

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

LONGLEAT

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

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Name:	LONGLEAT
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Corsley
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Horningsham
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Longbridge Deverill
County:	Somerset
District:	Mendip (District Authority)
Parish:	Selwood
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.186822 Longitude: -2.2587445 National Grid Reference: ST 82013 43098, ST 84997 42182 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000439 Date first listed: 01-Sep-1987

Details

A grand C16 mansion surrounded by formal gardens and pleasure grounds with elements of the early C19 layout, added to in the mid C19 by William Taylor, in the mid C20 by Russell Page, and in the late C20 by the seventh Marquess of Bath. These sit in extensive parkland, largely of mid C18 origin by Lancelot Brown, with additions by Humphry Repton who produced a Red Book in 1804, by Jeffry Wyattville, and by Russell Page in the 1930s.

Note

This entry is a summary. Because of the complexity of this site, the standard Register entry format would convey neither an adequate description nor a satisfactory account of the development of the landscape. The user is advised to consult the references given below for more detailed accounts. Many Listed Buildings exist within the site, not all of which have been here referred to. Descriptions of these are to be found in the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

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In 1529 the priory which formerly stood on the site of the present Longleat House was dissolved and in 1546 the site, together with its mill, was purchased by Sir John Thynn who began to accumulate land and property. Following a fire which destroyed the priory in 1567, Thynn began the construction of a grand new mansion, designed by Robert Symthson (c 1536-1614), beside the brook which had powered the mill. The result, together with its enclosed formal gardens, is recorded in paintings by Jan Sieberechts, dated 1675-8, which show the house and grounds surrounded by an enclosed park grazed by deer. During the C17 the estate's land holdings in other counties increased, funding the grand expansion and development of Longleat. In 1683, Thomas Thynn, newly created first Viscount Weymouth, commissioned George London (d 1714) and the Brompton Park Nurseries to create a great formal garden in the Franco-Dutch style which covered c 28ha and included a canalised section of the brook, fountains, mazes, plats, and a large wilderness plantation known as The Grove. These gardens were recorded in engravings by Kip and Knyff between 1702 and 1707. The first Viscount died in 1714 and during the early part of the C18 the formality of the landscape began to soften. The second Viscount turned the Great Canal into a 'serpentine river' and created the South Drive, flanked by a double avenue, between Horningsham village and the south front of the house. In 1757, following his succession in 1751, the third Viscount Weymouth commissioned Lancelot Brown (1716-83) to lay out a park and remove the remaining formal elements of the gardens. Brown retained The Grove but altered the character of its planting to blend into the new park, and relocated the walled kitchen garden to a site reached from the house through a new wooded pleasure ground. He also created a string of informal lakes along the course of the brook. During the same period an area of rough pasture, moorland, and common was purchased to the east of the park which was enclosed and thrown into the park and farm (estate accounts). The third Viscount became the first Marquess of Bath in 1789, by which time his passion for forestry had seen an average of 50,000 trees planted annually on the moorland and common. In 1790 he began to create a large new boating lake, known as Shear Water, beyond the new plantations. The first Marquess died in 1796, to be succeeded by his son, the second Marquess who carried on his father's work on the landscape, commissioning Humphry Repton (1752-1818) to prepare a Red Book in 1803-04. He made alterations to the water beside the house, designed a gothic boathouse for Shear Water, and collaborated with Jeffry Wyattville (1766-1840) who designed the new stables and the Orangery in the gardens. Wyattville also added a north wing to the house and built the Horningsham Lodge and County Cottage. In 1852, Alexander Thynn, the fourth Marquess, laid out, with his Head Gardener William Taylor, complex formal gardens to the east and north of the house. At the end of the century he added ornamental plantings along the Longcombe Drive. Following the First World War the fifth Marquess simplified the gardens and in 1929 commissioned Russell Page (1906-85) to redesign both them and the approach to the South Front. The fifth Marquess was succeeded in 1946 by his son Henry who, in 1964, created a Safari Park in part of the park. The seventh Marquess inherited the estate in 1992, since when he has added several new features to the gardens and has developed further visitor attractions on the north-west side of the house. The site remains (2000) in single private ownership.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION Longleat lies in a rural location on the western border of Wiltshire, c 8km south-west of Warminster. The park covers an area of c 505ha bounded to the north by country lanes and farmland, to the south by Horningsham estate village, and to the east and west by extensive woodlands. Shear Water is included as a detached area within the registered site. The ground slopes generally from south to north, with the house at the level of the lakes and the park laid out on slopes rising to the surrounding woodland on higher ground. The setting is largely agricultural land with substantial areas of estate forestry.

There are two main approaches to Longleat. One enters from Horningsham estate village in the south, through Wyattville's arched lodge (listed grade I) and along the straight south drive to the south front. Although the lodges are early C19, the drive itself is early C18 and was lined with a double avenue of elms; these were replaced with groups of Tulip trees by Russell Page in the mid C20. A second row of horse chestnuts has recently (2000) been planted. The second approach enters the estate woodlands c 3.5km to the east-north-east of the house and runs along the Longcombe Drive, planted with mixed exotics in the mid C19, to emerge on the top of Park Hill where extensive views look west across the park towards the house. The drive drops gently through the park, crosses the string of lakes, and arrives at the south front. Two further minor drives enter the park, one through High Woods to the west, past Wyattville's County Cottage lodge (listed grade II), and the second from the northern boundary beside Stalls Farm.

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The gardens lie to the north and east of the house which sits to the west of centre of the park, c 100m to the west of the largest of the string of lakes, known as Half Mile Pond. The east front lawn is planted with two low mazes of box (late C20), the terrace below the east front running north parallel to the lake bank, through an avenue of pleached limes planted by Russell Page in the early C20, to a covered Palladian bridge (Wyatville, listed grade I) over an inlet from Half Mile Pond. Early C19 walled enclosures below the north front contain a rose garden (seventh Marquess of Bath, late C20) and the early C19 Orangery by Wyattville (listed grade I). A small garden, enclosed by a hedge, has been laid out by the seventh Marquess on the west front during the late C20. To the south-west of the house, c 250m from the south front, an ornamental iron gateway leads to a path through a wooded pleasure ground (Brown, mid C18) to the mid C18 walled kitchen garden which lies c 900m south of the house, on the southern boundary of the park.

The extensive parkland is almost entirely retained under grass and is scattered with parkland trees of various ages, the mature specimens being predominantly oak. A string of six ponds or lakes runs from Upper Pond in the south to Half Mile Pond in the north through the centre of the park. These were created by Brown in the mid C18 and altered by Repton in 1804. The ground rises sharply to the east as far as Park Hill and Prospect Hill, on the top of which a viewpoint known as Heaven's Gate (mentioned in Repton's Red Book) looks out over the park. The slopes are planted with hanging beech woods, proposed by Brown but planted towards the end of the C18. Beyond Park Hill dense woodlands of mixed conifer, hardwood, and ornamental species are cut through with rides and drives, the most formal of which is known as The Red Way, extending eastwards from the Longcombe Drive and into the estate woodlands (beyond the boundary of the registered site). The planting of the Longcombe Woods was started in the late C18/early C19 although much of its ornamental character dates from the mid C19 and parts of it were replanted after the Second World War. During the C19 carriage drives led from Longcombe Woods south-east into Aucombe Woods, in the south-east corner of which lies Shear Water, a boating lake created in the 1790s by the first Marquess. Repton's boathouse on its shore no longer survives.

The Longleat Safari Park, created by the sixth Marquess in collaboration with the Chipperfield family in 1964, is located in the north-east quarter of the open park and contains a heavily wooded area, developed since the late C18, which includes The Grove. Further late C18 hanging beech woods lie beyond the Safari Park along the northern boundary.

REFERENCES

Note. There is a wealth of published material about this site. The key references are listed below.

J Kip and L Knyff, *Britannia Illustrata*, (1724-9) C Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus* 3, (1725) *Country Life*, 2 (14 August 1897), pp 154-6; 12 (18 October 1902), pp 496-503; 105 (22 April 1949), p 926; (29 April 1949), pp 990-3 J Sales, *West Country Gardens* (1908), pp 227-32 C Grosvenor and C Beilby, *The First Lady Wharnccliffe and her Family* I, (1927), p 214 P J Toynbee (ed), *Horace Walpole's Journals of Visits to Country Seats etc* (Walpole Society XVI, 1927-8), p 45 D Stroud, Humphry Repton (1962), pp 131-2 D Lindstrum, *Sir Jeffry Wyattville* (1972) D Stroud, *Capability Brown* (1975), pp 85-6 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Wiltshire* (2nd edn 1975), pp 308-13 D Burnett, *Longleat: the Story of an English Country House* (1978) J Harris, *The Artist and the Country House* (1979), p 69 G Carter et al, Humphry Repton (1982), p 163 *Garden History* XI, i (1983), pp 6-36 *The Longleat Estate: a brief history*, (*Historic Landscape Management* 1998) [contains a comprehensive list of references]

Maps [All reproduced in HLM 1998] C Campbell, *Plan of the gardens, plantations etc of Longleat...*, c 1725 (in *Vitruvius Britannicus* 3, 1725) J Ladd, *Map of the manore of Horningsham in Wiltshire...*, 1747 (private collection) Enclosure maps for Horningsham and Corsley parishes, 1783 (Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office) T Davis, *Estate map*, 1804 (private collection) C Greenwood, *Map of the County of Wiltshire*, 1820 (Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office) Tithe maps for Horningsham and Longbridge Deverill, 1844 (Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884

Illustrations Jan Sieberechts, paintings, 1675-8 (private collection) [reproduced in Burnett 1978] J Kip and L Knyff, engravings of gardens, 1702-07, (in *Britannia Illustrata* 1724-9)

Archival items The extensive Longleat archive is held in a private collection.

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Description written: November 2000 Register Inspector: FDM Edited: May 2005

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.