



Belton Park

Although the parkland looks natural it is in fact a designed landscape. A few years after the House was built, in 1690, 'Young' Sir John Brownlow gained royal approval from William III for a deer park.

This meant that where the land had been ploughed in an open field system from medieval times, it was now enclosed (or fenced). Once this happened, Fallow deer were introduced into Belton Park, changing the use and look of the park.

One of the first changes to the park at this time was changing Old Wood. Already called this in 1690, 'Young' Sir John had the woodland layout made into a more formal, ornamental one. With a rectangular boundary he had paths (walks) put in, in a geometrical pattern like two Union Jacks.

This arrangement of trees and shrubs cut through with walks was called a 'Wilderness'. It was very fashionable in the 17th and 18th centuries but wasn't intended to be 'wild' as we understand it today. In a time when gardens were very formal and structured they were places that enveloped the visitor, heightening the contrast between the artificial parterres (designed planted areas) and the wide, wild landscape beyond: contrasting and contemplating man and nature.



Who designed the Belton Park you see now?



Viscount Tyrconnel commissioned the landscape architect and gardener William Emes to redesign Belton Park.

William Emes did keep some of the natural environment, incorporating the existing ancient woodland and areas of pasture into his design. What he created were new vistas, the Bellmount Tower and a picturesque 'Wilderness' garden.

Emes particularly liked using water and trees to create parks which looked more natural than the previously fashionable formal designs. Stand in the parkland and you will see clumps of trees at interesting viewing points, or South and East Avenues of trees that tie the house with its parkland, and ponds and streams feeding into the River Witham.

This landscape was designed to provide points of interest and to show how rich and powerful Viscount Tyrconnel was.



Even the River Witham didn't escape the re-design; a dam was introduced to create a cascade water feature to complement the Gothick ruin that was built. An island was also created in the river near this point for a summerhouse for the family to use.

Emes didn't get to see everything that he designed completed, with Towthorpe Ponds being created after his death.

The Parkland today

Today this Grade 1 listed parkland is still home to the National Trust's only naturally maintained deer park and is a haven for wildlife. Grazing in the parkland are the Fallow deer and, at certain times of the year, sheep. The wildflowers and tree blossom provide food for butterflies and bees, with dragonflies spotted near the ponds.

Within the ponds and river are some protected or rare species. Otters occasionally fish here for carp and there is a significant, regionally important population of white-clawed crayfish.

It is also home to two archaeological sites: the deserted medieval village of Towthorpe, located to the south of Towthorpe Ponds; and the First World War 'Kitchener Camp' that became the Machine Gun Corps training camp and Military Hospital.

Today, instead of the hustle and bustle of thousands of people that would have been in the park 100 years ago, you might be lucky enough to see a red kite soaring overhead or one of Belton's foxes.



Safety note: Although East Avenue and Old Wood still exist; we don't recommend that you visit them as there are many ancient trees which are in poor condition. Some branches may be unstable and could fall. They make great habitats for wildlife though - including as a sanctuary for the fallow deer herd.

More details about Belton Park can be found in the guidebook.