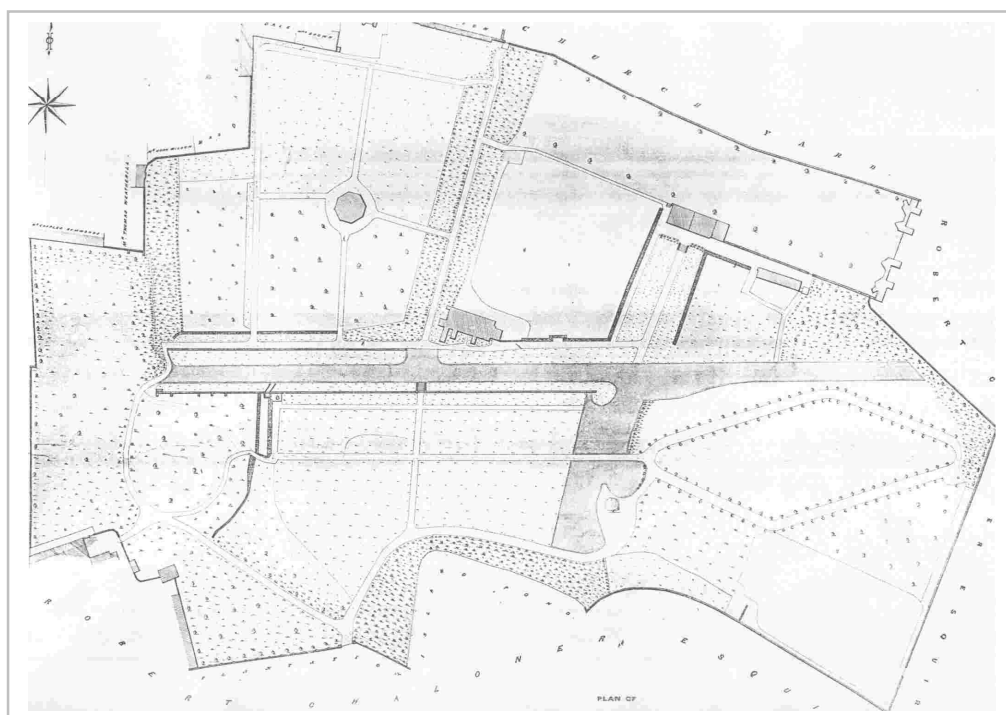


Gisborough Priory Gardens

Notes on the significant trees



Estate plan of 1854

Prepared for the Gisborough Priory Project

By

Nick Owen

March 2008

Introduction

1. The field work for the notes was carried out in October 2007. A sample of historically significant trees was surveyed; this included measuring girths in centimetres at chest height, notes on the tree's habit or form (for evidence of the management history of the tree – whether, for example, the tree had been pollarded or 'headed' at one period in its life) and distances between Monk's Walk trees were recorded to obtain the dimensions of the walk.
2. The recent archaeological survey, together with the historic plans and photos, were revisited to update my understanding of the layout.

The Monk's Walk

The background to the Monk's Walk

3. Strictly speaking, because of the frequent changes in direction, the Monk's Walk is a tree-lined walk rather than an avenue - Sarah Crouch, in her paper 'The Practice of Avenue Planting in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' 1992, defined an avenue as 'a designed drive or walk, with regularly planted trees in straight rows'. Avenues were often focussed onto a building or other feature.
4. The practice has a long history – John Smythson's plan of Wimbledon gardens in 1609 shows a walk planted with Lime trees 'both for shade and sweetness'. Avenues were planted at St. James's Palace in 1660 and at Hampton Court in 1661 and by the end of the 17th century the practice had spread over the whole country. The first written reference to avenues was probably in John Evelyn's *Sylva* of 1664. The Common Lime (*Tilia x europea* – probably imported from Holland in large numbers in the 17th century), rather than the Small-Leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*) was the Lime usually planted in avenues – John James recommended Limes in his *The theory and practice of gardening* 1712

'Walks of Limes are likewise very handsome, especially when they are Dutch Limes. These Trees are known to shoot up very high, they have a smooth Bark, a most agreeable Leaf, and yield an abundance of Flowers that smell very sweet; besides which, they are subject to no Sort of Vermin'.
5. John James recommended a spacing of 12 feet for trees in walks and counter walks of Elm, Lime and Chestnut; Batty Langley (*New principles of gardening* London, 1728) recommended a planting distance of 10, 12 or 16 feet for 'shady walks' in Lime (the Monk's Walk trees are planted at a 12 feet spacing in the walk, 10 feet across the walk – this last dimension probably the least that could accommodate two people walking side by side).
6. The common practice was to plant Limes between 5 and 10 years old. The trees were almost always 'headed' ie. the leading shoot was cut off at planting time as this was thought to promote root growth and aid establishment and gave a standard height tree. Pruning was the usual management, as this produced the high crown and clean bole considered appropriate for walks –

Batty Langley advised pruning up to 20 feet high to retain a clear view down the walk. The aim seems to have been to create what was described as a ‘Tufted’ tree – a straight, clean bole topped by a round crown.

7. By the middle years of the 18th century, fashions had turned against pruning trees, and many avenues and walks were allowed to grow on unpruned – the field evidence suggests that pruning of the Monk’s Walk Limes stopped at about this date. This preference for natural forms was part of the development of the English Landscape Style and during its heyday, avenues, and other regular, formal plantings, also fell out of favour. However, many avenues were planted after c. 1750 and gardening authorities continued to give advice on avenues and walks.

The illustration below is taken from Sarah Couch’s paper for the Garden History Society ‘The Practice of Avenue Planting in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’.

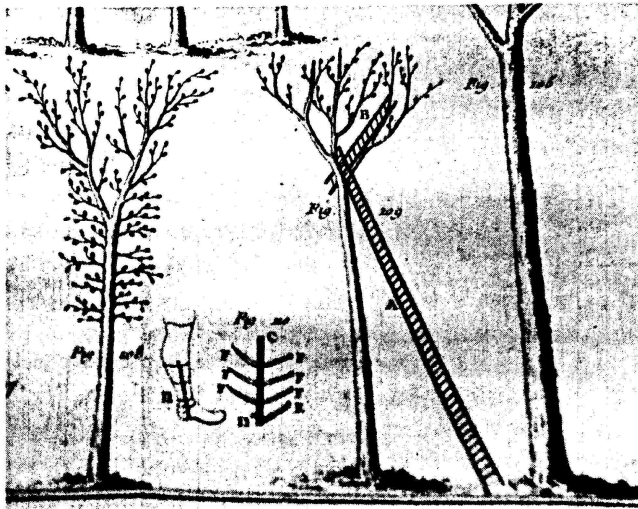


Figure 11. Duhamel du Monceau, *Des semis et plantations des arbres, et de leur culture* (1760), Plate x. Pruning trees for walks

Photo: author, by permission of the Royal Horticultural Society Lindley Library

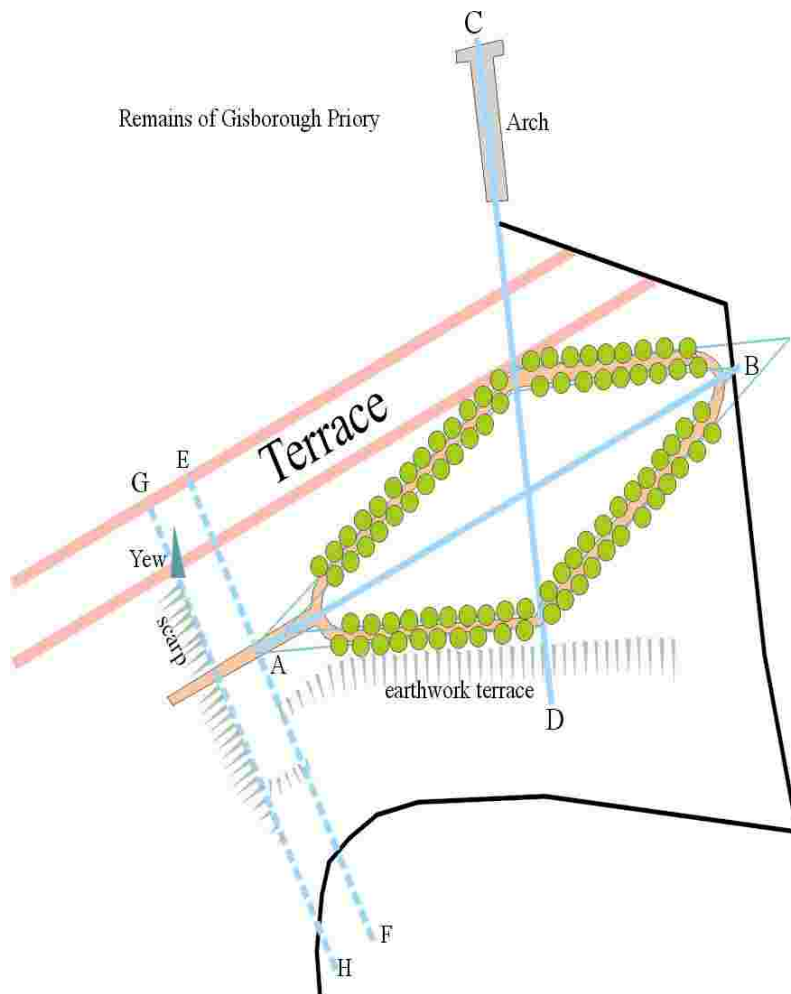
The findings of the survey

8. According to the historic documents, the walk was laid out sometime between Kip’s engraving of 1709 and the plan of 1773. The girths of the Monk’s Walk trees fall into two bands; the larger band - girths averaging c. 250 cms.; the smaller - girths averaging c. 175 cms. Those in the larger range are all forked or multi-stemmed at about 3 metres, a consequence of having had their leading shoot removed at some (relatively early) stage in their history, and perhaps of regular pollarding subsequently. The smaller trees are almost all single-stemmed. The different girths, taken with the different habits, strongly suggest two different planting dates – perhaps c.1720, when the walk was first laid out, and c.1850, when it was patched, presumably replacing trees that had failed.
9. As noted, the original trees were apparently ‘headed’ on planting and thereafter pruned regularly to keep the boles of the trees clean and the view open and the height of the trees restricted (perhaps to 4 or 5 metres). The pruning regime was abandoned at some point in the 18th century and the trees have not been pruned since.

10. The distance between the rows was 10 feet; the distance between trees in the rows was 12 feet. The path at the east and west ends was curved - the lozenge shape made by the Monk's Walk trees appears to have been truncated at each end; ie. while the path (obviously) meets at either end, the lines of trees do not (see the early 20th century photo below). The archaeological investigation found that the path was surfaced with shale – a sort of pink gravel - from the Chaloner quarries. As visible on the photo, the gravel extended the full width of the walk.
11. The layout of the walk was tied into both the surrounding garden and the Priory ruins (see plan below). The four angles of the walk seem to have been left unplanted, presumably to allow for cross-views – the old house on Bow Street to the west, the Arch to the north.
12. The topographical plan shows how closely the figure fits the landform; the southern arm of the Monk's Walk runs along a sharp, south-facing terrace that is clearly man-made – in fact, the whole level platform on which the Monk's Walk stands is probably artificial, and this considerable earthwork represents a massive expenditure of effort and resources. If, as seems reasonable, the terrace and platform were constructed as part of the Monk's Walk (rather than having their origins in some lost feature of the Priory to which the Monk's Walk was tailored) then this is a convincing demonstration of the importance and status of the walk when it was laid out.



The Monk's Walk in the early 20th century



The topographical survey, which accurately plotted the Terrace, the garden walls, and the trees of the Monk's Walk, enables us to work out how the lozenge shape was derived. The Monk's Walk is shown to have been a rhomboid based on the Terrace and the Arch, its acute angles 40° , obtuse 140° . The line A-B is the centre-line of the figure made by the lines of trees (shown on the plan as thin blue lines, extended to their intersection). A-B is parallel to the Terrace (and was almost certainly aligned on the centre of the old house on Bow Street). C-D is extended from the Arch and determined the location of the obtuse angles. Both lines were sight-lines (the absence of trees at the four bends is therefore significant) and are shown as paths on the 1773 plan.

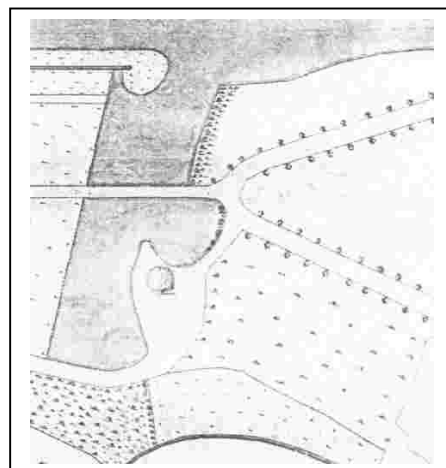
The lines E-F and G-H are shown dotted to indicate a less certain hypothesis. E-F is based on the point at which the outer lines of trees intersect and lies at right-angles to the Terrace and to A-B; G-H is the line of a pronounced scarp that marked the division between the Monk's Walk and the gardens to the west (the Yew which stands at the junction between the scarp and the Terrace may survive from a hedge on this boundary) and this also lies at right-angles to the Terrace – these two (E-F and G-H) may define the cross-axis that was aligned on the summerhouse that 19th century plans show on the Priory ruins.

The whole figure made by the Monk's Walk was fitted into the space defined by the Terrace to the north, the earthwork terrace to the south, the scarp to the west (both earthworks shown by hatching on the above plan) and the garden wall to the east.



Horse Chestnut (T418); a 'Phoenix-growth' tree, almost certainly rooted from a branch of the original tree. This was reputedly the first Horse Chestnut planted in England, grown from a conker brought over with the Armada. This last detail is almost certainly legend - Horse Chestnuts are usually considered to have been introduced to England in 1616, from Albania or Greece (*A Field Guide to the Trees of Britain and Northern Europe* Alan Mitchell 1974). There is a photo of the Gisborough Priory tree in 1899; on this, its branches are already touching the ground and have rooted (known today as 'Phoenix-growth'), and many of the Horse Chestnuts found in the gardens today, including the one shown above, are probably visible, as young trees, in this photo of 1899.

The original tree is shown on the plans of 1773 (below left) and 1854 (below right); both show it in roughly the same place – immediately south-west of the west end of the Monk's Walk.





A Lime in the Monk's Walk; the forked habit is typical of trees probably planted when the walk was first laid out. The fork shows that the trees were 'headed' (the leading shoot removed) on planting, and that they were kept pruned for many years subsequently. Eventually, this form of management was abandoned – the size of the limbs at the break suggest that this happened fairly early in the walk's history, probably by 1800.



The Yew (T303) at the end of the Terrace (just visible to the left of the trunk); this tree's habit – multi-stemmed at or near its base – shows that it has been cut down close to its base (probably more than once), and allowed to grow back. This form of management usually means that the shrub was once part of a hedge or a shrubbery; in this case it was probably a hedge (the field evidence suggests Holly with Yew) planted on the top of the scarp dividing the Monk's Walk from the gardens to the west.



Two Yews (T447 and T448); these probably survive from a shrubbery planted in the early 19th century. This is shown on the 1854 plan, where it extended across the north-east corner of the gardens, backed by the garden wall.