

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

WARDOWN PARK

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

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**WARDOWN PARK**

Name:	WARDOWN PARK
District:	Luton (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.893435 Longitude: -0.41870580 National Grid Reference: TL 08911 22835 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001445 Date first listed: 04-Jan-2000

## Details

Early C20 municipal park overlying the landscape park and pleasure grounds of a country house of the 1870s.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

During the mid C19 (Tithe map, 1844) the parcel of agricultural land known as Bramingham Shott lay with several adjacent similar small parcels bounded by the Old and New Bedford Roads, in open country to the north of Luton. In 1847 Robert How built a white stucco farmhouse on one of the plots towards the north of the area, which was called Bramingham Shott. In 1868 Frank Chapman Scargill (1836-1919), a successful local solicitor, bought Bramingham Shott and began to buy up the adjacent parcels of land to the north and south, whilst living in the farmhouse and planning his new mansion to be built on the site of, or close to, the existing house. In 1875 Scargill commissioned C T Sorby to design and build a new house, which was complete by 1877, having cost £10,000, with a similar amount having been spent on other estate buildings, including lodges. Gardens and pleasure grounds were laid out around this building, and further features including a park were added during the 1880s and early 1890s.

In 1894 Scargill retired and moved away from Luton, and in 1897 the estate was leased to B J H Forder who changed the name to Wardown House after his former home in Buriton, Hampshire. In 1900 the estate was let to Mr Halley Stewart, founder of the London Brick Company, and in 1902 Scargill sold it. In 1904 Luton Corporation bought the estate for £17,000, and over the following years they spent a further £6000 laying out new features. The Pleasure Gardens at Wardown Park were opened in 1905, and the remainder of the park was opened in 1906. From 1904 to 1907 a network of paths was laid out, a small lake with an island and boathouse was enlarged to incorporate further boating facilities, new bowling greens were laid out, and a bandstand erected. A cricket ground which Scargill had laid out was enlarged, incorporating the adjacent kitchen gardens which were demolished. The house was partly used for staff accommodation, and during the First World War as a convalescent hospital, until in 1931 Luton Museum was transferred to it.

The park remains (1999) in municipal ownership and open to the public.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Wardown Park lies within the northern suburbs of Luton, 1.5km north of the town centre. The 20ha site is bounded largely by roads, with to the north Stockingstone Road, to the west the A6, New Bedford Road, to the east Old Bedford Road, and to the south a development of late C20 flats on the site of a

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**WARDOWN PARK**

former dye works. The site is bounded in parts by sections of late C19 and early C20 brick wall, these largely flanking the west and south-west entrances to the park. The site was never entirely surrounded by brick walls; in the C19 wood and wire fences supplemented the lengths of brick wall (Luton Borough Council 1999). The site occupies the valley of the River Lea running north to south towards Luton. The ground slopes gently south to the parkland from a plateau in the north-east part of the site on which the house, pleasure grounds, and cricket pitch to the north are situated.

The setting is largely a C20 suburban residential area, with views of the People's Park (late C19) extending east from the south-east corner of Wardown Park up the valley side to the wooded summit.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main entrance to the park approaches off New Bedford Road at West Lodge (late C19, listed grade II), standing 175m south-west of the house, set back off the road on the north side of the gateway (late C19, listed grade II). The single-storey lodge is built of Luton grey bricks with mock timber framing and terracotta decorated ridge tiles and moulded finials. The drive is flanked by a pair of octagonal red-brick pillars, attached to curtain walls, the northern one of which is attached to the Lodge at its north side. Each curtain wall is pierced by four archways. Formerly iron piers stood between the brick piers, flanking the carriage entrance, with a pedestrian gate to the south filling the space between brick and iron piers. Curved quadrant walls extend to the north of the Lodge and south of the gateway, that to the north terminating at a pier and the Lodge garden gate and that to the south meeting the boundary wall. A low stone kerb, supporting bow-top fencing (late C20), encloses the Lodge garden lying adjacent to the road. From this entrance the west drive curves east up a gentle gradient, flanked by a horse chestnut avenue, overlooking the park to the south. The drive turns north-east 50m from the house to arrive at a carriage sweep on the west front, attached to which stands a large brick and terracotta porte-cochère enclosing the entrance. From the carriage drive a spur extends north-east to the main entrance to the stable yard, standing c 20m north of the house. The entrance is flanked by a gateway in the form of a terracotta triumphal arch (dated 1877, listed grade II), this being flanked by the stable block to the north and service buildings to the south.

A further entrance to the park approaches off Old Bedford Road, 175m south-east of the house, at East Lodge (late C19), a two-storey red-brick house set back off the road on the north side of the gateway. The drive is flanked by two low red-brick piers, in turn flanked by dwarf, curved brick walls. From here the east drive extends north-west through the park, flanked by a lime avenue, to a car park lying 100m south of the house, and from here the drive turns north through mature trees to join the west drive 50m from the house.

A service drive enters off Old Bedford Road 100m east of the house, extending west along the north edge of the pleasure grounds between mature trees set in grass, to enter the east side of the stable yard, north-east of the house. At the entrance from the road, the drive is sunk between retaining walls which are faced with rustic stonework.

At the south-west corner of the park, c 650m south-west of the house, stands a pedestrian gateway, built in the early C20 as the main pedestrian entrance from Luton to the public park. The entrance is flanked by panelled brick walls, on the southern of which stands the only remaining panel of the early C20 iron railings which were erected by the Corporation and almost entirely removed during the Second World War. From this entrance a path extends north along the west bank of the lake, giving access to the network of paths through the park and eventually leading to the house.

The three gateways and drives in the northern half of the park were created by Scargill during the late C19 as part of his development of the site. By the early 1880s (OS 1881) the drives had been laid out, flanked by avenues of trees, that to the west being mixed conifer and broadleaved. At that time East Lodge was present, but not West Lodge which was added shortly after.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Wardown House (T C Sorby 1875-7, listed grade II) stands at the centre of the northern half of the site on a plateau overlooking the park to the south. The two-storey country house, of irregular plan form, is built in Neo-vernacular style, of Luton grey bricks with much terracotta detailing including Tudor-style decorative chimneys. The house overlooks the formal gardens to the south, to the north the raised terrace which formerly held the wooden-framed conservatory, and to the east and west the pleasure grounds. Adjacent to the north-east lies the stable yard, the north side of which is bounded by the stable block (late C19, listed grade II with the gateway), a single-storey brick range.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens and pleasure grounds surround the house. A terrace runs along the south front, reached from the porte-cochère on the west front and a garden door on the east front. Formerly a copper-roofed

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**WARDOWN PARK**

verandah stood on the terrace, supported by the house at the west end of the south front (postcard collection, Luton Museum). A tarmac path runs along the top of the terrace, from which a low grass bank leads down to a level lawn beyond. A central flight of stone steps leads down the bank from the terrace to the main lawn. The lawn is divided into two by a path flanked by lime trees leading east from the west drive, 50m south-west of the house, to the pleasure grounds east of the house. This was formerly a spur off the west drive which led to the east front of the house (OS 1881) and also defined the southern boundary of the garden at that time, before the extension south of the garden in the 1880s. South of the lime-flanked path the lawn is laid out with a formal pattern of seasonal bedding beds, formerly the site of a fountain set in a star-shaped flower bed (Sale map, c 1903). The south end of the lawn, and garden, is bounded by a path set in a shrubbery running west to east above a brick retaining wall standing 80m south of the house, with brick bastions projecting south from the wall, overlooking the park to the south. The wall and bastions were formerly surmounted by a low, pierced terracotta screen, of which one section of c 10m remains. The wall is inset with terracotta panels repeating motifs used on the house and gateway to the stables, including daisies and roses. A grass path (formerly gravel), known as Daisy Chain Walk, runs along the bottom, south side of the wall at the north edge of the park, overlooking the park to the south.

East of the lawn, reached from the east end of the terrace and the lime-flanked path, lies the main area of pleasure grounds, laid largely to informal lawn and planted with mature trees, including pine, beech, lime, yew, and sycamore. At the centre of this area stands an octagonal rustic summerhouse (c 1880s, listed grade II), with tile-hung walls, a thatched roof, and west-facing french doors and windows. South and south-east of the summerhouse lie tarmac tennis courts, those to the south occupying the site of the C19 tennis lawn, and that to the south-east on the site of the former C19 bowling green, at the south end of which formerly stood a rosery (Sale map, c 1903). Between the bowling green and tennis lawn stood a fountain.

West of the carriage sweep by the house lies a further lawn, bounded to the west by Mrs Scargill's Path, this in turn bounded by a planting of mature pines. The south end of this path was formerly reached from the main lawn via a small path from the west drive. The north end of Mrs Scargill's Path gives access to the west end of a terrace at the north end of the west lawn, on which formerly stood the conservatory (now, 1999, gone). The terrace is supported by a low grass bank, at the centre of which a flight of stone steps (aligned to the north on the site of the former central entrance of the conservatory) leads down to a path crossing the lawn south to the north side of the carriage sweep. Two mature Wellingtonias flank the path.

By 1881 (OS) a garden had been laid out to the north, south, and west of the house which included Mrs Scargill's Path (which overlooked features on the west lawn and extended north alongside the kitchen gardens) and the conservatory and terrace to the north of the house. It is thought that the garden was extended and the pleasure grounds created in the 1890s (Luton Borough Council 1999), taking in an area of parkland to the south and east (OS 1881). At this time the main, south lawn was extended to the newly built retaining wall overlooking Daisy Chain Walk and formalised with beds surrounding the fountain, and the informal pleasure grounds were laid out with the tennis lawn, bowling green, summerhouse, rosery, smaller fountain, and trees (Sale map, c 1903).

**PARK** The park encloses the house and pleasure grounds to the north, west, and south. It is divided into north and south sections by the pleasure grounds and west drive.

The north section, lying west and north of the pleasure grounds, is given over to three areas of sports facilities. A pitch and putt course overlies an area of former ornamental parkland between the pleasure grounds and the New Bedford Road boundary to the west. It has a circular clump of mature trees at its centre and is bounded to the south by the west drive. North of this, in the north-west corner of the park, lies Stockingstone Field, the site of a former athletics track, which is now laid to sports pitches. The area occupies a terrace dug in the 1920s from the parkland, which is bounded to the south and east by terraced seats set into the hillside. This area was formerly partly osier beds, with an arm of the River Lea running through the north-west corner and a ford on the north boundary (OS 1881). Adjacent to the east, to the north of the pleasure grounds, lies Stockingbridge Field, containing the cricket pitch, extended in the early C20 to cover the kitchen gardens on the west side and bounded to the east and west by belts of trees. In the north-east corner adjacent to the north boundary stands North Lodge, a late C19 two-storey estate house, surrounded by mature trees.

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**WARDOWN PARK**

The south section of the park lies south of the pleasure grounds and west drive, laid out informally and dominated by the sinuous lake which extends south for 500m to the south-west edge of the park. The lake, on whose banks stand many mature trees, is divided into several sections, with an oval island towards the south end, and is crossed by two bridges. The northern bridge, standing 300m south of the house, is an ornamental iron suspension bridge (1908), its iron piers clad subsequently in concrete. It replaces an earlier rustic wooden bridge. On the west bank stands an early C20 brick boathouse, and at the north end stands a small brick changing room pavilion. The lake was formed from two arms of the River Lea which flowed south through the park in the late C19 (OS 1881). The river enters at the west boundary, 200m south-west of the house, and is culverted before entering the lake at the north end. The water leaves the lake at the south end, where it flows out into two arms: a mill race on the east side of New Bedford Road and the river bed on the west side of the road. A small lake was formed between the two arms of the river as it ran through the south of the park, around the present island c 1900 (OS 1901), and this lake was enlarged to its present dimensions by the Corporation in two campaigns c 1905. Views extend from the east side of the lake and park in the area of the island, east across People's Park (also known as Pope's Meadow).

The park surrounding the lake is largely laid to informal lawn with many mature trees, both native and exotic, arranged in clumps, belts, and singles, planted in the mid to late C19 and C20. Several prominent circular clumps are believed to date from the 1870s to 1890s. The lawns are covered by a network of informal paths laid out in the early C20 when the Corporation took over the park (OS 1901, 1924). The remains of a substantial early C20 stone drinking fountain stand close to the west bank of the lake, north-west of the southern bridge. The fountain has lost its classical wings and been badly damaged. Formerly an early C20 bandstand (now, 1999, gone) stood in an open area west of the lake. In the north-east corner of this south section of the park lie two bowling greens, the northern one overlooked by an early C20 wooden pavilion (1905, extended 1920s) with classical detailing, and further tennis courts.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen gardens, which formed part of the estate when in private hands, lay north of the west lawn, between the conservatory and Stockingstone Lane, and were demolished in the early C20. They consisted of two main rectangular compartments divided into north and south halves by a wall or fence. Mrs Scargill's Path extended north from the west end of the conservatory terrace, flanked by trees including conifers, along the west boundary of the kitchen gardens, entering the northern compartment at its north-west corner. From this section of the path, views would have extended west and north-west across the adjacent river valley.

#### REFERENCES

The British Architect 3, (25 June 1875), p 345 Wardown Park, Application for Registration, (Luton Borough Council 1999) [copy on EH file]

Maps Tithe map for Luton parish, 1844 (Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service) Sale map, c 1903 (copy at Luton Museum, Wardown Park)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881-2 2nd edition published 1901 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881 2nd edition published 1901 3rd edition published 1924

Archival items Postcard collection (Luton Museum)

Description written: November 1999 Amended: January 2000 Register Inspector: SR Edited: April 2004

## 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.