

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WOBURN FARM

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

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Name:	WOBURN FARM
County:	Surrey
District:	Runnymede (District Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.380638 Longitude: -0.48548490 National Grid Reference: TQ0549865709 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000342 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

Arcadian landscaped ferme ornee designed by Philip Southcote from 1734/5.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Woburn Farm once formed part of the estate of Chertsey Abbey. Woburn, meaning 'crooked stream', could still describe the stream known as The Bourne which forms the northern boundary of the site. Philip Southcote (c 1697/8-1758) married the rich Dowager Duchess of Cleveland in 1732 which enabled him to purchase Woburn (or Wooburn) Farm, alias Cocks Lands, lying between Chertsey and Weybridge, from a Mrs Hornby c 1735. As a Catholic, Southcote was required to live more than ten miles from the City of London. Southcote had spent several years in France prior to his marriage but on his return to England established a wide circle of friends and acquaintances which included Alexander Pope (1688-1744), William Kent (1685-1748), and Joseph Spence (1699-1768); he was also related to the talented botanist and plantsman, Lord Petre (1713-43). In c 1748 he commissioned William Kent to design a new house to replace the existing gentleman's residence at Woburn.

Joseph Spence, a clergyman and Professor of Poetry at Oxford University who recorded conversations with Southcote and literary figures from 1726, attributes the invention of the ferme ornee to Southcote (Symes 1988). The land at Woburn was not particularly scenic or notable but Southcote set out to create a working landscape that was also picturesque, using techniques borrowed from art. Southcote aimed to hide the boundaries so that the extent of the relatively modest 47ha site (later enlarged to c 60ha) was not obvious, and used a broad perimeter circuit walk to give access to all parts of the grounds. A planting plan by Southcote, reproduced by Spence, shows a wide border of herbaceous plants and rows of shrubs stepped up to an existing hedgerow (Garden Hist 1974). Spence described how each area of the grounds had a foreground, middle ground, and distance, and from the hill within the site, the sides of which he planted with trees, were views out to local landmarks such as St Anne's Hill and Windsor Castle. In 1750 the view was enhanced by the construction of Walton Bridge, a feature also visible from the neighbouring Oatlands Park (qv), 2km to the east. Woburn was much admired by contemporaries, who referred to it as Southcote's Paradise (ibid). They were impressed not only by the planting, which included the extensive use of flowers, and the scattering of temples, but also the atmosphere of a peaceful, rural life.

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Following Southcote's death in 1758, the estate was maintained by his second wife and continued to be visited by travellers, several of whom wrote accounts of the experience. The visitors included Richard Pococke (1704?65), an Irish cleric, in April 1757 and John Parnell (1744-1801), another Irishman, in 1763 and 1769, the latter writing a particularly detailed description of the site. Mrs Southcote died in 1783, leaving the estate to Lord Petre's son. It was leased out, but still of interest as Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) recorded in his Memorandums Made on a Tour to some of the Gardens in England (1786). In 1814 it was sold to Charles Stirling, Vice Admiral of the White, who owned the estate, now known as Woburn Park, until 1834. The subsequent owner, the Dowager Lady King, was responsible for enlarging the original mansion. The next owner, the Earl of Kilmorey, built the present entrance lodge, replacing Southcote's octagonal lodge. In 1884 the estate passed back into the hands of the Petre family when Monsignor William Petre, twelfth baron, moved St George's College, founded by the Josephite Community in Croydon in 1869, to the site. The eastern two thirds of the site is now occupied by an extensive range of school buildings and sports facilities. By 1897 the north-west centre part of the site contained three large residential properties, Woburn Chase, Woburnhurst Park, and Brackendene. These have since been subdivided and some redevelopment has taken place. In the C19 the kitchen garden was moved to the western boundary of the site; this is now used as winter quarters for showmen and is known as Woburn Park Farm. To the north is a late C20 BMX track. The site is now (2001) in divided public and private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Woburn Farm lies on the north side of the A317, 2.5km from Chertsey to the north-west and 2km from Weybridge to the south-east. The registered site covers an area of c 60ha, of which some 37ha are occupied by the College and its grounds; the central section of the site to the north-west which is in private residential use covers an area of c 5ha, and the remainder, owned by the local authority, is leased for various uses. Alongside the A317 the site is enclosed with a variety of fencing and walls. The boundary to the north-west is a stream that flows north into The Bourne, which flows from west to east and forms the northern boundary of the site. The far bank of Woburn Park Stream, which also flows north into The Bourne, forms the eastern boundary of the site. The landform is mainly flat, lying as it does to the south of Chertsey Meads in the Thames flood plain, but in the centre of the site the land rises to a hill c 15m high, with a steep slope on the north, the high ground giving views across the Thames valley.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Today (2001), access to St George's College is via a roundabout on the A317, opposite the end of Station Road. The original, C18 entrance to Woburn Farm lies c 70m to the south-east, where a single-storey stucco lodge is situated on the west side of the original access drive, c 170m south-south-east of the house, behind a bellmouth of 1.5m high stucco walls and two pillars surmounted by urns. The present lodge dates from the mid C19 and replaced Southcote's octagonal lodge of yellow brick. The drive, flanked by an avenue of lime trees, runs straight for c 150m, before turning west towards the main house. There are vehicular entrances to the various residential properties within the registered site from the A317, Woburn Hill. At the northern end of the site, access is gained from the road Addlestone Moor, which also gives pedestrian access to the stream on the northern boundary.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Woburn Park (listed grade II) is a square, two-storey house designed by William Kent c 1748. Built of yellow brick, it was substantially altered in the mid to late C19 by the Earl of Kilmorey who added an ornamental parapet and had the elevations cement rendered. An extensive range of C20 school buildings, principally of red brick, is situated to the north of the house.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Very little remains today (2001) of the landscape laid out by Southcote in the mid C18. Whately (1771) noted that the site covered c 150 acres (c 60ha), of which 35 acres (c 14ha), 'are adorned to the highest degree'; of the remainder, some two thirds was pasture and the rest in tillage.

Immediately to the south of the house is a small rectangular area of rose beds in turf around a small pool and fountain. This dates from the late C19 or earlier (OS 1885). The area is enclosed on three sides by a 1m high stucco wall, interrupted on the south side by wrought-iron railings and gates (?C18, listed grade II) opening onto an informal area of trees and grass with a small watercourse running through. This is all that remains of the almost circular water feature created by Southcote to the south of the house. The creation of this water caused great inconvenience to the local residents and necessitated the diversion of the

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road (Manning and Bray 1804?18). A stone grotto (listed grade II) which terminated a blind arm of the water survives c 20m south of the house. A large, brick-built gateway (listed grade II) designed by Kent stands to the east of the main drive, c 70m south-east of the house. The area to the south of the house is illustrated in an engraving by Luke Sullivan of 1775 (reproduced in Symes 1988). This shows the house, part of a Chinese bridge crossing the water, plinths and urns, the Octagon building, Kent's gateway, and the grotto. These features are all recorded in Parnell's description of the site (Garden Hist 1979).

PARK The open land within the college grounds is used for sports pitches, these occupying what were once Southcote's fields. The eastern perimeter of the site, adjoining Woburn Park Stream, is fringed with trees, and in some places a pathway exists, a relic of Southcote's boundary circuit walk. A cricket pavilion with a swimming pool to the rear, built between 1885 and 1896 (OS), stands to the west of the stream, c 200m east of the main house complex. Near the north-east corner of the site a drain flows into the stream, crossed by a brick bridge which was part of Southcote's circuit around the farm. In some places the path was sand, in others, gravel. Turning west there are views across the Thames water meadows at Chertsey Meads. The land rises steeply from The Bourne, forming a hill north of the college buildings. The hill is wooded and 440m north-west of the original house contains the base of Southcote's Octagon Temple, said to have been designed by Lord Burlington (Symes 1988). No trace remains of the tree-lined avenue which led south from the Octagon Temple to a Ruined Chapel which was situated in the centre of the site, west of the house, nor of the canal which flowed north into The Bourne (Plan, Jacques 1974). Other features around the site included a Rustic Cell, a Gothic Hut, and a menagerie near the stream in the north-west corner where Southcote kept first exotic pheasants and later ducks and turkeys.

Between 1885 and 1896 (OS) the site was divided, and three large properties erected north-west of the College grounds. This central area of the site still consists of private residential properties, surrounded by trees. To the north-west the land slopes away to the flat Thames flood plain, crossed by high-voltage power lines and pylons. The former Woburn Park Farm now houses a lorry park and winter quarters for showmen within the brick walls and corner turrets of the kitchen garden. The stream on the north-west boundary has the remains of bridges and artificial stonework along its banks (early C20). At its northern end where it joins The Bourne a bridge gives a vantage point across the Meads towards the Thames. East of the stream and north of the walled enclosure, the ground which was formerly (mid C20) Brackendene Caravan Site has been remodelled (late C20) to create a BMX track for children.

KITCHEN GARDEN Nothing remains within the complex of school buildings of Southcote's circular kitchen garden, described by Parnell from his visit in June 1769 (Garden Hist 1979), except the layout of roadways around it. The garden was replaced in the late C19 (OS 1896) by the walled enclosure in the north-west corner of the site which is now (2001) used as winter quarters for showmen.

REFERENCES

T Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1771) T Jefferson, *Memorandums Made on a Tour to some of the Gardens in England* (1786) O Manning and W Bray, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey* (1804-14), pp 227-8 E Brayley and J Britton, *History of Surrey* (1850), p 234 *Garden History* II, no 3 (1974), pp 27??; III, no 2 (1975), pp 3??; VII, no 2 (1979), pp 82??; VII, no 3 (1979), pp 9-12 J Dixon Hunt and P Willis, *The Genius of the Place* (reprinted 1979), pp 34-5, 267, 334 D Jacques, *Georgian Gardens: The Reign of Nature* (1983), pp 25, 28 *Country Life*, 176 (5 July 1984), pp 28-30 M Symes, *Fairest Scenes: Five Great Surrey Gardens* (1988), pp 50-7 M Batey, Alexander Pope, *The Poet and the Landscape* (1999), pp 91-2, 117, 121

Maps D Jacques, Plan [copy on EH file]

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1864-70, published 1868/72 2nd edition published 1897 3rd edition published 1920 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1865, published 1885 2nd edition published 1896 3rd edition published 1914

Illustrations William Woollet, engravings, 1759 (reproduced in *Garden Hist* 1974) Luke Sullivan, engraving, 1775 (reproduced in Symes 1988)

Description written: February 2000 Register Inspector: BJL Edited: March 2003

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.