



YORKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

Hazelwood Park

Statement of Significance

This statement of significance for Hazelwood Park, created by the Yorkshire Gardens Trust, is derived from research carried out as part of Selby District Historic Designed Landscapes project.

1. Heritage Values Summary

Hazelwood was the seat of the Vavasour family for over 800 years. The house, now known as Hazlewood Castle, is listed Grade I. Until the Reformation, the Vavasours were an influential, high-status gentry family, but their adherence to the Catholic faith meant their social status and economic fortunes suffered over the following 200 years. Very little evidence survives in the family archive relevant to the designed landscape before the mid-1700s. When Sir Walter, 6th bt succeeded in 1766 he embarked on remodelling of the house, probably employing John Carr of York, and commissioned a landscape improvement plan from Anthony Sparrow, land surveyor, who worked during the 1760s and 1770s at Harewood. Although no documentation has been found to record practical implementation of the 'Brownian' improvements proposed by Sparrow, evidence confirms that by the turn of the century, Hazelwood had taken on the typical appearance of an English landscaped park, and despite the break-up of the estate in 1908, this character is still evident today.

2. Historical Value ('Narrative')

The Vavasour family was one of the oldest in Yorkshire. A Vavasour is reputed to have come to England at the time of the Norman Conquest, and Malger Vavasour is recorded in Domesday as owning several manors in Yorkshire, including Hazelwood. The right to create a park and licence to crenellate the manor house in the thirteenth century demonstrate the social status of the family in medieval times. Magnesian limestone from quarries on the estate was used not just for the family home but at York Minster, King's College Chapel, Cambridge, and Eton College.

Until the mid-1500s, and after the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829), Vavasours played prominent roles in politics and society, serving their country as soldiers, sheriffs and magistrates. The history of the family and the estate thus illustrates the history of Catholicism in England. The family suffered financial, political, social and personal disadvantages incurred by their recusancy, and their support for the King in the Civil War. Unusually, the family home and St Leonard's Roman Catholic Chapel (Grade I, 1286) survived unmolested; and despite fines, double taxation, and sequestration, the estate survived reasonably well until the late 1800s.

Easing of restrictions on Catholics in the later C18 allowed Sir Walter 6th Bt to follow the prevailing fashion for building and landscape improvement. John Carr of York is generally credited as the architect employed to modernise the house c. 1770. Sir Walter also engaged landscape improvers with a certain reputation: Anthony Sparrow, surveyor and foreman for Richard Woods and Thomas



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White at Harewood; and Thomas White himself, landscape designer and arboriculturalist. The very large 1768 improvement plan for Hazelwood is a fine example of the type of presentation plan prepared for estate owners by the great designers of the period (e.g. Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, Richard Woods). And, significantly, Sparrow was a Catholic.

In the mid-C20 the close association with Catholicism was renewed by the establishment of a Carmelite retreat and Pilgrimage Centre at Hazelwood, which was designated Shrine of our Lady and Forty Martyrs. Along the wall of the kitchen garden, the Rosary Way was created, with a shrine to the Carmelite saint, St Therese of Lisieux; the Mystery of the Rosaries (removed when the Carmelites left in 1997) was the work of Polish Catholic artist Adam Kossowski, a refugee from Soviet Labour camps.

3. Evidential Value ('Research')

Very little is known of the designed landscape prior to the C18. Given the social status of the family the probability of a medieval deer park seems strong, but firm evidence is lacking. The sparsity of relevant surviving documentation from the C17 and C18 centuries may be accounted for by the caution exercised by Catholics in keeping records.

The most important document regarding the Hazelwood landscape is the 1768 Sparrow improvement plan. Detailed records of implementation have not been discovered in the Vavasour archive, but other evidence would suggest the improvements were implemented over the last decades of the C18. Developments to plantations and park from mid-C19 can be traced on OS maps.

Further documentary evidence shedding light on the Hazelwood landscape may still survive in archives where material has been deposited through marriage links and land acquisition. Such material might include correspondence or journals with references to the gardens and park. Architectural plans (which could influence garden design) and landscape designs, unidentified or misattributed, may survive elsewhere. Further archaeological investigation and LIDAR might yield evidence of earlier, pre-C18 gardens and park. It would be particularly interesting to pursue any indications of Catholic iconography in the designed landscape, as at other Catholic family seats.

Further research into the involvement of Anthony Sparrow and Thomas White is needed. The importance of White is known, but there is a possibility that Anthony Sparrow was one of a family of land surveyors, agents and improvers, possibly all Catholics, who worked for prominent Catholic families in Wiltshire, Dorset, Hampshire and Lancashire.

4. Aesthetic Value ('Emotion')

Although the house and its original estate have been under divided ownership for just over 100 years, it is still possible (and desirable) to see the house and its setting in the designed landscape as an integral unit. The landscaping that can still be seen at Hazelwood was part of an aesthetic movement that swept across the country in the second half of the C18, a movement led by great gardening artists such as Richard Woods and Lancelot Brown and disseminated by professionals who worked with them: improvers, arboriculturalists and surveyors such as Thomas White and Anthony Sparrow. The gardens and pleasure grounds to the immediate west of the house have changed over the last century, but despite some loss of hedgerows and partial conversion of



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parkland to arable fields, Hazelwood's landscape as seen from the house remains recognisably similar to what the Vavasours and their visitors would have enjoyed from the late C18 on into the C19. Extensive views to the south are still a feature for hotel guests and visitors, and walkers on public footpaths, to enjoy; and the views back to the house from the Towton battlefield survive for everyone to see. The ancient Hazel and Bullen Woods are still woodland, still screening and sheltering the house as they have done for centuries.

The conversion of the building to a hotel, while ensuring its future, has inevitably reduced some aspects of its aesthetic value, particularly the use of the walled kitchen garden as a carpark. The maze survives, but its neglected and overgrown state could be rescued, and would add another historic feature to the hotel grounds.

5. Communal Value ('Togetherness')

Hazelwood probably did not form part of the collective memory and experience of the local community, as did so many other historic houses, precisely because of the family's recusancy over such a prolonged period. The house and park are at some distance from the nearest village, Stutton. However, it is a significant site in terms of the historic and present-day Catholic community. Catholic associations have been maintained by the unbroken and continuing use of the chapel for regular Catholic mass and marriages. It contains many monuments to the Vavasour family. Of more recent importance is the Adam Kossowski painting over the altar.

The Catholic graveyard is significant as the burial place for the Vavasour family, members of their household and estate workers, and celebrated Catholics. It is reputed that close by the medieval cross (Grade II) is the burial site of St Margaret Clitherow, martyred in York in 1586, canonised in 1970, one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. The cross was of sufficient significance for Sparrow to mark it prominently on his improvement plan for Hazelwood.

Two other structures on the former Hazelwood estate are associated with Catholicism. The cross on Chantry Lane, of which little seems to be known, may mark a significant point on the route leading between Hazelwood and York; and the octagonal tower, an C18 garden building often referred to as The Chantry, was quite possibly given that name because it was built on the site of a second chantry of 1452.

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