



YORKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

Owston Hall park and garden

Statement of Significance

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

1. Heritage Values Summary

The historic designed landscape around Owston Hall was shaped by Bryan Cooke and his son, Philip Davies-Cooke, between 1785 and 1853, with the former consulting the noted landscape designers, Thomas White and Humphry Repton. Although much altered, the mid-19th century designed landscape is still legible today as a setting for the Grade II* listed Owston Hall and its associated buildings, many of which are also listed. It thus provides an important green space not only for the visitors to the hotel and the two golf courses but also to the residents of the former estate buildings.

2. Historical Value ('Narrative')

Bryan Cooke consulted the landscape designers Thomas White in 1785 and Humphry Repton in 1792, after making plans to build a new hall in the centre of his landholdings in Owston. These had been consolidated through enclosure and purchase since the Cooke family acquired the estate in 1698. While positioning the new hall there would have given him space to create a large park and gardens, he decided instead to put the building next to the existing hall to the east. Although this partly negated White's and Repton's proposals, some of their suggestions for improvement were adopted by Cooke over the next thirty years. These included a new kitchen garden, parkland, pleasure grounds, flower garden and extensive plantations.

Philip Davies-Cooke had plans to remodel the hall in the Grecian style on inheriting in 1821 but he too abandoned this project probably due to the cost. However he continued his father's work in developing the grounds, adding four entrance lodges so that the hall could be accessed from five directions west to east. He turned the pleasure grounds around the hall into an arboretum, reflecting his scientific interest and planted a vineyard. With Philip's death, his successors inherited the estate but also many debts, so there were neither the resources nor the will to continue expanding Owston's designed landscape. The Davies-Cooke family concentrated on their estate in Wales instead. By the early 1930s, the hall had been converted to a golf club house with most of the parkland turned into a golf course and this was sold in 1979. Its new owner kept the golf course and turned the hall into a hotel, which remains to this day.

3. Evidential Value ('Research')

While an extensive number of archive documents have already been consulted, the exact extent of first White and then Repton's involvement at Owston is still not clear. White may well have provided a foreman to supervise works such as the construction and landscaping around



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the kitchen garden, who was then paid directly by the estate. Although Repton visited in 1792, prior to the completion of the Red Book, with the change of location for the new hall, he may have come back to visit and give informal advice from 1793. More research and examination of the archives is therefore needed to establish the roles these designers played.

Philip Davies-Cooke made many changes to the designed landscape that he inherited, however it would be useful to know whether he sought the advice of others such as professional designers and local nurserymen or relied on his head gardener. The kitchen garden area is known to have had a range of buildings including 6 separate glasshouses, one of which was an indoor fernery. While a report from 2011 looked at this area, a more detailed analysis is needed to establish the date and purpose of each of these glasshouses.

4. **Aesthetic Value ('Emotion')**

Owston Hall, its immediate surroundings and the two lodges on the A19 are in the Owston Conservation Area, which has 16 listed structures reflecting the development of the site since the late 17th century. The wider parkland together with the conservation area are on the list of local parks and gardens of special historic interest for the Doncaster region. It was included due to level of preservation of historic landscape features and the involvement of the leading late 18th century designer, Humphry Repton.

5. **Communal Value ('Togetherness')**

Owston Hall is a well-established hotel and attached golf course, which is open to its guests to visit. There is a separate public golf course in former East Park. Together with two public rights of way, one from the former Skellow Lodge in west to the hall and the other from Owston Lodge to the hall, allow the local community to enjoy this important green space. Owston's rural setting alongside other former estates around Doncaster, also provides the city's inhabitants with easily accessible access to the countryside.

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