

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

FONTHILL

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

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Name:	FONTHILL
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Chilmark
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	East Knoyle
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Fonthill Bishop
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Fonthill Gifford
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Hindon
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Tisbury
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	West Tisbury
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.084437 Longitude: -2.1212158 National Grid Reference: ST9160631687 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000322 Date first listed: 01-Sep-1987

Details

Landscape park developed c.1740 onwards by Alderman William Beckford and c.1793 onwards by his son William Beckford, with further development c.1850. At most extensive c.2,000ha. Now in divided ownership and in varied use - mainly parkland,

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woodland, and agricultural, and with several separate residences. The present Fonthill House is not within the area covered by the erstwhile Beckford estate, nor has it any connection with that estate.

The main buildings at Fonthill have a complex relationship. On a site 1km south of Fonthill Bishop church, and some 200m west of Fonthill Lake (NGR ST9331), successive houses were built, enlarged or modified (1) for Sir John Mervyn, who bought the nucleus of the estate 1553, (2) for Sir Francis Cottington, who bought it in 1631 and added a stable block, (3) for Alderman William Beckford (1709-70), who bought the estate c.1736 and enlarged and altered the Cottington mansion. This was burnt 1755, and rapidly replaced by (4) a new mansion, Fonthill splendens, designed by 'Mr Hoare' and more or less complete by 1770. Main building and east service wing demolished 1801-07. West service wing incorporated into a further building by Wyatt and Brandon 1848-49 for James Morrison. This last now demolished. William Beckford (1760-1844), born in Fonthill splendens, considered building a Gothic 'chapel' or tower on Stop's Beacon in the early 1790s, and a mock convent ruin on Hinckley Hill 1km south-west of Fonthill splendens. In 1796, work on the latter (designed by James Wyatt) began, and this project rapidly evolved as the nucleus of Fonthill Abbey, elaborated, enlarged and repaired by Wyatt with Beckford's participation until c.1817, and using much of the material from Fonthill splendens in its construction. Beckford sold Fonthill Abbey in 1822, and moved to Bath, where he built, and gardened, again (see Register entry for Beckford's Ride, Avon). The main tower of Fonthill Abbey collapsed 1825, and much of the vast structure was rapidly demolished, leaving only the western end of the Abbey intact, including the Oratory, Sanctuary and Lancaster Tower. Another mansion (also named Fonthill Abbey) 300m south-east of Beckford's Fonthill Abbey, was built for the Marquess of Westminster 1846-52 by William Burn, and demolished 1955. The adjacent stables, also by Burn, were converted to a private residence c.1978, and mid-C19 terraces with 2 sculptural groups remain to the south-west of the site of the Burn mansion. C19 walled kitchen garden 400m further south-east.

Extensive garden and landscape development in the Fonthill estate was undertaken for Alderman Beckford in the mid-C18. Fonthill Lake was enlarged from earlier fishponds to a length of 1.7km, by means of a weir at the southern end. Near the head of the lake are a Boathouse (or possibly 'Water Temple'), and adjacent bridge reached via causeway with 2 large stone vases. 100m west of the Boathouse and spanning the public road from Fonthill Bishop, the Entrance Gateway with twin flanking pavilions probably c.1750, and late C19 approach walls on northern side. Alderman Beckford also built Holy Trinity Church at Fonthill Gifford, 1748, which formed part of the landscape scheme. This replaced in 1866 by another church by T H Wyatt.

On both sides of Fonthill Lake, c.1km south of the Boathouse, are cave or grotto works, probably made for the 2nd William Beckford. Those on the west side include the Hermit's Cave and the Hermit's Cell, with the Hermitage ('a rude erection in imitation of a Cromlech') on higher ground above the caves. Tunnel under roadway nearby. Opposite - i.e. on east side of lake - the Landing Stage, with 4 large stone vases, probably c.1750 - and 100m south, using a quarry site, the main grottoes extending on 3 levels with several entrances and chambers. These described in William Beckford's *Modern Novel Writing*, 1796, II, vi, and probably created by Josiah Lane 1794. An 'Alpine Garden' was made above ground in this area, now mainly beech wood. Apart from these grottoes, William Beckford's park and garden activity was mainly west of Fonthill splendens, ranging widely round the Abbey. Beginning in 1793, he surrounded a large area of the estate with a wall (he did not wish his neighbours to hunt through his grounds), and by c.1797 some 800ha were enclosed. Both this area and outer parts of the estate were crossed by over 40km of paths, some of which can no longer be traced. The wall now mainly demolished. Sections are visible on east side of Newtown/Hindon road, north of Stone Lodge. In the 1790s, his tree plantation was extensive - 'above a million of Trees' in 1796. He made Bitham or Bittern Lake km south of the Abbey, erecting a dam across a steeply falling valley. Uphill from and north of Bitham Lake, a winding rockwork channel, now grown over by rhododendron from the 'American Plantation' to north-east of the Lake where Beckford established trees and shrubs recently introduced to England. Mature deodar, Wellingtonia, swamp cypress, araucaria remain, with undergrowth of rhododendron. Some of this planting may date only from mid- or late C19. Most of Beckford's smaller garden features have gone - glasshouses, rosarium, thornery, herb garden - with the destruction of the Abbey. On Stop or Stop's Beacon, 1km south-west of the Abbey, foundations of a tower remain, which may date either from c.1760, or from 1794-95, when Wyatt made plans for a 'chapel' to be built there.

Country Life, 28 Dec 1901, 840-46; 24 Jan 1957, 157; 24 Nov 1966, 1370-74 Gardener's Magazine, 11, Sep 1835, 441-449 William Beckford Exhibition 1976, 1976 Fothergill D, Beckford of Fonthill, 1979 Grigson G, 'Caves of Verdure', in Gardenage,

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

1952 Pevsner N, Wiltshire, 1975 Rutter J, Delineations of Fonthill, 1823 Thacker C, Masters of the Grotto: Joseph and Josiah Lane, 1976.

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.