

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

TACKLEY WATER GARDEN

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**TACKLEY WATER GARDEN**

Name:	TACKLEY WATER GARDEN
County:	Oxfordshire
District:	West Oxfordshire (District Authority)
Parish:	Tackley
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.879595 Longitude: -1.3089070 National Grid Reference: SP 47669 20340, SP 48059 20498 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001109 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

## Details

Substantial remains of an early C17 formal water garden, depicted in Gervase Markham's *Cheape and good husbandry* ... , 1623, associated with the site of an early C17 house and related structures.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

John Harborne (1582-1651), a merchant of Middle Temple, London, bought both the manors of Tackley, Hill Court (now known as Tackley Park) and Base Court (now known as Court Farm), in 1612, and moved to the village in 1613, becoming High Sheriff of Oxfordshire in 1632. Around 1615 Harborne built a new manor house (now gone, although the manorial complex of granaries and a dovecote remains) west of the village green, together with attached terraced gardens on the east-facing hillside above, and a detached formal water garden 250m east of the green, close to Base Court. The water garden was never completed, lacking a fourth major pond, but a plan of the garden in its projected completed state was shown by Gervase Markham in the third edition of *Cheape and good husbandry* for the well-ordering of all beasts, and fowls, and for the generall cure of their Diseases (1623), published by Harborne's friend Roger Jackson. The water garden is first mentioned in the 1653 sale documents for Base Court and associated land, and is shown on an estate map of 1787 (Garden Hist 1994). Harborne's son, John, sold the two manors in the 1650s, the water garden, which from then on remained largely unaltered, being associated with Court Farm, as it still is (1998). The water features and earthworks were cleared and restored in the 1960s by the then owner, Sir Harald Peake.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The remains of structures related to John Harborne's 1615 house, which stood c 300m west of the water gardens, stand to the west of Tackley village street, on level agricultural land which slopes up to the west beyond the site of the house. The related water gardens lie on the east side of the village, at the south edge of the later C20 developments of the village of Nethercott. The c 2ha level garden is bounded to the east by agricultural land, to the west by Court Farm and its associated paddock, to the south by Tackley Park, and to the north by housing, a school and its playing field. The setting is largely rural, with the C18-C19 landscaped Tackley Park adjacent to the south.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The area occupied by the house and its garden terraces is entered via a stone gateway (listed grade II) bearing Harborne's arms, dated 1615. The gateway, standing at the south end of the village green, 250m south-

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west of the water garden, is flanked by stone walls, opening from the west side of the village street onto what is now a field containing the c 1ha remains of three garden terraces rising up the hillside to the west. The gateway may have been aligned with Harborne's house at the bottom of the slope 50m to the west. North of the site of the house stand a stone dovecote (1616, listed grade II) and stables (c 1616, listed grade II) which were associated with Harborne's house.

The main approach to the water gardens is now (1998) via a public footpath from the west, which crosses Court Farm paddock which separates the field containing the remains of Harborne's house and gardens from the water gardens. The path enters the paddock off the east side of the village street, south of the green. It crosses the paddock following a line running north of a possible C17 access route from Harborne's manor house to the ponds along the old Moor Lane, now marked by the boundary with Tackley Park to the south (ibid). The approach walk to the water gardens spurs off the footpath 200m east of the road, adjacent to the north boundary of Tackley Park, running north for 75m, flanked to the east by a row of limes and to the west by a row of cypresses and flanking ditches. The approach walk, along the main axis of the garden, arrives at the main entrance at the garden's south end, marked by an arched stone gateway with iron gates (listed grade II), dated 1620 on the outer side, and flanked by short lengths of 3m high screening stone wall terminating at the flanking ditches. A raised walk along a grass path, planted with an avenue of semi-mature beeches, extends north beyond the gateway for c 75m, above flanking parallel ditches, before arriving at the south end of the main garden. This walk offers views east across the adjacent fields towards low hills in the middle distance, and west towards the hillside on which the garden earthworks associated with Harborne's house lie.

**GARDENS** The 150m x 150m main body of the garden is centred on a series of ornamental but functional fishponds and channels, laid out on a regular pattern on either side of the central axial walk extending from the entrance, and separated by grass walkways varying in width from 6m to 10m. The water enters the garden at the west boundary via a channel from an irregular feeder pond to the west, fed by a spring (Tackwell) within it, with a second pond lying further west. The southern part of the garden contains two triangular ponds flanking the central axial walk, each with two parallel channels along their outer sides. A walk runs along the north side of these ponds and forms the main cross axis of the garden. North of the westernmost triangular pond lies a larger square pond. East of the main axis, in the space where a mirroring square pond should lie, stands a low-lying, rectangular wooded area, c 0.5ha in extent, containing banks and ditches which do not relate to Harborne's water garden. The three ponds, up to 2m deep, contain central islands of the same shape as the ponds in which they lie, reached by narrow isthmuses. The islands are scarped and stepped up towards their centres, these indicating the remains of upper levels once reached by steps opposite the isthmuses, the positions of which are still discernible. The square island contains the remains of two tiers of walks, and several mature trees including a large beech. The islands are largely covered by shrub growth.

A linear mound, c 1.6m high on the south side, runs along the north side of the square pond, adjacent to a grass path which separates the mound and pond. It is planted with a row of mature pine trees along its south side, cut into by a C20 external drain creating a steeply sloping north side. The mound gradually decreases in height to ground level towards the east end.

Harborne's water garden seems to have served two main purposes: as an elaborate formal garden of the type fashionable in the early C17 and as an angling facility (Harborne is thought to have been a keen angler), as well as having the subsidiary use of storing fish. The design provides a high ratio of bank to water, giving easier access to the fish and likely sites for wildfowl to nest. Different types of fish may have been kept in each pond.

It appears that the gardens, in their projected but never completed design, provided the model for Markham's plan in the 3rd edition of his *Cheape and good husbandry*. The plan appeared again in his *A way to get wealth* (1631, 5th edition onwards) and his *The Country Husbandman* (1638).

An estate map of 1787 shows the water garden in very similar layout to now (1998), with the woodland in the north-east corner labelled as Twyham's Spinney, and several long, narrow closes in different ownership, including St John's College, Oxford, running north from the north boundary of the garden. From this it is possible to speculate that the divided ownership of this area, and particularly the reluctance of St John's College to sell land, may have prevented Harborne in the 1620s from consolidating his own land holding and thus from constructing the intended north-east, square pond shown in Markham's plan.

#### REFERENCES

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G Markham, *Cheape and good husbandry for the well-ordering of all beasts, and fowls, and for the generall cure of their Diseases* (3rd edn 1623) F Woodward, *Oxfordshire Parks* (1982), pp 12-13, 15, 29 Victoria History of the County of Oxfordshire 11, (1983), pp 194-9 J Harrington, *Tracks Through Time* (1992) *Garden History* 22, no 1 (1994), pp 37-63  
Maps R Davis, *A New Map of the County of Oxford ...*, 1797 A Bryant, *Map of the County of Oxford ...*, surveyed 1823 Tackley Tithe map, 1845 (Oxfordshire County Record Office) A T Jones (CPRE), Tackley, 1978/1990 (copy on EH file)  
OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881-2 2nd edition published 1898 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880  
Description written: March 1998 Amended: March 1998 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.