

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

PECKOVER HOUSE

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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**PECKOVER HOUSE**

Name: PECKOVER HOUSE

County: Cambridgeshire

District: Fenland (District Authority)

Parish: Wisbech

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.665180  
Longitude: 0.15447500  
National Grid Reference: TF 45796 09674  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1000629  
Date first listed: 16-Jan-1985

## Details

An early to mid C19 walled town garden, with late C20 additions in the Victorian style.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Peckover House was built on North Brink in 1722, at which time it was known as Bank House. Shortly after completion it was acquired by the Southwell family who employed craftsmen, possibly from Houghton Hall in Norfolk (qv) to add interior decoration. The House and its estate were purchased by local tradesman Jonathan Peckover in 1794. The Peckover family were Quakers with a long historical attachment to the town of Wisbech and Jonathan was responsible for the founding of the Wisbech Literary Society in 1781. On purchasing the property he opened a banking hall adjoining the House at the request of his customers and from the beginning of the C19 onwards began to develop the grounds. On his death in 1883 the family business and the estate passed to his two sons William and Algernon who continued to add to the grounds in the 'Gardenesque' style. When William died in 1877, Algernon's eldest son Alexander succeeded and during his time the banking business continued to flourish, moving to a new site and allowing the family to extend Bank House and its gardens. After his retirement, Alexander was elevated to the peerage, becoming Baron Peckover of Wisbech in 1907. His daughter Alexandrina remained at Bank House until 1944 during which time the gardens became somewhat neglected. In that year she vested the House, gardens and 48 acres (20ha) of estate land to the National Trust who continue to maintain the property today (1999), giving it the name Peckover House.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Peckover House lies in the centre of the town of Wisbech, on a road known as North Brink which runs above the River Nene. This town-centre setting surrounds the site on all sides, the garden of c 1ha being enclosed by a high red-brick wall, beyond which lies North Brink to the south, Chapel Road to the north, and adjoining garden properties to east and west. The ground at Peckover is flat, with no major views into or out of the site.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The front of Peckover House faces onto North Brink and is set back off the road behind high railings. Gates give access to the gravelled front courtyard, planted with shrubs beside the House and bedding along the road boundary. Immediately to the west of the forecourt are tall red-brick gate piers with stone caps and pineapple finials (listed

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
*PECKOVER HOUSE*

grade II together with the front railings) which lead to a service courtyard and two-storey mid to late C18 stable building (listed grade II\*) built of local brown brick under a slate roof. The stable block forms an integral part of the wall enclosing the garden to the north.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Peckover House (listed grade I) is an elegant early C18 Georgian town house, built in three storeys of local amber and red brick under lead roofs. It is laid out in a square plan of five bays, the entrance door on the south front having raised and fielded panels and a round-headed fanlight while the garden door on the north front leads to a balustrated stone staircase down into the gardens. Flanking wings to east and west are curved, single-storey late C19 additions. The House was originally constructed in 1722 (architect unknown) and was extended by the addition of the wings and the incorporation of the late C18 bank building on the west front in 1878 by Edward Boardman of Norwich for Algernon Peckover.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens lie at the rear of the House, to the north and west, and all are enclosed by a high red-brick wall (listed grade II). A serpentine path runs around the boundary which is for the most part planted with a variety of evergreen shrubs and deciduous trees. The garden is divided into three sections which are linked by the serpentine walk. The eastern end, which is the largest, is entered from the House by descending a flight of stone steps looking over an open croquet lawn (in the late C19 adorned with intricate bedding around its edge). Along the east boundary lies The Wilderness, a laurel, aucuba and fern shrubbery walk planted in the mid C19, with mature trees including a liriodendron and a ginkgo, which are said to have been amongst the earliest introductions of these species to this country (NT pers comm, 1999). The perimeter walk runs east along the boundary wall past a mid C19 niche with a statue of a boy which is framed by the planting to be seen from the House steps. To the west of the croquet lawn is a late C19 rustic wooden summerhouse with tree-trunk columns overlooking a circular lily pool surrounded by a rose garden (both originally late C19, restored late C20). Beyond this to the north are shrub borders where evergreens predominate, including mature monkey puzzles and palms. The perimeter walk along the north boundary continues west under the Bandstand, a late C19 wrought-iron gazebo covered with roses, and the thrift border along the wall (late C20 planting of a Victorian-style feature).

In the centre of the garden are two high red-brick walls running north/south which form a long narrow compartment that divides the west garden from the east garden. An autumn border runs along the outside of the east wall and deep herbaceous borders along the outside of the west wall. Inside the walled compartment a wooden painted loggia at the south end looks onto an oval pool enclosed by a yew and topiary hedge, beyond which a gravel path flanked by deep mixed borders designed by Graham Stuart Thomas leads to the mid C19 Orangery on the north boundary wall. This area was designed and laid out in the late C20 under the direction of the National Trust.

To the west of the Orangery are workshops, a propagating house, a fernery and several frames all dating from the mid C19 and enclosed by privet hedges. In the north-west corner of the garden stands the gardener's cottage (substantially remodelled in the late C19) overlooking an open lawn. A substantial C17 thatched threshing barn (listed grade II) lies on the west boundary and looks south onto a courtyard laid with a late C20 maze pattern taken from a maze laid out by the family on nearby allotment ground (see below). The barn is said to have been used by the Peckover family as a theatre in the early C19 (listed buildings description). Completing the circuit walk east back towards the House along the southern wall of the garden, the path leads past the White Cross (medieval cross shaft, listed grade II) to a Victorian fern garden with rustic thatched summerhouse (brought here by the NT from the family allotment ground where it was erected in the late C19).

The gardens were laid out by the Peckovers from the early C19 onwards, then partly remodelled in the late C19/early C20 by Alexander Peckover, and further developed by the National Trust since 1948. The internal brick walls show the divisions between adjoining garden plots which were incorporated into the Bank House garden as the family purchased more properties along North Brink during the C19.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen garden was developed at Bank House in the mid to late C19 at which time it covered the western half of the site. It was laid out with a wide drive running through it, in front of the gardener's cottage which was remodelled and extended during this period. This area was incorporated into the ornamental gardens by the National Trust from the mid C20 onwards.

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**PECKOVER HOUSE**

**OTHER LAND** Beyond the registered site, c 300m to the north-west, lies an area of derelict (1999) ground which, during the C18, acted as the site of the kitchen garden for Bank House. During the C19 it was opened by the Peckover family to the residents of Wisbech for use as allotment grounds as they purchased more property along North Brink and were able to extend the gardens there and move the kitchen garden closer to the House. The rustic thatched summerhouse in the fern garden at Peckover House was originally sited in the Bank House kitchen garden area during the C19 and was gifted back (late C20) to the House by an allotment holder. The Bank House kitchen garden also had a planted maze during the C19, the design of which was recreated in the late C20 by the National Trust in the courtyard outside the threshing barn beside Peckover House.

**REFERENCES**

F J Gardiner, *History of Wisbech* (1898) *Victoria History of the County of Cambridgeshire VI*, (1978), p 242 G S Thomas, *Gardens of the National Trust* (1979) *Country Life*, 167 (24 January 1980), pp 248-50 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Cambridgeshire* (1982), p 500 Peckover House, guidebook, (National Trust 1999)

Maps Map of the town of Wisbech, 1867 (1040/P1), (Cambridgeshire Record Office)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886 3rd edition published 1925

Archival items There are no known maps or plans of the gardens but a growing archive of other material relating to the family and their estate is held by the National Trust at Peckover House.

Description written: November 1999 Amended: July 2000 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: January 2001

## Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.