

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PROSPECT PARK

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Name:	PROSPECT PARK
District:	Reading (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.449011 Longitude: -1.0095846 National Grid Reference: SU 68922 72690 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000589 Date first listed: 30-Sep-1987

Details

A C19 landscape park surrounding a late C18 country house, developed from 1902 onwards as a public park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Prospect House, or Prospecthill Park as it was then known, was built in the late C18, set on the south side of a hill formerly covered in woodland (Rocque, 1761; Pride, 1790) and encircled by roads. The House was remodelled and enlarged c 1800 by James Wright Sanderson for J E Liebenrood. The park was laid out in the early to mid C19, probably around the time that the lodge was built (1813-¿28), and the public roads diverted. The site was acquired by Reading Corporation in 1902 and subsequently developed as a public park, with the insertion of sports pitches and associated buildings, and the loss of the walled garden and eastern section of the park to development. Prospect House is now (1998) a restaurant and conference centre.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Prospect Park lies in the western suburbs of Reading, 2km from the town centre. The 46ha park is bounded largely by roads, with the A4 London to Bath road forming the south boundary, and the site of the former Park Hospital at the north-west corner covering what was once the walled garden. The ground slopes up from the largely level south and east areas of the park to Prospect Hill in the north-west corner of the site, on which the House stands. The setting is now urban, with C20 development having encircled what was, in the C19, a country estate, and covered the former east section of the park beyond Liebenrood Road, which was sold for development 1900¿10 (OS 1914). Panoramic views extend south from the south front of the House across the park to urban Reading and distant hills beyond.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach enters from Liebenrood Road, 500m east of the House, along the east drive, truncated by the loss of the east section of the park early in the C20. Formerly the drive entered 400m south-east of the present main entrance, marked by a single-storey, rendered gothic lodge (1813¿28, listed grade II) standing adjacent to the Bath Road, now completely isolated from the park. The original southern portion of the drive is now (1998) lost beneath housing. From Liebenrood Road the drive curves west through the park, lined by the remains of an avenue of trees, past sports pitches to the south, with associated pavilions, and a playground to the north. A spur from the north off Tilehurst Road joins the east drive, entering the park 300m north-east of the House, the entrance formerly marked by a lodge (now gone). The east drive continues west, rising up the gentle slope of Prospect Hill¿s east side, with long views south across the park and beyond to distant hills, arriving at the north front of the House. The drive continues west and north up to the summit of the hill, to the

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site of the former stable block, now a car park, set within The Rookery wood. At one time a service drive, also now gone, gave access west down the hill to the kitchen garden and adjacent lane.

Another former drive entered 300m west of the House off Honey End Lane, running east up the hill past the south side of the kitchen garden to the north front. This was lost when the hospital was constructed, land to the south of the buildings being taken as hospital grounds, but the former entrance is still discernible.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Prospect House (late C18, remodelled c 1800, listed grade II) stands towards the north-west corner of the site, remodelled in Regency style by James Wright Sanderson for J E Liebenrood. It is of two storeys, of stucco, with a greatly projecting centre on the south front supporting an Ionic portico on a raised plinth, flanked by side wings terminated by semi-domed bays. The House, sited towards the top of Prospect Hill, enjoys panoramic and extensive views from the south-west to the south-east. The former stables, sited 50m north of the House, were demolished in the late C20.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The House is surrounded by a semicircle of informal lawn to the west, south and east, planted with mature and semi-mature trees, and reached from the centre of the south front via a small flight of stone steps down from the portico giving access from the garden door. Further steps at either end of the portico give access to the lawn to west and east. The open area of lawn immediately south of the portico, flanked by mature trees including cedars, allows views south down the hillside across the park to the distant hills beyond suburban Reading. It is not fenced from the park beyond, but seems to have been so in the C19 (OS).

North of the House lies The Rookery, an oak woodland on the site of earlier woodland (Rocque, 1761), which occupies the hilltop plateau and contains a network of informal C19 paths, and formerly (OS 1877, 1911) a small pond in the south-east corner (parts may still remain in undergrowth). The woodland stands above the House, separated from it by an earth bank leading down to the drive on the north front. The paths may have been designed to provide views out from the hilltop over what was then countryside.

PARK The park encircles the House to the north, east and south, being largely laid to mown grass with some grass sports pitches, and many mature park trees planted in singles and clumps, with the fragmentary remains of a C19 avenue running south from the House, and another c 350m east of the House running north-north-west/south-south-east across the park. A line of trees runs intermittently along the south boundary, with a thicker belt along the west boundary with Honey End Lane. The narrow area north of The Rookery was incorporated into the park in the early C20 (OS), having previously been divided into two fields. The hillside areas immediately east and south of the House enjoy views beyond the park towards central and western Reading and to the hills beyond to the south. A diagonal path runs from the north-east corner of the park to the south boundary, and the area east of this path was used as allotments during the Second World War until 1949.

KITCHEN GARDEN The former kitchen garden lay 200m west of the House, towards the bottom of the hill, apparently demolished during the construction of the Park Hospital (now gone) 1900-10 (OS 1911). It appears to have been of unusual concentric design, with an almost circular outer wall enclosing a further walled hexagonal enclosure (cf Buscot Park, Oxfordshire qv, for a similar design).

REFERENCES

N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Berkshire* (1966), p 207 Reading Chronicle, 7 March 1986

Maps J Rocque, Map of Berkshire, 1761 T Pride, A topographical map of the Town of Reading and the County adjacent to an extent of 10 miles, 1790

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1883 2nd edition published 1914 3rd edition published 1932 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1877 2nd edition published 1911

Description written: June 1998 Register Inspector: SR Edited: April 2000

Legal

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