

The Garden Temple

at
Gopsall Hall



Present day temple ruins



George Frederick Handel



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

Gopsall Hall, perhaps the grandest Georgian country house in Leicestershire, was erected in the eighteenth century by Charles Jennens. The mansion was set in a 1000-acre park, with two lakes, a walled garden and garden buildings including a Chinese boathouse and a Gothick seat. The house was designed by John Westley and built by the Hiorns of Warwick who in the 1750's added service wings and lavish Rococo interiors. In 1818 a grand entrance arch modelled on the Arch of Constantine to a design by Wyattville was added.



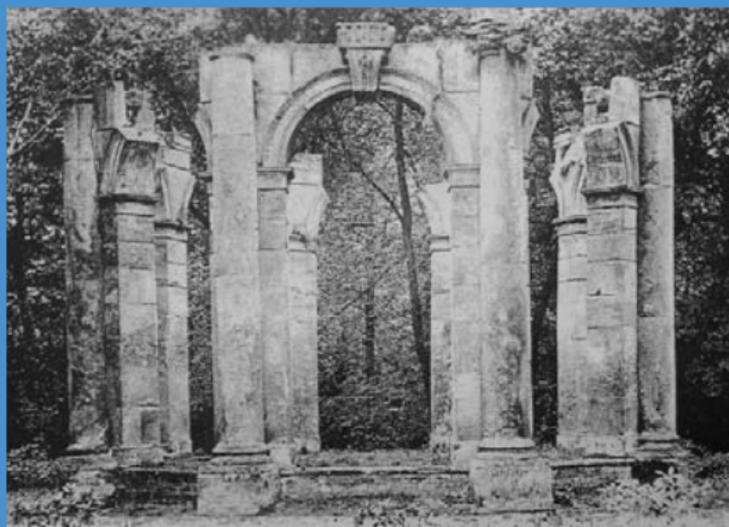
*Painting of Gopsall Hall, showing the Temple on the left
(copyright Paul Mellon Centre for studies in British Art)
attributed to Pieter Tillemans who was in England 1704 -1734.*

Visitors to the estate have included King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra and the young Winston Churchill. Most of the associated buildings were demolished in 1951 and now only part of the walled garden, the electricity generating building, an underground reservoir and the garden temple, now a ruin, remain.



Gopsall Arch detail with a fragment of inscription from the frieze around the temple.

The Grade II Listed temple stands on a low wooded ridge on the north edge of Race Course wood to the southeast of Gopsall Hall Farm. The Farm stands on the site of the former mansion. It is believed that the temple was also built by the Hiorns adapted from a design by James Paine, the famous Palladian architect. It had an octagon arrangement of columns with a domed roof and was set on an earth mound, within a ditch bounded by a brick ha-ha wall.



Postcard of c1912 showing the Temple from the North

The statue of Religion by the sculptor Louis Francois Roubiliac (d. 1762) is said to have been placed on the roof of the Temple. It was erected as a memorial to the classical scholar Edward Holdsworth (1684 - 1746). Roubiliac also carved a statue of Handel in Vauxhall Gardens, London and also carved the composers tomb in Westminster Abbey. It is recorded that the temple 'fell down' in 1835. Richard Pen, Earl Howe in 1857, presented the statue to Leicester City.

Like Jennens, Holdsworth was a non-juror. These were men who refused to swear allegiance to George I of the new Hanoverian royal line and believed that the Stuarts should still be kings of England. It is believed that this statue symbolised the struggle to achieve the triumph of this belief.



Statue of Religion by Roubiliac

A cenotaph in memory of Edward Holdsworth was also placed inside the temple in 1764. Its location has been identified from the paving layout within the temple, which was excavated during conservation work on the temple in 2002. The cenotaph was acquired by Leicestershire Museums in 1951 after a sale of items from Gopsall Hall.

Both cenotaph and statue are now displayed in the garden of Belgrave Hall Museum, Leicester which is open to the public.

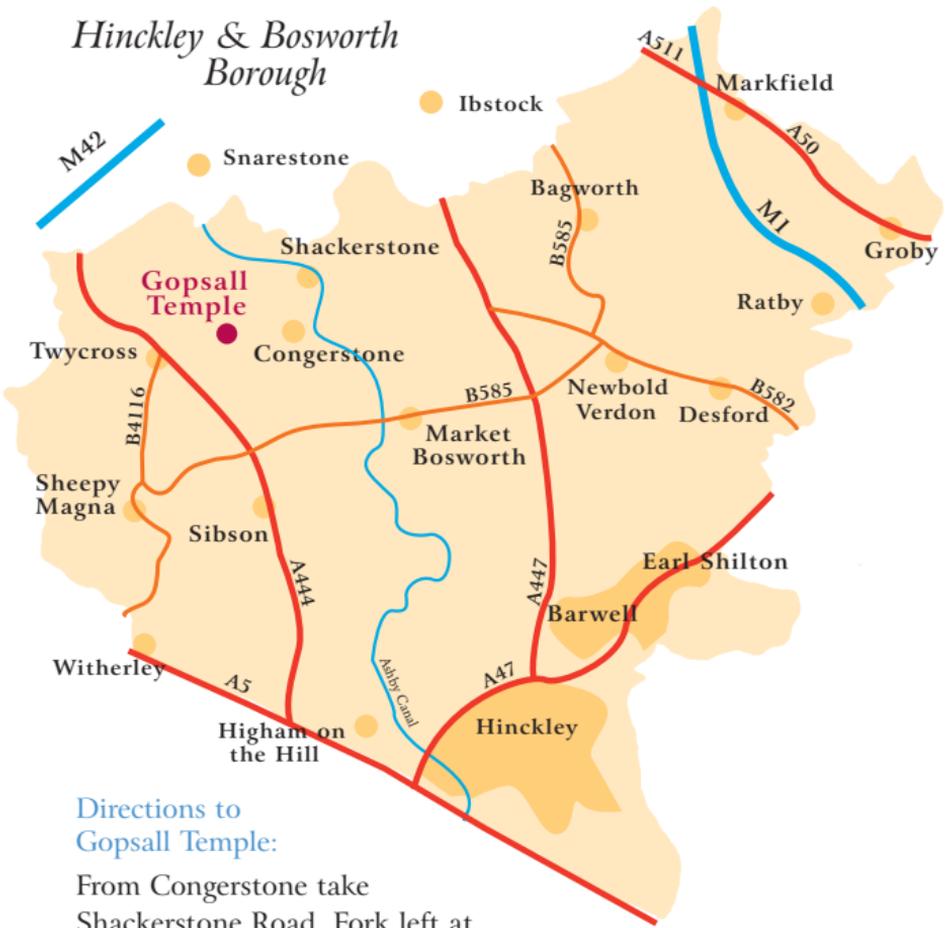
(photograph here of the cenotaph and also of the statue by kind permission of Belgrave Hall Museum - Leicester City Council)



George Frederick Handel is said to have closeted himself inside the Temple for 3 weeks in August/September 1741 to write his masterpiece “The Messiah”, when staying as a guest of Charles Jennens. The estate was then held by Charles’ grandfather, Humphrey Jennens, a rich iron founder.

Recent history - At some time during the 20th century, a falling tree brought down some of the piers. The remaining standing stonework bears graffiti from the 1880's and 90's and World War II when the army requisitioned it. Examples include, names from the A.T.S., the U.S.A., and a German prisoner of war.

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough



Directions to Gopsall Temple:

From Congerstone take Shackerstone Road. Fork left at school along Gopsall Road to bend in road. Follow track towards Gopsall Hall Farm. Permissive footpath, by kind permission of the Crown Estate, to Gopsall Temple is 400m on left.
Open all day, everyday.

Conservation work completed at the temple in 2003.



The conservation work on these ruins has been funded jointly by The Crown Estate, EMDA, Leicestershire County Council and Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council 2003



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