

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ST NICHOLAS, RICHMOND

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ST NICHOLAS, RICHMOND

Name: ST NICHOLAS, RICHMOND

County: North Yorkshire

District: Richmondshire (District Authority)

Parish: Richmond

label.localisation: Latitude: 54.404069
Longitude: -1.7250220
National Grid Reference: NZ 17948 00991
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001073
Date first listed: 10-May-1984

Details

Compartmented gardens laid out by the Honourable Robert James in the period c 1905-25. The garden contains a plant collection within which shrub roses and rhododendrons are particularly prominent, reflecting early C20 taste associated particularly with figures like Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson. Despite some depletion the collection is of interest in its own right.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

St Nicholas is on the site of a Benedictine hospital which was founded before 1171 by one of the earls of Richmond. In 1448 it was granted by Henry VI to William Ayscough who renovated the buildings and founded a chantry chapel on the site. It was dissolved in the 1540s and refounded under Mary c 1553 but subsequently sold by Elizabeth I in 1585 from which time it has been in private ownership. In 1813 it was bought by the Marquess of Zetland of the neighbouring Aske estate (qv). After several changes of ownership it passed to the James family in the late C19. The Honourable Robert James (1873-1960), who laid out the gardens, was in contact with leading horticulturists and garden designers of the day, including Lanning Roper, Lawrence Johnston and many others. He was awarded the Victoria Medal of Honour by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1954. St Nicholas continued in the family and remains in private ownership (1998).

DESCRIPTION LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING St Nicholas lies on the main York to Richmond road, the B6271, on the south-east side of Richmond, c 850m north-east of the Market Place in Richmond. The c 3ha site lies on high land overlooking the town on the edge of a scarp called Clink Bank. Clink Bank Wood forms the southern boundary of the site, and a wall running alongside the road forms the northern boundary. A track and hedge runs along the west side of the site whilst a cast-iron fence is the eastern boundary.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are two entrances, both from the B6271. The principal entrance has gates and leads to a short drive with clipped yew hedges running south to the east front of the house. A gated entrance on the north side of the site leads to a path running into the northern part of the garden.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING St Nicholas (listed grade II), the oldest recorded domestic building in Richmond, was constructed in the C17 using materials from the medieval hospital and possibly incorporating part of a C16 building. The house was altered in the early C18 by Ignatius Bonomi and others. The colonnade on the south front of the building is thought to date from the late

C18 or early C19. The house was altered and extended in the early C20 and it is in use as a private residence (1998). GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Gardens extend along the east, south and south-east side of the house and they divide into three main sections. On the east side the house, the forecourt, the Formal Garden, Rock Garden and Field Walk are divided from a central section within the walls of a (probably early C19) former kitchen garden. This area encompasses the Privet Alley, Cottage Garden and nursery and greenhouse areas. To the west is the Orchard, Tennis Lawn, Long Border and the kitchen garden. The garden is characterised by a use of local natural stone for structural features and by a compartmented layout which relates strongly to the house, in a tradition associated with the Arts and Crafts movement. The more intimate areas on the east side of the site contrast with bolder vistas and larger, more simply arranged compartments to the west.

A terrace on the east front has central steps leading down to a gravel forecourt flanked by lawns. On the east side of the forecourt there is a lawn with a clipped and topiaried yew hedge which is bowed in alignment with the front of the house. A central opening in the hedge leads to a grassed path on the edge of a ha-ha, shown on the 1895 OS map, from which there are views over falling land to the south and east with the ruins of Easby Abbey visible in the distance. Stone steps lead down to the base of the ha-ha wall where the grounds are divided from open pasture by a cast-iron fence which bounds a path called the Field Walk running south along the edge of the site and leading into the Rock Garden at the south-east tip of the site.

A yew hedge on the south side of the forecourt has an opening in it leading to the Formal Garden which is an elongated rectangle bounded by clipped and topiaried yews divided into two levels by two closely spaced terraces with retaining walls and central stone steps leading down to the south. An axial path on the line of the terrace along the east front of the house continues across the Garden. The Formal Garden is grassed and the enclosing hedges conceal it from other parts of the garden though it can be seen from the principal bedroom in the house. Borders around the edges of the Garden shown in photographs of 1936 (CL) have been grassed over.

To the south of the Formal Garden steps lead down to the Old Orchard which occupies a rectangular area with a retaining wall topped with the yew hedge dividing it from the Formal Garden and stone walls on the south and west sides of the area. The orchard contains a mixture of fruit trees planted at irregular intervals and spring flowering bulbs are planted in drifts beneath the trees in what Robert James described as 'an attempt to copy nature...' (quoted in Kernan 1993).

South and east of the Old Orchard there is an area thickly planted with trees and shrubs within which there is a simple stone building, probably of C18 date, called the Summer House, which lies c 80m south-east of the house. In the extreme south-east tip of the site there is a rock garden on sloping ground in an artificially created hollow which has stone steps leading through it. The stone wall of the former kitchen garden runs north/south across the site from the south-west corner of the house, dividing the Formal Garden and Old Orchard from garden areas to the west. An opening in the wall c 20m south of the house leads to an offset narrow path called the Privet Alley which runs west and is aligned with an opening in the west wall, in turn aligned with a grass walk called the Long Border. The two doorways in the east and west walls are not aligned with one another, necessitating an offset position for the Alley if it was to be aligned with the Border. On the north side of the Privet Alley there is an area of nursery gardens and greenhouses. To the north of this area there is the Bee Garden, where hives were once kept, and a stable yard and coach house. On the south side of the Alley the Cottage Garden is divided into narrow beds which were planted with lilies and roses by Lady Serena James in the 1920s.

At the west end of the Privet Alley the Long Border, which stretches for a distance of c 120m westwards, comes fully into view terminating with a garden seat which is a replica of the William Kent seat at Holkham Hall (qv). The borders are backed by hornbeam hedges and broken at regular intervals by grass bays with seats against the hedge. The border is largely planted with shrub roses.

On the south side of the Long Border there is a long rectangular area once used as a vegetable garden. On the north side there are two compartments divided from one another by a high beech hedge. That to the east is grassed and is called the Tennis Lawn. A central arched opening in the beech hedge leads through to the Orchard with an avenue of fruit trees flanking a path leading west to the edge of the garden.

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REFERENCES Country Life, 80 (12 December 1936), pp 626-32 N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Yorkshire The North Riding (1966), p 299 K Lemmon, The Gardens of Britain 5, (1978), pp 110-12 C Kernan, The Hon Robert James and St Nicholas, (unpublished MA thesis, Univ of York IAAS 1993)

Maps G Jackson, Plan of the Borough of Richmond, 1773 [in Kernan 1993]

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1857

Description written: November 1998 Register Inspector: CEH Edited: October 1999

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.