

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

THE VALE, EDGBASTON

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| Name: | THE VALE, EDGBASTON |
| District: | Birmingham (Metropolitan Authority) |
| Parish: | Non Civil Parish |
| label.localisation: | Latitude: 52.461967 Longitude: -1.9242463 National Grid Reference: SP 05244 84894 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF) |
| label.overview: | Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001483 Date first listed: 06-Dec-2000 |

Details

A mid C20 university campus landscape designed by Mary Mitchell within an overall development scheme by Sir Hugh Casson and Neville Conder.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1786 Sir Henry Gough (created Lord Calthorpe in 1796) granted the first building leases on his estate adjoining Edgbaston Hall (qv). In 1791 the Birmingham and Worcester Canal Act allowed the construction of a canal which divided existing agricultural holdings; this is shown on J Piggott-Smith's Map of 1825. The first building lease on the site was granted in 1816, with further leases being granted in the 1830s and 1840s. In the late 1830s a new road, Edgbaston Park Road, was constructed to the south of the site, opening up a further building plot on which a villa known as The Vale was built; these developments are shown on Piggott-Smith's manuscript map of c 1851 (BCL). The villas on what is now the University campus known as The Vale were among the most prestigious on the Calthorpe Estate which had been developed by successive Lords Calthorpe, and were occupied throughout the C19 and first half of the C20 by leading Birmingham families. During or after the Second World War the villas ceased to be private residences and passed into various institutional uses. The C19 villa known as The Vale was acquired by Birmingham University for use as staff accommodation c 1945.

In 1951 Birmingham University had only one purpose-built hall of residence, University House, and the highest number of students in private lodgings of any provincial university (Parklands 1999). By 1954 the University was in negotiation with the Calthorpe Estate to acquire additional land in Edgbaston, and in 1955 its offer of £127,000 for three villa sites, The Vale, Wyddrington, and Maple Bank, was accepted by the Estate. The Vice Chancellor in the Annual Report for 1957 noted that: 'A development plan for the residential estate of 45 acres [c 19ha] bounded by Edgbaston Park Road, Church Road and the Canal, was also commissioned from Sir Hugh Casson and Mr Neville Conder ... Its ruling idea was to preserve the attractive park-like character of this attractive sloping site, by placing residential halls in clusters among trees, and by turning the low-lying damp centre of the site into a lake. This idea was welcome, because the University has been generously admitted into Edgbaston and the Calthorpe Estate, and would wish to preserve as far as possible the green and gracious appearance of this part of Birmingham'. (Birmingham University 1957).

In their 'Report on Proposed Development for Birmingham University' (1957), Casson and Conder developed two alternative proposals, one for villa-type residences set in the existing landscape associated with the C19 villas, and an alternative, inspired

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by C18 English landscape design, for 'Buildings set in a "natural" flowing parkland and sufficiently far apart not to disturb each other and broken down in scale when approached more closely in order to avoid any feeling of institutionalism.' (Casson and Conder 1957); the latter plan was broadly adopted. Considerable remodelling of the ground form was undertaken, and the new campus was laid out in 1959-60 to a plan by the Birmingham landscape architect Mary Mitchell. This scheme incorporated some mature trees from the mid and late C19 villa gardens, while at the same time creating a new setting for the mid C20 halls of residence designed by Harvey and Wicks, H T Cadbury-Brown, and Tom Mellor. Additional residential blocks were built within the site in the late C20, and today (2000) the site remains in institutional use.

The Vale is an early example of a university campus landscape, and was influential on the design of later campus universities including York University and the University of East Anglia.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Vale is situated c 2km south-west of the centre of Birmingham, and c 0.25km west of Edgbaston parish church. The c 17ha site is approximately triangular on plan, and is bounded to the north-east by the B4217 Church Road, and to the south by Edgbaston Park Road. To the north the site is bounded by the C19 brick wall to the garden of Oakhurst, a villa built in the 1830s (Assoc Garden Trusts 1997). Remnants of the mid C19 stone boundary wall associated with the villa known as The Vale survive near the south-west corner of the site. The north-west boundary is formed by the Birmingham and Worcester Canal which was constructed across the Calthorpe Estate in 1791. The canal flows on a lightly timbered embankment to the south-west of the site, and in a shallow cutting to the north-west, its east bank being screened from the site by hedges and trees. To the east the site adjoins the grounds of Edgbaston Grove, the mid C20 Judges' Lodgings constructed on the site of a mid C19 villa of the same name; the site is separated from Edgbaston Grove by mid and late C20 hedges and fences. The site slopes steeply from the north and north-east down to the south and south-west, the ground levels having been altered as part of the mid C20 landscape scheme developed by Casson, Conder, and Mitchell. The Chad Brook flows from north-west to south-east through the site, and is dammed to form an approximately elliptical lake; this was created as part of the mid C20 landscape. The site enjoys extensive views south-east towards Selly Oak, south towards the main university campus where the early C20 campanile acts as an eyecatcher, and towards the wooded landscape of Edgbaston Hall (qv) to the south-east of Edgbaston Park Road. There are significant designed views into the site from Edgbaston Park Road to the south where the boundary is predominantly open and marked by a row of C20 timber bollards. To the north-west the site adjoins the open landscape of Chad Valley which comprises playing fields associated with Edgbaston Girls' School. The Birmingham Botanical Gardens (qv) lie c 400m north-west of the site, while the Westbourne Road Town Gardens (qv) are situated c 140m to the west. Villas and other domestic properties to the north-east of Church Road are set in well-planted grounds separated from the road by high brick walls.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The Vale is entered from the B4217 Church Road to the north-east at a point c 400m north-west of its junction with Edgbaston Park Road. A simple entrance flanked by mature specimen trees leads directly to the principal drive running through the site. To the north of the entrance is an area of late C20 car parking which incorporates specimen trees, while to the south a further area of mid C20 car park slopes down to a brick bridge which marks the entrance to a sunken service area to the east of Chamberlain Hall. There is a further entrance to the site from Edgbaston Park Road to the south-west, at a point c 160m north-east of its junction with Somerset Road. This entrance forms the southern end of the principal drive passing through the site from north-east to south, linking entrances from Church Road and Edgbaston Park Road, and the three principal halls of residence on the campus.

The tarmac drive leads c 190m west from the principal entrance on Church Road before turning south-west to follow the western boundary of the site for c 200m which is here formed by an embankment retaining the Birmingham and Worcester Canal. The embankment supports mature and semi-mature deciduous trees. The drive passes immediately to the west of Shackleton Hall, where a secondary drive extends east below the north facade of the building to reach an area of car park which is set in a steep-sided semicircular depression; this is screened to the north-east by a group of ornamental trees, while further groups of specimen trees are planted to the south-west. Some 80m south-west of Shackleton Hall the drive turns south to pass over a mid C20 concrete bridge which crosses the canalised Chad Brook north of the mid C20 lake. Continuing south-west for c

240m along the western boundary of the site, the drive passes to the north-west of Mason Hall, before turning sharply south-east to reach service areas to the south-west of the Hall. To the south-west of the drive are a group of two-storey, red-brick terraced staff houses. These flat-roofed buildings have angled facades to the north-east with symmetrically arranged windows. The drive continues south-east for c 100m to join Edgbaston Park Road south-west of Mason Hall.

Some 200m south-east of the principal entrance to the site from Church Road, an early C19 entrance (listed grade II) comprising a pair of massive rusticated, stuccoed, square-section piers and quadrant walls extending to a further pair of similar piers leads from Church Road to the late C20 Aitken Wing to the south-east of Chamberlain Hall. This entrance formerly led to the early C19 villa Edgbaston Grove, which was replaced in 1958 by the Judges' Lodgings. This entrance and the site of Aitken Wing were taken into the site from the grounds of Edgbaston Grove in the late C20 and lie outside the site here registered.

In addition to the formal entrances to the site, there are informal points of pedestrian access from Edgbaston Park Road to the south, and from Church Road to the north-east adjacent to Chamberlain Hall. A late C20 brick pedestrian bridge provides access across the canal to the tow path on its west bank, c 160m west of Chamberlain Hall.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS The landscape relates to three principal mid C20 buildings which were constructed as students' halls of residence. Chamberlain Hall, originally known as High Hall and Ridge Hall, stands on high ground south of the principal entrance from Church Road on the north-east side of the site. High Hall comprises a brick and concrete tower block of eighteen storeys, the top storey being recessed and surmounted by a flat-roofed pavilion. The tower is entered through a concrete portico which extends the full width of the north facade. Geometrical patterned paving extends below the north facade and returns round the east facade to reach a roof terrace above a lower wing to the south-east of the tower block which contains dining rooms. There are significant views south-west across the site towards the campanile of the main university campus from this terrace. The two-storey dining-room wing has large plate-glass windows overlooking the site, and serves to link the tower block to a further four-storey range to the south-east which was originally known as Ridge Hall. High Hall and Ridge Hall were designed by Harvey and Wicks in association with Jackson and Edmonds in 1960-4 and formed part of Casson and Conder's campus scheme (Pevsner and Wedgewood 1966; Parklands 1999).

Some 80m west of Chamberlain Hall stands Shackleton Hall. Originally known as Wyddrington Hall and Lake Hall, this Hall comprises a series of three- and four-storey blocks constructed in buff brick and concrete and arranged in a complex plan which partially encloses two concrete-paved terraces facing east and south; these overlook the lake and grounds. Due to the fall in ground level from north-west to south-east, the east end of the south range is supported on slender square-section concrete piloti which allow views beneath the building to the lake and surrounding lawns. Shackleton Hall was designed c 1961-5 by H T Cadbury-Brown, and formed part of Casson and Conder's campus scheme.

South-west of the lake and c 400m south-west of Chamberlain Hall stands Mason Hall. Originally known as Lake View Hall and Chad Hall, it comprises a range of blocks which are approximately L-shaped on plan. The building stands on a low, narrow grass terrace retained to the north-west, east, and south-east by walls of reddish-brown brick and concrete. The north-west range comprises five storeys with windows angled north-west and south-east to take advantage of views. The north-west range is linked to a similar three-storey range to the south-east by a single-storey concrete dining room with large windows facing north-east across lawns sloping down to the lake. At the south-west corner of the Hall a tower block rises through ten storeys. To the south-east of the tower block a glazed bridge crosses a service drive to reach a further two-storey accommodation block. Mason Hall forms part of Casson and Conder's campus scheme of 1957 and was designed c 1961-5 by Tom Mellor.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The designed landscape occupies a shallow bowl with the ground dropping gently from north, north-west, and south-west to the south. The three principal halls of residence are constructed on high ground to the north-east, north-west, and south-west, while the central area of the site comprises sloping lawns planted with groups of ornamental specimen trees, which drop down to an approximately elliptical lake. The lake is encircled by a gravelled walk, while a white-painted concrete and timber footbridge carries the walk across a channel of water which extends north-west towards the inflow. This area is planted with ornamental trees and shrubs. At the southern end of the lake, surmounting the concrete structure of the outflow, a simple timber seat faces north-west across the water. Further groups of mid C20 specimen trees are planted to the south-west and south-east of the lake, while ornamental shrubs are planted on its east bank. The ornamental planting

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around the lake frames a series of vistas across the site which are generally focused on the three 1960s halls of residence. To the south-east of the lake a further gravel walk ascends the west-facing grass slope and sweeps north for c 300m; further views west across the site are framed by groups of mid C20 specimen trees. Some 20m north-east of the lake a concrete plinth formerly supported a late C20 sculpture by Dame Barbara Hepworth (sculpture removed, 2000). A wide tarmac walk ascends c 200m north-east from the northern end of the lake to reach Chamberlain Hall. This walk is flanked by mature conifers and mid C20 ornamental trees, the conifers surviving from a series of alleys planted in the gardens of the mid C19 villa known as Wyddrington (Parklands 1999).

The lake forms the centrepiece of Casson and Conder's mid C20 campus landscape, replacing a smaller informal, late C19 fishpond which lay to the north-west and which was constructed c 1880 on the site of Wilmore's early C19 nursery; this formed part of the pleasure grounds associated with Wyddrington. The gradient of the slopes to the east, north, and west of the lake were significantly modified by Casson and Conder using fill from the excavation of the lake and material imported from the main university campus. The landscape design and planting was carried out by Mary Mitchell. Proposals by Casson and Conder for a single residence and service building including shops and other facilities adjacent to the lake (Casson and Conder 1957) were not implemented.

The high ground towards the northern apex of the site is occupied by a group of late C20 residential blocks, Maple Bank. The two- and three-storey brick blocks are surrounded by areas of lawn planted with groups of mature and semi-mature trees. There are views from this area west and north-west to the upper Chad Valley. Maple Bank replaced an early C19 villa of the same name c 1970. Immediately south-east of Chamberlain Hall a further late C20 residence, the Aitken Wing (outside the area here registered) comprises two- and three-storey blocks constructed in polychrome brick under pitched tiled roofs. This building is partly screened by semi-mature trees forming part of Mary Mitchell's mid C20 landscape scheme, and overlooks lawns which drop west towards the lake.

REFERENCES

Annual Report of the Vice Chancellor and Principal, (Birmingham University 1957), p 7 H Casson and N Conder, Report of Proposed Development for Birmingham University: Part 2 The Residential Site (1957) N Pevsner and A Wedgewood, *The Buildings of England: Warwickshire* (1966), pp 172-3 The Edgbaston Conservation Area, Landscape Study, (Assoc Garden Trusts 1997) *The Vale, Edgbaston, Historic Landscape Survey*, (Parklands Consortium 1999) M Hampson, *Images of England: Edgbaston* (1999), p 83

Maps J Snape, Survey of Edgbaston, 1787 (MS2126/599), (Birmingham Central Library) J Piggott-Smith, Map of Birmingham, 1825 (Birmingham Central Library) J Piggott-Smith, Map of Birmingham, c 1851 (Birmingham Central Library) Harvey and Wicks, Plans for High Hall and Ridge Hall, c 1960 (Birmingham University)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1887, published 1890 2nd edition revised 1901, published 1904 3rd edition published 1921 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1887, published 1890 1938 edition OS 10' to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1887

Archival items Calthorpe Estate Collection, including deeds, leases, plans and correspondence, early C19 to mid C20 (MS2126), (Birmingham Central Library) Correspondence and plans for the development of the site, late 1950s-c 1970 (Birmingham University Library Collection)

Description written: November 2000 Amended: November 2000, October 2001 Register Inspector: JML Edited: November 2001

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.