

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SWAYLANDS

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

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Name:	SWAYLANDS
County:	Kent
District:	Sevenoaks (District Authority)
Parish:	Penshurst
County:	Kent
District:	Tunbridge Wells (District Authority)
Parish:	Bidborough
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.165328 Longitude: 0.19179219 National Grid Reference: TQ 53343 42959 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001280 Date first listed: 14-Nov-1994

Details

Terraced gardens and pleasure grounds, including extensive rockwork, and a small landscape park, all developed through the second half of the C19 around a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The original Swaylands, a small villa, was built c 1850 for William Woodgate who then sold the property to Edward Cropper. In the 1870s Cropper employed the architect George Devey to greatly extend the house and to terrace the gardens but he soon placed the house back on the market and it was purchased by the banker George Henry Drummond. Between 1879 and 1882 Drummond made further additions to the house and in the 1890s he commissioned the Arts and Crafts architect, Sir M E Macartney to build a large pilastered conservatory at the northern end of the house. For part of the C20 the house and its grounds were used as a school. After the school closed in the 1980s Swaylands was purchased by a property developer who is currently (2001) about to divide the property and construct private dwellings within the site.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Swaylands lies in a rural setting c 1km to the south-east of the village of Penshurst. The c 18ha site is bounded to the north-east by Rogues Hill, to the south-east by a minor road, and to the north-west and south-west by farmland. The house stands close to the north-east boundary, enjoying south-westerly views out over the rolling pastoral landscape.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES A short drive leads through the boundary wall of diapered blue and red brick, from the lodge on Rogues Hill c 50m north-east of the house. It crosses the pleasure grounds to arrive at the entrance on the north-east front.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Swaylands (listed grade II) is country house built of red brick with blue diaper work and stone dressings. The long, Tudor-style building has a main south front of three storeys with a projecting three-bay centre and an octagonal battlemented corner tower. The house was built in the 1850s and extended in the Tudor style by George Devey (1820-86) in the 1870s. The stuccoed northern section was added by Mervyn Macartney in the 1890s. The stables stand within the oak woodland c 50m to the north-east of the house on Rogues Hill, to the north-west of the lodge.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The main garden lies to the south-west of the house where an extensive series of grass terraces extends from below the stone retaining wall of the top terrace. To the south-west of the original house is a sunken rose garden, replanted in 1994. A complex of terracing to the south-east of the house is shown on a sale plan of 1877. Since the gothic finials to the short stone piers bordering the sets of steps match those at nearby Penshurst Place (qv), and the walled staircase at the south-east end of the terrace is similar to that at Nonnington Park, Kent, the terrace is presumably by George Devey.

From the centre of the south-west front, steps lead down through the terrace wall, continuing in a walk which leads to and round the western boundary of the pleasure grounds, divided from the park beyond by a ha-ha. A path from the south-east end of the house also leads south-west down steps from the top terrace, this straight walk meeting a cross-walk; immediately to the south-east of the junction is a small late C19/early C20 concrete classical pavilion. This garden building is surrounded by trees and looks onto an expanse of level lawn lying to the south-west, the northern edge of which is marked by a path bordered with yews. The walk from the house extends c 250m to the south-west to join another path which skirts the western edge of the pleasure grounds. The path continues south, following a serpentine route with the ha-ha to its west and a high rockwork bank, constructed in the early C20, to the east. A series of flights of steps leads up through the bank, linking to a walk round the perimeter of the lawn above. The rockwork is sculpted into bays to accommodate a number of specimen oaks. At the south end of the bank, the path turns to the east, continuing along the foot of the rocks to the site of a roughly circular pond, now silted up. The pond, dug in the late C19, is set into the slope of the land, with a rockwork bank to the north and east. A C19 boathouse (now ruinous) stands on its south-west bank. The path provides a walk round the perimeter of the pond, joining back with the walk along the ha-ha. To the north of the pond, a path leads north into the main area of rockwork. This predates the rockwork bank, having been added from 1886 onwards, and is probably the creation of George Drummond and his head gardener, Mr Hosier. Drummond bought and cleared a quarry at Penshurst, extracting a huge quantity of stone for the purpose. The rockwork is on a grand scale with paths, steps, ravines, grottoes, an arch, and a top-lit cavern leading through it, and was once planted with choice alpines. It is now (2001) very overgrown with woody species. A second, smaller pond, also dry but with the base of a fountain jet surviving, lies within the rock garden, beyond the terrace and lawns on the east side of the house.

North of the rock garden, set in pleasure grounds, is a square lawn bordered by a terrace with a lime walk, already recorded in the 1870s, and planted with a central specimen *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, said to have been put in in the late C19 by the author Harriet Beecher Stowe. Parallel to the public road, to the north-east of the house is a band of pleasure grounds, with informal lawns, shrubberies and an arboretum, merging with more natural oak woodland away from the house area.

PARK The park is restricted to a small area to the west of the gardens. It is retained under pasture and is planted with a scattering of exotic and parkland trees dating from the mid to late C19.

KITCHEN GARDEN The mid C19 brick-walled kitchen garden stands at the southern tip of the site, south-west of the round pond, forming part of the Farmery and Dairy Cottage complex. Within it are the remains of some late C19/early C20 glass, the remainder being laid to lawn.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 19 (16 June 1906), pp 870-5 C Holme, Gardens of England in Southern and Western Counties (1907), p 119
J Newman, The Buildings of England: West Kent and the Weald (2nd edn 1976), pp 460-1 A Forsyth, Yesterday's Gardens VI, (1983), pp 96-7

Maps Plan of the estate to accompany Sale particulars, 1877 (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1907

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Description rewritten: April 2001 Amended: October 2001 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: November 2003

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.