

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

KENSINGTON GARDENS

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Name: KENSINGTON GARDENS

County: Greater London Authority

District: City of Westminster (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

County: Greater London Authority

District: Kensington and Chelsea (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.506150
Longitude: -0.18097645
National Grid Reference: TQ 26342 80148
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: I
List Entry Number: 1000340
Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Pleasure grounds and park begun in the late C17 by George London and Henry Wise, incorporating land from Hyde Park, with development from the C18 by Charles Bridgeman and William Forsyth.

NOTE This entry is a summary. Because of the complexity of this site, the standard Register entry format would convey neither an adequate description nor a satisfactory account of the development of the landscape. The user is advised to consult the references given below for more detailed accounts. Many Listed Buildings exist within the site, not all of which have been here referred to. Descriptions of these are to be found in the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Between 1536 and 1689 most of the land that later became Kensington Gardens was part of Hyde Park (qv). In 1689 Nottingham House, later to be named Kensington Palace, was bought from Daniel Finch, Earl of Nottingham as a convenient retreat for William III and Queen Mary. It was considered sufficiently removed from Westminster, yet more accessible than Hampton Court (qv). Christopher Wren (1632-1723) was commissioned to enlarge Nottingham House while George London (d 1714) and Henry Wise (1653-1738), from the nearby Brompton Nurseries, were appointed to carry out works in the grounds, mainly gravelling walks. In 1689 the king's private road (now Rotten Row) was made from Kensington, through Hyde Park to Westminster. The elaborate design of the gardens made to the south of the Palace in 1690 and 1691 are shown on an engraving dated c 1706 (Jacques and van der Horst 1988).

At the beginning of Queen Anne's reign (c 1702) Henry Wise alone was contracted to look after the gardens. Queen Anne removed the box hedges much beloved of Queen Mary. In 1704 Wise took over the kitchen garden and c 12ha of gravel pits

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north of the Palace which were made into a formal wilderness of several quarters, one of them containing a mock mount of evergreens, another a sunken terrace garden. The next year 41ha was taken from Hyde Park. This land, which also became Wise's responsibility, was used as a paddock to accommodate the royal deer and antelopes. By 1711 Wise, whose contract had been renewed five years earlier, considered the garden to be finished. The improvements had been complemented by the addition of ornamental buildings and garden furniture. After 1711 no more building works were undertaken by Queen Anne nor, for many years, by her successor George I.

Between 1689 and 1727 Kensington Palace grew from the nucleus of Nottingham House and had become an important royal residence. In 1726, the year in which he was appointed Royal Gardener (along with Wise), Charles Bridgeman (d 1738) submitted estimates for new works in Kensington Gardens; these were undertaken between 1727 and 1731. Bridgeman created a ha-ha and new wall as a boundary with Hyde Park; constructed the Round Pond and the Long Water or Canal, and laid out the gardens. Most of the work was initiated by George I and completed after his death by George II and Queen Caroline. Queen Anne's flower borders were removed and replaced by lawns, plantations, promenades, and vistas. In 1728 Wise retired and Bridgeman became sole Royal Gardener, continuing working to improve and maintain the gardens. In 1733 Kensington Gardens was open to the public on Sunday nights. Charles Bridgeman died in 1738, the year after Queen Caroline, and Samuel Milward was appointed Chief Gardener at Kensington Palace and St James's Palace (qv). On the death of George II in 1760 Kensington Palace ceased to be the principal royal residence, an important factor in preserving the earlier layout rather than it being redeveloped (LUC 1982).

In 1784 William Forsyth (one of the founder members of the Royal Horticultural Society) was appointed 'Gardener to the King at Kensington' and made a number of changes which included planting quantities of fruit trees in the west part of the Upper Wilderness (to the north of the Palace) and probably introducing a paddock for the royal horses. It is clear from the plans made by Forsyth (Kensington Palace and Gardens, 1787), that the sunk garden made by Wise, most of the Upper Wilderness, and all the serpentine walks had been lost by the mid 1780s.

By the early C19 the gardens were open to the 'respectable' public every day. The increasing public access gave rise to expectations of facilities and entertainment similar to that which could be found in neighbouring Hyde Park. The Victorian and Edwardian period had a great impact on the site, this being a period of partial merging with Hyde Park. The first refreshment room opened in 1855 and the original bandstand in 1869. The number of drinking fountains and public lavatories increased and there was a proliferation of statues and monuments throughout the Victorian period. The 1840s saw the first of a number of nurseries on the site of the Mount which had been removed by this time. The use of the gardens for sheep grazing appears to have begun sometime in the first half of the C19. A particular characteristic of Kensington Gardens which only evolved in the late C19 and early C20 was its association with children, best symbolised by the statue of Peter Pan (1912). The children's playground north of the Palace was established in 1909.

There were few innovations or changes in the period between the two world wars. The basic planting structure remained substantially the same although there were both losses and replacements. From 1919 the Round Pond became increasingly popular as a place for sailing model boats. During the Second World War most of the external and internal railings were removed and enemy bombs destroyed two lodges. In 1953-4 400 trees were felled, including 200 along the Broad Walk. The Broad Walk was replanted between 1972 and 1981 with Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*) and Lime (*Tilia platyphyllos*).

Kensington Gardens remains (1999) a public open space managed by the Royal Parks Agency. The Palace continues to be used as a residence by members of the royal family.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Kensington Gardens is situated in west London immediately to the west of Hyde Park. The gently undulating c 112ha site falls slightly from north to south and is bounded to the north by Bayswater Road and to the east by the West Carriage Drive of Hyde Park. Kensington High Street and Kensington Gore make up the south boundary, and Kensington Palace Green and the rear gardens of houses in Kensington Place Gardens the boundary to the west.

There are a total of twenty-two gateways into Kensington Gardens and, in terms of public use, all except Queen's Gate, Coalbrookdale Gate, and Palace Gate, all to the south of the site, are for pedestrians only. The majority of the lesser entrances

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were constructed by 1890. Many of the actual gates, like the railings, were melted down in 1942 and now have late C20 replacements. Original gates and railings survive at the Magazine.

Kensington Gardens, laid mainly to grass, are crossed by a number of paths which radiate from the gates and from points within the site. There are two major walks: Lancaster Walk which runs north/south across the centre of the site between Lancaster Gate to the north and the Albert Memorial (1872, listed grade I) on the southern boundary; and the Broad Walk which runs north/south between Bayswater (Black Lion Gate) and Knightsbridge (Palace Gate). Both walks are recorded on Bridgeman's plan of 1728 (reproduced in Willis 1977). The early C18 avenue of elms along the Broad Walk was replaced in 1954 with lime trees. Kensington Palace (listed grade I) is set close to the western boundary. The brick-built palace has its origins as a small country house, Nottingham House, built c 1605. After it was bought by William III in 1689 the house was only gradually enlarged and did not become known as Kensington Palace until the C18. To the north of the Palace is the brick-built Orangery (listed grade I) constructed for Queen Anne in 1704. The Orangery was probably designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor, with some revisions by Vanbrugh (Cherry and Pevsner 1991). The west front of the Palace overlooks Kensington Palace Green from which it is separated by tall iron railings. In front of the C18 entrance gates (listed grade II) stands a bronze statue of William III (listed grade II) erected in 1907. The east front of the Palace overlooks lawns and a statue of Queen Victoria. To the north-east of the Palace is the early C20 Sunken Garden, decorated with herbaceous beds, and the Orangery Garden laid out at the same time but in the Dutch Style.

The pleasure grounds to the east of the Broad Walk are dominated by two pieces of water: the c 3ha Round Pond and the Long Water. Both are based on existing bodies of water which are shown on a plan of 1706 attributed to Henry Wise. The plan shows an oblong basin of water to the west and a string of ten pools to the east. Between 1726 and 1728 the basin was enlarged to the shape of the Round Pond. A series of trout pools along the line of the Westbourne were linked to form the Long Water in 1727 (LUC 1982). The broader, longer Serpentine was made in Hyde Park in 1731, and the two were subsequently linked to form one water body. At the north end of the Long Water are the Italian Fountains (listed grade II); constructed in 1860 as part of The Serpentine cleaning works the fountains are set within four pools with elaborate urns. On the south side stone balustrades with carved roundels flank water nymphs attending the cascade down to the Long Water. Overlooking the fountains to the north is the single-storey Italianate shelter (listed grade II) which was built to house the pumping engine for the fountains. To the north-east of the shelter is Queens Anne's Alcove (listed grade II*). Constructed c 1706-7 and moved to this location in 1868, it formerly stood to the south of the Palace.

The west bank of the Long Water is decorated with lawns, trees, and shrubberies amongst which stands Sir George Frampton's statue of Peter Pan (listed grade II*) which was erected in 1912. At the south end of the Long Water is the Serpentine Bridge (listed grade II) which carries the West Carriage Drive (the eastern boundary of the site), with pedestrian access to Hyde Park underneath it. The bridge was constructed 1825-8 by George Rennie who in 1828 brought the two pieces of water to the same level.

REFERENCES

N Cole, *Royal Parks and Gardens of London* (1877), pp 19-24 N Braybrooke, *London Green* (1959), pp 49-100 P Willis, Charles Bridgeman and the English Landscape Garden (1977) Hyde Park, Historical Survey: Report for Royal Parks Agency, (Land Use Consultants 1982) G Williams, *Royal Parks of London* (1987), pp 64-77 D Jacques and A van der Horst, *The Gardens of William and Mary* (1988) B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 3 North West* (1991), pp 471-89 R Church, *London's Royal Parks* (1993), pp 26-30

Maps [reproduced in LUC 1982] Henry Wise (?), *Kensington Palace and Gardens ad Hyde Park*, c 1706, Work 32/312 J Rocque, *Kensington Palace and Gardens and part of Hyde Park*, 1736 W Forsyth, *Kensington Palace and Gardens*, surveyed 1784-7 C and J Greenwood, *Map of London*, surveyed 1824-6, published 1827 J Mann, *Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park*, surveyed 1840, published 1846

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1869 2nd edition published 1894-6 3rd edition published 1916

Description written: December 1999 Amended: January 2000 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: January 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.