

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

WELBECK ABBEY

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A late C18 landscape park by Francis Richardson and Humphry Repton which has its origin as the grounds of a Premonstratensian abbey. The Abbey, now a country house, is surrounded by mid C19 gardens, the late C19 and early C20 gardens of Alfred Parsons and Walter Partridge, and the C20 gardens which succeeded the early C17 and then late C17 garden.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Welbeck Abbey, a Premonstratensian foundation, was established in 1153–4 by Thomas de Cuckney. After its Dissolution in 1540 it was acquired by Gilbert Talbot, seventh Earl of Shrewsbury who in 1597 leased it to his brother-in-law Sir Charles Cavendish, son of Bess of Hardwick. Sir Charles purchased the Abbey in 1607 and Robert Smythson produced a plan for rebuilding for him. Sir Charles' son, Sir William Cavendish (d 1677) was created first Duke of Newcastle in 1665. He called in John Smythson to build a riding school and stables. The dukedom became extinct on Sir William's death. John Holles, Earl of Clare who married Sir William's daughter, Lady Margaret Cavendish, was created Duke of Newcastle of the second creation in 1694. Designs by William Talman (1650–1719) and Sir John Vanbrugh (1664–1726) were discussed in 1703 but nothing was built. The Duke's only child, Lady Henrietta Cavendish-Holles (1694–1755) married Edward Harley, second Earl of Oxford, and when she inherited Welbeck further building work commenced. Lady Oxford called in Francis Richardson who produced two plans. Lady Margaret Cavendish-Holles-Harley inherited Welbeck on the death of her father, Lord Oxford, in 1741, later marrying William, second Duke of Portland (d 1762). Building work was carried out in the early 1760s and late 1770s by John Carr of York (1723–1807), including a chapel in 1763. Humphry Repton (1752–1818) produced Red Books in 1790, 1793, and 1803 for the third Duke, William Henry Cavendish Bentinck (1738–1809) outlining his proposals for alterations to the landscape. He recommended emphasising the *piano nobile* of the Abbey by raising a sloping bank in front of the basement, laying out the pleasure grounds, deepening and extending the lakes, and building new bridges. His second Red Book dealt with the situation of the Abbey and his third Red Book suggested building a new house on a hill to the north of the Abbey. In 1810, Bulstrode Park (qv), home of the dukes of Portland was sold and Welbeck Abbey became their main residence. Alfred Parsons and Walter Partridge worked on the gardens from 1899 to 1905. Since 1952 part of the site has been leased to Welbeck College; Welbeck Abbey remains (1999) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Welbeck Abbey is situated 7km south-west of Worksop and 3.5km east of the village of Creswell. The site covers c 1140ha. The western boundary largely follows the A60 while the northern boundary partly follows the line of Millwood Brook then continues east through woodland, south of Manor Hills. The eastern boundary crosses woodland, running first south then south-east to the east end of Carburton Dam Lake. The southern boundary runs west along an unclassified road, parallel for part of the way to Carburton Dam Lake and Carburton

Forge Lake, to Tile Kiln Wood in the south-west corner of the site. The setting is arable and woodland in an undulating landscape.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance is at Main Gates Lodge, off the A60 at the south-west corner of the site, 1.7km from the Abbey. The drive, known as Winnings Road because of a row of almshouses known as the Winnings (listed grade II), extends north-east, then north to Welbeck estate village. A further entrance is located 220m north of the main entrance, from where another drive curves north-east for 550m, terminating at a lodge immediately south of the walled kitchen garden. The entrance to the kitchen garden, now (1999) a garden centre, and the Gasworks, now (1999) the Harley Gallery, is 750m north of the main entrance, some 1.65km from the Abbey. Sharing this entrance and running to the north of the Gallery is the entrance to Welbeck College and to the offices housed to the rear of the Gallery. This drive continues north of the walled garden then bifurcates, with the northern path continuing past the north of the stables and then north-east to West Park. The southern path leads to the estate village. Some 2km north from the main entrance and c 2km from the Abbey at Gunabrig Lodge, a road runs south-east past Fishpond Lodge to join the drive from Creswell Crag then continues past Oaksetts Lodge to the stables. Park Lodge lies on the southern boundary of the site, c 1.6km from the Abbey. From this lodge a drive runs north for 300m then north-west for a further 1km before curving north again for 350m and entering the pleasure grounds. The path continues for 150m to Grotto Lodge and then runs north-east for 550m to arrive at the gates (mid C19, listed grade II) standing 150m west of the Abbey. Another drive enters the site 500m north-west of the village of Norton and 1.85km south-east of the Abbey, by Bunker's Hill Lodge (c 1860, listed grade II), built of ashlar with a decorative tiled roof. The drive goes north for 850m then curves north-west for c 1km before turning north to arrive at the west entrance of the Abbey.

Around the boundaries are a number of other lodges, all of which date from c 1860 and are listed grade II. A network of paths crosses the site both east to west and north to south.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Welbeck Abbey (listed grade I), a stone-built L-shaped building, stands in the centre of the site, west of Shrubbery Lake. The entrance front to the west is of two storeys, with three-storey towers at each end and a central four-storey pedimented entrance with a Baroque-style *porte-cochère*. The three-storey Oxford wing stands to the south. Chapel Court, an extension of the entrance front, curves north-west to the rectangular chapel and library wing. The west front overlooking Shrubbery Lake is one of the garden fronts, the other being the south front of the Oxford wing.

Robert Smythson (1535–1614) produced a plan for rebuilding the Abbey for Sir Charles Cavendish but only a small part of these proposals were carried out. The south wing was reconstructed and the west wing remodelled by John James (c 1672–1746) for Lady Oxford in the period 1741–52 after a survey in 1741. Alterations to the east front were made in 1764–5 by John Carr of York. The west front was remodelled by Humphry Repton in 1790 emphasising the *piano nobile* of the house by hiding the basement with a sloping bank. In the 1860s the fifth Duke rebuilt the south wing, and built a series of underground rooms and a glass-roofed conservatory connected by tunnels. After a fire c 1900 the south wing of the Abbey was remodelled by Sir Ernest George (1839–1922).

The Stables (listed grade I), which stand 950m west of the Abbey, are built around a square courtyard with entrances to the north and south. They are now (1999) College offices. Earlier stables, demolished in the 1860s, had been built in 1625 by John Smythson. The Riding School, 800m west of the Abbey, was built by John Smythson (d 1634) in 1622 for Sir William Cavendish. It were remodelled into a chapel and a library for the sixth Duke in the 1890s to designs by John Dando Sedding (1838–91) who died before the work was begun. To the south-east of the Riding School is the mid C19 estate village, converted to school buildings in the mid to late C20.

Set within Roomwood Plantation, north of Welbeck Park and some 1.2km north-east of the Abbey, is Welbeck Woodhouse (listed grade II), built in 1930–1 for the Marquis of Tichfield to designs by Walter Brierley (1862–1926) and Mr Rutherford. This site is almost identical to that chosen by Repton for his proposal for a new house at Welbeck in 1803 (*CL* 1933).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gardens are situated on the south and east fronts of Welbeck Abbey, with further west the Sunken Garden and a fountain garden to the north. From the forecourt at the west entrance the south front garden is approached down steps at the side of the Oxford wing, with pairs of urns at top and bottom, leading to a terrace. From the steps, a path joins the main terrace path which runs east and west. The western part of the path has a wall as its northern boundary for 90m, then curves south and south-west to join the south drive. East of the steps the path runs parallel to the south front of the Abbey and continues to join the lake-side path beside Shrubbery Lake. Off this path, aligned with the central canted bay of the south front, a path leads south to ornamental gates set in a low balustraded wall, the southern boundary of the lower terrace, which overlooks the cricket ground. The path widens midway along and is edged with yews set around a large copper, marble, and ashlar fountain decorated with cherubs, garlands, and mythical heads, set in a circular basin (listed grade II with the walls); between the paths is a lawn. Some 40m east of the fountain path a path leads north to steps to an upper terrace of the east front garden. To the south-west of the Abbey is a summerhouse.

South-east of the east front, with the steps to the upper terrace of the east front garden forming its western boundary, is a small ornamental vegetable garden surrounded on three sides by a small hedge, with on the east side a low wall topped with statues. The vegetable garden is grassed between the beds with a well in the centre. North of this garden are the upper terraces on the east front which overlook Shrubbery Lake. They are entered by steps from the south front terrace or from steps set in the balustraded eastern wall. The east garden is on two levels with central steps leading from the upper terrace to the lower terrace, now (1999) a rose garden. On the northern edge of the terraces stand two summerhouses (listed grade II), the one on the upper terrace having a curved colonnade. The one on the lower terrace is semicircular with a gabled copper roof supported on ashlar piers. A fountain, aligned with the centre of the east front and the central steps, is set in the centre of the lower terrace.

The Sunken Garden (late C19 and C20, listed grade II), 230m west of the Abbey, was created by the sixth Duke from the excavations for the fifth Duke's enormous Bachelor's Hall. The mid C19 Glass Court abuts its northern edge, with gated entrances down steps into the Garden from the north-east and south-east corners and in the south a sloped stone pathway. To the north, abutting Glass Court, is a large pedimented summerhouse with stone pillars to the front and wooden pilasters to the rear. In the centre of the Garden is a tennis court flanked on the north by an ornamental pool and on the south by a swimming pool, converted from the

southern ornamental pool. Around the outer edge of the pool and tennis court are brick pergolas. Against the south wall is a small temple with a roof supported by four herms with, on the back wall, a pedimented ornament dated 1641, and an inscription celebrating the peace of 1919 at the end of the First World War. In the middle of the east side of the Garden is a statue and in the middle of the west side is an ornamental well. The Sunken Garden was part of a design commissioned in 1899 from Alfred Parsons (1884–1914) and Captain Walter Croker Saint-Ives Partridge (1855–1924) (Milette 1995). The fountain garden, 160m north of the Abbey, was also included in this design and was a rectangular garden with a central fountain; it is now (1999) an assault course. West of this, set among ornamental trees, mainly cedar, is another assault course. A grotto with a rusticated entrance (listed grade II) is situated 30m north of the Abbey.

William Senior's survey of Welbeck Abbey and its surroundings, made by 1629, showed elaborate water gardens to the south and east of the house. Arcades lay at either end of a long canal to the east and another canal flowed to the south under two taller buildings or pavilions, approached by steps. John Smythson's design for one of the pavilions survives (Girouard 1983). The gardens are no longer extant. Francis Richardson made a survey for Lady Oxford in 1748 of the park and gardens at Welbeck. This shows formal gardens with two terraces on the south front, a water garden of seven interconnected rectangular pools to the east and, at the north end of the water garden, a walled orchard. The terraced gardens are illustrated in a watercolour of c 1730 (Harley Gallery). Also in 1748, Richardson produced a plan which swept away the formal gardens. Repton laid out a pleasure garden in the 1790s (Stroud 1962). From 1899 to 1905 Parsons and Partridge worked at Welbeck, their design including the south and east terraces, the Sunken Garden, the walk beside Shrubbery Lake, and the fountain garden (Milette 1995).

PARK

Parkland surrounds the gardens and pleasure grounds of Welbeck Abbey to the north and south with Shrubbery Lake dividing them from the park to the east. The lakes, known as Gouldsmeadow Lake, Shrubbery Lake, Great Lake, Carburton Forge Dam, and Carburton Dam divide the site on a north-west to south-east axis running from the tip of Gouldsmeadow Lake c 1.1km north-west of the Abbey to Carburton Dam at the south-east corner of the site, 4km south-east of the Abbey. Between each lake are bridges carrying paths into the parkland. The bridge (listed grade II) between Shrubbery Lake and Great Lake has a late C19 gateway with iron gates and screens. The parkland north-west of the Abbey is known as West Park which is bounded on the north-west by boundary plantations. The paths which cross this part of the park are partly underground, forming part of the complex of tunnels which runs throughout the site. Several lodges are set within this part of the park: West Park Lodge, 1.1km north-west of the Abbey; Gouldsmeadow Lodge, 1.15km north-west of the Abbey; Millwood Lodge (c 1860, listed grade II), 1.7km north-west of the Abbey; and Oaksetts Lodge, 1.1km west of the Abbey. To the east of Gouldsmeadow Lake is White Deer Park, now (1999) arable. This park is crossed by a tunnel 890m long which ends at Tunnel End Lodges standing 1.2km north-east of the Abbey within ornamental trees. In the south-west corner of White Deer Park, on the eastern shore of Shrubbery Lake is a wooden boathouse (listed grade II). South-east of White Deer Park is Welbeck Park which is broken up with plantations and is now mainly arable. The parkland to the west of the lakes is also now (1999) arable.

Richardson's plan of 1748 shows a lake where Gouldsmeadow Lake is now. Mrs Delaney

(1700–88), a good friend of the Duchess of Portland, wrote in 1756 that ‘they are floating a valley’ (Thacker 1994). Repton recommended the building of new bridges and deepening the lake (Stroud 1962) and his Red Book of 1793 shows a scheme for draining the lake to provide a new approach (CL 1933).

KITCHEN GARDEN

The 10ha kitchen garden complex is located 1.1km west of the Abbey. The west of the area is now (late C20) a garden centre and car park. The greenhouses (Messenger & Co, early C20) set in the western end of the north wall are still extant. The eastern gardens, bounded to the east by the east garden wall, are now paddocks. To the north-west of the garden is the early 1990s Harley Gallery, the entrance to which is through gates off the car park. The Gallery is built on the site of the Gasworks built by the fifth Duke to light his tunnels. Within the courtyard of the Gallery is a fountain (1990s) set within a pond with stepped sides fed by two concrete water features set at each end of the south side of the courtyard.

OTHER LAND

West of the main site, c 3km west of the Abbey and covering c 24ha are Creswell Crags (scheduled ancient monument). The Crags comprise a wide gorge with rugged limestone cliffs containing caves on either side. In the centre is a lake, the area to the west being very silted up (1999). The lake was used for wildfowl shooting from the early C18 and the Crags were used as source of building stone. Excavations in the late C19 revealed relics of the Palaeolithic era as well as evidence of cave dwellings of 20,000 BC and others from the C5 and C6 AD (Player 1997).

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Illustrations

Watercolour, Terraced gardens at Welbeck, c 1730 (Harley Gallery)

Archival items

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