

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SHIRBURN CASTLE

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Name:	SHIRBURN CASTLE
County:	Oxfordshire
District:	South Oxfordshire (District Authority)
Parish:	Pyrton
County:	Oxfordshire
District:	South Oxfordshire (District Authority)
Parish:	Shirburn
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.660471 Longitude: -0.99716084 National Grid Reference: SU6946396219 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001105 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

Later C18 and early C19 garden and pleasure grounds around a late C14 castle, remodelled 1720s and early C19, set in a landscape park incorporating the remains of an early to mid C18 formal layout.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

A park at Shirburn is first mentioned in 1336 when Alice de Lisle received permission to enclose 50ha of wood and 20ha of waste to make a park (VCH). In 1716 Thomas Parker, then Baron Macclesfield, created Lord Chancellor in 1718 and first Earl of Macclesfield in 1721, bought the castle, and made considerable alterations to the buildings and park. A map of c 1718 depicts a bowling green and garden covering c 2.5ha lying south-west of the castle, with to the north a kitchen garden. In 1720 the first Earl made the large ornamental water called the Upper Duckery, and soon after Homefield and Mill Furlong had been laid to grass with avenues of Dutch elm planted in Mill Furlong (VCH). By 1736 (Burgess map, 1736 [in VCH]) a formal garden had been made north of the castle, with, to the east, a path running from the castle to a circular lake and temple (now gone). Throughout the C18 further landscape improvements were made, particularly between 1780 and 1807. By 1797 (Davis) various walks to the north-west of the castle had been laid out, there was a new flower garden and the Lower Duckery had been made. Enclosure in 1806 meant that the old houses flanking the direct approach road off the Watlington road could be demolished and estate buildings erected in their place. In 1808 Queen Charlotte visited the castle accompanied by her daughters. The park was enlarged to the south as far as the Pyrton lane during the C19 (Bryant, 1823; OS 1883). The estate remains (1998) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Shirburn park lies 1.5km north-east of the small town of Watlington and adjacent to the west of the village of Shirburn, which, until enclosure in the early C19, extended along both sides of Castle Road. The c 105ha site is bounded largely by agricultural land, with the village of Pyrton lying at the south-west corner, and the B4009 Chinnor to Watlington road forming the east boundary. Alongside the northern section of the Watlington Road is a late C18/early C19 chalk and brick wall, running south into a brick wall which extends south to Castle Road. The southern half of the east boundary, running south from South Lodge, is marked by a line of mature holm oak (*Quercus ilex*), which continues west along the south boundary as far as the lodge at the entrance to Pyrton. The land is largely level, with a slight slope down to the west, the site lying close to the bottom of the Chiltern scarp, which rises c 1km to the east. The setting is largely rural, with views east from the park across agricultural land towards the dramatic Chiltern scarp.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach, off the Watlington Road 250m south-east of the Castle, runs along the straight Castle Road, flanked by the walled gardens to the south and estate buildings to the north, arriving at the gothic gatehouse (early C19, listed grade II), with studded double doors and a crenellated parapet, which stands c 85m south-east of the Castle. The drive continues north-west through the stable yard, and beyond, passing the parish church to the south. It then curves north through a belt of trees, arriving at an open informal lawn which bounds the west arm of the moat, at the centre of which a two-arched bridge flanked by iron hand-rails allows access to the Castle, the two arches being linked by an early C19 drawbridge. The west front overlooks the park to the west. In the early to mid C18 Castle Road, then part of the main village street, appears to have carried the principal approach (Burgess, 1736), when the road ran south of the church and churchyard, turning north and running along the west side of the churchyard to the moat and the west front.

Formerly (later C18 and C19 maps) a curving drive crossed the south park, entering off the Watlington Road 400m south of the Castle, through an archway connected to the gothic, two-storey, stucco South Lodge (early C19, possibly John Nash, listed grade II) which stands adjacent to the north, the whole set within mature trees. The former drive curved north across the park to the west front of the Castle. Beyond this it continued west through the pleasure grounds, crossing the south end of the Lower Duckery and emerging into the park, curving across to a belt on the west boundary. From here it wound through the trees, terminating at the north end of Pyrton, 800m west of the Castle, at West Lodge (early C19, extended late C20, listed grade II), a polygonal, stucco building with a pyramidal roof, adjacent to stucco gate piers with iron gates, attached to a chalk rubble wall. Traces of this drive may still remain. The south arm was present in the late C18 (Davis, 1797), and the west arm seems to have appeared in the early C19 (Bryant, 1823).

A further former lodge, of brick, probably of C19 construction, stands 800m south-west of the Castle, on the south boundary of the park, adjacent to Pyrton lane.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Shirburn Castle (1377, possibly Henry Yevele, with alterations 1716-25 and early C19, listed grade I) stands towards the centre of the site, set in an L-shaped moat, with a bridge incorporating a drawbridge on the main, west front, and further, smaller bridges on the south and east fronts. The three-storey brick and stone castle is square in plan, with an internal courtyard and four circular corner towers. The associated stable block and coach house stand within the service yard through which the main drive approaches, c 50m to the south.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens and pleasure grounds lie to the west, north and east of the Castle, incorporating elements from the C18 and C19. A gravel path runs north along the east side of the moat, overlooking the east side of the pleasure grounds, with a broad, open lawn (formerly the site of five tennis courts (CL 1900)), at the east side of which lies the serpentine lake called the Upper Duckery, surrounded by lawn studded with mature trees. The gravel path gives access to the formerly walled flower garden lying 50m north of the Castle, laid to lawn with scattered island beds and a central circular feature enclosed by a clipped hedge, at the centre of which lies a circular stone pond with a fountain. This area is dominated by a long stone orangery (early C19, listed grade II) with a slate roof, standing 120m north of the Castle against the centre of the remaining brick wall (which forms the north boundary of this garden), with a broad gravel path running along the south side. Adjacent to the north lies a further walled garden area. On the east side of the flower garden, set amongst mature trees, stands a Portland stone rotunda (Westby Gill of the Office of Works, 1741, listed grade II) with Ionic columns and a domed roof.

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West of the flower garden lies the west side of the pleasure grounds, planted with mature trees, through which an avenue, called the Clare Walk, runs north-west, aligned at its south-east end on the west front of the Castle. The Clare Walk formerly extended into the park, crossing a straight terrace which defines the north boundary of the western pleasure grounds with the park. Paths ran north-west through the trees, one along the east bank of the Lower Duckery, encircling its north end to reach the Summer House (1720s-40s, listed grade II), a semicircular stone orangery with a domed roof and Doric portico, overlooking the park to the south.

In 1716 Thomas Parker had begun constructing a formal layout with six or seven avenues of trees intended to radiate from the west front of the Castle, of which only three were planted, the Clare Walk being the main survivor (J Soc Architect Historians 1981). By the mid C18 (Burgess, 1736) an elaborate garden surrounded the Castle, including a sequence of water features which was begun and terminated by the Upper and Lower Duckerys respectively, at the centre of which lay the Castle and moat. The Duckerys were then more formal in shape than today, with the Upper Duckery being flanked by village buildings. The rotunda seems to have been sited at the north-west corner of the extended north arm of the moat, at the south end of a walk north which ended with a clairvoie or gates overlooking Mill Furlong. The Clare Walk was flanked by groves, aligned at its south end on the putative site of the rotunda and beyond this the west front, with its north end extending into Mill Furlong along an avenue of trees. The present flower garden was then laid out with flower beds in a formal design. It appears that by the late C18 (Davies, 1797) the water features had been altered, parts being removed altogether, the remaining Duckerys being extended and fashioned into serpentine forms, probably during a general remodelling of the whole pleasure grounds and park. **PARK** The largest section of the park lies south of the Castle and pleasure grounds, which bound the park areas to the north. The south park is laid to pasture with many clumps of trees, and views extend east towards the Chiltern scarp. The section lying north of the western pleasure grounds formerly contained an avenue extending north-west from the Clare Walk, aligned on the west front of the Castle. That section lying north of the eastern pleasure grounds contains many mature lime trees, with a lodge at the east corner.

The south park appears to have been laid out in the mid to late C18, when its southern boundary, formerly marked by an avenue, ran north-west from South Lodge (Davies, 1797; C19 maps). The park appears to have been extended south to its present limit after the mid 1820s (Bryant, 1823), being copiously planted with clumps, particularly of limes (characteristically a ring of six specimens enclosing a central one), probably at the same time as the holm oak south and east boundary line was planted. The park was probably also extended north of the pleasure grounds at the same time.

KITCHEN GARDEN The partly cultivated kitchen garden lies c 130m south of the Castle, approached from the south side of Castle Road past the gardener's cottage. It is enclosed by brick and chalk walls (mid/late C18, listed grade II) and entered from the north-east corner. A gap in the south wall gives access to a narrow southern compartment, also bounded by a brick wall. The remains of a glasshouse stand against the north wall of the main garden, with small bothies standing against the north side of this wall, within a former frame yard, now a plant nursery. A further enclosed area lies adjacent to the east, with a narrow belt of trees which screens both areas running along the south walls, and an enclosed former orchard to the north-east. To the west, 90m south of the Castle, within a wooded area, lies the brick icehouse (C18, listed grade II). This walled area was formerly (Burgess, 1736) the site of a grove of treed walks, with a circular feature at the centre, possibly a raised viewing mount.

REFERENCES

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Legal

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