

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

STOWE

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
STOWE

Name:	STOWE
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Biddlesden
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Buckingham
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Lillingstone Dayrell with Luffield Abbey
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Radclive-cum-Chackmore
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Stowe
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Water Stratford
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.039009 Longitude: -1.0171727 National Grid Reference: SP 67511 38301 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.localisation:	[52.0554990124265,-1.02239657827582], [52.0554989207709,-1.02238942941946], [52.0555033283171,-1.02238977806497], [52.0554990124265,-1.02239657827582]
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000198 Date first listed: 30-Aug-1987

Details

Extensive and complex pleasure grounds and park around a country mansion. Main phases C18 and early C19, utilising late C17 base, with early C18 work by Charles Bridgeman, Sir John Vanbrugh, James Gibbs and William Kent, and mid C18 work by Lancelot Brown. Stowe was supremely influential on the English landscape garden during the C18.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
STOWE

NOTE This entry is a summary. Because of the complexity of this site, the standard Register entry format would convey neither an adequate description nor a satisfactory account of the development of the landscape. The user is advised to consult the references given below for more detailed accounts. Many Listed Buildings exist within the site, not all of which have been here referred to. Descriptions of these are to be found in the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Temple family bought Stowe in the late C16. In 1677 the third baronet, Sir Richard Temple, began building a mansion on a new site. This building is at the core of the current mansion. Completed in the early 1680s, it had a formal terraced garden with straight walks to the south and a walled kitchen garden close by. The fourth baronet became Lord Cobham in 1714. He rebuilt the house in lavish style and extended and developed the garden in collaboration with Sir John Vanbrugh and Charles Bridgeman (d 1738). Bridgeman created a semi-formal scheme between 1713 and 1734, of which little survives except the boundary walks. By 1724 it covered 14ha and contained more than ten buildings with an early ha-ha. By 1732 Cobham had extended the garden south and west, adding c 30ha and employing William Kent (1685-1748) in the early 1730s to design various buildings and the Elysian Fields, and then James Gibbs for the Hawkwell Field. From 1741 Cobham employed Lancelot Brown (1716-83) as head gardener and clerk of works. Cobham died in 1749, leaving over thirty-nine buildings in c 100ha of garden and Brown left in 1750 to set up his landscape practice. Cobham's successor, Richard Grenville, Earl Temple, reinforced the garden's naturalism and purified the Classical style of the buildings. He also rebuilt both main fronts of the house before his death in 1779. Relatively little was done to the garden during the Marquess of Buckingham's time (1753-1813), but his son, the first Duke, was a plantsman and created the Japanese Garden in the 1820s. The garden then fell into a long, slow decline. In 1921 the estate was sold and became a public school. Some restoration work was undertaken during their tenure of the garden, before the National Trust acquired most of the garden and much of the park in 1989 and embarked on a long-term comprehensive restoration scheme.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The site is adjacent to the north Buckinghamshire boundary with Northamptonshire. Stowe mansion lies 4km north-west of Buckingham, although one of the approaches, Stowe Avenue, begins at the edge of the town. The c 500ha site lies in gently hilly countryside, bounded on the south by the Chackford to Dadford lane, and on the other sides by agricultural land. The setting is largely agricultural with the small villages of Chackford and Dadford on the south and west boundaries respectively. These villages have always been closely associated with the site. Silverstone Race Circuit is adjacent to the northern tip.

The two major approaches to Stowe are very formal, impressive drives and avenues. Stowe Avenue, or the Grand Avenue (c 1774), approaches for 2km straight from Buckingham to the south-east, terminating in the Corinthian Arch which overlooks park, pleasure grounds and mansion to the north. Two drives diverge at this point: one curves across the park to the two Boycott Pavilions (Gibbs 1728, listed grade I) to join the Oxford Avenue west of the pleasure grounds, the other arrives at Bell Gate at south end of the pleasure grounds. Oxford Avenue (late C18) approaches straight from the south-west, crossing the Oxford Water, past the Boycott Pavilions to the north front of the mansion.

The site consists of extensive pleasure grounds, park and woodland. The 400 room mansion (C17/C18, listed grade I) lies near the centre of the site, close to the west boundary of the pleasure grounds. The main, north, entrance front overlooks informal level lawn and beyond this, parkland. The south, garden front faces down the smoothly contoured South Lawn to the Octagon Lake, and beyond the unseen ha-ha across parkland to the Corinthian Arch (Thomas Pitt 1765, listed grade I), 2km away on the southern horizon. Although the house is dominant in the landscape, not all the pleasure grounds are directly visually linked to it. The c 100ha pleasure grounds consist of several informal compartments ranged around the house. These compartments are still enclosed by Bridgeman's formal boundary and the lines of many of his straight ha-has. The major water bodies, formed by damming local streams, connect most of the compartments: Home Park, the South Lawn, the Elysian Fields (Kent), the Grecian Valley (Brown) and Hawkwell Field (Gibbs). Each compartment contains and links a variety of C18 garden buildings and structures in many styles. There are around thirty-three garden buildings in total. Many of these are of great architectural importance and influence and were designed by distinguished architects. The buildings reflect much iconography relating to

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
STOWE

the political views of Lord Cobham and Earl Temple: of the importance of empire, and the satirising of Robert Walpole (Prime Minister 1721(42) and his foreign policy which Cobham considered too pacific for British interests. Most C18 guidebooks adopted a clockwise route through the pleasure grounds to visit the compartments and their buildings, entering south of the Octagon Lake. This tour can still be accomplished. A golf course has been sited in Home Park and on the South Lawn, whilst several other sports facilities have been sited in the pleasure grounds. A variety of school buildings erected since 1923 lie to the west of the mansion.

The pleasure grounds are surrounded by the parks, now farmland. At its most extensive (1868) the designed landscape and woodland covered c 250ha, increased from c 200ha in 1727. The park is bounded to the north by the major woodland, Stowe Woods, laid out with a network of formal rides, some of which may date from the early C17. This area is partly affected by Silverstone Race Circuit north-east of the Wood. The Fallow Deer Park links the woodland and pleasure grounds. Its backbone is the straight Roman Road which runs diagonally across the site from south-west to north-east and forms the west boundary between pleasure grounds and park. The park contains its own group of eighteen C18 ornamental buildings, some of which continue the iconographic themes. One of these is General Wolfe's Obelisk (Vanbrugh C18, listed grade I), dedicated after his 1759 victory at Quebec, continuing the theme of the importance of empire.

REFERENCES

Note: There is a wealth of material about this site. The key references are cited below.

B Seeley, Description of the house and gardens ... at Stow (1744 and 1777 edns) *J Garden History* 2, no 1 (Jan-March 1982), pp 53-4; 5, no 1 (Jan-March 1985), pp 72-83 *Country Life*, 17 (15 April 1905), p 522; 35 (3 January 1914), pp 18-26; (17 January 1914), pp 90-9 M Bevington, *Stowe, The garden and the park* (1994) [good on printed and archival sources] N Pevsner and E Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (1994), pp 660-87

Maps S Bridgeman, General plan of woods, park, and gardens of Stowe, 1739 Seeley, Plan in 1777 edn of Description of the house and gardens ... at Stow

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885 2nd edition published 1900 1923 edition OS 25" to 1mile: 1st edition published 1880
Description written: May 1998 Register Inspector: SR 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.