

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

LARMER TREE GROUNDS

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Name:	LARMER TREE GROUNDS
District:	Dorset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Farnham
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Tollard Royal
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.951665 Longitude: -2.0833290 National Grid Reference: ST 94243 16918 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000478 Date first listed: 01-Sep-1987

Details

Late C19 pleasure grounds laid out by General Pitt-Rivers for the enjoyment and education of the public.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Larmer Tree Grounds, named after the Larmer Tree, a dead wych elm that stood at the entrance to the gardens, were laid out between 1880 and 1885, by the archaeologist and anthropologist A H L F Pitt-Rivers, for the recreation of the local people. The pleasure grounds contained statues, such as *The Hunter of Early Days* by Boehm (see photograph, c 1900 in Savills 1991), and various exotic buildings, some brought from India, placed here in order to introduce the public to foreign cultures. Works at the Larmer Tree Grounds started in 1880-1, and they were opened to the public in 1885. On a Sunday in July 1886, 400 people visited the pleasure grounds, and in 1893 it had 24,143 visitors (VCH 1987). In 1889 or 1890, Pitt-Rivers opened the nearby King John's House at Tollard Royal (outside the area here registered), a former farmhouse which he had converted into a small museum. It housed an exhibition on the history of pottery and needlework and included a public reading room for the local residents (ibid).

After Pitt-Rivers' death in 1900, as the grounds gradually became less popular, they fell into decay and some of the buildings and structures were demolished. In the late C20 the former Dining Hall of 1896 was extended and converted to a tea room. In the early 1990s, following storm damage, the gardens and several buildings were extensively restored.

The Larmer Tree Grounds remain (2002) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Larmer Tree Grounds were laid out south of the village of Tollard Royal, on land that formed part of the neighbouring Rushmore Park estate (qv), where Pitt-Rivers lived.

The Larmer Tree Grounds, a site of c 5ha, are situated in a rural area to the south of the village of Tollard Royal on Cranborne Chase. The Wiltshire and Dorset county boundary runs through the southern part of the site. Immediately to the south and south-east of the Larmer Tree Grounds is the site of a late C19 public race and golf course (Map of the Rushmore-Larmer

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Golf Links, 1896), now partly in use as a car park and festival site. This area forms part of Rushmore Park, which encloses the Larmer Tree Grounds on all sides.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance lies along the southern boundary, north of the south-western approach to the adjacent Rushmore Park. The entrance is flanked to the east by a lodge or caretaker's cottage, built in 1881, and to the west by the site of the Larmer Tree, now (2002) marked by a small stone pyramid. Opposite the entrance, to its south, is a semicircular lawn enclosed by late C19 park railings lined with a small group of mature trees. From the entrance, and the lawn in front of it, there are extensive views of the Dorset countryside to the south-east, and on clear days the Isle of Wight can be seen in the far distance.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The Larmer Tree Grounds are bounded by a belt of mature shrubs and trees, and in parts a hedge. Within the Grounds the planting is mainly characterised by mature conifers, oak, and yew, with beneath them dense plantations of laurel.

The west and north-west part of the site has an open, informally laid out lawn surrounded by various garden buildings. To the south of the lawn, c 60m north-west of the entrance, stands The Temple (c 1880, listed grade II), an octagonal limestone building with a domed stone roof. South of the Temple, a flight of steps, flanked at the bottom by piers topped with ball finials, leads down into the Dell. The Dell, planted as an ornamental rock and water garden (late C20), consists of a series of small ponds surrounded by a series of walks and steps carved out in the rockwork. The latter lead to a grotto set in the face of the rock, and a rustic arbour called Temple View, so named because it offers a fine view of the Temple to its north. In the centre of the largest pond in the Dell stands a late C19 sculpture of two birds (photograph, c 1900).

To the east of the lawn, c 50m north-north-west of the entrance, stands the Singing Theatre of 1895 (listed grade II), with adjacent to its north, the site of a circular thatched building (OS 1901; photograph, c 1900). The rectangular theatre has a timber frame clad in match-boarding with a galvanised sheet roof. Some 50m to the north stands the Lower Indian Room (listed grade II), an ornamental timber-framed pavilion brought from India in the late C19 and re-erected on the present site in 1897. Adjacent to the west, set in an area enclosed by a laurel hedge, stands a circular thatched rustic arbour of 1882 called The Vista, re-roofed in the late C20. To the south-west stands the General's Room (1899, listed grade II), another ornamental timber-framed pavilion brought over from India. Adjacent to north and south respectively are the stone foundations of an octagonal bandstand and the site of the Upper Indian Room with adjacent thatched rustic arbour (Savills 1991). To the east of the Singing Theatre stands another thatched rustic arbour, called Band View (1886), which formerly offered a view of the bandstand. The rustic arbours were rented out during the late C19 for private picnics.

A series of formal walks, lined by laurel hedges, radiate from the lawn in the western part of the site, leading to small garden enclosures and linking up with the Golden Glade and Laurel Tunnel situated in the far western corner of the site. The Golden Glade, a small open lawn surrounded by woodland, and the Laurel Tunnel (late C19), were restored in the late C20 (ibid). The Tunnel passes the site of a rustic arbour halfway along its length (OS 1901).

The eastern part of the site is also laid out around an open irregular lawn, but this is smaller in size than its western counterpart. The lawn is surrounded by shrubs and trees and an informal walk, laid out in the late C19 and altered in the late C20. Along the northern arm of the walk is the site of the former Hounds' Quarter, a rectangular thatched rustic building, and the site of the Wishing Well (OS 1901; photograph, c 1900). At the east end of the lawn stands the Dining Hall of 1896, now (2002) in use as a tea room following its remodelling in the late 1990s. A short distance to the north-east are the stone footings of the late C19 Oriental Room (photograph, c 1900), demolished in the mid C20. At the west end of the lawn stands a stable block of 1890, now (2002) in use as storage and utility rooms, with to its south a group of birdcages (late C20). From here a path leads to a children's playground (late C20), situated to the rear of the Dining Hall in the south-east part of the site.

REFERENCES

A H L F Pitt Rivers, *A short guide to the Larmer Grounds* (1900) B Jones, *Follies & Grottoes* (1974), p 256 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Wiltshire* (2nd edn 1975), pp 526-7 Victoria History of the County of Wiltshire XIII, (1987), p 82 Larmer Tree Grounds Restoration Plan, (Savills 1991)

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Maps Map of the Rushmore-Larmer Golf Links, 1896 (private collection) Map of Rushmore, The Larmer Grounds, King John's House, and the Museum at Farnham, with the surrounding country, 1900 (private collection)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1901

Archival items Series of photographs of Larmer Tree Grounds, c 1900 (private collection) [copies in Savills 1991]

Description written: August 2002 Amended: September 2002 Register Inspector: FDM Edited: November 2004

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.