

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

BABWORTH HALL

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II

A late C18 landscape park designed by Humphry Repton, which surrounds an early C18 country house with later alterations set within pleasure grounds.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

J Bridgeman Simpson inherited the C18 Hall and called in Humphry Repton (1752–1818) who produced a Red Book in 1790. Repton's proposals included a covered or winter walk, enlarging the lake and planting around it, putting in the eastern approach, and laying out the walled garden (Stroud 1962). The Hall remained in the Bridgeman Simpson family until the late C19 when it was purchased by Colonel Whitaker. The Hall became a convalescent hospital in the First World War. The Hall and its grounds remain (2000) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Babworth Hall is situated 2km west of Retford and comprises c 85ha. The northern boundary gives onto arable land; the eastern edge of Dog Kennels Plantation abuts the Chesterfield Canal on the north-east boundary, continuing southwards and merging with other woodland to form the south-east boundary. The southern boundary runs westwards along Babworth Road to the south-west corner of the site. From there the western boundary runs northwards along Sutton Lane. The site is mainly flat but slopes to the south-east. The setting is rural to the north and west and urban to the east and south-east, with the East Coast railway line running in a north-westerly direction c 250m from the eastern boundary of the site.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

There are two entrances to the park. From Sutton Lane the west drive runs past the brick-built West Lodge eastwards for 600m then turns south for 60m to meet the east drive at the east front of the stables, 90m north of Babworth Hall, from where it continues south to the west front of the Hall. From Babworth Road, the road to Retford, the east drive runs north-westwards for 500m from the gates, flanked by stone gate piers, by Babworth Hall Lodge which is of brick with a tiled roof. It then crosses a bridge to the north of the dried-up lake, before turning south-westwards for 400m to arrive at the west front of the Hall. An approach from the Retford Road was proposed by Repton but the existing drive was not laid out as planned (Pevsner and Williamson 1979). Carriages using the proposed approach would have been hidden by trees when nearing the Hall. A short drive from Old Lodge, 500m east of Babworth Hall on the eastern boundary of the site, joins the main west drive to the Hall.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Babworth Hall (listed grade II), which stands in the southern half of the park, is built of three storeys in red brick and ashlar. Dating from the mid C18, alterations were made in the late C18 by Humphry Repton as set out in his Red Book of 1790. He proposed that the Hall be colour-washed with a mixture of lime mixed with black and yellow. The Hall was described in 1790 (Throsby) as having been 'greatly enlarged by the present possessor' and the description.

continues 'it has a modern front of brick, with plain ornamental stone'. Repton's proposal to colour-wash the Hall had been carried out by 1813 as it was described in *The Beauties of England and Wales* as 'a plain, comfortable, white-fronted residence having had considerable additions made by the present possessor' (Stroud 1962). In 1850 William Burn (1789–1870) restored the red brick and carried out other alterations.

Some 90m north-west of the Hall stand the stables, (early C19, listed grade II), built of ashlar, render, and red brick with slate roofs to a quadrangle plan. The stables stand south-east of the walled garden, the south-west wall of the stables being the south-east wall of the walled garden.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gardens lie to the south of the Hall within the pleasure grounds which enclose the Hall, stables, and walled garden. Lawns lie to the west, south, and east of the Hall. To the south-east of the south lawn are gradually sloping cobbled steps, flanked by yews, which lead to the lower garden. At the base of the steps a path leads westwards with shrubs planted on the steep slope. Some 20m along the path a narrow, stepped stone path leads north-westwards to the upper garden. Further along the path to the south is a swimming pool together with a wooden hut. Shrubs are planted to the west of the pool. The path continues to the west end of the garden and then leads north up a gentle slope to the upper lawn. Another path leads westwards off from this junction in the lower garden to join a path which runs north-eastwards. This path runs in a cutting with banked sides and leads to the forecourt at the west front of the Hall.

Repton, in his *Observations on The Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1803), described winter or covered walks in general:

it was possible to obtain a covered line of connection with the green-house, and other appendages of a winter garden, at a little distance from the house ... a shelter from rain at all seasons but not covered in glass, all which add great comfort to the interior, while they contribute, by their exterior, to ornament garden history.

One of his examples on a small scale was 'the winter walk at at the Hon J B Simpson's at Babworth' (Repton 1803).

The pleasure grounds are enclosed by a ha-ha on the south-west boundary at the western edge of the west lawn and on the south-east boundary. To the north and south of the west lawn are lightly wooded areas. In 1790 the pleasure grounds were described thus: 'The pleasure grounds, which appear to be pleasing appendages, are improving under the direction of a Mr Repton' (Throsby 1790).

The area surrounding All Saints' church (listed grade I), 150m south-west of the Hall, and Haygarth House, the former Rectory (listed grade II), 240m south-west of the Hall, forms part of the pleasure grounds which extend to north of the walled garden. The Rectory was aggrandised for the Rector, the younger brother of J B Simpson, in the late C18/early C19 (J Whittaker pers comm, 2000).

PARK

The Hall stands with the pleasure grounds in the centre of the parkland. Some 220m south-west of the Hall lie the remains of a lake, which dried up in the early 1960s due to changes in the water table. Between the pleasure grounds and the lake lies the Lawn (parish map, 1857) which is now (2000) put down to permanent pasture. East of the lake lies an area of woodland stretching along the eastern boundary of the site, the north-east section of which is known as Dog Kennels Plantation with Lakeside Plantation to the south-east. Dog Kennels Plantation was put in as part of Repton's designs (J Whittaker pers comm, 2000). The woodland is a mixture of the early C19 trees and mid to late C20 additions. The remainder of the park is mainly laid down to arable.

Repton's Red Book discusses ornamenting the lake. Illustrations in the Red Book of the area before improvement show a bleak and windy scene beside the lake with Mr and Mrs Simpson being blown by the wind and Retford church spire in the distance. Repton's illustration of his proposed improvements shows the family sitting under mature trees playing musical instruments on the lawn which slopes down to the lake, now planted around the edges (Stroud 1962). By 1899 a path ran from the pleasure grounds east to the lake and then south along the lake side, crossing the lake by a series of three footbridges between two islands at the southern end. The path continued north on the east shore of the lake to the Boat House at the north end, then crossed the stream which runs from the lake and continued westwards to the east front of the stables, with a spur running south-westwards 100m from the stables (OS 1899). The path across the park has gone (2000) and the lake site is much overgrown.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The walled kitchen garden lies immediately west of the stables, 100m north-west of the Hall. The garden is approached from the south-east as a spur of the path from the forecourt of the Hall to the stables. Some 60m north-westwards along this path another path leads north-west through woodland to south of the walled garden, with wide herbaceous borders abutting the south-facing external walls. The entrance to the walled garden is by a cast-iron gate. Within the garden are planted Christmas trees at the west end with a C20 greenhouse abutting the north wall. Marks on the north wall confirm the location of the former lean-to greenhouse (OS 1899). A border planted with rhododendrons abuts the south wall. Set against the centre of the east wall is a brick-built, two-storey gardener's house. In the south-east corner of the garden is the bothy, now (2000) a private cottage, whose garden lies to the south of the stables. The kitchen garden was proposed by Repton in his Red Book of 1790 and was laid out according to his plan with brick walls set at intervals with stoves and flues to ward off frost (Stroud 1962). Bound into Repton's Red Book is a working drawing by William Wilkins for a greenhouse; this was never built (ibid).

REFERENCES

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S Daniels, *Humphry Repton, Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England* (1999), pp 12–13, 55–6, figs 18, 58

Maps

Pigot and Co, *British Atlas, Counties of England* (1840)

Parish map, 1857 (BA/BL), (Retford Museum)

OS Old Series 1" to 1 mile published c 1840

OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1906

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1884, published 1886

2nd edition published 1899

3rd edition published 1920

Archival items

H Repton, Red Book for Babworth Hall, 1790 (private collection)

Description written: May 2000

Register Inspector: CEB

Edited: January 2002