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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

RUFFORD ABBEY

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Name: RUFFORD ABBEY

County: Nottinghamshire

District: Newark and Sherwood (District Authority)

Parish: Rufford

label.localisation: Latitude: 53.170312
Longitude: -1.0319593
National Grid Reference: SK6480864126
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001085
Date first listed: 01-Jan-1986

Details

An C18 landscape park which originated as the grounds of a Cistercian abbey. A C16 deer park and remains of C17 gardens and C18, C19, and C20 gardens all lie around the ruined abbey with a number of later additions.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Rufford Abbey was founded by the Cistercian order of monks in 1146 and built between 1147 and c 1170. It was added to in 1233 when the king licensed the Rufford abbot and his monks to enlarge the courts of their house by taking an acre of the king's wood (Norton 1998). After its Dissolution in 1537, Rufford was granted by the Crown to George Talbot, fourth Earl of Shrewsbury. His grandson, George Talbot, sixth Earl of Shrewsbury inherited Rufford in 1560 and gradually converted the Abbey buildings into a country house. His wife, Bess of Hardwick, contrived the marriage of her daughter, Elizabeth Cavendish, and Charles Stuart, Earl of Lennox, fifth in line of succession to the throne, at Rufford in 1574. James I and Charles I both hunted at Rufford. The Abbey was extended with north and south wings in 1610, by Gilbert Talbot, seventh Earl of Shrewsbury. In 1626 Rufford passed into the Savile family, through Lady Mary, sister of the seventh and eighth Earls and the first wife of Sir George Savile, second Baronet. In 1660 Sir George Savile, fourth Baronet of Thornhill (created first Marquess of Halifax in 1685) built the stables, and in 1680 had the remaining Abbey ruins pulled down, rebuilding the house and landscaping the grounds (ibid). Sir George Savile, seventh Baronet (the marquessate died out after the second Marquess), an enthusiastic improver, built the bath house and garden pavilion designed by John Hallam in 1729, laid out the ornamental canal and Broad Ride c 1730, and made alterations to the stables in 1737. The eighth and last Baronet created the present lake and corn mill in 1750 and planted vast numbers of trees in the mid to late C18. John Lumley-Savile, eighth Earl of Scarborough commissioned Anthony Salvin (1799-1881) to extend the house in the 1830s as well as carrying out many other improvements to Rufford Abbey and grounds. His natural sons, Captain Henry Savile and John Savile, former British Ambassador to Rome, created first Baron Savile, also made improvements to the Abbey and grounds. John Savile Lumley Savile, who inherited in 1896, entertained on a grand scale and Edward VII stayed at Rufford when attending the Doncaster Races. Sir George, third Baron Savile, inherited as a minor in 1931 and in 1938 his trustees sold the 18,730 acre (c 7800ha) estate to Sir Albert Ball, Mayor of Nottingham, who sold the estate on in individual lots (guidebook). Henry Talbot de Vere Clifton bought the Abbey and grounds, of which part were

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developed for housing. Used by the army in the Second World War and the Civil Defence up to the early 1950s, Rufford Abbey and grounds were acquired by Nottinghamshire County Council in 1952. The north and east wings were demolished in 1956 and the remaining buildings put into the care of the Ministry of Works Ancient Monuments Division (now English Heritage). Rufford Abbey was designated as a country park in 1969. From the 1970s to the present (1999) Rufford Abbey's buildings and grounds have been renovated and new gardens created. The registered site, which includes Rufford Abbey and its grounds and the land to south and west, is now (1999) in divided ownership, part private and part local authority. Rufford Abbey remains in English Heritage guardianship under local management.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Rufford Abbey stands 11km north-east of Mansfield to the east of the A614, 3km south-west of Wellow, 3km south-east of Edwinstowe, and 4.5km north of Bilsthorpe. The c 460ha site occupies flat ground which forms part of the valley of Rainworth Water, which runs from north to south. The western boundary is formed partly by the A614 and, further south, by Rainworth Water and the perimeter planting of Beech Hill Wood. The perimeter planting of Long Belt forms the southern boundary, with agricultural land on the south-east and New Park Wood on the north-east boundary. The northern boundary comprises perimeter planting west and east of Rufford Mill and ford, south of Rufford Lane.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the area owned by Nottinghamshire County Council, created in the mid C20, is through a gate off the A614 450m west-south-west of the Abbey. From the entrance a tree-lined drive leads to a car park 90m south-west of the Abbey. An earlier entrance with gates and a screen wall of 1841 (listed grade II), probably by Anthony Salvin, is situated 50m north of this entrance and on the opposite (west) side of the road from this is the West Lodge (listed grade II), also by Salvin. From this earlier entrance a further drive flanked by a lime avenue (1875) runs from west to east parallel to, and to the south of, the current drive (1999). This drive is now (1999) disused. The present drive leads eastwards to a turning circle at the west front of the Abbey. Two urns (listed grade II) flank the drive on the western edge of the turning circle. Some 100m north of West Lodge, on the east side of the A614, a drive leads from opposite Rose Cottage into the wooded area known as the Wilderness. This entrance originated as part of an earlier crescent-shaped drive which swept north-west from the Abbey (now part of the B6034) to meet the main road (A6075) in Edwinstowe. The drive was made in 1760 by Sir George Savile, eighth Baronet (Pigot & Co, 1840; Norton 1998). At the northern end of the park, off Rufford Lane and to the west of Rufford Mill, is an entrance which leads to a car park, and a footpath enters the site between the Mill and Rufford Mill Cottages. Other entrances are at Park Lodge, 1.65km south of the Abbey, and at Old Kennels, 1.25km south-east of the Abbey. Access to the golf course which occupies the northern parkland is from Rufford Lane.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Rufford Abbey (listed grade I), built between 1147 and 1170 and from 1233 onwards, is now a partial ruin. On the west front the ornate Tudor-style entrance and balustraded causeway built by Salvin (1838-40) remains. The north and east fronts were demolished in 1956, revealing the lay brothers dorter on the west side and the undercroft. The dorter is now (1999) roofless and is entered from the west front entrance with access to the north by the axial night stairs. South of the west entrance is the restored south wing, built in 1660 and extended in 1680, now (1999) used as offices. The clock tower and bell cupola were designed by Salvin and added in 1837 (Norton 1998). Also built in 1837 and designed by John Birch (fl 1830s) were the coach house, brew house, and water tower (all listed grade II). The brick-built stables (listed grade II) lie 20m south-west of the Abbey, laid out around a square central courtyard. Constructed in 1660 (guidebook 1980), they were altered in 1737 and re-roofed in 1890. In the 1980s and 1990s they were converted into a visitor centre.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Formal gardens lie to the north and south-west of Rufford Abbey with pleasure grounds to the north and north-west. A large lawn, contained within a ha-ha, lies north of the Abbey. This occupies the site of the King's Garden laid out by the first Marquess of Halifax in the late C17, which may be part of a garden scheme shown on the 1725 survey which included a fountain court east of the Abbey and a wilderness beyond the King's Garden. On the survey map this garden is shown to be rectangular and divided into quarters around a central feature with a gravel terrace along the western side. A plan of c 1680 by William Thom shows the quartered rectangular garden with a *patte d'oie* to the north of the garden with small gardens on either side. Stone markings on the lawn indicate the position of the abbey church. The Queen

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Mother's Walk, created in 1981, runs parallel to the north and west edges of the lawn, with an avenue of pleached limes with urns (listed grade II) along its north side. North-west of the Abbey is the grassed Abbey Meadow, to the south of which is a children's playground. Part of the Meadow is the site of a bowling green shown on the 1725 survey. Army huts were set up here during the Second World War. Long Meadow lies to the east of the lawn and is now (1999) a wild flower meadow with a new hedge planted to mark the millennium.

Some 40m south-east of the Abbey is the orangery (listed grade II), which started life as a cold bath and summerhouse. It has brick walls on three sides with, at the south-east end, twin towers joined by a three-bay Tuscan loggia topped with balustrading. The orangery building is entered by a door in the north-east wall; the interior is paved and set in the paving are internal steps to view the base of the bath. Between the towers, a bay window topped by balustrading overlooks the oval pond and lamp fountain. The remains of the canal which in the C18 ran from the fountain pool, form the western boundary of the present (1999) orangery garden. John Hallam (fl mid C18) designed the cold bath in 1728. It was described by Dugdale (Georgian Grp J 1997) as: an open air canal, aligned east to west, flanked by a stone paving and enclosed by a high brick wall, with an entry from the north ... At the east end the bath terminates within a Summer-House. The eastern side of the Summer-House has a half octagonal plan, projecting in a circular pool with a fountain. The bath was supplied via a sluice-regulated aqueduct from a reservoir called Blackwalk Pond. The latter had been formed by damming a stream called Rainworth Water.

The bathhouse was converted into an orangery in 1889, with a glazed roof and a boiler, to house the first Baron Savile's exotic plants and his collection of sculpture. The building was renovated in 1995, having been used as an ammunition store during the Second World War; it is now (1999) used as an exhibition area.

Formal gardens created in 1983 which are situated 60m south-west of the Abbey are entered through a pair of ornamental gates. The gardens are laid out as a series of compartments linked by paths and ornamented with sculpture. From the entrance the central or main path has subsidiary paths on either side; on the east a path leads to the Birch Garden and on the west a path leads to the Orangery Garden. The main path leads into the Foliage Garden, now (1999) laid out as a sculpture garden with shapes outlined with stones and filled with coloured gravel. From the Foliage Garden, the path to the west leads to a herb garden, divided into quarters of formal beds of herbs edged with box and brick paths. Adjacent to the herb garden is an arched wooden pergola walk between two hedges which leads to the Long Avenue. A sculpture entitled Man and Ewe on a Park Bench by Siobhan Coppinger is placed at the south end of Long Avenue. South-west of the avenue and adjacent to the pergola is a garden with herbaceous borders and brick paths of diagonal herringbone pattern. North-east of the formal gardens is the Reg Hookway Arboretum, laid out as a memorial to the first director of the Countryside Commission who died in 1982. It is planted with different varieties of oak and birch and has a wooden summerhouse set among the trees. This whole area was the site of formal gardens and a Japanese garden in the late C19 and early C20 (Anthony 1979). On the 1725 estate plan an oval walled garden bisected by a path leading to a feature called the White Walk is shown on the same site.

The pleasure grounds to the north and north-west of the Abbey gardens are made up almost entirely of woodland. Part of this woodland, the area immediately north of the present Abbey Meadow and the Queen Mother's Walk, is marked as a Wilderness on the 1725 plan. Broad Ride extends north from the Lawn for 540m, terminating 700m north of, and on an axis with, the Abbey. It was created c 1730 and lined with beech trees which were felled during the Second World War (guidebook 1992). The Ride, now (1999) a grass path edged with trees, has been replanted as an avenue, with smaller paths leading off it into the woodland to the east and west. To the north of Broad Ride is a clearing and another car park. A path leads back south-west from the Ride. Off this path, 500m north-west of the Abbey, is the larger of the two icehouses (both listed grade II). The second icehouse is in the Wilderness wood, 150m south-west of the larger icehouse and 450m north-west of the Abbey. These are the remaining two of the three icehouses which were built in 1820; the third is no longer extant.

East of Broad Ride is Rufford Lake, 400m north-east of the Abbey, created in 1750 by the damming of Rainworth Water. At the southern end are two decorative islands linked by an unusual tunnel bridge (guidebook 1992; Norton 1998). Fed by Gallow Hole Dyke from south, the lake stretches north for 400m. The lake became silted up and was dredged in the 1980s and a lake-side walk was created in 1991. This walk starts from the Queen Mother's Walk, continuing past a pets' cemetery beside woodland to the south of the lake where hard paths with low fenced edges make up the circuit around the lake. The path

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leads north-east for 100m, passing over wooden bridges which link the islands making up the south-east boundary of the lake. Picnic areas and small sculptures are interspersed among the trees which edge the water. There are views north over the lake to Rufford Mill (listed grade II). The path continues north for a further 100m, through Scotland Bank Wood to Rufford Mill. Built in 1750 by the eighth Baronet Savile as a three-storey corn mill with a large decorative cupola, in 1790 the Mill became a two-storey classical building. Captain Henry Savile added east and west wings when it was converted into a saw mill in 1860. From the Mill, paths lead south-west to Broad Ride and south along the west bank of the lake.

PARK Parkland forms a major part of the registered site. The northern part of the parkland east of Rufford Abbey is occupied by Rufford golf course. East of the golf course and 1.3km east of the Abbey is New Park Wood (c 40ha), made up of rides converging on a rondpoint. South of the golf course and south-east of the Abbey is an area which is now (late C20) arable with an open aspect. Kennel Wood (4ha) lies 100m south of the Old Kennels entrance along the eastern edge of the main parkland. Rufford Park (c 120ha) is bounded to the north by the path which runs west from south of Kennel Wood to south of Beech Hill on the west boundary. It was formerly part of a larger deer park, shown on the 1637 map, which extended south beyond the present southern boundary now delineated by the Long Belt plantation. The 1830 map shows the park with a path (extant) running east/west from Kennel Wood to the north of Beech Hill Wood, of which it forms the northern boundary, with a deer barn (now gone) in the eastern section and the southern boundary delineated by Long Plantation with farmland to the south of that. In 1857 the Rufford inventory shows 300 deer in the 500 acre (208ha) deer park (Norton 1998).

The Nottingham to Doncaster road, shown on the 1637 map as the way to Eakring, ran immediately south of the Abbey to the edge of the registered boundary, c 100m north of Old Kennels. In 1658 it was moved c 1.5km west of the house to run north/south as seen on the 1725 plan. The Edwinstowe to Wellow road which ran east/west c 200m north of the Abbey was also moved then. Both the Wellow road and the Nottingham road, now (2000) the A614, were moved to their present positions c 1765 (ibid).

KITCHEN GARDEN Houses now (late C20) occupy the site of the former kitchen garden, which lies c 15m to the south of the Abbey, outside the land here registered. The area of the garden had been reduced by 1890 (OS) although glasshouses were still present. By 1900 (OS) part of the area had become an orchard together with the area to the south. The glasshouses are shown on a photograph of 1900 of the kitchen garden. Both the orchard and walled garden are shown as separate lots on the sale plan of 1938.

REFERENCES

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Maps Estate plan, 1637 (private collection) William Thom, *Scheme for Gardens and Parkland*, c 1680 (private collection) Estate plan, c 1725 (DDSR 202/21) (Nottinghamshire Archives) Nottinghamshire County Council, *Rufford Country Park Sculpture Garden*, 1:500, c 1995

OS Old Series 1" to 1 mile, published 1830 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1883/4, published 1890 3rd edition published 1915 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1919

Archival items Letter and sketch showing oblique rides from Rufford Hall, dated April 1725, signed 'T S' (DDSR 211/227/135), (Nottinghamshire Archives) Photograph of kitchen garden, c 1900 (Nottinghamshire Archives)

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Legal

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