

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF DONINGTON PARK

**DRAFT
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1. Context

- 1.1. Donington Park is an area in Castle Donington parish and NW Leicestershire district. It is about two miles west of Castle Donington's village centre. It is about 15 miles SW of Nottingham. It is about 9 miles SE of Derby 'as the crow flies'¹.
- 1.2. The amended NW Leicestershire Local Plan (NWLDC, 2021) recognises Donington Park as an area of countryside, i.e. land that does not form part of a settlement hierarchy. Policy S3 *Countryside* specifies forms of development that may be supported in the countryside. Policy EC7 *Donington Park* supports development at the motorsport circuit that conserves "the site's racing and parkland heritage and heritage assets".
- 1.3. In 2024 the District Council consulted the public about a draft new local plan. The draft new local plan includes the allocation of about 1000 houses on "land north and south of Park Lane" (allocation CD10). It acknowledges that the impact on heritage assets would be one of "the main impacts of this development". The draft new local plan includes amendments to policy S3 (renumbered S4) and policy EC7 (renumbered EC11).
- 1.4. The River Trent is situated at about 35m AOD. The valley floor has been quarried for sand and gravel. In 2014 Shardlow Quarry obtained planning permission to extend "onto land known as the Weston extension" (Derbyshire County Council reference CM9/0811/53).
- 1.5. Land between 35m and 55m AOD is on the Helsby sandstone formation. The 1836 map indicates a quarry in woodland to the NE of King's Mills. Land between 55m and 75m AOD is on the Tarporley siltstone formation. Land above 75m AOD is on the Gunthorpe member of mudstones and siltstones (except for the ridge along the NE boundary of the park, which is on the Tarporley sandstone formation).
- 1.6. The park is bisected by a ridge that runs SSW-NNE between NGR 44135 32650 and NGR 44170 32715. Land to the west of the ridge descends to about 55m AOD along the NW boundary of the park, before the 'boathouse walk plantation' descends steeply to about 35m AOD to meet the River Trent.
- 1.7. Land to the east of the ridge forms a bowl, with the top of the bowl at about 80m AOD. At the bottom of the bowl, Donington Hall is situated at about 50m AOD. The park rises to about 90m AOD along its SW and SE boundaries.
- 1.8. At Home Farm, Park Lane is situated at about 67.5m AOD. It descends to about 62.5m AOD at the lodge, to about 45m AOD at the chain bridge, to about 35m AOD at King's Mills.

¹ The area is about 11 miles SE of Derby 'door-to-door'. Fisher (2016) refers to a chain ferry at King's Mills "provided by the Hastings family c.1790" and which "ceased to operate c.1942".

2. Sources

2.1. Section 4 contains a bibliography. In addition, the following sources have been consulted:

- The estate map (1735) held at Leicestershire Record Office (DG30/Ma/64/2);
- The enclosure map (1779) held at the record office (DE5251/2);
- The Quarter Sessions map (1833) held at the record office (QS48/1/95);
- The map (1836) held at Ashby Museum.
- OS 1:2500 maps of 1882, 1901 and 1922-23;
- Vertical aerial photographs taken in 1948;
- Castle Donington Rural District Council's planning registers, 1948 to 1974;
- NW Leicestershire District Council's planning registers, 1974 to present.

3. Manorial and administrative history

- 3.1. Sir George Hastings purchased the park in 1595 and built "a modest house" (Fisher, 2016). The hall and park remained in the Hastings family until 1903, when it was sold to Major Frederick Gretton, "whose late father had been a director of the brewers Bass Ratcliff & Gretton". In 1915 the hall was requisitioned as a prisoner-of-war camp; Major Gretton "never furnished the hall or moved in" (Olsen, 1990).
- 3.2. Major Gretton died in 1928. In 1929 the hall and park were sold to John Shields I. Mr Shields lived at Isley Walton Manor House and used the hall as a "country club hotel". In 1939 the hall was "requisitioned as a billet for troops and an officer's mess", while the park was requisitioned by the army "and used as a vehicle depot" (Fisher, 2016; Olsen, 1990). The army remained until 1956.
- 3.3. Between 1957 and 1966 the hall was leased to the Ockenden Venture "as a home for displaced children" (Fisher, 2016). John Shields III "wanted to make the hall his home" and "to generate income the stable block and the dairy were converted into residential accommodation" (Olsen, 1990; CDRDC references 63/67 and 45/72).
- 3.4. John Shields III "never lived at Donington Hall" (Olsen, 1990). Since c.1980-82 the hall has been in business use, first by British Midland International and second by Norton Motorcycles. Fisher (2016) says that "the deer herd was rebuilt after the army left in 1956". In 2015 John Shields IV maintained a deer herd in a 65ha park.
- 3.5. Donington Park was administered from 1894 to 1974 by the Castle Donington Rural District Council. It has been administered since that date by NW Leicestershire District Council.

4. Historic development (c.1200 to c.1922-23)

- 4.1. Map 1 indicates the extent of the park in 1735 and development before c.1922-23.

Development before 1779

- 4.2. Donington Park may have been established in the early thirteenth century, while water mills may have been established at King's Mills in the early fourteenth century. Sir George Hastings purchased the park in 1595 and he "reputedly took stone from the castle ... to build a modest house". Fisher's *Victoria History* (2016) describes the medieval and post-medieval development of the park, house and mills.
- 4.3. The 1735 map indicates the extent of the park and King's Mills. It indicates the 'ridings' (1), a pair of enclosures outside the northern boundary of the park, one of which was planted with parkland trees. The enclosures had been 'emparked' before 1833.

Development between 1779 and 1836

- 4.4. Castle Donington's open fields were enclosed in 1779. The Earl of Huntingdon was allotted a strip of land about 75 metres wide along the NE side of the park (2). The strip of land had been 'emparked' by 1833.
- 4.5. The "modest house" erected by Sir George Hastings was extended in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, "resulting in a patchwork of different periods" (Fisher, 2016). In 1790 Francis Rawdon Hastings demolished the house and erected a new hall; his architect was William Wilkins. Fisher (2016) discusses the possible involvement of Humphrey Repton in the landscaping of the park.
- 4.6. The new hall was complete in 1793 and a dairy was erected in the mid-1790s. According to Garwood (2021), "Wilkin's association with Donington lasted longer". In 1801 he discussed "proposals to demolish ... the existing kitchen garden to the north of the house and [to] merge the newly opened-up space with the pleasure grounds". A replacement kitchen garden on the north side of Park Lane (3) appears on the 1833 map.
- 4.7. Buildings including a paper mill, a plaster mill and the 'Priest House' were erected in about 1800; workers' cottages were erected in the early nineteenth century (national heritage list). Palmer (1992) identifies the 'Priest House' as the former mill house.
- 4.8. Home Farmhouse appears on the 1833 map. The national heritage list says that it was erected in the early nineteenth century and that it was "formerly used as a laundry to Donington Hall". The 1836 map indicates "new farm buildings" at Home Farm (4).
- 4.9. In 1833 permission was granted for the "diversion of the footpath from Melbourne ... to Castle Donington". Land to the SE of the park² had been 'disemparked' by 1836 (5).

² 'Starkey's Bridge' carried the footpath over the drive from Coppice Lodge. The bridge is inscribed '1834'.

Development between 1836 and c.1922-23

- 4.10. The national heritage list says that the Park Lane lodge was erected in the mid nineteenth century. To the north of the hall, the 'shrubbery', a network of paths laid out in a double saltire, was laid out at some time between 1836 and 1882.
- 4.11. The hall underwent "considerable restoration and improvement" in the 1860s. James Pulham & Sons "are believed to have created caves and a waterfall in the grounds in 1866-67". An article published in January 1868 refers to Lady Hastings' "new conservatory" (Garwood, 2021); it was demolished c.1882-1901.

5. Redevelopment (c.1922-23 to present)

- 5.1. Map 2 indicates the redevelopment of the park since c.1922-23.

Redevelopment c.1922-23 to c.1976-77

- 5.2. The paper mill and plaster mill at King's Mills were destroyed by fire³ in May 1927 (a).
- 5.3. John Shields I purchased the hall c.1929-30 and converted it to "a country club hotel with a golf course" (Fisher, 2016). Golf House⁴, "formerly the club house to the local golf course", was erected before 1937 (b). In 1931 a racing circuit was "established outside the southern park boundary".
- 5.4. In 1939 the park was "commandeered by the army and used as a vehicle depot" (Fisher, 2016). At some time between 1923 and 1948, the Park Lane entrance was widened and straightened, bypassing the lodge, probably to accommodate army vehicles (6).
- 5.5. 'Park Lane Nurseries' had been established before 1941 (Derby Daily Telegraph, 8 July 1941). It was renamed 'Donington Nurseries' in 1984. A dwelling ('Woodland Bungalow') was erected in 1985 (7), a sales building in 1986 and a portal-framed agricultural building in 1990 (our references 85/0898/P, 86/0306/P and 90/0779/P).
- 5.6. The 'Priest House' was extended in 1964 to form a restaurant (c); the workers' cottages were altered in 1978 to form a hotel (CDRDC reference 3/64; our reference 77/0024/P). In 1989 the 'Priest House' was extended to form a hotel (8); the workers' cottages were extended to form 4 additional bedrooms (our references 89/0086/P and 89/0955/P).

Redevelopment since c.1976-77

- 5.7. In 1971 John Shields III sold the racing circuit to Tom Wheatcroft. In 1976 planning permission was granted for the "realignment, widening and resurfacing" of the racing circuit and for the erection of ancillary buildings (our reference 76/01293/P). A strip of land about 75 metres wide was removed from the southern boundary of the park (d). The racing circuit reopened in 1977 (Fisher, 2016).

³ The plaster mill was operational, but the paper mill had closed in 1875. The Stapleford & Sandiacre News (27 May 1927) said that "the old mill house [sic] has been an historic ruin for some years".

⁴ The Derby Daily Telegraph (6 November 1937) refers to the Golf House. The Nottingham Evening Post (30 June 1989) refers to a bungalow, "formerly the club house to the local golf course", but in 1968 John Shields III said that the army had "ploughed up a nine-hole golf course and burned down the club house" (Derby Daily Telegraph, 11 July 1968).

- 5.8. In 1980 John Shields III sold the hall to British Midland International (BMI). BMI obtained planning permission to use the hall as a “headquarters office and residential training centre” and listed building consent to erect a lift tower (our references 80/0603/P and 81/0679/L). The hall “came into full use again in 1982” (Olsen, 1990). In 1988 the chapel was altered “to form a dining room” (our reference 88/0294/L).
- 5.9. To the NW of the hall, BMI laid out car parks in 1981 and 1987 (our references 81/0634/P and 87/1173/P) (e). In 1988 BMI erected a three-storey office block (‘Hastings House’) to the north of the hall (our reference 88/0835/P) (f). In 1990 they laid out a car park opposite the Park Lane lodge (our reference 90/0916/P) (g).
- 5.10. In 2001 we granted planning permission for the “use of land for stationing touring caravans” and to erect a “reception office and store room” (01/01067/FUL) (9).
- 5.11. In 2003 we granted planning permission for the use of agricultural buildings at Home Farm as four residential units (our reference 02/00357/FUL). The site has been extended to accommodate an access drive and a detached garage (16/01125/FUL) (10). A new farmstead was established to the north of the kitchen garden (05/01661/FUL) (11).
- 5.12. In about 2012-13 BMI ceased to trade and the hall was acquired by Norton Motorcycles. The Lansdowne Building (a ‘manufacturing centre of excellence and training facility’) was erected in two phases 2014-17 (our references 14/00772/FUL and 17/00991/FUL). The building was erected on a car park laid out by BMI in 1987 (h).

‘Disemparkment’ since c.1922-23

- 5.13. Since c.1922-23 land to the east of the park has been ‘disemparked’ (i). Land to the far east of the park is in use as an “off road vehicle test track” (15/00180/FUL) (j).

6. Bibliography

Fisher P (2016) *Victoria History of Leicestershire: Castle Donington*

Garwood A (2021) *Heritage Statement: Donington Hall, Park Lane, Castle Donington*

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