

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WOLLATON HALL

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Name:	WOLLATON HALL
District:	City of Nottingham (Unitary Authority)
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Details

An early C16 deer park, developed into a landscape park in the late C18. In the centre, the C16 Hall is set within formal gardens and pleasure grounds of C16, C17, C18 and C19 date. The site has been a public park since 1926.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The early C14 manors of Wollaton and Cossall were acquired by judicious marriages by the Willoughby family and the park was enclosed for deer and wild white cattle between 1492 and 1510. The Willoughbys, who descended from a successful Nottinghamshire merchant Ralph Bugge (d 1240) had made their main residence at Middleton, Warwickshire but when Henry Willoughby (c 1451-1528) exploited the coal reserves at Wollaton, he made what is now Wollaton Old Hall, near the church in Wollaton village, his chief residence.

Henry's great grandson Francis Willoughby (1547-96) became heir to the estates at the age of twelve in 1559 when his brother, Thomas, died. He commissioned Robert Smythson as his builder and 'architector' (Pevsner and Williamson 1979) to build Wollaton Hall. Built between 1580 and 1588, it is considered to be the most important Elizabethan house in Nottinghamshire and one of the most important in England (Pevsner and Williamson 1979). The Hall was passed to Francis Willoughby's daughter Bridget who married her cousin Percival Willoughby (d 1643), but fell into disuse until their grandson, Sir Francis (1648-88) created Baronet in 1677, inherited aged nineteen and took his brother, Thomas (d 1742) and sister, Cassandra (1670-1735) to live there. Sir Thomas succeeded in 1688 and was made the first Baron Middleton in 1712. Alterations were made to the Hall in this period and the gardens were greatly enlarged and avenues planted across the park. In 1720 a park wall was built with the effect of reducing the impact of the long avenues, although these were not removed.

A large number of garden and park buildings were built in the latter half of the C18 and early years of the C19, by the 5th and 6th Lords Middleton, and considerable expense was lavished on improvements to the park. The architect Jeffry Wyatt (later Wyattville) was called in by the 6th Lord Middleton in three periods, 1801-05, 1823, and again in 1832. His work involved both the renovation and extension of the Hall and the design of garden and park buildings.

During the early years of the Napoleonic wars, the 6th Lord Middleton had a pre-occupation with defending his property and supported a militia of his own Volunteers. Building work of around this time was typically defensive in design. Nottingham Lodge, for example, built in 1823, had internal security features and a fire proof construction. In 1831 there were riots in Nottingham during the progress of the Reform Bill and various local landed estates, including among them Wollaton, were attacked by rioters. This appears to have added to the 6th Lord Middleton's fears and he commissioned the construction of Beeston Lodge, fully fireproof and secure, in 1832.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
WOLLATON HALL

After the 6th Lord Middleton's death in 1835, the estate was handed down to Digby, 7th Lord Middleton, who planted additional avenues of oak and lime. After his death in 1856, the family did not return to the estate and, in 1867, it was leased to Henry Ackroyd Esq. Extensive works were nevertheless carried out within and around the walled Nursery garden with the construction of plant houses including a Musa house, Pine house, Melon house, Cucumber houses and vineries. The Inventory produced for the lease to Henry Ackroyd showed a prolific number of exotic plants being grown.

The 11th Lord Middleton (d 1970), due to double death duties incurred by the deaths of his father and uncle after the First World War, sold the estate to the Corporation of Nottingham in 1924-25. The 801 acre (c 334ha) estate was made up of 744 acres (310ha) of the Hall and Park and 57 acres (c 24ha) of garden allotments. The Corporation sold off 274 acres (c 114ha) for housing development, the remainder being set aside as a public park with 139 acres (c 58) for use as a golf course. From 1940 for almost fifteen years the northern area of the park was used for military purposes, first to accommodate US troops, then, from 1945 onwards, German Prisoners of War.

The site remains in local authority ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Wollaton Hall and its surrounding park, comprising 203ha, is located on the west side of the City of Nottingham. The northern boundary of the site in part follows Wollaton Road, with the Derby Road (A52) following part of the southern boundary. The western boundary is represented by the park wall beyond which are houses and their back gardens running along Parkside. The eastern boundary abuts housing built after 1926 on land which was formerly within the park.

Wollaton Hall is built on a hill, the ground sloping down steeply to the north with a more gradual slope to the west and with the gentlest slopes to the south and east. The other notable landform is Arbour Hill to the south-east.

The park is now enclosed largely by housing development, with the University of Nottingham campus to the south of Derby Road.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The two main park gates lie to the north of the Hall adjacent to lodges, Lodge No.1 and Lodge No.2, on Wollaton Road. From each leads a straight drive, the two drives being parallel and the northern section of that from Lodge No.1 following a row of oaks planted in the late C18. The approach from the east, from the two sets of formal gateways (erected in 1926, listed grade II) which stand on Middleton Boulevard, and along the eastern half of Lime Tree Avenue, now serves a golf club. These are the main historic entrances with a fourth, a pedestrian gate, 700m south-east of the Hall on Derby Road at the crenellated, Gothick-style Beeston Lodge (Jeffry Wyatt, 1823, listed grade II). From the latter a footpath leads west to the lake before turning north to reach a C20 gate into the pleasure grounds; formerly this approach crossed the present golf course. There are an additional five gated entrances to the park, all inserted since 1926.

The main approach to the Hall prior to 1926 was that to the east, from Nottingham Lodge (now Lenton Lodge), built in 1823 by Jeffry Wyatt, which stands on the far side of the inner ring road (outside the present park boundary). Before the construction of Nottingham Lodge, the main entrance appears to have been from the south-east near Beeston Lodge.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Wollaton Hall (listed grade I), built of Ancaster stone, is made up of a central hall of three storeys, topped by a prospect room with three-storey corner towers. It was built for Sir Francis Willoughby by Robert Smythson (1535-1614). An inscription on the exterior of the Hall translates as 'Behold this house of Sir Francis Willoughby built with rare art and bequeathed to Willoughbys. Begun in 1580 and finished 1588' (CL 1900). The Hall was altered in the late C17 by Sir Francis Willoughby, his brother Thomas, Baron Middleton, and his sister Cassandra. The 6th Lord Middleton in the early C19 commissioned from Jeffry Wyatt many alterations including a new servants' wing in 1823, those to the exterior of the Hall, however, being minor.

The stables and service range (listed grade II) stand 100m to the west of the Hall. The formal classical quadrangle was built in 1743, this being extended with service buildings, stabling and pavilions in 1774, and extended again in 1829 with an indoor Riding School. The buildings are mainly red brick with an ashlar sandstone formal south facade, with portico. They were extended in 1972-74 with steel and glass buildings to house machinery for the Industrial Museum which first opened in 1970. The stables also contain a shop, offices, flat and a gallery (opened 1996).

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
WOLLATON HALL

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GARDENS The pleasure grounds are set within a brick ha-ha dating from 1788, which wraps round the Hall to the south and east. From the south front of the Hall steps lead onto a terrace comprising a lawn set around a circular pond, with a terrace walk and brick retaining wall to the south-east surmounted by a long balustrade (listed grade II). Balusters from the C17 balustrade are mixed with C19 and C20 replacements. The circular pond is designed with an integral lead fountain and is illustrated in views of the garden dating from the end of the C17/early C18 (Jan Siberechts 1695, Kip and Kniff 1707). The terraced brick retaining wall is a late C18 reconstruction of the C17 wall, also shown in late C17/early C18 illustrations, which was itself on the line of the late C16 Smythson wall. Pairs of Mannerist-style statues are set on the lawn on either side of the central path. These, fibreglass replicas of the original stone statues, now housed within the Camellia House, represent the Roman gods Neptune, Flora, Venus with Cupid, and Bacchus, and appear to be illustrated in the Siberechts paintings.

Below the top terrace is the lower terrace comprising lawns with a large grove of cedars, Cedar of Lebanon being the first planted group, supplemented in the mid C19 with Atlantic cedar. Most of the other exotic trees here have been added since 1925. To the south-west is the Camellia House (probably designed by Wyatt; listed grade II*) constructed in 1823. This is a pre-fabricated cast-iron structure (reputedly the first ever cast-iron glasshouse) with copper glazing bars and unique heating system designed by Harrison of Derby, which takes rainwater from the fluted cast-iron supporting columns which serve the piped heating system. Bronze floor vents provide an humidifying effect. To the rear of the Camellia House is its boiler house. To the south of the Camellia House are flower beds and shrubs planted much as illustrated in County Life photographs of 1900. East of the Cedar Grove is a circular sensory garden, laid out in 1994, which is probably on the site of the Rosary also illustrated in Country Life.

The brick ha-ha surrounds the pleasure garden on three sides (north-east, south-east and south-west). At the centre of the south-east side, on axis with the formal garden, is a projecting semi-circular bastion. A bridge crosses the ha-ha from a door in the Doric Temple (listed grade II*), also known as the French Hovel, which stands at the edge of the pleasure grounds, 200m south-east of the Hall. The front of the Temple has an open loggia with Doric columns and was designed to display eight oval stone panels. The main construction of the building dates from c 1800 although it contains recycled elements from other sources: the columns and pilasters may be part of the late C17 Orangery and the stone wall plaques, incorporating themes from classical mythology, may be from an earlier C17 building.

The grounds to the east of the Hall are mainly laid to lawn with a pronounced embankment leading up to the east elevation which contains a former doorway. A large quantity of soil was removed from this area when the ha-ha was constructed and the ground was levelled to create the platform around the Hall to the north, south and east. The C17 illustrations show a large change in level between the east and south side of the Hall.

On the north front of the Hall an oval drive replaces the C17 walled enclosure. A single-storey stone gazebo (c 1800, listed grade II) with a lead coped parapet is located 50m north of the Hall. This appears to have been augmented, c 1823, with a water tank, hidden by a raised parapet, to provide a water supply for the water trough and lion's head fountain also of c 1823, which are situated in the retaining wall to the west. East of the gazebo is an early C19 icehouse (1826, listed grade II).

The raised terrace to the south of the Hall with central pond, roughly corresponds to the design shown in the 'platt' or plan of the Hall and garden by Robert Smythson (Girouard 1983). John Smythson in a design dated 1618, for Sir Percival Willoughby, for the 'Newe Orchard', shows the terrace to the south of the Hall already present and a proposed raised mount copying the plan of the house, planted with box, below. This was constructed, for Cassandra Willoughby describes its removal in her diaries of the late C17. From 1687 into the early C18, Sir Francis, Thomas and Cassandra Willoughby made many improvements to the house and garden. The gardens to the north-east side of the house were extended as a D-shaped bowling green edged by a brick wall and railings within which were several curved terraces with rows of lime trees (Siberechts paintings of the 1690s). The outline of the bowling green and the remnants of a row of lime trees survive outside the present line of the ha-ha. Cassandra referred to reforming the gardens with the advice of Mr Pratt, formerly of the Chelsea Physic Garden (qv) (Chandos 1911). Jan Siberechts, commissioned by Sir Thomas Willoughby, painted three versions of Wollaton Hall in 1695, 1697 and c 1697, two of which were similar bird's eye views but showing slight differences. These illustrate the terrace and central fountain,

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
WOLLATON HALL

parterres to the east with a brick walled orangery, bowling green, and two-storey gazebo. In one view the lower terrace is laid out with parterres, on the other, orchards. In 1788 the formal bowling green and wall were levelled and replaced by the present hahā separating the Hall from the park. The garden was subsequently planted with the grove of Cedar of Lebanon and embellished with structures including the Doric temple and a summerhouse with grotto, since demolished. By 1856, the terrace was described as 'a most extensive lawn adorned with statues, fountains and gold and silver fish' (Fyfe) offering picturesque and extensive views. The area of the terrace to the north-east was then described as a wood of fine beeches called the 'Wilderness', and the area to the south-west as the Rosary.

PARK Wollaton Hall is set on a hill in the centre of the wall-enclosed park. Sir Henry Willoughby had enclosed the park between 1492 and 1510 with a pale, but the wall (described by Daniel Defoe in his *Tour Through England and Wales*, 1724) was not built until 1720. The park contains a number of tree-lined avenues, most of those focused on the Hall having been laid out in the late C17 as illustrated in the Siberechts paintings of the 1690's and the Kip and Kniff engraving in *Britannia Illustrata* of 1707. To the north are two major avenues, one of sweet chestnut and oak planted in the C17 in two double rows, lined on the north front of the Hall, the other a single avenue of oaks planted in the late C18 near the walled Nursery garden. To the north-east is a double avenue of oaks, Digby Avenue, planted in 1838-9. To the west of the Hall are field enclosures, separated from Thompson's Wood by an avenue of sweet chestnut, originally a double avenue dating from the C17. To the east of the Hall is a double lime avenue, Lime Tree Avenue, first planted c 1700. This bisects the golf course, dating from the 1920s, which occupies the park to the south and east of the Hall. An oak avenue planted in the late C20 lies on the southern boundary of the course. To the south of the Hall is a single avenue of limes dating from c 1700. South-west of the Hall is a Horse Chestnut avenue planted in 1980 and to the west, between Parkside Road and the lake, is a second late C20 oak avenue.

The park contains a number of plantations. These include Thompson's Wood to the west and south-west of the Hall, dating principally from the late C18, of beech, sweet chestnut, oak and lime with an understorey of yew and rhododendron; and Arbour Hill and Deer Barn copse to the south-east. Arbour Hill, originating in the C16, was replanted in the mid C19 with Scots pine, larch and wellingtonia underplanted with rhododendron. The park was planted during the latter part of the C18 with many informal groups of trees, including, in 1786, some 11,300 oaks. During the early-mid C19 these were supplemented with circular and oval copses of contrasting broad-leaved and coniferous plantings. The best surviving examples of these are to the north of the Hall, one being a wellingtonia grove framed by a ring of horse chestnut. The park also contains several individual wellingtonias.

400m to the south of the Hall lies a 18ha roughly triangular lake. This was created between 1774 and 1785 on the site of an earlier lake shown in C17 illustrations. It is retained by a dam and drainage ditch 800m long. The brick boathouse (listed grade II) by the southern shore was designed to look like a classical bridge from the far side of the lake but this effect is no longer apparent the water level having dropped. As part of the late C18/early C19 improvements, the land between the west side of the Hall and the lake was kept as an open broad sweep in order to maintain views with the stable block in the foreground. The view from the lake of the stable block is shown in a watercolour by P M La Cave dated 1788.

KITCHEN GARDEN The c 1.7ha kitchen garden (walls listed grade II) is set against the north wall of the park beside the north gate and is now (1999) derelict. Built in 1783, with three flue-lined walls, additions were made in the C19 and C20. The late C18 Gothick glasshouse has been demolished but west of the garden is the gardener's cottage (late C18, listed grade II) which is now (1990s) a private house. West of the cottage is a barn and attached cartshed (listed grade II) which is now (1999) a restaurant and store.

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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
WOLLATON HALL

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OS 25" to 1 miler 1st edition published 1884 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1914 1938 edition

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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.