

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WORCESTER COLLEGE

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Name:	WORCESTER COLLEGE
County:	Oxfordshire
District:	Oxford (District Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.755657 Longitude: -1.2665546 National Grid Reference: SP 50723 06584 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000465 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

C15, C18 and C20 college buildings with C18 quadrangles, and early C19 landscape gardens surrounding a contemporary lake.
HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Gloucester College, founded in the 1280s at the edge of the City of Oxford, was one of the monastic colleges dissolved by Henry VIII, being dissolved in 1541. Its buildings were taken over by Gloucester Hall in 1560, which was re-founded in 1714 as Worcester College following an endowment from a Worcestershire baronet, Sir Thomas Cookes. Building work continued from 1720 to 1790, with no further major additions until the mid C20. By the early C19 various garden elements existed, but the extension in 1788 of the Oxford Canal, along the college's river frontage to the south, prompted the creation of the crescent-shaped lake and surrounding picturesque landscape between c 1810 and 1820 (M Batey 1982; Cobham 1991), initiated by Whittington Landon (Provost 1795(1839). It has also been stated that the Bursar Richard Greswell laid out the gardens c 1827 (Daniel and Barker 1900), but this seems to relate to the planting of trees and shrubs within the garden. Several buildings were built around the south-west boundary during the C20, and the Sainsbury Building was erected at the north end of the lake in the early 1980s. The site remains (1997) in college use.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Worcester College lies close to the centre of Oxford, 500m north-west of Carfax. The c 12ha college is bounded to the north by the C19 residential area of Jericho and to the south-west by the Oxford Canal, and beyond this by the River Thames. To the east the college is bounded by the contiguous Worcester Street and Walton Street, this boundary marked largely by medieval walls (C15, listed grade II) on either side of the classical entrance facade, the northern wall containing a C15 gateway (listed grade I) adjacent to the North Range. The site slopes away towards the Canal and within the largely level Main Quad terraces to the east and north raise the ground to street level. The setting is largely urban, with the old railway sidings to the south of the river being developed (1997) for residential accommodation.

ENTRANCES, APPROACHES AND QUADRANGLES The main entrance stands at the junction of Worcester, Walton and Beaumont Streets, its imposing, east-facing, classical ashlar facade overlooking the slightly curved Beaumont Street running east towards St Giles' street. Beaumont Street, laid out 1828-37, is a broad street lined with long terraces of three-storey,

ashlar-faced houses with iron verandas and balconies, its west end broadening out and terminated by the entrance to Worcester College (said by Pevsner to be the finest street ensemble in Oxford). The college Bursar at the time, Richard Greswell, is said to have insisted that the plans for the development of Beaumont Street were modified to include its attractive curve (Devereux and Griffiths 1994). The college entrance, off Worcester Street, is marked by a wrought-iron screen and double gates with overthrow, standing on a dwarf stone wall (C18, listed grade II), from which a stone path flanked by narrow panels of lawn runs west through the entrance in Main Block to Main Quad. The centre of Main Block (1720-86, listed grade I), containing the library, recedes deeply behind projecting wings, containing the hall and chapel, which flank the panels of lawn, so forming a small quad which is open to Beaumont Street. The path continues through the gatehouse, emerging in a stone loggia or cloister beneath Main Block, part of the east range of Main Quad, which it overlooks.

Main Quad contains a raised terrace along the north and east sides, supporting the stone North Range (classical main range to west, Dr George Clarke 1735-59; adjacent camerae to east C15, all listed grade I) forming the north side of the Quad, together with the classical Main Block, with its loggia, forming the east range. The stone south range, lying at the lower level of the centre of the Quad, runs east into Pump Quad (the whole C15, listed grade I), consisting of blocks of camerae, or cottages in which each unit was the responsibility of one particular monastery. The west side of Main Quad is closed by a high stone wall (listed grade II) of varying dates, topped by a wrought-iron fence, and with a gateway inserted towards the north end giving access from the Quad directly into the Provost's Garden to the west. The terraces are topped by gravel paths, access from them to the lower central level being via a set of straight stone steps in the centre of the north terrace and curved stone steps by the south end of the loggia on the east terrace. A gravel path bounds a central, rectangular panel of lawn at the lower level. A passage through the east end of the south range gives access to the college garden, mirrored by a second passage at the west end of the range. This passage passes beneath a 'hanging garden' adjacent to the west front of the westernmost camera. Here a lawn is elevated to first-floor level, supported by a banked mound enclosed by stone walls (listed grade II). A central door in the first floor of the camera opens directly on to the east end of the raised lawn, this elevation of the camera being decorated in cottage orné style. The west end of the lawn is reached from the south lawn below by a set of stone steps at the west end. The bank was probably created from the spoil from digging out the adjacent lake in the early C19, and taken advantage of when the cottage orné was made, with a first-floor window made into a door opening onto the raised 'hanging garden' (M Batey pers comm, February 1999).

Main Quad stands on the site of the medieval quad of Gloucester College, shown in the C16 (Agas, 1578) with buildings around three sides and a wall or fence along the fourth, west side, and the C15 south range much as it is now (1997). Two entrances are visible: one in the boundary wall north of the north range (where the medieval gateway now gives access to the Fellows' Garden from Walton Street), entering a rectangular courtyard with access through the centre of the north range into the quad to the south; the other standing in a similar position to the current entrance, slightly set back off the road, at the centre of the small, irregular east range of buildings which predated the current main block. By the mid C17 (Loggan, 1675) a ruinous building ran along the roadside parallel with the east side of the quad, with the main entrance being through the northern gateway. Pump Quad was enclosed, and the site of the 'hanging garden' was enclosed by garden walls. By the end of the C18 (Davis, 1797) the current (1997) main entrance was laid out, overlooking meadow or cultivated ground east of the road, although the flanking wings containing the hall and chapel were not shown. The mid C19 (Hoggar, 1850) saw the entrance and Main Quad in their most recent arrangement, the entrance overlooking the newly created Beaumont Street, opening out to the west to reveal the full width of the hall and chapel wings.

GARDENS The Fellows' Garden lies adjacent to the north side of North Range, laid largely to lawn with a curved perimeter path and informal planting against the walls. Access is gained from a door in North Range, or off Walton Street through the medieval gateway in the boundary wall, or through a further gateway in the north-west corner.

The main part of the college gardens, laid out in the early C19 as picturesque pleasure grounds, consists of three informal sections of open lawn, each area with its own wooded perimeter path, all connected by the central lake. The south lawn, entered from Main Quad, is overlooked to the north by the C15 south range, given picturesque detailing on this face in the C19 to imitate a row of rural cottages. Along the east and south boundaries of the lawn stand several C20 buildings in varying styles.

The perimeter path, encircling the lawn, runs in front of the buildings, overlooking the lawn planted with mature specimen trees including a very large plane tree. Some of the mature trees on the lawn remain from early C19 shrub bed planting, when they were meant to be seen as spires in the beds and then removed. They were never removed and the canopy killed the floriferous underplanting (M Batey pers comm, February 1999). Along the north side of the lawn the path passes the bottom of the steep stone steps giving access to the west end of the small 'hanging garden'. Adjacent to the bottom of these steps stands a stone gateway (listed grade II) giving access from the south lawn to the Provost's Garden to the north, past the end of the south arm of the lake. At this point the path around the south lawn reaches the south arm of the lake, continuing along the lake side to a stone gateway (C16, listed grade II), an arch re-sited in the early C19 from the remains of the medieval college buildings. Here the south-west arm of the perimeter path joins the path around the south lawn. The south-west path is largely screened from the south lawn by shrubs, with various breaks allowing views across the lawn to the picturesque camerae.

The path continues north-west along the west edge of the lake, past three stone benches sited at various points overlooking the lake, breaking into two at the western tip of the lake to encircle the cricket ground (created out of marshy meadow c 1900). This forms the second perimeter walk, with an informal path and adjacent drainage ditch running north-west through a wooded belt (present by the mid C19, Hoggar, 1850), overlooking the Canal to the south-west, continuing along the north and east sides of the cricket ground and running along the lake's north edge back to the southern tip of the cricket ground, where the early C20 cricket pavilion stands. Views extend east from the west side of the lake, towards the upper floor of the elevated Main Block in Main Quad, and the west end of the Provost's Lodgings, and north towards the 1981 Sainsbury Building. The north arm of the lake was extended to the edge of this building so that it sits on the edge of the water.

The third section of the gardens consists largely of the Provost's Garden, mostly laid to lawn and surrounded by a perimeter walk, the west side of which runs through shrubs and trees alongside the east side of the lake, providing views west across the lake and cricket ground. Further informal lawns lie to the north-east. The Provost's Garden is dominated by the four-storey main, west facade of the Provost's Lodgings (Henry Keene 1773-6, listed grade I). The Lodgings, which are attached to the west end of North Range, have a Palladian front and a garden door at first-floor level from which the garden is reached by a stone double staircase. A small, formal garden lies in the south-east corner of the Provost's Garden, the subject of a formal Arts and Crafts design by Alfred Parsons for Provost Daniel (1903). It apparently contained a central sundial surrounded by beds of roses, pinks and snapdragons; delphiniums, tiger lilies, peonies, sweet peas and other herbaceous plants grew in the shelter of the stone wall (Cobham 1991) dividing it from Main Quad. The lawns to the north of the Provost's Garden and North Range are informally arranged, with a box-edged border running along the north boundary with Ruskin Lane, and garden service buildings in the north-east corner. An orchard is situated on the west half of this area. Prior to the construction of the Sainsbury Building, Ruskin Lane provided access to the cricket ground, screened from Ruskin College to the north by a line of mature *ilex* trees (*Quercus ilex*) planted by Provost Lys c 1913.

In the later C16 (Agas, 1578) the gardens of 'Glocester Haule' extended north as groves or orchards of trees, with a small enclosed grove adjacent to the west wall of Main Quad, where the Provost's rose garden now lies. The open area to the north-west, adjacent to the river, where the lake and pleasure grounds encircling the cricket pitch to the north now lie, was known as 'Glocester Haule Meadowes'. This area was crossed by several small streams draining into the river. By the later C17 (Loggan, 1675) the gardens had been extended, particularly to the south where they reached as far as Hythe Bridge Street, covering what is now the south lawn, and the meadows were encroached upon for the expanded gardening activity. At the end of the C18 (Davis, 1797) a nursery garden occupied the site of the south lawn, owned by the Tagg family who subsequently supplied plants for the C19 landscaping works, once the college had bought the ground from them; a small, formal garden, on the site of the Provost's Garden, lay west of, and on an axis with Main Quad; meadows extended west, as far as the new Canal, and north, with the drainage ditches crossing the area flanked by lines of trees. By the mid C19 (Hoggar, 1850; OS 1876) the dramatic landscaping around the college had been accomplished, with the creation of the lake, bounded to the east and south by lawns with island shrub beds and specimen trees. The lake was enclosed by perimeter walks, and enjoyed views to and from the buildings surrounding Main Quad. As Mavis Batey puts it in *Regency Gardens 'The Fellows of Worcester College, in 1817, having skilfully contrived a would-be cottage orné with curly barge boards and trellis on the upper end of a monastic range of*

buildings, created a lake and a forest lawn with a perimeter Regency ornamental shrubbery in the college grounds'. There appear to have been open views between the Provost's Lodgings and its adjacent lawns and the lake, and likewise between the raised east terrace of Main Quad and the lake. These views are now largely obscured by later tree growth on the east side of the lake. The depiction of the grounds by Hoggar and the OS appears to be a good representation of the newly created landscape. An early to mid C19 view (in Batey 1982) looking east across the lake shows an open prospect of the Provost's Lodgings (looking like a Palladian country house (fronted by open lawn running down to the water's edge, with adjacent glimpses of the centre of the east range of Main Quad and the gabled west end of the south range with a rustic bridge below.

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Maps Agas/Bereblock, *Map of Oxford*, engraved 1728 from 1578 original Hollar, *Map of Oxford*, 1643 Loggan, *Map of Oxford*, 1675 R Davis, *A New Map of the County of Oxford ...*, 1797 Hoggar, *Map of Oxford*, 1850

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1876 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1876 2nd edition published 1900 1921 edition OS 1:500: 1st edition published 1876

Description written: December 1997 Amended: March 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: March 2000

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.