

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

MENTMORE TOWERS

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

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MENTMORE TOWERS

Name:	MENTMORE TOWERS
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Cheddington
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Mentmore
County:	Hertfordshire
District:	Dacorum (District Authority)
Parish:	Tring Rural
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.863380 Longitude: -0.68743381 National Grid Reference: SP 90480 19125 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000319 Date first listed: 30-Aug-1987

Details

A mid C19 park and garden surrounding a contemporary country house, all by Sir Joseph Paxton, with 1870s-80s additions to park and gardens.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Baron Meyer de Rothschild bought the manor of Mentmore from the trustees of the three daughters of William Harcourt in 1850, having already acquired most of the adjoining land during the 1830s-40s. Rothschild employed Joseph Paxton and Paxton's son-in-law G H Stokes 1851-3, to design a mansion on a grand scale, situated in a prominent, elevated position in the midst of the Vale of Aylesbury, together with an impressive garden and park to complement it, created from unadorned agricultural land. Importantly, it was the first of the grand Rothschild properties to be constructed in the Vale of Aylesbury. The framework of the landscape was established at this time, including roads, avenues, drives, woods and gardens with the house at the heart of the landscape. The nurseryman James Veitch is credited with much of the planting (Inspector's Report 1988). Following the Baron's death in 1874, his daughter, Hannah, married Lord Rosebery in 1878, who expanded the initial layout, extending the garden south of the house into the park, and created a series of gardens in the pleasure grounds east of the house (Debois 1992). A further period of park and woodland planting occurred c 1900, together with the construction of two further lodges. The Rosebery family sold the estate in 1977, when the house and gardens were bought by the World Government of the Age of Enlightenment. A golf course was constructed over much of the park c 1990. The house and gardens have recently (2000) been sold and development proposals are being drawn up.

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DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Mentmore lies 10km north-east of Aylesbury and 5km south of Leighton Buzzard, in the Vale of Aylesbury, 5km north-west of the Chiltern scarp. The 200ha site is bounded by agricultural land, with part of the north boundary defined by the Mentmore to Wing lane and the village of Mentmore. The house stands at the highest point of the site, 30m above the surrounding Vale of Aylesbury, on the top of a low hill, with largely flat parkland surrounding it to the west, south and east, and the pleasure grounds on a spine of land east of the main drive to the house. The setting, much of which was part of the 700ha C19 park (now returned to agricultural usage) surrounded by nine miles of iron fencing, is agricultural with the contemporary Arts and Crafts-style estate village of Mentmore sited at the main entrance, running along the east side of the village green. Distant views from north-east to south-east are dominated by the long scarp of the Chiltern Hills, with the modern Pitstone cement works chimney standing needle-like in the Pitstone gap in the hills to the south-east. Within the wider setting Mentmore Towers is one of seven Rothschild country estates within a 10km radius of Aylesbury, bought, and usually furnished with a new house (of which this is one of the grandest), during the second half of the C19. It is said that the other six houses could all be seen from Mentmore.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance, 350m east of the house, is off the Mentmore to Wing lane, at the junction on the village green with the lane north to Leighton Buzzard. It is marked by Stone Lodge (?George Devey 1879, listed grade II), an ashlar, single-storey building in early C17 style with much ornamentation. The entrance to the drive is flanked by cast-iron gates and railings painted blue and gold, supported by four stone piers (?G H Stokes 1852-4, listed grade II), with an elaborate scrolled crest over the central gates and two large cedars of Lebanon flanking the piers. The gravel drive runs west through the north end of the pleasure grounds with views south-west over the park, curving west towards the house to arrive at a large gravelled courtyard adjacent to the east front of the house enclosed to the north by the servants' wing and to the south by the conservatory.

The southern approach from Cheddington begins 2km south-east of the house, aligned with the south-east, garden front, running north-west straight along the public road, flanked by wide grass verges and a broad avenue of Wellingtonias and other mixed trees. The drive (following the original line of the public road) enters the park at Cheddington Lodge (G Devey 1870-80, listed grade II), a picturesque, thatched, single-storey building lying 1km south-east of the house which closes the great avenue to the south. From here it continues straight through an irregular flanking belt of mixed trees, before turning north towards the pleasure grounds, along whose south boundary it runs having left the belt, before joining the main drive 200m east of the house. Spectacular views of the house suddenly appear across the park from this drive. At Cheddington Lodge the public road turns north to run straight along the double horse chestnut avenue bisecting the east park to the kitchen gardens and village, and the main entrance on the green. A spur off the south drive 500m south-east of the house continues across the west park for 1km, with extensive views of the countryside towards the Chilterns, arriving at Crafton Lodge (G Devey 1870-80, listed grade II), a two-storey brick and half-timbered building with a steeply pitched tiled roof, which marks the entrance from the adjacent hamlet of Crafton with its stud farm (?G H Stokes 1853). A further drive entered the park 1km north-west of the house off the Wing lane, past Wing Lodge, a single-storey, mid to late C19 half-timbered and rendered lodge with steep tiled roofs. This drive, now disused and largely lost at the northern end in the north-west park through which it initially ran, was flanked by a straight double avenue through this part of the park, parts of which avenue still remain. The southern part of the drive still exists on its course through the woodland north of the house, before arriving at the service wing, where it joins the service drive (still in use) which enters north of the church from Wing lane, past the laundry buildings (W P Manning, ?1870s), curving south to the main entrance courtyard.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Mentmore Towers (Sir Joseph Paxton 1852-4, listed grade I) was built on a new site 400m west of the earlier Manor House (mid C18, listed grade II*), on a low but prominent hill close to the north boundary of the site, with long views south and south-east across the park to the distant hills. The house is of light grey Ancaster ashlar, in Jacobethan style, much influenced by the Elizabethan prodigy house Wollaton Hall, Nottinghamshire (qv), of two storeys in a square plan with projecting three-storey corner towers and single-storey wings flanking the entrance courtyard. A large square service wing, with

a central courtyard approached from the service drive to the north, is attached to the north corner. The brick stable courtyard and riding school (G Devey 1869-70) lie 200m north-east of the house, opening onto the Mentmore to Wing lane.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Formal garden features lie close to the house on its three main garden fronts to the north-west, south-west and south-east. A broad gravel path runs along these three fronts on the top terrace, linking the garden features. Originating at the entrance court the path enters the garden at the east corner of the house through a set of French wrought-iron double gates and railings with delicate floral ornamentation (C18, listed grade II), and passes along the side of the conservatory, situated on the east corner of the house, which opens at its south end down a flight of stone steps onto the terrace, overlooking the park and wider landscape. The path returns along the south-west front, and then the north-west front. A further gravel path below the top terrace, separated by a grass bank, runs parallel along the south-east and south-west fronts, having spurred off the main drive east of the courtyard, with two sets of wrought-iron gates and gate piers, one below the gates on the top path at the east corner of the house, the other set below the south corner of the house. Below this path, on the south-east front, a broad grass slope leads down to a wide lawn separating the garden from the park. A long, central flight of broad stone steps leads from the garden door in the centre of the south-east front down the grass slopes to the lawn, with a magnificent view of the park and countryside beyond.

Two adjacent rectangular parterres lie to the north-west and south-west of the house, sited below the great terrace supporting the house. Each parterre is connected with the top terrace by a flight of stone steps and is backed by clipped yew hedges. The parterres are largely screened from the wider landscape by mature trees, particularly cedars of Lebanon, and are supported by large earth banks below their outer edges. The northern of the two parterres is largely laid to lawn, with the original cruciform path pattern visible, emphasised by young fruit trees, and a herbaceous border running around the perimeter. The southern parterre is laid out in an oval pattern of beds edged with a single line of stone flags, surrounding an oval central pond, present in the late C19 (OS 2nd edition map 1900). North of the house densely planted earth banks act as wind breaks and screen the view of the adjacent church from the house and main drive.

The pleasure grounds are detached from the formal garden areas, lying east of the house and south of the main drive which connects the formal garden areas and the house with them. They consist of an informal area of mature trees and lawn which held several formal features added in the 1870s, including a rosery, fernery, aviary and maze, now all gone except the aviary building sited close to the village green. A 1990s shrub garden lies at the north-west end and a C19 arboretum with many fine specimen trees at the south-east end, connected by a grass path through the middle. The west end of the area faces south-west, with views across the park to the house and hills in the distance.

PARK The park is divided into three main sections. The area west of the south drive is largely surrounded by belt planting with substantial spinneys and parkland trees. This area contains a golf course (laid out c 1990), with related structures, ponds and planting in the landscape, together with a clubhouse at the centre of the west park and an access drive from the south-east entering from the main avenue on the Cheddington lane. The east park is bisected by the lane running north from Cheddington Lodge to the village, flanked by a double horse chestnut avenue, with occasional glimpses of the house to the north-west. The west half is pasture; the east half is open arable land. The third park section runs north-west from the house, with the north drive running through it, flanked to the north by The Belt screening the parkland from the Wing lane skirting this area. The golf course also covers this area.

KITCHEN GARDEN The c 5ha brick-walled kitchen gardens, now disused, lie 700m east of the house on an east-facing slope, divided into two sections by a brick wall running from west to east. A 175m long range of derelict glasshouses lies against the west wall of the larger, southern section, with a circular feature c 75m to the east, at the centre of which is a mature walnut tree, aligned with the gabled middle section of the glasshouse range. A rustic cottage orné (G H Stokes 1859, listed grade II), Dairy Cottage, which was the former dairy and dairyman's house, lies close to the lane on the south side of the kitchen gardens.

REFERENCES

Mentmore: A survey of the landscape, (Debois Landscape Survey Group 1992) N Pevsner and E Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (1994), pp 472-6

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Maps The following items are part of the Mentmore Estate papers held at Buckinghamshire Record Office: Mentmore estate map, 1878 (D/RO/4/6/R) Rothschild estate map, nd (D/RO/4/3+4/R) Plan of Mentmore estate showing proposed new trees and plantations, late C19 (D/RO/4/2/R)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885 2nd edition published 1900 1926 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881-2 2nd edition published 1899

Archival items The extensive collection of Mentmore Estate (Rosebery) papers (C19-C20) are held at the Buckinghamshire Record Office (D/RO).

Description written: 1997 Register Inspector: SR Edited: October 1999

This list entry was subject to a Minor Enhancement on 15/07/2020

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.