

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

YORK HOUSE

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

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Name:	YORK HOUSE
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Richmond upon Thames (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
National park:	N/A
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.447490 Longitude: -0.32380904 National Grid Reference: TQ 16579 73388 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001548 Date first listed: 06-Aug-2001

Details

An early C20 garden with C19 elements forming the setting for a C17 town mansion.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

During the reign of Henry VIII the manor of York became Crown property as part of the Honour of Hampton, the manor lands being regularly leased out from the mid C17 until the mid C19. The central block of the present York House dates back to the mid C17 and was built either by the Pitcarnes, who owned the property from 1612 to 1656, or possibly by the next owner Edward Montagu, the second Earl of Manchester (1602-71). By 1661, when the property passed to the Earl of Clarendon, Lord Chancellor to Charles II, and his sons, York House was one of the largest houses in Twickenham. In 1689 York House was bought by Sir Charles Tufton, the property passing on his death in 1708 to his wife, Lady Tufton, who resided there until 1720. As late as the 1740s, York House was known locally as 'Lady Tufton's'. After 1720 York House had a succession of both owners and tenants and some parts of the grounds became detached. The Sale particulars of 1742 described it as 'situate on a rising gravelly soil, fronting the River Thames with a Piece of Meadow Ground before it, having a most beautiful and extensive Prospect every way'; it was sold in 1746 to James Whitchurch. Whitchurch was responsible for reassembling the York House grounds and the boundaries have remained virtually unchanged since. James Webber of Welbeck Street acquired the House in 1788 and improved both it and the grounds. It is described in some detail by Ironside in his *History and Antiquities of Twickenham*, published in 1797.

Louis Stahrenberg, the Austrian Ambassador became the owner in 1796. Both Ironside's description in 1797 and the draft estate map of 1818 record that to the north of the House was a paddock, with a formal kitchen garden adjacent to the east, while to the south of the House lay a lawn with a gravelled terrace walk at its southern end (now the road known as Riverside). To the east of the lawn was an elm grove with serpentine walks, later called The Wilderness (estate map, 1876). A small formal garden lay near the stables on the west side of the lawn. As mentioned in an advertisement in *The Times* of 1817, many additional buildings had been built around the original house: attached and detached offices, coach houses, stabling, a conservatory, a greenhouse,

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and a theatre. The property was sold again in 1818, to the sculptress Anne Seymore Damer (1749-1828). She set up her studio in the gardens and lived in York House until her death. From 1828 until 1864 York House stood empty or was let out to tenants. In 1864 York House was purchased by two directors of Coutts Bank on behalf of Louis Philippe Albert (1838-94), the Comte de Paris and the Orleanist claimant to the French throne. There is no clear evidence as to what alterations took place during his occupation, but the saloon and winter garden were probably added at this time. From 1871 onwards York House again stood empty until it was bought, this time as an entirely freehold property, by Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff in 1876. Grant Duff, who was very fond of gardening, made some alterations to the existing layout, including the transformation of the northern lawn into a croquet lawn. A boathouse was built on the east side of the river meadow (estate map, 1876). In 1897 Louis Philippe Robert, the Duc d'Orleans, bought York House, his birthplace in 1869. He added a new east wing and modernised the House. A high brick wall was erected along the eastern boundary of the river meadow in order to screen it from public view, and the meadow was transformed into a garden with a tennis court and connected to the northern part of the estate with a rustic wooden bridge. A map of 1907 shows that the small formal garden adjacent to the stables had been removed.

In 1906, York House was bought by Sir Ratan Tata, who undertook substantial alterations to the gardens. A sunken garden was laid out south of the House and the former river meadow was converted into a hedged formal garden with a rosery and a substantial fountain brought from Lea Park, near Godalming. Sir Ratan Tata died in 1918 and in 1922 his widow decided to return to India. Before the House was sold an auction lasting five days took place in the grounds, during which much of the garden statuary, such as a carved stone pagoda, a Roman cistern, a lead fountain, a marble well-head dated 1642, and a life-size Venus were sold.

In 1924 York House was acquired by Twickenham Urban District Council and was converted for council use, in which use it remains (2000). The York House gardens became a public open space in perpetuity. Conservation work has recently (late C20) been carried out to restore parts of the grounds to their early C20 layout.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The c 4ha, nearly rectangular site is situated in Twickenham, c 15km south-west of the centre of London and c 800m south-east of Twickenham Station. York House is surrounded on three sides by residential development and is bounded by York Street to the north-west, Sion Road to the north-east, the embankment of the River Thames to the south, St Mary's church to the south-west, and Church Street to the west. The west and north-west boundaries are marked by c 0.5m high brick walls and a belt of mostly evergreen planting, while the boundary along Sion Road and to both sides of Riverside is a high brick wall (listed grade II*). The southern boundary is defined by a balustraded terrace walk planted with mature trees, the Thames Walk, which provides a view south-east across the river to Ham House (qv). The south-west boundary also consists of a high brick wall.

The setting is largely urban, with the river frontage to the south and Ham Lands meadows and playing fields beyond Eel Pie Island. York House is one of a group of significant villa sites located along this stretch of the Thames, including Strawberry Hill (qv), Pope's Grotto (qv), Marble Hill (qv), Orleans House, Ham House (qv), and the houses formerly associated with the Terrace and Buccleuch Gardens, Richmond (qv).

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance lies on York Street to the north-west and consists of imposing wrought-iron gates flanked by pedestrian gates and brick piers (c 1897, listed grade II*) aligned on the main, north-west entrance front of York House. Single oaks are planted to either side behind the piers. An avenue of columnar yews and formal yew hedges frame the view along the formal approach drive which runs south-east to the House. To the south-west is a car park constructed in 1955 on the former site of a Dutch Garden which was probably laid out by Sir Ratan in the early C20, on the site of an earlier orchard (estate map, 1876).

Two further entrances enter the site from the C20 car park off Church Street south-west of the House. A pedestrian entrance to the north-west is marked by a c 1.5m break in the brick wall, while the approach from the west is flanked by two brick piers. In 1876 this was the main entrance, with a carriageway leading to a still extant oval bed to the north of York House; it is now the principal approach for visitors to the municipal offices. An entrance consisting of iron gates with flanking brick piers is situated on Sion Road between the tennis courts and the service yard.

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The southern half of the gardens can be reached either via the footbridge from the House or through iron doors in the high brick wall which borders Riverside. One is situated to the east of the bridge, the other at the western end of the Thames Walk.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING York House (listed grade II*) stands in the north-west half of the site. It is a large, three-storey H-plan house which dates originally from the mid C17 but was remodelled in the early C18, with later alterations and extensions from the mid C19 (east wing) until the mid C20 (office wing to the west). The House is built of red brick with stone quoins and a cemented rusticated ground floor and a hipped roof.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The park consists of two parts divided by Riverside: to the north lies the House and a sunken garden; to the south a formal rose garden with a fountain. The two halves are linked by a brick footbridge with stone balustrade constructed by Sir Ratan Tata in 1911 to replace a former wooden bridge across Riverside.

The sunken garden lies immediately to the south-east of the House and was constructed by Sir Ratan in c 1906. It includes a rectangular, sunken area of lawn and grass banks with brick steps aligned on the central north-west/south-east axis leading to the two raised walks: the Terrace Walk to the north-west and the perimeter walk along the apsidal south-east end of the sunken area. The garden is enclosed to north-east and south-west by high brick walls lined by shrubbery. Each wall has gateways at either end, those to the north providing access to the Terrace Walk along the south-east front of York House. The gateway at the southern end of the south-west wall leads to an overgrown area of shrubbery through which runs the remains of a serpentine path which winds northwards to meet the south-west end of the Terrace Walk. Some 5m from this point lies a small, rectangular pond. The central axis of the sunken garden is extended to the south-east by the brick footbridge (1911). To the north-east of the footbridge, adjacent to the east corner of the sunken garden lies a Japanese Garden, bounded to the south by Riverside. The Garden, which was created by Sir Ratan in the early C20, contains an irregular pond spanned by a wooden bridge (late C20). To the south-west of this bridge stands a single Young's weeping birch, while to the east is an iron sculpture of Venus. The north-west end of the pond is surrounded by a rockery planted with a variety of plants including juniper and heather.

The Japanese Garden is surrounded by woodland currently (2000) planted with a variety of specimen trees and shrubs including Chinese witch hazel, bamboo, cornelian cherry, azalea, and viburnum; these were perhaps intended to form a continuation of the adjacent Japanese features. In the late C19 this wooded area was known as The Wilderness (estate map, 1876). Two branches of the Gokhale Walk (named after a one-time President of the Indian National Congress) wind northwards through the wooded area, joining with another path which runs from the south-east gate of the wall bordering the sunken garden; the path then runs parallel with Sion Road to the junction with the Terrace Walk. To the north-east of this junction are two mid C20 tennis courts which replaced the former kitchen garden. At the south-east side of the tennis courts between Sion Road and the Gokhale Walk lies the service yard with a greenhouse. A rare example of a once ubiquitous style of urinal in cast iron by the Walter Macfarlane Saracen Ironworks, Glasgow stands south of the junction. The perimeter path then runs north-west past the tennis courts to the main entrance on York Street.

Access to the south-east, riverside part of the garden is via the brick footbridge which is approached through iron gates flanked by iron railings. The bridge overlooks York House to the north-west, the Japanese Garden to the north-east, and the riverside garden where the main axis is continued south-east through a simple circular pond to the embankment. This part of the garden, formerly a meadow, was designed in 1897 by the Duc d'Orleans (Cashmore 1990). The garden is laid out along a west-south-west/east-north-east axis which is crossed obliquely at its centre by the principal axis from the House and sunken garden to the north. The central point is marked by the circular pond surrounded by a circular lawn and path, off which lead six regularly spaced openings. A boathouse stands at the east end of the garden, while at the west end is a large fountain. This substantial three-tiered fountain (listed grade II), set behind a lily pond, was bought and erected by Sir Ratan in 1909 and includes a group of life-size sea-nymphs and horses disporting themselves, all of Carrara marble. They are possibly the work of the Italian sculptor Marabitti (fl 1904). The fountain, which was set up to screen a now-demolished warehouse, was restored in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Between the central circular pond and the fountain lies a formal lawn enclosed by topiary yew hedges with mature, mostly evergreen trees beyond. This lawn is mirrored by a similar hedged enclosure to the east of the pond, laid out as a rose garden. The central axis from the sunken garden is continued on the far, south-east side of the pond by a path which leads down stone

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steps to the riverside embankment. The embankment consists of a balustraded terrace drive, the Thames Walk, lined with mature trees and with some mature climbers hanging through the balustrades. The boathouse marks the east end of Thames Walk. The path which branches north-east off the central pond becomes a serpentine woodland walk which joins the eastern lawn after c 40m. A branch north-west off this leads after c 25m to the iron door in the wall bordering Riverside, and after a further c 15m reaches the brick footbridge.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden formerly lay to the north-east of the House, adjacent to Sion Road. It was replaced by two tennis courts after the House became offices in 1924.

REFERENCES

E Ironside, *History and Antiquities of Twickenham* (1797) Sale advertisement, *The Times*, 3 July 1817 T H R Cashmore, *York House, Twickenham* (1990)

Maps Moses Glover, *Map of Isleworth Hundred, 1635* [in Cashmore 1990] J Rocque, *Map of Twenty Miles Around London, surveyed 1741-5, published 1746* Sketch Map of York House, 1818 (Greater London Record Office) [in Cashmore 1990] Map of 1846 [copy on EH file] Estate map, 1876 (Greater London Record Office) [in Cashmore 1990] Plan of House and Grounds, 1907 [in Cashmore 1990]

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1869 2nd edition surveyed 1894-6 1920 edition 1938 edition

Description written: February 2000 Register Inspector: CV and PS Edited: May 2001

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.