

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

NEWBOLD COLLEGE (formerly MOOR CLOSE)

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

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*NEWBOLD COLLEGE (formerly MOOR CLOSE)*

Name: NEWBOLD COLLEGE (formerly MOOR CLOSE)

District: Bracknell Forest (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Binfield

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.422688  
Longitude: -0.78370227  
National Grid Reference: SU 84667 69999  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II\*  
List Entry Number: 1000547  
Date first listed: 30-Sep-1987

## Details

A late C19 country house surrounded by an early C20 formal garden, the first commission Oliver Hill received after setting up as an independent architect.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The millionaire Charles Birch Crisp, who owned the late C19 Moor Close, employed the young Oliver Hill (1887-1968) 1910-11 to create formal terraces around the house (overlying a previous informal design), at the same time as he completed major alterations to the house. This was Hill's first commission after setting up his own practice (although not typical of his later work), and he continued to work for Crisp on the gardens at Moor Close for several years afterwards, producing Sylvia's Garden in 1913, the planting schemes being heavily influenced by the style of Gertrude Jekyll. During the 1920s the garden attracted much publicity and praise, receiving coverage in, for example, *Country Life*, *Architectural Review*, and *The Studio*, who held it up as a good example of the style of layout then in fashion for a small country house. Towards the end of the 1920s Crisp suffered financial difficulties, and the garden began to decline, some of Hill's designs never having been implemented. Newbold College acquired the site in 1945, and it is now (1998) used by the College as a residential facility.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Moor Close lies at the southern end of the village of Binfield, 2km west of the centre of Bracknell. The 6ha site is bounded to the west and south largely by Popeswood Road, marked by a brick wall at the north-west end, to the north by the open lawns and mid C20 buildings of the main college campus, and to the east by agricultural land and the garden of Popeswood Lodge. The land generally slopes down to the east and south, and the setting is suburban, with a late C20 primary school on the west boundary, and views extending east towards low wooded hills which conceal the C20 tower blocks of Bracknell beyond.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main approach enters off Popeswood Road, 100m west of the house, set back between panelled brick gate piers supporting wooden gates, flanked by a low, curved brick wall. A two-storey brick lodge (1881) built in Tudor style stands adjacent to the north. The drive curves east down a gentle slope, between mature trees and shrubs, opening out into the tarmac forecourt on the north-west front of the house. The entrance of the drive into the forecourt is marked by two brick piers in similar style to those at the main entrance, whilst a further entrance from the college campus to the north is also marked by brick piers and broad stone steps. On the west side of the forecourt stands the gymnasium and a raised terraced area

largely laid to grass with clipped hedges. The drive continues past the north-west front giving access to the service ranges to the east. The forecourt was formerly laid out with an oval carriage sweep enclosing an oval lawn, with a path leading to the front door flanked by panels of lawn. On the north side of the forecourt, opposite the front door, steps led up to an enclosure via the entrance gateway to the area now occupied by the college campus (The Studio 1924).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Moor Close (1865, altered c 1910) stands at the north end of the site, overlooking the surrounding gardens. Of two storeys, it is built in rambling L-form of brick with stone dressings, in Tudor style, its main garden fronts facing south-west and north-east. The house was extended c 1910 by Oliver Hill, whose work included the addition in vernacular style of the entrance wing on the north front containing a stone-faced porch, the ornate palm court which lies on the east front, leading onto the east terrace, considerable alterations to the exterior of the Victorian house, especially on the south-west front, and a complete redesigning of the interior, especially the ground floor and grand staircase.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The garden is divided into several sections, the main ornamental feature, Sylvia's Garden, built by Crisp to commemorate the birth of his youngest daughter, being separated from the formal terraces surrounding the house by a terraced lawn court. The complex formal Great Plat to the south-west of the sunken garden, if it was built at all, has now disappeared, the area now being laid to grass. Throughout the garden there are complex changes of level, largely marked by a series of terraces connected by shallow steps, many of them circular or semicircular.

The garden is entered from a paved area lying at the south corner of the forecourt below the north-west front, via the Slate Court to the south. This small courtyard, which lies adjacent to the south-west end of the north-west wing and is bounded to the north-west by a brick wall containing two roundels flanking the gateway which gives access to it, is paved with blue slate. The south-west side of Slate Court is bounded by a pergola with ornamented brick pillars, the pillars linked at the top by wooden beams. From here a path leads between the low, brick, south-east boundary wall of Slate Court into the Sunk Garden, a square, sunken lawn laid out with rectangular flower borders and enclosed by low, clipped hedges. A stone path separates it from the north-west wing, and south-west front. The narrow grass terrace above the south-west side of the Slate Court and Sunk Garden, reached via steps up from the Sunk Garden, leads to a further set of broad stone steps extending south-west up to the lawn which may have held the Great Plat (if ever constructed). By the 1920s this area was laid out as a shrubbery surrounding informal lawns (OS 1932; Landscape Design 1992), and is now laid to lawn. The narrow grass terrace extends south-eastwards, above the Water Parterre and Lawn Court, as far as the Ravine to the south, punctuated by several flights of stone steps, one of which crosses it, rising from south-east to north-west, giving access from the Lawn Court below to the lawn to the west.

Steps down from the south and east corners of the Sunk Garden and the west terrace lead down to the Water Parterre which contains several small pools and rills set in lawn and linked by stone paths, this area being planted with clipped topiary specimens and other shrubs. Steps at the south and east corners of the Water Parterre, linked by a brick retaining wall, lead down to the Lawn Court. From the Water Parterre a terrace extends east along the south-east front of the house to a viewing platform above the lawn, to the north of which several raised beds constructed as alpine beds lie on the terrace. The terrace extends north along the east front, above the lawn, to a stepped and terraced feature lying adjacent to the palm court which leads down to the lawn. This is part of the 'great stairway of some thirty steps' (The Studio 1924), which, crossing the broad grass terrace of the lawn, continues as a circular stair, flanked by the brick retaining wall which supports the lawn terrace, leading down to the lower lawn. The lower east lawn extends north-east of the house, flanked by service buildings to the north and woodland to the south, to the site of the former kitchen garden, overlooking low wooded hills to the east.

A grass path flanked by stone paving leads south-east across the centre of the Lawn Court, the Court largely being surrounded by brick terrace walls, with to the south woodland screening it from the park beyond. The path leads to The Ravine, a natural cutting containing a boggy stream set in woodland, running down from west to east, crossed by a stone-paved brick bridge leading into Sylvia's Garden. Sylvia's Garden (Hill 1913) is composed of several formal compartments based around the main axis aligned on the entrance from the Lawn Court. A major feature is the variety of materials used in the structures, particularly the paving surfaces which are highly decorative in places.

The bridge across The Ravine leads, with steps down at the south-east end, to the Entrance Court, a rectangular area paved with a complex stone and tile pattern, enclosed partly by brick walls. To the north-east a gateway leads out to a small stone

platform, formerly with an iron balustrade, overlooking the wooded ravine. To the south-west a similar gateway leads to an enclosed court, paved with a complex stone and pebble pattern in star form, flanked by raised beds and yew hedges. From the south-east side of the Entrance Court broad stone steps lead down to the Lawn Court, containing a central rectangular panel of lawn surrounded by stone paving. To the north-east a stone terrace with a central rectangular bed of rhododendrons stands above a semicircular brick basin, flanked by the remains of shallow stone steps. From the south-west side of the Lawn Court a formerly balustraded double staircase curves up to a stone-colonnaded pergola (stone balustrade and paving below restored late 1990s) terminated to north and south by twin brick gazebos with stone dressings. From here the pergola gives onto the square enclosure of the Upper Pool to the south-west. The circular pool is surrounded by pebble paving, with to the north-west twin narrow lily tanks separated by a path leading north to the court lying west of the Entrance Court. Grass steps once led south-west up the slope from the Upper Pool, these now largely lost.

South-east of the Lawn Court lies the sunken lily pool, the Lower Pool, surrounded by stone paving and shallow steps leading down to the water, in which stands a fountain, with flanking borders to the south-west and north-east (all restored early 1990s). The south-east end of the area is apsidal, projecting above the field beyond, with a central circular bed which formerly held a small lily pool. The south-east and north-east boundaries of this area are supported by a brick retaining wall, with views across the park to the grounds of Popeswood Lodge to the south-east and low, wooded hills to the east. On the south-west side of the sunken lily pool steps lead up to a brick wall with stone balustrade (restored late 1990s), broken in the middle to allow access to an informal wooded area.

Country Life (1924) described the layout as 'a vivacious scheme, definitely formal in its layout and definitely architectural in its main features, but with freshness and grace pervading it'. This 'effective setting' showed 'a right use of garden statuary, pots, and shrubs in tubs; and 'some individual design in the paving' through the use of red tiles, Portland stone, black slate and marble and blue beach pebbles. Hill kept the fine old trees which existed on the site and his design was, to an extent, controlled by them. PARK The small park lies to the east and south-east of the garden, largely laid to pasture, edged in places by mature trees.

KITCHEN GARDEN The former kitchen garden and glasshouses (largely gone, 1998), lay east of the house on the northern edge of the park. The area is now open.

#### REFERENCES

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OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1912 3rd edition published 1932

Archival items O Hill, Designs for Moor Close, 1910;22 (RIBA Drawings Collection)

Description written: August 1998 Amended: March 2000 Register Inspector: SR Edited: April 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.