

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ERIDGE PARK

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Name: ERIDGE PARK

County: East Sussex

District: Wealden (District Authority)

Parish: Frant

County: East Sussex

District: Wealden (District Authority)

Parish: Rotherfield

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.086272
Longitude: 0.24788370
National Grid Reference: TQ 57533 34287
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000265
Date first listed: 01-Dec-1988

Details

An extensive park, originating as a medieval deer park, which was landscaped and extended in the late C18 and early C19 as a picturesque park associated with a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

During the Norman period the land comprising Eridge Park lay within Waterdown Forest, and there are early references to a deer park there belonging to Odo, William the Conqueror's brother. This park has been identified with Reredfelee, mentioned in the Domesday Survey and confiscated by William the Conqueror. The first definite mention of Eridge is in 1344 when the lands were described as a 'chase containing 600 acres' with a 'messuage called Erugge' (quoted in Cobham 1993). By 1400 land, principally heathland and ferny ground considered to be of little value, was imparked, stocked with deer, and called 'Newepark' (ibid). In 1410 Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, came into possession of Waterdown Forest and subsequently, through him, the estate passed to the Nevill family, earls of Abergavenny, who have owned the land ever since.

The park was visited by Henry VIII as well as by Queen Elizabeth, who stayed there for six days in 1573. Sometime during the mid to late C16, the Eridge estate became a principal manufacturing site in the Wealden iron industry, the Nevills investing heavily in the construction of a large furnace pond supplied by a series of pen-ponds in the river valley. A forge pond was added with sluices, dykes, and bays. It may have been Eridge's importance both as a sporting estate and an industrial centre that led to its establishment in 1588 as a separate manor, distinct from Rotherfield Manor.

During the 1630s the park became popular on account of the discovery of chalybeate springs with their supposed curative powers but the Nevills promoted the springs at nearby Tunbridge Wells, perhaps to avoid demands for access to their private estate.

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During the C17 and up to the late C18 the principal seat of the Abergavenny family was at Kidbrook, West Sussex (qv). It was not until 1792, when the second Earl of Abergavenny (1755-1843) decided to make Eridge the family seat, that a designed landscape park was laid out. He intended Eridge to be a model village and estate and rebuilt the cottages in a distinctive estate style. The park was further enlarged during his lifetime (by 1822 the park extended to 2000 acres (c 810ha)) and an extensive picturesque landscape with follies and plantations was laid out. By 1827, 'the extent of plantations which has been made, combined with a happy diversity of ground, now decorates a wide extent of country' (Ackerman 1827). The second Earl is said to have been advised on his improvement scheme by his father-in-law John Robinson, a keen planter.

Eridge Castle, a picturesque castellated mansion, was constructed in 1787 and was said to be to the designs of an architect called Taylor (Garden Hist 1989). It replaced an earlier house but was itself demolished in 1938, when Eridge Park House was built on the same site. In 1958 this was halved in size resulting in the present building (outside the area here registered). Since the late 1950s the landscape park has been divided between separate branches of the Nevill family.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Eridge Park lies 4km south-west of Tunbridge Wells. It extends from the A26, Tunbridge Wells to Lewes road that forms its west boundary, for 4km eastwards to the A267, Tunbridge Wells to Frant road. To the west of Eridge Park (outside the area here registered) is Eridge Green, the estate village, and Eridge Rocks, a sandstone rock outcrop running 500m north to south, which was also laid out as part of the second Earl's picturesque landscape (J Horticulture and Cottage Gardener 1872).

The area of the park here registered extends to 546ha over steep south-facing slopes where there are frequent outcrops of Lower Tunbridge Wells sandstone. The northern portion of the park covered by Whitehill Wood is predominantly woodland; the southern portion, which stretches down to Saxonbury Wood, is now mostly arable. Whitehill Wood (the major portion of the wood lies to the north of the area here registered), occupying high land in the north-east of the park, falls southwards down to a steep-sided valley which runs from east to west through the park. The land then rises up beyond the valley to Rocks Wood and Saxonbury Wood. Saxonbury Hill, at 203m the highest point in the park, lies at its southernmost point.

On its eastern side the parkland perimeter tree belt lies parallel to the A267; along its northernmost section it is separated by a 180m strip of fields and gardens before adjoining the road itself at Rock Cottages. The western boundary of the park as here registered runs downslope and south of Eridge Park House and follows the principal path which leads from the south front of the House, south of the stables to meet an east to west track north of the Boat House. The boundary follows the western shore of the lake and then runs in a southerly direction towards Long Wood. From thence it turns eastwards following the northern boundary of Spring Wood, and then the boundary of Saxonbury Wood to embrace Saxonbury Hill.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Eridge Park House, built in 1938-9 to a design by the architect John L Denman, stands on a knoll just to the north-west of the registered area. From this high point there are views out across the parkland to the south. Saxonbury Wood forms the backdrop to this main view.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Numerous lodges around the periphery of the extent of the historic park mark entrances into the estate surmounted by motifs of the Abergavennys, either their coat of arms, the letter 'A', or a bull's head, their heraldic beast. Windmill Lodge, Frant Bottom Lodge, and Whitehill Lodge all lie outside the area here registered and mark the C19 perimeter of the park, when it reached its greatest extent.

Windmill Lodge (c 1825, listed grade II), north of Eridge Green on the A26, is typical of the early C19 remodelling of the estate. It was designed by John Montier of Tunbridge Wells, who c 1825 remodelled Eridge Castle (demolished 1938) and designed many of the estate houses and village school. From Windmill Lodge a drive leads southwards through woodland and shrubbery to cross a stream and lead up to the north, entrance front of the House.

Frant Bottom Lodge (c 1825, listed grade II), also by Montier, lies at the north-east corner of the park, on the A267, midway between Tunbridge Wells and Frant. A drive led westwards through this entrance to run parallel with the road which marks the northernmost extent to which the park reached, but is no longer in use. Whitehill Lodge (c 1825, listed grade II), probably also by Montier, lies on the northern edge of Frant village on the A267 and from here a drive crosses westwards through Whitehill Lodge, providing access to Whitehill woods and Eridge Old Park.

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GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the east and south of the House (outside the area here registered) the grounds are set with lawns bounded by a ha-ha and planted with specimen trees and shrubs. An arboretum situated to the north of the House was started in the second half of the C19 by the then head gardener, Mr Rust. A pair of C19 gates in the north-east corner of the stone park wall provides access to the park to the east of the Castle.

The main garden area lies to the south-west of the House and consists principally of gardens and features laid out in the early C20 century. A substantial terrace planted with an avenue of tulip trees which forms the southern boundary of this area is traditionally dated to the C17, although tree-ring dating has dated the trees to the early C19 (Inspector's Report 1988). A walk leads southwards from the tulip-tree terrace, down to the Mill Pond set within the New Park.

PARK The development of the park is complex and its evolution from a medieval deer park can be clearly charted, although the different enclosures and their distinctive landscape character has altered dramatically during the C20.

The Old Park, comprising Whitehill Wood to the north and Saxonbury Wood to the south and the valley in between, originated as a medieval deer park. The valley lands between the woods are now pasture (2000) but were arable for the latter part of the C20. The park's character was originally akin to the deer park at Knole Park, Kent (qv) as shown on an early estate map (Budgen, 1810) and was crossed by a complex series of rides linking a hunting lodge, warren, and kennels. Along the stream and lakeside within the Old Park are scattered oaks that survive from the earlier deer park, on the steep, uncultivable slopes.

In the late C18, Eridge New Park was laid out on high ground to the north-west of the Old Park, to provide a setting for the newly built Eridge Castle, sited slightly to the north and east of the existing house so as to afford clear views of the water in the valley below and vistas across the park. To the north-west of the House (outside the area here registered) the park is flat and used as a cricket pitch (late C20). The planting of the New Park is now much simplified, although the main structure of copses, woodland, and belts survives amidst pasture. The New Park had a very different planting style to the rough, ancient wood-pasture of the Old Park, being a stricter system of sinuous belts enclosing the pleasure grounds, avenues, copses, and a crescent-shaped woodland adjacent to Mill Pond, an 8ha lake in the valley.

To the south of Mill Pond is an area converted to arable during the mid to late C20 (outside the area here registered), which was imparked after 1822 (Abergavenny Papers). This stretches southwards to Long Wood, which lies to the west of Saxonbury Wood and was designed to be viewed principally from the New Park. The functional buildings within this extension were modelled so as to appear picturesque within the landscape as at Hickpits Farm, now called Sham Farm, at Danegate. A Keeper's Lodge 400m to the east of Sham Farm, now ruinous, was built in a Gothic style with a series of tall, crenellated brick towers. This series of early C19 picturesque follies continued within the Old Park. Saxonbury Hill (within Saxonbury Wood) is crowned by Saxonbury Tower (listed grade II) set atop the remains of an Iron Age camp. This five-storey tower, built in 1828, marks the southernmost and highest point of the second Earl's picturesque landscape.

A series of lakes and ponds have been formed in the valley running east to west across both the Old Park and the New Park, dividing the hilly land of the Old and New Parks in two. Within the Old Park, the chalybeate spring which rises 1.85km south-south-east of the House flows from south to north through the park. A walk alongside this leads to a Y-shaped cave with a small circular chamber at its foot, formed in a sandstone outcrop. The stream runs into a series of pools and cascades before reaching the south-east corner of Furnace Pond, also known as Hammer Pond, which was originally a C16 furnace pond supplied by a series of pen-ponds and weirs along the valley. The latter still survive, although referred to in the C19 and C20 as 'stews' or fishponds. Mill Pond, the largest lake, is situated to the west of Furnace Pond (outside the area here registered). A bridge and weir crosses one of the outflows at its western end and the other is landscaped into a cascade. These lakes all appear to have been incorporated into the second Earl's picturesque landscaping scheme.

KITCHEN GARDEN Immediately to the south-west of the House and outside the area here registered are the late C18 stables and kitchen garden, both part of the second Earl's scheme of improvement.

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(1907), pls 55, 56 H J Elwes, *The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* (1906-13) *Country Life*, 138 (23 September 1965), pp 750-3; (30 September 1965), pp 818-21 *Inspector's Report: Eridge Park, East Sussex*, (Debois Landscape Survey Group 1988) *Garden History* 17, no 2 (1989) *Eridge Park An Historical Appraisal*, (Cobham Resource Consultants 1993) *Maps Estate map, 1597* (East Sussex Record Office) *Budgen, Estate map, 1810 (ABE/27E)*, (East Sussex Record Office) *Estate map, c 1822* (East Sussex Record Office) *Tithe map for Frant parish, 1842-6* (East Sussex Record Office) *OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1872-3, published 1878 2nd edition published 1910* *Archival sources Abergavenny Papers* (East Sussex Record Office) *Description written: May 1992 Revised: July 1996; August 2000 (KC) Register Inspector: HJ Edited: January 2005*

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.