

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

COWLEY MANOR

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

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COWLEY MANOR

Name: COWLEY MANOR

County: Gloucestershire

District: Cotswold (District Authority)

Parish: Coberley

County: Gloucestershire

District: Cotswold (District Authority)

Parish: Cowley

County: Gloucestershire

District: Cotswold (District Authority)

Parish: Elkstone

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.827603
Longitude: -2.0529161
National Grid Reference: SO 96450 14333
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000759
Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986

Details

Mid to late C19 landscape park and formal garden with lakes and waterworks.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Pershore Abbey retained the manor of Cowley until the Dissolution. In 1542 Cowley was granted to the dean and chapter of Westminster but was leased to William Blomer until his death in 1554 (VCH 1981). In 1630 Cowley Manor was granted to the royalist Henry Brett and remained in the Brett family until 1721. After passing through several hands, James Hutchinson, a London stockbroker, became lord farmer of the manor c 1852. He purchased the freehold from the dean and chapter in 1860 and enlarged the estate by purchasing land in Brimpsfield, Elkstone, and Coberley. In c 1855 he built an Italianate house on the site of Henry Brett's 1674 house. He laid out the terraces south of the Manor and formed cascades and lakes along the River Churn. Hutchinson died in 1873 and a year later the estate was sold to Robert Richardson-Gardner, MP for Windsor. In 1882 it was purchased by William Baring-Bingham and in 1895 by James Horlick (created baronet 1914, died 1921), the founder of Horlick's Malted Milk Company (ibid), who much augmented the house and built most of the cottages in the village (Verey 1970). He was succeeded by his son Sir Ernest Burford Horlick.

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In 1928 the estate was broken up and the house, together with some land, was purchased by Sidney Allen, then passed to Cyril Heber-Percy by 1937. During the Second World War, Cowley Manor was leased to Cheltenham Ladies' College. Gloucestershire County Council bought the house, with c 250ha, in 1946, and by 1978 was using it as a conference centre and for social events; it was later used as a nursing home. The Manor and park are currently (2000) in divided private ownership; the Manor, which has recently undergone restoration work, is being converted to a hotel.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Cowley Manor stands at the east end of the village of Cowley, c 7km south of Cheltenham. The Manor is approached via a minor road leading west from the A435 which runs north/south from Cheltenham to Cirencester. The registered area of c 45ha is bounded to the east by the A435 and to the north-west by a minor road. Another minor road crosses the centre of the park from Cowley village, running south-east to the A435. Boundaries consist of wrought-iron fences, with sections of low ashlar wall around the entrances to the park. The estate is situated on gently sloping ground, the elevation varying from 250m at the south end of Cowley View (on Bubb's Hill), to 170m along the course of the River Churn, which runs from north-west to south-east, east of the Manor. From the river, the ground rises to the north, to a height of c 200m at the north-east corner of the park.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES A pair of c 2m high square ashlar piers, topped by wrought-iron finials and with pyramidal pedestals, mark the north-east entrance to the park from the A435, 600m north-east of Cowley Manor. A lodge formerly stood south of the piers (OS 1903). From the piers, a minor road continues west, then south-west, along the site boundary, to the village of Cowley and another entrance to the park, at the north-west corner of the Manor. Here, 3.5m high, square ashlar piers with banded rustications interrupted by long rectangular panels and surmounted by ball finials (which replaced finials of carved wyverns, Hutchinson's crest, in the early C20) support a pair of wrought-iron gates. A low wall extends from each pier, connecting the gateway with the service wing of the Manor (to the south) and the stable block (to the north). At intervals along the wall are square ashlar columns supporting wrought-iron railings. The mid C19 piers, gates, and railings are listed grade II. East of the gates, a short drive leads east, between strips of lawn on the south of which stand two clipped yews, to a rectangular forecourt (being removed 2000) north of the main block of the Manor.

The main entrance to the park is c 200m north-north-east of the Manor. A pair of square, c 2m high ashlar piers, with wrought-iron lantern finials, support a pair of wrought-iron gates situated c 10m south-east of the minor road, in a semicircle formed by low ashlar walls. A lodge once stood south-west of the gates (OS 1903; archival notes, 1874, GRO). A drive passes between the piers and continues south, on a curving course, along the west bank of the upper lakes, before turning west to enter the forecourt at its north-east corner.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Henry Brett built the first Cowley Manor on the site of the present house in 1674 and the footings and some of the walls of this house may remain beneath the present Manor (listed grade II). James Hutchinson had Cowley Manor extensively rebuilt, in Italianate style, in c 1855-60 to designs by George Somers Clarke (1825-82). In the late 1890s, R A Briggs, for Sir James Horlick, extended the main body to the west and enlarged the service wing. The ashlar-built Manor has a rectangular main body of one to three storeys, with a large service wing at the north-west corner. The roof has a balustraded parapet. An arcaded projection runs the entire length of the south front at ground-floor level.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The pleasure grounds extend around all but the west side of the Manor, covering an area of c 11ha. North of the forecourt a rectangle of lawn, edged by yew hedges, stands east of the stable block and coach house (listed grade II) and is now (2000) being substantially remodelled. North-east of this a slightly sunken, C20 tennis court has recently been removed (2000) and the area is being redeveloped as a swimming pool. To the west of this is a lawn, edged with trees and low box hedges.

The River Churn flows from north-west to south-east through the park, dammed to form three narrow, sinuous lakes, the middle of which is the largest and has a small central island. The ground adjacent to the lakes slopes steeply down to the water. The west banks are planted with mixed trees, including mature *Wellingtonia*, cedar, larch, yew, and pine. The east banks are more densely wooded with birch, fir, and pine. Winding gravel paths lead through the woodland on both banks. A boathouse standing on the east bank of the middle lake has been present since at least c 1903 (OS).

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St Mary's church (c 1200, restored 1872, listed grade II*) stands at the north-east corner of Cowley Manor and forms an important visual element of the garden scheme. A gravel path leads from the forecourt of the Manor around the east side of the churchyard, which is enclosed by a 2m high yew hedge, to the formal terraces and lake south of the Manor. The balustraded terraces extend the length of the south face of the main block of the Manor (c 50m) (balustrading and steps c 1860, listed grade II). The narrow, paved, top terrace is supported by a coursed rubble retaining wall, topped by iron railings. Stone steps lead down from the western end of the terrace to a courtyard containing a central circular stone fountain (no longer working, 2000). The courtyard is enclosed to the north and west by the service block of the Manor, to the east by the house proper, and to the south by stone balustrading. A centrally placed double flight of steps leads from the top terrace to a lower, wider grass terrace, which is quartered by paved paths and extends slightly further east than the top terrace. Five young columnar cypresses grow at the east end of the terrace. A single flight of steps from the centre of the south side of this terrace leads to a shorter, narrow gravel terrace, with a stone seat at its east end. Another flight of steps leads from the centre of this terrace, down a steep grass bank, to a gravel path running along the top of a sloping lawn north of the western lake. All the terraces are supported by low stone walls with pedestals, many of which still retain large stone urns.

A roughly oval lake (c 0.75ha) lies c 40m south of the Manor and is surrounded by lawns to the north, south, and west. The western lawns contain scattered trees. To the south-west, a large circle of sloping ground is enclosed by a yew hedge and is planted with trees and shrubs. This enclosure contains a small circular pond, from which a stream flows, in a culvert, into the lake. A gravel walk goes around the lake, widening into a circle, formerly balustraded (CL 1906), at the east end of the lake, on top of a 6m deep and 20m long wall which retains the upper lake. Water flows from the upper lake (south of the Manor), east to the middle lake on the River Churn, via a water-staircase composed of an ornate system of fountains and pools (c 1860, restored 2000, listed grade II) below the gravel circle, from which two flights of stone steps lead down. Water from the upper lake issues from grotesque bearded stone heads, set at intervals along the retaining wall, into a sub-rectangular stone pool. A flight of shallow stone steps then channels the water into a small circular stone pool with a central fountain. The pools are ornamented with carved stone statues of eagles and lions. From the circular pool, the water flows down another, short flight of steps, aligned on a squat marble column with a limestone upper (possibly intended as the base for a sundial), then goes underground into the middle lake.

The lakes along the Churn and south of the Manor were created by James Hutchinson in the mid to late C19. The middle lake was dredged by Gloucester County Council in the 1960s and 70s. Silt recovered was dumped at the southern end of the lake, substantially reducing it in size (P Doini de Frankopan Subuc Zrinski pers comm, 2000). Hutchinson was also responsible for the water-staircase and south terraces, the latter of which formerly had (in the early C20) twin fountains in geometric pools, sculpture, and extensive areas of formal bedding (CL 1906). James Horlick was responsible for planting many of the trees along the Churn in the late C19 and also had the terraces extended (Notes on Cowley, GRO).

PARK The park is divided into two sections by the River Churn and its adjacent woodland. East of the Churn is an area of c 14ha of parkland, with a thick belt of woodland along its western edge. This part of the park is divided into large pasture fields but still retains several scattered clumps of mature trees.

South-west of the Churn, the park continues from the Manor to the edge of Cowley Wood and Ward's Wood, c 700m to the south. It is planted with some mature clumps and, c 350m south of the Manor, a small wood. An avenue, Cowley View, extends south-west from the Manor for 1.4km, rising to the summit of Bubb's Hill. Its northern section is a double horse chestnut avenue but it continues south as a linear clearing through Cowley Wood.

Sometime c 1850-60, James Hutchinson had a road through the park removed and may have had Cowley View extended and realigned on the new house (which was slightly west of the original Manor) (ibid). William Baring-Bingham had Cowley Wood and the avenue planted with 135,000 trees in 1882 (ibid).

REFERENCES

Country Life, 20 (4 August 1906), pp 162-72 D Verey, *The Buildings of England: Gloucestershire The Cotswolds* (1970), pp 202-3 M Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (1979), p 196 Victoria History of the County of Gloucestershire VII, (1981), pp 193-7 Inspector's Report: Cowley Manor, (English Heritage 1986)

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Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1881-3, published 1883 2nd edition published c 1903

Archival items Notes on Cowley (including diaries, descriptions and accounts) (D 2820), (Gloucestershire Record Office)

Aerial photographs, 1999 (NMR, Swindon)

Description written: May 2000 Amended: February 2001 Register Inspector: TVAC Edited: April 2003

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.