



YORKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

High Melton Hall park and garden

Statement of Significance

This statement of significance for High Melton Hall park and garden, created by the Yorkshire Gardens Trust, is derived from research carried out as part of Doncaster Historic Designed Landscapes project.

1. Heritage Values Summary

High Melton Hall is situated in an area of significant designed landscapes including Sprotbrough, Cusworth, Hickleton and Brodsworth and these must have had an impact on the evolution of its historic landscape over the 250 years that it belonged to the Fountayne family. While some historic features have been lost, most notably the walled kitchen gardens and their associated buildings, the historic parkland and woodland of Melton Wood and Melton Warren largely remain. These represent an important survival of late 17th century parkland and a key area of green space for the local residents. The surviving icehouse and the garden building known as the fernery add to the legibility of the historic designed landscape. The medieval St James Church (Grade II*) and the scheduled monument of the Wildthorpe medieval settlement are linked by the 'Dean's Walk', a designed feature from the 18th century that afforded views over the parkland, towards the River Dearne and to Melton Wood to the north.

2. Historical Value ('Narrative')

The historic designed landscape around High Melton Hall was developed by the Fountayne family from the late 17th century. The previous owner, John Levett, had acquired through inheritance, marriage and purchase, the manor of High Melton, a modest mansion house and most of the land in the township of c. 1440 acres by 1649. On gaining the property in 1666, John Fountayne (or possibly his brother, Thomas, from 1680) laid out the c. 40 acre park to the south and west of the hall before 1711. To the north, the extensive Melton Wood with rides through was probably added in the early 18th century by Thomas' son, John. The bathhouses and their associated ponds to the west were also possibly in place by 1702.

John Fountayne's second son, also John, inherited in 1740. Following his third marriage to the heiress, Ann Montagu, in 1754, he expanded the park and also developed the land nearer the Hall with pleasure grounds, walled kitchen gardens, an orangery and hothouse/vinery. Fountayne's grandson, Richard Fountayne Wilson, continued to develop the estate from 1802, including adding or extending the woodland just north of the hall (Melton Warren). The final changes were made by Wilson's two sons, Andrew and James Montagu, with the former dismantling the walled kitchen garden area to turn into pleasure grounds with a footbridge over the village lane to Melton Warren. James Montagu added the conservatory to the hall in 1876 and he, or possibly his widow, made the



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third kitchen garden northeast of the church. The estate was put up for sale in 1927, with the hall and about 120 acres as one lot. This was sold to Doncaster Council in 1947 for use as a college, which closed in 2017.

3. Evidential Value ('Research')

Although both the documentary and physical evidence (ridge and furrow on lidar images) show that the park was created from unenclosed land in the late 17th century, further research is needed to establish exactly when and how it was originally laid out. Two avenues of trees are shown on the Jeffrey's map of c. 1771 from the hall, one due west to Melton Mill Lane and the other southwest to Mill Race on the river Dearne, so perhaps these were remnants of a more formal layout that was popular at this period.

The role of John Fountayne in further developing the designed landscape remains unclear due to a lack of documentary evidence. It is likely he followed gardening trends and made the parkland and surrounding gardens less formal in the second half of the 18th century. William Mason (1724-1797), poet and garden designer, had professional and personal links to John Fountayne over a period of 40 years through Fountayne's wife. Her family home of Papplewick, Nottinghamshire, was landscaped at this time with advice from Mason, so the latter's involvement at High Melton should be explored.

Richard Fountayne Wilson too may have called upon the services of a professional landscape designer. A letter from Adam Mickle junior (c. 1747 – 1811) to William Danby dated 5 May 1805, in the Swinton Park archives (North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZS collection), mentioned that he had been at Melton at that time. It would be of interest to know whether he prepared a plan and whether any of it was implemented.

The surviving garden building in the former pleasure grounds may date from the 18th century with repurposing as a fernery in the 19th century. Given its current ruined state, more research is needed to establish its origins and later uses, so that it may be sensitively stabilised or restored. There is also the possibility that another garden building, known as the Temple, in Melton Warren may have survived.

4. Aesthetic Value ('Emotion')

High Melton Hall and its surroundings lie in a conservation area, reflecting the fact that despite some additional modern buildings, its historic setting remains legible. The grounds and parkland of High Melton Hall, as well as Melton Warren and Melton Wood (which are not included in the conservation area) contribute to the important woodland element of this area, in contrast to the open spaces of the surrounding fields and wider rural setting.

The designed landscape to the south is influenced by the picturesque nature of the limestone ridge known as Melton Cliff and where the deserted medieval settlement of Wildthorpe was located.



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From the church near the hall, there is a path known as 'Dean's Walk' that must have been created by John Fountayne in the 18th century. From it there are spectacular views out over the Dearne Valley.

5. Communal Value ('Togetherness')

When the site was a college, it was an important area of green space for local residents and those that used the golf course.

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