

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

NONSUCH PARK

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Name: NONSUCH PARK

County: Greater London Authority

District: Sutton (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

County: Surrey

District: Epsom and Ewell (District Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.359646
Longitude: -0.23348243
National Grid Reference: TQ 23091 63767
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001672
Date first listed: 19-Jul-1995

Details

Mid and late C18 gardens and parkland surrounding a country house. The mansion was, in the mid C18, the home of Thomas Whately, author of *Observations on Modern Gardening*, published 1770, who was responsible for making improvements to the gardens. The site includes the site of the Tudor palace of Nonsuch.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The site of the Tudor palace of Nonsuch, and accompanying gardens, is included within the boundary of the area here registered. Stretches of the present park boundary correspond to the boundaries of Henry VIII's much larger Little Park, disparked in the late C17 and early C18.

King Henry VIII began to build Nonsuch Palace in 1538, choosing a site then occupied by the village and church of Cuddington, these being cleared away. The design of the original palace and gardens formed an integrated whole: the plan of the two square courts of the palace was replicated, at three times the scale, in the plan of the original pair of square garden compartments. Unfinished on his death in 1547, the palace was completed by Henry Fitzalan, twelfth Earl of Arundel (d 1580), after his purchase of it from the Crown in 1556. The gardens surrounding the palace were extensively improved by Fitzalan and his son-in-law, John, Lord Lumley, their work including the creation of the Grove of Diana, between 1559 and 1580. A Banqueting House, built in the 1540s, the base of which survives (scheduled ancient monument; listed grade II), originally lay in open parkland, outside the boundaries of the formal garden, but was incorporated into the scheme through the addition of the Grove of Diana.

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The Nonsuch estate was regained by the Crown in 1592, remaining in royal hands, apart from the Interregnum when much of the park timber was felled, until 1670 when Charles II granted it to trustees for Barbara Villiers, Countess of Castlemaine. The Countess demolished the palace in 1683-4.

Two parks originally accompanied the Tudor palace, the Great Park of 1000 acres (c 405ha), which lay to the north-west of the palace and gardens, and the Little Park of 671 acres (c 272ha). The parks were divided by London Road (Stane Street) which remained a public thoroughfare. The Little Park was disparked after 1687, but, although broken up into parcels, remained in single ownership, probably into the C20. The Great Park, later known as Worcester Park, appears to have survived as a park until at least 1731 when the Nonsuch estates were sold by the second Duke of Grafton, grandson of Barbara Villiers. Little if anything of this park now survives on the ground.

In 1731, Joseph Thompson purchased the land of the Tudor Little Park and used the site of existing buildings within its boundaries to build a new mansion house and gardens. After his death in 1743, the property was occupied by his nephew, the Rev Joseph Whately (d 1797) and Whately's elder brother, Thomas (d 1772), came to live here. Thomas Whately was author of *Observations on Modern Gardening*, illustrated by descriptions (published 1770), referred to by J C Loudon (1822) as 'the Grand, Fundamental and Standard Work on English Gardening'. He was also a friend of William Gilpin (1724-1804) who lived nearby in Cheam, and designed gardens for Gilpin there. Gilpin praised Whately's work on the Nonsuch gardens in his *Observations* (1808), and, as a result of Whately's work, the grounds of Nonsuch Farm, as the property was then called, became well known.

The estate was purchased by Samuel Farmer (d 1838) in 1799 (Dent 1970) and he was responsible for rebuilding the mansion house. William F G Farmer (d 1860), who inherited from his grandfather, Samuel, and was owner in the 1840s and 50s, specialised in the cultivation of exotics, particularly orchids and azaleas, and his head gardener, S M Carson, was responsible for many prize-winning blooms exhibited at London horticultural shows. Nonsuch continued to appear in the prize lists until 1869. In 1860 the estate passed to Capt W R G Farmer (d 1910) who was succeeded by his daughter Alice Matilda Mary (d 1936), wife of Col The Hon Francis Colborne (d 1924).

In 1937, a large part of the Little Park was purchased by a consortium of local authorities to safeguard it from further speculative development. The present park is managed by the Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee, a statutory joint committee of the London Borough of Sutton and the Borough of Epsom and Ewell.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Nonsuch Park, a total of 120ha in extent, lies in the centre of a densely residential area, to the north-east of Ewell. The boundaries of the registered area are defined by London Road to the north-west, Cheam Park and Cheam Recreation Ground to the east, and the line of a proposed road, now a footpath, to the south. Elsewhere the site is delineated by housing which has encroached progressively since the late C19 and, more rapidly, since the Second World War. The south-west corner of the registered area extends as a 10ha rectangular strip reaching 500m to the south-west such that it includes the site of Cherry Orchard Farm (now demolished) and the Tudor Banqueting House. To the north of this, outside the registered area, is the site of Cuddington Church.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES In the early to mid C19 (between 1839 and 1866), a new drive to the mansion house was constructed. This leads into the estate from London Road at a point 175m south of the northern tip of the park, crossing south from here over the park for some 800m to arrive at the courtyard on the north front. This approach is no longer the main means of access to the mansion and park, and the lodge, Sparrow Farm Lodge, built in the mid C19 to accompany it, has been demolished. The current approach (2003) is from the Cheam Road gate at the south-east corner of the park. This entrance was the site of the Tudor Bellgate Lodge; replaced in the mid C19, this later building has also, in its turn, been demolished. The drive, forming a continuation of the Ewell Road, leads south-west parallel to the southern boundary of the park, along The Avenue, a feature already planted with trees as a formal approach to the mansion by 1790 (Dent 1970). Just in from the entrance, on the north side of the drive, is an area for car parking. Carried on a broad terrace, The Avenue extends 1.1km before turning a right-angle to lead north-west for a further 400m to Redgate Lodge (rebuilt mid C19, subsequently demolished, all three lodges now being C20 replacements). The route of The Avenue probably follows one of the approaches to the Tudor palace which

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survived as a track through the post-medieval period. Formerly planted with elms, The Avenue is now of horse chestnut and beech. The northern extension to Redgate Lodge appears to have been a mid C18 addition, not being present on a survey of 1731 but depicted on Rocque's county map of c 1762.

Some 500m from the west end of The Avenue, before its turn to the north, a spur leads north across the park to the west of the gardens, forming an approach to the north front of the house. A footpath running directly south-east across the park from Redgate Lodge joins to this approach.

The Fir Walk branches north off The Avenue 275m from the Cheam Road gate, running between the east side of the garden wall and the west side of the kitchen gardens, to reach the east front of the house. The line of the Walk is shown on the 1731 survey.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The Mansion House (II) and accompanying buildings stand a little to the east of the centre of the park occupying the site of a house and farm called Little Pightle which may have evolved from either a Keeper's Lodge, or stables, associated with the Tudor palace. The present house was built by Jeffrey Wyatt in 1802-6 for the then owner, Samuel Farmer (Dent 1970) and incorporates, in the kitchen wing, part of the mid C18 house built on the site between 1731 and 1743 by Joseph Thompson who had demolished the earlier buildings.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The main gardens lie to the south of the house, screened from the Fir Walk to the east by a flint and chalk chequer-work and brick wall (listed grade II), in part of Tudor date and in part dating from the mid C19. The gardens are divided from the park to the north and west by a ha-ha, constructed at some point between 1731 and 1804, and probably during the period that Thomas Whately lived in the house.

From the house the ground falls away steeply to the south, the site of an old chalk pit south-west of the building, probably associated with the construction of the Tudor palace, having been landscaped by Thomas Whately. East of the pit is the formal flower garden while further to the south, 150m from the house, is a terrace some 100m long, a rose arch walk with iron-work frame, and a pool. At the southern end of the gardens, walks lead through the pinetum.

William Gilpin noted Thomas Whately's mid C18 improvements to the gardens at Nonsuch (Gilpin 1808) while William Francis Farmer is recorded as having been responsible for entirely remodelling the gardens in the 1840s (Brayley 1845). Presumably the greenhouse (of which no trace survives) shown on the 1st edition OS map of 1867 south of the dell in the gardens, which was longer than the mansion itself, was of his creation. The early C18 gardens also lay to the south of the house, divided into northern, central, and southern sections and bisected by a central axis.

PARK The park is partly enclosed by wooded belts: London Road Plantation to the north-west, North Plantation to the north-east, and a broader piece of woodland, The Wood, to the east. A railway line (300-450m to the south of the boundary of the site as here registered) was cut through the southern section of the Little Park in the 1840s. Between the First and Second World Wars, the area beyond the line, to the south and south-west, was built over with housing. A road was later planned to cut across the park some 300m south of the mansion, the embankment for which was constructed. The road was never completed and its planned route survives as a footpath (taken as the southern boundary of the area here registered).

Following demolition of the Tudor palace in the late C17, the parkland of the Little Park was converted into agricultural land. Field boundaries, probably dating from the later C17, and shown on the estate map of 1731, formed the basis of the subsequent field system, being retained into the C19. The Tithe award of 1839 indicate that much of the area was then under the plough. Areas were put back to pasture in the 1840s when W F Farmer extended the park to make the area of park and gardens up to 100 acres (c 40ha) (Brayley 1845). A number of ornamental circular plantations were planted around this date as well as some isolated specimen trees. Planting of the Banqueting House site with a variety of coniferous species also dates from the C19.

At the western end of The Avenue, to the east of the village of Ewell, is the site of Nonsuch Palace with, extending further to the west, the site of the palace gardens. Some of the Tudor features survive as earthworks, including the boundaries of the Henrician formal garden compartments and the probable site of a grotto (Actaeon's Pool) in the Grove of Diana. Trial trenches excavated by the Surrey Archaeological Unit in 1996 confirmed the presence of wall foundations on the lines of the earthworks recorded by the RCHME around the Privy Garden. The palace site was extensively excavated in 1959-60 by Martin Biddle (CL 1961; Surrey Archaeol Collect 1961). The features in the Tudor gardens are discussed at length by Dent (1970). The palace and gardens area includes the site of Cherry Orchard Farm, demolished in the 1970s. A building on this site is shown on the

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1731 survey and was then probably a new farm apparently cultivating fields which largely retained the boundaries of the Tudor Wilderness and the palace frontage (Oswald 1995).

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen gardens for the Mansion House lie to the east of the building, divided from it by the northern end of the Fir Walk. The southern part of the gardens is shown on the Tithe map of 1839, the northern section post-dating this survey. None of the glasshouses from the former ranges survive.

REFERENCES

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OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1867 2nd edition published 1895

Description written: May 1997 Revised: July 2003 Register Inspector: HJ Edited: September 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.