

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

**BATTLESDEN PARK**

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

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**BATTLESDEN PARK**

Name: BATTLESDEN PARK

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Battlesden

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Heath and Reach

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Milton Bryan

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Potsgrove

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.952547  
Longitude: -0.61203003  
National Grid Reference: SP9548329138  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1000573  
Date first listed: 30-Nov-1986

## Details

An C18/C19 landscape park surrounding the site of a country house, with the remains of formal terraced gardens; various works to park and garden possibly carried out by Humphry Repton and Joseph Paxton.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1334 Thomas Fermbaud was licensed to impark 100ha of land and wood in Battlesden and Potsgrove, seemingly on the site of the current park (VCH). A house existed during the C18, probably of earlier origin, and is shown on Jefferys' map (1765) without an adjacent park. Humphry Repton (1752-1818) was employed before 1808 by Sir Gregory Page-Turner to alter the house and survey the park, describing his visit to the derelict mansion in his Memoir (Carter et al 1982). Joseph Paxton (1803-65), born in the adjacent village of Milton Bryant in 1803, is said to have created the southernmost of the two lakes in 1821 (VCH), although he would have been remarkably young if this is indeed the case. The house was rebuilt for Sir Edward Page-Turner in the early 1860s by G H Stokes, advised by Stokes' father-in-law, Paxton, and demolished shortly after 1885, when the estate was bought by the Duke of Bedford. The principal building is now the 1860s? stable block, converted to residential use.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Battlesden Park lies 2km south-west of the village of Milton Bryant, and 5km north-east of Leighton Buzzard. The c 90ha park is bounded largely by agricultural land, with the south-west

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boundary formed by the A5 Watling Street. The site of the house lies on the southern tip of a shoulder of land extending 1km south from the A4012, with the park surrounding it, the ground sloping down to a valley to the west and south in which lie two lakes. The setting is largely agricultural, with the village of Potsgrove adjacent to the north-west, the settlement of Battlesden 1km to the east, and the extensive parkland of Woburn Abbey (qv) lying close to Milton Lodge to the north.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main approach, off the A4012, runs through the settlement of Battlesden, approaching from the south-east along a public lane with views of St Peter's church tower on the hillside to the west. The lane passes the church to the south, becoming a private drive which turns north, to arrive at the stable block situated 100m north of the church and 100m north-east of the site of the house.

The north drive, now disused, was the main approach to the house during the C19. Milton Lodge (Stokes 1860s, listed grade II) stands at the northern end, 1.5km north-east of the site of the house, close to the A4012 which gives access from Woburn and Milton Bryant. Built in a free Gothic style, of red brick with stone dressings, it consists of one storey with attics. The entrance to the drive is flanked by a brick and stone gateway (Stokes 1860s, listed grade II) with four piers supporting iron carriage gates and flanking pedestrian gates, linked to outer piers on the road edge by symmetrical lengths of curving brick wall, pierced to simulate balusters. The drive, now a track, curves south-west along an avenue of mature, mixed deciduous trees (mainly beech and lime) running along the spine of the shoulder of land which leads to the site of the house. The drive enjoys long views to west, south and east across distant undulating agricultural land, arriving at the east front of the stables.

Before the house was demolished (1885), a spur (now gone) led west off the north drive 50m north-east of the stables, curving south across a wooded lawn to a turning circle within an enclosed courtyard on the north front of the house (OS 1st edition published 1882). The entrance court was dominated by the central tower and projecting porch on the north front of the house, which formed its south side. To the west and east the court was flanked by the single-storey wings of the house, the blind walls containing arch-headed niches; to the north it was bounded by a pierced brick wall, simulating balusters, with gate piers set wide apart, in similar style to the gateways at the two lodges.

The south drive, now disused, gave access from Watling Street. Battlesden Lodge (Stokes 1860s, listed grade II) stands close to the road at the southern end, 800m south of the site of the house, and is built in similar style to Milton Lodge. The entrance is flanked by a brick and stone gateway (Stokes 1860s, listed grade II) in similar style to that at Milton Lodge (but with much of its pierced brick-work gone). The drive curves north-east along the eastern edge of the park, past the end of the southern lake, passing through an avenue of trees before joining the lane from Battlesden settlement 400m east of the site of the house.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Battlesden House (G H Stokes, advised by Sir Joseph Paxton, 1860-4, demolished 1885) lay at the centre of the park, on the site of an earlier house. Built in French Gothic style, with turrets and towers, for Sir Edward Page-Turner, the house, which faced south, was situated on a broad terrace above a valley to the west and south, with panoramic views over the valley. A central tower faced north and south, overlooking the garden to the south and the entrance court to the north. After the house was demolished part of the service wing to the north-east was retained into the early C20 (now (1997) gone), and used along with the stables as a shooting box (VCH). The stables, which have subsequently been converted to residential use, are built in Italianate style with a low central tower, around three sides of an open, east-facing courtyard.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens lie to the south of the site of the house. A broad grass terrace runs along the south and west sides of the house site, sloping down to a second terrace, and below this to the south to a flat, square, open lawn which extends to the east. Several mature cedars of Lebanon grow on the east side of the lawn as it runs up to the adjacent churchyard.

Late C19/early C20 map and photographic evidence (OS maps 1882 and 1901; photographs at Bedfordshire Record Office) indicates the terraces, and a square lawn below them to the south, were laid out formally, with broad, straight gravel paths on the terraces and surrounding the lawn. A fountain in a circular pool surrounded by a circular gravel path lay at the centre of the lawn, on an axis with the south front of the house. Broad stone steps connected the paths on the terraces. An impressive doorway on the east front gave onto the top terrace.

Shepherd's engaging watercolour of 1818 (Fleming and Gore 1979, pl 107) shows the roofs of the old house overlooking the informal garden to the south, with several small garden buildings in different styles and exotic plants planted on an open lawn,

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backed by trees to the north in front of the house. Several drawings by Shepherd (copies at Bedfordshire Record Office) show further contemporary views of the garden and its buildings, including a thatched and rustically pillared 'grotto in the shrubbery', together with, in the park, 'a bridge over the pond', and a view along the north drive and avenue.

**PARK** The park, which surrounds the site of the house and the garden, is now mixed pasture and arable, with some remaining single trees. It enjoys views out to the surrounding countryside in most directions. A narrow band of trees amongst a hedgerow runs along the south-west boundary with Watling Street. Home Wood, a mixed deciduous woodland, lies at the north-west corner, above a small lake lying 150m west of the site of the house, the lake lying at the bottom of a valley running north to south. The lake, largely silted up at its north end, is fed by a stream from the north, which emerges to continue south for a further 200m, broadening out into a second, larger lake lying 300m south of the house, also partly silted up.

The available mapping of the park seems to show that it was not laid out by the mid C18, the only features shown by Jefferys on his map of 1765 being the west lake and Home Wood, which extended further to the south-west than at present. By 1826 (Bryant) the south lake is shown, together with a garden enclosure of similar size to that of the later C19, as is the north drive and flanking avenue, and a lodge marked at the far end of the south drive. Paxton is said to have laid out the larger, south lake when only nineteen years old (VCH). The 1882 OS map shows the park fully formed and generously covered with single trees and clumps.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The rectangular kitchen garden, no longer cultivated, lies 100m south-east of the site of the house. It is situated on the south-facing hillside, against the south side of the churchyard, and is enclosed by brick walls. A single-storey brick gardener's cottage, situated at the north corner of, and overlooking, the walled garden, has steeply pitched roofs and tall brick chimneys, and may possibly be the central building shown in Shepherd's 1818 watercolour (if so, this would indicate that the area shown was sited within the walled garden).

#### REFERENCES

The Victoria History of the County of Bedfordshire 3, (1912), p 343 G Carter, P Goode and K Laurie, Humphry Repton (1982), p 147 L Fleming and A Gore, *The English Garden* (1979), pl 107

Maps T Jefferys, 'The County of Bedford', 1765 A Bryant, 'Map of the County of Bedford', 1826 Tithe map for Battlesden parish, 1845 (Bedfordshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881 2nd edition published 1901 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: September 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: April 1999

## 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.