

A Garden to Visit

HAMPSHIRE: Houghton Lodge



This is a beautiful example of the late Georgian, *Cottage Ornée* style of architecture, set in serene surroundings next to the river Test near Stockbridge.

The building isn't immediately apparent as you are directed through the walled garden on entering. It looms up behind you as you wander through the walled garden and turn right towards the river.

A little turn of the head and there it is: a stunningly unique and oddly compelling over-sized cottage, looking slightly over your head, distractedly, into the far distance. For me, the relaxed, informal atmosphere of this garden (actively encouraged by the present owners) is the major attraction. They want you to enjoy the experience, as much as they seem to enjoy living there.



More than anything, this is a picnicking garden: a place where you want to sit on the grass, to pause and reflect and take it all in. To claim the space to just 'be' and to feel unhurried – so pick a day that is fine and dry to make your visit and pack a sandwich or two.

What immediately occurs to you is the choice of location – this particular stretch of the Test and the meadows beyond - are sites of special scientific interest and it's one of those increasingly rare spots in central Hampshire that still feels remote, peaceful and completely unspoilt.

It's not at all difficult either to imagine that this would have been the same view and same ambience as when the house was built, two hundreds years ago.

This is a garden that has the quiet confidence to understate, to charm through diffidence and modesty. The setting and the genius loci have been allowed to take centre stage and to work their charm.

It's a place that knows that the house and the view draw the visitor's attention and so care has been taken on the paths and signage, alignments and screening and thresholds and gates to provide an uncluttered, open and flowing garden that draws you ever inwards.



Directions:

North Houghton, near Stockbridge, Hampshire
SO20 6LQ, www.houghtonlodge.co.uk, 01264 810063