince Regent, Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm and the King of the Netherlands visited; * Group value: with the Grade I-listed house and model farm, Grade II-listed lodge, Pump House, Bathing House, sea wall (a 50m length), two cattle shelters and four stone-lined ponds, as well as the adjacent Grade II* registered park and Grade I-listed house at Osborne.

Bibliographie

Books and journals

Basford, V, *Historic Parks and Gardens of the Isle of Wight*, (1989), 41, 54, 56, 62
Carter et al, G, *Humphry Repton Landscape Gardener 1752-1818*, (1982), 155
Daniels, S, *Humphry Repton*, (1999)
Pevsner, N, Lloyd, D, *The Buildings of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, (1967), 743-4
'Norris Castle' in *Country Life*, , Vol. 4, (9 July 1898), 28-9

Other

Ettwein Bridges Architects, *Norris Castle Heritage Assessment report* (2016)
Ettwein Bridges Architects, *Norris Castle Statement of Significance* (2016)
George Brannon, *Norris Castle Isle of Wight*, engraved and published 1844 (ECWS 227), (Isle of Wight Record Office)
George Brannon, *Norris*, engraved and published 1844 (ECWS 219), (Isle of Wight Record Office)
J Andrews, *A topographical map of the Isle of Wight in Hampshire, 1769* (Isle of Wight Record Office)
Lake, J, *Norris Castle Farm Site Assessment Report* (2016)
OS map 1:2500 (1864 edn, surveyed 1863-4)
OS map 1:2500 (1898 edn)
OS map 1:2500 (1908 edn)
OS Map, 1:10000 (1866 edn)
OS Map, 1:10000 (1938 edn)
OS Map, One inch to one mile (Old Series, 1810)
Phibbs, J, *Lord Henry Seymour's marine villa, assessment report* (2016)
William Cooke, *Norris, Lord Henry Seymour, Isle of Wight*, drawn and published 1808 (ECO 185), (Isle of Wight Record Office)