

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

SARSDEN HOUSE

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**SARSDEN HOUSE**

Name: SARSDEN HOUSE

County: Oxfordshire

District: West Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Churchill

County: Oxfordshire

District: West Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Lyneham

County: Oxfordshire

District: West Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Sarsden

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.903520  
Longitude: -1.5818714  
National Grid Reference: SP2886422858  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II\*  
List Entry Number: 1000503  
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

## Details

A C17 and later country house, surrounded by a park and pleasure grounds designed by Humphry Repton c 1795 for John Haughton Langston. The landscape was laid out on the site of a former formal design, with the aid, during the early C19, of George Stanley Repton. At this time George Stanley Repton also designed the rectory for the Langstone family's newly acquired and adjacent Sarsden Glebe, also advising on the associated landscape.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1600 the Sarsden estate came into the ownership of the Walter family, who enlarged it substantially during the C17 and early C18 (Debois 1992). The house was rebuilt after a fire in 1689, and two engravings of 1695 (White Kennett 1695) depict the house and elaborate gardens surrounding it. In 1731 Sir Robert Walter died, leaving the Sarsden estate to his nephew John Rolle of Bickton. An estate map of 1788 depicting the Rolle ownership shows three fishponds south of the house, and an ornamental planted area in between.

In 1792 James Haughton Langston (d 1795), a merchant banker, bought Sarsden and the neighbouring estates. His son John (d 1812), following inheritance from his father, summoned Humphry Repton (1752-1818) to Sarsden in 1795, who in March

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1796 produced a Red Book containing his proposals for the park and pleasure grounds in text and watercolours. The proposals appear to have been largely carried out over a period of decades, and following John's death, his son James (d 1863) employed Humphry Repton's son George Stanley from c 1817 and during the 1820s to continue the improvements to the estate, including the erection of various picturesque buildings. In 1817 James' sister Elizabeth married the Rev Charles Barter, and lands were obtained lying adjacent to the north end of Sarsden park on which George Repton subsequently built a new rectory, Sarsden Glebe. The Glebe's grounds were probably laid out by William Smith, a local surveyor who was subsequently influential in establishing the science of geology (J Phibbs pers comm, May 1998).

During the early to mid C20 the estate became neglected, and in the 1950s many of the picturesque buildings were demolished, including Green Lodge, Keeper's Lodge, the Kennels and New Farm. In the late C20 much alteration occurred within the drive system, and new features were added to the garden. The estate remains (1998) in private ownership.

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Sarsden Park lies 4km south-west of Chipping Norton, close to the county boundary with Warwickshire and Gloucestershire, at the eastern edge of the Cotswold hills. The c 115ha park is bounded largely by agricultural land, with the small Sars Brook marking the north-west boundary. The park lies largely on an undulating shoulder of land which slopes down to the north-west into the Sars Brook valley bottom and to the south and south-east, with the land rising gently to the north-east. Sarsden House is sited on a plateau at the south-west end of this shoulder, whilst the Glebe and its park lie above the Sars Brook on the north-west-facing hillside as it runs north-east.

The setting is largely agricultural and wooded, with the village of Churchill standing at the top of the hillside on the north side of the Sars Brook valley. Here the church stands conspicuous on the ridge, with its prominent tower rebuilt for James Langston in 1826 to resemble Magdalen College tower in Oxford (qv), a deliberate viewpoint from the north park and Glebe parkland, and formerly from the north front of the House before the view was blocked by mature trees. Distant views extend south and west from the House and parkland. Sarsgrove House, standing within Sarsgrove Wood, c 1.5km north-east of Sarsden House, was remodelled in 1825 by George Repton as a picturesque cottage orné for James Langston's unmarried sisters, and formerly seems to have had its own ornamental landscape within the woodland. Sarsden is one of a group of local landscapes at which Humphry Repton advised, most notable of which is Adlestrop (qv) where his recommendations were carried out c 1799.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main entrance is approached off the A361 Chipping Norton to Swindon road, c 3.5km south of Chipping Norton and 1.8km east of Sarsden House, marked by a pair of tall stone gate piers with ball finials (early-mid C18, listed grade II) standing 50m apart at the east end of the lane which leads 500m west down to the main entrance to the park. The elaborate and massive ashlar gate piers formerly related to the formal landscape surrounding the House during the C18, and may have been moved several times during the C18 and early C19 (Debois 1992). The main entrance to the park, lying 1.3km east of the House, enters off the lane, having formerly been set back c 50m west of the lane along the drive, and marked by a stone wall (some parts remain) and a lodge on the north side of the drive (foundations remain). The east drive runs south-west through Kennels Belt, emerging into the east park 800m east of the House, passing close to the south end of The Belt, and curving west across the park towards the House, with views south-west across the east park to distant hillsides. The drive across the east park has been constructed in the late C20, roughly following the line of Humphry Repton's proposed drive, which does not seem to have been fully implemented. The drive enters the pleasure grounds c 50m north-east of the House, curving south-west across informal lawns to a short, straight arm centred on the north front of the House which opens out by the north front into a gravel forecourt adjacent to George Repton's balustraded portico. In the late C17 the north front was enclosed by a square, walled entrance courtyard, with a central path flanked by panels of lawn. The north side was broken by two gate piers with elaborate carved urn finials and terminated by two small pavilions (White Kennett 1695). This arrangement seems to have been removed in the later C18.

By 1830 (OS) the former main drive ran through Kennels Belt, and through the belt extending west from this along the south boundary, past the former east lake, and into the pleasure grounds, running above the south bank of the west lake, crossing Repton's stone bridge. It continued north along the top of the dam, emerging into the west park, running up the slope to join the west arm of the former north drive.

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A service drive, giving access from the Glebe and Churchill, enters the site 200m north-east of the House, off Sarsden Lane, curving south-west between farm buildings and yards to join the east drive where it enters the pleasure grounds c 50m north-east of the House.

Formerly (OS 1885) the northern approach to the House was via a U-shaped drive through the north arm of the wooded pleasure grounds, entering off Sarsden Lane c 150m north of the House, passing the late C18 former stables to the east and curving south across an open, informal lawn to the north front. The drive continued west from the north front to rejoin the lane 100m west of the House, along which arm the former east drive emerged.

A green lane bisects the east park, extending south from the lane from Churchill, entering west of the walled garden, flanked by the remaining one of a pair of large, stone gate piers (C18, listed grade II), this having lost its finial. The lane, formerly part of the road between Churchill and Shipton-under-Wychwood, runs south through the east park, crossing the high dam at the west end of the former east lake, emerging into agricultural land south of the lake, and crossing Fairgreen Farm yard, beyond which two massive stone gate piers with elaborate swagged urn finials stand in isolation, terminating the lane 1.2km south-east of the House. The piers are in similar style to those depicted in Kennett's 1695 engraving of the courtyard adjacent to the north front, and may mark the entrance to a former south drive.

The approach to Sarsden Glebe enters off the Churchill to Sarsden lane, 200m south-west of the Glebe itself, past a small, single-storey, picturesque stone lodge (George Stanley Repton c 1818, listed grade II), based on a design by Humphry Repton for a pair of lodges at St John's, Isle of Wight (now gone). The drive curves north-east across the park, arriving at a small, gravelled courtyard, entered between stone gate piers with an ornamental iron field gate, opposite which stands an austere porch forming the main entrance to the house on the east front.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Sarsden House (1690s, late C18/early C19, alterations by Humphry and George Stanley Repton, listed grade II\*) stands towards the centre of the park. George Repton added a portico to the north, entrance front, together with, on the west, garden front a balustraded loggia with Ionic columns and, flush with this to the south, an attached conservatory with a double-span glass roof (all c 1825). A service range to the south-east is attached to a former stable block (C17, listed grade II\*) and yard.

A later stable block (mid C18, listed grade II) stands 100m north of the House, close to the entrance of the former north drive off Sarsden Lane. This and the associated yards to the north occupy part of the site of the former C18 kitchen garden.

Sarsden Glebe (listed grade II) stands c 800m north of Sarsden House. Built c 1818 to the designs of George Repton, the three-storey, stone house was enlarged in 1834, when the upper floor was inserted. Undated drawings of the house, attributed to George Repton, are held in the RIBA drawings collection. The garden front overlooks terraces to the south and west and the park beyond, with rather obscured views north-west across the valley to Churchill church.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** Sarsden House garden lies adjacent to the west and south fronts, and from here the pleasure grounds, laid out much as Repton suggested in his Red Book of 1796, extend south down to the lake. A formal terrace lies adjacent to the west front, approached via George Repton's 1820s loggia, and enclosed on the west and north sides by a contemporary stone balustrade (listed grade II), probably also by George Repton, with extensive views south-west out over the west park. The terrace is laid out as a formal parterre with three panels of lawn recently planted with box, holly and yew, and two small circular pools at the centre of the outer panels (? late C20 feature), the whole encircled by gravel paths and overlooked by the Repton greenhouse at the south end of the east side. South of this lies an informal lawn, planted with two mature copper beech trees close to the boundary with the park, from which the lawn is separated by an iron fence. The lawn is bisected west to east by a low retaining wall, with a late C20 formal rectangular terrace on the east side close to the House. The lawn extends east, merging into the north end of the pleasure grounds, surrounded by a shrubbery. A path leads south through the 'neck' of the pleasure grounds, planted with mature trees and ornamental shrubs, particularly cedars, to the lake side, where it overlooks the rustic boathouse at the east end of the lake, and the bridge at the south-west end. A path leads around the perimeter of the lake, formerly two fishponds joined and informalised probably by Repton. The path runs west, joining the course of the former east drive, then leads south across the dam, screened by mature trees, crosses the rusticated stone bridge (H Repton c 1796, listed grade II), and runs eastwards up the hillside, past the site of the former C18 rotunda (probably demolished late C18),

which overlooked the lake. The path runs north, leaving the course of the old drive, to the boathouse (H Repton c 1796, listed grade II), built in the form of a rusticated classical temple overlooking the lake, which masks an enclosed boathouse to the rear. The path continues west, curving north to return along the east side of the 'neck' of the pleasure grounds to the House.

In the late C17 (White Kennett 1695) elaborate, formal compartmentalised gardens enclosed by a wall, surrounded the House to the west, east and south. Almost nothing of these features remains visible, apart possibly from some earthworks (Debois 1992), but the five early to mid C18 gate piers which stand in various parts of the estate were probably moved from here when the formal garden was dismantled in the later C18.

The gardens at Sarsden Glebe lie adjacent to the south and west fronts. A small, formal terrace below the loggia on the south front is entered from the forecourt to the east. It is laid to lawn with perimeter borders, and overlooks a low, stone terrace wall to the south, beyond which are views over the park and distant countryside. A path leads from the south terrace to the west front, with stone steps set into earth terraces descending the hillside to the west. From the lowest terrace a grass path leads north into the small wooded pleasure ground which encircles the north side of the house and service buildings, with views from here north and north-east along the Sars Brook valley towards Sarsgrove Wood. A small shrubbery containing mature yews and other evergreens lies east of the house, on the south side of the kitchen garden.

**PARK** The park at Sarsden House, all laid to pasture, was not laid out until the 1770s, and generally seems to have been modified to follow Repton's subsequent recommendations, although it was not extended south from the lakes as he suggested. It is divided into three sections, those to the east and west being divided by the pleasure grounds, and that to the north being separated from the House and pleasure grounds by Sarsden Lane. The east park is enclosed by belts, containing clumps of mature lime trees, with restricted views west to the distant countryside. Kennels and associated buildings (demolished 1950s) formerly stood at the east corner, some having been designed in Picturesque style by George Repton. At the south-west corner lies the remains of a third fishpond or lake, restored in 1998, which was not drawn by Repton into his scheme for the pleasure grounds. The west park runs down from a plateau by the House to the south-west, containing the remains of park trees formerly abundantly planted (OS 1885), with extensive views to the south and west. These two park areas formerly contained formal avenues extending out from the House (OS 1885; Debois 1992), probably remains of the late C17/early C18 landscape. The north park, known in the C18 as the Little Park, runs down the slope to the Sars Brook, and contains various mature park trees, with views up the hillside beyond to Churchill and its prominent church on the skyline. Formerly a drive or path curved north across this area, connecting the north drive with the entrance to the Glebe park (OS 1885).

The Glebe park, laid to pasture, surrounds the Glebe house and pleasure grounds to the north, west and south, and lies on the north-west-facing slope of the Sars Brook valley, overlooking Churchill and its church to the north-west. The park is largely edged with belts of mature trees, with further mature trees scattered throughout, and a particularly fine clump of oaks immediately south of the house.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The rectangular, brick-walled kitchen garden, erected in the C19 north-west of an earlier kitchen garden present in the C18, lies 300m north-east of Sarsden House, entered through several arched doorways in the walls. The main entrance, via a doorway in the north wall, is flanked by the two-storey, brick gardener's house to the west and the site of former glasshouses to the east. A range of low bothies runs along the north side of the north wall. The garden, following prolonged neglect, is currently being restored as a productive and ornamental feature and farmed for organic produce.

Sarsden Glebe also has a walled garden (about half the size of that at Sarsden House), lying adjacent to and to the north-east of the Glebe, largely built of stone with some brick facing on the interior of the walls. It is still under cultivation.

#### REFERENCES

White Kennett, *Parochial Antiquities ... in the Counties of Oxford and Bucks* (1695), pls 8, 9 N Pevsner and J Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), p 752 J Garden History 6, no 2 (1986), pp 89-111 A Report on the landscape of Sarsden Park, Oxfordshire, (Debois Landscape Group 1991, revised 1992)

Maps A Map of the Several Farms and Grounds of Denys and John Rolle ... , 1788 (Oxfordshire County Record Office) Enclosure Map, Sarsden, 1791 (Oxfordshire County Record Office) R Davis, *A New Map of the County of Oxford ...*, 1797

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A plan of the new pond in the intended approach to Sarsden House, 1818 (Oxfordshire County Record Office) A Bryant, Map of the County of Oxford ..., surveyed 1823

OS 1" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1830 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1922 OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1922

Archival items H Repton, Red Book for Sarsden, 1796 (private collection)

Description written: May 1998 Amended: March 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: March 2000

## 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.