

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BECKLEY PARK

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Name:	BECKLEY PARK
County:	Oxfordshire
District:	South Oxfordshire (District Authority)
Parish:	Beckley and Stowood
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.803858 Longitude: -1.1639756 National Grid Reference: SP5774212021 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001087 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

Formal early C20 gardens surrounding a mid C16 hunting lodge, incorporating the remains of three concentric medieval moats, formerly enclosing a medieval royal hunting lodge. The moats were probably part of medieval garden features, which possibly extended into the wider landscape of the surrounding former deer park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Beckley Park, known as Lower Park Farm in the C19 and early C20, is first recorded in 1175-6, having been for some time part of the capital seat of the Honour of St Valery, that is, the main property of the St Valery family. In the 1190s the park was refurbished and enclosed by a stone wall. In 1227, the park having come into the hands of the Crown, Henry III granted the manor and park to his brother the Earl of Cornwall who restocked the park with deer and constructed a deer leap. The park subsequently passed through the hands of several members of the Royal Family during the Middle Ages. Beckley Park formed the site of the park hunting lodge, situated at the centre of the c 300ha park, probably initially built in the early C13 and by 1300 being used as a centre for royal hunting parties and other entertainments. The site contained a hall, chambers, chapel, kitchen and stables, together with a garden and vineyard, all possibly contained within a moat. The lodge was rebuilt on a more lavish scale for Edward II over several years from 1373, and included an outer moat, planted around its outer perimeter with a hedge, with two gates and a porter's lodge. This work is assumed to have resulted in the present triple moats (VCH 1957; Taylor 1996). In the C15 and early C16 the park received little maintenance, and the lodge was probably ruinous by the early C16, by which time the park had been abandoned for hunting. Around 1540 Sir (later Lord) John Williams of Thame obtained the park, rebuilding the lodge between the inner and middle moats such that they were partly filled in, and reviving the hunting. The park continued to be used for hunting until at least 1600. During the C17 and C18 the house was occupied by the Earl of Abingdon's tenant farmers. The house and its surrounds continued in agricultural use until the early C20, when it was bought and restored by Mr Percy Feilding who cleared out parts of the moats and planted a formal hedged garden within the central space. The house remains (1997) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Beckley Park lies 10km east of Oxford and 1.5km north-east of the village of Beckley, at the south edge of Otmoor, an area of low-lying, marshy land. The c 1.5ha site, comprising house and surrounding gardens, lies on level ground at the centre of the medieval Beckley deer park. The park formerly covered c 300ha, the north-eastern half situated on low-lying ground, the south-western half situated on ground rising up to Beckley village to the west. The former park is now largely agricultural land divided into fields, with the C17 or earlier Blackwater Wood lying adjacent to the south-east boundary. Parts of the park's boundary are still marked by the medieval bank and ditch, with, in places east of the village, the remains of the stone park wall standing up to 1.5m high and 1m wide (Taylor 1996). The wider setting is agricultural and wooded, with Otmoor lying adjacent to the north, and, close by to the east, the former Royal Forest of Bernwood.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is approached from the south, along a drive off the Horton-cum-Studley to Beckley lane, entering the former deer park c 1km south-east of the house and extending through the former park. The drive approaches the house from the south, entering the registered site at the south corner of the outer moat, c 50m south of the house, then running north, parallel with the west front, between the west arms of the outer and middle moats. A two-arched pedestrian bridge (C16, walls possibly earlier, listed grade II*) built of rubble and brick carries a path across the middle moat, flanked at the east end by brick walls extending to north and south along the inner edge of the moat. The path extends east beyond the bridge for a short distance, giving access to the central front door of the house, reached up a flight of stone steps and enclosed by a porch comprising the remains of a projecting tower built with the house. From here views extend west across fields towards the hillside rising up to Beckley village. A path leads south, between the moat-side wall and the southern extensions of the house, to a small, two-storey stone gazebo at the south corner, overlooking the drive and west arms of the middle and outer moats, and said to have been constructed by Mr Feilding (Lady Neidpath, pers comm 1998).

At the south corner of the middle moat a spur off the drive leads north-east into a rectangular service yard adjacent to the south end of the house, standing probably largely on ground formerly occupied by the south arms of the outer and middle moats. The yard is largely surrounded by ranges of agricultural buildings, including on the south side a weatherboarded, timber-framed barn (C17, listed grade II) and cowhouse (possibly late C17, listed grade II).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Beckley Park house (c 1540, listed grade I), a former hunting lodge built for Lord Williams of Thame, stands towards the west edge of the present gardens. Built of dark red brick diapered with black headers and stone dressings, it is of two storeys plus cellars and attics. It is a narrow house, only one room thick, with the most prominent features being the three full-height, projecting gabled towers on the east, garden front, overlooking the former central moated island. The central tower contains the newel stair up the full height of the house, whilst the flanking towers contain garderobe flues. Each of the towers contains first-floor and attic-level windows overlooking the garden. Low extensions have been added to the south side of the house during the C20, that adjacent to the house enclosing a door at the south end of the east front which formerly led directly into the garden. A further door at the bottom of the central staircase tower, and offset from its centre, gives access to the garden. Both doors approached the garden via flights of stone steps.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens extend to the north and east of the house, enclosing the moats. At the centre, situated on the former central island, lie two lawns, each surrounded by clipped box hedges, and separated by a stone-cobbled path aligned on the central tower. This path leads from the stone path running along the bottom of the east front, across the centre of the island, flanked by box hedges separating it from the lawn. A grass path surrounds the two hedged lawns, itself enclosed on the outer side by a perimeter hedge along the inner moat-side. The central island seems to have been the site of the former royal park lodge and associated buildings, and possibly also gardens, the foundations of which probably still exist beneath the surface (CL 1929). At the end of the C19 it was an orchard (OS 1900).

A path leads from the north end of the east front into a yew topiary garden adjacent to the north front, situated between the inner and middle moats. Laid largely to lawn and enclosed by tall, clipped yew hedges, this area contains two parallel rows of topiary specimens aligned on the north front. An opening at the south-west corner gives access to the lawn between the west front and the middle moat, leading to the front door. A second opening from the topiary garden leads east into a box-hedged knot garden enclosed by clipped hedges, with a small open lawn at the east end. Openings in the outer hedges flanking the knot garden to

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north and south lead to the inner and central moats' water sides, with a further opening to the east giving access to a grass path leading south along the bank between the moats' east arms. This walk turns west at the south end, c 50m east of the house, returning west either to the house or continuing into the service yard. The south end of the walk gives access to the east to a grass path between the middle and outer moats' east and north arms, terminating at the drive along the west side of the house. During the C20 various parts of the moats seem to have been cleared at different times, culminating in the present situation where water is contained within the north, east and south arms of the inner moat, the west, north and east arms of the middle moat, and the north and east arms of the outer moat, together with the southern half of its west arm.

'The triple-moated site, a type known elsewhere to be associated with medieval gardens, together with the documented high-status lodge and garden and the pond [a medieval fishpond situated close to Middle Park Farm 0.5km to the south], may indicate the former existence of a medieval landscaped park.' (Taylor 1996).

REFERENCES

Country Life, 65 (23 March 1929), pp 400-7 Victoria History of the County of Oxfordshire 5, (1957), pp 56-7, 60, 65 H M Colvin, History of the Kings' Works II, (1963), pp 898-900 Council for British Archaeology, Group 9 Newsletter, no 3 (1973), pp 22-5 N Pevsner and J Sherwood, The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire (1974), pp 448-9 F Woodward, Oxfordshire Parks (1982), p 7 C Taylor, Medieval Deer Parks, (EH Theme Study 1994; 1996)

Maps R Davis, A New Map of the County of Oxford ..., 1797 A Bryant, Map of the County of Oxford ..., surveyed 1823 Map of lands in Township and Hamlets of Beckley ... 1831 (Oxfordshire County Record Office) A Jones (CPRE), Beckley Park, 1973 (copy on EH file)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881-2 2nd edition published 1901

Description written: July 1998 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: January 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.