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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HEDSOR HOUSE

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Name:	HEDSOR HOUSE
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Hedsor
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Taplow
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.564043 Longitude: -0.68625932 National Grid Reference: SU 91160 85836 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001373 Date first listed: 24-Dec-1997

Details

A mid to late C18 landscape park and pleasure grounds surrounding a C19 country house, with formal C19 and C20 elements.
HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1583 a new manor house was built close to the site of the present Hedsor Priory by Rowland Hynd, on the north-east-facing hillside at Hedsor, retaining parts of a medieval manor house which by 1720 had passed to the Parker family. At the adjacent Cliveden estate, c 1706, Lord Orkney planted his northern, axial, 250m long lime avenue approach to Cliveden House (qv), which stretched north from the Cliveden turning circle into the Hedsor estate for 330m, as shown on the Survey of Cliveden House and Gardens, 1749. When Frederick, Prince of Wales, rented Cliveden, 1739-51, his equerry, Sir William Irby, housed his retainers in Hedsor Manor, and it is also possible that it was used as a minor residence for the Dowager Princess Augusta until 1764, when, following the death of Mrs Elizabeth Parker, the estate was sold to William, first Lord Boston. Frederick, second Lord Boston engaged Sir William Chambers to build a new house at the top of the hill, aided in its design by George III and Queen Charlotte, the grounds probably being remodelled as part of the activity (Kim Wilkie Assocs 1997). The house, finished by 1778, was damaged by fire in 1795, being demolished in 1865 and replaced in 1868 by the current house, formerly Hedsor Lodge, set to the east and designed by James Knowles. The area around the house was formalised 1900-7, with the addition of formal gardens, straight hedges and gravel paths. The estate was sold in 1926 and split up, part being bought by the Astors at Cliveden. The House is now (1998) used as a company training centre.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Hedsor Park lies 3km south-east of Bourne End and 10km north of Maidenhead, above a loop in the River Thames which lies south of Bourne End. The c 85ha site is bounded to the south and west by Bourne End Road, to the north-west by the former White Hill lane and Harvest Hill lane, and to the east by Cliveden Road, being located on undulating Chiltern Hills, including a scarp and associated plateau on which the House stands. Hedsor is one of a chain of important C18 designed landscapes sited along this scarp and plateau: these include the

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Cliveden estate immediately south of Hedsor and the contiguous Taplow Court (qv) on Cliveden's southern boundary, together with Dropmore (qv) on the east boundary (and the large wooded area of Burnham Beeches east of this); Hall Barn (qv) lies 2km to the north-east. The setting is thus largely of designed landscapes and Chiltern woodland, with the villages of Bourne End and Cookham to the north-west and south-west respectively.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance at the east end of the east drive, past Upper Lodge (late C20) off the Taplow to Wooburn lane, runs between flanking stone pedestrian gateways with iron gates (a gift to Philip Shephard in 1947 from Sir Hugh Fraser), and late C20 screen walls flanking the gateways. The drive curves north, then west through the park for 1km, initially closely bordered by a rhododendron plantation, opening out into parkland and approaching Hedsor House following the contours of, but just below, the plateau, to arrive at a gravel turning circle on the main, east front of the House. It is likely that this drive was constructed in conjunction with the building of Chambers' house c 1778 or thereafter. A late C20 car park has been constructed east of the turning circle.

A second, west drive enters at Hedsor Priory Lodge (c 1820, listed grade II, formerly known as Lower Lodge), a single-storey, gothic, flint and brick lodge standing at the bottom of the scarp, 300m north-west of Hedsor House. The drive runs north, as Church Road, then east, around the bottom of the slope, passing the walled garden, then ascending the steep slope north of the House, curving sharply in several places, past St Nicholas' parish church part way up the hill. Curving around the flint boundary walls (C16 and C19, listed grade II) of Hedsor Priory (1844), built on the site of the former manor house, it runs south up to the wooded area enclosing the stables and back entrance to the House, joining the east drive next to the turning circle. Views extend from the drive in the valley bottom up the steeply sloping parkland to the church to the east and the late C18/early C19 Lord Boston's Folly to the north. From the church views extend north across the parkland straddling the valley to Lord Boston's Folly, and west in a panorama across Cookham, Bourne End and the just visible River Thames.

A third, north-east drive (now gone) formerly entered at the crossroads of Hedsor Lane with Sheepcote Lane. It passed a lodge (rebuilt C20) before proceeding south-west along the eastern edge of Woolman's Wood and along the western edge of the north-east park to meet the east drive 400m east of the House (where the north-east drive enters the registered area). There may have been further access routes across the estate, including one branching north off the north drive to Hedsor Farmhouse (OS 1st edition published 1883).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Hedsor House (James Knowles 1865-8) lies towards the west end of the site, immediately east of, and further back from the edge of the scarp and slightly higher up the hill, than the site of William Chambers' 1778 house, and 150m south of the site of the old manor house, rebuilt in the 1840s and now called Hedsor Priory. It is built in an Italianate style of white Suffolk brick with two-storey canted bay windows all round, with a service wing of similar size attached to the north-west corner. A temporary accommodation block built in the 1960s lies west of the House, which has views to the south-east, but is largely screened from the panoramic views to the west and south by the wooded pleasure grounds of The Rookery. In the late C19 a largely clear lawn ran down from the west front of the House (OS 1883) allowing views across the valley towards Bourne End, and possibly also to Lord Boston's Folly, views which are now (1998) obscured close to the House by the accommodation block, and, further from the House, by tree growth.

The brick stable courtyard (? J Knowles c 1860s) with a central clock tower, in similar Italianate style to the House, lies on falling ground between Hedsor House and Hedsor Priory, enclosed on three sides by stable ranges, and on the fourth, south side bounded by a screen wall with a gateway flanked by two brick gate piers, and surrounded by trees. Hedsor parish church is a small, flint, medieval building with a bellcote, much restored in the 1860s, situated on the side of the scarp, above the northern parkland, with a view north to Lord Boston's Folly on the far hillside and west to the panoramic view of the Thames valley. The church is important in views up the hillside towards the House from the north drive and north-west park.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The House is linked to formal gardens to the south-east and north, created c 1900-7 and after, before which there appear to have been no formal garden areas. The garden to the south-east forms a series of contiguous rectangular features bounded to the north by clipped yew hedges and includes a former rose garden and lily pool garden, now largely having lost their detail and a hard tennis court having been placed over part of the rose garden. The foundations and floor of a small summerhouse lie 150m south-east of these features, now overgrown but originally with a

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semicircular bedding feature to the south (OS 1883). On the north front of the House, set against woodland separating it from the stables, the Dutch Garden (c 1930) consists of two stone-paved terraces connected by steps and retaining walls, leading down from the House to the third terrace with a formal, sunken pool in the centre. A view north, now obscured by trees, looked across the valley to Lord Boston's Folly, and north-east along The Dene valley.

The wooded pleasure grounds lie south and west of the House. A path through the woodland, originating in the Oaken Grove at the east end of the pleasure grounds, runs through the southern park belt and a group of holm oak, known as Holm Oak Walk, lying close to the south boundary, then north to Hedsor church, returning south to the House. The southern half of the west woodland, The Rookery, part of the C18 pleasure grounds, is yew woodland on the steep western slope, managed in the early C20 in order to frame views down to the Thames (Gardener's Mag 1907).

The garden of Hedsor Priory (rebuilt 1843) was laid out by a former steward, Montagu Hepworth, probably during the late C19, with work during the 1940s to a design by Percy Cane (J Wontner pers comm, 1998).

PARK The park is divided into several sections. The Dene, a dry valley, runs north-east from the House, down the hill and north-east along the valley bottom, flanked by woodland. A ride north between two woodland blocks 200m east of the House, from the east drive down the hill to The Dene, overlooks the valley pasture to Woolman's Wood beyond, a remnant of the wider views across and down the hill when the hillside was all open parkland and views extended from here north-west towards Lord Boston's Folly (Stroud, 1834). A car park has been sited in The Dene close to the House. South of the east drive and The Dene lies a plateau with open pasture and views of the House, this running south to the southern shelter belt and Holm Oak Walk adjacent to the south boundary. East of this, the Oaken Grove lies at the heart of the estate and contains the strongest physical C18 connection with the Cliveden estate: the Cliveden lime avenue. Surrounded by ancient, semi-natural oak woodland, in the C18 the Cliveden lime avenue terminated at its north end at a gate into the Oaken Grove. The earth banks and ditches on which the C18 trees were planted still exist, together with one or two limes, possibly of C18 origin, although the majority of trees are C19/C20. The pond at the north-west end of the avenue is also recorded as an C18 feature (Cliveden map, 1749). At the north-east corner of the Oaken Grove is Gulley Farm, a 1930s' house and associated service buildings on the site of an earlier farm, with a contemporary garden surrounding it. The land east of this is largely woodland with some ornamental shrubs.

The north-west park, straddling the valley north and west of the House, is largely separated from the rest of the park by the pleasure grounds and Hedsor Priory. It extends to the west boundary of the site, being still largely pasture, with few park trees. At the north-west corner, on the crest of Harvest Hill, stands Hedsor Towers (listed grade II, formerly known as Lord Boston's Folly, converted to a house 1991(2)). It is a substantial eyecatcher designed originally to be seen from the late C18 Hedsor House (which stood immediately west of the present house), probably constructed c 1800-20 to commemorate George III. Four flint and brick towers (round, square, hexagonal and semicircular) are connected, except for the round one, by curtain walling. From here a view extends south-east across the north-west park towards the House, presently masked by mature trees in the pleasure grounds but formerly (Robertson 1792; Combe 1794; OS C19/C20) a prominent feature in this view, with further views over the Thames valley.

The remains of the north-east park lie immediately to the north of the east drive, and are bounded to the north-west by Woolman's Wood, and to the north by Hedsor Court. Hedsor Court (1920s.), and its associated c 7ha gardens, lying outside the area here registered, divides the remaining parkland from a small section of former parkland to the north (also outside the area here registered)+, leading up to Sheepcote Lane and Hedsor Lane crossroads and lodge.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden lies 250m north of the House, a brick-walled rectangular structure with an apsidal west end, aligned north-west/south-east with a brick wall across the middle running from south-west to north-east. A range of bothies lies on the outer side of the north-east wall, with a range of free-standing glasshouses running parallel to the north. It is (1998) in use as a nursery.

REFERENCES

A Robertson, *Topographical Survey of the Great Road 1*, (1792), pp 87-8 W Combe, *An History of the River Thames 1*, (1794), p 274, pl 36 Gardener's Magazine, (1907), pp 249-52 N Pevsner and E Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (1994), pp 380-2 Hedsor Park Landscape Restoration and Management Plan, (Kim Wilkie Associates 1997)

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Maps Survey of Cliveden House and Gardens, 1749 (Buckinghamshire Record Office) Tithe map for Hedsor parish, 1839 (Buckinghamshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1883 2nd edition published 1900 1925 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1900

Archival items John Stroud, Sketch of Hedsor Park and Lord Boston's Folly, 1834 (private collection)

Description written: August 1998 Amended: April 1999; January 2001 Register Inspector: SR Edited: October 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.