



Farming the  
historic landscape  
Caring for historic parkland



This leaflet has been designed to help farmers, land managers and farm advisers identify historic parkland features and ensure their conservation through appropriate management.

### WHAT ARE HISTORIC PARKS?

Historic parks are an integral part of the English countryside, making a unique contribution to its character, its biodiversity and cultural heritage. This leaflet is principally about country house parks. Many historic urban parks and other designed landscapes such as cemeteries have drawn inspiration from the aesthetics of the country house park; and many local authority 'country parks' were once former country estates and parklands.

Parks are enclosed land traditionally managed for deer or other grazing, ornamented with a variety of features which include woods, clumps and individual trees, lakes and water features, and sometimes buildings and eye-catchers such as monuments. Most but not all are associated with a mansion or castle, although some – especially medieval deer parks – are detached or were never associated with a settlement. Many park buildings, such as lodges and model farms were a functional part of the estate enterprise, even though designed to be ornamental. Others were places to visit, eye-catchers or part of the design narrative.

The historic designed landscape often extended well beyond the park with features such as shelter belts, coverts and decoys for game. The parkland and their woodlands were productive landscapes used for grazing and timber growing as well as places for enjoyment and entertainment. The herds associated with parkland, as well as the formal gardens and kitchen gardens are part of the same heritage, often intimately associated by design and function.

Most parkland today is the product of several phases of design over several centuries. Some originated as, and retain elements of, mediaeval deer parks, others retain remnants of the pre-park agricultural landscape, and some contain scheduled monuments and other archaeological features. In most cases, individual historical phases co-exist on the same site, and vestigial phases often require expert analysis for correct identification. Past stewardship can help inform their future conservation.

### WHY ARE HISTORIC PARKS IMPORTANT?

Landscape parks are often considered as England's greatest contribution to western art, valued as a quintessential English feature, and as places to enjoy and visit.

They are important:

- As an expression of evolving landscape design and an insight into the past, its people and values
- For their association with individuals, historic events, art and literature
- As the setting for important historic and architectural buildings
- As sites of archaeological importance with features such as barrows, pillow-mounds, ridge and furrow, medieval deer park remains, earlier historic gardens and landscapes designs
- For their permanent pasture, grasslands, mature and veteran trees, wood pasture and other woodlands, and water bodies (parkland and wood pasture are a priority UK Biodiversity Habitat Action Plan)
- As landscapes to enjoy
- As productive landscapes and as tourism and leisure business assets



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## WHAT IS A REGISTERED PARK?

The 1983 Heritage Act empowered English Heritage to compile the *Register of parks and gardens of special historic interest in England*. The *Register* includes a diverse range of designed landscapes including urban parks, allotments, hospital grounds, cemeteries and post-war designs. As with listed buildings, the sites are graded, but the *Register* has no equivalent statutory powers or consent scheme. However, the *Register* is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, which can help ward off inappropriate development, and most development plans now incorporate protection policies. Registration can also help make the case for grants and tax reliefs.

Each *Register* entry comprises a written description, together with a map showing the boundary of the registered land. The entry includes a summary history and a description of the site as existing, highlighting its special features and characteristics. *Register* descriptions and maps can be obtained from English Heritage's National Monuments Record Centre; sites are also indicated on [www.magic.gov.uk](http://www.magic.gov.uk) and, along with other parkland of nature conservation on English Nature's wood-pasture and parkland information system at [www.wapis.org.uk](http://www.wapis.org.uk).

The *Register* only records sites of historic importance in a national context. Many more are important locally or regionally, and a number of local authorities and county gardens trusts have compiled or begun to compile local lists of parks and gardens, which may or may not also be subject to development plan policies. Such lists vary widely in their contents. The Association of Gardens Trusts and the University of York also have a useful reference database [www.york.ac.uk/depts/arch/landscapes/ukpg/database](http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/arch/landscapes/ukpg/database).

Many county Sites and Monuments Records or Historic Environment Records contain information on parks and gardens and their archaeological features.

Parkland is likely to be of historic interest if it contains:

- A listed principal house
- Plantations, avenues, clumps or specimen trees over a hundred years old
- Features like follies, eye-catchers, lodges, icehouses, ha-has, old boundary walls or fences, walks and drives either intact or in disrepair, whether listed or not

## WHAT CAN HARM HISTORIC PARKLAND?

Unlike historic buildings, parkland does not fall down overnight as a result of neglect or low levels of maintenance but is vulnerable to changes in farming and silviculture practices. It can also be damaged by development. Loss of individual historic features such as trees and boundary walls will harm the park as a whole. Other than pollards, coppice and individual trees which were venerated as historic and aesthetic features, parkland trees and woodland were always intended to be part of a regime of felling and replanting. Similarly parklands were designed as pastoral scenes enlivened by livestock. Landscape design can be undermined if gaps in new planting span several generations of owners, and its vitality lost if herds no longer graze and perpetuate the browse lines of the parkland trees.

Examples of changes that could harm parkland include:

- Changes in stocking levels leading to under or over grazing
- Use of fertilisers, pesticides and veterinary products
- Arable cultivation of former parkland pasture
- Undermining of the parkland form and archaeology from compaction, bramping, ploughing, digging and other movement of soil
- New farm developments such as storage facilities, tracks and roads
- Degradation of boundary features like the ha-has perimeter walls or fences
- Sub-division of parkland with new fences and boundaries
- Harm or loss of trees, especially veteran trees, from livestock sheltering or browsing, ploughing and ditching, fertilisers and other chemicals, lopping and removing dead wood, felling
- Poorly designed or sited new tree-planting or inappropriate species and forms
- Silting up of lakes and secondary woodland or scrub growth
- Lack of maintenance of lake dams and other water features, or damage to historic form
- Abandonment of park buildings and monuments
- Poorly sited or unsympathetic new development such as new buildings, golf courses, telecommunication masts and details such as signage and lighting
- Intrusive development beyond the boundary

## HOW CAN I RECOGNISE HISTORIC PARKS AND PARKLAND FEATURES?

Historic parks are complex artificial landscapes, their artfulness was carefully disguised. In addition to carefully sited plantations and individual trees, they depend for their effect on composed views in and out of the site, water bodies, approaches, ridges and paths, buildings or eye-catchers, ha-has and other inconspicuous boundaries. Sympathetic grazing and trees with browse lines is a management characteristic.

As part of a historic estate, the park and its wider designed landscape will often have its own distinctive vocabulary of vernacular or traditional styles, building materials, decorative finishes such as gates, walls and fences or paint colours, and hedgerow management. Characteristically, a host of interesting buildings may be found dating from various periods – neoclassical temples, rustic picturesque cottages and gothic lodges.

### Medieval deer parks

Deer parks were already in existence in Norman times, when hunting was popular among the nobility and venison was highly prized. The parks were generally either wood-pasture, with trees and grass intermixed, or separate areas of grassland and woodland blocks: the pollarding and coppicing of trees were key elements, in addition to grazing, in park management. Very rarely the parks survive little altered, in which case they are likely to be of significant ecological as well as historical interest. Most medieval parks evolved into landscape parks, and the earlier parks and gardens may survive as archaeology.

Surviving characteristics include rough pasture, pollard and veteran trees, ancient woodland and archaeological features such as boundary banks and ditches, wood banks, and other remains like internal stock-management divisions, lodge sites, fishponds and warrens.

### Formal parks

Parks continued to be laid out for the breeding and hunting of deer until the Civil War. In the 17th century, more ornamental planting and building developed; approaches



became grander and lodges and boundary walls more architectural. Avenues, sometimes single and sometimes radiating in many directions from the house, were the mode.

From the 17th to the early 18th century, the most evident characteristic is formal woodland planting using straight lines in avenues and ridings, and along the edges of plantations. Water features such as pools and canals, sometimes adapted from earlier fishponds, were also geometrical in design, as was the location of statuary. Generally, this formality was later modified or replanted, and there are very few original 17th century avenues still in situ. However, the formal design may remain a key to complement a contemporary house.

### Landscape parks

In the mid 18th century, many formal parks were transformed into the English landscape style championed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Often incorporating elements of previous layouts, this new style dissolved the visual separation of garden and park through the use of ha-has or sunk fences, creating a view of the landscape flowing unbroken from the house to the boundary and the house rising naturally from the park. The arrangement of trees and clumps, naturalistic water bodies, ornamental buildings, eye-catchers and the reshaping of the land created the impression of an idealized natural landscape which could be appreciated through carefully composed views from the house and garden, or from the approach, walks and rides through the park.

In the late 18th century, Humphry Repton's picturesque style, developed from the English landscape style, led to further changes characterised by smaller composed picture-views rather than large-scale sweeping views. A wider range of ornamental architecture was deployed, and the gardens near the house were more formal. W S Gilpin, a successor to Repton, promoted ever more irregularly shaped clumps of trees with promontories, bays and varied foliage. The buildings and enclosures of estate farms were often designed as model layouts and intended as part of the viewing experience. This was also a time of increased planting of an ever wider range of unusual species for individual specimen trees, and increased appreciation of areas of rough woodland or natural topography as visual features.

The principal characteristics of the 18th century landscape park style were single trees or clumps set in open grassland, informal woodland, perimeter belts and rides. Contrasting trees such as pines were used skilfully to add texture and highlights to the landscaped scene. Other characteristics

- A Belsay Hall, Northumberland
- B Dunham Park, Greater Manchester
- C White Park Cattle
- D Stowe, Buckinghamshire
- E Witley Court, Worcestershire

- F Audley End, Essex
- G Melbury Park, Dorset
- H Compton Verney, Warwickshire
- I Luscombe Castle, Devon
- J Moccas Park, Herefordshire

included a range of building styles, irregular, natural-looking water bodies often formed by a dam, and views to and from features either inside or outside the park boundary. Ha-has or sunk fences dividing the garden from the park often survive intact; designed approaches or other routes, even where they have been subsequently abandoned or altered, often survive as earthworks. Designed views, however, have frequently been blocked by new planting or natural regeneration.

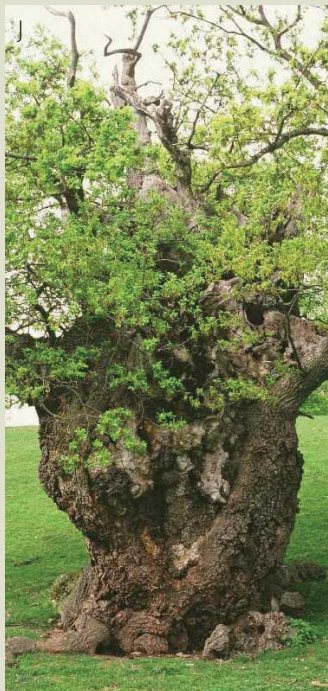
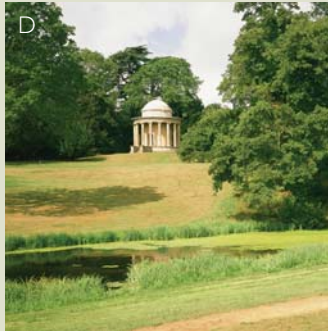
### Victorian Parkland

The Victorian park was both a further development of the 18th century landscape style and a revival of formal elements in garden and park design. Avenues again became popular, now using specimen trees such as *Wellingtonia* as well as native trees. A far wider variety of trees were used in parks, sometimes singly near the house but often gathered in highly prized specialist arboreta and collections. Glass house and heating system developments renewed interests in kitchen garden production, and formal gardens flourished around the mansions. Rhododendron was widely planted as cover for sporting activities.

More exotic tree species, especially evergreens, frequently characterise the Victorian layer in a historic park, along with a greater number of surviving shrubs such as rhododendron and laurel. As in the 18th century, many farm buildings had an ornamental as well as a functional role. In the 19th century, relatively cheap iron estate railings were introduced which made a distinctive contribution to landscape character.

This last period of large-scale park creation came to an end with the agricultural depression of the late 19th century, followed by the impact of World War I on rural communities and aristocratic families. The requisitions of World War II were a further blow to sustainable parkland management, as were the fiscal and policy changes of a succession of post-war Governments which affected everything from agricultural support to death duties. In the early 1950s especially, numerous country houses were demolished and parkland landscapes eroded.

The storms of 1987 and 1990, which devastated so many parks in the south, ironically drew attention to the importance of these landscapes both in their own right as part of the national heritage and for their contribution to the character of the wider countryside. Since then, significant amounts of grant-aid from English Heritage, the Countryside Agency, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Defra, have been directed towards restoring parkland.



- Developments which alter the water table
- Intensification of parkland uses such as events and car parking
- Sub-division and sales of parkland into different or multiple ownerships, leading to fragmentation of management regimes

## HOW DO I GO ABOUT PLANNING PARKLAND RESTORATION?

The principle of parkland conservation is to protect and retain the original historic fabric where possible, to accurately repair where needed, and to sustain its ecological and amenity value. Repair may also involve restoring the landscape to a previous form. It is desirable that management should conserve the design and special parkland characteristics as well as accommodate new uses to meet the challenge of sustainability. Ad hoc decisions about management, such as where to establish a new plantation, can unwittingly cause far-reaching problems.

The key to all these approaches is authoritative knowledge of the park's historical development and its current significance in all senses – historical, archaeological, cultural, ecological, landscape character and amenity. This knowledge allows a management regime to identify what matters and why, and to how conserve it for future generations. A plan of cyclical replacement is desirable if the design intentions are to be reflected indefinitely. A plan, generally called a conservation management plan, is used to document this research, develop an understanding, identify and analyse issues and constraints, make decisions, and plan short- and long-term management, and programme work. As in the past, economics of farming and forestry need to be considered alongside conservation aims and will influence the management work. Such plans need to be flexible and regularly updated, and available so that others, whether successors or grant-giving bodies, can understand the management aims and objectives. Conservation management plans do not need to be lengthy documents but need to be informed and authoritative.

## HOW CAN I GET ADVICE ON CARING FOR HISTORIC PARKLAND OR GRANT AID?

You can obtain advice on how to protect historic parklands or relevant grant schemes from the following organisations:

- **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:** Defra agri-environment scheme advisers can advise you about grants for environmental land management, including the conservation of historic parklands and their component features. A list of local offices is available on the Defra website at [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk) by selecting Contact Defra
- **Forestry Commission:** Your local Forestry Commission office can advise on grants for parkland woodlands and shelterbelts. A list of offices is available on the Forestry Commission England website at [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)
- **English Heritage:** English Heritage's National Monuments Records Centre (NMRC) can provide register entries and maps, and the regional offices can advise on the conservation of parks and may offer grants for the repair of grade I and II\* sites. The addresses for the NMRC and regional offices are available on the English Heritage website at [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk) by selecting Contact Us. Other advice on historic parklands and conservation management plans is available at [www.english-heritage.org.uk/parksandgardens](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/parksandgardens)
- **County Gardens Trusts and the Garden History Society:** These societies are actively engaged in researching the history of gardening, landscaping and horticulture, and advising on the conservation and restoration of parks and other designed landscapes [www.gardenstrusts.org.uk](http://www.gardenstrusts.org.uk) and [www.gardenhistorysociety.org](http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org)
- **Local Authority:** Your Local Authority Archaeologist or Conservation Officer can supply general advice about the park's history and conservation management. Some authorities may be able to offer help with site management. A list of county Sites and Monuments Records or Historic Environment Records is available from the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers website at [www.algao.org.uk](http://www.algao.org.uk)
- **Historic Houses Association (HHA), Country and Landowners and Business Association (CLA) and National Farmers Union (NFU):** These organisations will provide members with advice and assistance on legal, conservation and taxation matters relating to parklands [www.hha.org.uk](http://www.hha.org.uk) [www.cla.org.uk](http://www.cla.org.uk); [www.nfu.org.uk](http://www.nfu.org.uk)

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ENGLISH HERITAGE

