

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HEIGHTS OF ABRAHAM

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

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Name: HEIGHTS OF ABRAHAM

County: Derbyshire

District: Derbyshire Dales (District Authority)

Parish: Matlock Bath

County: Derbyshire

District: Derbyshire Dales (District Authority)

Parish: Matlock Town

label.localisation: Latitude: 53.123490
Longitude: -1.5653993
National Grid Reference: SK 29181 58568
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000680
Date first listed: 04-Aug-1984

Details

A late C18 pleasure ground created in 1787 for use as a commercial public pleasure ground to exploit the dramatic qualities of the Derwent valley and the presence of spectacular caves. The site has group value with High Tor (qv), Lovers Walks (qv), Derwent Gardens (qv), and Willersley Castle (qv), a group of registered parks and pleasure grounds with common origins in the exploitation of the dramatic scenic qualities of the gorge of the River Derwent.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Matlock Bath developed as a spa during the late C17 and early C18. The dramatic scenery was an attraction as much as the waters. During the late C18 and early C19 communications were improved and the town became a popular summer resort. Notable visitors included Byron who compared Matlock Bath to Switzerland. The Heights of Abraham was a development of Matlock Bath associated with the opening of the third bath by the Simpson family in 1786. The name came from a supposed resemblance to the Heights of Abraham at Quebec scaled by Wolfe in 1759. The Simpsons laid out and planted the zig-zag path on the south-facing flank of Masson Hill and in 1787 advertised 'walks to the Heights of Abraham'. Subsequent land purchases enlarged their holding and when George Vernon bought the estate in 1797, he extended the planting scheme. Before 1801 an entrance lodge was in place, now modified as a private dwelling on Waterloo Road. By 1808 when the property was in the ownership of Benjamin Wyatt, builder and architect of Sutton Coldfield, The Tower, now the Lower Towers, had been built in Gothick style. The Upper Tower House was added c 1830 by Dr Jonathan Gilbert in similar picturesque style. He was also responsible for opening the first show cavern in 1810 when he developed worked-out sections of the Nestus lead mine as the Rutland Cavern. Ongoing clashes with miners asserting their traditional rights led to legal actions in one of which witnesses included Joseph Paxton who argued that the site should be classified as pleasure grounds. The court finally designated the site as

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a garden and therefore an area which could not be mined. Later Masson Cavern opened; both caverns are still open to the public today (late C20). The Victoria Prospect Tower was built in 1844. Today (1999) the freehold Heights of Abraham grounds are owned by Derbyshire Dales District Council but are run as pleasure grounds by a private lessee.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Heights of Abraham lie on steeply sloping land immediately north of Matlock Bath. The c 12ha site is on the lower slopes of Masson Hill and is divided from adjacent land by fences. The site overlooks the gorge of the River Derwent with the town to the south and views east across the river to open land beyond.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are three entrances to the site. East Lodge, in simple cottage orné style on Masson Road was built in the 1860s to replace an earlier c 1840 octagonal lodge which survives as a private dwelling, the Round House on Holme Road. East Lodge and the crenellated West Lodge on Upperwood Road (c 1840) have gates and stone gate piers. On the east bank of the river, c 200m north of Matlock Bath station (1842, listed grade II) there is an enclosure at the foot of High Tor grounds from which cable cars (1984) run to the site. This is the principal entrance for visitors.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Upper Tower House (listed grade II) was built in Gothick style c 1830. The central range is flanked by round crenellated towers and the building is on a platform cut into the hillside commanding views to the south over the town and the Derwent. It is a prominent landmark which can be seen from the town and from walks on the far (eastern) bank of the river. Traditionally the Tower was occupied, as now, by the owner or lessee of the site and in the C19 also housed refreshment rooms.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The path leading up from East Lodge to the shoulder of the hill incorporates the majority of the Simpsons' zig-zag walk of 1787. The rustic summerhouse (listed grade II) with tufa walls and thatched roof is shown on Benjamin Roger's print published in 1801 (cited in Ian Lyne 1997). Views to the south are partially obscured by mature trees now. At the top of the path is the Victoria Prospect Tower (1844, listed grade II), a circular limestone tower with a spiral staircase leading to a viewing platform from which long-distance views of the dramatic scenery of the Derwent valley can be obtained. Prominent in the views is Riber Castle (1862, listed grade II), a large sham castle on a hilltop to the north-east. There are also views south-east to Lovers Walks (qv) and Willersley Castle (qv). Paths lead west to the upper cable car station and to the late C20 cafe and shop, called Tree Tops Centre, which straddles a significant historical feature (the spoil tip of the Nestus mine. A shaft into the Nestus mine is visible nearby. A late C20 building which lies c 50m north of the cafe covers the entrance to Great Masson Cavern, one of the principal attractions of the site. The exit point, c 100m to the north-west, is close to the highest point of the site where there are spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. Lower down the zig-zag path, a short spur leads west to a terrace where there is a late C20 cafe and a path which runs to the (private) grounds of Upper Tower House. The path from West Lodge joins that from East Lodge south of the cafe. The terrace has long-distance views to the south over the town and river to open land beyond. The cafe incorporates the entrance to the Rutland Cavern, a popular attraction since its opening in 1810 when it was named presumably in honour of the Duke of Rutland who owned mineral rights in the area. It is developed in and from the workings of the Nestus mine for which written records survive from the C15.

An engraving by Edward Dayes published in 1794 (cited in Lyne and Assocs 1997) shows the zig-zag path ascending a bare hillside. The Benjamin Roger's print of 1801 shows the effect of the Simpsons' planting localised around the path, in contrast to the Samuel Rayner painting of 1830, which shows the hillside well wooded as a result of the additional early C19 planting by Vernon. The trees, predominantly beech, which clothe the hillside now could include remnants of the early planting.

It is located within the buffer zone of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage site.

This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 14/11/2011

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.

Bibliographie

Books and journals

Pevsner, N, Williamson, E, *The Buildings of England: Derbyshire*, (1978), 273

Other

J Gratton, *Plan of Matlock Bath and its Vicinity*, 1848 [all maps in Lyne and Assocs 1997]

Matlock Bath, guidebook (A Jewitt 1837, revised and expanded 1888)

Matlock Bath, guidebook (Derbyshire Countryside Ltd 1993)

Matlock Bath, guidebook (W Thwaites c1870)

Matlock Bath, guidebook, (Henricus 1838)

Matlock Bath, illustrated guidebook (Derbyshire Dales District Council c1995)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1879

OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1899

The Matlock Parks, Proposals for a Restoration Management Plan (Ian Lyne and Associates 1997)