

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WOBURN ABBEY

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

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Name: WOBURN ABBEY

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Eversholt

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Husborne Crawley

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Milton Bryan

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Potsgrove

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Ridgmont

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Woburn

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.989132
Longitude: -0.59684538
National Grid Reference: SP 96448 33227
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: I
List Entry Number: 1000364
Date first listed: 30-Nov-1986

Details

Extensive and complex park and pleasure grounds around a country mansion. Main phases C18 and early C19, using C17 base, with early C18 work by George London and Charles Bridgeman, and early C19 work by Humphry Repton.

NOTE This entry is a summary. Because of the complexity of this site, the standard Register entry format would convey neither an adequate description nor a satisfactory account of the development of the landscape. The user is advised to consult the references given below for more detailed accounts. Many Listed Buildings exist within the site, not all of which have been here

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Inventory of Great Britain
WOBURN ABBEY

referred to. Descriptions of these are to be found in the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Woburn Abbey, founded in 1145 on the site of the present house, was given in 1547 to Sir John Russell of Chenies (Buckinghamshire), later first Earl of Bedford. In 1619 Francis, Lord Russell, later fourth Earl, established Woburn as the principal family seat, extending the adapted ecclesiastical buildings and, in the 1620s or 1630s, commissioning the Grotto in the new north wing, probably from Isaac de Caus (Strong 1979). By 1661 (Mapp of the Mannor of WoburnY, 1661) a series of enclosed gardens had been laid out to the west of the house, within a park enclosing various areas of woodland with straight rides cut through. The park was extended and further formalised by 1738 (Plan of the Manor & Parish of Woburn, 1738), the circular Bason Pond [sic] having been created by George London (d 1714) as part of his grand west approach. Charles Bridgeman (d 1738) was consulted in the 1730s, his work including the removal of much of the formal C17 gardens surrounding the house. In 1747 the fourth Duke employed Henry Flitcroft (1697-1769) to rebuild the great west range of the house, the fifth Duke employing Henry Holland (1745-1806) to build the south wing in the 1790s to 1800s, together with the Chinese Dairy, Sculpture Gallery and great London Entrance, at the same time as the informal gardens to the east and south were enclosed and developed. The sixth Duke employed Humphry Repton (1752-1818) in 1804, who produced his most splendid Red Book for Woburn in January 1805, with suggestions covering both park and gardens. Repton was employed until at least 1810, although some of his suggested features were not executed or were implemented later in the C19, Woburn being probably his largest and most complete work. The sixth Duke was a keen plant collector, as is reflected in the publication between 1816 and 1833 of several catalogues with extensive lists of plants in cultivation at Woburn, and he also extended the park to its current extent. The gardens were further developed by Percy Cane c 1930, and in 1955 the house and grounds were opened to the public, with the subsequent development of the safari park in the north park (although a collection of exotic animals has been kept since at least the C19), and other visitor facilities close to the house. The estate remains (1997) in private ownership.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Woburn Park lies on the Greensand Ridge of low hills, adjacent to the village of Woburn to the west and 7km north-east of Leighton Buzzard. The c 1200ha park is bounded to the south-west, north-west and north by the A4012 road from Hockliffe to Ridgmont, and to the east partly by the lane from Ridgmont to Milton Bryan and partly by agricultural land and woodland. Those stretches bounded by roads are enclosed by high, red-brick walls. One c 200m length of wall, situated 1.3km west of the house, is of reduced height, the upper portion being replaced with an iron fence and gates in the form of a clairvoie to give views of the broad, west avenue beyond, known as Wayn Close. The setting is largely agricultural, with the large wooded expanse of Wavendon Heath and Bow Brickhill woods to the west, and the villages of Woburn, Ridgmont and Milton Bryant lying close to or adjacent to the boundaries. An area of farmland adjacent to The Evergreens wood, outside the north-west boundary, links the enclosed park with Aspley Wood, some 4km north-west of the Abbey. Formerly ornamental woodland, possibly laid out by Humphry Repton, it is now used for mineral extraction with surrounding commercial woodland. Repton's associated C15-style Henry VIII Lodge (1810-11, listed grade II), and small garden, lie at the north-west corner of the wood.

The main approach to the Abbey enters the park at the southern tip, through the London Entrance (Holland and Repton 1810-11, listed grade II*), a stone gateway with a tall central carriage arch flanked by smaller pedestrian arches with latticed iron gates, flanked by c 50m long, curving, stone screen walls framing an extensive apron of lawn adjacent to the road. The drive, laid out by Repton, runs north through the park in almost straight sections, crossing Basin Bridge (Sir William Chambers 1770, listed grade I) 250m south-west of the Abbey, a stone, three-arched bridge separating Basin Pond to the north from New Pond to the south. The drive skirts the east bank of Basin Pond, turning east some 200m west of the Abbey to approach the west front, reaching a broad gravel sweep adjacent to the house, this section of the drive being aligned with Basin Pond and the great avenue west of the Woburn road in Wayn Close. Further major drives, marked by lodges and gateways, curve across the park, entering from Woburn, Husborne Crawley, Ridgmont and Froxfield, the park being bisected by that between Woburn and Froxfield, which is also a public road.

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The site consists of gardens, pleasure grounds, extensive parkland and woodland. The mansion (C17/C18, listed grade I), surrounding three sides of a courtyard open to the east, lies towards the centre of the southern half of the site, on the west boundary of the garden and pleasure grounds. The main, west entrance front overlooks parkland, standing at the east end of the great west axis created in the C17 and extended in the early C18. The north front encloses, on the ground floor, the early C17 arcaded grotto room, attributed to Isaac de Caus (Strong 1979). This overlooks the informal Grotto Garden which is enclosed by mature trees, including yews around the boundary. The south, garden front overlooks a formally laid out, square garden which extends east along a straight path, running along the south fronts of the Sculpture Gallery (Holland c 1790, listed grade I) and adjoining Camellia House (Jeffrey Wyatville 1822, listed grade I), both attached to the South Stable Block. This stable block forms a pair with the North Stable Block 75m to the north (both Flitcroft 1750, listed grade I), the two originally flanking the entrance to the main, east front (demolished 1950s), and still enclosing a large courtyard, overlooking the house, with a mature cedar of Lebanon at the centre of an oval panel of lawn.

The c 12ha pleasure grounds, remodelled by Repton, consist largely of informal mature woodland and lawns enclosing features such as the Chinese Dairy (Holland 1788, listed grade I) and adjacent pond, the circular hedged maze with its central Chinese Pavilion (1833, based on a 1757 design by Sir William Chambers, listed grade II*), several other garden buildings and seats, a rock garden, cedar avenue and Greenhouse Pond. The area is enclosed by a ha-ha to the south and east, and an iron fence and gates to the north.

The gardens and pleasure grounds are surrounded by the park, still largely pasture with many single trees and clumps, containing herds of several different species of deer. A series of ponds runs from south to north through the centre of the southern half, dominated by Basin Pond, laid out initially by George London in the early eighteenth century as a formal circular pond, aligned with the west front of the house, with an avenue extending west to the park boundary and beyond. This pond was naturalised by Repton, who included it as part of a chain of informal ponds extending north-west and culminating in Lower Drakeloe Pond, lying 1.5km north-west of the Abbey. Bisected by the drive from Woburn, the Pond encircles an island with a Chinese Gothic temple (1749, listed grade II). At the centre of the northern half of the park lies the Safari Park, developed mid to late C20, with its own network of drives and paddocks, at the east edge of which stands Repton's Thornery (1808, listed grade II*), a small, rustic thatched cottage used as a summerhouse. The Evergreens, on the north-west boundary, is an extensive area of native and exotic woodland with rhododendron underplanting, laid out in the C18 and extended in the C19.

REFERENCES Note: There is a wealth of material about this site. Some key references are cited below.

S Dodd (printer), *Guide to Woburn Abbey* (1845), pp 44-50 *The Victoria History of the County of Bedfordshire* 3, (1912), pp 458-61 *Country Life*, 117 (31 March 1955), pp 854-8; (14 April 1955), p 987; 138 (8 July 1965), pp 98-102; (15 July 1965), pp 158-61; 173 (31 March 1983), pp 772-5 R Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England* (1979), pp 139-41 G Carter, P Goode and K Laurie, *Humphry Repton* (1982), p 147, col pls 5, 6, pls 52, 57, 78

Maps Mapp of the Mannor of Woburn the possessions of Lord Russell, 1661 (Bedfordshire Record Office) Plan of the Manor & Parish of Woburn, 1738 (Bedfordshire Record Office) T Jefferys, *The County of Bedford*, 1765 A Bryant, *Map of the County of Bedford*, 1826 Map of Woburn, 1831 (Bedfordshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881 2nd edition published 1901 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: September 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: May 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.