

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

MISSENDEN ABBEY

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**MISSENDEN ABBEY**

Name:	MISSENDEN ABBEY
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Great Missenden
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.697509 Longitude: -0.69843083 National Grid Reference: SP 90052 00664 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000605 Date first listed: 30-Aug-1987

## Details

A late C18/early C19 park, woodland, lake and pleasure grounds, laid out around a country house on the site of a medieval Augustinian Abbey. **CHRONOLOGY OF HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT** Missenden Abbey was founded in 1133 for Augustinian canons. It was one of the largest monastic foundations in the county, although Buckinghamshire did not have particularly large or wealthy monasteries. The foundation was dissolved in 1538 and the monastery itself leased to Richard Greneway, a gentleman usher of the Household, in 1541. In 1574 the Abbey was sold to William Fleetwood, becoming the family home for the following two centuries. Parts of the abbey church were used within the mansion built by the Fleetwoods, starting c.1600. The Fleetwoods owned the estate until 1787 when James Oldham Oldham bought the estate and carried out work to the house and grounds. It was then sold to John Ayton in 1806 who carried out substantial work, again both to house and grounds, before 1815 when it was sold to the Caringtons. The Caringtons lived in the house until 1947 when it was sold to Buckinghamshire County Council. The house and garden accommodate an adult education centre (1997). **DESCRIPTION** **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LAND FORM, SETTING** Missenden Abbey lies at the head of Misbourne Valley in the heart of the Chiltern Hills. The c. 40ha. site consists of parkland in the river valley, falling slightly to the south, and rising up the rolling hillside to the east to the edge of Wendover Woods. The site is bounded on the west by the old London Road from Amersham to Great Missenden, to the north by the village buildings, Church Lane, the churchyard and Frith Hill road, and to the east by Wendover Woods. The west boundary of the site is partly defined by a flint wall with brick piers (C19, Grade II), beginning at the north-west corner of the site, and continuing south for about 300m along the London Road. It may originally have run as far as the track which leads to the ford over the Misbourne, but if so has disappeared for a 100m stretch. It is a retaining structure along part of its length, supporting the raised walk along the west of the garden to the park. The setting is mainly agricultural, with the large Chiltern village of Great Missenden adjacent to the north. In 1960 the Missenden bypass was constructed through the middle of the park, with only a road bridge linking the house and the western side of the park with the eastern side and the parish church. The bypass cuts the whole park in two and is a great intrusion into the site, both visually and physically. **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main approach to the house is directly off the old London Road, west of the house. The entrance from the road is modest, with 2m high gate piers (C19, Grade II), and modern gates. The short drive emerges from a cover of mature yews and other evergreens to arrive at a turning circle by the west front of the house. A long drive is shown on the 1883 6" Ordnance Survey entering at the south end of the park, running roughly parallel to

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the River Misbourne. This drive ran up to the south front of the house, crossing the still extant rustic bridge over the Misbourne in the garden. The drive within the garden is still visible, but that within the park is not. PRINCIPAL BUILDING Missenden Abbey (Grade I) lies in the north-west corner of the site. Parts of the medieval abbey buildings were incorporated into the house c.1600, and it is believed that the house is on the site of the abbey cloister. The C17 house, a gabled, two storey manor house with dormers, was substantially altered in the late C18 (to a Venetian style) by James Oldham Oldham, and in the early C19 when it was Gothicised by John Ayton. It remained largely unaltered until the interior was destroyed by fire in 1985, and only the external walls were saved. It was rebuilt 1985-88 by Paul Markcrow so that externally it appears little altered. The major view from the house is south along the park and valley, the view funnelled south by the belt to the west and woods to the east. Immediately north of the house, and partly enclosing the old (possibly monastic) pond is a curved, brick accommodation block (1985). GARDENS The gardens lie close the house, to the west, south and east. The house is set on level lawn. The ground north of the drive is now mainly car parks with some of the mature tree cover retained. The major garden feature lies east of the house. The river Misbourne, running south from where it rises in the village, has been culverted beneath the north-eastern walled garden. The river emerges beneath a restored flint and brick, battlemented, three-arched Gothic summerhouse (c.1800, Grade II) through a flint arched bridge (c.1800, Grade II), to meander down to another flint bridge (c.1800, Grade II) which carried the drive from the park to the south front of the house. The river seldom flows and the river bed is dry. South of the garden the river widens into the lake known as Warren Water, also dried up. The garden south of the house is lawn, separated from the park to the south and east by a modern post and rail fence, effectively incorporating part of the park. On the lawn stands a sundial (Grade II) with Gothic cusping, inscribed with the date, 1814, name and arms of John Ayton. 50m south of the house a partly restored flint and brick ha-ha marks the C19 division between house and park. Two 'causeways' divide the ha-ha into three sections; the western end has gradually been filled in, and only the top brick courses are visible. West and south-west of the house is a raised walk and shelter belt, about 1.5m above ground level. The planting forms a shelter belt above the park wall. The 250m long walk runs south into the park, at its southern end providing views back to the house. It is planted with mature evergreen shrubs, including yew, holly, Portugal laurel and box. A line of mature limes runs along the walk's east edge where it drops down to the lawn. At the north end, south of the drive, is a shrubbery with mature trees and evergreens (laurel, holly, etc.). A C17 painting of the house and its grounds survives. It depicts a hunt across the Abbey grounds, east of the river Misbourne, the view looking westwards across the Abbey house and gardens towards the Chiltern Hills beyond. The Abbey has a formal entrance on the south side, and a formal garden in front of this with small topiary cones and shaped trees. There are also two (perhaps three) unmatched pavilions shown, and a bridge across the Misbourne. There is no visible evidence of this design. PARK The park is split by the bypass. The park remains pasture, retaining scattered mature park trees including lime, oak, chestnut, sycamore. The main feature of the park is Warren Water, which lies in the western half, with an island in it. The river runs along the western side of the park, flowing into Warren Water at its north end, and leaves it at the south, running under a restored C19 iron bridge, continuing the length of the park to enter Bank's Pond. This pond may be medieval in origin and is dammed. The park now tapers out south of this pond, although the 1900 6" Ordnance Survey shows that it continued on what is now arable land east of the bypass as far as Deepmill Farm. The eastern half of the park, east of the bypass, is of similar character to the western half. It covers undulating hillside to the top of the hill, past the medieval church of St. Peter & St. Paul (Grade I) which is prominent on the boundary. This part of the park has good views of the western half of the park in the valley, and across to the eastern hillside in the distance. The church and park would have had views of the house, although these are now obscured by modern, coniferous planting, screening the by-pass from the house. There may have been views of this part of the park and the church from the Gothic summerhouse in the garden. The east park has a view west across the site to woodland on the ridge to the west, outside the site. Wendover Woods beyond the park boundary provides shelter for the park from winds coming from the eastern plateau, visually defining much of the east park boundary. It is not known exactly when the Abbey grounds were landscaped, but the Fleetwoods probably moved out of the property in 1774, and it was sold in 1787. The sale particulars refer to the 'pleasure grounds' which together with some of the woods and farmland 'might be made into a Park, which would have the Advantage of there being no Road across (except a Foot Path), and of being watered by a Trout Stream, running near a Mile through the West side of it' (BRO: D1/9/24). This indicates that landscaping had yet to be carried out, and

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that it was begun after the sale of the estate, towards the end of the C18. James Oldham Oldham bought the Abbey, which is described in the 1787 sale particulars. It came with stables, outbuildings, gardens, orchards, meadows, shrubberies, plantations and fishery. Oldham had made many considerable alterations to the grounds by 1801 (J. Britton & E.W. Brayley, *The Beauties of England* vol. I, 1801). A footpath diversion plan of 1805 (BRO: QH/21) shows alterations to the outline of the house, together with the area of the gardens near the house and elements of the features in the gardens, a belt running along the Missenden road south of the entrance to the site, and the old footpath across the south front of the house (this was moved to the north of the kitchen gardens north of the house). **KITCHEN GARDEN** Two walled gardens (Grade II) are situated north and north-east of the house. The walls of both are of a similar pattern to the western boundary wall: flint panels with brick piers between them. They may be C18. That north of the house is now reduced to its north and east walls, and encloses the 1985 accommodation block. Its earlier use is uncertain. The other walled garden of similar pattern appears to have been a kitchen garden. It is built into the side of the hill which rises to the east above it. It is now used as an educational facility. **REFERENCES** E. Kaye, *Missenden Abbey, a short history*, 1973, revised 1992. N. Pevsner & E. Williamson, *The Buildings of England, Buckinghamshire*, 1994, 352-353. **MAPS** Ordnance Survey 1st Ed. 25", 1881-2; 1st Ed. 6", 1883; 2nd Ed. 6", 1900; 2nd Ed. 25", 1898; 6" 1921. At Bucks Record Office: QH21 Footpath diversion map, 1805 (details of garden elements, SW belt along Missenden Road, lake & R. Misbourne. Footpath went across SW front of house. Diversion moved it beyond north of gardens. Useful snapshot, no intricate detail). D/BMT/92.T Woodland belonging to John Ayton, Esq., plan, 1811 (may not relate to park). QH52 Footpath stopping up map, 1819. 274 Great Missenden Tithe map, 1839. IR/83 Great Missenden Inclosure map, 1855.

## 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.