

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

CRAGSIDE

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

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**CRAGSIDE**

Name: CRAGSIDE

District: Northumberland (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Brinkburn

District: Northumberland (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Rothbury

label.localisation: Latitude: 55.316776  
Longitude: -1.8859095  
National Grid Reference: NU0733902528  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: I  
List Entry Number: 1001046  
Date first listed: 01-Jan-1985

## Details

Gardens, pleasure grounds, parkland, and landscape created from 1863 onwards by William George Armstrong, Lord Armstrong and his wife Margaret.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Cragside was created by Lord Armstrong (1810-1900), the inventor, notable engineer, and founder of the Elswick Engine-Works, Newcastle. The works produced hydraulic cranes, engines, accumulators, bridges, and ordnance. By the 1860s, Armstrong was at the forefront of engineering developments and technological research. During his childhood in the early C19 he had spent holidays in Rothbury, returning for holidays as an adult during the 1830s. By 1863, when Armstrong resigned his government appointments and began to devolve the running of the Elswick works, he started to plan a country retreat in the Debdon valley, and to buy up land to form his own, new, estate.

Initially in 1863, he purchased 20 acres (c 8ha) from Archdeacon Thorpe and started to construct a small house for occasional summer visits, named Cragside from Cragend Hill above the house. This modest, two-storey picturesque lodge, for shooting and fishing parties, was completed in 1866. A priority from the start was planting the surrounding moorland hillsides with trees. Armstrong's wife Margaret (1807-93) was a major partner in the development of the gardens at Cragside, and their first-hand experience at their Newcastle home, Jesmond Dene (qv) was fundamental to Cragside. William Bertram, resident land steward at Cragside until 1903 and Henry Hudson, the head gardener, who started in 1866, supervised the long-term project.

To avoid water shortage in the Debdon Burn, Armstrong dammed the stream to form Tumbleton Lake in 1866. Below, he installed a hydraulic ram to pump water up to a reservoir 200ft (c 60m) above the house. This supplied water to the house, gardens, and conservatories at Cragside Lodge. A further four lakes were created: Blackburn Lake, two lakes at Nelly's Moss, and Debdon Lake (west of the Alnwick Road, outside the area here registered). The latter provided power to a sawmill and generated electricity for the house.

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**CRAGSIDE**

The estate, house, and gardens were developed further. By 1900 the pleasure grounds immediately around the house extended to over 1000 acres (405ha), with a further 700 acres (283ha) of estate farmland and moorland. There were some 40 miles (64km) of drives and footpaths laid out along the burns, crags, and valleys. Masses of rhododendrons were planted on the hillsides, which transformed them with colour (Elliott 1986). A pinetum was planted along the Debdon valley. Armstrong stated that his landscaping was achieved with 'pleasure to me to add to the locality's natural beauty by operations which have given healthy employment to a large section of the population' (National Trust 1992).

Rock gardens consisting of different forms of rockwork were built. One area contained natural boulders, rearranged on-site to create a natural-looking scree between the house and the Debdon Burn. Water from uphill was piped down to form springs, falls, and pools. Level areas of flagged rock slabs, south of the house, were luxuriantly planted. Directly to the north of the house, rockwork was constructed to link eastwards with the quarry which had provided the building stone. The quarry face was extended with large rocks, laid to simulate the natural strata.

The formal gardens were laid out at Cragside Lodge, c 400m west-south-west across the valley from Cragside, alongside the Land Steward and Head Gardener's houses. They included a series of terrace gardens. The upper terrace was furnished with glasshouses and ferneries. The central terrace was set with a dramatic carpet-bedding display and a large Orchard House. The lower terrace was laid out with an Italian Garden and below this was the Kitchen Garden. From the Kitchen Garden, open parkland contrasting with the surrounding rugged, natural landscape extended westwards to Knocklaw.

Lord Armstrong died at Cragside in 1900, his heir being his grandnephew William Watson-Armstrong, first Lord Armstrong of the second creation. Upon his death in 1972 the house with 911 acres (369ha) and two farms was transferred to the National Trust through the National Land Fund and it remains (2001) in their ownership.

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Cragside lies 1.5km north of Rothbury on the B6341, Rothbury to Alnwick road. The designed landscape covers 380ha between two tributaries of the Coquet extending from the Debdon Burn, eastwards to the Black Burn. The Debdon Burn cuts through the Northumberland Sandstone Hills to form a steep and rocky glen. The south boundary follows the B6344, Rothbury to Longframlington road, skirting the steep banks of the hills which make up most of Cragside's grounds. The parkland lies at the south-western extremity of the registered landscape between the B6341 at Knocklaw and the gardens at Cragside Lodge, with the Debdon Burn itself forming its eastern boundary. This parkland area contrasts with the majority of the designed landscape, which consists of wooded pleasure grounds along the glen and eastwards across the hills.

Cragside is set on a dramatic site, situated on a narrow platform cut into the steep valleyside, overlooking the Debdon Burn gorge.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Eight lodges were built at the same time as Cragside in 1863-6, marking various entrance drives from the public roads (B6341, B6344) which form over 5km of the boundary. Dunkirk Lodge, standing 1.4km directly to the south of Cragside, forms the major approach to the entrance front of the house. Reiver's Lodge lies 800m south-west and its drive leads downhill to run parallel to the Dunkirk Lodge drive. The principal entrance to the estate now lies at Debdon, some 900m north-west of Cragside mansion and 450m south of North Lodge.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Cragside (listed grade I), built in 1864, was progressively enlarged between 1869 and 1883 by Norman Shaw (1831-1912). Additions in 1895 are by F Waller, for Sir William George Armstrong, first Lord Armstrong.

Two other building complexes are focal to the design scheme. Cragside Lodge, previously known as Cragside Park House, was the estate office situated on the east side of the B6341. It is surrounded by formal gardens (listed grade II) with an adjacent Clock Tower (1864, listed grade II\*), 110m north-east of Cragside Lodge.

The third complex, to the north of Cragside, is formed by the Stables and Home Farm (c 1864, extended 1892-3, now, 2002, National Trust Visitor Centre, listed grade II), along with estate cottages and an experimental hydraulic silo (c 1895, listed grade II\*).

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** Rock gardens of 1.4ha extend on all sides of Cragside mansion and down to the Pinetum on the west side. To the south the rock platform on which the house is built forms a natural rock garden. To north and

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**CRAGSIDE**

west the rockwork is formed of repositioned boulders, with two cascades, and is closely planted with small planting pockets. These areas have been progressively restored by the National Trust in the 1990s. A rough-flagged path between the rockeries leads southwards to a lawn surrounded by a stone terrace wall.

The pleasure grounds lie between the mansion and the formal gardens at Craggside Lodge, 400m to the west-south-west. They extend to 40ha, being the nucleus of those laid out by Lord Armstrong between 1864 and 1900. Within them the Pinetum is planted along the steep, rocky, Debdon gorge which is crossed by a series of rustic footbridges linking flagged paths, planted with rhododendrons and other flowering shrubs and highlighted by a series of waterfalls. The outstanding tree collection includes North American conifers, Caucasian, Spanish, and Grecian firs. Of a series of five waterfalls shown on the OS 3rd edition (1926), only one remains.

A series of paths criss-cross the gorge, carried across on bridges to link Craggside with Craggside Lodge. The Iron Bridge (listed grade II\*), a steel bridge manufactured in the 1870s by the Elswick Works, spans the gorge 80m north-west of Craggside. On the main footpath to Knocklaw, 220m south-west of Craggside, is a stone footbridge (late C19, listed grade II).

At Craggside Lodge are a series of south-facing, 'High Victorian' terraces and kitchen gardens. These are being progressively reinstated by the National Trust and stand behind a roadside wall (late C19, listed grade II) which screens them from the public road (B6341). The Orchard House and stables (late C19, listed grade II), 60m north-east of Craggside Lodge, is notable for eighty huge earthenware pots on turn-tables set on a massive sandstone terrace. These enabled ease of access to, and even-growth of, the soft fruit grown for the table. On the upper terrace a fernery (late C19, listed grade II) stands 20m north-east of the Orchard House, surviving from a formerly extensive glasshouse complex. The carpet-bedding scheme on the middle terrace has been replanted (Horticulture Week 1995). A late C19 heliograph by Brady & Martin of Newcastle (listed grade II) stands 16m to the south-east of the Orchard House. A dahlia walk lines the southern walk on the terrace, which overlooks the terrace below. This lower terrace comprises a rose arbour and terrace wall (late C19, listed grade II), 15m north-east of Craggside Lodge. These survive from the Italian Garden, which also has a double Italian staircase leading down to the Kitchen Garden. Two chimneys (both late C19 and listed grade II) are situated 100m north-north-west and 420m north-west respectively from the public road and belong to an elaborate ventilation system designed for the Orchard House.

Tumbleton Lake, 450m to the north-west of Craggside, provides a picturesque lakeside setting for the Stables and Home Farm. A boathouse (late C19, listed grade II) lies on its east bank, at the point at which it issues south-east into the Debdon Burn. There is also a Ram House (c 1866, listed grade II) with a restored hydraulic ram.

**PARK** The 30ha parkland is situated on a large area of glacial deposit and lies 400m south-west of Craggside mansion. This intentionally provided a contrast between the resulting smoothness of ground cover, falling towards the Coquet, and the rugged topography of Cragend Hill. The parkland is planted with specimen trees and clumps.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The partially walled kitchen garden lies immediately to the south of the Italian Garden, abutting the roadside wall. It is situated as Craggside Lodge, described above.

**OTHER LAND** Moorland extends to the north and east of the mansion, comprising part of the modern Rothbury Forest, an area of the Northumberland Sandstone Hills that was historically part of Rothbury Forest. Central to this lies Nelly's Moss Lakes, which formed a reservoir for the mansion water supply.

#### REFERENCES

Gardeners' Chronicle, (11 September 1880), p 325; (1 April 1882), pp 436-7 The Garden, (6 October 1900), p 271; (12 January 1901), p 31 N Pevsner and I A Richmond, *The Buildings of England: Northumberland* (1957, reprinted 1974), pp 134-5 Country Life, 146 (18 December 1969), p 1640; (25 December 1969), p 1694; 168 (4 September 1980), p 759 G S Thomas, *Gardens of the National Trust* (1979), pp 72, 82, pl 127 B Elliott, *Victorian Gardens* (1986), p 195 Craggside, Northumberland, *Parks and Gardens guide*, (National Trust 1991) Craggside, Northumberland, guidebook, (National Trust 1992, reprinted 1994) Horticulture Week, (22 June 1995), pp 29-31

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed c 1860, published 1865 3rd edition surveyed 1924, published 1926

Description written: October 2001 Register Inspector: KC Edited: July 2003

## 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.