

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

CHICKSANDS PRIORY

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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**CHICKSANDS PRIORY**

Name: CHICKSANDS PRIORY

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Campton and Chicksands

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.039647  
Longitude: -0.36473633  
National Grid Reference: TL 12259 39178  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

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label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1000574  
Date first listed: 30-Nov-1986

## Details

A country house surrounded by an C18/C19 landscape park.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Chicksands Priory, founded in the 1150s, was a large Gilbertine house with fifty-five canons and 120 nuns, of which the present house represents the southern, canons' cloister, which was attached to the church to the north. The Priory, dissolved in 1539, passed into the Osborne family in 1576, who continued in ownership until 1935. The Osbornes lived in the relatively unaltered Priory buildings during the C16 and C17, until, in the mid C18, Sir Danvers Osborne employed Isaac Ware (d 1766) to modernise the house, removing the medieval features. George Osborne, Sir Danvers' son, seems to have built Gothic garden buildings in the 1760s (Collett-White 1995), employing James Wyatt (1714-1813) c 1813 to rework the house in Gothic Revival style. Wyatt may also have designed several garden buildings. Chicksands was sold by the Osbornes to the Government in 1935, the estate being developed for military use and a considerable amount of parkland being built upon. The land remains in Ministry of Defence ownership, with the house undergoing restoration (1997) and intended for residential occupation.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Chicksands lies 2km west of the village of Shefford and 10km south-east of Bedford. The 55ha site is bounded largely by mid to late C20 military housing and other developments, together with agricultural land and woodland. The estate lies on the Greensand Ridge, the southern half on largely level ground, with a low rise to the north and north-west. The setting includes the outlying woodland of Rowney Warren to the north, seen across former parkland from the north boundary, with the ornamental facade of the Firstlodge Farm buildings adjacent to the south side of the wood and east side of the north drive.

Long Drive is a track which bisects, from north to south, Chicksands and Pedley Woods, which lie adjacent to each other some 2km west of the Priory, across farmland (outside the registered area). Within the woodland two obelisks are sited at the north and south ends of Long Drive. The first, sited at the north end (0.5km south-west of Appley Corner, NGR TL104 406, listed grade II), dates from the late C18 or early C19; it was erected by George Osborne and was possibly designed by James Wyatt. The second, sited at the south end of Long Drive (NGR TL097 395), is dated 1889.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The current (1997) main approaches are from the north and from the south, along the almost straight Chicksands Avenue. The south entrance is marked by a single-storey stone lodge (listed grade II) with gabled attic, dated 1866, lying west of the drive entrance. From here Chicksands Avenue runs due north as a road, originally crossing the lower lake 450m south-east of the Priory via an C18/C19 three-arched brick bridge with a brick parapet, but now diverted several metres to the east and carried by a late C20 bridge. The drive to the house leaves Chicksands Avenue, curving north-west across the park to arrive at the south entrance to the entrance court, which is flanked by stone gate piers, on the east front of the Priory. The court is bounded by a stone ha-ha lying 40m from the east, entrance front, with a tarmac carriage sweep by the entrance to the house. The ha-ha is not shown on the 1881 or 1901 OS maps. Chicksands Avenue continues north across the park from the bridge to the top of an incline; from here Rowney Warren wood is visible across former parkland (outside the area here registered), which the Avenue then crosses, running through the wood, and emerging on the Bedford Road. A spur south-west off Chicksands Avenue breaks away 300m north-east of the Priory, arriving at the north entrance to the entrance court, also marked by stone piers, opposite the entrance to the stable yard. It then curves south to the carriage sweep.

East Lodge (listed grade II), lying 1km south-east of the Priory, is a single-storey stone building with gabled attic, dated 1866, and almost identical to the south lodge. It is situated at the east entrance to a former drive from the edge of Shefford. The entrance, lying close to the east front of the lodge, off the Ampthill road, is flanked by two stone gate piers 1.5m high, linked by curved stone walls (listed grade II) topped by wrought-iron railings. The drive originally curved north-west through Campton Plantation but is now (1997) built over at its northern end close to Chicksands Avenue Bridge, although the southern half may survive as a track.

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**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Chicksands Priory (listed grade I) lies towards the centre of the park, a two-storey rendered country house incorporating the remains of the medieval Gilbertine priory. The east, entrance front overlooks the east park, with views beyond towards distant, low hills. The front is dominated by a single-storey central stone porch with a pointed-arched doorway and ornate embattled parapet and pinnacles. The south front overlooks an open lawn and the upper lake beyond, with a projecting central bay in Gothic style, with pointed openings. The west front is approached by a late C20 road from the development to the north-west, having been without vehicular access before this was constructed, the road arriving at a large tarmac apron lying adjacent to this front. The stable yard, adjacent to the north front, is surrounded by a group of late C18 red-brick buildings, with, to the east, a two-storey, four-centred archway giving access from the entrance court.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The majority of the gardens lies south of the Priory, consisting of a largely level lawn extending south to the upper lake, flanked by trees and shrubs, in particular yews, bounded to the west by a clipped yew hedge and to the east by the park. The Orangery (c 1800, listed grade II\*), probably designed by James Wyatt for Sir George Osborne, stands 100m north of the east front, on a circuit of the former pleasure grounds (now (1997) largely lost) surrounding the walled garden. The building is in Gothic style, of red brick with a timber facade including slender Gothic clustered half columns separating the full length sash windows. Flanked by mature yews, it faces south onto a lawn partly surrounded by clipped yew hedges. The lawn runs down to the entrance court. On the west side, close to the stable entrance, stands a 4m high obelisk (1816, listed grade II) of rendered brick with an inscription commemorating peace after the Battle of Waterloo. This monument has been moved twice, initially in 1856 to woodland on the current western park boundary, and in 1975 to its current position, having first been sited possibly in Chicksands Wood.

The 1881 and 1901 OS maps show a circular walk, now largely lost, running north from the east front of the house past the Orangery, encircling the east, north and west outer walls of the walled garden, returning to the south-west corner of the Priory. The walk formed a wooded circuit with conifers and broadleaved trees, a path from the north boundary giving access to Priory Farm immediately to the north, and also leading south into the outer walled garden. A further spur from the circular path on the west side gave access through the outer wall to the inner walled garden.

**PARK** The park lies adjacent to the Priory and gardens to the north-west, east and south. The dominant features are the two narrow lakes, formed from the widening of the River Flit, which bisect the south park from west to east. The upper, west lake, separated from the lower, east lake by a semicircular cascade, is crossed from the north bank by a late C20 wooden bridge, which leads onto a small wooded peninsular emerging into the lower lake and giving access to the south bank. The top of the cascade is shown without a bridge in a print of 1781 (Bedfordshire Record Office), which shows the view from the south, north towards the Priory, with the park running up to the south and east fronts of the Priory; a c 1820 watercolour (Bedfordshire Record Office) of the scene from the north depicts a rustic bridge crossing the cascade. Much of the park has been developed and the remaining area has lost many of its trees. The small areas of woodland to the north-west appear to have been significant: Temple Grove contained a temple, now gone (1997), and walks throughout, with the remains of a chapel within or close by the south boundary; Druids and Penserose Groves have names which may be of C18 origin, but late C19 mapping (OS 1881) shows no features within the woodland.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The now disused kitchen garden lies north of, and adjacent to, the stable court, separated from it by a stable building and a red-brick wall, and entered via a pillared doorway in the wall. The garden, divided into two sections, consists of the west and south sides of an outer garden which, when complete, encircled the square inner garden. Red-brick walls (listed grade II), parts of which are C18, surround the inner and outer areas, with, at the centre of the inner garden, a range of lean-to glasshouses against a wall with storage sheds behind, some with wooden produce storage structures.

#### REFERENCES

W C Grayson, Chicksands, a Millennium History (1992), (copy at Bedfordshire Record Office) J Collett-White (ed), Inventories of Bedfordshire Country Houses, 1714-1830, (Bedfordshire Historical Record Society 1995), pp 23-7

Maps T Jefferys, The County of Bedford, 1765 A Bryant, Map of the County of Bedford, 1826 Plan of the Chicksands estate, 1855 (Bedfordshire Record Office)

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OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881 2nd edition published 1901 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: September 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: May 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.