

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

LONG BARN

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Name: LONG BARN

County: Kent

District: Sevenoaks (District Authority)

Parish: Sevenoaks Weald

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.233771
Longitude: 0.18535974
National Grid Reference: TQ 52667 50556
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000937
Date first listed: 01-May-1986

Details

An early C20 formal and ornamental garden, designed and planted by Harold Nicolson and Vita Sackville-West.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The buildings which comprise Long Barn, reputedly the birthplace of William Caxton (CL 1981) date from the C14, C15, and C16. The house had been occupied both as a dower house and as labourers' cottages when it was rescued from dereliction by Mrs Lilian Gilchrist Thompson, and in 1915 it was bought from her as a country home by the writer and diplomat Harold Nicolson and his wife, the writer and gardener Vita Sackville-West. They extended the house and designed and laid out the structure of the present garden with, in 1925, some assistance from the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944). In 1931, the Nicolsons left Long Barn to live at Sissinghurst Castle (qv), letting the house to various tenants including the film producer Sidney Bernstein and Charles Lindberg and his wife. After the war Long Barn was sold to Paul Soskin and in the 1960s was owned by Sir Max Raine. Dr Ione Martin and her husband owned it in the late 1970s and early 1980s before selling it in 1986 to Mr and Mrs Brandon Gough. Long Barn remains (1998) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Long Barn is situated on the extreme south-east edge of the village of Sevenoaks Weald which lies some 1.5km south-west of the main A21, Sevenoaks to Tonbridge road. The c 1ha of formal terraces flanked by informal plantings which comprise the registered site lie on the south-east-facing slope of a low Wealden ridge which drops steeply across the site from north-west to south-east. There are extensive distant views southwards over the Kentish Weald. On their west side, the gardens are enclosed from the adjacent minor lane by a close-boarded fence while to the north, east, and south they are bounded by a mixture of tall, clipped thorn hedge (to north and south) and post and wire and further close-boarded fencing (to the east). To the immediate north-west, north, and north-east, adjacent village buildings, garden land, and paddocks abut the site while beyond the remaining boundaries is a landscape of wooded farmland.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is entered from the lane on the west side. A timber, trellis-work gate in the fence leads eastwards along a stone- and brick-paved path flanked by small square lawns bordered by shrubbery, to an iron gate in the wall enclosing the tiny brick-paved courtyard into which the principal, west-facing door of the house opens.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Long Barn (listed grade II*), which sits towards the upper, north-west corner of the site, is an L-shaped house comprising two separate but attached buildings. Facing west onto the lane is the brick and tile-hung two-storey cottage with high pitched tiled roofs which has C14 origins and incorporates a C16 hall at the rear. Attached at the north-east corner by a short, two-storey link and extending eastwards, is a five-bay timber-framed barn, re-erected and converted to living quarters by the Nicolsons in 1916, from its former position in a lower part of the garden (owner pers comm, 1998).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The central section of the garden lies on the east side of the house and is laid out as a series of six descending terraces, on an east to west axis. Supported by abundantly planted drystone retaining walls, the terraces are cut into the south-east-facing slope and are linked by a north to south cross-axis.

The two wings of the house, which are clothed in climbing plants, enclose a brick-paved terrace, constructed by Mrs Thompson in 1915 to the Nicolsons' request. A flight of seven semicircular brick steps lead eastwards from the terrace down onto the Main Lawn which is retained on its north side by a drystone wall topped by a brick path. The lawn is edged with a border of random stone paving, planted with herbaceous and rock plants and low shrubs and, along its south side, by a row of tall, drum-shaped clipped Irish yews. A few metres east of its mid-point, the lawn is intersected by the north to south cross-axis, marked on its north side by a flight of stone steps leading up onto a parallel terrace. This area, planted during the Nicholsons' time with roses (Brown 1985), is now laid out with a line of four square compartments, the two inner squares planted with low, clipped box parterres and the two outer squares as herb gardens enclosed by tall box hedges (features added since 1986). Northwards, above this terrace, the axis extends beneath the pergola of the Rose Walk, built in the 1990s, to the registered site boundary while beyond the east end of the terrace is a rose garden of four rectangular beds with a pergola-covered seating area at the north end, laid out after 1986 on the site of the Nicolsons' tennis court.

South of the Main Lawn, the north/south axis is continued by further flights of brick and stone steps which descend, via a narrow, grassed terrace walk with statuary as a focus at each end, onto the Pleasance Lawn terrace, which is surrounded by clipped box hedges. At its west end is a rectangular, stone-edged lily pool, set within a tall enclosure of box hedging with, above it to the north-west and overlooked from the south windows of the house, a small, rectangular, box-edged White Garden, laid out on the site of Vita's box garden. On its west side is a small rose garden, created since 1986.

From the Pleasance Lawn, an axial flight of steps leads down onto an east/west brick path on the south side of which is the Dutch Garden, laid out in 1925 to a design by Sir Edwin Lutyens of six L-shaped beds raised on low brick walls (restored, with the path, since 1986), abundantly planted with a wide range of flowering perennials and enclosed along the west, south, and east sides by tall, clipped hornbeam hedges. Eastwards beyond the Dutch Garden, the line of the brick path continues along the Oak Walk, a short avenue of fastigiate oak trees planted after the 1990 storm as replacements for the poplars planted by the Nicolsons, to a kidney-shape pond, built originally as their swimming pool. Its surrounding grassy banks, covered with a light, informal scatter of trees including mature oaks and shrub groups, were laid out by the Nicolsons as a wild garden known as the 'Delphic Grove'. South of the Oak Walk is a kitchen garden, enclosed on all sides by clipped hedging, which occupies the site of an old orchard developed by Vita as the Apple Garden with fruit trees underplanted with bulbs and a summer flower border (Brown 1985).

REFERENCES

Country Life, 169 (9 April 1981), pp 924-6 J Brown, Vita's Other World (1985), pp 61-77, 90-100

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1868-9, published 1871 2nd edition published 1879 3rd edition published 1909 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1868-9 3rd edition published 1909 1939 edition

Description written: April 1998 Amended: January 1999 Register Inspector: VCH 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.