

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

STOKE PARK

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

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

Name:	STOKE PARK
District:	City of Bristol (Unitary Authority)
District:	South Gloucestershire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Stoke Gifford
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.492215 Longitude: -2.5527241 National Grid Reference: ST 61723 77175 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000129 Date first listed: 18-Jul-1986

Details

An C18 park laid out by Thomas Wright between 1748 and 1766 around a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Berkeley family of Berkeley Castle, Gloucestershire (qv) gained possession of the manor of Stoke Gifford c 1338. Stoke Park House was built in 1563 by Sir Richard Berkeley, who succeeded to the estate of the Stoke Gifford branch of the family in 1553. The family prospered from ownership of the parish of Stoke Gifford and parts of the parishes of Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell, Filton, and Stapleton and, in the late C17 and C18, from coal-mining liberties in Kingswood Forest. The Stoke Gifford estate passed through several generations of the family. Between 1712 and 1725, John Symes Berkeley (d 1736) commissioned Sir James Thornhill to rebuild a summerhouse at the end of the terrace as a classical pavilion or orangery. He also had rides cut through the woodland. John's son, Norborne Berkeley, Lord Botetourt (1717-70) remodelled the house and established the current structure of the landscape with the assistance of Thomas Wright of Durham (1711-86). Norborne was bankrupted through investments in Champion's Brass Works at Warmley House, Avon (qv) and in 1768 became Governor of Virginia where he died in 1770. He was succeeded by his sister Elizabeth, widow of the fourth Duke of Beaufort of Badminton House, Gloucestershire (qv), who continued to employ Wright until his death. Following the death of the Dowager Duchess in 1799, the Stoke Gifford estate remained in the hands of the Beaufort family until its sale in 1915. From 1908 the House, by then known as the Dower House, became the focus of the Stoke Park Colony for the treatment of the mentally handicapped. Stoke Park was taken over by the NHS in 1948 and continued as a mental hospital until its closure in 1988. The built footprint of the hospital was developed for housing between 1998 and 2002 and the Dower House was converted to apartments in 2002. The parkland and woodland are currently (2002) undergoing partial restoration as public open space.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Stoke Park occupies a wedge of open land extending from 2km to 5km north-east of the centre of Bristol. The 140ha park occupies the scarped and indented eastern flank of Purdown, a ridge of lias limestone rising to c 90m above sea level and commanding wide views over Kingswood, Bristol and the valley of the River Frome. The park retains its open character but is now surrounded on all sides by housing and other development and is

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

divided by the M32 motorway. The park is bounded to the north by fences and a stone wall from a cycle track which marks the southern boundary of the grounds of the University of the West of England. The west boundary is formed by the back gardens of houses on Romney Avenue, the south-west boundary by public open space and the boundary wall of Heath House, and the south-east boundary by the M32 motorway and Frenchay Park Road. The southern end of the east boundary is formed by Stoke Lane which becomes Coldharbour Lane to the north. The former hospital site to the north-east which has been developed for housing is excluded from the site here registered. Although missing some key landscape features and compromised by its poor condition and the intrusion of the motorway, Stoke Park is of considerable interest as the best documented and most complete surviving landscape design by Thomas Wright.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are three main historic entrances. From the north-east is the earliest entrance, which was associated with the Elizabethan house, a direct c 400m drive from Coldharbour Lane which follows one arm of two former diverging avenues radiating north-eastwards from Stoke Park House. The line of this avenue remains and has recently been replanted (2002) and now passes through a new housing development west of the Clock Tower (c 1930s) erected to the memory of the Rev Harold Nelson Burden who founded the Stoke Park Colony. It then passes the western edge of a lawn, formerly a bowling green, to approach the north-east front of the House. Two serpentine drives were laid out between 1725 and 1768, approaching from Bristol to the south-west and from Stapleton to the south. The first is an extension of a public footpath, formerly a drive, called Sir John's Lane which runs along the top of the Purdown Ridge, entering Stoke Park c 25m west of Purdown Camp (scheduled ancient monument) which was used as an anti-aircraft gun site (1940). The drive provides a variety of extensive views over the park and the surrounding countryside to the east and glimpsed views of the House to the north-east. It passes through the remains of Purdown Camp and, after c 400m, curves to the north, west of Pale Plantation, and follows a mid C20 fence line to a mid C20 gateway where it turns north-east through parkland on the top of the ridge, then east between Hermitage Wood to the north and Barn Wood to the south, before turning south to meet the north drive c 100m north of the House. The south-east drive enters the park at Duchess or Broomhill Gate (Wright 1768, listed grade II) at the junction of Park Road, Broom Hill, and Frenchay Park Road, 600m south of the House. It proceeds in a cutting 200m in a north-westerly direction, through a subway under the M32 (1968) and turns north through the park at the eastern end of Duchess Pond. It passes below the south-west revetment of the House and meets the south drive 50m north-east of the north-east edge of Barn Wood. The C18 gates of Duchess Gate were removed to Badminton in 1908, where they were re-erected at the entrance to Kennel Drive. These gates were copied in the restoration of Duchess Gate by the Stoke Park Restoration Trust (1988-96). There are numerous informal access points to the park, particularly from the west along Romney Avenue.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Stoke Park House (listed grade II*) stands on a massive stone-revetted and balustraded terrace (listed grade II) built for the 1563 house at the end of a narrow promontory. The terrace links the House to the Orangery (c 1720, listed grade II). The Elizabethan house faced north and provided no windows to exploit the extensive views to the west and south. By 1712 two stairwells had been extended above the roofline to form towers topped with viewing platforms. Further alterations followed, to the designs of Thomas Wright. In the first phase from 1749 to 1752, single-storey octagonal rooms linked by an arched loggia were added at the south-east and south-west corners. Visiting in 1755, Lady Anson, Duchess of Northumberland described the view from these rooms as 'such a more than semi-circle of Prospect, surpassing the richest as well as the greatest Views I ever saw' (quoted in Harding and Lambert 1994). In the second phase, from 1760 to 1764, these octagonal rooms were built upwards to form three-storey towers, with matching towers at the north-east and north-west corners. The whole Elizabethan house was then encased in walls with rearranged classical fenestration and the gable ends of the pitched roofs hidden behind crow-step crenellations. The reformed house has been described as 'the first true creation of the conscious Jacobethan revival' (Mowl 1993). The House was externally restored and converted to apartments in 2002. Stoke Park House and its immense platform is the dominant visual feature in the landscape.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Around the south-west and south-east fronts of the House is a terrace, protected from the precipitous drop by a stone balustrade. The terrace leads north-east to the pavilion or Orangery, converted to a chapel for hospital use and currently undergoing restoration (2002). The area north of the Orangery is extensively developed with hospital buildings and car parks and is currently undergoing redevelopment (2002). In the Thomas Wright layout access was

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

gained through the Orangery, then known as Summer Hall, to a sequence of gardens and pleasure grounds to the north-east. A path led through a square enclosure with an oval planted mound called the Oval Garden, immediately north-east of the rear of the Orangery, and along the eastern edge of the escarpment, formerly known as Stable Hill, to some lawns ornamented with shrubberies. West of this path, c 200m north-east of the House, were the Stables and the Kitchen Garden of which no trace remains. The path continued to the west side of Coldharbour Lane where a stone-built abutment is all that remains of a crenellated stone bridge (Wright 1761-2) which formerly linked the gardens north-east of the House to an extensive L-shaped viewing terrace on Sims Hill, each side of the 'L' being c 100m long. The bridge was removed for road-widening in the 1970s. Sims Hill, formerly Simon's Hill, provides views to the north and north-east which are not attainable from the House. The terrace, with its mature Turkey oaks from the Thomas Wright design, survives in an overgrown condition. The three woods, Barn Wood, Hermitage Wood, and Long Wood, which straddle the ridge to the west of the House, contain the remains of a footpath system which gave access to the woodland gardens. These, and the features within them, were linked to each other by serpentine paths, with the entrance to the circuit at the north-east point of Barn Wood, close to where the drives from the south and south-west meet. Previously overgrown and largely impenetrable, the path network is currently undergoing a partial restoration. Barn Wood contains the Beaufort Memorial (Wright 1756, listed grade II), the cold bath (Wright c 1750, listed grade II), a stone tunnel (Wright c 1750, listed grade II), and the surviving footings of the Rotunda (Wright 1755-6). In Hermitage Wood, yew trees mark the site of Bladud's Cell (Wright 1750), a root house which has disappeared. Hermitage Wood is linked to Long Wood via a partially derelict stone tunnel with rusticated entrance arches (Wright c 1750, listed grade II) which runs beneath a track. The path in Long Wood emerges at the south-west corner, affording wide views to the south and east across Bristol. The Wright 'Wood Walks' were Stoke Park's most celebrated feature. Mason (1795) said of them:

'the pieces of woodland... are neither remarkable for extent in themselves, nor for the size of their timber; yet the management of them gave me, more than anything I had seen, an idea of what might be done by the internal arrangement of a wood'.

Laird (1999) describes their floristic elaboration in detail, describing Wright's improvements at Stoke as 'a very complex horticultural intervention'. The circuit of the park, as described by Bishop Pococke (1764), commenced with these woodland gardens, the winding walks taking in the features mentioned above. A recent survey (LUC 1992) identified many beech and horse chestnut trees surviving in Barn Wood and thirteen widely spaced mature planes in Hermitage Wood, in a large circle centred on the site of Bladud's Cell, from the Thomas Wright period. There is no trace of the 'Saloon of Oaks' in which the Rotunda once stood (Russell 1988).

PARK The main area of the park lies west and south of the House, occupying the dramatically undulating ridge to the west, the slopes and valleys leading eastwards down from the ridge, and the parkland floor to the south. The ridge top with its carriageway offers many and varied views of the park and wider landscape. On Star Hill, a spur of the main ridge, sit the remains of the Obelisk (Wright 1761-2, listed grade II) which was erected to the memory of Norborne Berkeley's niece, Caroline, who, according to the inscription, 'died here'. On the edge of a steep escarpment 1km to the south-west of, and facing the House across the park is the site of the now lost Tomb of the Horatii and Curiatii (Wright 1762-4), modelled on an ancient mausoleum at Albano, near Rome. Below and east of this lies Pond Field Wood, and in a fold of the ridge to the north lies Pale Plantation (c 1745), the first ornamental woodland to be planted at Stoke by Berkeley. In the valley bottom 500m south-west of the House is Duchess Pond (1768). The original pond was the last ornamental feature to be added to the landscape. It was infilled for the construction of the M32 motorway in 1968 but was recreated in a slightly adjusted position by the Stoke Park Restoration Trust between 1988 and 1996. Some 300m due south of the House is an area of parkland (c 30ha) which is physically but not visually disconnected by the M32 motorway. This area retains its C18 boundary planting of beech, horse chestnut, lime, and oak.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden was located 200m north-east of the House, next to the stables on Stable Hill. This area was completely redeveloped for hospital use in the 1930s and no trace of the kitchen garden survives.

REFERENCES

R Atkyns, *Ancient and present state of Glostershire* (1712), p 690 L Knyff and J Kip, *Britannia Illustrata* 2, (1715) T Wright, *Arbours and Grottos*, 1755 and 1758 (reprinted 1979, edited by E Harris) G Mason, *An Essay on Design in Gardening* (2nd edn 1795), p 117 Country Life, 181 (7 May 1987), p 119; no 15 (14 April 1988), pp 132-5 J R Russell, *Three Garden Buildings*

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

by Thomas Wright in Stoke Park, Bristol (1988) Garden History 17, no 1 (1989), pp 68-82; 24, no 1 (1996), p 133 Bristol and Avon Archaeology 8, (1989), pp 30-40 M Batey and D Lambert, The English Garden Tour (1990), pp 200-3 Stoke Park Restoration Plan, (Land Use Consultants 1992) S Harding, Conservation issues in the disposal of National Health Service land, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of the West of England 1993), pp 87-158 T Mowl, Elizabethan Jacobean Style (1993), pp 197-8 S Harding and D Lambert, Parks and Gardens of Avon (1994), pp 39-41, 105-6 M Laird, The Flowering of the Landscape Garden (1999), pp 88-98

Maps J Vascon, Survey of Stoke Park, 1725 (D2700), (Gloucester Record Office) S Cook, Survey of Stoke Park, 1749 (D2700), (Gloucester Record Office) J Blandford, Survey of Stoke Park, 1768 (D2700), (Gloucester Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1904 1921 edition

Archival items The Beaufort archive is held at the Gloucester Record Office (D2700). The Stoke Gifford Estate Papers are held at the Badminton Muniment Room, Badminton House, Glos. R Pococke, Travels of Dr Richard Pococke Bishop of Osary in 1764 (British Museum Add MS 14), pp 260-1 Set of six postcards published by Avon Gardens Trust (c 1988)

Description written: August 2002 Register Inspector: SH Edited: November 2002

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.