

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BATTLE ABBEY

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BATTLE ABBEY

Name: BATTLE ABBEY

County: East Sussex

District: Rother (District Authority)

Parish: Battle

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.911590
Longitude: 0.48465922
National Grid Reference: TQ 74769 15398
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.localisation: [50.9106496925818,0.490115703235797], [50.9098911307797,0.488838118486023],
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[50.9110267911137,0.489699512794498], [50.9106496925818,0.490115703235797]

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000309
Date first listed: 25-Mar-1987

Details

A monastic site with a few surviving features of C16 and C19 gardening activity, set within a C19 park laid out in and around the site of the Battle of Hastings.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Battle Abbey was established as a Benedictine foundation in c 1070 by William the Conqueror, as a memorial to his victory over the English at the battle which took place on the site in 1066. The Abbey church was completed by 1094, followed by the remaining permanent buildings of the cloister and outer court. The Abbey was originally endowed with all the land within a league (c 2.5km) of the high altar, which was sited on the spot where King Harold fell. The existence of the Abbey led directly to the establishment of the town of Battle.

Considerable alteration and reconstruction of the Abbey took place in the late C13 and continued throughout the Middle Ages. In 1538, at the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, the Abbey and a substantial area of land was given to Sir Anthony Browne, the King's Master of the Horse. Browne demolished the Abbey church, chapter house and part of the cloister and adapted the west range of buildings as a residence. Browne died in 1548 and his son was created first Viscount Montague. The estate remained in the hands of this family until the sixth Viscount sold it in 1715 to Sir Thomas Webster. It was owned for a period from 1857 until 1901 by the Duke and Duchess of Cleveland until bought back into the Webster family by Sir Augustus, the eighth Baronet. In 1922 he leased the west range of the cloister buildings to Battle Abbey School which still occupies them. The estate was purchased for the nation in 1976 and is in the guardianship of English Heritage.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Battle Abbey lies immediately to the south-west of the main A2100 London to Hastings road, at the south end of Battle High Street and on the crest of a south-facing ridge which falls away to the south and south-west giving fine, distant views towards the coast. The 54ha site is bounded to the north by the A2100 and enclosed along 250m of this boundary by the only remaining section of the C14 wall (listed grade I) with, here, a wall-top walk, which originally enclosed the whole monastic precinct. To the north-west and west a stock-proof fence and a perimeter footpath define the boundaries, beyond which is a landscape of rolling pasture and woodlands. The south-east, continuously hedged boundary, is formed by Powdermill Lane, beyond which lies further wooded farmland.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the Abbey grounds is through the Great Gatehouse (listed grade I) in the north boundary wall. The Gatehouse dominates Abbey Green (the forecourt car park on its north side) and the view south down Battle High Street. A wide, gravelled drive leads south from the Gatehouse's vaulted passageways between open lawns which formed the Abbey's outer court up to the mid C16. Both a drawing of c 1700 and an engraving by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck dated 1737 (guidebook 1994) show the courtyard planted with a few simple lines of trees. The present Gatehouse, which is rectangular in plan and has octagonal turrets at each corner, dates largely from a reconstruction begun in 1338. Now (1998) forming the main visitor entrance and exhibition rooms, the Gatehouse originally provided both security and accommodation for the Abbot's guests or visiting officials.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Only the west range of the Abbey (listed grade I) has survived as habitable buildings. These lie to the south-east of the drive, c 80m from the Gatehouse and with the entrance on the west front. The range was rebuilt in the C13 as accommodation for the Abbot's guests and enlarged during the C14 and C15. It was adapted after the Dissolution as a country house, by Sir Anthony Browne. At the south end of the range, on the west side, is the library, built by Henry Clutton for the Duke of Cleveland in 1858. The range was extensively damaged by fire in 1931 and restored by the architect Sir Harold Brakespear.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The west range opens on its east side onto a large, square lawn, enclosed by a wall at the north end and with perimeter gravel paths. This was formerly the cloister garden of the Abbey. By the early C19, formal planting beds had been laid out in the cloister (Bygone Battle, unattributed illustration of c 1830); these were developed into complex box-edged parterres with bedding by the Duchess of Cleveland in the late C19.

South of the cloister, a further rectangular lawn, with the ground plan marked in the grass, is the site of the Abbey's south range which contained the frater and the kitchen. Immediately south of the kitchen site, on the south side of a high wall, is an area of grass enclosed at the east end by an arch-shaped solid brick wall. These walls mark the site of the conservatory built by the Duchess in the mid to late C19. It replaced vineries built by the Webster family between the C18 and the early C19 (History of Battle 1877). There was a garden of herbaceous borders and bedding on the south side of the conservatory.

West of the conservatory site, and running from east to west, is a 70m long grass and gravel terrace which forms the surface of the undercroft to the Abbey's former south guest range (listed grade I). This had been demolished by the late C18 (guidebook). Below the terrace to the south, and at the level of entry to the undercroft, is the wide, gravelled, Lower Terrace walk. It extends c 170m to both east and west and commands extensive views over the park and battlefield to the south. Its present form is C19. The Duchess' profuse shrub planting to the undercroft walls and the terrace border, laid out in the mid to late C19, no longer survives. South of, and parallel to, the terrace walk is a further, gently sloping, wide grass terrace which meets the park on its south side in a grass bank. Buck's view of 1737 shows lines of trees planted along the south side of the undercroft on the site of the present terraces.

North of the wall enclosing the north side of the cloister lawn are further lawns on which the ground plan of the high altar of the C11 Abbey church, which marks the spot where Harold was killed, is marked out in gravel. The lawns extend northwards to the precinct wall against which is planted a camellia walk at the west end and a yew walk at the east end. The Duchess of Cleveland introduced outdoor camellias into the gardens in the 1860s (History of Battle 1877) and the walk is probably a survival of her planting. After demolishing the Abbey church in the mid C16, Sir Anthony Browne laid out its site as a garden with a central fountain or cistern (shown on the OS 1st edition map surveyed 1873-5), and enclosed with yew walks. The garden

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was developed by the Duchess in the late C19 as a wild garden influenced by the writings of William Robinson (1838-1935). The present stable buildings were built over the west end of the garden by Sir Geoffrey Vassall Webster in the early C19.

The east side of the cloister lawn is enclosed by the surviving walls of the north/south Dorter range (listed grade I). Beyond the Dorter, a gravelled walk leads eastwards through open lawns to the icehouse and the thatched octagonal dairy (restored 1991), built by Sir Geoffrey Vassall Webster in the early C19. A further 25m east of the dairy is a small (c 0.25ha) walled garden, laid to rough grass and in use for storage. This, shown planted as an orchard divided into six plots by paths on the OS 1st edition map, was described by the Duchess of Cleveland as being an orchard in 1857, to which she added mulberry and fig trees (History of Battle 1877).

A gravelled walk leads south from the lawns around the dairy and meets with the extension eastwards of the Lower Terrace walk. The pond sited 30m east of the path junction served as a lily pond in the late C19 but was previously a horse pond, associated with adjacent stable buildings in the late C18 or early C19. A track leads eastwards to South Lodge, c 200m distant on the site's eastern boundary.

PARK The park slopes away to the south and south-west of the Abbey and is laid to pasture, the site of the battlefield lying beneath the Abbey and the parkland immediately to its south. The character of the park is that of a largely open landscape with few trees. Towards the south-east, c 200m from the southern boundary of the precinct, a chain of ponds extends c 400m south-westwards. There are three smaller ponds, connected by the scrub-lined feeder stream to a large (c 1.5ha) pond. The smaller ponds are shown on Richard Budgen's map of 1721 and on Gardner and Gream's of 1795; they may have their origin in monastic stew ponds and are referred to as such on Budgen's map. The large pond, known as New Pond, appears on the Tithe map of Battle c 1840 where it is recorded as 'the new fish pond'. The park is enclosed on the north-west boundary by a belt of woodland known as the Long Plantation which is shown on the Tithe map but not on Budgen's of 1721.

A number of field boundaries are maintained within the park, some surviving from the pattern shown on the Tithe map. Neither Budgen's map nor the Tithe map show much evidence of the establishment of a park; by the date of the OS 1st edition of 1873 however there is extensive cover of parkland trees over the south-west half of the site. In the C19, the Duchess of Cleveland planted a number of Turkey oaks in the park and many new trees were planted in the mid 1990s to replace those destroyed in the storm of 1987.

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled kitchen garden, measuring c 120m by 60m, lies on the east side of Powdermill Lane, some 200m south-west of its junction with the main A2100. The garden was laid out by the Duke and Duchess of Cleveland's gardener between 1857 and 1873 and contained fruit, vineries, peach houses and a gardener's house (History of Battle 1877). Its walls were repaired in 1997.

REFERENCES

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Maps Anthony Everenden, *The Great Park at Batle*, c 1650 (BAT 4419), (East Sussex Record Office) Richard Budgen, *Part of the Manor of Battel ...*, 1724 (Map no.7 in his *Survey Book of Battle Abbey Estate*), (East Sussex Record Office) W Gardner and T Gream, *A topographical map of the County of Sussex*, 1795 Tithe map of Battle parish, c 1840 (East Sussex Record Office) OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1873 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1910 4th edition published 1930 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1873 2nd edition published 1909 3rd edition published 1930 4th edition published 1948 Description written: March 1997 Amended: July 1998 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: February 2000

Legal

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