

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WREST PARK

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
WREST PARK

Name: **WREST PARK**

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Gravenhurst

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Silsoe

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Longitude: -0.40483426
National Grid Reference: TL0958935466
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

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 Grade: I
 List Entry Number: 1000113
 Date first listed: 30-Nov-1986

Details

Extensive and complex formal pleasure grounds and park around a country mansion. Main phases early C18 and early C19, utilising late C17 base, with mid C18 work by Lancelot Brown.

NOTE This entry is a summary. Because of the complexity of this site, the standard Register entry format would convey neither an adequate description nor a satisfactory account of the development of the landscape. The user is advised to consult the references given below for more detailed accounts. Many Listed Buildings exist within the site, not all of which have been here referred to. Descriptions of these are to be found in the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The de Grey family held an estate in Silsoe from the C13. In the C15 Edmund Grey was created Earl of Kent. Anthony, the eleventh Earl, married an heiress, Mary, daughter of Baron Lucas of Crudwell, in 1662. From 1671-1702 the Earl and Countess altered the medieval and C16 house, laying out a formal landscape around it, largely focussed on the axial canal called the Long Water, shown in *Britannia Illustrata* (1705-6). The eleventh Earl was succeeded in 1702 by Henry, the twelfth Earl, created Duke in 1710, who created the Great Garden around the C17 features, incorporating iconography relating to his Whiggish beliefs and regard for William III. He laid out the woodland garden flanking the Long Water, the formal canals enclosing it

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and the canals at right angles to the Long Water. He also built the Pavilion at the far end of it, as well as introducing a great variety of garden buildings and ornaments, as shown by John Rocque in two plans of 1735 and 1737. The Duke died in 1740 and was succeeded by his granddaughter Jemima, Marchioness Grey who hardly altered the core of the garden, but employed Lancelot Brown c 1758-60 to work on the periphery of the Great Garden to soften the contours of the perimeter canals. When the Earl de Grey, an accomplished amateur architect, inherited Wrest in 1833 he demolished the old house and built a new one in Louis XV style 200m to the north, laying out new formal parterres to compliment it. He rebuilt various structures in similar style, including the orangery, kitchen garden, stables and several lodges. Following the Earl's death in 1859 Wrest ceased to be the principal residence of the family. The de Greys sold the estate at the end of World War I and between the 1920s and 1940s almost all the numerous park and avenue trees were felled. After the Second World War the house, gardens and part of the park were bought by the Ministry of Public Building and Works who now, as English Heritage, lease the site to Silsoe Research Institute, an agricultural research establishment.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Wrest Park lies 14km south of Bedford, on the eastern edge of the village of Silsoe, on the Greensand Ridge of low hills. The c 380ha site is bounded to the west by Silsoe and the old route of the A6 Bedford to London road and on the other sides largely by agricultural land, parts of the boundary being marked by a stone wall. The late C20 A6 Silsoe by-pass cuts through the west edge of the park, set in a cutting to the north and on a low embankment to the south. The park and garden are largely level, except for the rise to the east which includes Kempson's Park and Cain Hill. The site offers views of the villages of Upper and Lower Gravenhurst from the higher ground to the east and the east drive, together with views of the low hills to north and south. The main approach from Silsoe gives access along a straight avenue (replanted C20) through the park, past the two Louis XV-style Silsoe Lodges (Earl de Grey 1826, listed grade II) with their wrought-iron screen and gate piers. The drive crosses the sunk by-pass, then runs past the impressive entrance to the kitchen garden to the south, arriving at the house at right angles to its main axis. The drive continues eastwards to Gravenhurst Lodge, through Kempson's Park, eventually emerging at Upper Gravenhurst lane. A spur south continues between the east side of the Great Garden and Cain Hill to Whitehall Lodge, and beyond this through Whitehall Plantation to Ion Lodge. A straight spur north passes the two Louis XV Brabury Lodges (Earl de Grey 1816, listed grade II, ruinous 1997), eventually giving access to the A507.

The site consists of extensive pleasure grounds, park and woodland. The rectangular mansion (Earl de Grey 1830s, listed grade I) lies near the centre of the site, on the north boundary of the pleasure grounds, built of orange ashlar in Louis XV style and flanked to the east by the adjacent stables (Earl de Grey 1830s, listed grade II) and to the west by the extensive kitchen garden (Earl de Grey 1836, listed grade II), to which it is linked by a screen wall. The main, north, entrance front overlooks informal level lawns bounded by the main drive to the north and beyond this the shortened remains of the north avenue (replanted C20) within the north park, with a view of a low ridge to the north. The south, garden front is aligned on the central axis of the c 40ha pleasure grounds. It overlooks the formal 1830s parterre and site of the old house 200m to the south, to the Long Water, flanked by the wooded Great Garden. At the end of the Long Water, 800m to the south, lies the Pavilion (Thomas Archer 1709-11, listed grade I), a Baroque, red-brick, domed banqueting house, with a low range of hills closing the view in the far distance. The pleasure grounds are largely enclosed by the formal canals naturalised by Brown 1758-60, flanked by Old Park, the site of the medieval park, to the west and the park leading up to Cain Hill to the east; they contain a variety of garden structures and statuary placed within various formal and informal compartments.

The park, which surrounds the house and pleasure grounds to the west, north and east, has been almost completely denuded of mature trees, except for an area south of the east drive, adjacent to Poorhill Plantation, which retains mature park trees and old pasture. The land is largely open arable, with some pasture, and mown grass along the west avenue and close to the north front. A considerable development of late C20 industrial farm buildings and offices lies in the park close to the east and north-east of the house, dominating this area. A belt of woodland runs south from Pateman's Wood along the east and south boundaries, parts of which have been replanted (mid to late C20). The summit of Cain Hill is the site of Hill House, also by Archer (c 1711, removed 1830), which was a Baroque cruciform building which acted as an eyecatcher from the pleasure grounds. As with the

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Pavilion, each facade was designed to face a different avenue and close a vista. Hill House was replaced by a stone monument, the base of which survives in the woodland.

REFERENCES Note: There is a wealth of material about this site. Key references are cited below.

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OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881 2nd edition published 1901 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: September 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: May 1999

This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 11/01/2017

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.