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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CLIFTON HALL

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Name:	CLIFTON HALL
District:	City of Nottingham (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.911901 Longitude: -1.1919823 National Grid Reference: SK 54435 35247 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001692 Date first listed: 25-Nov-2004

Details

An early to mid C17 terraced garden set on a cliff top above the River Trent associated with the seat of the Clifton of Clifton family. Remodelled and embellished in the early to mid C18, and in 1874 by Milner.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the late C13 the manor of Clifton passed to the Clifton family, whose members played a prominent role in regional affairs in the Middle Ages and later. Sir Gervase de Clifton (d 1666), who came into the estate in 1587 as a minor, was created a baronet in 1611 and in the early 1630s commissioned John Smythson to do work at Clifton, apparently in anticipation of a royal visit. By this time terraced gardens already lay - or were now created - to the south of the house. Considerable changes were made to both house and gardens for Sir Robert Clifton before 1748. The house was further remodelled for Sir Gervase Clifton between 1778 and 1797, and again for another Sir Robert c 1810-14. The formal gardens were sensitively remodelled in the mid C19. The direct line became extinct in 1869 but the baronetcy passed to Henry Robert Markham, a relation by marriage, who changed his name to Clifton. In 1874 he employed 'Mr Milner' (Edward or his son Henry) to further embellish the formal gardens.

The site and adjoining land was purchased by Nottingham Corporation in 1947. The Hall was used firstly as a school and latterly as premises for Trent Polytechnic. Since 1947 many features have been lost or damaged and new structures erected. Clifton Wood, Clifton Grove, and the kitchen garden remain in the ownership of the local authority but the Hall and gardens were sold to property developers in 2001.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Clifton village lies c 6km south-west of Nottingham. The Hall stands alongside the parish church at the west end of the village on a bluff overlooking a sharp bend in the River Trent. The c 33ha site is bounded by the river and by the bottom of the river cliff to the north-west, otherwise the boundary follows the south-eastern edges of Clifton Grove, the former kitchen garden, and Clifton Wood. The setting is primarily suburban but the Trent floodplain remains undeveloped. Although partly obscured by trees there are extensive views from the site over the valley and towards Wollaton Hall to the north.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Clifton Hall is approached from the village to the east, past the former stables and the churchyard. A short drive leads directly to the turning circle immediately in front of the east elevation of the Hall. In the C17 and C18 there was a grand tree-lined approach along the river cliff to the north via Clifton Grove; this led (via a ferry over the

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Trent at Wilford) from Nottingham. A neoclassical lodge (no longer surviving) was built at the south-west end of the Grove, opposite the stables, in the early C19. Historically there was also an approach from the south-east, via a drive through Clifton Wood; a lodge in the Greek Revival style built at the south end of this in 1815 has been demolished. **PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Clifton Hall (listed grade I) is built of red brick with ashlar dressings with slate roofs behind balustraded parapets; the south elevation is rendered. The building has a shallow U-plan of three storeys; the north wing has a cellar. The south wing is five bays on the east elevation but seven bays on the west, irregularly spaced. The five-bay central section is set back, with three blind windows to the north and a five-bay single-storey colonnade of paired Tuscan columns at ground-floor level. It incorporates early fabric but has been extended and remodelled on a number of occasions. John Smythson probably undertook work on the house c 1632: the fireplace in the Great Chamber closely resembles those at Bolsover Castle (qv). The work at this time, including the Page's Room with its full-height panelling decorated with painted versions of illustrations from Jacob van Gheyn's military manual, preceded the visit of Charles I to Sir Gervase Clifton in 1632 or 1633. Further alterations were made c 1684-6: the plaster ceiling in the state bedchamber is attributed to Edward Gouge. There were significant alterations throughout the Georgian era, Sir Robert Clifton remodelling the elevations and much of the interior of the south wing including the Octagon between 1731 and 1748. Between 1778 and 1797 Sir Gervase Clifton employed John Carr of York (1723-1807) to add the full-height bow on the south elevation (at ground-floor level this was Lady Clifton's dressing room that opened on the left and right into the attached greenhouse - now removed), the colonnade on the entrance front, and to undertake internal alterations and redecoration, including additional plaster decoration by Dugdale in the Octagon. The five-bay north-east wing was rebuilt c 1810-14: it appears from the break in the cornice that it was intended to build a longer north elevation. In the 1960s the Hall was extended in an unsympathetic style for the school and a free-standing annexe was built adjoining the west boundary of the walled garden.

The C17 and earlier house (Hollar, 1677) comprised a five-bay gabled block to the south, a crenellated tower to the north-east, and a square central block with lower structures adjoining to the west. It was surrounded by walled enclosures with corner turrets.

A late C18 stable block (listed grade II) stands east of the churchyard on the approach to the Hall.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS A grassed turning circle is situated to the east of the Hall. A stone wall and gateway (possibly reset, listed grade II) on the east side of the forecourt give private access to the churchyard.

In the south-west angle of the Hall is a square lawn with an elaborate C19 central artificial stone fountain basin (damaged). The C19 scheme represented a reworking of the lawn with central pool mapped in 1763 (Ingham). The C19 garden was itself reworked by one of the Milners in 1874, and it was probably at the same time that a tall, domed conservatory range with a Pulhamite rockery was erected along its north side (footprint now occupied by school buildings) (J Hort 1876). From the west corner of the lawn a gateway gave access to terraced walks (badly eroded) along the cliff above the River Trent and to steps (largely missing) descending to a cold bath at the base of the cliff, of which only the tank survives.

The main gardens comprise four (originally five) grass terraces rising to the south of the Hall over c 150m, apparently constructed in or before the early 1630s. Probably in the mid C19 the lowest terrace, closest to the Hall, was partly refashioned as a walk; a pair of Coade stone lions (date stamped) 1846, listed grade II) was moved to flank steps at the east end of the walk in the C20.

A C20 brick wall alongside the walk retains the bottom surviving terrace, that terrace being laid out as hard tennis courts in the late C20. It retains a line of old yews on the upper (south) edge but all other features shown on C19 and C20 illustrations, including a double flight octagonal stairs, have been removed.

The second and third terraces were combined as a single compartment (albeit retaining the dividing terrace ramp) when the gardens were remodelled, probably by Sir Robert Clifton between 1731 and 1749, which arrangement (Ingham, 1763), albeit again reworked in the mid C19 and now physically degraded, survives today. The principal ornamental feature, in the centre of the dividing terrace, is a mid C18 grotto or orangery known as the 'Old Chapel' (listed grade II). Its three-bay facade was adorned with pedimented surrounds and formed the backdrop for a circular fountain (in 1900 (CL) this second terrace was called the Lower Flower Garden). Originally a double curved stairway embellished with balustrades, urns, and statuary led up

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to either side of the facade. All of the statuary, fountains, stairs and other features indicated on illustrations (Dunwell, c 1840) and early photographs (CL 1900) have been removed, and only the vaulted undercroft and substructure remain as ruins. East of this square compartment (and now contiguous with it) was a triangular compartment bounded to the east by a brick wall, the line of which can still be traced.

A concave-convex double flight leads from the centre of the west side of the mid C18 compartment up to the narrow top terrace. This was the bowling green described in c 1655 and 1666 (Wood 1937; Throsby 1790-6), the former account being by Gervase Holles who noted how after ascending many steps he arrived at 'a fayre bowling greene, w'ch yieldes a most pleasant prospect overlooking the Trent, the town of Nottingham, the vale of Belvoyre and part of the Forrest of Shirwood'. The green is lined with trees, including mature yews on the garden side. At the east end of the latter is a tall brick pier (early-mid C18) that formed the end of the wall that enclosed the triangular garden compartment to the north. At the east end of the bowling green are the earthwork remains of a bastion that in 1763 (Ingham) formed its eastern termination. This also formed the north end of a walk down the east side of Clifton Wood which continued north of the bastion to the east front of the Hall. The main view from the bastion would have been eastward however, along a broad riding through Crow Wood (outside the area here registered).

A straight flight of stone steps rises from the centre of the bowling green to Clifton Wood, which extends southwards along the cliff top for a further 450m. It comprises mixed deciduous and secondary woodland, with some C19 specimen trees in its northern part and with mature limes and other trees defining a cliff-top walk with the same panoramic views westwards enjoyed from Clifton Grove to the north of the Hall. The Wood was mapped as a formally planted wilderness in 1763 (Ingham) but was probably laid out at the same time as the terraces to the north (with which it shares a common east boundary) which were present by the 1630s. In 1632 John Smythson designed a four-towered banqueting house for Clifton which may be the structure shown rising from the area of Clifton Wood on Hollar's view of 1676, this last presumably being the 'very beautiful summer house of stone' at the west end of a fine long gravel-walk beyond the bowling green noted by Deering in 1751 and by Laird in 1813; no trace of this remains today. This may be separate from a summerhouse, set on arches and once richly decorated and allegedly dating from 1734 (Firth) which overlooked Holme Pit, a fishpond at the bottom of the cliff (outside the area here registered). This was demolished c 1970 and its site is marked by a litter of bricks.

A dry valley, Holgate, drops down to the river immediately to the north of the Hall. A mid C18 icehouse (listed grade II) is cut into its north side. Holgate marks the southern end of Clifton Grove, which in the C17 and later formed a grand approach to the Hall from Nottingham. It today (2004) comprises a 1.5km long, 100m wide, grassy tree-lined (notably some mature oaks) ride along the cliff edge. Gaps in the trees afford extensive views west and north across the Trent and its meadows to the county beyond, with Wollaton Hall (qv) 5km to the north standing as an eyecatcher. Mellors (1926) suggests that it was planted up c 1690 by Sir Gervase, the fourth baronet, while the cliffs down to the river were reportedly planted with fir and elm c 1740 (Doubleday Scrapbook IX). In 1900 (CL) the Grove was described as a double elm avenue. Several C18 and C19 commentators remark on the Grove - allegedly wide enough to accommodate twelve carriages abreast - and the magnificence of the views enjoyed from it (eg Laird 1813), as well as commending the riverside walks with their exposure of banded alabaster in the cliff near the Hall (eg Throsby 1790-6).

In 1777 William Eames (d 1803) proposed an informal landscaping of the terraced gardens, Clifton Wood, and Clifton Grove but the work was unexecuted.

KITCHEN GARDENS C18 brick-walled kitchen gardens (described J Hort 1876; derelict 2004) lie behind the stables to the east of the Hall, as mapped in 1763 (Ingham). Sections of the walls still stand, notably that to the east.

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Archival items The Clifton of Clifton Papers are held at the Hallward Library, University of Nottingham, and include: account books, inventories, receipts and personal items C17-C19. Scrapbooks compiled by W E Doubleday, photographs and illustrations (Local Studies Collection, Nottingham Central Library)

Description written: May 2004 Amended (PAS): November 2004; January 2005 Register Inspector: JSE Edited: January 2005

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.