

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HEYTHROP PARK

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HEYTHROP PARK

Name: HEYTHROP PARK

County: Oxfordshire

District: West Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Enstone

County: Oxfordshire

District: West Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Heythrop

County: Oxfordshire

District: West Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Over Norton

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.943258
Longitude: -1.4900110
National Grid Reference: SP3515327318
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000489
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

An early C18 country house with extensive early C18 formal and informal pleasure grounds. Mid to late C18 lakes and cascades; later formal additions to gardens c 1870s.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury, bought the Heythrop estate in 1697, employing Thomas Archer to erect Heythrop House, 1706-11. By 1713 the 4km long Grand Avenue was in existence (VCH 1983), and it is possible that the Royal Gardener, Henry Wise (1653-1738), who was working and living on the nearby Blenheim Palace (qv) estate at this time, may have been involved with the formal layout (Wise was, as Royal Gardener, under the control of Shrewsbury, both before and after the latter returned from a visit to Italy with an Italian wife in 1707). The other avenues were probably planted a little later (ibid). The informal features centring on the Bath House in the south-west corner of The Wilderness seem to have been in existence by 1710, and if so are a very early example of this type, pre-dating those at Rousham (qv). The estate maps produced by Bainbridge in the 1790s show the landscape much as it must have been laid out in the early C18, including areas of formal and informal pleasure grounds, the formal Grand Avenue with flanking subsidiary avenues, and the entrance drive from the north-east crossing the two

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narrow lakes. The lakes were probably created in the mid to late C18, together with the cascade walks and adjacent woodland walks (M Batey pers comm, January 1998). In 1820 the Earl of Shrewsbury rented the house to Henry Charles Somerset, Duke of Beaufort. In 1831 the house was badly damaged by fire and reduced to an uninhabitable shell, but was bought in 1869 by the railway magnate Thomas Brassey for his son, Albert. Alfred Waterhouse restored and extended the house, at the same time as the formal terraces were constructed against the south front. The estate sold in lots in 1922, the house being bought by the Society of Jesus and used as a college. The Society built two accommodation blocks in the grounds and employed W H Romaine Walker to remodel the service wings. The National Westminster Bank bought the house and park in 1969, adding further buildings in the grounds for use as a staff training college, in which use it remains (1997).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Heythrop Park lies 4km east of Chipping Norton in north Oxfordshire, adjacent to the villages of Enstone to the south and Heythrop to the north. The c 240ha site is bounded largely by agricultural land and woodland, straddling a spur of level ground between two steep valleys, each with a stream at the bottom, running north-west to south-east, parallel to, and 0.5-1km north of the A44 Oxford to Stratford road. The two streams join 1km south-east of the house at the south-east end of the pleasure grounds, from here continuing south-east, close to the south drive, along the valley bottom to Enstone. The central axis of the landscape runs along the exposed spine of land dividing the two valleys, with lateral avenues plunging down from the house into the valleys, and to the confluence of the streams to the south-east. The setting is largely rural, with various settlements and villages distributed around the perimeter and long panoramic views from the house and terraces.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The present main approach, from the south-east (Enstone) end of the site, enters 2km south-east of the house, off the B4030 on the north side of the village of Enstone, past a two-storey stone lodge (C19) set back off the road. The winding south drive, flanked by grass verges, ascends the small, wooded valley, emerging 1.1km north of the entrance into more open ground, continuing west along the south side of the pleasure grounds, then into the wooded Wilderness, through which it curves up to the square forecourt lying adjacent to the north-west, entrance front of the house. The north-east and south-west sides of the forecourt are formed by the two service wings; the north-west boundary is defined by a stone balustrade with a central gateway flanked by stone piers through which the drive enters, dividing to encircle a central panel of lawn and arriving at the imposing stone steps sheltered by a large portico. The south drive was created by Albert Brassey after his father had bought the estate for him in 1870, to facilitate access from Enstone, and is shown in place by 1886 (OS).

A second, north, drive enters off the Enstone to Heythrop village lane, 1.5km north-east of the house, passing a two-storey, gabled stone lodge dated 1878. The drive runs due south-west, with a view of the north-east front, before descending the hillside at the bottom of which it widens out to form two flanking lakes (formed mid C18). The drive crosses between the lakes, carried by Archer's bridge (early C18, listed grade II), which disguises the later dam between the upper, west lake and the lower, east lake. It continues up the valley side, flanked by an avenue of beech trees, in line with the north-east front of the house which gradually appears rising above the horizon, before the drive curves west 300m from the house to arrive at the entrance to the forecourt. This drive was built at the same time as the house, in the early C18, and is shown in the late C18 (Bainbridge, 1790s) flanked by an avenue of square and round platoons of trees.

A third drive enters 600m west of the house, from a track off the A44. It crosses the stream via a late C20 stone bridge (replacing an earlier stone bridge) before passing a group of stone cottages to the north, one of which is decorated in Picturesque style and seems to have been a lodge. The drive continues north up the hillside, turning south-east towards the house onto the Grand Avenue track 500m from the forecourt.

A fourth drive, now (1990s) a track, enters c 550m south-east of the house, from a track leading north-east off the A44. The track crosses the stream via a further stone bridge standing 350m south of the house, before joining the main drive a few metres to the north of this.

The Grand Avenue approach from the north-west, now largely a farm track, was the main approach to Archer's house in the early C18. Entering off the A361 Banbury to Chipping Norton road 3.5km north-west of the house, past Banbury Lodge (C19), the drive links Heythrop lane to the forecourt on the north-west front of the house, passing Heythrop church from where it continues

along the north side of the Avenue. Some platoons of mature trees survive towards the north end, and further replacement planting has taken place at the south end, but in between the trees have largely gone. At the south end the Avenue flanks a large lawn laid out with a golf course. Several bungalows recently (1990s) built along the Heythrop to Chipping Norton lane, which crosses the Avenue 2km from the house, sever the course of the Avenue and are prominent in the view from the house. The Grand Avenue was constructed in the early C18, together with the north avenue and the house, and is shown in the late C18 (Bainbridge, 1790s) marked by square and round platoons of trees, flanked along the southern half by several single ranks of trees.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Heythrop Park (Thomas Archer 1706-11, remodelled Alfred Waterhouse 1870, listed grade II*) stands towards the south-east end of the site, at the south end of a spine of land running north-west and above falling ground to the south-west, north-east and south-east. The baroque, two-storey stone building is flanked by two stone wings, joined to it by short, arcaded links. The wings were rebuilt by Waterhouse in the 1870s and altered by W H Romaine Walker in the 1920s, with further alterations in the later C20. The northern, Shrewsbury wing appears to have been the stable block and still surrounds a courtyard with access through an archway from a service yard to the north-east; the southern, Archer wing incorporates a C19 conservatory adjacent to the garden front of the house. The house enjoys extensive views, across its own parkland to farmland beyond but particularly down the South Avenue and across Enstone to further countryside.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The house is flanked to north-east and south by several formal and informal features, based on the early C18 design with later insertions. From the garden door in the centre of the south-east front a set of double steps (early C18) leads down to an imposing formal terrace with stone balustrading (1871) overlooking a broad, level lawn, divided into two panels by a central gravel path. The lawn, reached from the terrace by two sets of broad, stone steps, is bounded to the south-east by a stone ha-ha (ha-ha and terrace listed grade II) dividing it from the large informal south lawn sloping down to the South Avenue. The terrace overlooks two formal parterres (1870s), the Italian Gardens, which flank the main block of the house and front the wings. Bainbridge's map of 1794 suggests that in the late C18 the garden door gave direct access to the open south lawn and the South Avenue beyond.

The terrace path leads south-west from the garden door in the south-east front, offering a vista across the valley. The gravel path is cut at right angles 75m south-west of the house by a straight grass ride. This ride leads 500m south-east through woodland, part of the early C18 Wilderness, running parallel with the south lawn and avenue, to the C18 walled garden. Informal paths lead south from the terrace path through The Wilderness, within which a car park (late C20) has replaced a C19 rosary. A straight ride leads south from the drive 200m south-west of the house, down to a three-niche stone alcove (C18, based on the Italian nymphaeum) standing 400m from the house. The path continues south-east for 100m, reaching the stone-built Octagon Bath and Bath House (both early C18) which flank it within a grove of yew trees. A spring rises in the small Octagon Bath and is channelled down the hillside a short way, under the path, to the adjacent stone Bath House through which it flows in a stone channel, emerging to run down the hillside to the main stream. The Bath House contains two circular windows, one facing south, down the valley, and the other east. Stephen Switzer probably refers to this area, including the winding wilderness walk, the Bath House and miniature cascade, in his *Ichnographia Rustica* (1718); when speaking of natural gardens he says 'the first attempt I ever saw [he visited in 1710], and which in a great measure prompted these thoughts, was at the seat of the Duke of Shrewsbury's in Oxfordshire'.

The path continues south-east, crossing the C19 drive into the main body of The Wilderness which retains several straight rides based on C18 lines, as well as, close to the centre, a substantial C19 pool and rock garden with a grotto incorporated. The semicircular stone Alcove Bower (C18, listed grade II) stands 700m south-east of the house, at the south boundary of The Wilderness, beyond the overgrown oval pond, surrounded by trees, which terminates the South Avenue. The Bower, with a wide, depressed arched opening on the south-east front, stands above a stone revetment overlooking the open ground to the south through which runs the south drive, the view south being terminated by woodland. Across the South Avenue, north of The Wilderness, lies the Woody Plantation (marked on many C20 maps as The Wilderness). This wooded area is crossed by a path connecting The Wilderness with Kite Grove and the Cascade Walks to the east.

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The Cascade Walks run alongside the stream, with a path on either side of the river rising up the wooded valley to the two narrow lakes to the north. A series of seven C18 cascades, two of which are crossed by wooden bridges, restricts the flow of the stream. The Moss House (c 1780, recently (late C20) restored) stands close to the third cascade down the series, some 500m east of the house, its mossy, conical roof covering a small octagonal hut with gothic window openings and doorway, formerly paved with horses' teeth and covered with reeds. At this point the path on the east bank crosses to join that on the west bank and together they continue north as one path to the south lake, running alongside it and emerging on the north drive close to the Archer bridge. It appears that in the late C18 ornamental paths ran west through Fattening Field Copse, lying above and to the south of the lower lake, accessed from Woody Plantation across Fattening Field, continuing west across the north drive into Foxberry Wood and through the centre of this wood, creating an informal, 2.5km long wooded walk (Bainbridge, 1790s).

North-east of the house, reached by an extension from the broad gravel path above the terrace ha-ha, lies a formal C18 feature, the Octagon Walks, situated within a rectangular grove of yews and other trees. Eight short, straight walks, flanked in places by mature yew trees, radiate out from a sunken, central, circular bowling green which is encircled by a gravel path. Three of the walks are hard-surfaced, the others being grassed. The area to the north-west, known as the Archery Lawn, is intermittently bounded by a ha-ha, in places partially filled in, which extends north-east, terminating 400m from the house. The Octagon Walks connect the house with the late C19 walled garden to the north-east, built in the former Great Paddock and interrupting an C18 path from the Octagon Walks down to the walks in Fattening Field Copse and the riverside walks beyond (Bainbridge, 1794).

PARK There is no park as such, the open park-like spaces relating rather to the approaches and pleasure grounds.

KITCHEN GARDEN Heythrop possesses two rectangular walled gardens, located entirely separately. The C18 walled garden, now used as a Christmas tree plantation, stands 500m south-east of the house, in the south-east corner of The Wilderness. The stone walls, lined internally with brick, each contain a central gateway, except for the north side which has a depressed arched opening to a semicircular shelter; Wilderness Cottages, mostly C20, rebuilt on the site of earlier gardeners' cottages, stand in the west corner. In the late C18 (Bainbridge, 1790s) the garden was divided into two rectangles, each with cruciform paths, with a detached glasshouse along the west wall of the northern half. By the 1870s this walled garden was used as an orchard and kitchen garden (VCH 1983).

The late C19 walled garden stands 300m east of the house, reached via a spur from the north drive. The long north wall retains outhouses and glasshouses, and at the centre a tower (formerly part of the gardeners' bothy), beneath which is the main entrance from the former yard to the north-west. The brick Head Gardener's cottage stands in the north corner. The garden retains its late C19 (OS 1886) cruciform path pattern with perimeter path, and is now an ornamental feature with perimeter borders and panels of lawn. An ornamental iron gate in the west wall gives access directly from the house via the Octagon Walks. The open area to the north, formerly a frame and glasshouse yard and now enclosed by woodland, contains a car park.

REFERENCES

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OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885(6 2nd edition published 1900 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880 2nd edition published 1900

Description written: January 1998 Amended: March 1999; April 1999; March 2000; September 2001 Register Inspector: SR Edited: September 2000

Legal

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