

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BELGRAVE HALL

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Name:	BELGRAVE HALL
District:	City of Leicester (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.659293 Longitude: -1.1253108 National Grid Reference: SK 59260 07200 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001620 Date first listed: 11-Jun-2002

Details

A Queen Anne-style house built in 1709, with accompanying walled gardens which were extended in 1721 and further developed in the late C19, before being opened as public gardens in 1936.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1709 Edmund Craddock purchased a plot of land in the Leicestershire village of Belgrave where, together with his wife, he erected a hall which was surrounded by walled gardens. Following the death of the Craddocks in 1715, Belgrave Hall was held in trust until 1721 when it was purchased by John and Helen Simons. The Simons also acquired the land to the west of the Hall, on the far side of The Gravel (now known as Church Road), and here they laid out a diminutive park-like garden with a central lawn and shrubbery walks around the perimeter. In 1767 the Simons put the estate up for sale, at which time it was purchased by William Southwell for his brother-in-law, William Vann, the High Sheriff of Leicestershire. When William died in 1772 the estate was divided into two, his son Richard staying in Belgrave Hall whilst William junior built Belgrave House on the land to the west acquired by the Simons. Richard was succeeded at Belgrave Hall in 1796 by his younger brother James and his wife Hannah who remained there until 1844 when she put the property up for sale. The Hall was purchased by John Ellis MP who added a bay window to the back. After John died in 1862, Belgrave Hall passed to William Henry Ellis who sold it in 1868 to his sisters. In 1889 they were able to buy back part of the old park to the west of Church Road from the owners of Belgrave House, thus reuniting the gardens again. Between 1923 and 1936 the estate was owned by Thomas Morley who, in 1936, sold it to Leicester City Council for £10,500, at which time the Council also acquired Belgrave House. From that time onwards the Hall became a museum and the grounds were opened to the public as period and botanical gardens. The site passed from the City to the County Council in 1974 at which time the hedge which created the division in the west gardens was removed. Ownership has since been returned to the City as a result of unitary status. The site remains (2002) in single public ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Belgrave Hall is located c 3.5km north of Leicester city centre. The c 2.5ha site is bounded by Loughborough Road to the east, Thurcaston Road and the Talbot Inn to the north, the River Soar to the west, and St Peter's churchyard, the vicarage, and old allotment ground to the south. The allotment ground has recently (late C20) been converted by the City Council into an extension of the gardens. The level ground is divided into two sections

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by Church Road which connects Thurcaston Road to St Peter's church. The eastern half of the grounds is entirely enclosed by a high red-brick wall while the western section is walled to the east and north, and open to the river in the west.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Both the east and west sections of the garden are entered from Church Road. The walled gardens to the east are approached from Belgrave Hall while the open lawned garden to the west is entered via iron gates set opposite the entrance to Belgrave Hall.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS There are two principal buildings on this site. Belgrave Hall (listed grade II*), which stands on the east side of Church Road, is a red-brick, Queen Anne-style gentleman's residence, constructed in three storeys with projecting bays flanking the entrance porch on the west front. It was built for Edmund Craddock in 1709. The garden front to the east has a large bay at ground-floor level, added to the property in the 1840s by John Ellis. The northern boundary wall incorporates a row of service buildings, now (2002) known as Cross Corners.

Belgrave House (listed grade II) stands on the west side of Church Road and is an Adam-style three-storey building of red brick under a slate roof. The entrance front faces onto Church Road while the garden front, with its three-storey central bay, faces west over the gardens looking towards the River Soar. On the south side of the House is a long, two-storey range of service buildings.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS There are two separate areas of gardens: the east gardens and the west gardens.

The east gardens, associated with Belgrave Hall, are all enclosed by high red-brick walls (listed grade II) which are contemporary with the building of the Hall. The gardens are divided by internal walls into formal compartments dating from the creation of the gardens in 1709 and contain urns and statues (including a Statue of Religion, listed grade II*, carved by Roubilliac in 1747). Thus, although the detail of the planting has altered, the framework of these gardens survives from the early C18.

Leading out from the east front a central path is flanked by lawns cut with small beds of annuals, surrounded by a perimeter path running alongside box-edged borders backed by garden walls. Beyond this compartment lie long late C19 herbaceous borders contained by box hedges. The central path leads through the herbaceous borders to a small enclosure at the eastern edge of the gardens, where a monument to Edward Holsworth (listed grade II*), moved here after the Second World War, stands backed by mature yews.

Turning north from the monument a path leads through the northern boundary wall of the central compartments into an informal pool and rock garden, laid out in the late C20 in front of Cross Corners. The existing path however follows the same serpentine route shown on the 1885 OS map at which time the area was laid to lawn enclosed by a path edged with trees and shrubs. Prior to this, in 1845, it was used as a tennis court (Hall curator pers comm, 2002). The south-west end of this compartment is formed by a curved wall with a gateway leading into the working area of the garden where C19 frames and glasshouses survive.

Beyond the south wall enclosing the main gardens is a woodland garden containing some mature specimens including an C18 yew and C19 medlar, and botanical garden, both being late C20 features. Between these two areas is a low C20 glasshouse range which replaced glasshouses shown in this position in the C19 (OS). The 1885 OS map shows the area of the 1970s woodland garden well covered with trees, suggesting a similar character prevailed here in the C19.

The west gardens are mainly laid to lawn around which runs a gravel path set beside mixed shrubberies planted along the north boundary. At the north-west corner the path turns south between mature yews and the bank down to the River Soar on the west boundary. The bank is terraced but covered in overgrown trees and shrubs, in contrast to the carefully controlled character of the planting shown in C19 photographs (Belgrave Hall), which reveal views from the gardens out over the river. A circular summerhouse which stood on the west boundary in 1885 (OS) has recently been moved to the extension of the garden onto the allotment ground. During the C19 clipped yews were added to the open lawn west of Belgrave House (Crooks 2000) although these had been removed by the early C20. The deed of partition prepared in 1777 when Belgrave House was built, described a lawn and summerhouse opposite Belgrave Hall and an orchard on the site of Belgrave House. A brick wall was built to form the partition between the grounds of the two houses and mid C19 photographs (Belgrave Hall) show that the grounds for Belgrave House were laid out with a lawn, serpentine gravel paths, and shrubberies. This character was extended across the whole western garden when the wall was once again removed to create a single garden in the C20.

REFERENCES

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Belgrave Hall, guidebook, (1973) F and P Gapper and S Drury, The Gardens of England Blue Guide (1991) N Pevsner and W Williamson, The Buildings of England: Leicestershire and Rutland (1994) J Crooks, Belgrave Hall Gardens, (Leicester City Council conservation report 2000)

Maps J Coffyn, Map of the Manor and Parish of Belgrave, 1657 (Leicestershire Record Office) J Speed, Map of Leicestershire, 1710 (Leicestershire Record Office) Map of Belgrave Hall Estate and Belgrave House to accompany Sale particulars, 1936 (Leicestershire Record Office)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885 1939 edition

Archival items C19 photographs of Belgrave Hall, House and gardens (Belgrave Hall Museum)

Description written: February 2002 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: October 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.