

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PRESTON MANOR AND PRESTON PARK

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Name:	PRESTON MANOR AND PRESTON PARK
District:	The City of Brighton and Hove (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.841199 Longitude: -0.14700285 National Grid Reference: TQ 30563 06266, TQ3031706108 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000204 Date first listed: 25-Mar-1987

Details

A Victorian park, opened in 1884, encompassing the house and walled gardens of Preston Manor (to which the Park's land had previously belonged), with significant additional designed gardens of the 1920s and 1930s.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

A house was established on the site of the present Manor at Preston by the C 13. The manorial lands and the house were leased, first from the Church and then in 1561 from the Crown, by the Elrington family from whom it was acquired in 1569 by the Shirleys. In 1712, the house and a portion of the manor were purchased by Thomas Western. His grandson sold the Manor house with c 1000 acres (c 416ha) of land to William Stanford in 1794. The sale and development of the Stanford estate for housing around the site began from 1871, Brighton Corporation purchasing the c 67 acres (c 28ha) for the Park (including the Rookery field on the west side of Preston Road) from V F Bennett-Stanford in 1883 for £50,000. The Stanford family retained ownership of the Manor, its walled gardens and a small area immediately below the southern boundary ha-ha wall known as The Lye. Preston Park was laid out by the Corporation's Head Gardener, James Shrives and the Borough Engineer, Philip Lockwood, in 1883-4 and formally opened to the public on 8 November 1884. Much of the Victorian layout and all its buildings survive.

In 1923, the southern end of the park was developed with sports facilities and gardens which were extended in 1928-9. The Rock Garden on the Rookery site, on the western side of Preston Road, was laid out in 1936. The northern part, beyond the Rock Garden, was developed for housing in 1996. In November 1932, on the death of Charles Thomas-Stanford's widow Ellen, Brighton Corporation took possession of the remaining land and buildings of Preston Manor, opening the Manor to the public in 1933. Its gardens became part of the park. The Manor is now run by Brighton and Hove Council to illustrate Edwardian life and the park is managed by private contractors.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Manor grounds, main park and detached Rock Garden which together make up Preston Park, lie in a north/south valley of the South Downs, to the south-east of Preston village and c 25km north of the centre of Brighton. The main park and Manor lie on the east of the A23 London to Brighton road (Preston Road) and the Rock Garden on the west side.

The triangular 30ha site is bounded on all sides by roads and housing. The eastern boundary, onto Preston Park Avenue, is unfenced. The former railings, which replaced the estate wall during residential development in the 1870s, were removed in

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1936 as a final part of the park's modernisation. At the southern end of Preston Park Avenue, a shrubbery belt encloses the park. The western boundary of the main park is also unfenced and opens onto the A23. It is lined with C19 mature elm trees and islands of bedding cut into the wide verge. The railings erected in 1884 were removed in 1928 to create a boulevard-style landscape. The grounds to Preston Manor are partly enclosed on the west side by a flint wall, erected in its present position after road widening in 1971. On the north boundary, the grounds are unenclosed, the C19 flint walls being removed in 1936, although the walls survive along the remaining north boundary of the park (on Preston Drive) to enclose the tennis club, St Peter's church and the park's cricket ground. The Rock Garden is bounded by the chain-link fence of the London to Brighton railway line on the west side, and by housing to the north and south. It opens onto the A23 on the east side, separated from the pavement by low, hooped fencing. The west and south parts of the park lie on the level valley floor, the land rising gently but significantly to the north-east, offering extensive views over the town from the cricket ground. West of Preston Road, the Rock Garden site rises precipitously from, the valley floor to the railway line.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Owing to its open boundaries, the park may now be approached at any point. Although three of the park's four original gateways no longer exist, their positions are still marked by subsequent design work or by the path system and to some extent still function as entrances. The present southern entrance at the junction of Preston Road and Preston Park Avenue was the park's main entrance in 1884, consisting of gates and a lodge (the latter built in the mid C19). The present surviving layout of paving, enclosed by two concave wings of composition-stone balustrading surmounted by torcheres of entwined fish, was designed in 1929 by Capt B MacLaren, the Superintendent of Parks. Similar balustrading and torcheres of the same date replace the 1884 gateway at the north end of Preston Road (south of the Manor). A third gateway, now marked only by an emerging path, lay halfway between the two. The present gateway on Preston Drive survives (without its gates) as the fourth entrance in the 1884 layout.

Preston Manor is approached on its north side, down a short drive from Preston Drive. Its previous entrance (up to 1971) was through the now-isolated gates which still stand to the west alongside Preston Road.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Preston Manor (listed grade II) stands at the north end of the park, with extensive southerly views. It may be considered the park's principal building although it did not function as such between the sale of the park's land in 1883 and 1932. Its approach from the park, laid out soon after 1932, followed a new, indirect route through the walled garden instead of through The Lye.

The medieval Manor was substantially altered in the C 17 and virtually rebuilt in 1783 by Thomas Western. Further additions were made c 1800. The architect, Charles Stanley Peach (1858-1934) carried out alterations for Ellen Thomas-Stanford in 1905 which included a new servants' wing, a dining room and the verandah on the north front. St Peter's church (listed grade II*) forms a strong visual ensemble with the Manor, both from the Manor gardens and from the park.

Within the park, both the Chalet and the Rotunda cafe function as visual and social landmarks. The Chalet (250m south-east of the Manor), perhaps so-named for its somewhat rustic 'Swiss' appearance, was built in 1887 in the centre of the park, to house the park police and club and refreshment rooms. It survives intact and commands extensive views over the park. The Rotunda, 100m north of the southern entrance, was designed and built by Capt MacLaren in 1929 and still functions as a popular tea room.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens of Preston Manor consist on its north and north-west sides of open lawns, scattered with mature trees and planted with shrubberies on the western side. The drive ends at the north front of the Manor in a grassed turning circle, shown as a feature in an illustration of 1818 (guidebook). A brick path and steps lead around the eastern end of the Manor onto the flagged walk surrounding the South Lawn, formerly a bowling green. This is separated from the park to the south by a flint-walled ha-ha, possibly of late C 18 origin. The lawn is enclosed to the east by the walls of St Peter's church tower and churchyard, against which is a small raised rockery dating from the Stanfords' layout in the early C20. On the north side of the north wall to the churchyard is the C 18 well house (listed grade II) for Preston Manor. To the west of the South Lawn, a wrought-iron gate, brought from Lake Como in 1921, leads down stone steps into the walled garden (walls listed grade II), quartered by grass and slab paths. Two quarters are laid to a shrubbery and a rose garden; the remaining two were modified in the 1970s to informal grass and herbaceous planting. The main, central path is edged with box and its northern half is covered by a laburnum tunnel-arch, planted in the 1970s. The central sundial was removed for security in the 1990s.

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Formal gardens are recorded on the site since 1617 (John Norden's map of that date). The present gardens date from the C 18 but have undergone much alteration in the C 19, early and mid C20. The walled garden was recorded in 1895 (Gardener's Chronicle) as being laid out in an old-fashioned style. Ellen Stanford rejected William Goldring's (1854-1919) proposal for a more formal layout, replanting it from 1905 in a style influenced by William Robinson's writings (CL 1992). Beyond the present west wall, the lily-pond garden which Ellen Stanford laid out was destroyed by road widening in 1971. To the north of the walled garden is an enclosed nursery garden with two glasshouses and beyond again, the walled orchard. Below the ha-ha wall to the south is The Lye, planted with informal shrubberies and trees and containing a timber summerhouse. This was laid out in 1952 as the Coronation Garden with scented plants for the blind. The Lye was part of the Manor's private gardens until 1932 and was planted as a wild garden by Ellen Stanford, with advice from William Robinson (*ibid*).

At the southern end of the park is a series of tennis courts, bowling greens and two pavilions, laid out with formal paving and shrubberies. A central path leads south between the tennis courts, flanked part-way by a dahlia walk, designed originally in the 1930s as a mixed herbaceous border. The central path terminates in the triangular rose garden, beside the Rotunda tea house, which is surrounded by a pergola planted with climbers and overlooks a circular pool decorated with heads of beasts. The garden is enclosed by clipped hedges with niches containing bay trees and is planted with modern rose varieties. It now (1997) contains only two pieces of its originally more numerous pieces of statuary, some brought from the Brighton Aquarium demolished in 1927, and the herbaceous bedding elements have gone. The garden was designed by Capt MacLaren to replace the original path and shrubbery layout and opened in 1929.

The Rock Garden on the west side of Preston Road covers c 1ha and is constructed of Cheddar limestone. The paved entrance path turns south and crosses a large, concrete-lined pond by stepping stones. A series of rocky cascades, the water for which is controlled from a small pump house, descends from the top of the garden into the pool. The path zig-zags westwards to the top of the site, crossing a timber bridge which overlooks a grassy 'meadow' and the pool below. The garden was built between 1934 and 1936, largely by hand, the stone being sledged down the slope from a specially constructed railway siding. The planting, originally containing a great variety of rock plants, including alpines, now consists of a mixture of trees, shrubs and herbaceous rock plants, and has undergone several replantings since 1936. A summerhouse sits part way up the slope, overlooking the entrance. It was designed by Capt MacLaren and constructed of stone from a former police station on the Level, in the town centre.

PARK The central area of the park is laid out to playing fields and is little altered from its structure in 1884. The clock tower, erected in 1882, overlooks the park from the eastern ridge, which is planted with a backdrop of trees. The ride or gallop, a track which connected the park to the Downland to the north in the late C19 runs behind the trees parallel to Preston Park Avenue. The cricket ground lies above a retaining bank in the extreme north-east corner of the park. It was constructed, with its surrounding cycle track, pavilion and flint-edged benches, in 1887. The site was the polo ground during the Stanfords' ownership, this use being transferred to the park's playing fields. To the south of the playing fields is a children's play area and multi-sports courts, laid out in the 1980s and 1990s.

REFERENCES

J G Bishop, *A Peep into the Past; Brighton in Olden Times* (1892), pp 399-404, 415-18
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Country Life, no 32 (6 August 1992), pp 5-6
V Hinze, *Brighton Parks Department: An Exploration of its Early History* (1994), pp 8-10, 60-6, 72-4
Preston Manor, guidebook, (Brighton Borough Council, nd)

Maps Tithe map for Preston parish, 1841 (Preston Manor)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1912 4th edition published 1932 5th edition published 1938
OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1873-5 2nd edition published 1898

Archival items Plans and drawings relating to the layout and construction of Preston Park, covering the period between the late 1870s and the 1960s. (Plan Registry of Brighton and Hove Council)
Collection of photographs and illustrations of Preston Park covering the period from the 1890s to the 1960s. (Brighton and Hove Council)

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Registered files of the former Brighton Parks' Department including gardeners' Time Books, Report Books, plans etc. (DB/D60-83), (East Sussex Record Office)

Description written: July 1998 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: March 2000

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.