

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ARMLEY HOUSE (GOTT'S PARK)

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Name:	ARMLEY HOUSE (GOTT'S PARK)
District:	Leeds (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.805337 Longitude: -1.6028741 National Grid Reference: SE2625134411 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001216 Date first listed: 01-Dec-1984

Details

A garden and park of the late C18, possibly by Thomas White, modified to a partially executed design by Humphry Repton for Benjamin Gott. William Sawrey Gilpin advised on a new entrance and approach in 1835.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The site was owned by a merchant, Thomas Woolrich, and the grounds are thought to have been laid out for him by Thomas White (1736-1811) (Sheeran 1990) in the late C18. Benjamin Gott, who was a prosperous cloth manufacturer, acquired the site in 1803 and lived there until his death in 1840. Humphry Repton (1752-1818) was consulted c 1810 and produced a Red Book, 'Armley House near Leeds in Yorkshire', his proposals being in part executed. The site remained in private ownership until 1928 when it was acquired by Leeds City Council. It is currently (1997) in use as a golf course and public park.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Armley House is situated c 3km west of the centre of Leeds in an area which is industrial to the north and east, and residential on other sides. The c 30ha site is on a spur from which the land falls to the north, to the east as the valley of the River Aire, and to the south. The site is bounded on the north-east side by the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, shown on a county map surveyed 1767-9, where the remains of iron palings survive along the canal side. On the north side the ruinous remains of a stone wall divide parkland from playing fields. Armley Ridge Road forms the west boundary; this was formerly walled but the wall only survives south of the main entrance where it runs alongside the road and continues to the south dividing the site from allotments. The remaining south-east boundary is a track which runs from Redcote Bridge to Stanningley Road and divides the park from part of the golf course to the south.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance is from Armley Ridge Road where a drive runs north-east to the House. This was probably constructed c 1835 for Benjamin Gott in accordance with proposals by W S Gilpin (1762-1843) (Piebenga 1994). Prior to this the main entrance was via Redcote Bridge which crosses the Canal on the south-east side of the site and leads to a track, now (1997) largely grassed over, which runs north-west to the House. The 1847 OS map shows the drive from this entrance running south and west, looping around the site to the west side of the House. Repton proposed a modification of this route so that the drive took a slightly shorter route to the east, to give an enhanced impression of the extent of the site, and he also proposed a drive leading north-west from the west side of the House. These proposals, illustrated in the Red Book, were not executed. Repton's remarks about the drives make it clear that the drive from Redcote Bridge was extant at that time.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING Armley House (listed grade II) was built in the late C18 for Thomas Woolrich. Repton advised Gott to alter and extend the House to make it more convenient and to take advantage of the views to the east and south-east. This was done c 1820 to designs by Robert Smirke (1780-1867) which were not wholly in accordance with Repton's suggestions: he had advised against a portico, but one was added to the east front. Wings flanking the building were constructed but they were both demolished in the C20 and only the foundations survive. The House is used (1997) to accommodate a cafe and club facilities for the golf course on the site.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The east front of the House has a terrace with central stone steps leading down to a lawn in the shape of an irregular oval which is fringed with trees and overlooks a steep wooded slope to the east. Repton proposed the terrace, but his illustrations show it with a balustrade which was not executed. An engraving of 1822 (Neale) shows railings along the edge of the terrace, but not the central steps, which are shown on the 1893 OS map. The terrace gives views to the east through mature trees over steeply falling ground. To the south-east there are views over the wooded slopes down to the Canal and over falling parkland with rising land beyond and Leeds city centre in the distance. This view is illustrated in the Red Book where Repton discussed his proposals, dividing the prospect into 'the foreground, the landscape and the offskip'. In the distance the offskip was the City of Leeds, and as Repton predicted this has greatly increased in size and assumes a major presence in the views. The landscape, in the middle distance, consisted of 'water and buildings, richly accompanied by wood'. Prominent here was Benjamin Gott's Armley Mill, which was illuminated at night by gas light. Repton's proposals concentrated on concealing the rigid lines of the Canal, revealing the curves of the river and framing the mill. In the foreground Repton proposed removing the shrubs and 'creating the effect of an open grove thro' which a glimpse of the Ayre may be preserved; without opening too much the scene, that is too populous to form the principal object of the landscape from the villa'.

To the north there are scattered trees along the edge of the lawn overlooking falling parkland beyond which Kirkstall Vale can be seen in the distance, in an area which is now built up. Repton proposed an opening in the trees so that the ruins of Kirkstall Abbey could be seen in this view.

The main elements of Repton's views are intact, though the mature trees obscure views of Armley Mill and the river. The area around the park has been built up since the early C19, but the golf course and playing fields on rising land outside the registered area to the south-east have helped to preserve some of the characteristics of the middle ground visible from the House.

On the west side of the House there is a car park and scattered trees. The prospect from this side of the House is illustrated in the Red Book. The proposal was to greatly increase the planting on this side of the House, which is shown fairly thickly wooded on the 1847 and 1893 OS maps. The (unexecuted) drives dividing and sweeping off to the north and south between the trees are shown on the illustration.

PARK There is parkland on all sides of the House. It consists of open land to the north and south with some individual mature trees and a few clumps of mature trees amongst planting of the mid to late C20, which was introduced to create fairways for the golf course. There is planting with mature trees along the perimeter, with paths leading through it, as proposed by Repton. On the east side of the House the wooded slopes have paths leading from the east lawn and joining with a path along the edge of the Canal. There are views of the House on top of the spur from various points around the park, some of which give a similar effect to the Red Book illustrations showing a prospect from outside the park on the far side of the Aire. These suggest that the park was already fairly well wooded and had clumps of trees within it, possibly reflecting work attributed to Thomas White. Repton's suggestions concentrated on bulking the planting to the east and west of the House, augmenting the clumps in the parkland and removing some field boundaries. In 1810 Gott's wife Elizabeth recorded in her diary (quoted in Sheeran 1990) that Gott himself was already supervising the planting of the grounds, suggesting that parts of Repton's scheme were put into effect almost immediately after the production of the Red Book.

An area of land bordering the Canal on the north-east side of the site was added to the park after Repton drew up his proposals and is shown imparked on the 1847 OS map.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden is situated on the south side of the main entrance, c 220m south-west of the House, on land which slopes down to the south. There are a number of stone cottages and ancillary buildings on the north side of the gardens, which consist of a rectangular enclosure with walls of red brick on all but the west side, where the wall is of stone and

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borders with Armley Ridge Road. The interior was laid out in the mid to late C20 as a rose garden and it was refurbished in 1998. Arched entrances lead off to the south and east and connect with a system of paths running around the site's perimeter. The garden is shown on the 1847 OS map, when there were more buildings on the north side. The 1893 OS map shows a number of glasshouses, all of which have disappeared.

Repton proposed siting the kitchen garden further to the east, alongside the proposed new line of the drive, as shown on the map on page 10 of the Red Book. He states in a note that when he made his proposal he was not aware that the garden already existed, which indicates that it is pre-1810 in date.

REFERENCES

J P Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen* 5, (1822) G Sheeran, *Landscape Gardens in West Yorkshire 1680-1880* (1990), pp 117-22 S Daniels, *Fields of Vision* (1993), pp 84-9 S Piebenga, William Sawrey Gilpin, (English Heritage Designer theme study 1994)

Maps T Jefferys, *Map of West Yorkshire*, surveyed 1767-9, published 1771

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1847 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1893

Archival items Humphry Repton, *Armley House near Leeds in Yorkshire, 1810* (Red Book), (Oak Spring Garden Library, Upperville, Virginia, USA, Mrs Paul Mellon Collection) [Reproductions of many of the illustrations and some parts of the text are available in secondary sources.]

Description written: February 1998 Amended: March 1999 Register Inspector: CEH Edited: November 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.