



# History of Stover Country Park

## Stover's History

Stover is a wetland area which was developed and clay extracted from the Bovey Basin. Much of the heathland has now been lost to forestry, development and clay extraction.

Stover Country Park was part of the 80,000 acre estate acquired by James Templer, a Devonian entrepreneur, in 1765. He immediately set about changing it forever. His activities involved re-landscaping the area, creating the lake and planting 200,000 trees, which included many exotic species.

James Templer's first project was to replace the original mansion house, called Stoford, and build Stover House - an austere Palladian villa with a rich interior in the style of Robert Adam. Constructed of granite from Haytor, the stone was laboriously moved by cart. Templer may have designed Stover, although Thomas Hardwick, an architect, did complete drawings of the house.

The house was built amidst the drained marshes of the area which prompted James Templer to write the following poem:

*Where once the vernal furze and russet sedge  
With tangled thorns and noisome weed o'erlain  
The heath's dark mantle, with luxuriance rude:  
Whose only tenants, were the bittern hoarse  
The venom'd adder, and her baleful brood,  
Or the dark mole that silent plough'd her way  
Thro' the black barren soil, and there uphove  
The frequent hillock, Nobly rise now  
Thy stately mansion - Stover - sweetly deck'd  
With every ornament art can devise:  
Encircled by such appropriate scenery,  
That each a relative peculiar grace  
On each reflects.*



Stover House

After building Stover House, James Templer set about landscaping the grounds. A 1.5 mile carriageway to the house was built and the 10 acre (4 hectare) Stover Lake was created, fed by water from the Ventiford Brook. Thousands of exotic trees and shrubs were also planted, but he kept the view of the lake from the house clear of trees.

James Templer died in 1782. His eldest son, also called James, carried on his work including carrying out his father's plans to build the Stover Canal. The canal ran between Jetty Marsh in Newton Abbot and nearby Teigngrace. It was built in 1792 to carry clay for export via Teignmouth Docks.

George Templer (James Templer II's son) took over the estate in 1813. He was responsible for building the Haytor Granite Tramway. The tramway was built in 1820 to transport granite from Haytor on Dartmoor to the sea port of Teignmouth. The Templer Way is 18 miles in length (29 km) and follows the route of the tramway and canal. The canal and the tramway are part of the Templer family's legacy to the area.

Granite from Haytor was used to build London Bridge, the National Gallery and the British Museum. In 1829 the estate was sold to the Duke of Somerset and George continued to work for the granite company.

## List of Historical Features

- Gatehouse**
- Carriage Drive** leading to:
- Stover House** (now Stover School) - can be seen from the edge of the park
- Bridges** including **Ventiford Brook Bridge**
- Stover Lake**
- Restored Pond**
- Original landscaped islands** with mature exotic tree species
- Other historic tree planting** (see Trees leaflet) including many exotic species and Turkey oaks planted along the Carriage Drive.
- Woodland boundary banks**
- Stream** - part of the original landscaping with Beech trees planted alongside.
- Boundary stones**
- Granite drains**

Also: **Templer Way** and **Heritage Trail** walking routes

cover photo by Rob Ballard

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The Gatehouse

The gatehouse and a new carriage drive was built by the Duke of Somerset and, in 1842, James Veitch, a famous Devon plantsman and landscaper, was brought in to advise on improvements to the grounds. These included draining more ground, introducing glades and rides, cutting back laurel and planting groups of rhododendron. Rhododendron has since spread throughout the grounds, overrunning the original planting.

Stover remained with the Duke of Somerset's family until 1927, although part of the estate had already been sold off in 1921. Stover House has been a private school since 1932 and currently stands outside the boundary of the Country Park.

The estate was taken over by the Forestry Commission in 1927 and stands of Scots pine, Norway spruce, Douglas fir, western hemlock, sitka spruce and larch were planted. In the 1940s pylons were erected on site and this meant that trees could not be grown underneath, thus re-creating valuable wildlife habitat including heathland.

Devon County Council acquired 114 acres of the original estate from the Forestry Commission in 1979 and since then it has been managed as a Country Park for the public. In 1984 it was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Additions to the Park include a Pinetum planted in 1980, an Arboretum planted in 1992 and an Interpretation Centre built in 2000. Heritage Trail and Templer Way leaflets are also available to help you explore more of the history of Stover.

## Stover Historical Dates

These dates show that major events in the history of Stover since the Templer family first created the landscaped grounds.

### Ownership:

- Templer Family 1765 - 1830
- Duke of Somerset 1830 - 1926
- Forestry Commission 1927 - 1979
- Devon County Council 1979 - onwards

### Recent milestones (up to 2006):

- Ventiford Brook Bridge - 1877
- Pylons and Firebreak - 1940s
- Pinetum planted - 1980
- Designated an SSSI - 1984
- Arboretum planted - 1992
- Historic Park Register - 1995
- Toilets/Ranger Office 1996
- Interpretation Centre 2000
- Local Nature Reserve - 2001
- Green Flag Award - 2005, 2006

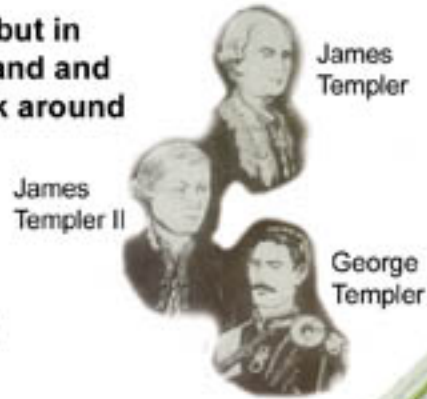
## Records and Sightings

We hope you have enjoyed your visit. Please let us know if you see anything unusual by calling in at the Visitor Centre.

The Visitor Centre has more information about the history and wildlife on site.

# Where to look for Historical Features

Stover Country Park was once part of Bovey Heath but in 1765 James Templer bought some 80,000 acres of land and formed what became the Stover estate. As you walk around the park you will see plenty of evidence of the legacy of the Templer family and the subsequent owners, the Duke of Somerset and the Forestry Commission. Many of the original features such as the ornamental lake, bridges, gatehouse, ponds and streams, as well as extensive tree planting, still survive from the Templer days.



Stover House was built of granite from Haytor by James Templer in 1765, replacing the previous mansion house that stood there called Stoford. The house has been a school since 1932 and is situated beyond the Country Park.



Stover House



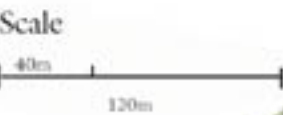
Stover House as seen from the edge of the Country Park.

## Gatehouse

The Gatehouse is a grand entrance to the estate and was a feature added by the Duke of Somerset soon after he acquired the estate in 1829. The building now stands on the A38 and is at the beginning of the Carriage Drive. Being the principle home of the Duke, who was keen on hunting, Stover also became a productive estate for rabbit, pheasant and duck.



Gatehouse



## Boundary Stones

Two granite stones have been erected next to the inlet channel. They were originally positioned either side of the then Ashburton Turnpike, at the point where the granite tramway crossed near Heathfield between 1820 and 1860. The initials H, T, W and B, cut into the granite are abbreviations for 'Haytor Tram Way Bounds'.



Boundary Stones



Stover Lake with exotic planting on the islands.

## Islands and Plantings

Part of Templer's grand design included islands in the lake planted with dramatic exotic planting. The original landscaped islands can still be seen with their now mature trees.



Restored pond seen from the aerial walkway.

Look for historical artefacts:



Granite drain



Unused granite blocks



Carriage drive through the woodland

## Carriage Drive

The route of the original carriage drive (late 1700s) runs from the Gatehouse to what is now Stover School and passes near the edge of the lake. Several bridges can be seen along the route. Turkey oaks were planted along the carriage drive. Look for granite drains.



Bridge on carriage drive

## Lake, Ponds and Streams

Stover Lake was created as an ornamental lake by James Templer as part of his grand design. He always made sure that the view of the lake from Stover House was not obscured by trees. Look for the restored pond (2002) from the aerial walkway. The bridge below the walkway is part of the original carriage drive but other bridges can be seen along the route. The stream is also part of the landscaped grounds; it was lined with gravel and beech trees were planted alongside. Original planted trees can be seen from the walkway.



Stover Lake created by James Templer.