

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ST MICHAEL'S CONVENT (formerly PARK HILL)

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

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Name: ST MICHAEL'S CONVENT (formerly PARK HILL)

County: Greater London Authority

District: Lambeth (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.424465

Longitude: -0.11683259

National Grid Reference: TQ 31027 71177

[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1000836

Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

A rare example of a surviving C19 villa garden in south London. This 2ha garden was designed by J B Papworth for William Leaf in the mid C19 and improved by Robert Marnock for Sir Henry Tate in the late C19

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The villa at Park Hill was built in 1835 by J B Papworth for William Leaf. The garden is described by William Keen in 1849 and included a gothic summerhouse, a deep dell arched with massive rockwork, lawns, evergreen shrubs, and a kitchen garden with a wide range of heated glasshouses. The house was modified in 1880 for Sir Henry Tate who also commissioned Robert Marnock (1800-89) to redesign the gardens. A description of the garden was published in Garden magazine in 1886.

Since 1923 Park Hill has been known at St Michael's Convent for the Congregation of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God. A chapel was built to the east of the villa in the mid 1920s and land to the east was sold for redevelopment (mid 1930s) as Benhurst Court.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING St Michael's Convent is situated on a high point to the north of Streatham Common. It is separated from the common by a major road, Streatham Common North, which acts as the southern boundary. The mid 1930s development of Benhurst Court provides the east boundary, and residential development fronting Streatham Common North and the Catholic comprehensive school, Bishop Thomas Grant, the boundary to the west. Property in Belltrees Road forms the boundary to the north. The main garden lies to the west of a north/south terrace and slopes gently to the west.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The approach drive from Streatham Common North leads past the lodge house through C19 wrought-iron entrance gates (listed grade II) and curves first west and then north-west through shrubberies and lawn up to the house (listed grade II), where it passes through the porte-cochère before curving south and east to rejoin the approach drive. In 1864 the OS 1st edition shows two drives sharing the same entrance gates, one curving in an arc around the west front of the house, the second curving past the east front before joining up with the main path. In 1886 the approach was described as a broad stretch of lawn uninterrupted except by fine trees, some of which were a remarkable size.

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A large part of the ground to the east was built over c 1950 and trees and shrubs screen the front of the house from the road.
PRINCIPAL BUILDING The two-storey stucco villa was built c 1835 for William Leaf by J B Papworth. The protostyle porch had a classical porte-cochère added in 1880. The Conservatory that was attached to the north side of the house and housed the mid C19 Pulhamite rockwork and a fernery was damaged during the Second World War and has since been replaced by a modern building.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The pleasure grounds lie on the west side of the house and are approached from a path 10m to the west of the porte-cochère. The path leads up a flight of three steps flanked by sphinxes to a terrace c 74m long which runs north/south and is supported to the west by a mid C19 low stuccoed wall with square plinths bearing krater-shaped urns set at intervals along its length. Three flights of steps, each flanked by sphinxes on plinths, lead down from the terrace to the garden. The terrace walls, steps, and the small Doric summerhouse at the north end are all listed grade II.

A high yew hedge partially screens the late C20 domestic buildings to the north-east of the terrace, but not the mid C20 additions to the villa to the east.

Below the terrace the main lawn slopes gently to the west with mature trees, including the remains of an orchard (c 1930s) divided from the main lawn by a low hedge, two Wellingtonias, and a large oak. Holm oaks and hollies thrive in the garden especially on the southern boundary. A small lake is set at the south-west corner of the lawn.

Parallel paths run east/west to the north of the site, one through the remains of the kitchen garden on the northern boundary and one from the steps at the north end of the terrace between the kitchen garden wall and the remains of the grassed orchard. Some 20m along the path which leads down from the north end of the terrace is a small covered oval seat set against the south side of the kitchen garden wall. Below the lower of the two Wellingtonias is a set of steps leading to a smaller lower lawn. At the steps the east/west path turns to the north and meets up with the path from the kitchen garden; it then continues west until it meets with a wrought-iron gate and stone wall which enclose a small compound. To the south of the path is an octagonal, castellated, Pulhamite gothic castle of the mid C19. Access to the first floor is by way of a flight of stone steps over a gothic arch. The approach to the ground-floor entrance is through the gothic arch. Three gothic windows look out from the first floor over the western boundary wall and into the grounds of the neighbouring school. The remaining three sides have slit openings. The ground floor has a window in the westernmost side and slits in all the others.

A serpentine path leads south away from the castle, separated from the western boundary wall by evergreen trees and shrubs. This path is paved with stone slabs, some of them obviously reused. Part way along the path divides around a small bed and then continues until the scene changes with Pulhamite rocks (mid C19) made to resemble a gorge, topped with a pretty wrought-iron bridge to the east. An unpaved path leads from the main lawn to the east, under the bridge, the path bordered to the south by stone-edged rills. The artificial stonework continues to the south with a small cave and a niche on the west side.

The serpentine path passes through the rockwork and continues to the south where it runs along the side of an irregular piece of water (mid C19) bordered with bamboo. To the south-west of the water the path, which is edged with industrial slag or furnace blocks, leads to a mound from which there is a fine view of the house and the rockwork to the north-west. Shortly after leaving the mound, the serpentine path turns east and continues parallel with the adjacent road, Streatham Common North. Much of the boundary planting of evergreen trees and shrubs to the west and south, which were described in the Garden in 1886, remain and help to screen the garden from the school and the road. As the path nears the house it branches to the north where it circles a round bed with an interesting collection of ornamental trees and shrubs before continuing east to join up with the south path and the main drive.

KITCHEN GARDEN To the north-east of the terrace and north of the house are the remains of the walled kitchen gardens but the Vineries and Hot Houses described in 1849 and 1886 (Keane; Garden) have been replaced by modern domestic buildings.

REFERENCES

W Keane, *The Beauties of Surrey* (1849), pp 81-4 *Garden* 29, (1886), pp 568-9 *Garden History* 16, no 1 (Spring 1988), pp 96-7
Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1865 1933 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1891

Description written: February 1997 Amended: May 1998 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: July 2001

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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.