

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

THE ROYAL PAVILION, BRIGHTON

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**THE ROYAL PAVILION, BRIGHTON**

Name: THE ROYAL PAVILION, BRIGHTON

District: The City of Brighton and Hove (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.822719  
Longitude: -0.13806552  
National Grid Reference: TQ 31244 04227  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1000205  
Date first listed: 25-Mar-1987

## Details

Gardens surrounding the Royal Pavilion, re-created during the 1980s and early 1990s, originally designed for King George IV by John Nash and laid out between about 1816 and 1825 during construction of the Pavilion.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1786, the Prince of Wales took the lease on Thomas Read Kemp's farmhouse on the site of the present Royal Pavilion. Between 1795 and 1802, while in partnership with John Nash, Humphry Repton (1752-1818) carried out landscape work in the Pavilion grounds for which he was paid £264. The nature of the work is not certain. From 1802 until 1816, the Prince acquired the land which forms the present Royal Pavilion estate. Repton was invited to advise on the site again in November 1805. His Designs for the Pavillion at Brighton, presented in the form of a Red Book, included illustrated proposals both for an Indian-style pavilion and gardens, but neither was executed. The Royal Stables and Riding School (now the Dome and Corn Exchange) were completed by 1808. John Nash built the Royal Pavilion in its present form between 1815 and 1822, and laid out the gardens simultaneously.

After King George IV's death in 1830, William IV continued to use the Pavilion as a royal residence but Queen Victoria was an infrequent visitor and eventually, in 1847(8, had the contents of the Pavilion removed to London or sold. The building survived a government proposal for its demolition and the whole estate was purchased by the town in 1850 to be used as public assembly rooms and gardens. Restoration of its Regency interiors by Brighton Council began formally in October 1950, following the centenary commemorations of the purchase of the Pavilion.

Virtually nothing of Nash's layout survived to the present day. In 1982, in conjunction with a complete refurbishment of the Pavilion, the re-creation of Nash's 1826 layout for the grounds, using documented sources and contemporary plant species, was begun. Restoration works to the gardens in the western boundary area will be completed around the year 2000, in conjunction with refurbishment of the Dome, Corn Exchange and Museum.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The Royal Pavilion estate lies adjacent to the west side of the Steine, Brighton's main, central thoroughfare, and some 300m inland from the seafront. Its 3.3ha are bounded on the Steine by a composition-stone balustrade. This was designed by the Superintendent of Parks, Capt B H MacLaren, in 1921 and constructed several metres inside the line of the C18 boundary to allow for the Steine to be widened. Several of the elm trees formerly

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growing inside the estate survive now as street trees in the Steine's pavement. The boundary balustrade replaced C19 iron railings on top of a bank, which in turn replaced the C18 estate wall and shrubbery. A section of the railings survive as the estate boundary at the south end of the Pavilion in Palace Place.

The estate boundary to the south consists of largely C20 office buildings which replaced William IV's dormitories and Nash's kitchen court with its water tower, both demolished in the C19. The present estate boundary and its shrubbery, several metres inside that of the C19 line, was probably established in the early C20.

To the west, the estate is bounded by a low wall and a wide belt of dense shrubbery which screens the gardens from New Road. Although the plant content has changed, the shrubbery is a surviving feature of Nash's layout. New Road was constructed and opened within the first decade of the C19, replacing the length of East Street which ran immediately past the main entrance front of the Pavilion and which the Prince had received permission to close.

On the north side, the gardens are enclosed by the Corn Exchange, the Dome and the Museum, which form part of the estate of the Royal Pavilion.

The eastern lawns are level and lie some 0.5(0.8m below the pavement level of the Steine. The ground rises across the site towards New Road in a series of gentle undulations. Even when newly constructed, the setting of the Pavilion and its estate was, as now, enclosed within the built-up centre of the town.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main entrances to the gardens are, as they were in the late C18 and early C19, through the North and South Gates. Subsidiary entrances from New Road and Princes Place have been developed since the estate came into public ownership. A pedestrian gate also leads from Palace Place onto the path around the eastern lawns. The main carriage drive, re-created between 1984 and 1987 to Nash's design, enters at the North Gate, loops in a westerly direction to a junction with the drive to the Dome (the Stables) before curving south-eastward to arrive at the grassed turning ellipse and pass under the Pavilion's porte-cochère. The purchase plan of 1850 shows the drive already grassed over and the ellipse with a hard surface. The North Gate (listed grade II) was built by Joseph Good for William IV (probably after a design by Nash). Nash's 1826 plan shows the north entrance marked by a pair of lodges further west on Church Street but the construction of the North Gate in 1832 appears to have re-established the route of the former public road (East Street) as the main approach to the Pavilion. This remained in use until 1992 when the lawns were re-laid up to the Pavilion frontage. The present South Gate (listed grade II) is the third gate to have been built in this position, Good having been responsible for the second in 1831/2. This was replaced in 1921 by Thomas Tyrwhitt's memorial gate commemorating the Indian soldiers tended in the Pavilion, which served as a hospital during the First World War.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** The Royal Pavilion (listed grade I) stands centrally within its gardens, its principal east elevation framed by trees and shrubbery but otherwise open to full view from the Steine. Its western elevation forms, with the Stables and Riding School buildings, a strong three-dimensional composition of which Nash's garden design is an integral part.

In 1787, the architect Henry Holland (1745-1806) created the new Marine Pavilion by adding a central saloon and a new north wing to balance the original farmhouse, which was incorporated as the south wing. Holland's practice carried out further major additions to the Pavilion between 1801 and 1803. John Nash demolished some of Holland's previous additions to construct the present Pavilion which was virtually complete (externally at least) by 1822. The architect William Porden (1755-1822) designed and constructed the Stables and the Riding House (listed grade I) between 1802 and 1808. The Stables were extended eastwards in the early 1830s by Joseph Good. This wing and the building on Church Street were re-modelled for a library and museum in 1877 and altered to their present appearance in 1901. The Dome's porte-cochère, extending into the gardens, was added at this time.

**GARDENS** For the Pavilion grounds, Nash designed a picturesque layout of serpentine walks and drives, sinuous flowery shrubberies and trees dotted casually over open lawns. It is illustrated in his *Views of the Royal Pavilion* published in 1826.

With the exception of the remnant of the Quakers' Croft elm avenue inside the western boundary, a large, hollow elm and possibly a few elms on the southern boundary, nothing has survived of this layout of the early 1820s. A purchase plan of the estate dated 1850 and the 1st edition OS map of 1875 both confirm the garden's existence, showing extensive shrubberies, largely in positions which match the location, if not the exact form, of those shown on Nash's plan. The surviving garden

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accounts (PRO) confirm the quantities of materials and plants brought in and the progress of the work. Subsequent OS editions show the gradual reduction in the number of shrubberies although much of their tree content survived until the resurgence of Dutch elm disease in the 1970s and the great storm of 1987. The present layout and planting of the gardens represents a re-creation of Nash's 1826 plan, modified where site boundary changes have occurred and incorporating subsequent established features and uses.

The lawns to the east and north-east of the Pavilion are enclosed by a perimeter walk below the balustrade whose configuration and associated group of three pools opposite the saloon mirror the ground plan of the Pavilion. The east lawn is the oldest part of the garden. Part of the Steine was enclosed by the Prince in the late C18 to extend the lawn, which was laid out in c 1802 with a perimeter carriage drive and boundary shrubbery by Samuel Lapidge (c 1740-1806). Mixed deciduous and evergreen shrubberies, replanted between 1984 and 1987, now surround the east lawn and frame the Pavilion as Nash intended. Several new tree groups dot the open grass.

The perimeter walk skirts the northern boundary, meeting the pedestrian and vehicle entrances at the North Gate. The north-east lawn was the last to be purchased, in 1816. The walk strikes a serpentine route south towards the Pavilion, through shrubberies with mixed herbaceous planting which reveal and conceal the Pavilion. All the walks and drives are lit with C19 lamp standards and lanterns (listed grade II) and are surfaced with a rolled gravel dressing to restore an early C19 appearance. Lawn and bed edges are protected by low, hooped iron rails, a feature introduced to the site probably in the late C19.

Most of the land to the west of the Pavilion was acquired by the Prince between 1802 and 1806. He purchased the 'Dairy Field' (which he had leased in 1795 to prevent building on the Pavilion's west entrance front), properties on the north side on Church Street and Marlborough Row, the Brighthelmstone Promenade Grove (in the middle of the estate) and Quakers' Croft burial ground (parallel to New Road) with its avenue of elm trees. The shrubbery belt enclosing the western boundary provides privacy from the public road and a setting for the present cafe, established in c 1955. Quakers' Croft elm avenue terminates the lawns to the west. It consists of elms at present, all probably replantings of the C18 avenue.

The central western lawn, defined by the carriage drive, forms the setting for the King's private apartments. Four extensive, sinuous shrubberies, with a high proportion of seasonal, herbaceous perennials, annuals and bulbs border the lawn, framing views both to and from the loggia. The shrubberies are planted to accord with Regency principles as advised by Henry Phillips, a local early C19 horticultural writer and landscape gardener. Grass is allowed to grow to c 150mm to imitate natural, woodland-edge scenery.

A further walk from the Pavilion, past re-created shrubberies and C19 elm and oak trees, leads along the southern boundary to the exit to New Road. The estate's icehouse was located in this extreme south-west corner, its underground chambers shown on a site plan dated 1849.

#### REFERENCES

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Maps Anon, Brighton in 1779 (Brighton Reference Library)

[The following items are all held in the Royal Pavilion Archive.] J Nash, Plan of the Royal Pavilion Estate, (from Views of the Royal Pavilion, 1826) J Marchant, Brighton from an Actual Survey, 1808 Royal Pavilion, Brighton, and Grounds Belonging Thereto, 1849 Pike & Imvey, Brighton from the Latest Survey, 1867 Borough Surveyor, Plan of the Pavilion Estate, 1937 Plan of the estate from Nash's Views, annotated to show land purchase dates, nd

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1912 4th edition published 1932 5th edition published 1938 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1875 2nd edition published 1898 OS 1:500: published 1876 Illustrations J & J Ford, Images of Brighton (1981), Gallery of Prints, nos 381(91) and 503(54)

Archival items An Abstract of the Expenses of the Royal Gardens from 1809 (LS11/1/XC000480), (PRO)

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Description written: July 1998 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: March 2000

## 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.