

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HIGHCLERE PARK

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Name: HIGHCLERE PARK

County: Hampshire

District: Basingstoke and Deane (District Authority)

Parish: Burghclere

County: Hampshire

District: Basingstoke and Deane (District Authority)

Parish: Highclere

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.329612
Longitude: -1.3557411
National Grid Reference: SU4498459143
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: I
List Entry Number: 1000109
Date first listed: 31-May-1984

Details

A late C18 landscaped park and pleasure grounds laid out by the first Earl of Carnarvon over a medieval deer park, the Earl's design for which loosely follows a plan drawn by Lancelot Brown c 1770 but also incorporates some of the built and planted elements of a late C17 and early C18 rococo garden. The pleasure grounds were further planted with ornamental shrubberies and exotics in the C19.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Highclere was granted in AD 749 to the church at Winchester, the northern part of the present park forming a deer park with fishponds from the C12. The bishops of Winchester had a palace at Highclere from at least the C13, on or near the site of the present house, to which Bishop William of Wykeham carried out extensive building work in the late C14 (Brown 1998). Following his death in 1404, Highclere declined and its park was leased as farmland until the whole estate was sequestered by Edward VI in 1551. The king granted it to William Fitzwilliam, after whose death it was bought by Richard Kingsmill in 1572, but for the eighty or so years following his death in 1600, his heirs, the Lucy family, were frequently absent, living on their estates at Charlcot in Warwickshire. They seem to have undertaken building work however in the early C17 at a manor house called 'Highclere Place house' and the existence of gardens is also recorded (Particulars of the Manor ..., c 1641-57). In 1679, Highclere was bought by Sir Robert Sawyer, a successful lawyer and Attorney General under Charles II and James II, who began to restore the estate and to initiate the layout of a formal landscape (Brown 1998). His grandson, Robert Sawyer Herbert, inheriting on the death of his mother Mary in 1706, continued the process of formalisation on a vast scale, creating a rococo landscape of walks, drives, and avenues ornamented with garden buildings and follies, several of which still (1998) survive. The Rev Jeremiah Milles described this landscape in his Account of a Tour in Hampshire and Sussex, made in 1743.

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The estate was inherited in 1769 by Robert Sawyer Herbert's nephew, Henry Herbert, created Lord Porchester in 1780 and Earl of Carnarvon in 1793. In 1770 he commissioned Lancelot Brown (1716-83) to prepare a survey and proposals for the park, the work being recorded in Brown's account book as including 'a general plan for the grounds' and 'a plan for the intended water and the alterations about it'. A surviving plan, which is probably the general plan, shows Brown having remodelled in his informal style much of the existing woodland and tree features recorded on a survey of 1768 (which survives as a copy made by Major Bull in 1795). Milford Lake is shown similar to its present form and a second lake is proposed at Duns Mere. The execution of the scheme, and the planting of hundreds of trees including many cedars, seems to have been undertaken, albeit in a modified form, by Henry Herbert himself (Stroud 1975). The first Earl was succeeded in 1811 by his son, Henry George, who enlarged Milford Lake and established the present surrounding rhododendron and azalea gardens; early C19 account books at Highclere record a wide range of exotic trees and shrubs being introduced into the park and propagated to produce well-known hybrids such as *Rhododendron altarclerense*. Henry John George, third Earl of Carnarvon, inherited in 1833 and in 1838 engaged Sir Charles Barry (1795-1860) to prepare designs for the complete remodelling of the house to its present form, which was undertaken from 1842, the interiors being completed from 1860 by the fourth Earl. The fifth Earl, who inherited in 1890, is probably best remembered as a keen Egyptologist and for his discovery, with Howard Carter, of the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1922. Highclere descended through the Herbert family in the C20 and remains (1998) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Highclere is situated c 5km south of Newbury on the east side of Highclere village and between the A34 and A343 roads which run south from Newbury to Winchester and Andover. The 430ha site, which comprises c 13ha of informal pleasure grounds and 417ha of parkland, pasture, and woodland, is largely bounded by agricultural fencing and enclosed by tree belts. Two short stretches of the north and north-west boundaries abut minor lanes and on the east side, east of Duns Mere, a kilometre of embankment screens the adjacent A34, Whitway diversion. The northern third of the park lies on the fairly level ground of the River Avon valley, this rising in undulations southwards before ascending the steep scarp of the Downs onto Sidown Hill in the extreme south of the park. Wooded downland, crowned by the open crest of Beacon Hill, forms the wider setting for the southern part of the park while the remainder is surrounded by extensive woodland with farmland and a scatter of small settlements.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to Highclere lies at roughly the centre point of the eastern boundary. A drive from the former course of the A34 bridges the cutting containing the present A34, Whitway diversion to enter the park at Cherrycot Lodge (listed grade II) and to describe a loop northwards and then 300m westwards to a central crossroads. From here, an approach lined with mature and late C20 replacement cedars sweeps southwards to pass between gate piers beside Castle Lodge (listed grade II) 130m north-east of the house and arrive on the gravelled forecourt of the north, entrance front of the house. A further arm of the crossroads, running 350m westwards, meets a north to south drive which provides service access to the house and (to the north) the buildings of the former home farm (Park Dairy). The main approach to the house in the mid C18 was from the south, entering at Siddon Lodge and following a route down the lower slopes of Sidown Hill and along the Long Walk (a late C17 beech avenue removed in the late C18). At that date there was also an approach from the east, along a tree-lined avenue (Particulars of the Manor ..., c 1641-57), the present east to west drive, then entering at a point near to the site of Cherrycot Lodge, being shown on Brown's plan of c 1770. The lodge itself is early C19, recorded in estate papers as occupied by a Dame White and Ruth White in c 1812 (Thorp Notes, 1998). Highclere is served by several other entrances with lodges established in the late C18 and C19, from which surfaced drives and a network of subsidiary tracks criss-cross the park. London Lodge (listed grade II), standing on the north-east boundary (c 1.8km from the house), comprises a classical arched gateway flanked by Ionic pilasters built by Henry Herbert in 1793, with single-storey lodges. The drive running southwards from the lodges, which follows a winding course along high ground to pass the Temple, was noted by Prosser in 1833 as the principal approach to the house and the delights of its landscape were described in 1834 in the *Gardener's Magazine*. The Tudor-style Headstock Lodge (date stone 1838, listed grade II) stands in the north-west corner while along the western boundary are two further C19 lodges, the plain, classical Clerewood Lodge (c.1.4km from the Castle, listed grade II) and, due west of the Castle, the single-storey, tile-hung, 'Gothic-orné' Church Lane Lodge (date stone 1857, listed grade II). Beacon Hill Lodge, standing in

the south-east corner below Beacon Hill, comprises a carriage arch flanked by two subsidiary arches and may be contemporary with London Lodge (Carden 1994).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Highclere Castle (listed grade I) stands centrally in the park, on the plateau of an intermediate ridge with vistas to the south and east focused on two surviving C18 garden buildings and with extensive views northwards to the Avon valley and the Berkshire Downs beyond. The Temple forms a focal feature to the north-east. The three-storey mansion, in the Elizabethan style, has three symmetrical elevations of three storeys, the corner turrets and centrepieces rising to four, with applied orders of pilasters on the north and south fronts. The pierced parapet has strapwork and pinnacles and the windows have mullions and transoms. The whole is faced in Bath stone ashlar. The present appearance of the mansion is the result of Sir Charles Barry's remodelling and refacing, from 1839 to 1842, of the previous three-storey house which is shown in an C18 engraving (CL 1959) to incorporate both a probable late medieval and a Jacobean phase, this latter associated with rebuilding by the Lucy family in 1616 (Brown 1998). The house was further altered in 1774-6 by William Burt, possibly to plans prepared by Lancelot Brown c 1770 which he refers to in his account book (Highclere archive; Stroud 1975). A U-shaped red-brick stable block (listed grade II) stands immediately west of the mansion with, on its north side, the site of Sir Robert Sawyer's church of St Michael, built by him in 1689 and replaced in 1870 by a new church by Sir Gilbert Scott outside the western park boundary (VCH 1908).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The pleasure grounds lie to the south and west of the mansion, much of the present general form of planted lawns, laid out in the late C18 by Henry Herbert, reflecting that shown on Brown's plan of c 1770. The gardens are fenced, except on the north front of the house where an open lawn is enclosed from the park by a ha-ha wall shown on Brown's plan. The south front opens onto a 150m long oval of open lawn which slopes gently southwards, the ground beyond falling more steeply and laid to rough grass. The lawn, extended southwards from its C18 limit between 1896 and 1912 (OS editions), occupies the site of a late C17 or early C18 parterre and its central north to south axis, which is gently hollowed, is focused on Heaven's Gate (listed grade II*). This mid C18 triple-arched eyecatcher, sited in the park some 1.1km away on the north-facing slope of Sidown Hill, was built by Robert Sawyer Herbert. Its structure was restored in 1997-8. Until the late C18 alterations to the park, the axis was planted as a formal avenue of beech trees, its mention in Robert Sawyer's will suggesting that the formal gardens were initially laid out by him in the late C17 (Brown 1998). West of the oval lawn, further lawn drops away to the garden boundary, the view to the park being framed by dense evergreen planting to the north (screening the stables) and by The Wilderness to the south. This informal arrangement of mixed trees set in grass, which was largely replanted in the late C20, is shown established as a grove of trees on a mid C18 plan by Blandy and is retained on Brown's c 1770 plan. It contains an icehouse mound and a small classical temple probably of late C19 origin (OS 1897).

On the east front, grounds known as The Lawn extend 250m eastwards and are variously dotted with mature cedars and planted with mixed exotics and shrubberies which reflect the character of Brown's design on his c 1770 plan and which replaced the more formal early C18 arrangement of lawns flanked by groves of trees (Blandy, c 1757). Some 220m eastwards on the axis of the east front, Jackdaw's Castle (listed grade I), a roofless classical temple, stands on a grassed berm. Built by 1743 (Jeremiah Milles describes it that year as 'recently built') with stone columns brought from the runs of Berkeley House in London, it may have been the work of Robert Sawyer Herbert's brother Henry, ninth Earl of Pembroke. South of The Lawn, a shrubbery belt screens an Orangery (shown on the OS 1st edition surveyed 1873) and a rhomboidal-shaped walled garden, the west wall of which is pierced by a series of round-headed archways. The garden, in existence by the mid C18 but replaced as a kitchen garden in the late C18 by a new one proposed by Brown, is laid to lawn with a central circular rose bed, a glasshouse on the north wall and, parallel to the south wall, a massive yew hedge with topiary. Southwards again from the walled garden is the Great Wilderness, planted in the C20 as a forestry plantation. Shown laid out to its present boundaries and containing serpentine walks and avenues leading to a rondpoint on the mid C18 plan, its eastern boundary is formed by Limetree Avenue which is planted with mature limes and extends some 300m beyond the Great Wilderness southwards into the park.

PARK The park surrounds the house and gardens with its greatest extent to north and south. Southwards below the slopes of the garden, the ground drops gently into Sidown Vale, its grazed parkland framed by blocks of largely plantation woodland and planted with a few individual trees and clumps including, to the south-east, late C20 replacement trees. The south side of the

valley rises steeply through dense woodland with occasional open glades, and the eyecatcher of Heaven's Gate, to the summit of Sidown Hill. The hill, shown with an extensive cover of loose clumps on Brown's c 1770 plan, was planted and incorporated into the park by the first Earl in the late C18, its slopes being described as having previously 'only five beech trees and a few ash and oak'. The Earl was also responsible for partially destroying Robert Sawyer's axial beech avenue which ran from the house to Heaven's Gate, and for turning the adjacent arable land into parkland (Gardener's Mag 1834). East and west of the house, as far as the tree-fringed site boundaries, and northwards to Duns Mere, the undulating slopes of the park are laid to pasture and extensively scattered with individual and clumps of parkland trees including immense mature cedar and oak. The medieval deer park lay in this northern part of the present park, the successive enclosures added by the bishops of Winchester between 1208 and 1558 leading to its final extent of between 125 and 208ha. Much of the deer park was in use as a rabbit warren in the early C18 until its conversion by the first Earl in the late C18 to parkland and its planting with many hundreds of trees including cedar of Lebanon (Stagg 1992).

Towards the north-east boundary the ground rises more steeply onto Tent Hill, its slopes planted with a mixture of woodland and parkland trees and occupied on the north-west side by the Temple or Rotunda (c.1.5km from the Castle, listed grade II*), a circular stuccoed structure in a classical form with a central drum capped by a dome and surrounded by a colonnade of twelve Ionic columns. Built probably in the 1770s (Brown's plan annotates its site for an 'intended building' but it is not shown on Major Bull's map of 1768) and altered by Sir Charles Barry in 1838 (Thorp Notes, 1998), the Temple forms a backdrop to Duns Mere lake which lies below Tent Hill to the north-west. Both Duns Mere and Milford Lake to its north-west, constructed in the late C18 by the first Earl, lay within the medieval deer park, the boundaries of which partially survive as earthworks running south-west from Milford Lake and also along the present north-east site boundary. Milford Lake consisted by 1370 of five fishponds, these being converted by the mid C18 to three rectangular ponds before being formed into the present lake (Brown 1998). Lancelot Brown's c 1770 plan shows both Milford Lake and Duns Mere as design proposals, Duns Mere being formed from 'the great pool of Dunneslade'. Both lakes are set within a landscape of copses and plantation woodland, although the immediate shores of the north-west end of Milford Lake are extensively planted with rhododendron, azaleas, and exotic trees. These shrubberies, established with numerous other American species in the early C19 by the second Earl of Carnarvon, form an ornamental setting for Milford Lake House (listed grade I). Overlooking the lake from its site on the dam at the north-west end, the house, of pale brickwork, consists of a tall centrepiece linked on each side by low passageways to a pedimented pavilion. It was built in the early or mid C18 as a summerhouse and has been attributed to both William Kent (1685-1748) c 1740 and to John Vardy (d 1765) c 1760 (CL 1959). It was altered to its present form of a family house under the supervision of the estate steward, Mr Bennett, between 1838 and 1843 (Thorp Notes, 1998).

A comparison between the boundaries shown on Brown's c 1770 plan and those on the OS map surveyed in 1873 show that the park was extended to both east and west during that period. On the east side, the additions were mainly to the east and south-east of Duns Mere while the western boundary was more widely extended to incorporate the present parkland from White Oak Copse south to Red Pool Copse. Red Pool, now fringed by woodland, is shown on Greenwood's Map of the County of Southampton in 1826 as set in open parkland, while a Wellingtonia avenue (remnants survive in 1998) which runs from Red Pool 250m south-eastwards to the Cemetery Chapel and cemetery first appears on the OS map of 1897. The Chapel, a three-bay single cell of squared, knapped flint with a roof in scalloped blue tiles (listed grade II as the Funeral Chapel) was built for the third (Dowager) Countess in 1855 by Thomas Allom (plans survive at Highclere).

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden lies 400m north-north-west of the house, on the south side of the former home farm buildings (shown as the Park Dairy on all OS editions from 1873). It forms a trapezium in plan and is enclosed by brick walls. Built in the late C18 and shown as a design proposal on Brown's c 1770 plan, the garden contains glasshouses and has an adjacent range of brick potting and store buildings. It was in use as a plant nursery until the late 1990s.

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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.