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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

FLITWICK MANOR

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Name:	FLITWICK MANOR
District:	Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Flitwick
District:	Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Westoning
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.994678 Longitude: -0.50180695 National Grid Reference: TL 02961 33974 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000383 Date first listed: 01-Jul-1989

Details

Late C18 and early C19 pleasure grounds and park, praised by J C Loudon, the setting for a small country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Edward Blofield purchased the manor in 1632 from the Crown and built the C17 manor house. The estate passed by inheritance and marriage through the Rhodes family in 1669, and then the Dells in 1735. The early C18 estate consisted of The Elms, a plantation to the west of the house, with a kitchen garden and orchard to the south, beyond which were Warren Close and Little Warren Close, and further south, beyond a ditch, Church End Mead which led down to The Flit.

Anne Fisher inherited the house on a marriage settlement with George Hesse and following his death she married George Brooks in 1783. Brooks was responsible for various late C18 improvements. John Thomas Brooks (1794-1858) inherited in 1817 and carried out extensive improvements to the estate. The pleasure grounds were praised by Loudon in the 1820s and 1830s, especially the high level of maintenance, the treatment of the wider estate as a ferme ornée and the exemplary arboretum, planted in a 'Natural Arrangement' (Loudon 1838). The property remained in the Brooks family until 1932 and was occupied by the Lyall family until the late 1950s. The house is now an hotel and much of the land to the north of the site is now under modern housing.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Flitwick Manor, 22ha, is located at the southern end of Flitwick, a small town in mid Bedfordshire, c 16km south of Bedford and 3.5km east of the M1. It is bounded by Church Road to the north, Westoning Road (A5120) to the south and east, and open farmland to the west. Shelter belts and plantations screen the boundaries to the west, north and south. The ground slopes gently from north-west to south-east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach to Flitwick Manor is from the east, along an C18 lime avenue. This approach runs from Church Road, at the southern end of Flitwick, directly to the east front of the house. Further approaches

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from the south and north are no longer used. The northern approach from Church Road was served by Upper Lodge and the southern approach from Westoning Road was marked by the Lower Lodge, both built in 1831 but no longer extant.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The manor house (listed grade II*) is located in the northern portion of the site and was built in the early C17, reworked c 1736, extended late C18 and at various dates in the C19, then to some extent reworked again in 1936 by Sir Albert Richardson. The Manor consists of a red-brick 'E' block of c 1736, encasing the C17 structure, and with later additions mostly in red brick.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the west of the Manor is a walled garden marked as a courtyard on the late C18 and early C19 maps. Pleasure grounds lie to the south of the Manor, occupying the site of a C17 or early C18 kitchen garden which was removed in the C19. To the west of the pleasure grounds and 50m south-west of the Manor is an C18 grotto bridge (listed grade II), constructed of clinker trimmed with red brick. The top of the bridge is grass and the west face is gothick, the east face classical. An archway room underneath is decorated with simple pebblework, with a pebble floor. The Grotto links the pleasure grounds with a plantation, marked on an estate plan of 1717 as The Elms and known by the end of the C18 as The Grove. To the east of the Manor is the main entrance and the C18 lime avenue approach from Flitwick. The parish church of St Peter and St Paul (listed grade I) stands c 50m north-east of the Manor, immediately outside the area here registered. The northern boundary of the estate ran between the Manor and the church until 1829, when it was diverted to the north of the church. The line of the old road is still visible.

PARK The 17ha park lies to the south-east of the Manor, the land falling gently towards the lake, Flit Water, and a shelter belt which screens the A5120 beyond. The existing layout, boundaries and planting of the park remain largely as it was laid out by George Brooks in the late C18, and J T Brooks in the early C19.

Down the western side of the park is the Arboretum, planted from 1819 when the strip of land known as The Five Acres was purchased. The western boundary was moved to the western side of the Arboretum and the southern drive, which is no longer used, led through the Arboretum along the pre-1819 boundary. Much of the C19 planting in the Arboretum survives.

The land to the north of the registered area is no longer parkland and much is now covered by modern housing. This area was part of a C19 expansion of the pleasure grounds to the north of Church Road by J T Brooks. During the 1820s and 1830s he laid out twelve miles of walks through natural and planted woods. These walks, which were ornamented by rustic buildings and seats, circuted a ferme ornée.

The Mount, a feature formed by J T Brooks out of the remains of a motte and bailey castle (scheduled ancient monument), survives. An icehouse has been inserted into its side and the land on which it stands is linked to the Manor and gardens via a tunnel under Church Road.

George Brooks' improvements included laying out the park to the south of the Manor to take in Warren Close, Little Warren Close and Church End Mead, and the formation of Flit Water (pre 1790), by damming The Flit at the north-eastern end of the park. By the early C19 the park had been slightly reduced along its eastern edge by the construction of Westoning Road, which formed the new boundary on this side, as shown in the Enclosure map of 1807. The eastern shelter belt was planted on both sides of Westoning Road in the C19.

John Thomas Brooks altered the boundaries to the west, through the purchase of The Five Acres in 1819, and to the north, by re-routing the public road to the far side (north) of the church in 1829. New approaches were formed from the south and north, served by the Lower and Upper Lodges respectively, both built in 1831. He laid out the Arboretum on the western side of the park and carried out extensive planting throughout the park and gardens.

REFERENCES

Gardeners' Magazine 3, (1827), pp 245-6, 258 Gardeners' Magazine 4, (1828), p 303 Gardeners' Magazine 5, (1829), pp 559-60 J C Loudon, Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum 4, (1838), p 2672 Gardeners' Magazine 19, (1843), p 641 J B Burke, Visitation 1, (1852), pp 8-9 B Jones, Follies and Grottoes (1974), p 286 Elwes and Henry, The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland 4, (1910), p 794; 5, pp 1064, 1070, 1106 Bedfordshire Historical Records Society 66, (1987)

Maps A True Mapp and Plott... George Lettin, 1717 (LL 17/338), (Bedfordshire Record Office) A Map of the Parish of Flitwick... 1793, (Bedfordshire Record Office) Estate Map, post 1798 (Bedfordshire Record Office) Enclosure map of Flitwick

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parish, 1807 (MA 68), (Bedfordshire Record Office) A Map or Plan of an estate belonging to George Brooks esq..., 1810 (LL 17/340), (Bedfordshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1881

Archival items J T Brooks, Flitwick House, its Gardens, Grounds etc (1838), (LL 17/284), (Bedfordshire Record Office) J T Brooks, Hortus Botanicus Flitwickensis (c 1838-42), (LL 19/1), (Bedfordshire Record Office)

Description written: May 1998 Register Inspector: CB Edited: September 1999

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.