

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WADHURST CASTLE

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Name:	WADHURST CASTLE
County:	East Sussex
District:	Wealden (District Authority)
Parish:	Wadhurst
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.058969 Longitude: 0.32951962 National Grid Reference: TQ 63346 31429 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001272 Date first listed: 20-Sep-1993

Details

A mid C19 pleasure ground and park providing a picturesque setting for a castellated villa, remodelled in the early 1840s.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Wadhurst Castle is built on the site of Maplehurst, recorded in the C14 (Colson Stone Partnership 1994). During the C18 the Sheldon family owned the farm. In c1818 Thomas Fleury Sheldon sold it to James Louis West of Countesbury Town Tenement Company, Devon who also acquired two adjacent farms, Foxes and Stonecross, to make up a property 'of a very striking and romantic character' (Anon, c1830). West demolished the old farmhouse and replaced it with a square, castellated stone mansion, with a turret at each corner.

On West's death in 1819, the estate was put in trust for his son Henry Talbot (b.1801). On finishing his education at Queen's College, Oxford, Henry Talbot resided at Maplehurst until 1826. During this time, having become interested in local history he wrote his researches in a book, known as 'The Red Book of Wadhurst'. In 1826 Talbot exchanged Wadhurst for a property in France, with Captain Aylmer Haly. Haly extended the estate by acquiring Luck's Farm, Windmill Farm, and Blackmain's. He also changed the name of the mansion to Wadhurst Castle. In 1838, he sold the entire estate to Mr Benjamin Harding who appointed the architect Edward Buckton Lamb to remodel the Castle. By this date, there was a small park of 8ha to the south of the Castle set with three regular clumps of trees.

Lamb exhibited two of his drawings at the Royal Academy in 1843. He was also, at this time, working as the principal illustrator for John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843) his work being included in Loudon's Encyclopaedia of Gardens (1822); The Architectural Magazine and The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion (1838). Loudon visited Wadhurst Castle on 14 October 1842, publishing this in his account of a tour of gardens in Sussex in the Gardener's Magazine. Between 1839-1840, Loudon was laying out the Derby Arboretum (q.v.), where Lamb was also involved in designing a pair of entrance lodges.

The parkland was developed, in the early 1840s, to complement the remodelling of the Castle, and essentially to provide a picturesque setting for the turreted castle. Loudon mentions the planting as 'a collection of ornamental trees and shrubs as will form a select arboretum; and there are few places where, from the shape of the grounds and the facilities for walks and drives, an arboretum could be set off to so much advantage.' The parkland was extended to the north and south of the Castle, ornamental

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trees were scattered throughout the parkland and evergreen trees (Scots Pine, Corsican Pine and Larch) were planted into Long Wood which ran parallel to the ravine and was extended in form. A pond was added in the ravine due south of the Castle, where the planting was extended (Tithe Map, 1849)

In 1844 the estate was purchased by Edward Watson-Smyth and remained in his family for the next 81 years. In 1870, Edward Watson-Smyth enlarged the Castle at its north-eastern end. By 1872 the parkland had been extended to 30ha to include agricultural lands lying to the north-west of the Castle and to the south of the Castle the parkland was extended to Foxes Farm. A new serpentine drive was laid out from Durgates to Wadhurst Castle and another led from the Castle to Windmill Farm. A belt of trees with a sinuous edge screened the new parkland from the London Road. A second pond was added, sited at the head of the ravine (1872 OS 25").

Following the First World War the estate was gradually reduced in extent through a series of sales from 1920-36. In 1933 the Castle was badly damaged by fire and the following year the remaining part of the estate was purchased by Alfred Charles Matthews, who repaired the fire damaged interior. The same year a lease was granted to the Wadhurst Gold Club and a 9-hole course was laid out. The north park, to the north of what is now Castle Walk, was developed as housing as was land to the west of the pleasure grounds, directly to the north-east of Windmill Farm. Wadhurst Castle and its surviving parkland remain in private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Wadhurst Castle lies directly to the south of the B2099 Tunbridge Wells-Flimwell Road, approximately 11km east of Crowborough. The 58ha park lies on a ridge which runs south-east to north-west and forms part of the High Weald of Sussex, formed from rocks referred to as the Hastings Beds. The Castle and grounds are highly visible in the landscape, and make a significant contribution to the landscape character. The Castle occupies an elevated position, commanding extensive views south over parkland and low lying countryside. The parkland has been designed to be viewed primarily from the Castle and its terrace walk.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach leads off from the B2099 at its junction point with the B2100. Turning south through an entrance lodge (designed by E B Lamb c1839, listed grade II) on the road, the serpentine entrance drive leads through an ornamental area planted with Wellingtonia, holm oak, Scots pine, Cryptomeria, beech and hornbeam and into an entrance forecourt on the north-west front of the Castle. A dwarf stonework wall encloses the entrance forecourt, probably part of Lamb's design, with two decorative garden gates surviving, although the main entrance gates no longer exist. In the early C20 the forecourt had a central island of grass planted with a single tree which no longer survives (1909, OS 25"; 1936 Sales Particulars).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Wadhurst Castle (listed grade II), was built c.1818-20 for James Louis West to replace the old farmhouse, and remodelled and extended to the west c 1839 by Edward Buckton Lamb, (1806-69). It was further enlarged in 1870 and after fire damage in 1933 was repaired by the architect owner A.C. Matthews.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the south-east of the Castle is a long terrace walk, which extends westwards to run parallel with the south-east side of the kitchen garden. This appears to be part of the an early garden layout associated with Lamb's design and was described as being 'adorned by little thousands of American and flowering shrubs' (Sales Particulars, 1835). South of the Terrace Walk is the Terrace Garden, bounded by a ha-ha on the park side and comprising a rectangular lawn surrounded on three sides by a gravel path and on the fourth by a grass bank. The Rose Garden, laid out 1909-25 is laid out with random stone paving with a central bed containing a sundial and is situated at the junction of the Terrace Garden and the Terrace Walk.

The Sunken Garden occupies a former quarry at the south-west end of the pleasure grounds. This formed a feature along a series of Wilderness Walks to the west and south-west of the Castle, laid out among rhododendrons and ornamental trees.

To the south-west of the kitchen garden is an area of lawn. By 1872 this was an orchard until in 1909 it was felled to make way for a tennis court and croquet lawn.

PARK The park falls away to the south and is defined by Windmill Wood (outside the area here registered) on its western side, and a shelterbelt screening it from the public road (B2099) along its eastern boundary. The southern boundary adjoins Snape

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Wood which together with Birchetts Wood to its east are both Forestry Commission plantations on a ridge of higher ground, (lying outwith the Register boundary).

A deep, winding ravine which runs north-south and forms the main natural drainage system divides the park. Ravine Wood set out along this steep sided gill contains a stream dammed to form two ponds at the northern end of the wood. The northernmost ornamental pond is designed to be seen from the Castle, while the lower pond may have originated as part of the early Wealden iron industry but was then incorporated as an ornamental feature in the late C19.

Parallel to the west side of the ravine is Long Wood, a broadleaf deciduous woodland which subdivides the park and frames views southwards to the countryside beyond. Upper Park on the eastern side of the park has a pit, probably remaining from the excavation of iron ore as part of the Wealden iron industry

The park was originally separated from the enclosure fields of the surrounding farmland by parkland fencing, lengths of which survive. A series of small ponds in the park were, according to tradition, used as sheep-dips.

KITCHEN GARDEN The brick-walled kitchen garden, contemporary with the initial building of the castellated house, stands in the pleasure grounds immediately to the west of the Castle. Ornamental stone entrances to it are situated in the south and east walls. On the south-east side are the remains of a castellated top to the entrance, which leads out onto the Terrace Walk. In the west corner are the remains of a greenhouse range, comprising double vinery and peach house.

REFERENCES:

Printed material Colson Stone Partnership, Wadhurst Castle. Historic Landscape Survey and Restoration Plan (1994) Anon, Wadhurst Castle, formerly called Maplehurst, undated manuscript, c.1830 (East Sussex Record Office) Sale catalogue, 1838, 1925, 1931, 1936, 1939 (East Sussex Record Office)

Maps Tithe map, 1849 (East Sussex Record Office)

Description written : March 1994 Register Inspector : Dr H Jordan Revised K Campbell, June 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.