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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

NORBURY PARK

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Name: NORBURY PARK

County: Surrey

District: Mole Valley (District Authority)

Parish: Mickleham

County: Surrey

District: Mole Valley (District Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.266100
Longitude: -0.33381373
National Grid Reference: TQ 16342 53201
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001252
Date first listed: 17-Feb-1992

Details

Pleasure grounds and a large park laid out by William Lock in the late C18 to accompany a new country house, and in part incorporating existing parkland.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Norbury is first mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086. In the early C14 'the manor called le North Bury' in Mickleham passed to the Husee family (VCH 1902-12), and then in 1425 to the Wymeldon family via the female line. In 1499 the estate was acquired by the Stidolphs, who held it until 1705 (ibid). The diarist John Evelyn visited the estate in 1655 and admired the great number of walnut trees (de Beer 1955). The remains of a medieval field system survive within the park, and the area was at one time enclosed by a park pale (LMS 1999). Norbury appears on the 1729 Senex Map of Surrey as a house and trees in the loop of the River Mole. Tycho Wing's estate map of 1731 shows an open landscape with three formal avenues radiating from the manor house close to the river. In 1766 the estate was sold to Anthony Chapman, who may have been responsible for felling thousands of walnut trees in the park for their timber value before selling Norbury in 1774 to William Lock (1732-1810). A noted connoisseur of the fine arts and a man of means, Lock pulled down part of the existing manor house, converting what remained into a farm; it now forms part of the property called The Priory. A new house was commissioned from Thomas Sandby, occupying a site which would take full advantage of the picturesque qualities of the area. Lock corresponded frequently on picturesque theory with William Gilpin (1724-1804): 'I really think you have more picturesque erudition than any man I know' wrote Gilpin to his friend in 1782 (quoted in Percy 2001) and Norbury Park in Lock's time became a fine example of the picturesque. Gilpin dedicated his *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* to Lock, with the acknowledgement that 'the best remarks and observations in them are yours'. In his *Observations on the Western*

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Parts of England in 1798, Gilpin wrote of Norbury: 'great houses in general resemble each other so nearly that it is difficult to find among them any characteristic features. Here the whole is new'. The writer Fanny Burney (1752-1840) was a great friend of the Locks, frequently staying at Norbury. Between visits Frederica Lock wrote to her 'in the fern house' and sent flowers from the garden. Fanny met her husband to be, General Alexandre d'Arbly, one of a group of French aristocrats who fled to England, when he stayed at nearby Juniper Hall, Mickleham. Lock offered the couple a plot for a new home at Westhumble, immediately to the south, the building of which was financed by the novel Camilla; it was named Camilla Cottage.

After William's death in 1810, his son (also William) neglected Norbury, then put it up for sale as too expensive to maintain. In 1819, the estate was sold at auction to E Fuller Maitland who subsequently exchanged the house for another with H P Sperling, who developed the pleasure grounds around the mansion. Sperling sold Norbury in 1848 to Thomas Grissell (1801-74), a railway engineer. It was during his occupation that the railway was put through the estate, and it was as a result of his influence that it was put into a tunnel with no shafts for ventilation permitted. Decorated structures had to be provided throughout and so the three viaducts over the Mole had coloured brickwork, cornices, and ornamented cast-iron parapets. A plantation of trees at least 5m in height was to screen the north end of the tunnel and trees were to be put in and grass sown on all railway banks within sight of the house. After Grissell's death the estate continued to be carefully maintained by his grandson, Thomas de la Garde Grissell, and equally prized by his successor, Leopold Salomons who owned it from 1890 until 1914. Salomons, the benefactor who gave Box Hill to the National Trust, had planned to bequeath Norbury to the nation but died before he could complete the arrangements and in 1914 Sir Edward Mountaine of Eagle Star acquired the property. In February 1930, after almost two decades of neglect, Norbury was put up for auction and possible speculative housing development. James Chuter Ede, then Chairman of Surrey County Council and a great lover of the Mole valley, took it upon himself to secure an option on the property which was then purchased by Surrey County Council. The mansion and 17ha of park around it were sold on in 1932 to H V Roe (of Avro, the aircraft manufacturer) and his wife, Dr Marie Stopes who lived there until her death in 1958; the mansion remains (2000) in private ownership. Of the land owned by Surrey County Council, the farmland is farmed under tenancy; the wooded areas are managed by the Surrey Wildlife Trust and are open to the public for access on foot.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Norbury Park stands on the southern escarpment of the North Downs where the hillside is bisected by the north/south valley known as the Mole Gap. The town of Dorking lies 4km to the south and Leatherhead 2.5km to the north. The c 150ha site here registered forms a broad crescent rising steeply to the west and south-west from a bend in the River Mole opposite the village of Mickleham. The registered area consists of parkland in mixed agricultural use, with arable and pasture in the river valley and on the lower slopes, and woodland on the higher slopes and ridge of the Downs. Some remnants of parkland railings remain around the estate, particularly beside the main drive. To the north-west the site adjoins Updown Wood and Fetcham Downs while to the south-west lie fields and further woodland. To the south-east the park is bounded by fields adjacent to the River Mole, the river itself forming the boundary to the east and north-east. Much of the surrounding land is within the Country Park.

Norbury Park mansion occupies a commanding position on the ridge of the Downs and enjoys views to Dorking in the south, Box Hill to the south-east, Cherkely Court across the valley to the east, and north to Leatherhead and London beyond.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are two vehicular accesses into the park from the A24 across the River Mole. One is the entrance from Mickleham village to the south-east over the three-arched, brick-built Weir Bridge (early-mid C19, listed grade II). The drive curves to the east before running north-west past the old kitchen garden and Norbury Park Farm, crossing the Mole again at Presforward Bridge, c 1km north-east of the mansion, and leading north towards Leatherhead. By the mid C19 there were lodges at both bridges (Sale particulars, 1848), but neither survived the building of the new Leatherhead to Dorking road in the 1930s (OS 1938). The mansion is approached from a drive which zig-zags up the hillside westward from the site of the original house, The Priory. This drive was constructed by Sperling as an improvement to Lock's drive further to the north which was straighter but very steep. The remnants of box trees which once lined both drives still grow in the vicinity of the house. A second drive, constructed in the mid C19, approaches the park from the village of Westhumble to the south. The drive runs north from Crabtree Lane then passes through Beechy Wood and along the west edge of the Druids Grove. Today (2000),

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pedestrian access to the wider park area is encouraged by the provision of car parks at Bocketts Farm to the north (outside the area here registered), and in Beechy Wood, north of Crabtree Lane, to the south. The railway station (listed grade II) at Westhumble, south of the park, was built in 1867 to an ornamental design as specified by Grissell; it remains (2000) in use.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Norbury Park mansion (listed grade II*) was designed by Thomas Sandby in 1774. Gilpin commented that the house 'pretends only to comfort and convenience' (Gilpin 1798). During Grissell's ownership the house was refaced to give it a more classical appearance with pilasters, a parapet, and cornices added and the building was extended by P F Robinson in 1820. The house is three storeys high and has a semi-basement. The entrance front is cemented and has a large porch with twin Doric columns. The rear elevation is constructed in white brick. To the north-west and detached from the house are the stables, and to the north-east is a similar building, presumably once the kitchens. These square, two-storey buildings with hipped slate roofs (listed grade II*) take the form of pavilions flanking the main portion of the house on its north side. A Victorian clock tower has been added to the stable building.

The house has a remarkable drawing room in which three of the four walls are decorated with landscape scenes, the fourth having a large window with views south to Box Hill, emphasising the natural picturesque quality of the park and the Mole valley. The ceiling is painted as sky seen through a circular trellis. The design was executed by George Barret (1728-84) in 1783, with the help of Gilpin's brother Sawrey for the animals, Giovanni Cipriani (1727-85) for the figures, and Benedetto Pastorini for the sky.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The curtilage of the privately owned Norbury Park mansion encompasses the gardens and pleasure grounds and is enclosed by a 2m wire deer fence, planted with shrubs to ensure privacy. The gardens on the north side of the house are laid to lawns with informal tree plantings; few mature trees survived the storms of 1987 and 1990. West of the house is a rectangular area enclosed by clipped yew hedges and to the south-west a small forestry plantation. On the ridge to the north-east a new (1998) walled garden has been created. The steep slope to the south of the house is planted as a rock garden. The pleasure grounds outside the door from the painted room were first laid out and planted by Sperling in the 1820s. He was also responsible for opening up vistas to the north-east, by the removal of the upper portion of a large chalk hill which had previously bounded the view in that direction.

PARK The eastern area of the park adjoining the river is in agricultural use, the fields either arable or pasture. Norbury Park Farm is situated on low-lying ground c 1km north-east of the house, close to the river. The farm includes an ornamental dairy with decorated bargeboards. To the east of the farm is The Priory, on the site of the former manor house. The railway crosses the park in Norbury Tunnel, which runs through the east end of the ridge c 450m east of the house. The spine of the park along the ridge is woodland, with minimal management in order to encourage wildlife. The steeper slopes are covered by ash and sycamore saplings; again, few mature trees survived the storms of 1987 and 1990 except in the area east of the house where there is a group of cedar trees and some beech. A saw mill run (2000) by Surrey County Council for timber from the estate is situated 220m west-north-west of the house. Near the northern entrance to the railway tunnel, within Icehouse Combe, are the remains of the estate icehouse.

Tycho Wing's estate map of 1731 shows essentially an open landscape at Norbury, with small areas of woodland on the crest of the Downs (LMS 1999). Three formal avenues are shown radiating from the manor house, one of which runs up across the scarp to terminate near the Druids Grove. The park was divided into three parts: Old Park, Upper Old Park, and New Park. The site here registered corresponds broadly with the area enclosed by the medieval park pale (ibid). The earlier park to the west of the old manor house was extended south-westwards down to the river by Lock to give an extensive and well diversified parkland setting for his new house. The park was laid out to picturesque advantage by Lock in the late C18, with a network of walks running along the steeply sloping hillside to the south-west of the house from where there was a series of views down into the valley and across to Box Hill. Despite Chapman's tree felling in the 1760s, the slope was probably wooded with mature oaks and beech when Lock arrived, and the extensive planting of yew trees on the slope to the south of the house, now called Druids Grove, may also predate his arrival. A watercolour of c 1780 by George Barret shows a grassy glade in woodland. Gilpin admired the results of Lock's work, describing the woodland walk on the 'downy hill' to the west of the south front of the house, which wound along the slope giving glimpses of the valley below, some of them 'seen through the spreading arms of

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an oak or beech, as through the frame of a picture' (Gilpin 1798). The descent from the north side was even more picturesque, with its 'oblique sweeps of descending foregrounds, everywhere well-wooded', making the whole what he imagined as being 'a good Alpine picture' (ibid).

The park has become steadily more wooded, with extensive planting of broadleaves in the late C19/early C20. Many of the views for which Norbury was famed are now obscured.

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled kitchen garden was situated in the valley bottom, to the south of The Priory. Rocque's map of c 1768 shows the site as a formal garden, and Keane in 1849 wrote of 'descending by the winding road to the kitchen garden' and then describes the 21/2 acre (c 1ha) site with its walls of flint stones and a new vinery, 41' (c 12m) long, heated by hot water. The 1848 Sale particulars list a vinery, peach house, and orchid house and a gardener's cottage. The accompanying map shows a large orchard to the east of the garden.

In 2000 a new walled kitchen garden was built in the grounds of Norbury Park.

REFERENCES

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Legal

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