

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WIGHTWICK MANOR

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	WIGHTWICK MANOR
District:	City of Wolverhampton (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.583947 Longitude: -2.1960879 National Grid Reference: SO 86811 98478 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001421 Date first listed: 29-Mar-1999

Details

Formal gardens, largely by Thomas Mawson, associated with a late C19 industrialist's country home.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1887 Theodore Mander, a Wolverhampton paint and varnish manufacturer, purchased part of the Wightwick estate on the western fringe of the town. The C17 house and outbuildings were renovated, and a new house built to one side which was named Wightwick Manor. In 1887, to accommodate the Manders' enlarged family, the new house was doubled in size. In the 1890s the estate was enlarged and cottages built on it for the workers. Theodore Mander died in 1900 leaving a widow, Flora, and it was for her that Thomas Mawson began the main scheme for the house's gardens. On her death in 1905 the estate was inherited by Geoffrey Le Mesurier Mander (kt 1945), who served as chairman of the family firm until shortly before his death in 1962. In 1920 he decided to move further into the countryside and most of the land and cottages were sold, but Wightwick Manor failed to find a buyer and instead was let for a time. In 1929 Mander was elected to Parliament as a Liberal, and in 1930 married as his second wife Rosalie Glynn Grylls (d 1988), later to become well known as a biographer. Mander was a keen preservationist and supporter of the National Trust, and in 1937 gave it the house, the first to be given absolutely in the lifetime of the donor. It remains in the Trust's ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Wightwick Manor lies 5km west of Wolverhampton on Wightwick Bank, a minor road leading uphill, north, off the A454 Bridgnorth Road. Although now largely surrounded by C20 housing the Manor's grounds are sufficiently extensive and mature to largely isolate it, although suburban development does intrude on the main view south, over the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal to the distant Clee Hills. Wightwick Bank and the A454 provide the principal boundaries to the east and south, while to the west woodland extends as far as the Tinacre Hill road. The area here registered is c 7ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The Manor is approached off a short, curving drive off Wightwick Bank lined with hedges and mature trees. This passes the stables court before entering a roughly circular gravelled forecourt on the north-west side of the house. This is surrounded by tall, formal yew hedges, openings in which give access to the Formal Garden and Long Walk. An early C20 scheme for a main approach off the Bridgnorth Road was not implemented.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING Wightwick Manor (listed grade I) was built south-west of the Old Manor in 1887-8 to a design by Edward Ould (d 1909) in the Old English style: a two-storey building incorporating several projecting gabled bays, its ground floor largely of red brick but the greater part, including the jettied first floor, timber framed. On the north side is a squat, crenellated brick tower. In 1893 Ould more than doubled the size of the house by the addition of the east wing, in a very similar style although with slightly more elaborate timber framing. All the rooms along the long, south, garden front enjoy distant views to Shropshire's Cleve Hills, and many have doors opening directly into the garden. The house is notable for its interiors, decorated in the late C19 and early C20 with pre-Raphaelite fittings, furnishings and decorations, notably those of Morris & Co. The late C16 or early C17 Old Manor (listed grade II*), now a cafe, pottery and bookshop, was retained for service use when the new house was built in the 1880s. West of it is a late C16 or early C17 malthouse (listed grade II*), now an education centre. North-west of the Old Manor is a brick stables court (listed grade II), probably C18 but extended and restored in the late C19.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The garden comprises three main areas. Around the house are largely formal gardens, laid out within a strong architectural framework of terraces, stone walls, balustrades and especially yew hedges. Beyond are more informal areas, of orchards, shrubs, streams and pools. On the edge of these are the Paddock and woodland, which originally merged with the surrounding countryside.

North-west of the forecourt, and surrounded by a tall yew hedge, is the Formal Garden, roughly circular and c 30m across. Topiary peacocks stand within hedged bays along the south side, while herbaceous borders run along the west side and around a central pergola, the last installed in the 1990s in place of earlier rustic designs. At the north-east corner of the garden is a tile-hung seat built against the gable end of a garage (listed grade II). A gap in the hedge around the Formal Garden west of this gives access to the Yew and Holly Walk (which Sir Geoffrey Mander called the Addison Walk), a curving grass walk, the south side of which is bounded by 4m tall, clipped, Golden Queen hollies which alternate with Irish yews. Along the north side of the Walk is a berberis border. At the west end of the Walk, looking over rough grassland falling to the wet ground north of Top Pool, is an octagonal, rustic, ling-roofed summerhouse (present by 1903) called Grigg House. From Grigg House there is access to the former kitchen garden area immediately to the north. South of the Walk, on the ground falling towards the Long Walk, is the main Orchard. The Long Walk, a grass alley c 5m wide and c 60m long between tall yew hedges, leads west from the forecourt. At its west end is a wooden seat. Running south from the east end of the Long Walk, down the west end of the house, is Pond View, a 20m long and 5m wide compartment which continues the main north/south axis. A collection of glacial erratics was put together by Sir Geoffrey Mander.

Along the east half of the south, garden front of the Manor is a stone-flagged terrace. This gives onto the Upper Terrace, a formal lawn 10m wide and 47m long, which runs along the whole of the south front and around the west side of the house. A line of twelve box balls is spaced along the south front, and there are herbaceous beds under the house's windows. The terrace is bounded to the south by a wall (listed grade II) in which sections with slender oak balustrades alternate with broad stone piers with tile bands. Central steps lead down to the Lower Terrace, a formal lawn c 45m long from north to south and 40m wide bounded to east and west by tall yew hedges. Against the terrace wall along the north side of the lawn, to either side of the steps, is a flower border divided up by yew buttresses into separate Poet's Gardens. These were created in 1937 and incorporate plants from gardens including William Morris' at Kelmscott (qv) and Dickens' at Gad's Hill. Running from the steps down the centre of the lawn are The Thimbles, two lines of clipped, drum-like yews at the south end of which is a sundial (listed grade II). Around the south end of the lawn, bounded by a curved terrace wall (listed grade II), are several mature specimen trees. From the end of the lawn there are views south.

East of the house and the Upper Terrace is another formal lawn, the Tennis Court, roughly square and c 35m in diameter. Running along its north side is a narrow, raised terrace walk bordered by a metal trellis supporting climbing roses. At its west end, leading down to a small formal lawn against the east end of the house, are rounded sandstone steps (listed with bridge and terrace grade II). At the east end of the walk is the wooden Mathematical Bridge, a 1949 replacement of an earlier bridge which is based on that at Queen's College, Cambridge. This carries the path high over the Wightwick Bank road to the Bridge Garden, a shady, wooded area with Scots pines and holly oaks designed by Graham Stuart Thomas. North of the terrace walk is The Nuttery, a small hazel coppice with architectural fragments (others occur elsewhere in the garden) brought from the Houses

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of Parliament in 1933. South of the Tennis Court and at a slightly lower level, and east of the Lower Terrace, is the Lower Orchard. This contains a variety of old fruit trees.

West of the Long Walk lawns with shrubs fall around Top Pool and to its south-west the larger Lower Pool. Paths run around the south side of this and to its west, across wet ground, past pollarded willows planted by Sir Geoffrey Mander, and across a small stream to the east end of an area of mixed woodland which extends west to Tinacre Hill. East of the Pools is the Paddock, a park-like close of permanent pasture with some mature trees, which slopes uphill to the east to the west side of the terraces south of the house.

In 1899, a year after the Manders moved to Wightwick, they consulted the Parsons Partridge partnership about laying out new gardens there. Capt Croker Ives Partridge offered plans and designs for 250 guineas: 'Our object is to make the grounds much more compact & less rambling & disjointed than at present' (guidebook 1996, 42). A site visit was made by Alfred Parsons (d 1920), garden painter and designer. What remains unclear is how much, if indeed anything, of the present garden was their work, apart from the Formal Garden and perhaps the Long Walk. Certainly to the south of the Manor the garden stopped at the rough stone wall at the bottom of the later South Terrace and the trees planted during a royal visit of 1900 were sited in what was then rough grassland. In 1904 Thomas Mawson (1861-1933), who was already known to the family through his design work for Wolverhampton's East Park in 1895-6, submitted proposals to Mrs Mander for alterations and improvements to the gardens. The most ambitious element of his scheme was the creation of the two level terraces to the south of the house which involved major earth-moving and construction works. Work stopped on the death of Mrs Mander in 1905, but was completed c 1910 for her son Geoffrey. During this second phase many of the garden's details were added, including the beds in the Formal Garden, the stone-flagged South Terrace and the round steps east of the house. In 1912 the garden was illustrated in the fourth edition of Mawson's *The Art and Craft of Garden Making*. The gardens were later further developed and extended by the Manders; in 1927 and 1928 hundreds of rhododendrons and laurels were planted, especially around the Pools. The Formal Garden was simplified in 1937, and the beds with artistic and literary associations planted. After a period of decline during and after the Second World War the gardens began to be restored c 1990. As well as replanting and cutting back, various seats and other features were introduced based on designs in Mawson's *Catalogue of 1905*.

KITCHEN GARDEN The rectangular, laurel-hedged kitchen garden lies north of the Formal Garden and the Holly Walk. In the north part of the garden, which slopes slightly down to the south, is a lean-to peach house of 1891 by Richardson of Darlington, restored in the 1990s. The main garden area is a paddock. The frames which occupied the south-east part of the garden are largely reduced to foundation level.

A separate fruit garden lay east of Wightwick Bank, reached by the bridge. This is now the Bridge Garden.

The head gardener lived on a house on the Bridgnorth Road, outside the registered area.

REFERENCES

T H Mawson, *The Art and Craft of Garden Making* (1912) *Country Life*, 133 (30 May 1963), pp 1242-4; (6 June 1963), pp 1316-19; no 139 (18 April 1996), pp 66-71; no 33 (15 August 1996), pp 46-9 *Wightwick Manor*, guidebook, (National Trust 1996) P Pegg, *A Very Private Heritage: The Family Papers of Samuel Theodore Mander of Wolverhampton 1853-1900* (1996) J Lovie, *Wightwick Manor*, (study for English Heritage 1998)

Archival items Letters and plans relating to work by Parsons & Partridge and Mawson (held at the Manor 1998)

Description written: August 1998 Register Inspector: PAS 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.