

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HORNIMAN GARDENS

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Name:	HORNIMAN GARDENS
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Lewisham (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.441910 Longitude: -0.061664609 National Grid Reference: TQ 34811 73217 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000813 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

A public garden of c 5ha presented, along with Horniman Museum, to the London County Council in 1901 by the owner Frederick Horniman.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Frederick Horniman, son of John Horniman, the founder of the family tea firm, was a life-long collector. In c 1868 he purchased Surrey House in London Road, Forest Hill which was on the site of the present Horniman Museum. When Horniman moved in to a new adjoining residence, Surrey Mount, in 1888, Surrey House was used as a museum and opened to the public. Surrey Mount was situated to the north of Surrey House in 9 acres (3.75ha) of grounds. These grounds formed the basis of the public gardens. In 1898 Horniman replaced Surrey House with a new, purpose-built museum building and in 1901 the Museum, Surrey Mount, and the gardens were handed over to London County Council for the people of London as a gift in perpetuity.

Surrey Mount was used for refreshments until it suffered bomb damage during the Second World War; it was eventually demolished in 1960.

The gardens were extended in 1911 and c 1930 when houses situated on neighbouring plots in London Road (which formed part of Frederick Horniman's original gift to the LCC) were demolished. In the 1950s, sloping land to the east of the garden's nursery was added and in 1988 the conservatory from Coombe Cliff House (the Horniman family home) was rebuilt at the back of the museum. In 1996 a Centre for Understanding the Environment (CUE) was built on the site of tennis courts near London Road.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The site lies within a residential area of Forest Hill in the London Borough of Lewisham. The gardens lie to the west and north of the museum, bounded by London Road to the south; by the embankment to the former Chatham and Dover railway line (now a Nature Trail) to the west; and by property in Westwood Park and Horniman Drive to the north and north-east. The boundaries to the west and north are screened by belts of trees. The gardens are on steeply sloping ground which falls away to the west and south with fine views across north and south London.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the gardens is through gates 50m to the west of the museum building in London Road. This is the former entrance to Horniman's house 'Surrey Mount' and the c 100m long avenue, lined with

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chestnut trees, is a relict from this time. A second entrance in London Road, Rose Hill Gate, a further c 100m to the west, still retains the name of the house which stood on the site and was incorporated in the garden c 1903. The third entrance, from Horniman Drive to the north, passes a modern lodge house and the nursery which still uses the site chosen by Horniman for his glasshouses.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Designed by Harrison Townsend as a purpose-built museum for Frederick Horniman, the Horniman Museum was commissioned in 1896 and completed in 1901. The main section of the building (listed grade II*) is under a wide segmental gable, expressing the line of the glazed barrel roof behind. A tall clock tower dominates the frontage. The blank upper storey has a row of pilasters with leafy capitals resting on the cornice of the lower floor. There are hooded niches with wrought-iron screens at the ends which rest on thick end pilasters with rounded angles and leafy capitals. The first-floor level is filled with a large mosaic by Anning Bell. Beyond the main section of the building is an annex which matches the main section and is linked to it with a single-storey entrance.

There are five levels of stone-paved terraces (listed grade II) south of the entrance to the museum building, with flights of steps between. The main flight has curved side walls with stout round piers at the top and bottom and three wrought-iron lamp holders. To the west of this, on a lower level, is a concrete-paved fountain with two round steps and a stem of limestone with a round bronze bowl.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Much of the ground to the west of the site was added to the gardens of Surrey Mount after it was given to the LCC. Seven houses were demolished: Bolton Brown and High Meadow c 1902; Rose Hill Cottage, Rose Hill, and Stanley House by 1916; Brunswick House and Birley House, the latter used as an open-air school between 1910 and 1925, by 1930. This land presents extensive sweeps of lawn with scattered mature trees and generally curving paths. The occasional mature tree survives from the boundary that screened Horniman's land from his neighbours.

A steep walk up the main avenue from London Road leads alongside, to the east, the new CUE environmental building (c 1996), built on tennis courts which occupied the site of High Meadow demolished by 1902. To the north of the CUE building a water garden (proposed 1923) extends north for c 45m. The water issues from the north and runs down into a series of pools connected by rills and cascades and now terminates in the c 1996 water garden associated with the CUE centre. Winding crazy paving paths lead around the area and above the water garden with, at the junction with the main drive, a wooden park keeper's hut. West of the museum building and c 10m east of the water garden is the cast-iron and glass conservatory (listed grade II) built at the Hornimans' Croydon home, Coombe Cliff, in 1894, and re-erected on the present site in 1988. The conservatory is made to a cruciform plan with doorways set in the centre of the two end walls and in the transept ends. There is a decorative porch with a semicircular arched doorway to the south transept. The decorative ironwork is by MacFarlane and Company of Glasgow and the roof is glazed with fish-scale glass tiles. In the space between the conservatory and the back of the special exhibition hall (c 1930) is a Coade stone group with pelican and figures, designed by Lady Diana Beauclark and executed by John de Vacre. The design first appeared in the Coade catalogue in 1799 and this example was made for the pediment of the Pelican Life Insurance Company in Lombard Street. When this building was demolished in the 1930s the group was moved, first to the Geffrye Museum and then to the Horniman Gardens. (This item has since (2001) been removed to the Museum of London.)

The chestnut avenue continues up rising ground to the centre of the gardens. Parallel to the west is a formal sunken garden (c 1936) planted out with massed bedding, with to the north a semicircular pergola enclosing roses.

The avenue widens out to become a broad tarmac terrace c 70m long from which there are fine views over the Thames to the city to the north-east and over Dulwich Park (qv) to the north-west. The view to north is spoiled by a very large modern building. In the centre, on the west side of the terrace, is the bandstand of c 1901, and c 10m to the north-east, on the east side of the terrace, is the Dutch barn. Built for Frederick Horniman, the barn was originally thatched and was probably used by him as a summerhouse; today (1997) it is used by the education department of the museum. Below the bandstand the ground slopes steeply to the west, the first c 15m being covered with dense laurel hedges. Below the laurel the sweeping lawn (part of Frederick Horniman's garden) descends to the western boundary and rises to the northern boundary, both of which are screened by trees. The pond in the north-west corner, also screened by trees and shrubs, is now a children's all-weather football pitch but still retains its elongated oval shape. To the east of the Dutch barn, in the north-east corner of the site, is an enclosure for

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small animals. A path running along the southern edge of this links up with the drive from the Horniman Drive gateway, where bedding displays flank the entrance. Some 15m inside the Horniman Drive entrance is the site of the kitchen garden attached to Surrey Mount. The original greenhouses have gone but the site is still used as the nursery for the garden.

To the east of the nursery is a recent (c 1950) addition to the garden in the form of a sloping lawn with trees and shrubs. From here there are fine views across the south London suburbs.

REFERENCES

E Cecil, *London Parks and Gardens* (1907), p 177 LCC, *London Parks and Open Spaces* (1924), pp 40-1 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 2 South* (1983), pp 417-18

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1894 3rd edition published 1916 1930 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1896

Archival items Extract from an account of the Opening of Museum, Library and Gardens in 1901 (copy on EH file)

Description written: July 1997 Amended: October 2001 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: November 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.