

LEICESTERSHIRE

COLEORTON

**NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE
COLEORTON
SK3917**

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SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

Parkland and a range of pleasure grounds around a country house developed in the early C19 by Sir George Beaumont and various of his artistic friends including the Wordsworths and Uvedale Price. Possible involvement by William Sawrey Gilpin.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE

The Beaumonts acquired the manor of Coleorton by marriage in 1426. Thomas, Viscount Beaumont died in 1702; he was the last of his family to reside at Coleorton for a century until, in 1800, Sir George Howland Beaumont decided to move from Essex to the dilapidated C17 manor house at Coleorton which he replaced with a new house designed by George Dance. Beaumont was an important patron of the arts, and a skilled amateur painter. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Scott, Reynolds, Constable, Wilkie, Lawrence, Mrs Siddons, Byron, Farington and Price were among his friends and visitors to Coleorton. Scott began Ivanhoe here, and Constable drew in the grounds. One or two, notably Uvedale Price, helped with laying out the grounds around it. Wordsworth, who in 1806 stayed at Hall Farm 600m to the west with his sister Dorothy and Coleridge, wrote a number of poems here and with her created the Winter Garden. On his death in 1827 Coleorton passed to Beaumonts cousin Sir G H Willoughby (d 1845), thereafter passing from father to son until sold to the National Coal Board (NCB) in 1948. In 1997 the Hall and surrounding land were sold by British Coal to a development consortium.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Coleorton Hall and St. Mary's Church stand 1km west of the extensive but scattered settlement of Coleorton, separated from it by the B5324 Rempstone Road. The Hall stands on high ground, with extensive views east to Charnwood Forest. To the south the boundary of the park follows Ashby Road, while to the north it follows a section of Rempstone Road and to the east a short length of Main Street, Coleorton. Otherwise the boundary follows field edges and, to the north, the southern limit of Rough Park. The area here registered is 100ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The modern approach to the Hall is from the south-west, via a curving drive off Ashby Road. This is to the west of the C19 approach, which still survives, albeit in derelict state. On Ashby Road is Top Lodge (listed grade II), a single-storey, Tudor-gothic building. This was built c. 1812, and enlarged in the mid and late C19. From this the drive runs north through a shrubbery for c. 150m before turning east, towards the Hall and its porte cochere. At about this point, 120m west-south-west of the Hall, it crosses an early C19, single-span, ashlar bridge (listed grade II), which in the early C19 carried the drive over Church Pool. Canterbury Lodge, larger and c. 1849, stands 700m north-east of the Hall, at the end of former tree-lined drive which approached its north side across grassland called Canterbury Park.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Coleorton Hall (listed grade II*) was built 1804-8 for Sir George Beaumont. George Dance the Younger (d. 1825), who had known Beaumont for twenty years, was invited to design a new house. At first (1802) it was intended to incorporate the old house. In the event, in a long correspondence Uvedale Price advised on the design of a new one, employing stripped gothic, Greek and 'Hindoo'

styles in what was a modestly-sized house, adequate for Beaumont's occasional residences there and sufficient to house part of his art collection. This house was greatly enlarged in 1862 by F P Cockerell (d. 1878), whose alterations and enlargements, including a second storey, produced the present tooled ashlar Hall. On the five-bay, west, entrance front there is a porte cochere. The garden front is to the south. At the north end of the Hall are area service buildings, extended in 1862.

North of the Hall is the C18 Brewery building converted c. 1806 into a cottage for the coachman. Also there are brick stables and coach houses of c. 1832, built onto the older C18 stable block. North of these, c. 100m north of the Hall, are office buildings constructed by the NCB in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Hall which Dance's replaced was built in the late C17. That incorporated an older stone turret.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

To the west of the Hall the approach drives run through lawns with specimen trees, some early C19 but mostly later C20. Just visible from the Hall is the bridge to the west-south-west, which when first constructed in the early C19 carried the approach drive over Church Pool, now a grassy hollow. To the south of the lawns (outside the registered area), and partly framing the view across them from the Hall, is St. Mary's Church (listed grade II*), a medieval structure with west tower and spire. In 1802, before landscaping began, there was a large service and farm courtyard west of the Hall including the kitchen garden.

Running along the south and east sides of the Hall is a broad terrace (listed grade II). This was built c. 1830, and has Coade-type stone urns (marked Croggan, Lambeth, 1827) on the east, garden front, wall. From this a short flight of steps leads down to the upper lawn, 100m from east to west. On the north edge of the lawn is a rustic summerhouse, later C20 but perhaps based on a C19 predecessor. To its west, 25 north-east of the Hall, is a large boulder, Wilson's Stone, dedicated to the landscape painter Richard Wilson (d. 1782); carved on it is 'BROUGHT HERE 1818'. This was drawn by Constable in 1823. A smaller boulder inscribed 'Red Wilson 1812' lies on the western rim of the Winter Garden. A terrace walk along the east side of the lawns gives views east across the Rose Garden, to the park beyond and the further landscape. A stone terrace wall (listed grade II), designed by Dance and described in 1806 as new-built, runs along the terrace walk; at its north and south ends are bastions, the latter 6m high and traditionally called The Pulpit. Here the wall turns west, to define what in the C19 was viewing terrace over the Winter Garden; now it overlooks the gardens of The Cedars (see below). In 1802 the area of the upper lawn was a Strawberry Garden.

A flight of fifteen steps leads down from the centre of the terrace walk along the bottom of the upper lawn to the Rose Garden (originally Flower Garden), which is 50m from east to west by 80m from north to south. An axial path runs east from the bottom of the steps terminating at a fountain. The two halves of the Rose Garden are lawn with geometric flower beds and regularly spaced conifers. Along the bottom (east) of the garden is a yew hedge and ha-ha; beyond is the park. Along the north and south sides of the Rose Garden are banks of rhododendrons, with shrubberies and specimen trees behind. Later C19 illustrations show highly intricate bedding schemes within this garden, of which the present scheme is a simplification.

Leading north off the north-east corner of the upper lawn is a flight of six steps, on piers either side of which are Coade stone busts (listed grade II) of 1817 of Milton and Shakespeare. From the steps a straight walk, with low yew hedges to either side, leads to Beaumont's Memorial (listed grade II), a 2m high block of stone with side pilasters and cornice in which is inscribed a verse by Wordsworth composed in 1811 (replaced 1976; original plaque set in Hall entrance).

Running from east to west in the woodland north of the upper lawn, behind the summerhouse, is an avenue of mature limes (planted by 1811), c. 50m long. At the west end is a memorial to Sir Joshua Reynolds (listed grade II), comprising a square funeral urn on a plinth which carries an

inscription by Wordsworth. This was drawn by Constable in 1823 as 'The Cenotaph'. Extending east from this, beneath the lime canopy, is a pebble- and tile-decorated walk, which expands at the east end of the walk to a pebbled circle c. 10m in diameter, set around the edge of which are herms surmounted by Coade-stone busts of Michelangelo and Raphael.

North of Reynold's and Beaumont's memorials The Grove, ornamental woodland with stone-edged paths, continues north for 350m, extending to the north-east into a lobe-shaped projection whose outer edge is retained by a rubble-stone terrace wall. Towards the northern end of the lobe is a large hollow, possibly once a quarry garden and originally a mine or quarry. On the north-west side of the lobe is a shed. This marks the site of the Hall's Home Farm, built in the mid C19. From the north-east corner of the lobe, perhaps the site of a seat, there are extensive views east and north. It is known that Uvedale Price advised on the 'picturesque' treatment of the Hall and its grounds, and correspondence of 1802 and later (Pierpont Morgan Library) indicates that Price may actually have overseen works here. It seems possible that these woodland walks, and perhaps the similarly stone-edged ones through the woodland around the Winter Garden south lawns, were Price's main contribution.

East of the East Terrace around the Hall lawns slope gently away. These are planted with large numbers of specimen trees and shrubs. Several trees have slate plaques recording the date and circumstance of their planting. These centre on the 1830s.

Beaumont invited William and Dorothy Wordsworth to stay at Hall Farmhouse in 1806 because of their overcrowded conditions at Dove Cottage. Coleridge joined them there soon afterwards. In a letter to Lady Beaumont William Wordsworth set out his ideas for a Winter Garden to be planted in an old quarry which had recently been used as builder's dump. The Wordsworths subsequently oversaw the development of the garden (in 1875 apparently called 'Wordsworth's Garden'), which lies south of the upper lawn. In 1959 a house (The Cedars) was built in the southern part of this garden, and there has been much planting since that date. Nevertheless, many features and trees of early C19 survive. At the north end of the Winter Garden is the 4m tall, prominently buttressed, stone wall with viewing terrace which retains the south-east corner of the upper lawn. Part of the wall was designed by George Dance. A pheasantry was built against this wall c. 1833, and its flagged floor still survives. South of this is a linear pool of 1933-4, south of which lawns with late C20 planting run down to The Cedars. West of that house in the early C19 quarry garden which forms the core of the Winter Garden. Features include steps and rockwork on the north side; a grotto with shellwork by Dorothy Wordsworth and a pebble floor with Star of David pattern on the west side; and an urn on a squat pillar, supposedly from Pompeii. In front of the grotto is a circular pool 5m across with central fountain; this a C20 reworking of an earlier C19 pool. Several features lie around the edge of the Winter Garden. On the south-east side is Scott's Seat, a stone-cut alcove. South of this are ruins of an old cottage. Elements of a second ruined building, Ivy Cottage, stand south-west of the garden. This, adjoining the main entry to the garden, was allegedly the setting of Sir David Wilkie's painting 'An Old Woman Knitting'. Above the west edge of the quarry garden is an early C19 pedimented ashlar monument (listed grade II), c. 2m high and incorporating a verse by Wordsworth composed in 1808. Beyond the Winter Garden, below the church, are the remains of a C19 icehouse.

In 1800 there were large numbers of coal mines around the Hall, and as well as natural desire to lay out new grounds around his new Hall, Beaumont intended that the landscaping would conceal the noxious local industry. The landscape gardener in charge of the work was James Cranston (d. 1835) of King's Acre (Hertfordshire), recommended to the Beaumonts in May 1803 by Uvedale Price. Later, in 1806, the Wordsworths had a rather uneasy relationship with Mr Crain, apparently the gardener. In 1820 Price recommended William Sawrey Gilpin (d. 1843), who he said was planning to take up the profession of landscape architect, to Lady Beaumont, and probably brought him to Coleorton in the autumn.

PARK

Extending c. 1km east of the Hall, and sloping away from it, is the park-like grassland known as the Paddock; this retains some mature parkland trees. Cutting across it from south-west to north-east is Rempstone Road. This is slightly sunken, set in a cutting retained by a 2-3m high stone retaining wall, and traffic is largely invisible from the Hall. The road was probably moved to this line c. 1812; earlier it probably crossed the upper lawn area east of the Hall.

There was a park at Coleorton by 1303, which lay between the Hall and Newbold Hurst. A larger park was created in 1606. This, which lay in the area of Rough Park, immediately north-west of the registered area, was later lost to coal mining and was long gone by the time Nichols wrote in 1804. The Paddock was presumably laid out by Sir George Beaumont in the early C19.

KITCHEN GARDEN

A walled kitchen garden formerly stood on level ground 250m north-west of the Hall. Its walls were built by 1835, and in the mid C19 its vineries were celebrated. The garden walls were damaged by mining subsidence and demolished in 1952. The area is now grass, having been used by the NCB as a sports pitch.

In 1802 the kitchen garden lay along the north side of the service courtyard to the west of the Hall. A new garden was then made west of the stables. It was this which was replaced by the garden of 1835.

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Maps

Plan of Hall and surrounds, 1802 (D1/9/3), (Soane Museum, London)

OS 6" to 1 mile : Leicestershire sheet 16 SW, 1925 edition

Leicestershire sheet 16 SE, 1925 edition

Archival items

Coleorton Papers, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York

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