

# **YORKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST**

## **East Riding Historic Designed Landscapes**

### **HIGH HALL PARKLAND, BISHOP BURTON COLLEGE, BISHOP BURTON**

Report by David and Susan Neave March 2013

#### **1. CORE DATA**

1.1 *Name of site:* High Hall Parkland, Bishop Burton College

1.2 *Grid reference:* SE 985402

1.3 *Administrative area:* Bishop Burton Civil Parish, East Riding of Yorkshire Unitary Authority

1.4 *Current site designation:* Not registered. A small section of the southern area is included in Bishop Burton Conservation Area (see plan in appendix).

#### **2. SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST**

Medieval deer park (associated with a manor house belonging to the Archbishops of York) with substantial remains of park boundary. The deer park later became the parkland setting of a private house, High Hall, which was rebuilt in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when notable Victorian landscape architect William Broderick Thomas was employed to lay out the grounds.

#### **3. HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE**

##### *3.1 Estate owners*

In the Middle Ages a manor house and surrounding parkland at Bishop Burton belonged to the Archbishops of York. In 1542 it became Crown property. William (later Sir William) Gee, a prominent lawyer who became Secretary of the Council of the North, purchased it in 1603. He probably rebuilt the old manor house, which later became known as High Hall. The estate descended in the Gee family until 1783 when it was sold to Richard Watt of Liverpool who had made his fortune in the West Indies as a sugar planter and ship owner. The Watt, later Hall-Watt, family retained it until 1930 when the hall (rebuilt in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) and park were sold to O.S. Hellyer, a Hull trawler owner. East Riding County Council purchased High Hall with 422 a. in 1951, demolished the house and built an agricultural college on the site, now Bishop Burton College. (Allison, *VCH Yorks ER IV*, 4-5; Neave, 'High and Low Halls')

### 3.2 Early history of the site

The archbishops of York had a deer park at Bishop Burton by 1323 when it was broken into, and deer taken. A survey of 1388 valued agistment (grazing rights in exchange for money) of the park at '46s 8d yearly clear besides the sustenance'. There was an area of pasture called New Park. The park ditch referred in the survey, together with a substantial bank, still surrounds much of the park site. (Neave, *Medieval Parks*, 22)

### 3.3 Chronological history of the designed landscape

#### 3.3.1 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries

High Hall, a substantial manor house with 20 hearths in 1672, was probably built by William Gee at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. (Allison, *VCH Yorks ER IV*, 5) In 1653 a relative of the Gees, Sir Ralph Verney, visited their 'Parke and Pallace' at Bishop Burton. (Borland & Dunning, *Bishop Burton and its People*, 16) The house was apparently remodelled by a later William Gee who held the estate from 1678-1718. A sketch of c. 1720 suggests the house had a small courtyard in front, from which a gateway with pillars topped with ball finials led into a walled enclosure, with trees or shrubs planted outside the walls (shown on the enclosure plan of 1772 as two strips of plantation). On the sketch this walled enclosure terminates in a cross-bar gate (also with brick pillars with ball finials) with hedges either side, marking the boundary between the parkland associated with the Gees' estate and the common lands of Bishop Burton village. The York road ran a short distance south-east of the boundary.

The Gee family died out in the male line in 1778 with the death of Roger Gee, who left debts totally over £40,000. (Neave, 'High and Low Halls') His extravagance may have included substantial expenditure on the grounds of the house, but the only documentary record of any work comes in the form of a schedule of his debts published after his death as part of a private Act of Parliament to settle his estates. (Copy of Act at HCC, DDCB/12/19). These included £22 12s 5d to George Plummer for making 'pleasure ground', £1 3s 6d to Minier, Mason & Co, seedsmen, and £88 13s 5 ½ d to Christopher Thompson, seedsman. He also owed £24 14s to Francis Gardener 'for making ponds' but there is no clue as to whether these were ornamental ponds in the grounds, or artificial dew ponds elsewhere on the estate.

The work undertaken by Roger Gee in the years leading up to his death in 1778 may have included building the kitchen garden (not shown on the enclosure plan of 1772) and the three ponds, including the circular one with a small central island immediately north of the walled garden shown on the Ordnance Survey plan published 1854.

In 1783 the trustees of Roger Gee's estate sold it to Richard Watt of Liverpool. His nephew, also Richard, lived at Bishop Burton from 1787, but in 1790 High

Hall was gutted by fire and the family relocated to Low Hall, a house nearer to the church. (Neave, 'High and Low Halls')

### 3.3.2 19<sup>th</sup> century

In 1840 High Hall was described as divided into tenements (*White's directory*, 1840), and in 1856 as 'for some years unoccupied' (Sheahan & Whellan, *History of York & ER II*, 522). It is unlikely that any major work was carried out to the gardens when the Watts were living at Low Hall, which had its own 'small but pleasant park' (ibid.).

William Watt succeeded to the estate in 1870 and it was seemingly around this time that plans to rebuild High Hall were made. A new house designed by George Devey in a neo-Tudor style was not completed until after William Watts' death in 1874, and in 1879 was still uninhabited. After William's heir, Ernest R.B. Hall-Watt, came of age in 1886 another architect, W.H. Fletcher of London was employed to extend and improve the new house. Stables and an entrance lodge were also built at this date.

Hall-Watt engaged a prominent landscape gardener, William Broderick Thomas, to lay out the grounds around the new High Hall. The following account appeared in the *Beverley Independent*, 4 August 1888.

*... the advice of Mr Thomas, of London, a gentleman of pre-eminence in landscape gardening, was sought, and his plans are being carefully carried out by Mr Drage, who for many years has acted in a similar capacity for him. Mr Thomas, we may remark, laid out the grounds of Dalton Hall for Lord Hotham. A new winding carriage drive, which leads from the York road to the principal entrances of the Hall, is now in course of construction. A porter's lodge, of red brick and neat design, is almost ready for roofing. Ornamental gates in a circular recess will guard the entrance to the walk, the sides of which will be sloped so as to give the greatest possible effect to the scenery which here is most pleasing to the eye. The introduction of water would add very much to the effect, and as there is a natural valley close by, a lake could be possible without any great resort to artificial means. A large number of trees have already been felled to admit of the alterations being carried out, and as this part of the estate is thickly wooded, others might with advantage be removed to improve the aspects from the Hall. Indeed we believe this is part of the plan. A terrace wall in front, and balustrade walls at the sides of the house, will enclose grass plots, lawn tennis ground, and ornamental flower beds.*

Thomas had been employed by Lord Hotham at South Dalton the previous decade but is more famous for his work on the Sandringham estate where he excavated two new lakes. (Venison, 'Garden through six reigns') No lake was created at Bishop Burton, but Thomas must have been responsible for the garden terrace wall, a section of which survives. This terrace was designed to provide a walk from which the splendid park could be viewed with bastions (look-outs) at the south-east and south-west corners. This design echoes that of some of the great gardens of the late 17<sup>th</sup>-early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries such as Blenheim,

where raised terrace walks provided views outward across the park and inwards over parterres and formal plantings.

Ernest Hall-Watt is also said to have planted some 200 a. of trees on the estate. (*Kelly's directory*, 1921, 461) The OS plan of 1890 shows more woodland than in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially around the northern perimeter of the old deer park, but the biggest changes came between 1890 and 1910. New areas of plantations included Park Ends at the western side, which lay between the medieval boundary bank and the York road. On the east part of the old boundary was swept away and the park extended to meet the lane. A new track was made from the pond area near the kitchen gardens through the park to the lane.

The 'terrace banks' are not part of the landscaping. These are lynchets, a remnant of old open-field land predating the creation of the medieval park.

## **4. SITE DESCRIPTION**

### *4.1 LOCATION*

Bishop Burton College, which stands on the site of High Hall and within its parkland, is on the north side of the A1079 Beverley to York Road, approximately 3 miles west of Beverley and 27 miles east of the city of York.

### *4.2 AREA*

About 200 acres (81 ha) at its greatest extent, comprising parkland 126 acres (51 ha), boundary plantations 50 acres (20 ha) and gardens and shrubberies 24 acres (10 ha).

### *4.3 BOUNDARIES*

The remains of the medieval deer park bank called The Reins mark the north-western boundary, with York Road forming the boundary on the south and south-west sides. On the east side the northern continuation of Finchcroft Lane runs along much of the boundary, the park having been extended east c. 1900.

### *4.4 LANDFORM*

The parkland lies on the east facing dip slope of the Yorkshire Wolds. The land is undulating but in general rises from about 40m to 50m from the south-east to north-west. The bedrock is chalk (Burnham Chalk Formation) and the superficial deposits boulder clay (Devensian Till) with a band of sand and gravel (Head) running north-south across eastern part of Park.

### *4.5 SETTING*

The grounds and parkland of former High Hall (Bishop Burton College) are East Riding Landscape Character Area 13 Yorkshire Wolds Open High Rolling Farmland with Bishop Burton covered by subsection 13B Bishop Burton Estate

Farmland because of its woodland cover. The wooded grounds lie in an area of large open arable fields with the picturesque estate village of Bishop Burton to the south east.

#### 4.6 ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main approach to High Hall and its parkland was from the York road, which separates the park from the rest of the village. A red brick and half-timbered entrance lodge designed by W.H. Fletcher was described as 'almost ready for roofing' in August 1888. (*Beverley Independent*, 4 August 1888) The tall, decorative chimneystacks echo those on the demolished hall. The lodge is listed Grade II.

#### 4.7 PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

##### 4.7.1 Stable block Not listed

The large stable block, with its prominent clock turret with cupola, was built 1888-9. It was designed by W.H. Fletcher who was employed by Ernest Hall-Watt to make improvements to the recently built High Hall, which has now been demolished. (Pevsner & Neave, *Yorkshire: York & ER*, 330)

#### 4.8 GARDENS AND PLEASURE GARDENS

20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings associated with Bishop Burton College cover much of the former pleasure gardens. The circular fish pond with island to the north of the kitchen garden is now built on, but an ornamental pond covers part of the site of the rectangular pond to the west of the walled garden, the layout of which can be traced on the surrounding grassland area.

The most important survival is the section of late Victorian garden terrace wall, part of the work carried out 1889-9 by the eminent landscape garden designer William Broderick Thomas. The wall, with its multangular bastion (viewpoint), has a handsome balustrade of quatrefoils in high-quality moulded brick and random stonework panels.

#### 4.9 KITCHEN GARDEN

The brickwork of the walled garden suggests a late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century date. It is possible the kitchen garden was built in the 1780s, before the hall was gutted by fire and abandoned c. 1790. The earliest documentary record is the OS plan published 1854, which shows the walled garden, but as no detail is shown of its internal layout, it is not clear if it was still in use. The plan shows the garden

as divided into two sections, of which only the north survives. There are indications of sheds or glass houses associated with smaller, southern area, and what could perhaps have been a gardener's house nearby.

The walled kitchen garden is shown in more detail on the 1910 OS plan, with greenhouses at the northern end, and a sundial at the intersection of the dividing paths towards the south. The greenhouses, still in use, probably date from c. 1890 when improvements were being made to the house and grounds. The wall of the kitchen garden may have been partially heightened at this date.

The walled gardens have been used for teaching purposes and student projects for a number of years. In 2012 Bishop Burton College announced a scheme to redesign and restore the 1.5 a. walled garden. (Press release, 21 Feb. 2012)

#### 4.10 *PARK & PLANTATIONS*

A substantial section of the medieval deer park boundary, known as 'The Reins' survives, the most impressive earthwork of its kind in the East Riding. About half the parkland has been built on by the College, but the eastern half is still open parkland with individual and clumps of trees. The site retains its perimeter plantations.

### 5. REFERENCES

#### *Books and articles*

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M. Borland & J. Dunning, *Bishop Burton and its People*, 1992

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T. Venison, 'A Garden through Six Reigns: Sandringham', *Country Life* 19 June 1980

*Primary sources*

Gee Estate Act, 20 Geo. III, c. 44 (Private Act) (copy at Hull History Centre [HCC], DDCB/12/19)

Newspapers (*Beverley Independent*)

Trade directories (*White's 1840; Kelly's 1921*)

*Maps*

Manuscript:

Enclosure plan 1772 (HCC, DDGE/3/2)

Printed:

Ordnance Survey maps published 1854-2012