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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Ceddesfeld Hall Gardens

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Name:	Ceddesfeld Hall Gardens
District:	County Durham (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Sedgefield
label.localisation:	Latitude: 54.651408 Longitude: -1.4467275 National Grid Reference: NZ 35797 28619 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001698 Date first listed: 24-Oct-2007

Details

A formal garden of the early C18 laid out around a medieval rectory. Joseph Spence prepared plans in 1756 which have been partially executed.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Little is known of the former medieval rectory, around which the gardens were designed, although the ornamental ponds and associated water features which form part of the garden design may have developed from a series of medieval rectory fish ponds. In the mid C18 the rectory was occupied by Robert Lowth, a prebend at Durham Cathedral and rector of St. Edmund's church, Sedgefield. Lowth went on to become Bishop of St David's, Oxford and, finally, in 1777 he was consecrated Bishop of London. Lowth was a close friend of Joseph Spence, a fellow prebend and neighbour in The College of Durham between 1754-68. Whilst in Durham, Spence helped to design some of the parks and smaller gardens of his circle of friends, most notably the great landscaped parks of Auckland and Raby Castles. Spence, a clergyman and scholar and Professor of Poetry at Oxford, was a nationally renowned influential figure in the field of C18 landscape design, who corresponded with leading figures in the field including Alexander Pope. Surviving gardens in which he is known to have had a hand are rare.

Two sketch plans by Joseph Spence of 1756 (now at Yale) show the outline of the south wall of the former rectory; the first depicts the existing garden, laid out in a functional vernacular fashion with three terraces, a viewing mound, a canal feature and ponds. The second plan is Spence's own design which brings a degree of informality and the picturesque to the more formal early C18 layout. Much, but not all of Joseph Spence's design was implemented at some time.

The medieval rectory burnt down in the late C18 and a new rectory was constructed in 1792 by Bishop Barrington. In 1974 the house, now known as Ceddesfeld Hall, was purchased by Sedgefield Town Council and is used as a community hall by Sedgefield Community Association. It is listed Grade II. **DESCRIPTION**

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Ceddesfeld Hall occupies a central position in the town of Sedgefield and is included within the conservation area. The registered site covers an area of c. 2.8ha. The walled north boundary is formed by Rectory Row and the wall continues around the east and south sides with developed land beyond. Beyond the developed land at the south east corner, its course is followed by fence lines up to and around Thurlow Hill which opens onto rural land. On the east side, the boundary is formed around encroaching development and the property boundaries of Shute

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House and Barrington Lodge. The site occupies level ground with a southerly aspect in a setting of largely developed and municipal land and some open countryside to the south east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There is a single entrance from the north off Rectory Road, flanked by gate piers (listed Grade II) and immediately opposite the church of St. Edmund (listed Grade I). Although the present house is a late C18 rebuild, there is no evidence that the original approach was altered, and the 1st edition OS map of 1857 shows that the main entrance of the rectory was approached by a short drive south from the entrance. Today this area is occupied by a large car park, flanked by trees and shrubs.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The former rectory of 1792, now a community hall known as Ceddesfeld Hall (listed Grade II) stands towards the northern boundary of the site. It is a rectangular stone-built two storey house in the Georgian style, rendered and painted. There is an L-shaped service wing attached to the east (listed Grade II and now two private houses which are not included in the registered area).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The grounds contain several elements of the earlier C18 layout, many of whose features were incorporated into a new design proposed by Spence in 1756, and implemented in part by Lowth. Northumbria Gardens Trust have confirmed that the Joseph Spence plan reflects the existing shrubberies and tree planting and it was noted that the yew and Portugal laurel to be seen in the gardens could be C18 survivals as could a beech of mid C18 date and a felled ash in Spence's 'Ash Grove' provided a ring count of c.1760.

The south front of the Hall overlooks the principle grounds. These comprise broad lawns which slope gently to the south, broken only by a terraced embankment in the immediate foreground, a survivor of a series of three pre-existing terraces. Spence proposed retaining and enhancing the upper terrace but removing those below to grade the slope to the south and this was implemented. The edges of the previously formal lawns flanked by walled boundaries have been softened on the west and east sides by tree planting and shrubberies as recommended by Spence. On the western side a sinuous path weaves its way through the 'open groves' in order to take in views of the of St. Edmund's church tower.

The path emerges at the earthwork remains of a viewing mound in the south west corner of the gardens, 180m south of the hall. This pre-existing feature, which stands c. 2m high, was incorporated into Spence's design as was a canal, now in filled but visible as a c.100m long slight earthwork which can be viewed axially from the mound. Spence proposed screening this from view of the main house with an 'ash-grove; to be broke into 2 clumps; and others added to fall in with Canal walk. This is depicted as the 'hid canal' on Spence's plan, which was implemented as the present day tree planting confirms.

There is a large ornamental pond at the bottom of the main lawn flanking the path along side the north side of the 'hid canal' and further east there is a formal linear pond, described by Spence as the 'Field Canal'. The latter is today truncated by C20 development. Both of these ponds were pre-existing formal features which Spence proposed could be joined, and his plan hints at a serpentine lake but this was not implemented. The proposals went further and Spence suggested that the water be 'carried on' eastwards and included a bridge and a shady tree lined walk to nearby Hodgemore Hill. While the water feature was not implemented, the 1st edition OS map of 1858 depicts a tree-lined walk to Hodgemore Hill. Parts of this c. 200m tree lined walk remains, and Hodgemore Hill is indeed a vantage point which affords views of the surrounding countryside and most importantly, of the church tower. The latter forms an important feature on the return walk to the Hall.

PARKLAND Later C19 OS maps depict large fields with curving tree lined boundaries lying beyond the extent of the ornamental gardens. These areas may represent surrounding parkland but as the full extent of the Rectory estate is unknown this cannot be confirmed.

KITCHEN GARDEN Spence proposed extending the existing walled garden but this was not implemented and all that now remains of the garden today (2006) is its north wall, which lies in area of housing development and hence outside the boundaries of the registered area.

REFERENCES

J Dixon Hunt and P Willis, *The Genius of the Place; The English Landscape Garden 1620-1820* (1988) T Mowl, *Gentlemen & Players: Gardners of the English Landscape* (2000) N Pevsner and E Williamson, *The Buildings of England: County Durham* (1983), p 404 M Roberts, Northumbria Gardens Trust Joseph Spence Day (2005) unpublished notes

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Maps Joseph Spence's plan 'as existing' 1756 (Yale University, Osborne Collection) Joseph Spence's plan 'proposed' 27th July 1756 (Yale University, Osborne Collection) OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1857 A formal early C18 garden, laid out around a medieval rectory, which was re-designed to plans by Joseph Spence dated to 1756. Although Spence's plans were only partially implemented and the topography is compromised by encroaching development, Ceddesfeld has special historic interest as a rare survival of a landscape in which the nationally renowned Joseph Spence had a hand. Sufficient of the landscape survives to adequately reflect his design. The significance of the landscape is enhanced by the survival of elements of the original pre-1750 layout, modified and incorporated by Spence, including ponds and a viewing mound. This landscape, which spans the change from a more formal geometrical approach to garden and landscape design to one of a more naturalistic or landscape style, fully meets the national criteria for Registration.

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.