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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

MARSTON HOUSE

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MARSTON HOUSE

Name: MARSTON HOUSE

County: Somerset

District: Mendip (District Authority)

Parish: Selwood

County: Somerset

District: Mendip (District Authority)

Parish: Trudoxhill

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.201999
 Longitude: -2.3462394
 National Grid Reference: ST7590644811
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.localisation: [51.1918086390972,-2.34620354630434], [51.1917764293797,-2.34617940723976],
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 [51.1922274868784,-2.34632445885458], [51.192077777154,-2.34629185380805],
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 [51.1918524783689,-2.34624794960429], [51.1918352005166,-2.34622206217699],
 [51.1918086390972,-2.34620354630434]

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
 Grade: II
 List Entry Number: 1001149
 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

Pleasure grounds laid out by Stephen Switzer between 1724 and 1745 and altered with advice from William Sawrey Gilpin c 1820s, and a late C18/early C19 park around a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Marston Bigot was held by the Crown after the execution of Charles, Lord Stourton in 1557. It was sold by Elizabeth I in 1596 to William Brown and James Orenge, or Orange, and was sold three more times, and leased to several parties, over the next forty years. When a survey was drawn up by Orenge in c 1600, Marston House did not exist (McGarvie 1987ii). The earliest description of Marston House is contained in a letter from Richard Boyle, Great Earl of Cork, to his

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steward John Whalley in 1641. Boyle had purchased 'the Manor of Marston Bigott... from Sir John Hippisley, at that time a fair house, with orchards, gardens and pleasant walks about it' (quoted in McGarvie 1987i). Boyle left Marston to his younger son, Lord Broghill, first Earl of Orrery, who was deeply involved in Irish affairs and neglected Marston until 1666 when letters and accounts describe tree planting and garden wall repairs. Marston underwent a further long period of neglect after the first Earl's death in 1679. In 1714, Marston became the possession of Charles Boyle, fourth Earl of Orrery, a statesman, soldier, and amateur scientist after whom is named the orrery, a clockwork representation of the motions of the solar system. He rebuilt the house c 1720, and employed Stephen Switzer (1682-1745) to lay out the grounds. Switzer dedicated his *Practical Fruit Gardener* (1724) to the fourth Earl and mentioned him in *Introduction to a General System of Hydrostaticks and Hydraulics* (1729). John Boyle became the fifth Earl in 1732 and embellished the gardens at Marston from 1733, having married into a fortune. Circumstances forced the fifth Earl to leave Marston in 1754. Edmund, the seventh Earl of Cork and Orrery, improved Marston House and park during the 1770s and 1780s, removing the formal gardens from the area north of the house and the church from the southern view. Edmund, the eighth Earl, succeeded in 1798 and survived until 1856. He added Marston Pond, a boathouse, and three gate lodges and consulted William Sawrey Gilpin (1762-1843) on changes to the drives, pleasure grounds, and park (Piebenga 1993). By the time the eighth Earl died, 'Marston House was in a deplorable state of repair' (McGarvie 1987i). His grandson Richard, the ninth Earl, married Lady Emily de Burgh, and her dowry allowed him to repair and enlarge the house and significantly alter the northern gardens. The ninth Earl died in 1904 and was succeeded by his son, who sold the property (ibid). The Walton & Lee sale catalogue of 1905 indicates that the estate comprised some 3600 acres (c 1460ha). The house, parkland, walled garden, and gardener's cottage (now Home Farm) were sold to the Bonham-Christie family and, apart from the house and its immediate grounds, remain in private ownership. Marston House and its grounds were used by the US Army during the Second World War (English Heritage 1990), and were finally rescued from dereliction in 1984 by John Yeoman (d 1987) and Angela Yeoman of Foster Yeoman Ltd, in whose possession it remains (2002) as the company headquarters. The ongoing restoration of the house is being carried out by Geoffrey Butcher of R Butcher and Son of Warminster (McGarvie 1987ii).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Marston House is located c 5km south-west of Frome and its park and pleasure grounds cover c 222ha. The north-west boundary is marked by Marston Road, the A361 between Frome and Shepton Mallet. The south-west boundary runs on, or parallel to the west of, a tree-lined minor road from Park Cottage in the north to Foghamshire Lane in the south. The northern 150m of this boundary includes wooded land on Cheese Hill, south of Park Cottage, and the northern c 500m of the road is a former park drive as far as Church Lodge, 350m south-west of the House. The southern c 1km of the south-west boundary runs between 50m and 200m west of the road, to include a strip of former parkland and the roadside trees. The south-east boundary generally follows Tuckmarsh Lane but excludes areas around Tuckmarsh Farm, 1.4km south-south-east of the House, and Lower Marston, c 1.4km south-east of the House. The north-east boundary follows the minor road, Bull's Quarr [sic] which leads into Bull's Quarries Road, but excludes properties in the hamlet of Tytherington, 1.2km east of the House, and Manor Farm, 1.1km east of the House. The House is at the top of a gently inclined landscape which slopes down towards the south-east, with consequent long views in that direction. The slope down is steeper immediately south-east of the House terrace. The landform rises to Cheese Hill in the west, c 500m south-west of the House. The park is surrounded by farmland, predominantly pasture.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance to Marston House is from Cheese Hill, formerly Chizzle, off a minor road c 400m south-west of the House. A tarmac drive runs through a loose avenue of mature and replacement trees (c 1990s), bounded on either side by post and rail fences, and leads to a forecourt surrounded by stone balustrades with stone gate piers. The line of this drive was the recommendation of Gilpin (Piebenga 1993), though not made until c 1858 and planted with trees in 1864 (McGarvie 1987i). A fork west of the House leads to a car park in woodland north of the House. From the forecourt north of the House the drive continues east through a further set of gate piers adjacent to the east end of the House to connect with the drive from the north-east. The latter is marked by Marston Lodge (mid C19, East Lodge on OS, listed grade II), 550m north-east of the House on the Frome road, which is undergoing restoration (2002). This former carriage drive, which runs 200m south and 350m south-west down the hill to approach the north front of the House from the east, was finished c

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1858 and planted with trees in 1864. There is a disused entrance at Weigh Bridge Lodge (late C18, listed grade II) 150m north of the House on the Frome road and immediately west of an icehouse (c 1740). The south-west entrance to the park is via the Tudoresque Church Lodge (1834, listed grade II), 400m south-west of the House, which leads past a lych gate 100m north-eastwards to the east end of St Leonard's churchyard, formerly running a further 300m north-east to cross 100m south of the south front of the House along the line of a ha-ha, before turning north to the east end of the House.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Marston House (early C17, extensive alterations C18 and C19, listed grade II*) is a former country house, in squared and coursed Douling stone with a slate roof and balustraded parapet, located on a 180m long terrace (1864) with stone urns, on a low eminence to the north centre of the site. The House is c 130m long but mostly only 20m deep, presenting a massive facade when viewed from the park. In the three-storey central block of this front are four Ionic columns supporting an entablature with small glazed porches either side. Projecting from the central block are ranges of two-storey buildings with pediments surmounted by ball finials. The west range has exceptionally large openings giving onto a ballroom, the range terminating in a huge and elaborate Victorian conservatory (1872), built on the site of an old laundry. The House dates from c 1610-30 and was rebuilt c 1715-26 and altered and extended 1749-51. The east and west wings were added in 1776 by Samuel Wyatt (1737-1807) for Edmund, the seventh Earl. The Ionic columns and entablature were by Sir Jeffry Wyattville (1766-1840) c 1817. The west wing was rebuilt on a grander scale, but retaining some of the 1776 facade, in 1866 (McGarvie 1987ii). According to McGarvie (*ibid*), 'surviving architectural features in the cellars of Marston House provide evidence of a building close to 1600 in date... It resembles strongly the work of Robert Smythson (c 1535-1614), the notable Elizabethan architect, and may be attributed to him'.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The main pleasure grounds at Marston encompass an approximately rectangular area of c 8.5ha. The grounds, which measure c 320m from west to east, are defined by Marston Road to the north and include the slope north-west of the House. To the south, the area extends for c 60m south of the House terrace, and c 150m east of the east end of the House, between the two drives from Marston (East) Lodge and Home Farmhouse. The pleasure grounds are approached by a serpentine path through woodland leading from the drive 130m west of the House or via a straight axial path opposite the north entrance of the House. The latter path climbs a double stone stairway in the 2m high balustraded garden retaining wall and climbs a further four flights of stone stairs (c 1872) on formal grass terraces set in a lawn flanked by C20 specimen trees. Little else remains visible of the pleasure grounds except a rustic, rectangular-shaped, above-ground limestone grotto (c 1743, listed grade II), 200 north-east of the House near the Frome road, which was built by James Scott (d 1753) of Rupert Street, Soho, for the fifth Earl. The remainder of the pleasure grounds are under C20 planted and self-seeded woodland and scrub, which also contains some mature C19 specimens of oak, beech, yew, and cedar; these may obscure further remains of previous layouts.

Before 1683 the first Earl was responsible for building two prospect mounts in the two northernmost corners of the pleasure grounds, shown in a bird's-eye view attributed to Parr and published by Badeslade and Rocque in Vitruvius Brtiannicus in 1739. The grounds were improved in the 1720s by Switzer who created cascades and water spouts, probably the two jets in the two large circular basins shown south-east of the House in Parr's view of 1739, which were removed c 1776. In 1733, when in the possession of the fifth Earl, the gardens at Marston were still modest, the 'best garden being 5 acres and the kitchen garden 3 acres' (quoted in McGarvie 1987i). The fifth Earl built three hanging terraces, a wood-walk with labyrinth and three small fountains in his gardens. From 1738 he extended and further developed the gardens as shown in a drawing by John Harvey based on Parr's 1739 bird's-eye view (in McGarvie 1987i). This drawing also shows a walled garden with a grid of walls for training fruit south-east of the House, and a bowling green and wilderness to the north, all probably dating to 1715-20. Switzer was again employed, but most of the advisory work was done by James Scott. During the period 1738 to 1746 a grotto, a mount, and an icehouse were added. Further work between 1749 and 1754, described by Bishop Pocock (quoted in McGarvie 1987i) who visited in 1754, included a large extension of the garden to the north-west with a hermitage and rustic cottage, Lady Cork's Bath (1754), 300m east of the House and 70m west of Home Farm, formerly Gardener's Cottage, and a monument to Orrery's favourite horse. Lady Cork's Bath survives as a rectangular pool of water with a ruinous 3m high pedimented ashlar wall in the style of a Roman temple, containing an arch and two window openings at its west end, facing towards the House. The bath

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house was reported in 1754 by Pococke 'as in an enclosure of an ancient cemetery, with several old inscriptions made for it, and at the end is a small room very elegantly furnished' (ibid). The three other walls were rubble built and are now reduced almost to ground level. The bath is fed by a spring and the overflow finds its way south to issue at the northern end of Marston Pond. Switzer's formal gardens were destroyed by the seventh Earl c 1776 and the enclosed garden was replaced in naturalistic style (c 1786). An engraving by J P Neale (1822) shows a sweep of lawn, with a few conifers, running up to the south front of the House, with a backdrop of trees rising behind. A sketch of 1835 by the Rev John Skinner shows a rockwork grotto, now vanished, near a spring opposite the church (reproduced in McGarvie 1987ii). The northern gardens were laid out with woodland walks c 1860s/1870s. A photograph of 1865 shows the centre of the northern gardens containing an oval rose garden with summerhouse, crossing paths, central trellised pavilion, and crescent-shaped beds; by 1885 this area had been made into tennis courts (McGarvie 1987i).

PARK The park, predominantly used for agriculture, undulates gently downhill from the House to the south-east. Its most notable feature is the roughly triangular Marston Pond, in the centre of the parkland 600m south-east of the House, flanked to the north-east by Horley Wood. The eighth Earl, possibly with the advice of Gilpin, had the modest Marston Pond dug out to create a lake c 1830 and built, on the north-west bank, a boathouse, the ruins of which survive 600m south-east of the House. A large number of mature trees, principally oak, survive in the park, and in the south-east, c 1.3km from the House, is the site of the vanished medieval village of Marston.

The park is a late C18/early C19 creation. In 1786 Edmund, the seventh Earl, improved the view southwards by taking down the old parish church which stood close to the south front of the House, the replacement St Leonard's church (1789, altered 1844, listed grade I) being erected 220m south-west of the House. A map by Harvey, based on OS maps of 1865 and 1886, shows the layout of the northern park, the House, pleasure grounds, and other features in the late C19 (in McGarvie 1987i).

KITCHEN GARDEN The brick-built kitchen garden, with walls c 2m high, is located on a south-facing incline 400m east of the House and continues in horticultural use. The walls adjoin Home Farm, the former Gardener's Cottage. Edmund, the seventh Earl, moved the kitchen garden from its Switzer-period location south-west of the House to its present location to the east c 1776.

REFERENCES

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Maps Tithe map for Marston Bigot parish, 1839 (Somerset Record Office) Sale catalogue map, Walton & Lee, 1905 (in McGarvie 1987ii)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1885, published 1891 2nd edition published 1904 3rd edition published 1929 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886

Illustrations Bird's-eye view attributed to Rene Parr, c 1739 (in Badeslade and Rocque 1739) [reproduced in McGarvie 1987i] View of south front of Marston House from the south-east, 1822 (in Neale 1822) [reproduced in McGarvie 1987i] J Harvey, *Marston House, Marston Bigot, Somerset, 1739*, redrawn c 1987 (plan based on bird's-eye view in Badeslade and Rocque 1739) [reproduced in McGarvie 1987i] J Harvey, *The pleasure grounds of Marston House in the later 19th century based on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1865 and 1886*, redrawn c 1987 [in McGarvie 1987i]

Archival items Walton & Lee, *Sale particulars of the Marston Estates, 1905* (private collection) Boyle correspondence (Houghton Library of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass, USA) Orrery correspondence (National Library of Ireland and Petworth House, W Sussex) Photographs, early C20 (in McGarvie 1987ii)

Description written: January 2003 Amended: February 2003 Register Inspector: SH Edited: May 2004

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.