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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

COURTEENHALL

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Name:	COURTEENHALL
District:	West Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Courteenhall
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.171813 Longitude: -0.89039473 National Grid Reference: SP 75981 53197 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001029 Date first listed: 25-Jun-1984

Details

Later C18 landscape park with some improvements in the 1790s by Humphry Repton associated with a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the Middle Ages Courteenhall was owned by Lenton Priory (Notts). In 1571 it was leased by the Crown to Richard Ouseley, a Clark of the Privy Seal, who later purchased the freehold and in 1580 built a new house on the site. Courteenhall was sold by his grandson in 1647, and soon after was acquired by Sir Samuel Jones, the son of a London merchant who was investing in lands in Shropshire and Northamptonshire. On his death, childless, in 1672 Courteenhall was inherited by his sister's grandson Samuel Wake. It became the Wakes' principal seat in the late C18. William Wake, eighth Baronet (1768-1846), probably used Courteenhall for hunting. He was responsible for rebuilding the stables c 1770, and began the present park. He was succeeded by his son William (d 1846), who built the present hall after coming of age. Courteenhall remains (1998) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Courteenhall village lies 8km south of Northampton, less than a kilometre from the M1 which runs past to the north-east. The park, with the hall at its centre, lies immediately west of the village. To the west the park is bounded by the A508 from Northampton to Milton Keynes, to the north by a minor road east off the A508 to Quinton and to the east by the road branching off the Quinton road to Courteenhall village. Its south boundary largely follows the park-edge plantations. The area here registered is c 150ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main drive enters the west side of the park, off the A508, past a lodge of 1878 in the Arts and Crafts style by S J Newman of Northampton. It then passes up a straight causeway lined with mature limes before curving slightly to the north around the edge of a shrubbery with mature specimen trees, only then to disclose a view of the north side of the hall. This approach was suggested by Repton in his Red Book of 1791.

There is another approach from the village to the east.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Courteenhall (listed grade II*) was built between 1791 and c 1795 to the designs of Samuel Saxon (1757-1831), who had previously worked in the office of Sir William Chambers. Its setting, on the highest site available, at an angle to and 150m north of the then twenty-five-year-old stables, was suggested by Humphry Repton (1752-1818). Of Blisworth Limestone ashlar with Weldon stone dressings, the three-storey house has three fronts of five bays while that to

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the garden, on the south-east, is of seven. Internally its plan is compact and sophisticated. Attached to the south-west of the house is a service block.

The stables (listed grade II*), attributed to John Carr of York (d 1807), were built on a dominating ridge-top site c 1770. The main, east front comprises a straight, fifteen-bay range, the centre three bays breaking forward under a pediment and the third bay from each end rising to a third storey as a pavilion. The stables were converted to residential use in the later C20.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the south of the curving approach drive, and extending west and south of the hall, is a broad shrubbery with specimen trees, many of them likely to have been planted about the time the drive was constructed, c 1800. There is also a shrubbery with specimen trees along the south side of the kitchen garden.

The approach drive leads to a gravelled forecourt on the north-west side of the hall. This is separated by iron railings from the park beyond, to which there is access through an iron gate, probably of c 1900. On this side of the hall the ha-ha has been filled in, although its line remains as a slight depression 200m out into the park. South-east of the hall however the ha-ha survives allowing an uninterrupted view across the park.

North-east of the hall another iron gate of c 1900 leads through into a later C20 arboretum with wide grass walks which extends for c 200m, to embrace a pool at its far end. On the western edge of the arboretum is a swimming pool with changing chalet.

The main formal garden lies before the south-east front and was laid out in the 1930s to replace a Victorian parterre. It comprises yew hedges, 1m tall and cut with wave-like tops, enclosing a lawned area c 50m square with, at its centre, a small rectangular pool. To the front of the enclosure, the south-east, the hedge is absent and there is a view from the hall, across the formal garden, to the tower of Courteenhall church which stands on a slight rise on the far side of the park 400m to the south-east. Alongside the church, to its south, is the substantial Rectory, the main gable of which is crow-stepped, presumably to improve its appearance from Courteenhall. South-west of the formal garden is a large tennis lawn. The lawn is served by a patio on the south-west side of the hall.

PARK Courteenhall stands on high ground towards the centre of a roughly circular park c 1km in diameter. The northern third of the park is arable; a few parkland trees survive in the fields sloping down to Washbrook Lane east of Watermill Spinney. The arable land is largely separated from the rest of the park by a broad belt of ornamental planting of the mid to late C20. Other plantation belts lie along the west and south boundaries of the park. The central and southern parts of the park are grassland, almost all of it permanent pasture, with parkland and specimen trees. There is much ridge and furrow, especially north, east and south of the hall. Across the main vista between the hall and Courteenhall church however earthworks representing the old manor house (200m south-east of Courteenhall), village and its roads are slight, suggesting that their sites were ploughed as part of the imparkment process. Running northwards towards the manor house site from the park boundary is a massive bank, 250m long, 8m wide and 1m high, a raised ridge for an avenue approach to the manor house shown on an estate map of 1766 (at Courteenhall and reproduced in RCHM(E) 1982, 37). This overlies the ridge and furrow. Some limes survive towards its southern end, while large depressions in its sides mark the positions of others. On a hilltop north of the drive is the mound of a post-mill shown on the 1766 map but gone by 1839. Watermill Spinney, on the north-west corner of the park, contains several ponds, presumably once associated with a mill.

About 250m west of the hall is the former Free Grammar School (listed grade II*) with adjoining school house, built c 1680 under the will of Sir Samuel Jones. It is now used as the village hall, with part still in residential use. A large new garden with formal elements was laid out in the 1990s on its south side.

The 1766 estate map shows that the greater part of the village of Courteenhall then lay north-west of the manor house, immediately west and north of the present hall and 600m west of the parish church. It seems that the Wakes were already thinking about imparking their house, as that map includes a note of a 'new road', whose construction would apparently involve the removal of the south end of the village. Within about five years the new stables had been built on the edge of the village site, and it would seem likely that the removal of this part of the village and imparkment took place at about the same time. Certainly by 1791, when the ninth Baronet consulted Humphry Repton about rebuilding the house and improving the park, the manor house stood alone but for the new stables and the grammar school, the only village building spared clearance. Repton's overall design concept was adopted (the Red Book is dated March 1793), for a new house set on high ground and linked to the

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stables by a shrubbery and trees. To its front, to the south and east, was 'dressed lawn'. Other, more specific, suggestions by Repton may not however have been realised. Those included a partly formal layout with a 'parterre for flowers in small beds', a 'corbeille' and 'repositoires', all screened by shrubbery. Similarly unexecuted was Repton's scheme for ponds in the lower part of the park, a rustic temple and a pair of lodges at the beginning of his winding approach.

KITCHEN GARDEN The rectangular walled kitchen garden, 110m east/west by 60m, abuts the stable courtyard to the west. Its west half is still used for horticulture, while its east half is largely given over to tennis courts.

REFERENCES

The Architect, (23 February 1878) Country Life, 86 (12 August 1939), pp 144-8; 180 (30 October 1986), pp 1388-90 Roy Comm Hist Mons Engl Inventories: Northamptonshire 4, (1982), pp 35-8 J Heward and R Taylor, The Country Houses of Northamptonshire, (RCHM(E) 1996), pp 145-9

Maps Estate map, 1766 (private collection)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1887 2nd edition published 1900 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885

Archival items H Repton, Red Book for Courteenhall, 1791 (private collection)

Description written: March 1998 Register Inspector: PAS 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.