

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

LEXHAM HALL

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
LEXHAM HALL

Name: LEXHAM HALL

County: Norfolk

District: Breckland (District Authority)

Parish: Lexham

County: Norfolk

District: Breckland (District Authority)

Parish: Litcham

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.719752
Longitude: 0.76251436
National Grid Reference: TF 86675 17146
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000268
Date first listed: 18-Sep-1987

Details

A late C20 formal garden by Dame Sylvia Crowe, surrounded by C18 parkland, further expanded during the C 19.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The first manor house at Lexham was built in the 1630s for John Wright and was acquired by the Wodehouse family of Kimberley Hall (qv) in 1673, together with the surrounding estate. During the early C 18 Edward Wodehouse extensively remodelled the house and built a walled kitchen garden, part of which survives. In 1776 Sir John Wodehouse carried out further improvements to the Hall, enclosed and laid out the park, and developed gardens and pleasure grounds to the south. John Hyde leased the estate from 1795 and eventually purchased it in 1801, selling on to Colonel F W Keppel in 1807 who extended the park and commissioned Jeffry Wyattville to enlarge the Hall. During the latter part of the C19 the park was further altered, expanding slightly to the east (OS 1891). In 1911 the estate was sold to the Jessop family who developed the farming side of the estate and in 1941 sold it to Olaf Kier, a Dane who intended to settle at Lexham after the war. During the war the house and park were occupied by the army; park trees were lost, the gardens suffered extensive damage and the Hall fell into disrepair. Consequently Kier put the estate back on the market and it was purchased by William Foster in 1946 who restored the house with the help of architect Jim Fletcher Watson. The site remains (1999) in private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Lexham Hall stands on the eastern boundary of the village of East Lexham, c24 km east of Kings Lynn and covers an area of approximately 65ha. Lexham lies in a rural part of Norfolk, set in a gently rolling landscape of farmland and woodland. The park is bounded to the north by farmland, with a minor country road linking East and West Lexham cutting off Great Wood and the Three-cornered Plantation from the main body of the park.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
LEXHAM HALL

To the east and south the boundaries are formed by farmland, while East Lexham village lies outside the park, adjacent to the western boundary. The whole site is surrounded by agricultural land. The land falls slightly to the Broad Water which runs north-south through the eastern side of the park, and there is a further gentle fall to the south towards the River Nar which cuts east-west through the southern tip.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The present drive (1999) enters directly off the East to West Lexham road to the north-west of the Hall and runs due south before turning east, past the north front to the main entrance on the east front of the Hall which looks out over the park and the Broad Water to the perimeter plantations. This drive was created by the army during the second world war and was retained by William Foster who planted a lime avenue along its straight length. A second drive, now a grass track, leads west to the village and leaves the park through the boundary plantation beside the West Lodge, a single storey rough cast brick and slate cottage with decorative chimneys and barge boards erected during the 1850s. The chimneys were made by a local brickworks to an original design by A W N Pugin for Oxburgh Hall (qv). The present main drive replaced the mid C19 east drive which entered the park by a lodge (now demolished) in Gardener's Plantation, crossed a bridge over the Broad Water and swept south-west through the park to the north front (OS 1891).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Lexham Hall (listed grade II) is a large colour washed brick and slate mansion. The north (originally the entrance) front is two-storey with seven bays and a porch over the centre bay, and five flat-roofed dormers. The present entrance is at the centre of the east side. The south (garden) front has eight bays and four gabled dormers with a fine view from the south terrace, looking south over the river and then through a cutting in the American Garden to the landscape beyond. To the west is a range of service buildings, including the c1850 octagonal former dairy (listed grade II) built of flint with gault brick dressing under a copper roof and a range of stables and garages. The fabric of the 1630s manor house at Lexham was incorporated in the building of a new mansion in c1700 by Edward Wodehouse, the wing at the east end of the south side surviving from this phase. During the early C 19 Sir Jeffry Wyattville was commissioned to enlarge the Hall and the whole was substantially restored and remodelled by Jim Fletcher Watson in 1948 for William Foster.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens cover approximately 2.5ha and lie principally to the south and south-west of the house. To the north is a gravel carriage drive set in grass lawns which sweeps round to the east front and circles a central grass area. The east front is bordered by balustrading added in 1949, broken in the centre of the east wall by a pair of wrought iron gates leading into the park and in the centre of the south wall by a gap leading onto the garden terraces. The C20 balustrading marks the extent of the C19 formal garden but otherwise nothing visible remains of the C 18 and C 19 gardens on these fronts.

To the south is the main garden, designed by Dame Sylvia Crowe and planted by Mrs William Foster during the 1950s. Two levels of shallow paved terraces, decorated with balustrading, come off the Hall front and lead down to a lawn enclosed by high yew hedges clipped as scrolls. A new scheme of rose planting (1999) designed by Peter Beales fills the border below the bottom terrace. Beyond the yew hedges is the park. To the west the lawn leads to a long walk bordered by yew on the park side and by a deep border of mixed shrubs and herbaceous perennials on the north side. The walk leads to the east wall of the walled kitchen garden 80m west of the house and also links the gardens to the pleasure grounds, known as the American Gardens. East of the gateway into the walled gardens is a flint and brick loggia, built in the 1950s using materials from the demolished East Lodge. The American Gardens cover c 12ha and run south from below the kitchen garden, along the western boundary, over the river before curving round to form the southern boundary of the park. This pleasure ground is a woodland garden of mixed exotics and hardwoods, underplanted with a variety of evergreen shrubs. Paths wind through the area and flint and brick bridges, built by Mr William Foster in the mid C20, cross the river beside weirs. The gardens contain two Gothic style brick and thatch summerhouses, one in the western section which has been restored and stands beside the remains of a fountain pond, the other in the southern section which is derelict (1999). The summerhouses both date from the mid 1850s. A vista has been cut through the southern section of the Gardens, aligned on the house terrace, to allow views out of the site to the south. The American Gardens were created in the early years of the C 19 and developed by Mrs Frances Keppel in the 1840s with plants supplied by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (qv) (Kelly 1985)."

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
LEXHAM HALL

THE PARK The park is laid to pasture with a generous scatter of trees, predominantly oak with lime and sweet chestnut of mixed ages. Some very mature oaks in the north park are most probably pre-park boundary trees. The River Nar cuts through the south park from east to west and broadens at the western end in two sections to create a lake. Running north from the lake, c200m from the house, is the Broad Water, a canalised spur off the river which runs for 800m through the park and crosses the East to West Lexham road into a small section of open park beyond.

The park was laid out in the 1770s by Sir John Wodehouse, possibly influenced by Lancelot Brown (1716-83) whom he employed at Kimberley the following year. At that time it extended north to the road and was enclosed by Great Wood and Three-cornered Plantation (Faden's map 1797). Gardener's Plantation was added in the mid C19 by the Keppel family who also created the Broad Water and extended the park beyond the river to the south, with the planting of the American Gardens. Further expansion took place at the end of the C 19, adding parkland to the east between Gardener's Plantation and Carr Plantation. William Foster restored the park, created the lake and built the lake bridge in the mid C20. During the C20 the level of tree cover has been much reduced by storm damage but the park, particularly to the north remains well treed and restoration planting has taken place in the late C20. During the 1980s the eastern park was returned to pasture by Mr Neil Foster.

THE KITCHEN GARDEN The walled kitchen garden covers approximately 1ha and lies 120m south-west of the house. The area is walled on three sides and is open to the south where it is bounded by a moat, the crinkle crinkle brick north wall (listed grade II) is the oldest, being possibly C17 (Tom Williamson pers comm 1999). The flint and brick east wall is C18 and has an ornamental gateway with urn-topped brick piers leading from the gardens. The west wall is a mix of C 19 and C20, the C 19 section forming a division beyond which lies a late C20 swimming pool. The garden is laid in a quartered pattern, planted for ornament in the southern half with grass, roses, herbaceous planting and urns, while the northern half is given over to fruit and vegetables. It contains some C19 and C20 glass and the remains of C19 melon frames.

REFERENCES N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North-west and South Norfolk* (1962), p147 J Kenworthy-Browne et al, *Burke's and Savills Guide to Country Houses III* (1981), p153 G I Kelly, *Lexham Hall - a history based upon manuscript sources*, 1985 (private report for Mr W Foster) [copy on EH file] *The Field* (29 Mar 1986), pp 50-53 Lexham Hall, (UEA report 1992) T Williamson, *The archaeology of the landscape park*, *BAR Brit Ser* 268, (1998), pp 260-261

Maps W Faden, *A new topographical map of the county of Norfolk*, 1797 (Norfolk Record Office) A Bryant, *Map of the county of Norfolk*, 1826 (Norfolk Record Office) Tithe award map for Lexham parish, 1841 (Norfolk Record Office) OS 6" to 1 mile 1st edition published 1891 2nd edition published 1906 1950 edition OS 25" to 1 mile 2nd edition published 1905

Archive items Sale Particulars, 1911 (BRA 983/41 5286 A), (Norfolk Record Office)

Description written: March 1999 HJ comments: June 1999 Owner's comments: October 2000 Edited: March 2001 Register Inspector: EMP

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.