

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

THE OFFICERS' TERRACE, THE
HISTORIC DOCKYARD, CHATHAM

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Name:	THE OFFICERS' TERRACE, THE HISTORIC DOCKYARD, CHATHAM
District:	Medway (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.393987 Longitude: 0.52854079 National Grid Reference: TQ 76009 69139 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000376 Date first listed: 01-Jan-1989

Details

A set of twelve town gardens, well-documented and retaining evidence of their original early C18 layout.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The officers' gardens at Chatham were started in 1719, in advance of the building of the terrace row which was constructed between 1720 and 1731, and were laid out symmetrically with simple stone-edged flower beds, set more often in gravel than lawn, and with sand or gravel paths. Up until 1984 when the Dockyard closed, they were in the single ownership of the Dockyard and were tenanted. The Dockyard itself was never modernised on the scale of that at Portsmouth or Plymouth, and this helped the survival of the gardens. Following the closure of the Dockyard, the area came under the administration of the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust; the Trust retains (2001) the freehold but have sold the leasehold of the terrace and gardens into various private ownerships.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The gardens are located on rising ground to the east of the dockyards in the town of Chatham. They are enclosed on all sides by buildings associated with the historic dockyard.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are two sets of entrance gates into each of the gardens: one from the road at the back of the houses in the north-west wall of the gardens and the other giving access into the street at the south-east end.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS The terraced row of twelve officers' houses (listed grade I) lies along the north-west boundary of the site and is separated from the gardens by a narrow carriage road known as The Terrace. The terrace was built in the 1720s and completed in 1731.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Below the main north-west facade of the houses are the small front gardens, marked by the remains of the iron railings cast in 1789 by Thomas Penn of Rochester, which replaced the original palings.

To the south-east, behind the row of houses and separated from them by stone-paved courtyards and the narrow carriage road, is a high retaining wall which supports the set of twelve long, narrow back gardens. The gardens, subdivided one from the next by internal brick walls, are of uniform length, but vary in breadth, measuring on average 36m x 12m. They were lengthened in the late C18 at which time gates were added into the new back walls giving access onto the road beyond.

Access to each of the gardens is via a door in the north-west wall. This opens onto a set of centrally placed stairs, except in the two largest gardens (nos 6 and 7 as shown on the 1755 estate map) where the position of the stairs has been altered in the

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early C19. Originally the stairs were covered over by arched wooden roofs with partially glazed sides, which extended into the gardens as small greenhouses or garden rooms. Two of these structures survive (nos 1 and 12).

The stairs lead to the lowest of the garden terraces which step up the gently sloping plots to the brick wall at their south-east ends. Particularly in garden nos 1, 2, 11, and 12 much of the original brick terracing, the Portland stone steps, and the pattern of centre and side paths, survive, correlating well with a detailed model of the dockyards made in 1774 and now at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

Archaeological investigations carried out in 1990 showed that there is also a high rate of survival of buried features, later developments having tended to protect rather than destroy the original design.

REFERENCES

Mariner's Mirror 68, no 2 (1982), pp 133-88 J G Coad, Historic Architecture of the Royal Navy, An Introduction (1983)
Georgian Group Annual Report (1988), pp 61-6 J G Coad, The Royal Dockyards 1690-1850 (1989) T Longstaffe-Gowan,
Private Urban Gardening in England 1700-1830, (draft paper May 1990) Garden History 20, no 2 (Autumn 1992), pp 132-52
Maps A geometric plan and north-west elevation of His Majesty's dockyard at Chatham, 1755 (Rochester Library)
Description rewritten: March 2001 Amended: April 2001; February 2004 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: November 2003

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.