

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

APETHORPE PALACE FORMERLY
KNOWN AS APETHORPE HALL

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Name:	APETHORPE PALACE FORMERLY KNOWN AS APETHORPE HALL
District:	North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Apethorpe
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.546506 Longitude: -0.49276139 National Grid Reference: TL 02305 95362 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001448 Date first listed: 17-Feb-2000

Details

This List Entry was subject to a minor amendment on 09/02/2015.

Country house with formal, terraced gardens, laid out in the early C20 by Reginald Blomfield, overlying a structure which dates from the C16 and C17.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1543 the manor and park of Apethorpe, including a substantial late C15/early C16 manor house, were sold by Charles, Lord Mountjoy to Henry VIII. In 1550 the estate, which stood within the royal forest of Rockingham, was granted to Sir Walter Mildmay (1520-89), a prominent and distinguished servant of the Crown. In 1584 Mildmay founded Emmanuel College, Cambridge (qv), which closely resembles Apethorpe Palace (CL 1898). In 1617 the estate passed to Mildmay's granddaughter Mary Fane, wife of Sir Francis Fane (cr Earl of Westmorland 1624, d 1691), in whose family the estate remained until 1904 as the main seat of the Earls of Westmorland. The Earl rebuilt the south and east ranges as state apartments c 1623, to entertain James I, who visited several times to hunt in the deer park, which was also substantially enlarged at about the same time.

Gardens were created in the C16 and C17, but the first depiction of the layout in plan form appears to be an early C19 copy of an undated early C18 map (RCHME 1984; NRO). A formal layout included a bowling green centred on the main range of the south front, leading via steps up to a broad formal walk flanked by statues and yew trees, these in turn flanked by gardens and orchards, with a large wilderness lying adjacent, projecting into the deer park. To the east, overlooked by the principal range, lay the square, enclosed 'Gravel Garden', overlooked by two corner pavilions, reached by walks from the Palace. This court, and part of the flower gardens south of the Palace, including a further pavilion, is partly depicted in a print of 1721 (CL 1909). Further work on the Palace, and possibly the grounds, occurred c 1740, when the seventh Earl carried out some remodelling, at the same time building a substantial dovecote north-west of the Hall. Additional work was carried out on the Palace in the mid C19 for the eleventh Earl.

By the 1880s (OS 1885) the wilderness and Gravel Garden had gone, and the principal entrance had been altered from the north to the east front, where lay an informal carriage sweep. Although the garden compartments remained in outline, it seems that some of the levels had been recontoured (CL 1898). Following the purchase of the estate in 1904 by Baron Brassey (1836-1918; cr first Earl Brassey 1911), the gardens and parts of the Palace were remodelled by Reginald Blomfield over a period of several

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years. Blomfield created features within the extant garden compartments, including many terraces and formal changes of level linked by steps.

After the Second World War the site was sold by the Brassey family, the Palace being occupied by a Reform School until the early 1980s. It is now (1999) empty and derelict.

DESCRIPTION LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Apethorpe Palace stands at the southern edge of the village of Apethorpe, close to the north-east tip of Northamptonshire. The 18ha site is bounded by the village to the north, and on the other sides by agricultural land which overlies the remains of an early C20 landscape park, possibly laid out with advice from Reginald Blomfield, this in turn overlying parts of the extensive C15 to C17 former deer park. The ground falls gently from west to east, to the Willow Brook lying in a shallow valley. In the early C20 part of the brook was dammed to form a lake, with advice from Blomfield (RCHME 1984). The setting is rural, with the archaeological remains of a Roman villa lying in a spinney c 500m south-east of the Palace, and Cheeseman's Lodge (mid C17, enlarged mid C19, listed grade II), the former keeper's lodge, standing 1.5km south-west of the Palace (outside the area here registered), set in the former deer park.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach enters c 200m north of the Palace, off a lane leading south from the village street, entering the large, level north lawn, bounded on the north side by a stone wall. North of this wall lie the remains of a generating house and gas works, formerly part of the estate. The drive runs south across the lawn, lined along the west side by a row of mid C20 semi-detached houses (excluded from the area here registered). It arrives at the north-west corner of the Palace at the entrance to the service court which is the westernmost of three courtyards which the Palace encloses. From here the drive continues east along the north front to the three-storey, C15/early C16 gatehouse entrance which gives access to the easternmost of the three courtyards.

West of the houses alongside the drive, the north lawn is (1999) overgrown but still bounded on the north side by the stone wall, and leads up a shallow hillside to a large, circular stone dovecote with a domed roof (c 1740, scheduled ancient monument, listed grade II). The dovecote overlooks the Palace to the south-east and the distant hillside to the east, and is prominent in views from the north front.

This northern approach was created in the mid C20 when the estate was in institutional use, although it reuses the north entrance to the Palace via the gatehouse. The latter was the principal entrance until at least the early C18, when it stood adjacent to an enclosure known as Walnut Tree Court (RCHME 1984). The north lawn had been laid out by the late C19 (OS 1885).

A further approach, much of which has disappeared (and the remains of which lie largely outside the area here registered), formerly entered off the village street, north-east of the church, 450m north-east of the Palace. From here the north-east drive led south-west alongside the edge of the village through a belt of trees, passing to the east and south of the stable block standing 30m north-east of the Palace. The remains of the drive now (1999) enter the north side of the square forecourt (Reginald Blomfield early C20, walls, gate piers and attached gates listed grade II), from south of the stable block. Within the forecourt an oval panel of lawn is encircled by the drive, which leads to the central entrance on the east front of the Palace. The forecourt is enclosed by stone walls and balustrade, with, at the centre of the north, east, and south sides gateways flanked by piers surmounted by small obelisks, supporting elaborate iron gates. The east side of the forecourt is supported by a stone retaining wall and overlooks a level lawn below, views extending east towards a distant hillside, with access to the lawn via a flight of broad stone steps. This forecourt was created by Blomfield to replace a late C18 or C19 informal carriage sweep, which in turn replaced the formal Gravel Garden associated with the 1620s remodelling of the east range, as shown on the early C18 plan.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Apethorpe Palace (late C15 and later, listed grade I) stands slightly north of the centre of the site, and consists of three adjacent courtyards built of stone. The two principal entrances, on the north and east fronts, give access to the easternmost courtyard, laid to lawn with stone paths crossing it, around which the principal rooms are ranged. The axis of the garden to the south is aligned on the centre of the south front of this courtyard. The east, Gallery range of this courtyard, remodelled in the 1620s, comprises three levels of recreational space which formerly overlooked the Gravel Garden, now (1999) the forecourt. The entrance hall occupies the ground floor, having been built in the 1620s as two open, arcaded loggias separated by a spine wall with niches. The west loggia opened to the east courtyard, and the east loggia was open to the Gravel Garden.

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The arcades were filled in in the mid C19 to form the present entrance hall. Above, the first floor is occupied by the long gallery and has windows in the west, north, and east walls, overlooking the courtyard, north lawn, and forecourt respectively.

The topmost, attic level of the Gallery range includes a parapet walk along the east side, which has covered seats in niches set into the back of each gable, and enjoys views east across the forecourt below and Blomfield's lake beyond, to the far side of the Willow Brook valley. The southern end of the walk is terminated by a rooftop enclosure which overlooks the gardens to the south and countryside beyond this to the south and south-west. The northern end of the walk terminates in a similar open rooftop area, overlooking the north lawn and dovecote, and the church and village beyond.

The one- and two-storey, L-shaped stable block (C17-C19, listed grade II) is built of stone, and stands 30m north-east of the Palace. The building has been partially converted to accommodation.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens and pleasure grounds lie south of the Hall, being divided into several formal compartments. From the gateway in the south side of the forecourt, stone steps lead up to the centre of the stone-paved east terrace which runs adjacent to the south side of the forecourt. The terrace is terminated at the east end by the remains of a stone wall and a pier standing on the south side, in similar style to those in the forecourt. The terrace overlooks the level east lawn beyond, in which is set a tarmac play area.

The west end of the east terrace leads through a clipped yew hedge and stone wall down a flight of stone steps to the sunken bowling green, bounded to the north by the south front, and on the other sides by raised, grass terraces overlooking the adjacent compartments. The stone-paved path continues westwards from the east terrace, at the lower level of the bowling green, across the south front. The path ascends a grass bank via a flight of stone steps leading to the cedar lawn adjacent to the west of the bowling green. At the centre of this lawn stands an enormous Lebanon cedar (the trunk of which had a circumference of over 6m in 1898 (CL)), set upon a higher level as though the ground level around it had been reduced at some time. The north side of the cedar lawn is bounded by the nine-bay, C18 orangery (listed grade I with the Palace), set into the south front of the middle court. The west side of the cedar lawn is bounded by a stone retaining wall and balustrade, and the path along the south front (in which is set the orangery) ascends this via a further flight of steps to the overgrown (1999) remains of a rectangular flower garden beyond.

The flower garden is bounded by walls to the north (dividing it from the western service court) and west, and to the south by a raised grass terrace. In the west wall is set a three-bay arcaded summerhouse (Blomfield, early C20 on the site of an earlier structure, listed with the wall grade II), and at the centre of the area, amongst the remains of formally laid out flower borders, lies a circular pond with a fountain. North of this stands a C17 well-head (listed grade II). At the south-east corner of the flower garden a flight of angled stone steps leads down to the grass south terrace, above the south side of the cedar lawn, which leads east back to the south side of the bowling green. A stone wall separates the south side of this terrace from a rectangular lawn to the south.

Formerly (early C18 map; RCHME 1984) this sequence of compartments comprised the central bowling green, flanked by flower gardens occupying the north end of what in the early C20 became the east terrace and lawn, and the cedar lawn and present flower garden. A garden house stood close to the position of Blomfield's present summerhouse.

A central stone path crosses the bowling green southwards, leading to a flight of stone steps ascending the south terrace. Beyond the terrace lies a long, rectangular lawn aligned with the bowling green on the centre of the south range of the east court. The lawn, which lies at approximately first-floor level, is enclosed by a gravel path, and flanked to west and east by a broad avenue of uncut, mature yews. The avenue is terminated to the south by a further, clipped, yew hedge, and bounded to the east by the east lawn, formerly (early C18 map; RCHME 1984) the site of a garden, beyond which lay the extensive wilderness, from which the garden was separated by 'the way to the old park'. At that time, the avenue itself was referred to as 'a walk ornamented with statues' which was flanked by two rows of yews.

The west side of the yew avenue is bounded by two rectangular compartments. The northern compartment, bordered below to the north by the south terrace, is laid largely to an open, level lawn, with a further terrace running above the west and north sides, adjacent to the west garden wall. The southern compartment was laid out by Blomfield in the early C20 as a sunken garden, with a central rectangular pool enclosed by stone paths which are now (1999) set with topiary specimens. A balustraded

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stone retaining wall supports an upper terrace laid to lawn, which is in turn enclosed by clipped yew hedges. At the west end steps lead up to a lime cross avenue, standing adjacent to the west wall, parallel to the sunken garden. Further entrances to the sunken garden give access via centrally cut archways in the yew hedges. These two compartments were known as the orchard in the early C18 (early C18 map; RCHME 1984).

South of the yew avenue lies an informal area, planted with further mature trees including yews, leading south to a sunken quarry garden.

It appears that the compartments present in the early C18, which probably reflected the C17 layout, were at least partially remodelled in the later C18 or C19. By the late C19 (CL 1898) the lawns adjacent to the south front were laid out with gently sloping contours, these the subject of much of Blomfield's remodelling of the early C20 (CL 1909). He created many formal terraces within the compartments, particularly the forecourt and the areas west and north of the yew avenue, based on the early C18 structure (early C18 map; RCHME 1984).

PARK Few features appear to have survived in the park (outside the area here registered), other than the lake. The former deer park, of which little trace remains, appears to have largely surrounded the Palace and gardens. John Byng in 1790 noted 'open cornfields opposite without a tree planted; a river running thro a rushy morass, and a ruinous mill' (Torrington Diaries II, (1935), quoted in RCHME 1984). Country Life (1898) referred to a 'park of 200 acres adorned by many fine and interesting tree', but the RCHME (1984) aver that no attempt was made to create a landscaped park until 1908 when Blomfield is said to have designed the present lake.

KITCHEN GARDEN The brick- and stone-walled kitchen garden lies 150m south of the Palace, south of the sunken garden, from which it separated by a small service yard containing bothies and outhouses. The garden is divided into two rectangular compartments, the northern of which contains ranges of free-standing and lean-to glasshouses. The southern compartment is partly disused. West of the kitchen garden stands the gardener's house (early C20, probably Blomfield), set in the southern part of an area of disused orchard.

REFERENCES

Garden, 48 (1895), p 495 Country Life, 3 (7 May 1898), pp 560-2; (14 May 1898), pp 592-5; 25 (20 March 1909), pp 414-23; (27 March 1909), pp 450-9 Victoria History of the Country of Northampton 2, (1906), pp 543-7 G Jekyll, Garden Ornament (1918), pp 190, 214 M Binney and A Hills, Elysian Fields (1979), p 20 RCHME, An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northampton 6, (1984), pp 5-14 J Heward and R Taylor, The Country Houses of Northamptonshire (1996), pp 58-69 Report on Apethorpe Hall gardens, (Northamptonshire County Council 1997)

Maps Plan of the house and gardens in the early C18 taken from an early C19 copy (W(A) Misc. vol. 37), (Northamptonshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885 2nd edition published 1901 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1900

Description written: December 1999 Register Inspector: SR Amended: July 2000 Edited: July 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.