

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

OLD WARDEN PARK (INCLUDING THE SWISS GARDEN)

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Name: OLD WARDEN PARK (INCLUDING THE SWISS GARDEN)

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Northill

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Old Warden

District: Central Bedfordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Southill

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.085089

Longitude: -0.33700867

National Grid Reference: TL1404544275

[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden

Grade: II*

List Entry Number: 1000474

Date first listed: 30-Nov-1986

Details

A mid to late C19 country house surrounded by an early C19 landscape park, with picturesque Swiss Garden c 1820s-30s.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Ongley family bought the Old Warden estate in the late C17. Robert, second Lord Ongley, inherited the estate in 1785 and seems to have been responsible for initially laying out the park c 1800-5 (Quarter Sessions Map 1802; OS Drawing 1804-5), during which time the road which ran close to the house was diverted away to the north, creating the current road from Old Warden to Biggleswade on the north boundary. In 1814 Robert, third Lord Ongley (1803-77) inherited the estate, creating the Swiss Garden during the 1820s and 1830s. He is thought to have been inspired by J B Papworth's *Hints on Ornamental Gardening* (1823), and P F Robinson's *Village Architecture* (1830), Robinson being employed to construct the Swiss Chalet c 1825. The garden was much commented upon during the rest of the century (Batey and Lambert 1990).

In 1872 Lord Ongley sold the estate to Joseph Shuttleworth (1819-83) who added features to the Swiss Garden and wider estate, employing Henry Clutton to rebuild the main house 1875-8. The estate was transferred to the Shuttleworth Trust during World War II and since 1976 the Swiss Garden has been leased and administered by Bedfordshire County Council, being extensively restored since 1977. The house is now in commercial use.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Old Warden Park lies 10km south-east of Bedford, on the east edge of the village of Old Warden. The c 172ha park is bounded to the north and west by the Old Warden to Biggleswade road, to the south by the lane from Southill to Old Warden, and to the east by agricultural land. The estate lies on the Greensand Ridge, the house sited on largely level land, with a valley containing the water features to the north-west, and on higher ground

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to the south-west Warden Warren woodland. The setting includes the picturesque village of Old Warden, the buildings rebuilt in the early C19 as a village orné, set amongst trees, with the cottages in varying styles set at different angles and heights, perched on grassy banks. Adjacent to the north lies Ickwell Bury (qv) park, and to the south, Southill Park (qv). Old Warden Airfield is sited on adjacent land to the east, housing the Shuttleworth Collection of old aeroplanes.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The entrances and drive system seem to be partly based on public roads which were closed c 1802 (Quarter Sessions Map 1802) during enclosure of the parish. The main entrance, set back off the north end of the main village street, lies alongside Old Warden Lodge 700m south-west of the house. The two-storey, Tudor-style stone lodge (Henry Clutton 1874, listed grade II) stands in open lawn south of the drive, which is flanked by wooden gates and two sets of square stone piers (Henry Clutton 1874, listed grade II). From here the west drive curves east along the north edge of Warden Warren, overlooking the park to the north, and entering it 400m west of the house. The drive curves north-east, passing through the park fence some 50m south-west of the house, before crossing a sunken fence to arrive at the carriage sweep on the south front. The carriage sweep, set within a level lawn parallel with the south front, overlooks a spur from the west drive which continues east as a sunken carriageway with a fence on the north side. Thus the view into the park from the south front is unbroken. The drive continues east from the south front, to provide access to the nearby stable yard. The east drive also arrives at this point, having crossed the park from the east, giving access from farm land and the Biggleswade road.

The north drive is marked by the Ickwell Lodge (Henry Clutton 1874, listed grade II), lying 600m north of the house, giving access from Ickwell and Biggleswade. The lodge, again in Tudor style, lies on the west side of the entrance which is flanked by two stone piers (identical in style to the secondary ones by Old Warden Lodge) and attached stone screen (Henry Clutton 1874, listed grade II). The north drive curves south across the park, through the remains of a copper beech avenue, overlooking the lakes and top storey of the house (partially obscured by the hillside rising beyond the lakes) in the distance. Having crossed a brick bridge across the west end of the lakes, the drive continues south to join the west drive 100m south-west of the house. The remains of a south-west drive exist in Warden Warren, entered from the south end of the village street opposite the Southill estate's Warden Lodge, past Warren Lodge (early C19, listed grade II), a single-storey thatched and colourwashed cottage ornée. The drive from here serpentine north-east through Warren Wood, emerging into the park 400m south-west of the house, to join the west drive 250m from the house. Southill Lodge, also an early C19 thatched and colourwashed cottage ornée, lies on the south boundary of Warden Warren, at the south end of a further ride or drive north through the wood, which possibly took in Queen Anne's Tower which stands on the east side of the wood.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Old Warden Park (Henry Clutton 1875-80, listed grade II*), built for Joseph Shuttleworth, lies towards the centre of the park, replacing an earlier house on the same site. The three-storey, Tudor-style, ashlar stone house was built to imitate Gawthorpe Hall (c 1600, qv), the home of the Lancashire Shuttleworths (seemingly no relation), and is approached from the south up a short flight of steps into a porch within the projecting central bay. From here a long view south-east opens up over the park and agricultural land towards distant hills. A door in the north front gives access to the gardens with views towards the village and church to the west. The building is dominated by a massive four-stage clock tower on the north-east corner, with a brick service wing attached to the east side of the house.

The stable block and coach house (Henry Clutton 1875-80, listed grade II), lying 50m east of the house, are in French Gothic style, built of yellow brick with stone dressings. The buildings, arranged in U-plan around a courtyard and now converted to domestic accommodation, are of one storey with attics, entered through a round-headed archway within a low tower at the west corner of the south wing.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The house is edged to the west and north by a gravel path and beyond this terraced lawns bounded by the continuation of the sunk fence which bounds the south entrance court. A path runs north-east from the north front, past a thatched pavilion with rectangular canal and associated garden (possibly early C20), entering a band of pleasure grounds north of the stables and old kitchen garden which lead north to the Swiss Garden at the north-east corner of the park. The pleasure grounds, probably laid out in the 1820s, contain the C18 Basin Pond at the centre (lying 250m north-east of the house), past which the main path leads to the Swiss Garden. The path continues north through open glades and evergreen shrubs, including yews and mature trees, to reach the bridge and underpass (c 1820s, listed grade II). The bridge is

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of brick faced with rough concrete to imitate rusticated stonework, with a terracotta parapet decorated with trefoiled arcading; surrounded by mature yew trees, it is used as access between fields. The path emerges from the gloomy underpass to continue north and east, arriving at the delicate wrought-iron gatescreen (1820s, listed grade II) consisting of a series of archways with double gates, flanked by mature trees, which is the main entrance on the west side of the Swiss Garden. A spur north from this path, shown on the 1883 OS map, runs past a late C19 brick boathouse, around the northern tip of the upper, east lake and along the north bank, arriving at Lakeside Cottage (listed grade II). This, an C18 building with C19 alterations, is timber-framed with colourwashed rendered walls and pointed-arched windows. South-east of the pleasure grounds, and now somewhat cut off from them by late C20 building, lies Bath Orchard, 400m east of the house. This elongated area of three rectangular ponds surrounded by trees, with a path from west to east, is shown c 1800 linked by a path within the pleasure grounds to the house and Basin Pond (Enclosure Map 1800; Quarter Sessions Map 1802).

The Swiss Garden lies on gently undulating terrain, crossed by meandering paths, with many small, separate vistas achieved through screens of shrubs and mature trees around lawns and grassy spaces. Two linked ponds of irregular shape, with islands, are situated in the north-eastern part of the garden: Middle Pond to the north and Upper Pond to the south, with a smaller linked pool further north. The Swiss Cottage (P F Robinson 1825, listed grade II*) lies 100m east of the entrance, towards the centre of the garden, an ornate two-storey octagonal building with a thatched roof, set on a 'curved mound or knoll', as Papworth recommended for some buildings in 'picturesque' settings. The thatched tree shelter lies 50m south-west of the Swiss Cottage, a large oak with thatched roofing around the lower trunk. Close by to the north is a marble tablet (1829-30, listed grade II) carved to imitate an open book, inscribed with a poem (possibly by Lord Ongley) to 'The Forgotten One'. A marble well-head (c 1900, listed grade II) in Italianate style stands nearby to the west. The sunken grotto and fernery (c 1830-3, with later C19 work, listed grade II*) lies 50m north of the Swiss Cottage, of cruciform plan with an iron and glass dome at the intersection and decorated with Pulhamite rockwork of the 1870s. A straight gravel terrace dated 1878 lies 50m north-west of the grotto and fernery, allowing views across the garden to the south and south-east. The Indian Kiosk (1829-30, listed grade II*) overlooks the Middle Pond from the north, consisting of a circular timber building with ornate stained-glass panels, elaborate bark and twig-work decoration and covered by a thatched roof. The Middle Pond has two ornate, hump-backed, cast-iron bridges (1829-30, listed grade II*), one to the north and one to the south; a third bridge (later C19, listed grade II*) crosses the channel between the Middle and Upper Ponds. The Broad Walk, probably contemporary with the terrace (late 1870s), extends for 80m north to south to the south of the Upper Pond, crossed by two cast-iron rose arches and terminated to the south by a large cast-iron urn (later C19, listed grade II) flanked by stone lions. Notable mature trees include natives planted as specimens in the C19, together with a variety of exotics. Further woodland lies to the west and north-west of the Swiss Garden, with views over the lake to the west.

PARK The park is bounded to the south by Warden Warren and The Hassocks woodland, and retains many mature trees, particularly to the south. Two lakes, created c 1800 (Enclosure Map 1800), dominate the park; they lie 300m north of the house but are not visible from it because of the rising land between. The sinuous lakes, created by damming and widening a small stream which enters through woodland north of the Swiss Garden, are divided by a weir towards the west end and dammed beneath the bridge carrying the north drive. West of the bridge a late C20 reservoir, with embanked sides to the north, east and south, covers the site of two further lakes which continued the series down the valley to the west. A C19 red-brick icehouse (listed grade II) lies 190m south-west of the house, set into a circular earth mound and containing a circular brick-lined room with tiers of wooden shelving.

Warden Warren, now largely coniferous woodland, was probably planted c 1800 (Jefferys 1765; Enclosure Map 1800; OSD 1804-5). A building including a tower, possibly a look-out tower, is shown by Jefferys on open land on the site of the current Queen Anne's Tower (1874), which stands on the highest ground within the present wood.

This red-brick building, with circular towers at the corners extending above the stone balustraded parapet, is now (1997) derelict. Four straight rides extend across the wood from it, including one leading along level ground to the north edge of the wood, another very short one extending north-east, aligned on the south front of the house across the park, and the other two extending through the woodland. Keepers Lodge, lying at the east edge of Warden Warren, surrounded by woodland, is a two-storey, timber-framed cottage ornée with leaded windows and a prominent central brick chimney stack, now (1997) derelict.

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KITCHEN GARDEN Two rectangular brick-walled kitchen gardens lie north-east of the house. The older of the two, largely filled with late C20 development (1997), lies 100m from the house, adjacent to the east wall of the stable court. It is shown divided into quarters on the Enclosure and Quarter Sessions Maps (1800 and 1802 respectively), with a lawn surrounding it on three sides, on the perimeter of which runs the pleasure grounds circuit connecting house, Basin Pond and Bath Orchard, and including a perimeter walk around the walled garden itself.

The second walled garden, built c 1913 (*Journal of Horticulture and Home Farmer* 1913), now disused, lies 300m from the house. It has a central path running from south to north, and brick piers marking the entrances.

REFERENCES

Journal of Horticulture and Home Farmer (1913) *Country Life*, 161 (17 February 1977), pp 364-6 M Batey and D Lambert, *The English Garden Tour* (1990), pp 263-5 *The Swiss Garden: A survey of the landscape*, (Debois Landscape Survey Group 1992) *The Swiss Garden*, guidebook, (Bedfordshire County Council 1996)

Maps T Jefferys, *The County of Bedford*, 1765 Enclosure Map, Southill and Part of Warden Parishes, 1800 (Bedfordshire Record Office) Road Order, Quarter Sessions Roll 18 no 6, 1802 (Bedfordshire Record Office) Ordnance Survey Drawing (OSD), sheet 147, surveyed 1804-5 A Bryant, *Map of the County of Bedford?*, 1826 *Map of the Old Warden Estate for Sale*, 1872 (Bedfordshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881 2nd edition published 1901 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: September 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: May 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.