

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

GOBIONS (GUBBINS)

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Name:	GOBIONS (GUBBINS)
County:	Hertfordshire
District:	Welwyn Hatfield (District Authority)
Parish:	North Mymms
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.715940 Longitude: -0.18616392 National Grid Reference: TL 25403 03469, TL2540403479 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000495 Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

Details

The remains of an C18 pleasure ground laid out by Charles Bridgeman in the 1730s, surrounded by a landscape park developed during the later C18 and early C19. The house was demolished c 1838.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

From at least the 1390s (VCH) the manor of More Hall was owned by the More family, who built Gobions House within the estate during the C16. Sir Thomas More, Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor, was executed in 1535, probably having written Utopia at More Hall. At this time the estate reverted to the Crown, being restored to the family in 1607. Basil More sold the estate in 1693, it being purchased in 1708 by Sir Jeremy Sambrooke (d 1754), who made major improvements to the property. In 1730 (Cobham 1990) Charles Bridgeman, the Royal Gardener (d 1738), was employed to make a 'Pleasure Garden' in Great or Gobions Wood, detached from the house, this being shown on an estate map of c 1735 (GRO). The map shows the woodland containing various formal features, including a bowling green and canals linked by straight walks, enclosed by avenues crossing the adjacent fields and parkland. James Gibbs designed, c 1740, a temple facade to terminate the largest canal, together with the large Folly Arch, a three-storey gothick gateway, to terminate one of the main avenues at the southern boundary of the estate. Gubbins House, as it was by that time known, was visited by Queen Caroline and her three daughters in 1732, when the gardens were described as second only to Stowe in their beauty. They were depicted in 1748 by Chatelaine in his views of the canal and bowling green. The estate was much admired during the C18.

In 1777 the estate was sold by the Freemans to John Hunter, it in turn passing in 1802 to his great-nephew Thomas Holmes, who changed his name to Hunter. Little is known of the development of the landscape at this time. By 1815 (sale plan, HRO) the parkland north and east of Gobions Wood had been landscaped, and the serpentine Gubbins Pond had been laid out close to the house and garden.

In 1836 Robert William Gaussen (d 1880) of Brookmans Park, a director and Governor of the Bank of England, bought Gobions (to which the name had reverted in the late C18/early C19), combining the two estates and pulling down Gobions House c 1838. Gaussen carried out planting in the area of woodland west of Bridgeman's work, which became increasingly neglected. In 1923 the Gaussen family sold the Brookmans and Gobions estates to developers, and houses were built along the north and

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east boundaries of the Gobions parkland. The remaining Gobions land, approximately one third of which is in public ownership and open to the public, is now (1999) in divided ownership.

The 'long C18' saw a significant expansion of the British Empire, and with it the development of a wealthy mercantile elite. The owners of Gobions from 1708 to 1838 were part of that group and had fortunes derived from a number of sources that are today the subject of controversy. These include the East India Company, the South Sea Company, and the economy of Caribbean plantations based on enslaved-peoples.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Gobions lies 2km north of the centre of Potters Bar and 4km south-east of Hatfield. The c 90ha park is bounded to the north and east by mid to late C20 housing, separating the park from its former eastern boundary, the Great North Road, and former northern boundary, the remains of the parkland of the former Brookmans Park. To the north of the C20 Brookmans Park development lies the former parkland of the Brookmans Park estate, now (1999) a golf course, with which the Gobions parkland was joined in the mid C19 by Robert William Gaussen. The southern boundary is marked at the east end partly by Swanley Bar Lane, from which the park is separated in places by further C20 development. The west end of the southern boundary is marked by Hawkshead Lane. To the west the park is partly bounded by a track south from Moffats farm, beyond which lies other open amenity land. The immediate setting to the south, west and east is rural, with, to the north, the C20 Brookmans Park housing development, and to the south buildings at Bolton's Park Farm and the taller buildings of Potters Bar, visible from high ground in the park. To the east lies Leggatts Park, also part of the Brookmans Park estate in the C19.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The present approach (1999) enters at the north-west corner of the park, near Moffats, off Moffats Lane. A much-extended, single-storey brick lodge stands 300m north of Gobions Pond, adjacent to the Lane. From here a track runs south into the north-west corner of the parkland, now Gobions Open Space, to a car park.

In the 1730s (estate map, c 1735) the house, which stood where the woodland known as Gobions Garden now lies, was approached directly off a lane which ran approximately west to east, to the north of the house. The house was set back behind a walled forecourt with a central gateway giving access from the road. The lane was closed later in the C18 and incorporated within the park, becoming a private drive giving access from the Great North Road to the east.

By 1815 (sale map) Moffats Lane had been constructed to the north of the house. A serpentine drive led south-east from the site of Moffats Lodge across the park to the house, meeting a second drive, from the east, following the course of the former road which linked Moffats with the old Great North Road turnpike.

In the mid C19 Gaussen joined the Brookmans and Gobions estates, linking the two via a new south to north drive, which gave access from Hawkshead Lane on the south boundary. The drive, now (1999) largely lost, entered at Folly Arch (James Gibbs c 1740, listed grade II*), which had not been part of an entrance to the estate until then. The large, brick-built archway of Folly Arch is flanked by two slender, three-storey crenellated towers, and is a very early example of the Gothick style. To the east of the Arch stood the mid C19 lodge, replaced in the late C20. From here the mid C19 drive formerly extended north, flanked by an avenue of trees, to enter the south side of Gobions Wood, through which it continued, emerging on the north side to continue north through the Gobions and Brookmans parkland to Brookmans house to the north. North-east of Gobions Garden the drive was flanked by two widely spaced parallel avenues of trees, in place since at least 1815 (sale map).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Gobions house lay within what is now (1999) an area of woodland called Gobions Garden, formerly the site of the garden surrounding the house. James Gibbs (1682-1754) extended the house in the 1740s, and it was pulled down c 1838 by Gaussen. A view of Gobions published in 1840 by J C Buckler (HRO) shows it to have been in Classical style.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The site of the former gardens around the house is now marked by Gobions Garden woodland, which contains several mature ornamental trees including cedars. In the 1730s (estate map, c 1735) a small, enclosed formal garden court lay to the south-west of the house, crossed centrally by a path leading from the south-west, garden front to a gateway. From here an avenue extended across fields past a small pond towards what is now known as Deep Bottom woodland. One hundred years later (sale map, 1833) the park swept up to the house, except to the north-west where, beyond the stables and service courts, a substantial kitchen garden lay surrounded by a narrow band of woodland.

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The south-west boundary of Gobions Garden wood is marked by the early C19 Gobions Pond (sale map, 1815). This serpentine lake, formerly overlooked by the house to the north-east, is dammed on the south and west sides and encircled by a path, with views south and west across the park to distant countryside. From the south side of the Pond a path leads south to Gobions Wood, past the small pond lying on the north side of the Wood. A further path leads south from the east end of Gobions Pond, on the course of a C19 or earlier path, to the west end of the early C18 pleasure grounds.

A network of watercourses runs from east to west through a valley at the centre of Gobions Wood. The west end of the Wood is occupied by Deep Bottom, near the east end of which are the probable remains of an icehouse.

The east end of Gobions Wood is the site of the 1730 Bridgeman pleasure ground. A small mound, on which stood a statue of Hercules, lies towards the centre of the Wood, marking a rond point adjacent to the east side of Gaussen's drive through the Wood. Formerly several straight walks, part of the Bridgeman scheme, extended from this mound through the woodland, each aligned on an ornamental feature.

One walk leading to the south edge of the woodland (now marked by the course of the mid C19 Gaussen drive), gave a view of the site of the later (c 1740) Folly Arch across the parkland, on the horizon. A second walk to the south-east led to the large bowling green, still discernible as a level area set into surrounding earth banks, within the woodland. This, as illustrated by Chatelaine in 1748, was surrounded by clipped yew hedges, with a small, square, domed summerhouse on a bank at one end (now gone, although foundations may remain). The third walk led north-east to the long, narrow, rectangular canal, set within the woodland and edged with a strip of lawn, embellished from the 1740s by Gibbs' temple facade at the north-east end. The canal remains, enclosed by woodland, but the temple facade has gone. The fourth walk from the rond point led north-west to an informal pond made by widening the main stream which ran through the woodland. A similar pond was restored c 1990.

From the north-east end of the bowling green stepped banks formerly led down to a further open space, from which a straight walk led through the Wood to a further canal to the north-east of the main canal (estate map, c 1735). This second canal, still extant, lies, as in the C18, within the open park, extending north from the woodland boundary. In the 1730s it led north to a fan-shaped wood containing serpentine paths surrounding a large open area of grass and scattered trees (ibid). This outer wood had gone by the late C19 (OS).

In the 1730s the house was linked to Gobions Wood and the fan-shaped wood by three avenues arranged in patte d'oie form (ibid). These extended across the park between the house and the woods, east to the fan-shaped wood, south-east to the south end of the canal linking the two woods, and the north-west side of the main canal. These avenues had gone by the early C19 (sale map, 1815).

Further features, now lost, which once stood in Gobions Wood include a grotto, a figure of Time holding a sundial, a wooden summerhouse in lattice pattern, a cascade, a figure of Cleopatra, a large pigeon house and various other statues and urns (The Ambulator; or, The Stranger's Companion 1774). The pigeon house was dismantled by Gaussen in the mid C19. Further walks linked the formal features in Gobions Wood in the 1730s, these being lost to later woodland growth. Drawings by Gibbs 'for Mr Sambrooke at Gubbins' exist (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, reproduced in Willis 1977) showing a temple and dovecote, both octagonal, in elevation and plan form.

The pleasure ground at Gobions was greatly admired during the C18. George Bickham the Younger, writing in his *Beauties of Stowe* (1750), proclaimed that 'the famous Garden of Sir Jeremy Sambrooke, at Gubbins ... deserves a Traveller's Admiration' for there he would see 'a sensible Resemblance in Miniature of Stowe'. Bickham continued, waxing lyrical with a description of the beauties of the features to be encountered at Gubbins, which 'form all together almost the only Garden in its Kind'. Horace Walpole (1785, reprinted 1995), in reference to Bridgeman and his style, stated 'I have observed in the garden at Gubbins ... many detached thoughts, that strongly indicate the dawn of modern taste'.

PARK Gobions park occupies the valley sides flanking Gobions Wood and Deep Bottom to the north and south. It is largely pasture with some arable land, but occasional park trees remain.

In the 1730s only the area between the house and Gobions Wood was parkland, the rest of the later park being divided into fields. Avenues then extended through these fields, enclosing Gobions Wood (estate map, c 1735). By the early C19 the avenues had gone, except for that linking Folly Arch with the pleasure grounds, and most of the park had been landscaped (sale maps 1815;

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1833). The park north and east of Gobions Wood was landscaped and planted with park trees in clumps and singles, although the area between Gobions Wood and Hawkshead Lane still retained field boundaries and was planted with clumps of trees.

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Maps Gubbins estate map, c 1735 (D1245/FF.75), (Gloucestershire Record Office) Dury and Andrews, A topographical Map of Hartford-shire, 1766 Sale map, Gobions estate, 1815 (31437), (Hertfordshire Record Office) A Bryant, The County of Hertford, 1822 Sale map, Gobions estate, 1833 (66057), (Hertfordshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1879 2nd edition published 1898 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1898 1914 revised edition 3rd edition published 1935

Description written: June 1999 Amended: October 2000 Register Inspector: SR Edited: November 2000

This List Entry was subject to a Minor Enhancement on 23 September 2020

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.