

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

FAIRMILE HOSPITAL

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

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FAIRMILE HOSPITAL

Name: FAIRMILE HOSPITAL

County: Oxfordshire

District: South Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Cholsey

County: Oxfordshire

District: South Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: South Stoke

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.568878
Longitude: -1.1368522
National Grid Reference: SU 59921 85909
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001476
Date first listed: 23-Oct-2000

Details

A late C19 asylum with grounds designed by Robert Marnock.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Lunatic Asylum for the County of Berkshire and the Boroughs of Reading and Newbury, later known as Moulsoford Hospital and today (2000) known as Fairmile Hospital, was founded on a previously undeveloped site near Moulsoford Station, Cholsey following the first meeting of the Committee of Visitors in March 1867 (Visitors' Minutes, BRO). The Committee appointed as architect C H Howell, who had previously designed the asylum at Woking, Berkshire (The Builder 1868). Howell was commissioned to design an asylum to accommodate 285 patients, with a chapel, medical superintendent's house, gas works, and farm (Minutes; The Builder 1868). Construction commenced in March 1868 with the appointment of Mansfield, Price and Co of London as contractors. In September 1868 the Visitors remitted the laying out of the grounds to a sub-committee 'to order and superintend the Formation of such Plantations as may be necessary for the protection of the Grounds of the Asylum', while in January 1869 Joseph Harding, a nurseryman of Winterbrook, Wallingford, was appointed to plant hedges and trees on the newly fenced asylum boundaries (Minutes). The asylum buildings, including the chapel and farm, were completed in 1870 and were described in The Builder (2 April 1870). Accounts for July 1871 record a payment of £30 to Robert Marnock (1800?89) for laying out the asylum grounds (Accounts), while the Annual Report for 1872 notes 'the planting of the trees and shrubs on the grounds in front of the Asylum, in continuation of Mr. Marnock's plan'. Gardening and work on the asylum farm, orchard, and vegetable garden formed an important part of the patients' regime, with over fifty patients being thus employed in 1871 (Ann Rep 1871). The farm included over 3 acres (1.25ha) irrigated by sewage.

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The original buildings were extended to the design of C H Howell in 1878 to provide accommodation for a further 500 patients. Further extensions were made by the Nottingham architect G T Hine in 1894 (detached infectious diseases hospital) and 1898 (ward wings), while in 1929-30 a new house for the medical superintendent was built to designs by Willcocks and Greenway of Reading. New accommodation for 100 female patients and an attached staff house were built to designs by C B Willcocks of Reading in 1934, while in the mid and late C20 further buildings have been constructed. Today (2000) the site remains in institutional use.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Fairmile Hospital is situated c 2.5km south of Wallingford and c 1km east of the village of Cholsey, to the south-east of the A329 Reading Road and to the north-west of the River Thames. The c 26ha site comprises c 6ha of airing courts, gardens and pleasure grounds, and c 20ha of kitchen gardens, orchards and paddocks. To the north-west the site is bounded by the A329 road, while to the south-west it adjoins a metalled track, Papist Way, which leads from Cholsey to the River Thames. The site adjoins agricultural land to the north-east, with the boundary being marked by C20 fences. To the south-east it adjoins the flood-plain of the River Thames; a gravelled walk extends across the flood-plain to the river bank. The north-west, south-west, and north-east boundaries are screened by dense plantations of mixed ornamental trees and shrubs which include a high proportion of evergreens. The boundary hedges were formed by Joseph Harding of Wallingford from 1868 (Accounts), while in 1874 the Visitors reported the planting of a belt of shrubbery and trees on the north-west and south-west boundaries (Ann Rep, 1874).

The site is generally level with a bank on the south-east boundary marking a descent to the level of the Thames flood-plain. Enclosed by mature trees and shrubbery to the north-west, north-east, and south-west, there are views south-east across the River Thames to high ground including Goring Heath, Checkendon, and Nuffield Hill.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Fairmile Hospital is approached from the A329 Reading Road to the north-west. The entrance is marked by late C19 low brick quadrant walls with cruciform pierced decoration, which support mid C20 wrought-iron lamps. To the south of the entrance and immediately within the site stands a lodge (listed grade II) which was constructed in 1868-70 to designs by C H Howell. The Gothic-style structure of red and blue brick comprises two storeys under gabled tiled roofs with a flat-roofed round turret to the north. From the entrance the tarmac drive extends c 50m south-east to reach a turning circle below the north-west or entrance facade of the Hospital. The turning circle, which is marked by an outer planting of mature maidenhair trees, encloses an oval-shaped lawn with a central circular bed for seasonal planting. To the north-east of the turning circle a drive extends c 100m to reach the farm and service buildings north-east of the Hospital. An entrance c 190m north-east of the principal entrance leads directly to the farm and service buildings.

A further drive leads south-west from the turning circle through an avenue of mid C20 specimen conifers, and is aligned on the late C19 chapel (listed grade II). The chapel was designed in Gothic style by Howell in 1868. Below its apsidal north-east end the drive divides, passing to the north-west and south-east of the building to reach a late C20 car park to the south-west of the building. The drive to the south-east of the chapel continues parallel to the south-east boundary of the car park through an informal avenue of C19 specimen trees to emerge on Papist Way c 100m south-west of the Hospital. A mid C20 single-storey staff club stands to the east of this drive.

A further entrance c 300m south-south-east of the Hospital leads into the site from Papist Way. A simple field gate gives access to a track which leads c 200m north-east between paddock enclosures, to join a further track which leads south-east from the Hospital to the River Thames. There is further access to the site from the riverside footpath.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Fairmile Hospital (1868-70, listed grade II) is constructed in Tudor-Gothic style to designs by C H Howell with red brick enlivened by blue brick and stone dressings under pitched slate roofs (The Builder 1868). Howell extended the original building in 1878 and it was extended again by G T Hine in 1898 (The Builder 1878, 1898). The Hospital comprises a central range running from north-west to south-east built around two courtyards. Symmetrical wings extend north-east and south-west providing separate accommodation for male (north-east) and female (south-west) patients. Hine's late C19 additions to these wings preserve a symmetrical ground plan. The north-east and south-west wings partly enclose late C19 airing courts for male and female patients. The entrance or north-west facade comprises three storeys with the principal entrance

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placed centrally in a projecting two-storey porch. The north-east range was designed to accommodate administrative offices and accommodation for 'working patients'. The entrance is flanked to the north-east by a four-storey hip-roofed water tower which surmounts an arch leading to a service court, while to the south-west a wing designed as accommodation for the medical superintendent breaks forward and is enlivened with a pyramid-roofed turret.

A single-storey isolation hospital for infectious diseases (today, 2000, a secure unit), stands c 190m north-east of the main hospital; this was built in 1894 to the design of G T Hine (The Builder 1898).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The informal pleasure grounds lie to the north-west of the Hospital, while further walled gardens and airing courts are situated immediately to the north-east, south-east, and south-west of the building.

The pleasure grounds to the north-west of the Hospital are divided into two approximately equal areas by the principal drive. The northern area comprises lawns screened from Reading Road to the north-west by late C19 mixed boundary planting; further mixed shrubberies screen the late C19 farm buildings to the north as well as late C20 single-storey annexes and, beyond the service drive, the service quarters to the south-east. The southern area is also laid out with lawns bounded to the north-west by a late C19 mixed boundary plantation; this returns along the south-west boundary of the site. The lawn is planted with late C19 specimen trees, while c 100m west of the Hospital and immediately south of the lodge, a small flower garden is enclosed by tall privet hedges. Today (2000) used as a therapeutic garden, the garden incorporates a mid C20 glasshouse which is constructed on the site of a late C19 or early C20 glasshouse or conservatory which is shown on the OS map of 1912. The pleasure grounds to the north-west of the Hospital were laid out in the early 1870s to a design by Robert Marnock, the patients being involved in the construction and horticultural work as part of their treatment (Ann Rep 1872).

A late C19 gravel walk running parallel to the north-west boundary of the southern lawn passes to the north-west of the chapel where it divides, one branch leading south and south-east to the chapel. The other continues south-west through the edge of the boundary plantation to reach an area of grass planted with standard apple trees. A small circular concrete pool survives c 100m south-west of the chapel, while a late C20 communications mast stands within a fenced enclosure at the south-west corner of the site. Some 30m south-west of the chapel a two-storey brick house stands in gardens enclosed from the pleasure grounds. To the north-east a gravelled turning circle is enclosed by privet hedges, while to the south-west gardens comprising lawns are enclosed by late C20 board fences. This house was built in 1929-30 to the design of Willcocks and Greenway of Reading as accommodation for the medical superintendent. To the south-east of the former medical superintendent's house and to the south of the chapel a rectangular area of mid or late C20 car park replaces further lawns.

To the east of the drive leading south-west from the turning circle to the chapel, a belt of evergreen shrubbery screens C20 tennis courts which occupy part of the site of the late C19 medical superintendent's garden. A tarmac path to the north-west of the tennis courts, and shrubbery to the south-west, survive from the garden layout shown in 1912 (OS). This garden is separated from a garden south-west of the female patients' day room by a brick wall c 3m high. The day-room garden is laid out with lawns and a single row of lime trees parallel to a gravel walk which runs below the north-west boundary wall. The garden is separated from a service yard to the south-east by C20 railings, a privet hedge, and late C19 brick walls.

Airing courts for male and female patients are situated to the north-east, south-east, and south-west of the Hospital. The courts allocated to each sex are of similar plan. The south-west or female airing court is enclosed to the south-west and south-east by brick walls c 2m high, and to the north-east by the Hospital buildings. The court is divided into two unequal areas by a bank c 15m south-east of the building; a mature horse chestnut is planted on this gentle south-east-facing slope. The smaller, upper area is laid out with a lawn enclosed by tarmac paths to the south-west and south-east. The larger, lower area is similarly laid out with a rectangular lawn surrounded by tarmac paths. To the north-east of this lower area, two small recesses between wings of the Hospital are separated from the airing court by spiked metal railings and gates manufactured by Hayward and Son of Wolverhampton. These inner courts are paved. The south-west airing court and the identical north-east (male) airing court were laid out between 1878 and 1898 when new wings were added to the Hospital by C H Howell and G T Hine (The Builder 1878, 1898); their present arrangement reflects that shown on the early C20 OS map (1912).

A narrow terrace returns along the south-east facade of the female wing and is separated from a further airing court to the east-south-east of the building by spiked metal railings. The east-south-east court is laid out with a rectangular lawn enclosed by

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tarmac paths, which are in turn flanked by narrow sloping panels of lawn below the Hospital buildings. It is enclosed to the south-east by a brick wall c 2m high, and on other sides by Hospital buildings. A late C20 two-storey wing to the north-east separates the lawn from a further area which is today (2000) used as a car park. This area is bounded to the north-east by a recreation room built as an extension to the main building by Hine in 1898. The corresponding area of the east-north-east court retains a brick quadrant wall which linked the south-east boundary wall to a recreation room added to the buildings by C H Howell in 1878; that in the east-south-east court does not survive. The east-south-east and east-north-east courts partly occupy the site of the airing courts constructed by Howell in 1868-70; these were altered as the result of additions to the Hospital in 1878 and 1898. Their present arrangement reflects that shown on the early C20 OS map (1912).

PARK Sports fields and paddocks occupy level ground to the south-east of the Hospital buildings, from which they are separated by a tarmac drive which encloses the buildings to the south-west, south-east, and north-east; this drive was constructed in 1875 (Ann Rep 1875). The grounds to the south-east of the Hospital are divided into two unequal enclosures by a gravelled walk which leads c 500m south-east from the Hospital to the River Thames. The larger, southern enclosure is laid out as a sports pitch and is bounded to the south-west by a two-storey ward block which was constructed in 1934, and to the south-east by a hawthorn hedge which separates it from a paddock. A mid C20 single-storey timber pavilion with a verandah enclosed between a pair of gabled wings stands at the northern corner of the pitch. The sports pitch was developed in the early C20 on the site of a kitchen garden and orchard which was laid out in the early 1870s (OS 1888, 1912). The paddock to the south-east of the sports pitch also formed part of the kitchen garden associated with the Hospital in 1888 (OS). This meadow enclosure is separated from a further paddock to the south-east by a track which leads across the site from Papist Way. The south-east paddock remains pasture with groups of mature ornamental and specimen trees planted adjacent to the south-west boundary. To the south-east the paddock adjoins the River Thames flood-plain.

To the north of the walk leading to the river a further approximately square enclosure accommodates sports pitches. In the late C19 and early C20 (OS 1888, 1912) this area formed part of the farmland associated with the asylum. The walk leading to the river is defined to the south-west by hedges which enclose the sports pitch and paddocks, and to the north-east by C20 wire fences and irregularly spaced mature specimen limes. This walk provided access both to the asylum farmland and to the riverside walk which was used as a place of exercise for some patients (Ann Rep 1872).

KITCHEN GARDEN The approximately square sports pitch to the south-east of the Hospital occupies the site of the late C19 kitchen garden. Enclosed by hawthorn hedges (ibid), the garden was divided by paths into quarters and planted with fruit trees (ibid; OS 1888). Further areas of productive garden were situated immediately to the south-east in an area which is today (2000) paddock (OS 1888). By 1912 (OS) the orchard to the south-east of the Hospital had been removed and a new area c 40m north-east of the male patients' wing was planted as an orchard. Today (2000) this area is partly covered by a late C20 laundry building, while c 60m north-east of the Hospital a single mature walnut survives in an area of mown grass.

Tanks c 270m east of the Hospital survive from the late C19 and early C20 sewage irrigation system. Three meadow enclosures c 300m east of the Hospital were irrigated with sewage for vegetable production (Ann Rep 1871). By 1873, 264 sacks of potatoes were being produced in addition to unspecified vegetables (Ann Rep 1873).

The buildings of the asylum farm survive c 70m north of the Hospital. Designed by C H Howell in 1868-70 and constructed in red brick, the farm comprises a pair of Gothic-style cottages fronting Reading Road, behind which lies an approximately U-shaped farmyard enclosed to the north-west, north-east, and south-west by one- and two-storey ranges of buildings. Further one- and two-storey buildings including a cart hovel, pig-sties, workshops, and poultry house are situated parallel to the north-east boundary of the site. The early C20 pig-sties (altered mid C20) replaced a late C19 gas works and gasometer (OS 1888, 1912). In 1873 the asylum farm produced 3628 gallons of milk, 792lb of butter and 35 dozen eggs in addition to pork, beef, veal, and poultry (Ann Rep 1873). The farm also provided therapeutic employment for the asylum patients.

REFERENCES

The Builder, (4 April 1868), p 256; (2 April 1870), p 264; (27 April 1878), p 443; (2 July 1898), p 19 Victoria History of the County of Berkshire III, (1923), p 297 N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Berkshire (1966), p 117 Inspector's Report: Fairmile Hospital (RCHME 1992)

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Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1888 2nd edition published 1914 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1912
Illustrations Engraving, Berkshire, Reading, and Newbury Lunatic Asylum [from the north-west], in *The Builder* (2 April 1870)
Archival items Hospital records, 1867-late C20 (private collection) Quarter session records including Minute books of Visitors' Committee 1867-70 (D/XQ1), Accounts and cash books (1867-1911) (D/XQ1/3, 1/4), and Annual Reports 1871-5 (Q/AL 12), are held at the Berkshire Record Office.

Description written: August 2000 Amended: September 2000 Register Inspector: JML Edited: April 2002

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.