

STOWE CONSERVATION AREA

Designated 18th July 1990

The Parish of Stowe is situated in gently undulating and heavily wooded landscape some two and a half miles north-west of Buckingham. The parish is curious for the fact that there is no village of Stowe, merely a large Manorial house which is now a School, a Church, a few farms,



five houses (close to the Oxford Avenue) and an assortment of 37 temples, follies, grottos and bridges within the grounds of Stowe School. The only village in the parish is Dadford, about a mile north of Stowe School. Originally sited further to the south, the village was rebuilt on its existing position in the seventeenth Century.

Construction work on the Grade I Listed house and estate began in 1676, when Sir Richard Temple employed William Cleare to design and oversee the construction of a new mansion house. Between 1720 and 1779 the house was altered and enlarged, in various stages, at the request of the subsequent owners, Viscount Cobham (Lord Cobham) and Earl Temple. The finest architects of their day were employed to carry out the work, such as Vanbrugh, Gibbs, Leoni and Adam. The surrounding estate lands, which run to many hundreds of acres, were laid out originally by Bridgeman and then subsequently altered and extended by Vanbrugh, Kent, Gibbs and “Capability” Brown (who, incidentally, was married in the Grade II* Listed Church of St. Mary within the estate in 1744). The gardens at Stowe are of European importance and significance, for they represent the first example of the natural landscape gardening style pioneered by Brown, although initially developed at Stowe by William Kent in the Elysian Fields.

Two main entrances approach the estate, from the south and from the south-west, along either the two mile long “Grand Avenue” from Buckingham, or the rather shorter “Oxford Avenue”, which follows the line of the former Roman road to Bicester. Both avenues are bounded by a substantial number of trees, although many of the original trees, particularly along the Grand Avenue, have been lost. The other two entrances are either from the north through Dadford from Silverstone, or from Akeley to the east, through Chackmore. These approaches were originally through Stowe Woods and along the Bycell Avenue but unfortunately they do not exist today. More distant views are also afforded from the Bycell Road cross roads and from the lane heading north past Stowe Castle towards Lillingstone Dayrell, across Castle Riding.

As a consequence of all the landscaping undertaken within the park and gardens views to the house and gardens from the public highway are limited to the approaches along the Grand and Oxford Avenues and also from a point at the southern end of Dadford where the road turns sharply south-westerly, and where views are obtained across the valley and past Home Farm, up to the Buchanan Avenue and the east wing of the house.

Within the gardens the grounds have been deliberately designed to provide numerous views across open lawns, lakes and ponds towards temples, bridges, follies and grottos, the majority of which are Listed Grade I.

In 1922 the house and grounds were sold and in 1923 the house was converted into a public school. It remains as such to this day, although in 1989, the estate grounds including all the buildings, structures and lakes were passed into the ownership of the National Trust. The Trust is now the owner of both the Grand and Oxford Avenues and some 558 acres of estate land.

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