

PARK PLACE, AND TEMPLE COMBE

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Official list entry

Heritage Category:**Park and Garden**

Grade:**II***

List Entry Number:**1000588**

Date first listed:**30-Sep-1987**

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Location

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

District:**Wokingham (Unitary Authority)**

Parish:**Remenham**

District:**Wokingham (Unitary Authority)**

Parish:**Wargrave**

National Grid Reference:**SU 77850 81998**

Details

Park Place, a C19 country house on the site of an earlier house, surrounded by C18 and C19 gardens and pleasure grounds and landscape park, with work in the mid to late C19 by Robert Marnock. A second, smaller estate, Temple Combe, developed during the late C18, lies enclosed within the Park Place estate.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1719 Mrs Elizabeth Baker sold land called Park's Place, also known as Strowdes, to Lord Archibald Hamilton, who at some time after this erected a Palladian mansion called Park Place on a new site (VCH 1923). In 1738 Park Place was sold to Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707-51) (ibid). Following Frederick's death in 1751 the estate was bought by General the Hon Henry Seymour Conway (1720-95), cousin of Horace Walpole, who enlarged the parkland during the 1760s-80s, embellishing it with various ornamental structures and buildings and developing the area known as Temple Combe. Following Conway's death in 1795, the estate was sold in 1797 to Lord Malmesbury who further expanded the park to the east, and entertained Pitt, Canning and other notable men of the day there. Following its sale in 1816 the estate passed through several hands during the C19. The house was rebuilt c 1871, following a fire, for John Noble of Noble's Paints and Varnishes (who had bought the estate in 1867), together with a new stable block. The grounds were subject to extensive 'landscape gardening' carried out under Robert Marnock (1800-89) c 1869, who planted thousands of specimen

trees and shrubs, 'as far as possible every known variety!' (Noble 1905). In 1949 the estate was sold out of the Noble family into divided ownership, the house becoming a school during the later C20, and being now (1998) in private ownership. A golf course has been constructed in the north-east corner of the park, with a second, smaller one in Happy Valley, and the estate remains in divided ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Park Place estate lies adjacent to the north bank of the River Thames, east of Henley-on-Thames. The 240ha site is bounded to the south-west partly by the river and partly by the A321 Henley to Wargrave road, to the east by a lane linking the A4130 Henley to London road with the A321, and to the north by the A4130 itself. The site occupies a plateau above the Thames valley lying towards the southern end of the Chiltern Hills, including, to the south-west, the undulating hillside leading down to the adjacent river. The setting is largely rural, with views from the western edge of the site over the river towards Henley to the west, and towards the countryside to the south and west.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance, standing 800m north-west of the house, is approached off the A4130 half-way up White Hill, and is flanked by two white-painted gate piers. From here the drive curves up the steep hillside through woodland, with views west across the river towards Henley, opening out at the top, 400m north-west of the house, into parkland lying on the plateau. Some 100m from the north front the drive turns south, passing between two pairs of stone obelisks (C18, listed grade II, erected mid C19 having been moved from Stanstead Hall) standing 60m from the house, and beyond this entering a tarmac forecourt leading to a porte-cochère on the north front. A spur leads off the east side of the forecourt to the stable yard entrance, marked by an archway set in the wall.

Several further drives give access to the house, crossing the parkland from the east, south-east and north-east, entering off the A4130 and the lane to the east of the park. Several of these entrances are marked by C18 and C19 lodges at the edge of the park. The drives converge 350m east of Park Place house, continuing west as one east drive to join the west drive where it turns south 100m from the house.

In the mid to late C18 (Rocque, 1761; Pride, 1790) a straight drive flanked by a double avenue of trees

gave access to the house directly from the Henley to London road to the north. The entrance off the road was set back in a curved sweep; the present flint and stone Tower Lodge (C18, listed grade II) standing 550m north of the house was possibly associated with that entrance.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Park Place (Thomas Cundy 1870, listed grade II), built of rendered brick in French Renaissance style, stands on the site of an C18 building which was badly damaged by fire c 1870, possibly incorporating parts of the C18 work. It is entered via a porte-cochère on the north front, with the west front giving access to the gardens via an iron staircase down from the ground floor, and, standing on the east front, the foundations of a former conservatory (demolished mid-late C20).

The stables (c 1871, listed grade II), standing 30m north-east of the house, are also of rendered brick, arranged in three ranges around a yard, with the fourth, west side formed of a closing wall with an entrance archway giving access from the forecourt.

GARDEN AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens surround the house to the west, south and east, with pleasure grounds leading away to the south towards the river.

Below the west front of the house, and reached by steps down from the garden door, lies a formal, rectangular terraced garden, separated from the house by an upper terrace running along the west front bounded at the west edge by stone balustrading. From the upper terrace a double flight of stone steps leads down a stone retaining wall to the centre of the garden terrace below, the steps being flanked by two alcoves set into the retaining wall. A perimeter path encircles the terrace, with two circular panels of lawn at the north and south ends flanking a central panel in which has been placed a tennis court enclosed by chain-link fencing. Formerly (OS 1913; 1938) a ride extended south-east from the south end of the terrace garden through woodland. The terraces overlook a lawn to the west, bounded to the west by mature trees, originally (OS 1913; 1938) with open views west towards Henley and the hillsides beyond (OS 1883; Harris 1979).

Adjacent to the south front lies a large tarmac rectangle, formerly (OS 1913) laid to lawn and surrounded by a perimeter path. South and east of this feature lie open lawns planted with many specimen trees, including large cedars of Lebanon (reputed to have been planted by Frederick, Prince of Wales) and enclosed by woodland. A path leads east from the tarmac area to the west entrance to the walled kitchen gardens. The lawn east of the house merges into an area of open woodland and

shrubbery enclosing an informal pond with two islands, largely surrounded by a grass path. Beyond this to the north, separated by the east drive, lie the remains of further ponds set in woodland.

In the mid C18 the house, set in a garden enclosure, overlooked the scarp edge to the west, with views across the River Thames to the countryside beyond, as shown on a view of the early 1740s, which also shows several formal garden terraces below the west front. At this time the south front of the house led directly into an enclosed wilderness crossed by two intersecting straight paths, one set on an axis with the house (Rocque, 1761; Harris 1979).

The informal and partly wooded pleasure grounds extend south from the lawns around the house. The remains of a sunken feature including dry waterways and a terrace to the east (probably C19) extend south alongside the west wall of the kitchen garden, leading to an overgrown area 300m south-east of the house in which lie several entrances to a network of ruinous C18 caves and tunnels cut into the chalk. Some of these entrances retain their flint archways, but most have lost their architectural features. From here a tunnel leads c 170m south to the Happy Valley hillside, emerging near the top of the valley in the dilapidated Grotto (C18, listed grade II), a long, vaulted gallery with niches for statues cut into and built of chalk beneath the slope at the head of the valley, the outer face having a series of six arches facing down the valley to the river. At each side of the Grotto stand ruinous flanking brick and flint structures originally representing Grecian ruins, reputed to be designed by James Stuart (listed building description). Formerly a gothic or rustic cottage (now gone) stood 400m south-east of Park Place house, above the Grotto at the head of Happy Valley.

The view down the grassy Happy Valley (now, 1998, a golf course) is flanked by mature trees, mostly beeches, with Conway Bridge (architect Thomas Pitt, first Lord Camelford, engineer Rev Humphrey Gainsborough, brother of Thomas Gainsborough, 1763, listed grade II) standing c 375m south of the Grotto, framing a view of the river beyond. This road bridge, carrying the Henley to Wargrave road, is built of cyclopian blocks in imitation of rockwork, and frames the river such that from the Grotto the river appears to lie immediately beyond the bridge, whereas in reality the river bank separates the bridge from the river by 50m. The bridge gives access to an open riverside lawn to the south, flanked to the north-east by the road, from which it is screened by mature trees, sloping down to the river to the south-west, with an early C19 boathouse by the waterside. From here views extend south-east across the river to water meadows and the hills beyond. Walpole wrote in 1763 'the works at Park Place go on bravely; ... the bridge [will be] sublime, composed of loose rocks that appear to have been

tumbled together there, the very wreck of a deluge; (quoted in Jacques 1983).

North-west of Happy Valley lie the remains of a further area of C18/early C19 pleasure grounds, covering an area towards the top, north-east side of Mill Bank. Within this area, 300m south-south-west of the house, lies a south-west-facing, rustic, semicircular flint alcove (mid/late C18, listed grade II) set into the hillside within woodland. It stands at the edge of a terraced path running north-west to south-east along the contour of the hillside. Close to the south-east end of the hillside path, 350m south of the house, stands a Chinese-style wooden summerhouse (rebuilt C20). The summerhouse stands on an artificial, south-facing promontory overlooking Happy Valley to the south and east, located at the south end of a path running along the top of a substantial raised bank which emerges from the woodland to the north.

South of Happy Valley lie the grounds of the former Temple Combe, a house erected during the later C18 at the top of the scarp, enjoying panoramic views of the Thames Valley. The original house, lying 700m south-east of Park Place house, was demolished in the C20, to be replaced in 1963-4 by a low, curvaceous modern house on the same site (Pevsner 1966), known as Happy Valley. This small estate, enclosed within the Park Place estate, is largely composed of woodland surrounding open lawns and paddocks, its principal feature being the Druidic Temple (erected 1787, listed grade II). The Temple stands at the top of the hillside 100m south-west of Happy Valley house, comprising a circular collection of forty-five granite megalithic stones set vertically into the ground with other stones as lintels. The Temple, found near St Helier, was presented to General Conway by the inhabitants of Jersey during his period as their Governor. Horace Walpole described the temple as 'very high priestly' (Pevsner 1966) and named it 'Little Master Stonehenge'. From the Temple views extend south-west across the river to the water meadows and the distant hillside.

PARK The extensive park, largely laid out during the later C18 by General Conway, surrounds the inner core of the gardens and pleasure grounds. Areas of open parkland, many containing clumps and specimen trees, are enclosed by belts of trees and woodland, the latter particularly found to the west of the site. The north-east section, incorporated in the C19, has been overlaid by a golf course (late C20), the remainder being a mixture of arable and pasture. An obelisk (late C17, erected 1837, listed grade II) stands 250m north-east of the house, part of the spire of St Bride's, Fleet Street (London) designed by Sir Christopher Wren, re-erected here by Mr Fuller-Maitland to commemorate Queen Victoria's accession.

KITCHEN GARDEN The 1ha brick-walled kitchen garden, probably dating from the mid C18 (Pride, 1790) lies 300m south-east of the house, on the plateau above Happy Valley, bounded to the west by the northern arm of the pleasure grounds.

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OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1883 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1938 OS
25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1913

Description written: November 1998 Amended: September 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: April
2000

Legacy

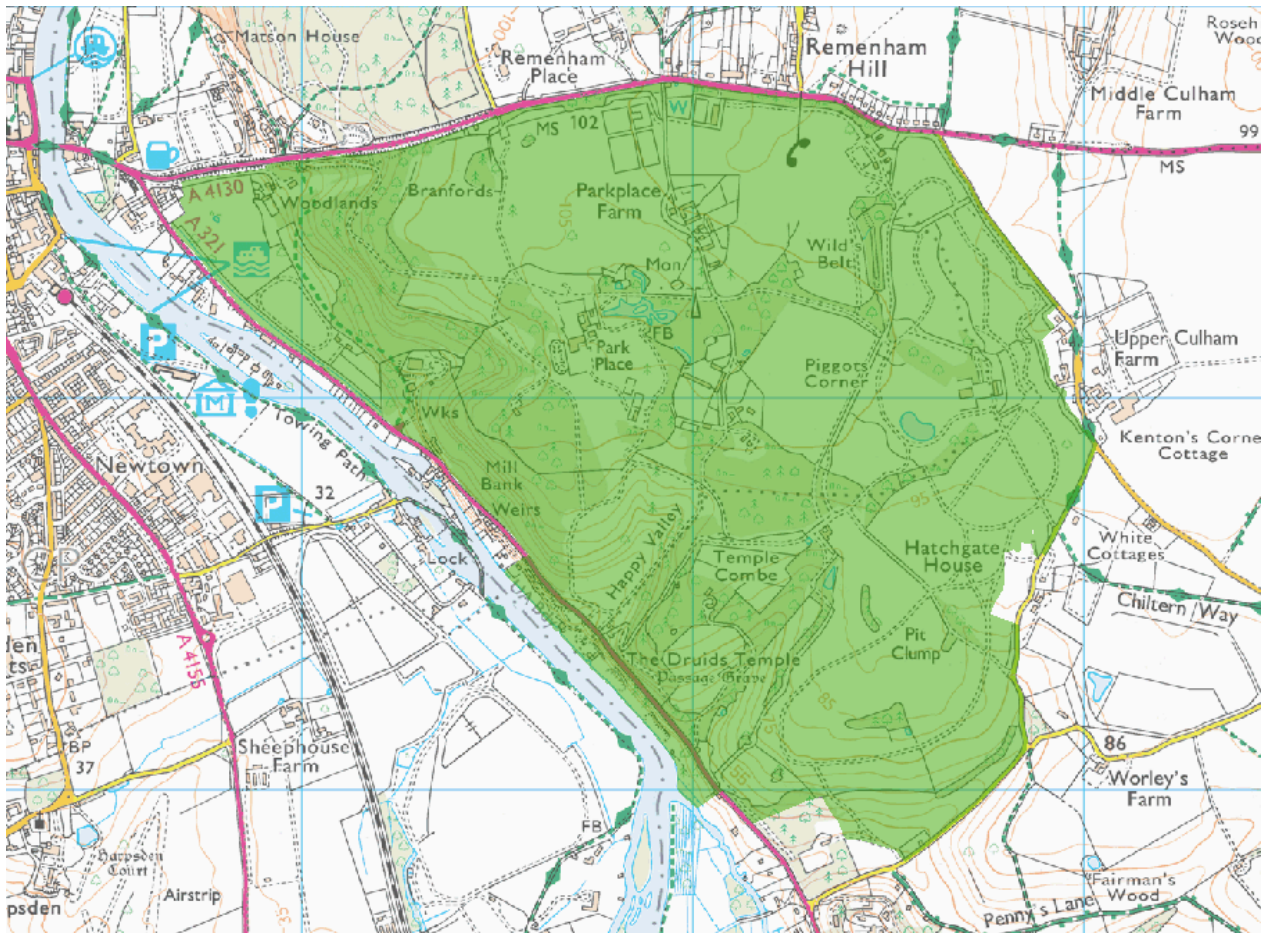
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Map

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