

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Gardens of Westfield House

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

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Name:	Gardens of Westfield House
District:	Bedford (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Oakley
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.175649 Longitude: -0.54579444 National Grid Reference: SP9953854040 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1431906 Date first listed: 24-Mar-2016 Statutory Address 1: Westfield Farm, Westfield Road, Oakley, Bedford, MK43 7SX

Historique de la conservation

Stephen Percival (Percy) Cane (1881–1976) was an English garden designer practising in a simplified form of the Arts and Crafts style. An article in *Country Life* by Arthur Hellyer explains characteristic features of Cane's work including 'a mainly classical use of stonework ... the other, for want of a better term, I call the slightly formalised woodland glade'. Among gardens open to the public his work may be seen at Dartington Hall (Registered Grade II*) and Falkland Palace. At the first he laid out dramatic but subtle flights of steps, with bold associated planting, for an ancient terraced garden. At Falkland, for the historic setting of a Scottish royal palace, he designed a great border and a series of island beds. Cane was a very successful professional designer, winning many medals at the Chelsea Flower Show, and securing prestigious commissions (such as designing gardens for the Emperor Haile Selassie at the palace in Addis Ababa).

The first edition 1" Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1834-5 shows a building known as West End Lodge in the field to the south-east of the current house and gardens. Westfield House was originally built as a farmhouse by the Duke of Bedford in the mid-late-C19 and has undergone several phases of alteration since, although the ground plan remains very similar to that depicted on the 1883 OS map. Curiously the bays to the south-east elevation are not depicted on this or more recent maps. The multi-gabled brick built house is largely covered in creepers with many of the gables displaying a date stone of 1855 and the Duke of Bedford crest.

The gardens at Westfield were created by Percy Cane from 1953 to 1964 for Mr E F Davison following the purchase of the house from the Duke of Bedford. He first began work on the flat area immediately behind the house, creating a rose garden at the western end and large pool at the eastern end. The pool was the termination of a sinuous rock and water garden which worked its way down from a smaller pool in the north-west quadrant of the garden. It is understood 145 tons of Westmorland limestone was used in the construction and Hellyer (1981) suggests this represents the largest natural rock and water garden made by Cane (with the exception of Hascombe Court, Surrey). Cane was particularly pleased with the contrast between the informal pool and the formal rose garden, both being visible from different aspects of the house. The gardens also included long, curving glades and straighter, grassed walks, some of which crossed one another and were adorned with statues or other ornaments which draw the eye to various features of the garden.

Different compartments of the garden developed in a piecemeal fashion, although the effect suggests a single phase of construction, it hangs together so comprehensively. To the front of the house, relative formality is prominent within the enclosed, rectangular garden, featuring a narrow canal pool running through its centre to the south. The pool is defined around the edges by Yorkshire stone slabs laid flush with the lawn and has fountains enhancing each end.

In Cane's 'The Creative Art of Garden Design' (1967) he reviews in some depth the gardens at Westfield, providing near contemporary images of the garden. In 1976 it is documented that Graham Thomas advised on the replanting of overgrown borders, and in more recent years the planting scheme in various parts of the garden has been renewed and updated as the garden has evolved. A greenhouse was constructed on the lawned area to the rear of the house in the early C21 and linked to the former rose garden by an extension to the stone paving. The structural basis of the former rose garden is retained, although the borders have now been planted with dwarf conifers and covered in gravel.

Details

LOCATION, SETTING, LANDFORM, BOUNDARIES AND AREA Westfield House, Oakley sits at the extreme western edge of the village, approached only by a 1.4 mile drive, on a slightly elevated position within a meandering loop of the Great Ouse River. South of the house the land drops very slightly onto the flood plain and to the north, beyond the flat terrace immediately adjacent to the house, it rises more steeply.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The only approach to the house and gardens is via a linear drive accessed from the village to the south-east. The 1.4 mile straight drive leads directly to the south-east corner of the garden, although it discretely sweeps around, between stone gateposts, to a gravelled parking area south-east of the house. The drive, with broad grass verges, is planted with an avenue of green and gold conifers intermingled with green and purple broad-leaved trees. In 1978 the drive was described as '...conifers alternating with green and purple trees' (Bisgrove) but the pattern of colour is less regular now (2015). **PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Westfield House was originally built as a farmhouse by the Duke of Bedford in the mid-late-C19 and has undergone several phases of alteration since, although the ground plan remains very similar to that depicted on the 1883 OS map. The multi-gabled brick-built house is largely covered in creepers with many of the gables displaying a date stone of 1855 and the Duke of Bedford crest. Associated with the house, and situated to its south-east, is a walled garage court with an open-fronted garage range with entertainment rooms above. Leaded-light windows run along the first floor of the front elevation and to both the first and the ground floor on the gable end. Also associated with the building is a brew house located to the north-west of the house, this has been converted to a dwelling.

ORNAMENTAL GROUNDS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Entering the drive from Oakley village the tree-lined 1.4 mile length drive adds anticipation to the arrival at the house. At the north-east end a gap in the hedge offers a glimpse of the fountain at the south end of the canal pool. As the drive sweeps around to the north-east, through the gate, the visitor arrives on the southern edge of the lawn, at the south-east corner of the house. The garden from this angle has two clear levels, the broad, flat lawn to the rear of the house and a slightly raised and sloped lawned terrace beyond. The two are divided by a stone wall running approximately two-thirds across the width of the garden, terminating just north of the large pool at the south-west end of the lower lawn. To the rear of the house the wall is broken by a broad flight of stone steps framed by stone piers, surmounted by urns; the break leads the eye to a pair of decorative wrought-iron gates beyond, again framed with stone gate piers surmounted with urns. The open design of the iron gates allows views to the rising landscape beyond. A tennis court has been added immediately beyond the gate.

At the north-west end of the lower lawn the hard landscaping of the York stone paved rose garden has been maintained with the central octagonal pond and statue offering a focal point, although the former flower beds are now covered in gravel and each one planted with a dwarf conifer. The pond depicted in photographs from the 1960s show it to be square in plan but the octagonal pond is certainly present by 1981 as it is shown in photos at this time. From the pond, looking north-east, a small wrought-iron gate in the boundary wall provides a glimpse of a sun dial sitting on the raised lawn terrace beyond. Looking south-east from the octagonal pond, stone piers, surmounted with urns, mark the boundary from the rose garden to the curved

edge of the lawn. The form of the tree and shrub planting leads the eye to the south-east boundary of the garden, at the far end of the lawn, where the boundary hedge is reduced in height suggesting this once was an opening offering views to the farmland beyond. A wrought-iron gate in the extreme south-east corner of the garden certainly offers this opportunity and is visible from the house but not from the rose garden. A greenhouse was constructed on the lawned area to the rear of the house in the early C21 and linked to the former rose garden by an extension to the York stone paving.

Passing up the steps to the upper lawned area, the sundial and urns at the north-west and south-east end respectively stand as eye catchers within enclosed compartments defined by trees and shrubs. From the top of the garden, a lawned path known as the Long Walk follows the entire north-east and south-east boundaries, shaded by cherries, laburnums and lilacs. The walk leads to the lower lawned area and the drive, and serves to enclose a sub-rectangular area featuring the rock and water garden; a sinuous stream linked by a series of pools. Starting at the northern end in a small pool with a statue in its centre, the water feature and its associated paths lead to a thatched summerhouse, currently (2015) encased in wisteria, set within an enclosure surrounded by woodland. The water feature terminates at the largest pool, on the lower lawned area.

To the south-west of Westfield House (front elevation) is an ornamental walled garden defined by a brick wall along the south side, an evergreen hedge to the south-west and the gable ends of farm buildings to the north side. A narrow canal pool runs through the centre of the garden, opening out to pools at each end, small and rectangular nearer the house but larger and bow-fronted near the gate. The pond is clearly defined by a border of York stone, laid flush with the turf. Wide herbaceous borders shown in photographs of 1981 running along the walls of the garden have now been replaced by espalier trees. There are fountain statues in each pool, the largest at the far end with two basins. The larger fountain can be glimpsed through a gap in the hedge on the approach along the drive. The whole garden can be viewed from the house or the terrace immediately outside it. The terrace is ornamented by another little pool, hexagonal in plan with a small fountain directly in line with the others. The decorative wrought-iron gates at the south-west extreme of the garden boundary, like those on the north-east boundary of the rear garden, offer views to the wider landscape, in this case across the floodplain and down to the river.

KITCHEN GARDEN Attached to the south-west of the garage court is a small walled garden, described in 1978 as a salad garden, now laid with herbaceous borders defined with box hedging. An open-fronted shed partially enclosed by decorative trellis defines the eastern side of the garden, while brick walls surround the other three sides. An arched, timber gate in each end wall creates a central walk through the garden.

Summary

The gardens at Westfield House, Oakley, created 1953-1964 by Percy Cane for Mr E F Davison.

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.

Reasons for Designation

The gardens of Westfield House are included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

* Design: it is an outstanding example of a mid-C20 garden by Percy Cane, a garden designer of international renown who himself considered the gardens at Westfield House to be one of the best he had created;

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* Intactness: the structural framework of the garden including, the walling, wrought-iron gates, gate piers, urns, ornamental water course, fountains, former rose garden, thatched summer house and canal pond all survive virtually intact and provide a context for the bold and deliberate planting the majority of which still reflects Cane's intention;

* Historic interest: it is of undoubted historic interest for its strong association with Percy Cane who achieved international and lasting renown for his contribution to garden design.

Bibliographie

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