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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PANSHANGER

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Name: PANSHANGER

County: Hertfordshire

District: East Hertfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Hertford

County: Hertfordshire

District: East Hertfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Hertingfordbury

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.798752
Longitude: -0.12790538
National Grid Reference: TL 29191 12780
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000916
Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

Details

A landscape park laid out from 1799, with advice from Humphry Repton, around a country house begun 1806-7 and demolished 1953-4. The park incorporated the site of an earlier house and park, improved in 1756 with advice from Lancelot Brown.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Around 1704 the mansion house called Fitzjohns was pulled down and replaced by Cole Green House, a seven-bay mansion built for William Cowper, first Earl Cowper (first Lord Chancellor of Great Britain, 1707-10, again 1714-18; d at Cole Green 1723). He occupied the house in 1711 and settled there upon his retirement in 1718. Fruit and formal flower gardens lay close to the house, closely attended by the Countess. In 1719 the Earl bought the adjacent Panshanger estate. By 1738 the park surrounding Cole Green House had been extended to c 50ha (Transactions 1955-7). Entries in the Cowper ledgers exist for work carried out by Lancelot Brown in 1755-6, 1761, and 1763-4, amounting to £618. Although it is not known exactly what he did, he seems to have created a ha-ha and carried out planting (ibid).

In 1797, the fifth Earl came of age and began improvements upon his Hertfordshire estates. Humphry Repton (1752-1818) produced a Red Book for the united Panshanger and Cole Green estates, suggesting where on the Panshanger estate a new house could be sited most advantageously, and how the River Mimram could be diverted and widened into a lake to take full advantage of the valley scenery around it (Red Book, HRO). This was part of a larger scheme to landscape the Earl's estates along the River Mimram valley, including Tewin Water (qv) for which a Red Book was also produced in the same year, and where his suggestions were largely carried out, and Digswell, which was dropped from the scheme at an early stage. Repton intended that each estate in the Mimram valley within Cowper's possession should be given 'a degree of extent and consequence

which it could not boast exclusive of the others, and while each possesses its independent privacy and seclusion, their united lawns will, by extending thro' the whole valley enrich the general face of the country' (Tewin Water Red Book, 1799, HRO). Repton seems to have taken little part in the implementation of the suggestions, which were instead supervised by the Earl until his death in 1837. Planting began in 1799, continuing over several years, and Cole Green House was pulled down in 1801/2. The enclosure of Hertingfordbury parish in 1801 meant that the park could be substantially enlarged, and six miles of public rights of way were diverted around it (Transactions 1955(7)). Panshanger House, modified from Repton's suggestions, was largely built 1806-9 and the Earl occupied it in 1811. After the fifth Earl's death his wife continued to manage Panshanger until 1867, she having remarried, to Lord Palmerston. Following her death the estate was managed until 1913 by the seventh Earl's wife, Katrine, who supervised the addition of formal garden features around the house.

After the First World War the estate deteriorated, and Lord Desborough, upon whom it had devolved, sold 4000 acres (c 1666ha) of it in 1919. The estate was finally broken up and sold out of the family in 1953, and by 1954 the house had been demolished. The park is now (1999) owned by a gravel extraction company.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Panshanger lies 2km west of the centre of Hertford, flanked to the east by the outer suburbs of Hertford and to the west by the outer suburbs of Welwyn Garden City. The c 350ha park is bounded to the north by the B1000 road linking Hertford and Digswell Water, to the west by the lane linking Poplars Green with Cole Green, and to the south largely by the C20 A414 dual carriageway linking Hertford with the A1(M). At the south-west corner the park is bounded by Cole Green settlement and village green. The land is undulating, with several high points in the south-west of the park where the former Cole Green House and its park lay, but the dominant feature is the broad River Mimram valley which bisects the site, the river running from north-west to south-east. Plateaux extend north and south from the valley sides. The setting is largely rural, with the extremities of Hertford and Welwyn Garden City close by to the east and west, and to the west the Panshanger Aerodrome. The A414 slices through the south-west corner of the park, effectively detaching an area of woodland which gives access from the South Lodge. Here, west of the Lodge and outside the area here registered, stands Cole Green House and associated outbuildings (C18, C19, listed grade II), the house having been rebuilt by the fifth Earl in the early C19 on a new site further to the south, as a dower house for Panshanger.

Tewin Water landscape park (qv) lies 2km to the north-west, laid out after 1799 to designs by Humphry Repton for the fifth Earl, and connected to Panshanger by the River Mimram.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The surviving drive system was devised when the park was laid out during the early C19. The main, north entrance lies 400m north-north-east of the site of Panshanger House, giving access from the A1000 from Hertford and Tewin. The entrance is marked by the two-storey, white-painted North Lodge in Tudor style, standing adjacent to white-painted gate piers, slightly set back off the road, flanking the drive. From here the drive extends through the north park south-west to the site of the house, passing through a belt of trees and across what was formerly an open lawn, before reaching the open remains of a formerly gravelled forecourt on the north side of the site of the house. A spur off the north drive 200m from the house leads south-west to the south side of the stable block standing 150m north of the site of the house.

Three further drives cross the park, now (1999) disused, except for access within the estate, and lost in parts. The west drive enters from Poplars Green, 1km west of the site of the house, at West Lodge, a single-storey brick cottage in Tudor style. From here the drive formerly passed through a belt of trees into parkland, descending into the river valley to the Carriage Bridge, a brick bridge carrying the drive eastwards across the River Mimram. From here the drive curves north-east (this section extant, 1999) up the hillside to arrive at the carriage sweep on the site of the north front.

The south drive enters 1.75km south-west of the house, at South Lodge (c 1830-40, listed grade II). This single-storey brick lodge, in Tudor style, stands 100m back off the main road through Cole Green, at the north edge of the village green. The entrance to the drive is marked by a pair of octagonal stone piers supporting iron gates, with a small brick gatehouse standing opposite the lodge (c 1830-40, listed grade II). From here the remains of a track, at this point following the course of a former public road stopped up c 1800, leads north through the undulating ground of the south-west corner of the park. Having passed through woodland, then beneath the A414, it runs between two high, open areas of ground, both having been quarried and

their levels reinstated with landfill. That to the west appears to have been the site of the former Cole Green House and its surrounding landscape. The track continues northwards, descending into the river valley to join the west drive at the west side of the Carriage Bridge.

The east, and longest drive formerly entered the park c 1.8km east-south-east of the house at the East Lodge (outside registered area), giving access from Hertford and Hertingfordbury. The white-painted, Tudor-style lodge (much extended), was detached from the park by the construction of a spur road (mid C20) off the A414 leading north to the A1000. The remains of the drive lead west from the spur road along the south edge of the wooded plateau, overlooking the open valley below to the south. Some 700m south-east of the site of the house the drive curves north-west across the wooded plateau, to join the north drive 150m from the house.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Panshanger House (William Atkinson 1806-11, demolished 1953-4) was built on the site of an earlier dwelling and stood in the northern half of the park, at the edge of the north plateau, overlooking the broad River Mimram valley below to the south. It was of two storeys, built in Romantic Gothick style with crenellated parapets, turrets, and several squat towers breaking up the facades (CL). The entrance front lay on the north side, overlooking a level lawn planted with scattered trees, whilst the south, garden front overlooked a broad, open sweep of parkland leading down to Repton's Broad Water in the Mimram valley, with distant views to countryside beyond the park to the south (OS). Almost nothing of the house survives except possibly the foundations, and the site is overgrown (1999).

The brick-built stables (c 1856, now converted to office accommodation, listed grade II) stand north of the site of the house, surrounding a square stable yard on three sides, the fourth, south side being closed by a brick wall with a central gateway. Adjacent to the north lies a farmyard, with brick yard walls, stock pens and outbuildings.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Panshanger House formerly stood within two wings of enclosed pleasure grounds which extended south-east down the valley side to Garden Wood, and west along the plateau to Poplars Grove. The largely earthwork remains of the formal garden features flank the site of the house to west and east. East of the house site lie the remains of a level, open lawn, formerly bounded to the east by a brick wall (traces of which remain), divided from the site of the house by an area of scrub. This contains the basin of a pool and fountain, formerly aligned on the centre of the east front, which marked the intersection of two paths in cruciform pattern. The basin is surrounded by a ring of overgrown box plants, with specimen yews scattered in the surrounding scrub, together with several mature cedars and pines. Formerly this area and the south terrace were graced by a group of marble vases (P van Bourscheit 1714) brought from the old Cole Green house (CL 1936).

West of the remains of the house lie the remains of two formal garden areas, formerly connected to the east gardens via a terrace along the south front. An enclosure adjacent to the west side of the house site contains a large, south-facing orangery (c 1856 for seventh Earl Cowper, listed grade II), of white brick with terracotta dressings in Classical style. It has lost its roof and windows but the main structure remains. South-east of this, the orangery is linked by a brick wall to a smaller, west-facing conservatory in similar style. Formerly, the orangery overlooked a formal garden.

West of the orangery garden lay a late C19, formal, enclosed garden (OS 1898; 1923; CL 1899). At the centre stood a sundial, with a path north to a small garden house, and to the south a central sunken terrace flanked by two fountains. The site of the sundial is surrounded by a ring of mature yews (formerly clipped as a hedge), and the sunk area to the south remains. West of this, in the pleasure ground leading to Poplars Grove, stands the Panshanger Oak, a very large, single oak tree, possibly over 600 years old and remaining in good condition.

In the C19 and C20, up to 1914, the gardens were kept to a very high standard, with ornamental areas of great intricacy including the Sunken Garden (part of the south terrace, surrounded by a balustrade), the Rose Garden, the Dairy Garden, and the Box Garden (overlooked by the east front) (CL 1899).

PARK The park is divided into three sections, such that the higher ground of the north and south parks is divided by the Mimram valley.

The north park, occupying the northern plateau, is laid partly to open pasture containing some clumps and single trees flanking the north drive, bounded along the road to the north by a belt containing exotic species including Wellingtonias. Woodland extends east from the open pasture, including Evergreen Wood and Lady Hughes's Wood. Gravel extraction is presently (1999)

carried out in areas of this woodland. The plateau edge overlooks the valley to the south and north-facing valley side beyond, with views south-east towards Hertingfordbury and the church.

The Mimram valley is dominated by Repton's Broad Water, a diversion of the Mimram northwards, dammed to form a sinuous sheet of water overlooked to the north by the site of the house and gardens, and from the surrounding valley sides. The Broad Water is fed by the Mimram, entering the park from Marden Hill Park to the north-west, and divided into two lakes by an island lying 300m south of the site of the house, which disguises a weir and sluices. The river is crossed by several footbridges, including two brick bridges south-west of the site of the house. Riverside Cottage (1755-63, listed grade II) stands in the valley bottom, 700m south-east of the site of the house on the north side of the river. It may have been constructed as part of Brown's work for the second Earl Cowper, and was altered in Picturesque style during the works of the early C19. The Mimram leaves the park close to Hertingfordbury, 650m south-east of the site of the house. The valley is laid largely to pasture, with occasional parkland trees.

The south park is laid largely to woodland rising up the valley side and occupying the plateau, except for the undulating south-west corner which is open and contains the site of the former Cole Green House and its park. The site of Cole Green House and its gardens may lie east of the present kitchen garden, in which case any remains have probably been lost to C20 gravel extraction and subsequent landfill works. The remains of an oak avenue run south of this however, from west to east across the south drive, and are aligned at the west end on an area south of the kitchen garden which has not been disturbed; this may alternatively be the site of the former Cole Green House.

KITCHEN GARDEN The octagonal, red-brick kitchen garden (early C18, probably for the first Earl Cowper, listed grade II), now laid to lawn, stands 1.5km south-west of the site of Panshanger House, close to the site of the former Cole Green House. The garden is entered via two large, arched and pedimented gateways in the west and east sides, with further smaller pedestrian gateways in the other sides. Adjacent to the south-east stands the two-storey, red-brick Keeper's Cottage (early C18, listed grade II), a gardener's house extended in the early to mid C19. In the later C19 the kitchen garden was surrounded by an outer enclosure, with a service yard to the north, but these areas are now (1999) open.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 6 (12 August 1899), pp 176-82; 79 (11 January 1936), pp 38-44; 151 (19 April 1972), pp 1178-9 Trans East Herts Archaeol Soc 14 pt 1, (1955-7), pp 42-58 D Stroud, Humphry Repton (1962), pp 101, 108-9 D Stroud, Capability Brown (1975), pp 220-1 G Carter et al, Humphry Repton (1982), p 154

Maps The Estate of William Cowper ... containing certain Farms, Tenements, Woods and Lands ... Surveyed and Drawn by John Halsey, c 1703 (redrawn and published in Transactions 1955-7) A Map of lands belonging to the manor of Panshanger, possession of the Rt Honble Wm Earl Cowper ... ,1719 (Hertfordshire Record Office) Dury and Andrews, A topographical Map of Hartford-shire, 1766 A Bryant, The County of Hertford, 1822 Tithe map for Hertingfordbury parish, 1838 (Hertfordshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884 2nd edition published 1899 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1923

Archival items H Repton, Red Book for Panshanger, 1799 (D/EP P21A), (Hertfordshire Record Office)

Description written: February 2000 Register Inspector: SR Edited: October 2000

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.