

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SOUTHILL PARK

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Name:	SOUTHILL PARK
District:	Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Old Warden
District:	Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Shefford
District:	Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Southill
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.069817 Longitude: -0.34113618 National Grid Reference: TL1380142570 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000579 Date first listed: 30-Nov-1986

Details

An C18/C19 landscape park, laid out by Lancelot Brown in 1777, overlying the remains of an early C18 formal layout, surrounding an early C18 country house and informal gardens.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Kelyng family owned the Manor of Gastlings in Southill in the late C17, including an old mansion house. Admiral Sir George Byng (created Viscount Torrington 1721) began to buy property in the Southill area in the 1690s, much of it formerly the Kelyngs', his first purchase being the house near the church. A new house was constructed to the south-west in the 1720s, and the old mansion house demolished and its site used in new gardens. The new house, surrounded by formal gardens, is shown in Thomas Badeslade's print of 1739, although it is uncertain exactly how much of the scheme shown was implemented. The formal layout was largely removed c 1777 by Lancelot Brown (1716-83), who created the majority of the present landscape park and lake. In 1795 Samuel Whitbread bought the Byng estate in Southill. He died in 1796, leaving the estate to his son, Samuel II, who employed Henry Holland (1745-1806) to remodel the house in the late 1790s. Holland also produced an improvement plan dated 1800 for the area around the house (Jacques 1983), showing the main entrance moved from the south front to the north. The estate has since remained in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Southill Park lies on the Greensand Ridge 12km south-east of Bedford, on the west edge of the village of Southill. The c 200ha site is bounded to the north by the Southill to Old Warden lane, which also forms much of the east boundary, to the south partly by the Southill to Ireland lane, and to the west largely by agricultural land together with part of the old course of the Ireland to Old Warden lane, now an estate drive. The land is slightly

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undulating, with the house sited on a high point within the park. The setting is largely agricultural and wooded with the village of Southill adjacent to the east, the hamlet of Ireland to the west, and the designed landscapes of Chicksands Priory (qv) 3km to the south-west, and Old Warden Park (qv) adjacent to the north.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main drive enters the estate 300m south-east of the house from the Southill to Ireland lane, past Sandstone Lodge (c 1905, listed grade II), a single-storey building of pink sandstone with a thatched roof lying east of the drive. The drive curves north and west with views across a cricket pitch towards the gardens, and south-west to the south park. The drive crosses a sunken garden path via a battlemented stone bridge with a single Gothic arch 100m north-east of the house. A service drive leads north off the main drive, east of the bridge, running along the east edge of the north pleasure grounds, giving access to the church and kitchen garden. It continues north to become a circulation drive within the north park, largely following the course of the road to Old Warden shown by Badeslade in 1739. West of the garden bridge the drive divides into three. The shortest, south arm curves south into the outer stable court through an C18 ironstone archway with a Gothic arch and embattled top, located in a C19 stone screen wall (listed grade II). The second arm of the drive continues south-west to the entrance on the north front of the house, which in the C18 was the main entrance, before continuing west along the north front of the house, then curving south to the turning circle below the west front of the west pavilion; a porte-cochère was added to the pavilion in the late C19 to make it the more imposing entrance. The drive leaves the terrace at the west end to continue down the wooded slope of Icehouse Hill to the south-west, to join the west drive as it runs 1km south-west to Rowney Lodge. The third arm of the main drive runs west parallel with, and 55m to the north of, the north front of the house, below the north terrace. It continues west into the park before curving north-westwards to form the north drive. This leads to the northern tip of the park, past Gastlings Farm and Gothic Lodge, to Warden Lodge, a single-storey, early to mid C19 brick lodge with ornate chimney pots at the south end of Old Warden, 1.5km north-west of the house. Gothic Lodge stands at what was the earlier north entrance to the estate before land was exchanged with the Ongleys during Enclosure c 1800 (A Map of the Parish of Southill, 1800), when the boundary and road were moved north to their present position. A spur south from the north drive, 200m north-west of the house, continues south-west as the west drive, which divides the north and south parks. This passes through Portland Wood, crossing the course of the disused railway and Ireland lane via mid C19 iron bridges, to emerge at Rowney Lodge, a single-storey C18/C19 rendered lodge with a prominent central porch. A stone obelisk (1864, listed grade II) stands between the old course of the Ireland to Old Warden road (between Rowney Lodge and Yewtree Lodge in Keepers' Warren wood) and the route constructed in the mid C19 which runs parallel with the course of the railway (opened 1857, dismantled 1964). The obelisk commemorates William Henry Whitbread (1795-1864) for his promotion of railways within the county, including the remains of that which it overlooks.

Badeslade's print shows a semicircular entrance drive and central turning circle leading to the south front of the house, with formal plantations on either side of a small lawn in front of the main entrance. Both entrances to the drive joined the public road which ran west from Southill forming the south boundary of the old park.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Southill Park house (c 1720s, remodelled 1790s, listed grade I) lies towards the east side of the park, on a rise overlooking the north park and lake. It consists of a brick-built central block with outer pavilions and linking wings. The house was clad in ashlar in 1796 by Henry Holland who rearranged the rooms, moving the entrance to the north, constructed colonnaded loggias to the south and built the service wing to the east. A late C19 brick orangery, with stone pilasters and a hipped glass roof, stands at the east end of the house. The earlier house, sited 400m north-east of the present house and north-west of the church, probably on a small rise within The Menagerie woodland, was demolished around the time the new one was built. The stable block (Henry Holland, listed grade II), lying at the east end of the service wing, was constructed as part of the remodelling of the house in the late 1790s. Of white brick with slated mansard roofs, it is built around a rectangular courtyard, with an entrance archway through the north range from the outer courtyard, which is entered through the Gothic archway off the main drive.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The north front overlooks a gravel sweep and lawn terrace enclosed 50m north of the house by a low Portland stone balustrade with central gateway (1795-1800), the latter with wrought-iron gates and screen

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(all listed grade II). The gateway, aligned with the centre of the house, bears the Byng arms, and was erected here in 1900, being approached from the north by a flight of rising stone steps flanked by low ashlar walls.

The main body of the gardens lies south of the house, partly enclosed by a ha-ha. This area is largely laid to lawn with lawn paths and mature ornamental trees, and various informal features including sunk paths, a sunk garden and small pond with cascade leading to it, and a tennis court. The major formal features lie close to the house and include a stone-flagged terrace walk adjacent to the south front bounded by a low stone wall, a circular feature of rose beds set in lawn on an axis with the centre of the south front, and a central grass path leading to the ha-ha 250m south of the house. From here are long views south to the broad avenue leading south from the south park. A second circular rose garden lies south of the stable block. A perimeter walk gives broad views into the south park and back to the house.

Two areas of wooded pleasure grounds, the remains of features shown in Badeslade's print, lie adjacent, to the north-west and north-east of the garden. Icehouse Hill, adjacent to the west front of the house, is a small wooded rise containing a brick icehouse on the north slope. It is separated by the west drive from the Round Basin of the early formal scheme, a circular pond 50m in diameter lying 100m north-west of the house at the bottom of the rise on which the house stands. The Badeslade print, a map of 1777 map and OS maps (1st edition 1881, 2nd edition 1901) show Icehouse Hill to have held a changing network of clearings and paths within woodland, initially connected by an open lawn to the Round Basin (Badeslade). North-east of the house, entered off the main drive 100m north-east of the house and from the garden via the crenellated and arched tunnel under the main drive, lies the second area of pleasure grounds, an area of mown paths and ornamental woodland with many mature yew trees, which leads north past the church to The Menagerie, now largely woodland. The 1881 and 1901 OS maps shows a circuit walk linking the garden, pleasure grounds (taking in The Menagerie, shown with open lawns) and inner park paddock north of the house.

PARK The park, laid out by Lancelot Brown and his foreman George Bowstreed c 1777 (Stroud 1975), surrounds the house and gardens to the north, west and south. It is composed of open parkland, largely pasture, edged by woodland and belts, and is divided by the house and west drive into north and south halves. The north half contains as its nucleus the c 25-30ha site of the formal pleasure grounds and park seen to the north of the house in Badeslade's print, of which the key element remaining is the Round Basin.

The dominant feature of the north park is the 15ha lake which lies at its north-east corner. This has an island towards the south end, and at the north end Smeaton's Bridge (Henry Holland c 1800, listed grade II), a single-arch bridge of red brick with a decorative stone-faced south elevation. At the head of a broad lawn running down to the north shore of the lake, flanked by woodland, stands the Fishing Temple (Henry Holland c 1800, listed grade II*), a small, brick, Tuscan temple flanked by screen walls to the west and east, with an imposing porte-cochère on its north front, and a small cottage attached to the west. Its main pedimented and colonnaded front faces south across the lake, forming an eyecatcher from the north front of the house. Features in the north park are linked by the drive which continues north from the service drive beyond the church and kitchen garden, encircling the north and east shores of the lake through belts of trees, and running through Foxhole Covert before dividing to run south of the Fishing Temple along the lake shore, and north through the porte-cochère of the Temple, arriving at the north drive close to Gothic Lodge.

The south park is largely enclosed by woodland, with views south into the broad avenue (replanted late C20) south of the Southill to Ireland lane. The open parkland contains clumps of trees and specimens, with glimpses of the south front of the house from the south-west, south, and south-east from the cricket pitch.

The 1777 estate map (A Plan of Wrotham Farm) shows much of the landscaping completed, including a curving entrance drive on the south front, clumps and single trees in parkland to the north and south, 'pleasure gardens' marked to the west around Icehouse Hill and to the north-east, connected by a great formal terrace parallel with the north front, but no south garden or great lake in the north-east corner. This appears to be an intermediate stage during Brown's landscaping. The 1817 map of Southill Park shows the landscaping completed, including the lake and clearings in the woodland along its north bank, punctuated by clumps of trees directing the views south, particularly from the Temple. The main entrance to the house is shown on the

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north side, following Holland's remodelling which also entailed the creation of the ha-ha-enclosed south garden (Jacques 1983, showing a plan for the gardens by Holland of 1800, including an enclosed area south of the house).

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden lies 400m north-east of the house, surrounded by brick walls with several openings and gateways. It is used as a container nursery for trees and shrubs and is surfaced with gravel. The C19 Garden House lies in an adjacent service yard close to the south wall.

REFERENCES

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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: August 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: May 1999

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.