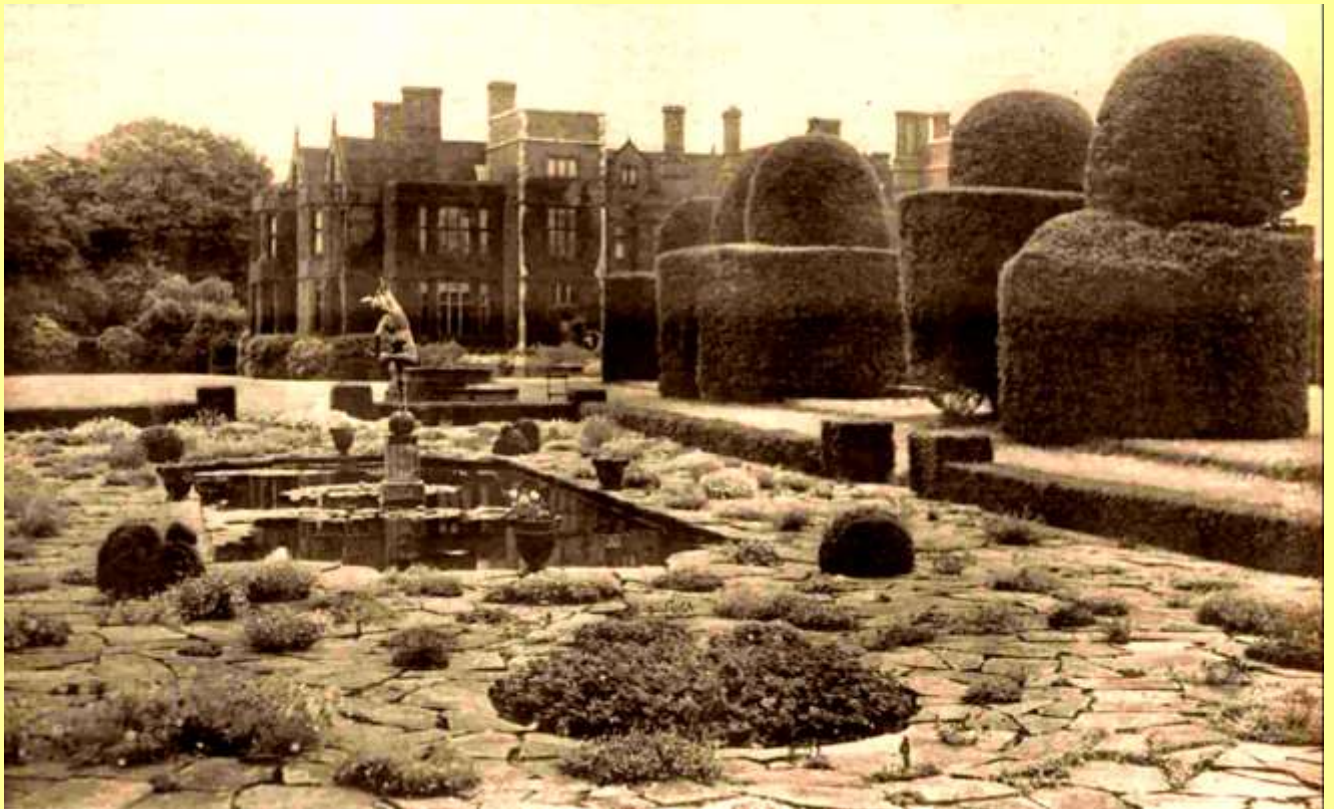


# **Fishergate, Fulford & Heslington Local History Society**

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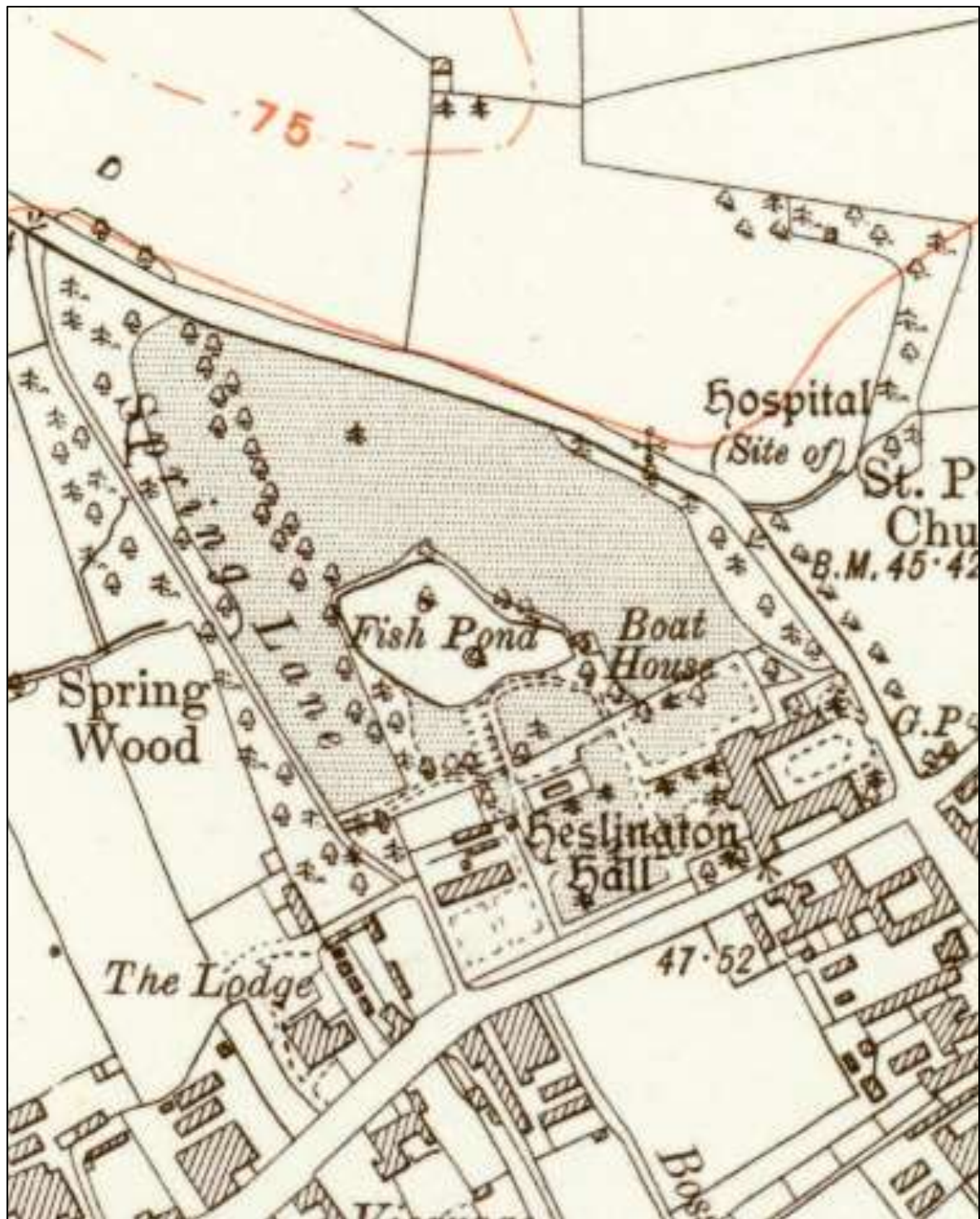
**March 2023**

## **History Tales from Heslington Hall's Gardens**



The Hermes Pool, Heslington Hall, 1932. Image: Yorkshire Post

**A study by Charles Patmore**



1931 OS map. National library of Scotland

## HISTORY TALES FROM HESLINGTON HALL'S GARDENS

by Charles Patmore



One of York's surprises is the dream-like garden of strangely topiarised yew trees at the rear of Heslington Hall – now part of York University and open for all to visit. The massed yews are carefully trimmed but in mysterious, amorphous shapes which defy labels, rhyme or reason. How did this extraordinary garden come about? Some answers to this question - and to some others - can be garnered from the limited information available on Heslington Hall's gardens' history.

Heslington Hall was built in 1568 as the grand home of Sir Thomas Eynns, an upwardly mobile senior civil servant to Queen Elizabeth I and prominent member of the Council of the North, based at Kings Manor, York. Subsequently the estate passed to other wealthy families through inheritance, marriage or sale. Around 1854 the Hall itself was extensively expanded and remodelled during its brief ownership by Yarburgh Greame. During World War II it was vacated by its owners and used by the Royal Air Force. After the war the Hall remained empty until the estate was obtained by York University. The Hall was then converted as a base for administration of the University from 1962.

Our initial focus is on the oldest surviving part of the Hall's garden, which is the enclosed topiarised yew garden, the adjacent two-storey gazebo with a balcony on its corner, now called the Quiet Place, and the adjacent Walled Garden. While some earlier Elizabethan and Jacobean garden would have surrounded the Hall, only vestigial traces survive – as discussed later. It is the topiarised yew garden, the Quiet Place gazebo and the Walled Garden which are the oldest surviving garden elements today.





Hall, yew garden and Quiet Place gazebo c.1720. Private Collection, by permission.

### ***The key historical record***

Titled 'Prospect of Heslington Hall from the slopes of Heslington Hill', this 1720s painting, has become the key to the origins of the surviving garden since written history is scarce until a *Country Life* article in 1900 <sup>1</sup>. Repeatedly it has been reproduced as a monochrome image derived from a historic monochrome print, sometimes presumed to be the original. A major development after the initial publication of this article was the location by another FFH History Society member of the true original, a colour oil painting. This revealed a wealth of extra detail, not visible in reproductions of the print, and resolved some specific doubts concerning the garden's history. (For details about the original painting and its artist see Appendix.)

From left to right, the image above shows: Heslington Hall before its mid- Victorian enlargements; a rectangular formal garden; today's Quiet Place gazebo, the actual building just as it is today.

Present in the picture, but absent today, is a formal rectangular canal in front of the Quiet Place gazebo. Today you can very clearly see traces of this vanished canal in the lawn between the Quiet Place and the lake. Absent from the picture but present today, is the lake nearest Derwent College, a lake created in the mid -19<sup>th</sup> century for boating.

Where that lake now stands, the picture shows pastureland with grazing animals which is fenced off from the formal garden area. On the right is a small square pond which is probably fed from a spring like those still present on nearby Walmgate Stray.

There is a small stone hut near centre foreground: one writer has identified this as a boat house connected by a narrow canal to the rectangular pool <sup>2</sup>. A 1950s booklet about Heslington Hall's grounds contains a map showing a boat house in the same position<sup>3</sup>.

The 6" scale Ordnance Survey Heslington map from 1853 shows water channels in the very same arrangement as in the 18<sup>th</sup> century picture.

The six tall trees, immediately to the left of the gazebo, can mistakenly be presumed to be today's yews in their early years. A high resolution photo of the original oil painting shows conclusively that this is not the case: these six trees, long since felled, are in front of the yew tree garden's boundary wall, not inside it. They do not resemble yews in any case. The same high resolution photo also clearly reveals the tops of young yew-like trees, topiarised pyramidically, rising behind what was then a wall round the yew tree garden (see Appendix).

The garden is now usually dated as originating in the reign of Queen Anne (1702 – 1714). Its creation has been attributed to James Yarbrough, whose wife inherited Heslington Hall in 1708; he died in 1728 <sup>4</sup>.

### ***A rare survival of a 'Dutch Garden'***

"A modest Dutch-style garden" is how Historic England describes this early 18<sup>th</sup> century garden at Heslington Hall <sup>5</sup>. 'Dutch Garden' was a term used in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for a style of formal garden which became particularly fashionable following the coronation of a keen Dutch gardener, William of Orange, in 1689. Hallmarks of a 'Dutch Garden' evident at Heslington Hall were rectangular compartments of ordered, topiarised evergreens, the now vanished rectangular canal and a tall, two-storey gazebo for viewing the whole garden from on high – today's Quiet Place <sup>6</sup>.

While the term 'Dutch Garden' has recently fallen out of favour among some garden history academics, it is clear that people used it during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and that the Heslington garden fitted the bill <sup>7</sup>.

Contemporary writer Daniel Defoe credited King William III with fostering a taste for evergreens, like yew and box:

"His majesty was particularly delighted with...evergreens as the greatest addition to the beauty of a garden, preserving the beauty of the place even in...an inclement and tempestuous winter...With this particular judgement all the gentlemen of England began to fall in, and in a few years fair gardens and fine houses began to grow up on every corner." <sup>8</sup>

In the Dutch style, these evergreens, often yew, would be neatly clipped into symmetrical arrangements of repeated geometrical shapes like globes, columns, pyramids or cones. This style seems present in the topiarised young yews glimpsed in close-ups of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century painting and very clearly in late Victorian and Edwardian photos of Heslington Hall's yew tree topiary, as will be shown.



Today's Quiet Place gazebo, minus the canal



Westbury Court Dutch Garden, with its canal

Many of England's 'Dutch Gardens' were swept away later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as described next. The most complete example in England today is the National Trust's restoration of Westbury Court Garden in Gloucestershire, originally created 1696-1705. The restoration aimed explicitly to restore all the original 'Dutch Garden' features, working from original Westbury Court documents and a very detailed 1707 engraving of the garden by a Dutch artist <sup>9</sup>.

At Westbury Court today can be seen a tall, two-storey brick gazebo, resembling Heslington Hall's Quiet Place building, but with its rectangular canal still present and its evergreen topiary cut in geometric shapes like those in old photos of Heslington Hall.

### ***An age of garden fashion wars***

Towards the end of Queen Anne's reign, the winds of garden fashion began to blow powerfully in a different direction – away from formality, away above all from labour-intensive topiary. In 1712 the essayist and journalist Joseph Addison inveighed against:

"our British gardeners who...instead of honouring Nature, love to deviate from it as much as possible. Our trees rise in Cones, Globes and Pyramids. We see the Marks of the Scissars upon every Plant and Bush...for my own part I would rather look upon a Tree in all its Luxuriancy ... than when it is thus cut out and Trimmed into a Mathematical Figure." <sup>10</sup>

The following year Alexander Pope, himself a garden designer as well as poet, published a famous article mocking topiary as now dreadfully commonplace and prone to frequent comical flaws <sup>10</sup>. Another factor may have been the costly maintenance which topiary required - Queen Anne is said to have demanded that her gardening bills be cut by two-thirds.

As the 18<sup>th</sup> century advanced, symmetrical, topiarised, formal gardens faded from fashion. In their place came first grand vistas across sleek green sward counter-pointed with classical temples and statues, as in Yorkshire's Duncombe Park and Studley Royal gardens.

Next, under the tutelage of Capability Brown, the temples and statues became fewer and further between and garden fashion focused on man-made "improvement" of the beauty of natural landscape. Common ploys were strategic placement of tasteful copses of trees on man-made mounds or new lakes designed to look serpentine, sinuous and natural. In Yorkshire, the parklands of Harewood House and Scampston Hall are examples of Capability Brown's work.

By mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, an 'English landscape garden' was becoming a must-have among status-conscious landowners and Dutch or French style formal gardens were being destroyed by followers of fashion. Dissenters accused Brown of ploughing well-crafted formal gardens back into ordinary countryside. The poet Richard Owen Cambridge quipped that he wished to die before Capability Brown, so he could see heaven before Brown gave it a makeover <sup>11</sup>. But Heslington Hall's 'Dutch Garden' somehow survived the destruction all the way through the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Not till mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was its rectangular canal replaced by a larger 'natural-looking' lake. The topiarised yew trees survived. Concerning the latter, the artist Laurence Whistler commented:

"Mercifully no-one at Heslington was even up-to-date enough to destroy them when, later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a house was only beautiful if it stood in the middle of a large bare field, not far from an irregular sheet of grey water". <sup>12</sup>

### ***Changes in topiary style for Heslington Hall's yews***

Late Victorian and Edwardian photos show a topiary style very different from today. Heslington Hall's yews are narrower and cut precisely into a set of repeated geometric shapes, rather than their luxuriant, eccentric shapes today. In 1913 *Country Life* called this "a sober geometry of simple devices such as a ball-topped cylindrical form...which give dignity to the simple scheme"<sup>13</sup>.

A geometrical topiary style can be glimpsed from the outset in the slim pyramidal yew tops visible in the 1720s painting. A similar geometrical topiary style features in the 1707 engraving of Westbury Court Garden, already mentioned, and in William III's Privy Garden at Hampton Court Palace.

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century photos and a late 19<sup>th</sup> century painting show Heslington Hall's yews as always topiarised into regular geometric shapes. By this period many yews had become massive and some had been cut in quite fanciful multi-layered cylindrical shapes while others were shaped as pyramids, cylinders, globe-topped cylinders or dumpy cones.

But till mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Heslington Hall's topiarised yews were always shaped as regular geometric forms: they were never topiary sculptures of living creatures.

The source of the change to today's luxuriant, eccentric topiary was a long period when Heslington Hall's yew trees received less management following Lord Deramore's permanent departure from Heslington Hall early in World War II and wartime shortage of gardeners for purposes other than food-growing. When the University took over the Hall, gardens and grounds in mid-1960s, the yews had grown large and unkempt.

A photo in *Country Life* 1971 shows the yews as large as they are today <sup>14</sup>. In the University era they have been trimmed to follow the forms they had grown into – and different trees had grown in different ways.



Space and vistas between the yews. Photo: *Country Life* 1913

In the 1990s a feasibility study considered whether the yews could be recut into the shapes shown in early 20<sup>th</sup> century photos. It concluded that this would require radical, severe pruning followed by such a long period of regrowing that the garden would be unrecognisable for a long time. Considering the popularity of the yew tree garden, the University decided to leave it as it is and continue to trim the trees according to the shape into which each had grown.

There are other historic topiary gardens where exactly the same thing has happened, for instance the now gigantic 17<sup>th</sup> century topiarised yew trees at Powis Castle, Wales <sup>15</sup>.





Now vanished yews close to the hall. Photograph: York Civic Trust Folk Park Proposal, p.6

Photographs of the original topiary convey that it gave the garden a notably different feel from today. The narrowness of the yews enabled clear vistas through the trees to the landscape and the Hall beyond, as the 1900 *Country Life* article comments <sup>1</sup>. This original garden would have lacked the mystery and immersive quality of the same garden today, where in some places reduced lines of sight give the feel of a soft, green labyrinth and where the eccentric, surreal shapes, into which the yews have morphed, keep providing variety and surprises. Indeed, the 1900 *Country Life* article comments about the original topiary style:

“It is a garden world of strange character, such as we like to linger in, but with marked features of a kind that would not bear too much repetition” <sup>1</sup>.

The yews are now trimmed annually. It takes 200 man-hours, starts in late August and continues through September. Much work is conducted from hydraulic platforms. During the 1990s the yew trimmings were collected by a drug company for use in manufacturing an anti-cancer drug. These yew trees are in good health.

At around 300 years old, they are quite young for this extremely long-lived species. They qualify only as ‘Notable Yews’ since ‘Veteran Yew’ status requires 400 years and a true ‘Ancient Yew’ starts at 900 years <sup>16</sup>.



Postcard image of the gardens in 1909. Photo: Garden Museum, London

### ***Puzzle of the chess-piece story***

A repeated tale presents the yew trees in the present topiary garden as having been shaped as chess pieces. A document produced by York Civic Trust, under the aegis of John Bowes Morrell, York's great conservationist, historian and city planner, states this as fact. Its 1950s proposal to utilise Heslington Hall's grounds as an outdoor folk museum mentions "the famous grove of ancient yews trained and cut in the shape of chessmen" <sup>3</sup>. The proposal's map designates these yews "chessmen". Lord Deramore's pre-war gardeners are known also to have referred to these yews as "chessmen". But neither 1900 nor 1913 *Country Life* articles about Heslington Hall make any such reference.

Certainly, chess pieces could be designed using the purely geometric shapes which characterised these yews' topiary, though which piece was which might not be immediately obvious. Six clearly differentiated shapes would be needed: king, queen, castle, bishop, knight, pawn. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century photos show sufficient variety of geometric yew shapes and sizes at Heslington Hall to fit this.

A persuasive argument for the chess piece story is that there are 32 trees, the precise number for a chess set, in today's yew tree garden. But, muddying the picture, is that originally there were around 14 more yew trees, topiarised in the same fashion, in a continuation of the topiary garden across a path all the way up to the Hall building.

These additional trees were removed and replaced by the present lawn when the University took over. The change can be seen clearly by comparing the map (page 17) or aerial photo from York Civic Trust's 1950s Folk Park proposal (page 9) with a satellite photo

of the current garden (page 12). The tops of these additional trees, then in their early years, can also be seen in the venerable 18<sup>th</sup> century painting of Hall and garden (see Appendix).

### ***Mystery of the missing sundial***

In the centre of the now vanished group of yew trees near the Hall, until the 1960s there stood an unusual sundial. It comprised a polyhedron on a pillar with a separate 'gnomon', the shadow-casting blade, on each of 26 faces. Such elaborate polyhedral sundials are chiefly found in Scotland and were created for decorative purposes. Photos in *Country*



The Sundial, pictured on a Wills cigarette card and in *Country Life* in 1913

Photographs in *Country Life* 1900 show the sundial's location clearly <sup>1</sup>. *Country Life* 1913 says the sundial was "raised upon steps...as a central feature" <sup>13</sup>. Such was the curiosity value of this sundial that it featured in a 1928 Wills cigarette card series, complete with a Heslington Hall yew topiary background. York Civic Trust's proposal for a Heslington Hall Folk Park celebrates it during the 1950s; indeed, the sundial serves as a logo on the booklet's cover <sup>3</sup>.

We do not know when it was first installed but it is wholly possible that the sundial was integral to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century garden. Its position at a focal point in the long vista from the gates of today's Walled Garden could make it look core to the yew tree garden's design. Multi-faceted sundials were certainly known late 17<sup>th</sup> century, when one striking example was installed in Charles II's Privy Garden and another at Glamis Castle in Scotland<sup>17</sup>.

As to whether the yew tree garden's designers were polyhedron-aware, cast your gaze on the 18<sup>th</sup> century gateposts between yew tree garden and Walled Garden. There today are a pair of stone finials in the very same polyhedral shape as the vanished sundial, though rotated by 45 degrees.



The Heslington Hall sundial was removed during the University's 1960s landscaping. An invoice and a photo survive concerning its dismantling. But, despite some determined investigations and a mistaken would-be sighting, its subsequent whereabouts are a mystery.

### ***The 'neo-Mughal' pool***

Between today's garden of topiarised yews and the lawn in front of the Hall is a charming rectangular pool with ten low fountains. It could be mistaken for an Edwardian 'neo-Mughal' pool, since in the Edwardian period and for decades thereafter there was a vogue for water features inspired by Mughal gardens in India – or Lutyens versions thereof. In York, for instance, one of the pools in the Terrys' garden at Goddards follows this style. But in fact this Heslington pool was created by the University in 1965. It was intended to match a set of similar low fountains in a pool at the new Derwent College nearby and help visually integrate the new buildings with the old garden. *Country Life* 1971 saw in this pair of matching fountain pools "an immediate connection between the old garden and the new, and a logical progression from a formal to an informal style" <sup>14</sup>.

### ***The Walled Garden: Quiet Place, Orangery and gateway***

At the opposite end of today's topiary garden, the end furthest from Heslington Hall, is the former Walled Garden. Nowadays most of it is an unprepossessing closed work zone, occupied by a number of modern greenhouses plus others which are probably late Victorian. You can make out some elements on the satellite map.



Satellite view of the yew garden and walled garden today. Photo: Google Earth

The quarter closest to the Quiet Place has been walled off from the rest of the Walled Garden to provide a small private courtyard garden for users of the Quiet Place.



The Quiet Place is now designated as “an area of stillness and quiet, which can be used for the purpose of reflection, meditation, prayer, reading and contemplative walking”. Outside the Walled Garden is an arched niche under the Quiet Place gazebo with a trellis-backed seat next the stairs to the gazebo’s upper storey room. Through an adjacent gate is access to the gazebo’s ground floor room and the secluded Quiet Place courtyard garden. The latter contains a small tree, shrubs, benches, and a recent memorial board. Apart from the trellis-backed seat under the gazebo, other parts of the Quiet Place require University access codes for entry.



The 'Quiet Place's private courtyard garden

On the satellite map, near the centre of the Walled Garden can be discerned a rectangular building. This is the old Orangery which today, along with a dilapidated greenhouse on either side, is secluded from the rest of the site behind safety screens.

The Orangery is a Grade II Listed Building, “probably mid C18 with C19 heightening and alterations” according to Pevsner <sup>18</sup>. Warm and sunny buildings for growing warm-climate fruits like oranges or peaches were quite common at stately homes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They utilised a variety of heat sources. The Heslington Orangery is south-facing, has five large windows and is made of heat-retaining brick.



The 18<sup>th</sup> century Orangery as it is today

Still surviving, though now walled-up on the Spring Lane side, is a grand gateway to the Walled Garden from Spring Lane. It can be glimpsed through the gate from the yew tree garden. On the Walled Garden side it is surmounted by a classical pediment, supported by four Corinthian columns. This gate has been identified as the original 16th century entrance porch to the Elizabethan Hall, transplanted to the Walled Garden during Victorian modifications of the Hall <sup>5, 19, 20</sup>.

As the satellite map shows, when the yew trees were slimmer, a long vista would exist from this gate through both the Walled Garden and the topiary garden all the way to the Hall. Pre-University photos show the Walled Garden as planted and laid-out with an eye to attractive appearance, like such vistas, alongside its utilitarian role in growing food <sup>1, 3</sup>.

### ***The Boating Lake, bowling green and 'Hermes pool'***

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the small lake now facing the Quiet Place was created as a boating lake <sup>5</sup>. The latter included a now vanished boat house at what is now the Derwent College end of the lake. As mentioned earlier, the original 'Dutch Garden' rectangular canal in front of today's Quiet Place was removed and the resulting depression in the lawn, clearly visible today, became used as a bowling green. Almost certainly this change was part of the 1854 remodelling of the Hall.



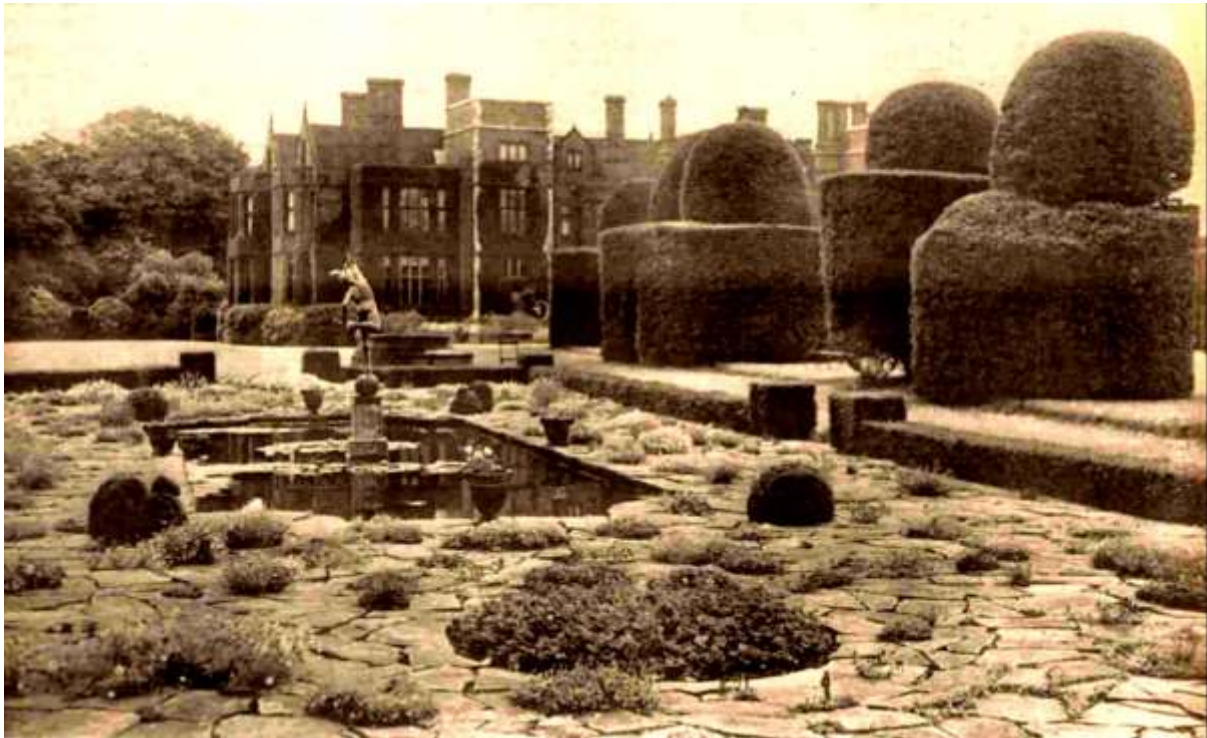
1853 Ordnance Survey map. Image: national Library of Scotland

The 1853 Ordnance Survey map for Heslington shows that the 'Dutch Garden' rectangular canal was still present during mapping whereas today's small lake was not. But by 1900 *Country Life* could write "the old bowling green is still used" with a photo of the filled-in canal <sup>1</sup>. Hence a date soon after 1853 seems likely for this change.

A photo in the on-line Borthwick Institute Schools History Pack shows a game of bowls being played in the former canal bed by soldiers during World War I, when Heslington Hall was used for wounded soldiers' recuperation <sup>21</sup>. The photo conveys how neatly the old canal bed suited a game of bowls, the banks providing seats for spectators.

An additional garden feature, probably no earlier than Edwardian, was a small ornamental pool between the yew tree garden and the Boating Lake. Photos show this pool as surrounded by a crazy-paving parterre and with a statue of a wand-waving Hermes-like deity on a globe in the middle of the water. It is present in photos from 1920 in the Borthwick Schools Pack and on York Civic Trust's c.1957 Folk Park map but has now, along with Hermes, disappeared in landscaping at the advent of the University.





The Hermes Pool in 1932. Photograph: Yorkshire Post

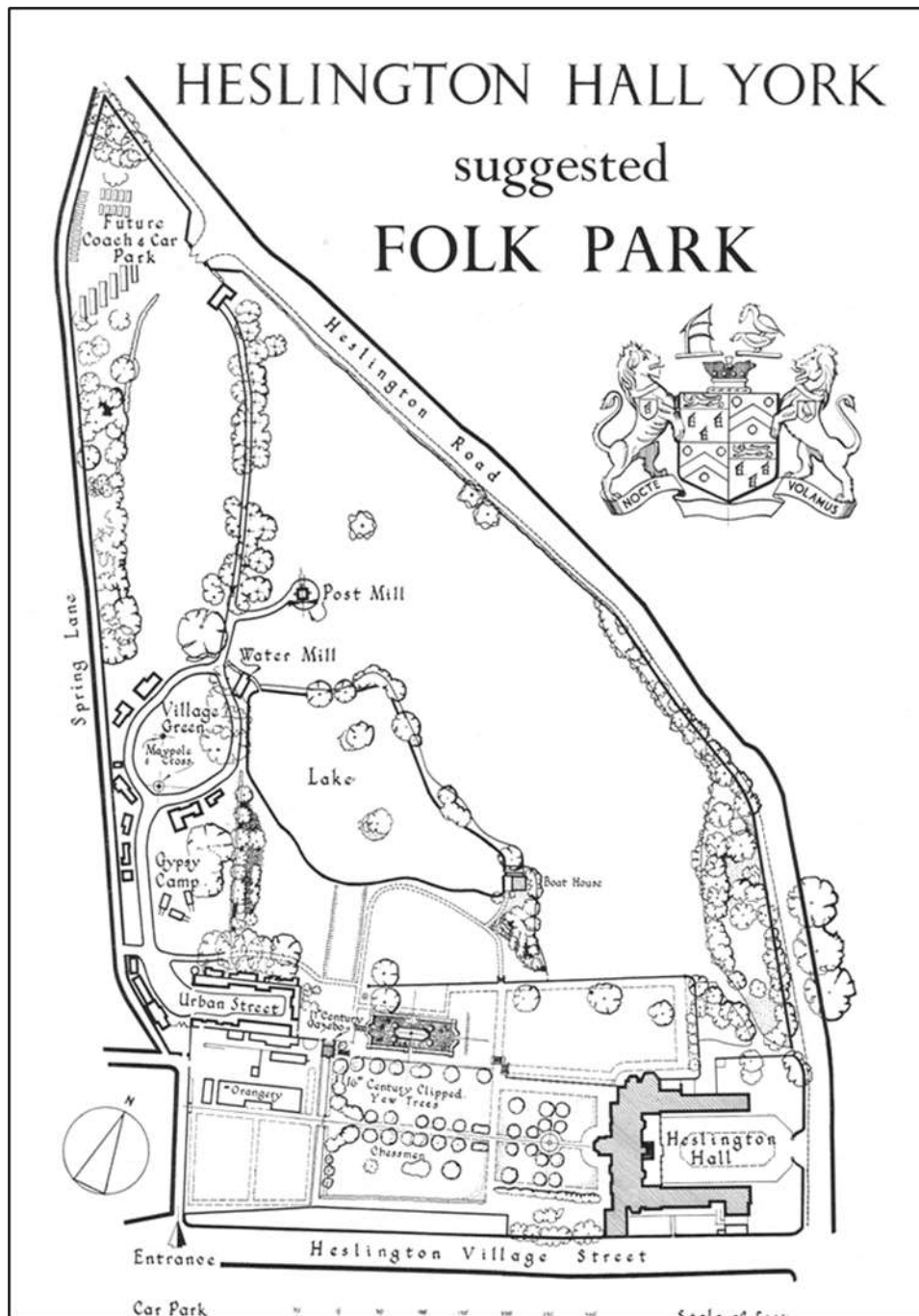
### ***The Folk Park that never was***

Shortly before he secured the Heslington Hall site for York University in 1958, John Bowes Morrell had been seeking a very different use for it. During the 1950s he was forming plans to use the landscape closest to Heslington Hall for a 'Folk Park' inspired by Skansen, Stockholm's huge, pioneering, open-air museum of bygone Swedish lifestyles.

Morrell had already worked with Dr John Kirk, the great collector of historic Yorkshire artefacts, towards the creation of York's Castle Museum. What he now wanted was some means for re-enacting bygone lifestyles through activities like Skansen's traditional glass-blowing, tanning and farm crafts amidst reconstructed historic buildings in a rural-looking setting. York Civic Trust's Folk Park proposal conveys his sentiments:

"In York we have the finest folk museum in the country but no folk park, and no room for it in the Castle precincts. Is it not therefore an extraordinarily fortunate circumstance that the grounds of Heslington Hall should be available?"<sup>3</sup>





Plan of the proposed Folk Park from York Civic Trust's proposal, p.2

Part of Morrell's idea concerned rehoming or recreating historic artefacts in Heslington Hall's grounds. Next to the Walled Garden and today's Quiet Place was to be an old street composed of re-assembled sections of a row of old wooden houses from Pavement, central York which had been demolished in 1912. Nearby would be the caravans of a "Gypsy Camp" and past that a "Village Green" complete with cross and maypole, according to the map in York Civic Trust's booklet *Heslington Hall, York: Suggested Folk Park*<sup>3</sup>. The Boating Lake made a natural site for a water mill, he pointed out. Morrell already knew how to source some such items. The watermill would be a disused mill already scheduled for removal from

a village near Pickering. (Eventually in 1966 this watermill was reconstructed outside York's Castle Museum next the Foss as today's Raindale Mill.)

Likewise, Morrell was seeking to relocate a windmill from another Yorkshire village. Another Folk Park feature would be a spiral turf labyrinth and yet another a Welsh coracle in the Boating Lake "to show how our Celtic ancestors fished before the Romans".<sup>3</sup>

Morrell envisaged teams of re-enactors for demonstrations of blacksmithing, pottery, weaving, wheel making or wood-turning. The Civic Trust proposal also suggested maypole and morris dancing, people walking the turf labyrinth, and open-air plays by the lake. "In such surroundings", it mused, "many forms of old merrymaking might well come into their own again"<sup>3</sup>. But, as things turned out, the woodlands and pasturelands around Heslington Hall would never discover whether their ambience could make this dream come true.

### ***York University and the huge 1960s lake***

Our story ends with the enormous landscape transformation, 1963-1980, whereby the University's Heslington campus was constructed in Heslington Hall's grounds plus some extra land to the west.

One key fact is worth clarifying. Apart from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Boating Lake already mentioned, all remaining water space on the campus is a single huge man-made lake created for the University in the 1960s. It may look or feel like more than one lake. Parts may look like a river with wooded islands. Parts look very natural indeed. But it is in fact one continuous 1960s man-made lake covering 15 acres of water, stretching nearly a mile in length, and holding some 14 million gallons of water<sup>5</sup>.

This lake was planned early on as a practical necessity on this flat, quite waterlogged site to drain water and to contain and gradually disperse the rainwater which would run off the new buildings and paved areas. It was one of the first and the largest lakes in Britain to be lined in butyl / polythene sheeting - thus a giant big brother of our garden ponds. While essential as a 'balancing lake' for drainage, the new waters of Heslington were also carefully contoured to enhance the beauty of the campus as a whole.

The sinuous shape of the grand lake system, the river-like section, the islands and woodlands are landscaping triumphs which echo the best of Capability Brown. As for visitors' uncertainty as to which parts of the campus are old and which post-1962, which are man-made and which are natural – this is tribute to the designers' skill. It is among the factors which led to the 2018 listing of the entire Heslington campus as Grade II, Parks and Gardens, on England's National Heritage List<sup>5</sup>.



Aerial view of the university and its lake under construction in 1964. Photograph: University of York



Yews near the hall in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Photograph from a private collection

### ***Summary: four chapters to Heslington Hall gardens' history***

Four chapters have been described, each opening with major changes to the landscape.

#### **The 16<sup>th</sup> century Elizabethan Garden**

This is a vanished garden about which no information has been discovered for this article - and maybe none will ever be discovered. As to that garden's character, Elizabethan and Jacobean gardens range from fairly simple designs, like the rare survivor at Haddon Hall, Derbyshire, to now-vanished emulations of grand Italian Renaissance gardens showcasing topiary, water-powered automata and shell-encrusted grottoes enlivened with joke fountains and artificial birdsong (such as remarkably are still in action at Hellbrunn Palace gardens, Salzburg)<sup>22</sup>.

Heslington Hall's creator, Sir Thomas Eynns, died in 1575, somewhat early in the period's vogue for Italian garden novelties, so a garden at the less exotic end of the spectrum is the likelihood for Heslington Hall. Geophysical survey might shed light on this garden, the major remaining mystery concerning the Hall's garden history. But if no accounts of this garden survive, could it really have amounted to much? Yes, it is possible: during HS2 rail investigations a large, elaborate but unknown 16<sup>th</sup> century garden was uncovered in Warwickshire, for which somehow there were no surviving written records or accounts by people who had seen it <sup>23</sup>.

#### **The early 18<sup>th</sup> century 'Dutch Garden'**

From early 18<sup>th</sup> century to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Heslington Hall hosted a classic example of England's 'Dutch Garden' style – rectangular canal, rectangular topiarised yew tree garden, two-storey brick Quiet Place gazebo, and Walled Garden with Orangery. Somehow it survived the storms of garden fashion, which destroyed many others of its ilk. Minus the rectangular canal, this 'Dutch Garden' is still here today.

#### **The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian garden**

The next major change was the removal of the 'Dutch Garden' canal and the creation of the much larger 'Boating Lake' near the latter's site – around the time of Yarburgh Greame's 1854 grand redevelopment of Heslington Hall. Other smaller changes occurred during following decades, like greenhouse construction. James Hornby, Head Gardener 1870 – 1902, expanded the growing of vegetables and fruit within the Walled Garden and elsewhere. The Borthwick Institute holds records of his work <sup>24</sup>.

#### **The 1960s integrated University landscape**

Some features of the existing garden were landscaped away, like some topiarised yew trees next the Hall, the 'Hermes pool' and the boat house. An enormous new lake system



was created together with two new ornamental pools. A wide variety of additional trees were planted. Steps were taken to integrate old and new landscape features.

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## APPENDIX: THE FOUNDATIONAL 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PAINTING

### *The original colour oil painting*

As mentioned on page 4, a crucial development late in the research for this article was the discovery that the original for the 18<sup>th</sup> century picture of the garden was not a monochrome print but a colour oil painting. Christopher Rainger, a member of the Fishergate, Fulford & Heslington History Society, then traced this painting to a private collection owned by a descendant of the last baron resident at Heslington Hall. The owner kindly enabled the History Society to access a high resolution photo of the painting.

This revealed a wealth of informative historical detail which is either not visible in the widely reproduced monochrome print or visible without sufficient clarity to identify features with confidence.

### *The artist*

'Prospect of Heslington Hall from the slopes of Heslington Hill' was painted by Jan Baptiste Bouttats, a Flemish artist who moved to England and lived in Hull and York in the 1720s. He died in 1743. Bouttats painted a range of subjects, including comparable vistas of grand buildings in rural settings, ship scenes and still life. One of his sons, John Bouttats, also painted stately homes in Yorkshire.

### *The monochrome print*



Monochrome reproduction of 'The Prospect of Heslington Hall'. Picture: Borthwick Institute

Repeatedly reproduced is this monochrome image whose origins are yet to be fully charted. The image above derives from a monochrome photo held by the Borthwick Institute.

The photo was given to the University in 1973, according to an accompanying letter, by a distant relative of Sir Thomas Hesketh whose descendants lived at Heslington Hall in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The donor had photographed for the University a "print" which he owned. The letter comments that this photo "has come out quite well, almost better than the original" which suggests that it was not a colour image which was photographed, hence not the Bouttats painting, the true original. His description of it as a "print" suggests that he was not photographing another photo. It could be that he was photographing a monochrome copy of the original Bouttats painting, possibly a copy made in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

After examining the high resolution colour image, it is possible to identify some of the same details in this image but it is difficult to do this with confidence from the monochrome image on its own.

### ***Historical detail revealed by the high-resolution photo of the colour painting***

Close-up examination of a high-resolution image of the original painting shows that today's yew tree garden was originally enclosed by a high brick wall. It had an entry archway next to today's Quiet Place. This wall extended all the way to Heslington Hall since the yew tree garden originally extended right up to the Hall, as shown in a photo on page 10.

In the painting, on the far side of this wall can be clearly seen the slender pyramidal tops of young trees resembling topiarised yews – both on the site of today's yews and, especially clearly, in the area close to the Hall where there are no longer yew trees today.

The six tall trees are clearly revealed to be between the painter and the near side of the wall, which encloses the yew tree garden, with something like a low hedge in front of them. Thus these six trees were definitely outside the yew tree garden contrary to a misinterpretation, which can be easily made from the monochrome image, that they occupy the same ground as today's yew trees. The latter would be hard to reconcile with the dating of the garden to the Queen Anne period, since the six trees are so tall and so unlike yews. Before seeing the high resolution image of the original painting, the author thus mistook the location of these six trees and was needlessly puzzled as a result.

Today the six trees and the hedge are long gone. The high enclosure wall facing the painter has been demolished – judging from photos, by no later than the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, very possibly during the 1850s renovations. A brick wall of similar height remains between today's yew tree garden and today's Walled Garden - with the ornamented gateway between them which was mentioned on page 11.