

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

WYCOMBE ABBEY

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

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**WYCOMBE ABBEY**

Name: WYCOMBE ABBEY

District: Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

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 Longitude: -0.75114173  
 National Grid Reference: SU8655092360  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

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label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
 Grade: II  
 List Entry Number: 1000609

Date first listed: 30-Aug-1987

## Details

A mid to late C18 landscape park, lake and woodland, possibly with work by Lancelot Brown, laid out around a country house, with early C20 additions and extensions to the designed landscape.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The house may be on the site of the medieval Hospital of St Margaret and St Giles. By the early C17 Loakes Manor house (the original name of the site) had superseded the hospital. In 1700 Henry Petty, first Earl of Shelburne bought the estate. His nephew John, second Earl of Shelburne donated several civic buildings to the town during the 1750s, including the Guildhall and the Market House. The Guildhall (1757) was designed by Henry Keene, who altered the Jacobean manor house. The second Earl died in 1761 and was succeeded by William, the third Earl, who improved the grounds, probably using Lancelot Brown (1716-83). In 1798 the third Earl sold Loakes Manor to Robert Smith, newly created Lord Carrington, who employed James Wyatt to remodel and extend Loakes in the Gothic style c 1803-4, and who renamed the estate in more Romantic vein, 'Wycombe Abbey'. Humphry Repton (1752-1818) may have been employed here, but his input is unknown.

The Abbey house and 30 acres (12.5ha) of land were sold in 1896 to a syndicate who created Wycombe Abbey School. The Carringtons moved c 1901 to the sumptuously converted and extended farm buildings now called Daws Hill which the first Lord Carrington had enlarged and given sham towers, and the focus of the landscape shifted from the Abbey house to Daws Hill House. In 1928 Daws Hill House, its associated landscape and the remainder of Wycombe Abbey Park were sold to the school. During the Second World War the US Air Force occupied Wycombe Abbey and sited buildings on terraces they created in the east valley. Various school buildings and structures have been built in the grounds, and a post-war development of housing sited at the east end of the east park.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The site lies 200-300m south of High Wycombe High Street and the A40 London Road east of the High Street. The house is sited where two Chiltern valleys meet, the parkland running south and east from the house along these two valleys. The hilltops are wooded, and Daws Hill House lies amongst this woodland on the plateau south of the Abbey. The 70ha site is bounded on the west by Marlow Hill road, on the south by development along Daws Hill Lane and High Wycombe Air Station and to the north-east by The Rye open space. The setting to the north and west has developed in the last 100 years as the small C18 market town has become a large urban centre. The site was directly connected to the High Street in the C19, but C20 commercial and road development has masked and detached it from the old town area. The C18/C19 fields to west and east have been reduced to the area of The Rye.

Some 700m south-east of Daws Hill House, a mature double avenue of lime trees flanked by large roundels of mature trees stands in parkland, extending for a further 750m south-east before terminating at the M40 motorway. The avenue lies outside the area here registered but was formerly connected to the landscape immediately surrounding the House by a drive through woodland and parkland which extended down the centre of the avenue. The area is now (1997) cut off from the House by a USAAF Air Base, but was planted in the early C20 around the time that Daws Hill House superseded the Abbey as the Carringtons' main residence on the estate.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The approach from the modern gateway to the north, entrance front of the house is largely laid to tarmac and gravel, with modern island shrub beds. This area extends west along the north front of the house, leading to the service entrance west of the house, where a small, stucco and pebbledash lodge (early C19, listed grade II) lies, at the south end of St Mary Street. Of the two main C19 entrances to the site (OS 1st edition 6" 1883), the course of the north drive has been most altered. It entered from the south side of the High Street through what appear to have been two burgage plots, over the River Wye, curving round the west end of The Dyke (see below: PARK) and up to the north front of the Abbey house. The High Street entrance was marked by two gothic lodges and a battlemented gateway (moved c 1900 to Marlow Hill). The north drive

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has been severely truncated by C20 road development so that the late C20 brick boundary wall and gateway is only 50m north of the north front of the house. The east drive is incomplete, entering the site 1.2km south-east of the house, from Keep Hill Road, past Keep Hill Lodge which is a single-storey, stucco, castellated building. The drive runs through the east woodland, interrupted by the 1960s Warren Wood Drive housing estate at the east end of the parkland. West of this development the drive crosses the park, running along the north edge of the lime avenue, above The Dyke, with views of the water, before curving north to arrive at the north front of the house.

An early C20 drive runs across the southern end of the south park, entering off Marlow Hill through Wyatt's old High Street gateway and past one of the lodges (early C19, listed grade II) which were re-sited on Marlow Hill and renamed Rupert Lodge, c 1900. The drive follows the contours from the west to the east side of this valley, rising up through Rookery Wood to arrive at Daws Hill House on the plateau. Another C20 drive gives access to Daws Hill House from the town across the west end of The Rye and The Dyke, running tortuously up through Roundabout Wood to the House. The Dyke was dammed at the entrance to the park to allow the new drive to cross it. In 1924 cast- and wrought-iron gates and railings (C18; C19, listed grade II) salvaged from Cumberland and Buckingham Houses in London were erected. A third drive to Daws Hill created during this period runs to the House from Daws Hill Lane to the south. When the Carringtons moved to Daws Hill House in the early C20 they retained most of the site, creating these drives through focused on their new house.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Wycombe Abbey (listed grade II\*) is based around the early C17 manor house of Loakes Manor: brick-built with three gable ends facing southward up the hill. To this Henry Keene added the three-storey square east block c 1755-8 which faces the east park. James Wyatt gothicised this and added the north block c 1803-4, building in local grey stone, re-facing the earlier building in the same material and castellating the roofs. Wyatt's north front is the principal entrance front, and is prominent from the town, looking down Queen Victoria Road. On the south side Wyatt created a stone arcade in front of the old manor house and an orangery with pointed arches. The views east and south-east from the house are the only surviving uninterrupted ones of the park and woodland. The view to the north has been truncated by the A40 re-routing and urban development, and that to the south by school buildings close to the south front of the house. The stables lay west of the house, but were demolished to make way for school buildings.

Daws Hill House (listed grade II), 600m south of the Abbey, became the second focus within this site after the third Lord Carrington remodelled the original farmhouse 1899-1901. The Carringtons extended this farmhouse and farmyard to create a sumptuous suite of rooms to entertain royalty. As they still owned the majority of the park, and Daws Hill lies at the south end of the C18 area, it was relatively easy to reorganise the landscape around this building to make it part of the design. The drive system was rearranged to provide picturesque and convenient access to the House, and views from the House over the south park cut through between Roundabout and Rookery Woods. The courtyard gates (C18, listed grade II) are wrought iron and came from the St Mary Street entrance to Loakes Manor.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** There are no ornamental gardens around the Abbey, and the park runs right up to the Abbey house. Much of the area close to the house has been built on or tarmacked, but there are no ornamental garden features shown here on the 1st edition 25" OS map published 1882. Early C20 ornamental features around Daws Hill House include formal yew hedges and terracing south and south-east of the House, and a lime avenue running south, aligned on the main, south entrance of the House, together with several sets of stone steps. The three wings of the House enclose a grassed courtyard, with wrought-iron gates on the fourth, north side, overlooking a further flat terrace north of the House. The House is encircled by the drive system.

**PARK** The park extends along two valleys to the east and south of the Abbey house. The south park is enclosed by the valley sides. The valley bottom runs up the centre of the south park and was the site of the old Marlow Road before it was moved in the mid C18. The hollow it occupied is still visible in some places. The south end is still grazed pasture. The north end has been largely filled with school buildings since 1896, so that there is no view south along it from the north end, or from the north front of the house. The west boundary is defined by a narrow line of trees south of the Arts and Crafts-style boarding houses (c 1900) on the boundary. There are several other school buildings on this boundary, south of the boarding houses. The south edge of the south park is defined by a belt of trees and bounded by Daws Hill Lane, and the east by Rookery and Roundabout Woods.

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On the north-east edge below Roundabout Wood, 250m south of the house is an icehouse with a flint facade, now bricked up, possibly dating from the 1760s landscaping or else by Wyatt, c 1802.

The east park, sited on a north-facing slope, is bounded to the north by The Dyke, a long, narrow stretch of water created in the C18, possibly by Brown, during the landscaping of the park. South of The Dyke is an adjacent strip of woodland which widens out at the east end where the old drive from London runs through it. An ornamental flint gardener's cottage lies in this woodland, overlooking the site of the grotto (filled in, late C20) and the cascade at the east end of The Dyke. The layout is similar to the south park as the parkland is bounded by woodland on three sides, focusing the view towards the Abbey house at the west end. However, C20 developments in the park, including the Warren Wood Drive development, Second World War terracing by the US Air Force, and terraces for games pitches have all been inserted. The Dyke and the woodland adjacent to the south remains largely undeveloped, although a large sports pavilion has been built adjacent to The Dyke on The Rye (outside the site boundary). A walk runs through the trees along the south side of The Dyke from the west end, arriving at the ?C18 cascade where the water drops c 5m to its natural level and becomes a stream once more. The remains of the old brick boundary wall cross the stream where it leaves the east end of the site. The northern edge of The Dyke is now part of The Rye open space, and has been paved. A line of mature yews and other evergreens runs along the eastern end. At its western end The Dyke has been truncated to accommodate the A40 road alteration in the town centre. A dam which carries the drive from the town up to Daws Hill was built across it in the early C20. Remnants of the park planting north and north-east of the Abbey house remain on what is now highway land and public open space, including ornamental conifers and several mature yews. Both halves of the park have suffered from C20 development, but still largely retain their C18 landscape character.

The main views extend north and east from the park, woodland and The Dyke. Originally the parish church was prominent in views from the Abbey and the surrounding park, but it is now largely obscured by urban development. The hillside north and north-east of the town centre draws the eye north and east across The Rye and east down the Rye valley.

The woodlands are still in good condition. They have drives and paths running through them, and act as visual backstops for the parkland.

The land adjacent to Daws Hill House is partly woodland of the Abbey landscape (to the west and north), but also C20 designed land to the south and east of the House. The park had been extended to the south and east in wide swathes by 1900 (OS), and by 1926 (OS) the area south of the House was formed into a more formal designed landscape. Much of the garden still survives around the House, but the extended park has largely been built over. The woodland east of Daws Hill House was extended c 1900, and this still remains, merging into the earlier woodland.

The second Earl of Shelburne, having been a benefactor to the town, was permitted to close the old road to Marlow and the right of way was extinguished. The town council also surrendered land on a 999-year lease between the town and the Abbey house. It was then possible to create the new road to Marlow west of the house, on its current course, and to develop a private park east and south of the house. The third Earl of Shelburne employed Lancelot Brown at Bowood House in the 1760s. A contract of 1762 exists at Bowood, for the improvement of the grounds there, but no contract seems to survive for Loakes Manor. There are however accounts at Bowood covering trees and shrubs bought by Brown specifically for Loakes Manor. It is probable that Brown carried out improvement works to the landscape at Loakes, creating The Dyke and fashioning the woodland and parkland in the east and south valleys. At this time the walled garden was created north-west of the house, the stream was dammed to create The Dyke, and a ha-ha was created between the house and parkland, with potted orange trees on the terrace in spring and summer. There are references in the Bowood archives to a menagerie which Shelburne kept at first at Loakes Manor, and later moved to Bowood.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The C18 kitchen garden lay north-west of the house, reached by a tunnel under St Mary Street. High Wycombe College now covers the site.

#### REFERENCES

K A Walpole, *From One Generation to Another* (nd), pp 1-10, 17-18 N Pevsner and E Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (1994), pp 390-2 Wycombe Abbey School, 1896(1996, (booklet 1996)

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Maps Diversion of footpath and highway adjacent to Wycombe Abbey estate, 1808 (Q/H/24), (Buckinghamshire Record Office)  
Diversion of footpath next to kitchen garden, 1808 (Q/H/27), (Buckinghamshire Record Office) Further diversions adjacent to  
Carrington estate, 1818 (Q/H/47 & 48), (Buckinghamshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1883 2nd edition published 1900 1926 edition OS 25" to 1mile: 1st edition published  
1881(2 2nd edition published 1899

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