

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BOUGHTON HALL

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Name:	BOUGHTON HALL
District:	West Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Boughton
District:	West Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Pitsford
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.293001 Longitude: -0.89626966 National Grid Reference: SP 75374 66670 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001297 Date first listed: 31-Oct-1994

Details

Early C18 gardens and pleasure ground, set within parkland greatly reworked in the second half of the C18 by William Wentworth, second Earl of Strafford.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Boughton and Pitsford estates were purchased by Thomas Wentworth (1672-1739), Earl of Strafford of the second creation (cr 1711), and owner of Wentworth Castle (qv) (purchased in 1708 and then known as Stainborough Hall), from the Lord Ashburnham, mortgagee of Sir John Briscoe, in 1717. They were acquired primarily as a 'half-way house' between London and Yorkshire. Thomas Badeslade included an illustration of the Hall in his series of views published in 1732, and it would appear that Briscoe was responsible for laying out the formal design of gardens depicted, presumably in the 1690s.

Thomas' son William (1722-91) inherited from his father at the age of eighteen, spending two years in Italy before returning to England. He was a close friend and regular correspondent of Horace Walpole (d 1797) having also inherited Mount Lebanon, overlooking Eel Pie Island, less than a mile from Walpole's Strawberry Hill. Of Strafford, Walpole commented: 'Nobody has better taste than this Lord'. William, second Earl, continued to develop the landscape around Boughton Hall, improving the park and giving the surrounding countryside a medieval flavour by the addition of gothic ornamentation to several existing farm buildings, and the construction of several gothic follies.

Boughton Hall was described in 1787 by Count Ferenc Szechenyi (d 1820), a Hungarian nobleman who was visiting England. He recorded: 'The building follows the old taste, it offers exciting vistas through the alleys that pass through the garden. The garden is small, but lovely; the place with the most beautiful view over the remote meadows and hills is on the highway side. From this and from the park the house is separated by a wall sunk in a ditch, which is imperceptible from a distance. There stands a kind of semicircular temple made of laths covered with white linen, which can be rotated round an axle hidden in the ground, in accordance as one wishes to avoid the wind. Not far from the place where one can enter the park and drive to the house there is a look-out tower.'

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The second Earl died without heir and the estate passed to his sister, Lady Lucy Wentworth, who married Sir George Howard. Their daughter, Anne, married General Richard Vyse, and it remained in the Howard-Vyse family until 1927 when it was broken up and sold by Sir Richard Granville Hytton Howard-Vyse.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Boughton Park lies on the west side of the village of Boughton, with the A508 forming the western boundary, Vyse Road defining the extent of the park to the south and south-east, and Butcher's Lane the eastern side of the north park. The disused mineral railway has been taken as the current northern limit of the park. Boughton Hall stands towards the southern end of the site. As described by John Bridges in his *History of Northamptonshire*, compiled between 1719 and 1724 (published 1791), 'it is pleasantly situated upon rising ground which commands a very extensive prospect'. The area here registered extends to 115ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance is the drive off the Market Harborough Road. This leads eastwards along the north side of the gardens and north of the Hall, before curving southwards to reach the east front. As its western end, adjacent to the road, stands the Hawking Tower (also known as the Hawking Lodge) (listed grade II), built c 1756. Horace Walpole wrote to William Wentworth, his friend and the then owner of the Boughton estate: 'I started at the vision of one of my own towers. I soon recollected that it must be Boughton'; it seems probable that he was referring to the Tower.

The gate piers which stood adjacent to this lodge originally bore a lead lion and griffin, the Strafford heraldic supporters. These now adorn the gate piers (listed grade II) which mark the entrance to the estate where the east drive from the present Hall joins Church Street on the west side of Boughton village. This gateway once incorporated a castellated arch (removed c twenty years ago) and is set between high castellated walls which surround the site on this side. A pair of cottages (listed grade II) within the park, 200m to the north-east of the Hall, also sport crenellations, having been converted into an eyecatcher presumably by the second Earl.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The house was deserted after 1808, and by c 1820, when Baker wrote his *History of Northants*, the house was recorded as being nearly levelled to the ground. The present house was built by Richard Burn (d 1870), in 1844, 'in the domestic style of English architecture' (quoted by Pevsner and Cherry 1973). It occupies a site a little to the west of that lived in by the Straffords.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens occupy a level terrace to the west and south of the present Hall, surrounded by a stone retaining wall surviving from the early C18 layout.

PARK An area of level parkland provides the setting for the gardens to the south; a strip of houses has been built within the park, fronting Vyse Road, and their gardens now form the eastern boundary.

To the north, beyond the drive, is the main area of parkland. The remains of the formal planting shown by Badeslade as crossing this area persisted into this century although few trees of this date now survive. The land falls to a stream, a tributary of the River Nene, beyond which it ascends. A block of woodland, Little Brickhill Spinney, stands adjacent to the Market Harborough Road, just to the south of the stream. The estate map of 1794 marks the position of 'The Temple' in this area, overlooking the western end of the lakes on the Hall side of the valley. Any evidence of this structure was presumably destroyed by a Second World War internment camp constructed on the site.

Of the C18 plantings on the north side of the valley, Long Clump, Grotto Spinney and a substantial part of Duke's Clump survive. Duke's Clump Lodge and Scotch Wood, which stand between Long Clump and Duke's Clump, are C19 additions.

The Belt, the perimeter planting at the northern end of the original park, and the small clumps and plantations which once stood north and east of Long Clump, no longer exist, but a drystone wall reflects the historic boundary. The scattering of smaller groups and single trees on this side of the valley have also gone. This area was subject to quarrying; the land has been restored to agricultural use.

To the east, the north park extends past Grotto Spinney, incorporating a drain alongside which survives from a chain of five small ponds which formerly occupied this line. The stream which runs from west to east through the valley is dammed to form a series of pools; a stone bridge carries the track which links the two sides of the valley, as it passes over the stream where it leaves the park. The pools date from the C20, but occupy the site of pools shown on Badeslade, 1732, and the lake illustrated

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BOUGHTON HALL

on the estate map of 1794. This is presumably the 10 acre fishpond mentioned in a survey of 1794, but this had silted up by 1883, as shown on the 1st edition OS map.

A feature of the site is the set of gothic buildings which decorate the park and the wider landscape setting, focusing primarily on the valley to the north of the site. These formed a key part of the second Earl's landscaping activities and, although several of them have not been included within the registered area, standing beyond the more formal park, their interconnection with the site is a highly important part of its character.

To the north of the stream, and 900m north-east of the Hall, is a small plantation, Grotto Spinney, surrounded by a walled ditch, within which a drystone alcove (listed grade II) covers the head of a spring.

Some 250m to the north-west of the spring stands Fox Covert Farm (now (1995) Fox Covert Hall), which, until 1929, was a thatched barn with a pair of castellated towers. The farm was formerly called Newpark Barn, the name being changed with the planting of Fox Covert in the early C20. It was built by the second Earl in 1770.

Also on the north side of the valley, and c 650m east of Grotto Spinney, is Bunkers Hill Farm (listed grade II). Constructed in 1776 (datestone), the farm was named in commemoration of the Battle of Bunkers Hill, 1775; General Sir William Howe, who led the British lines at the battle, was the second Earl's brother-in-law. A carriage arch flanked by a crenellated wall (listed grade II) with buttresses leads into the farmyard.

Standing on Spectacle Lane, the parish and the estate boundary, 1.7km east of the Hall, is a gothic folly known as The Spectacle (listed grade II), erected by the second Earl in 1770.

An obelisk (listed grade II) stands 800m south-east of the Hall, now engulfed by housing on the northern outskirts of Northampton. Erected in 1764 by Lord Strafford, it is dedicated to the memory of William Cavendish, fourth Duke of Devonshire (1720-64) who, as a young man, lived at Boughton.

The church of St John the Baptist, first mentioned in records in 1201, stands 1.5km to the south-west of the Hall. By 1719 the church was in ruins and as such may have been appreciated by Strafford as a 'real' gothic ruin in his landscape.

REFERENCES

J Bridges, *History of Northamptonshire* (1791), p 410 G Baker, *History of Northamptonshire I*, (1820) S Ransome, *Boughton Hall* (1969) H Walpole, *Letters* (1973) N Pevsner and B Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Northamptonshire* (1973), pp 109/10 S Scott, *The Follies of Boughton Park*, (unpublished report 1995)

Maps Map of the Howard-Vyse estate, 1794 (Map 5313), (Northants Record Office) Map of the Parish, 1862 (Northants Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1883 2nd edition published 1901 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1990

Illustrations Engraving, T Badeslade, 1732

Description written: January 1999 Register Inspector: PAS

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.