

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

FOLLY FARM

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

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Name:	FOLLY FARM
District:	West Berkshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Sulhamstead
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.414970 Longitude: -1.0943129 National Grid Reference: SU 63081 68828 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000585 Date first listed: 30-Sep-1987

Details

A C17 farmhouse substantially extended twice by Sir Edwin Lutyens in the early C20, surrounded by contemporary formal gardens, also by Lutyens, with planting designs (now simplified) by Gertrude Jekyll. One of the most complex designs produced by the pair, and regarded as one of their best gardens.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

A modest, timber-framed, C17 cottage was gradually enlarged to become a farmhouse, lived in following his retirement in the late C19 by Robert Fenn, a renowned gardener to the Bolingbroke family in Oxfordshire. In 1906 Robert Fenn sold the farm to H H Cochrane who immediately employed Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) to enlarge the house for him. Lutyens, then at the height of his reputation as a fashionable country house architect, produced a relatively small, dolls-house-like extension in late C17 style, and with the help of Miss Jekyll (1843-1932) laid out the first phase of the garden in a simple manner, adjacent to the east and south fronts. Zachary Merton bought Folly Farm in 1912, and employed Lutyens to extend the house to the west in his 'Surrey style'. The former croquet and tennis lawns adjacent to the original south front were replaced by a formal Dutch canal. At the same time a parterre garden was created to the west of the canal garden (adjacent to the extended south front), and from the parterre the axis was extended south as far as the walled kitchen garden. The Sunken Rose Garden was also formed to the south-west of the house. All this was accomplished with planting advice from Miss Jekyll.

Zachary Merton died in December 1915, and his widow let the house to Lutyens for the summer of 1916, when Miss Jekyll was persuaded on a very rare visit out of Surrey to stay. During the 1920s and 1930s the house was owned by the Gilbey family, who employed eight gardeners at Folly Farm. During the Second World War it became a maternity home, reverting to a private residence after the war ended, in which use it remains (1998).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Folly Farm lies in the Kennet Valley, towards the north end of the village of Sulhamstead, 3km south of Theale. The 3ha site is bounded by Sulhamstead lane to the east, much of which boundary is marked by a brick wall with a tiled coping (possibly by Lutyens), and by agricultural land on the other sides. The ground slopes gently down from south-east to north-west towards the distant River Kennet, and the setting is largely rural, with the village houses strung out along the village lane to north and south.

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ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach enters off Sulhamstead lane, through a green-painted, round-arched wooden door set into the brick boundary wall, emerging down two semicircular brick steps into the east side of the small, square, Entrance Court. This court is enclosed by brick walls on three sides, and on the fourth, west side, by the east wall of the house, all of which walls are clothed in wall plants. The court is laid largely with stone paving, with low, clipped box hedges edging the two axial paths set in cruciform pattern, and narrow perimeter borders at the bottom of the walls. The path from the entrance on the east side leads west to the east wall of the house, to an opening onto a curved passage leading to the offset former front door, invisible from the court. The north/south cross path terminates in round-headed brick archways set into the north and south walls of the court, that to the north leading into the Barn Court. Here the axial stone path turns west at the centre of a small, rectangular court, dominated by the black, thatched wooden barn (C18, listed grade II) to the north, and further enclosed by the brick estate wall to the east and the dividing wall with the Entrance Court to the south. The western extension of the path, now with a central herring-bone brick spine and flanked by rose borders, passes between two low brick walls running south from the west end of the barn, and out into a further small, rectangular court dominated on the west side by the timber-framed north-east (C17) wing of the house at the centre of which lies the present front door. A cross path in similar style runs north to a brick-arched gateway set in a brick wall extending west from the north side of the barn, through which access is gained to Lutyens' garage court and the later C20 open court to the west of this.

Vehicular access is via a mid C20 serpentine drive which enters off the lane 50m north-west of the house, rising up a gentle slope between an orchard of dwarf apple trees to arrive at the open courtyard on the north front of the house. This court is enclosed partly by the rear of the 1912 extension, in the north-west wing of which the back door lies. Formerly vehicular access was gained via an entrance off the lane immediately north of the barn, leading into Lutyens' garage court, surrounded on three sides by the garage block (including some residential accommodation) and on the fourth, south side, by the barn.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Folly Farm (c 1650, enlarged Edwin Lutyens 1906 in William and Mary style, and again in 1912 in Neo-Vernacular style, listed grade I) stands towards the north-east corner of the site, overlooking the formal gardens to the west and south. The two-storey country house comprises three distinct sections, joined together by Lutyens.

The C17 north-east, timber-framed wing is joined by its south end to the first of Lutyens' extensions, built in two shades of bricks, vermilion and grey ('the colour of a ripe plum with the bloom on it', Brown 1984), in rectangular form, the south front forming the termination of the central axis through the Canal Garden to the south.

The west wing, attached by Lutyens in 1912 to the west end of his 1906 extension, is of red brick. Here the south front lies adjacent to the Parterre Garden, largely enclosing the Tank Cloister, and the west front, with its extended sleeping balcony, overlooks the Sunken Rose Garden and parallel hedged walk to the north. The Tank Cloister is enclosed on the west and north sides by an L-shaped cloister shaded by the roof of the extension, which sweeps low to cover the brick-pillared walkway below. To the east the Cloister is defined by the west wall of the 1906 extension, encircling the Tank, a rectangular formal pool, bounded to the south by part of the Parterre Garden.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens, approached from various points around the house, lie to the south and west of the house. They are composed of formally laid out, interlinked compartments lying parallel to each other, bounded by informal lawns to the south and west. These compartments are linked by a cross walk which runs along the south front of the house.

The easternmost compartment, entered from the Entrance Court, ascends the long walk south from the Court to the White Garden, along an axial gravel path flanked by lawn, formerly the site of Miss Jekyll's 1906 rhododendron walk. This leads south to the Lime Walk, flanked by mature lime trees, and beyond this to the White Garden which terminates the Walk. This latter small compartment is surrounded by raised brick planters with stone coping, planted with white-flowering shrubs, bounding a perimeter path of stone with a central herring-bone brick spine. The path surrounds a central, stone-edged, rectangular bed, formerly a pool which was filled in in the mid to late C20.

Adjacent to the Lime Walk, to the west, lies the Canal Garden, aligned on the south front of the 1906 extension, constructed c 1912 on the site of former croquet and tennis lawns. Doors from the two wings of the south front lead onto a stone-paved terrace, from which a stone path leads south, flanked by two panels of lawn, to reach the east/west cross path which connects

the adjacent garden compartments. The rectangular, stone-edged canal leads south, flanked by two panels of lawn, across which two parallel stone paths, bordered by clipped yew hedges, lead south from the cross path. The canal is terminated by a curved, stone retaining wall in which are set three outlets for water, topped by a stone balustrade. To either side is a set of stone steps at the south ends of the flanking paths. South of the canal a raised lawn is enclosed by stone paths, that to the west edged with a late C20 laburnum raised hedge. A path leads south from here to the north-east corner of the walled garden.

The Parterre Garden lies west of the Canal Garden, from which it is reached via the east/west cross path down a flight of stone and tile steps. The Parterre Garden contains a square parterre laid to lawn, enclosed and crossed by brick herringbone-pattern, stone-edged paths, aligned to the north on the bay windows and large gable end on the south front of the 1912 extension and to the south on the main entrance to the walled garden. The Parterre Garden is edged by herbaceous and rose borders and backed by clipped yew hedges to the west, south and east. The lawn panels formerly also held herbaceous borders. The central brick and stone path continues south through a central opening in the south side, flanked by borders, continuing beyond these to informal lawn and a flight of semicircular steps giving access to the main entrance to the walled garden to the south.

The Sunken Rose Garden lies adjacent to the west of the Parterre Garden, reached from the west end of the east/west cross path down a flight of stone and tile steps, and also from the south-west corner of the Parterre Garden. This square compartment, laid out geometrically by Lutyens during the second phase of building c 1912, is surrounded by clipped yew hedges, with, at the centre, an octagonal pool containing a stone-edged island planted with lavender. Rose beds encircle the pool, with a brick and stone path around their outer perimeter and beyond this, fitted into the corners of the square, four stepped, stone platforms. The platforms are flanked by brick planters containing further rose bushes, the upper platforms formerly having held wooden benches designed by Lutyens. Parallel to the Rose Garden, to the north, lies a narrow, yew-hedged grass walk directing views from the west-facing balcony of the house to a stone pond, set into stone paving, lying 50m west at the edge of the garden. To the north of this walk lies a small orchard, and to the west of the Sunken Rose Garden a swimming pool, enclosed by clipped yew hedges. To the south an informal lawn, planted with shrub beds, extends down the west side of the walled garden.

KITCHEN GARDEN The square, 0.5ha, brick-walled kitchen garden (Lutyens c 1906, listed grade II) lies c 90m south of the house, largely forming the south boundary of the ornamental garden. The main entrance to the enclosure, set into the centre of the north wall, is aligned on the central axis running south from the Parterre Garden. A set of broad, semicircular stone steps leads up from the south side of the adjacent lawn to a green-painted door (in similar style to that at the main entrance off the lane) set into the brick wall, close to a mature lime tree. A second doorway from the ornamental garden stands at the east end of the north wall, giving access to a path running down the east side of the garden. Further doorways are set into the west and south walls. The ground is largely laid to pasture, with a flower border along the east wall, bounded to the west by the present main path leading south to a range of glasshouses lying against the outer side of the south wall, and associated buildings standing close by. A low range of bothies is built against the outer side of the east wall. South of the walled garden lies a paddock and Lutyens' South Cottages (Lutyens c 1912, listed grade II).

REFERENCES

L Weaver, Houses and gardens by E L Lutyens (1913), pp 275-83 *Country Life*, 52 (28 January 1922), pp 112-19; (4 February 1922), pp 146-53; 157 (15 May 1975), pp 1230-2 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Berkshire* (1966), pp 231-2 J Brown, *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon* (1982), pp 93-5, col pls 13-16 J Brown, *Sir Edwin Lutyens and Miss Jekyll at Folly Farm*, (leaflet 1984) J Brown, *The English Garden in our Time* (1986), pp 64-6

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1913 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1913

Archival items Copies of Jekyll's planting plans are held on microfiche at the National Monuments Record (originals held at Reef Point, USA). Sale particulars, 1920 (Reading Local Studies Library)

Description written: May 1998 Register Inspector: SR Edited: March 2000

Legal

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