

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ST LUKE'S GARDEN

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Name:	ST LUKE'S GARDEN
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Kensington and Chelsea (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.489377 Longitude: -0.16931389 National Grid Reference: TQ 27198 78303 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000834 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

A late C19 formal public garden, made on the site of a burial ground. Part of the formal garden was made over to a recreation ground in the mid C20.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

St Luke's church was built between 1820 and 1824. It replaced the existing church, now known as Chelsea Old Church, which had become too small to cater for the increasing population of C19 Chelsea. The ground on which the church and gardens were built was formerly the burial ground of Chelsea Old Church. It continued to be used as a burial ground from 1813 onwards and the new church was built on vaults. The ground to the north and south of the church was made into public gardens in 1881 and these were formally opened by the Countess Cadogan in the same year. The gravestones were removed and placed upright to form a boundary wall around the church and part of the garden.

Enemy action during the Second World War caused extensive damage to the east end of the church, the north garden, and the neighbouring church school. The railings around the grounds were removed during the early 1940s as part of the war effort. The second half of the C20 saw a number of changes at St Luke's: the north garden was made into an all-weather recreation ground, and during a period of restoration and repairs the vestry and vaults under the church were renovated and converted into offices which are now (2000) used by the parish and other organisations.

The garden continues (2000) to be maintained as a public garden by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING St Luke's Garden is situated in Chelsea to the south-west of London, c 1.5km to the south of Kensington Gardens (qv). Sloane Square is c 1km to the north-east and the Royal Hospital, Chelsea (qv) c 1km to the south-east. The c 1.5ha site is bounded to the north by Cale Street, the backs of houses in St Luke's Street form the east boundary, and Britten Street and Sydney Street make up the boundaries to the south and west respectively. The rectangular level site is enclosed within high chain-link fences with matching gates. To the north the narrow shrub bed alongside the Cale Street boundary fence is planted with plane trees, survivors from the C19 plantings. A similar arrangement exists along the southern boundary with Britten Street.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING St Luke's church (listed grade I) stands between the two halves of the site. It is built in the Late Gothic style with flying buttresses above aisles, an open-arcaded west front, and a delicately embattled west tower with pinnacles 43m high; it has a galleried interior. The area immediately around the church is separated from the public gardens and enclosed on three sides by gravestones removed from the burial ground around the church. The space between the church and the gravestones is laid to grass with, nearest to the church, a flagged area which follows the shape of the building. The forecourt to the west of the church has a curving tarmacked path between the front of the church and a semicircular grassed area. The forecourt is enclosed to the west by iron railings and gates, replacements for those removed during the Second World War.

The decision to build a new church was made at a public meeting in 1818 and a competition for the design was opened in 1819. A number of architects responded including John Nash, responsible for among other things, Regent's Park (qv) and Regent Street, and James Savage, one of the foremost authorities on medieval architecture of his time. The competition was won by Savage and St Luke's became one of the first neo-gothic churches to be built in London. Built between 1820 and 1824 it was one of the earliest of the churches of the new C19 Chelsea. Efforts to repair the damage inflicted to the church during the Second World War were hampered by lack of funds; it was not until the 1980s that the restoration began in earnest. As well as repairs to the stonework, the church was adapted for present day uses. The vaults on which St Luke's was built in order to provide better foundations on the sandy soil were cleared out in the late 1960s and the coffins removed to Brookwood Cemetery (qv). The vaults were then converted for use as offices.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The garden is approached from three sides. The main entrance is from Sydney Street to the west, through gates in the south-west corner. Like the boundary fence, the gates are made from chain-link mesh on iron frames. There are two additional pedestrian entrances to the north and south, both guarded by similar gates. The entrance from the north leads from Cale Street onto a tarmacked footpath which runs south along the length of the site where it exits up three stone steps onto Britten Street. The narrow strip of ground between the footpath and the eastern boundary is partially screened by an evergreen hedge behind which is a number of tombs, upright gravestones, and occasional shrubs.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS St Luke's garden is divided into two halves, north and south, by St Luke's church. The land to the south is bordered by tarmacked paths which run between shrub borders and the central lawn. This is cut by two elliptical tarmacked paths edged with stone curbing. The elliptical path to the south curves between the main entrance and the steps which lead up to the gate in the south-east corner. The path to the north curves between the boundary path to the west and the footpath to the east. The central junction between the two paths is octagonal in shape and decorated with a similarly shaped bed, edged with stone slabs and planted with a tree. Seats are placed around the edge of the area. The land in between the elliptical paths is laid mainly to grass decorated with cut beds and specimen trees. The shape of the garden paths have altered little since they were laid out in 1881 (OS 1894).

The garden to the north of the church is divided into two: two-thirds of the ground is used as an all-weather recreation ground and the remaining third as a children's playground. This area was originally (1881) laid out to match the ground to the south. It was tarmacked over after the ground was damaged and burials disturbed when a device exploded to the east of the church during the Second World War.

REFERENCES

B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 3 North West* (1991), p 560 C Johnston, guidebook, *A Guide to St Luke's Church, Chelsea* (1999)

Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1874 2nd edition published 1894-6 3rd edition published 1916 OS 60" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1894-6 1920 edition

Description written: February 2000 Amended: November 2001 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: January 2002

Legal

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