

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ST JOHN'S COLLEGE

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

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ST JOHN'S COLLEGE

Name:	ST JOHN'S COLLEGE
County:	Oxfordshire
District:	Oxford (District Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.756688 Longitude: -1.2588883 National Grid Reference: SP 51251 06704, SP 51264 06639, SP 51312 06644, SP 51404 06701 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001103 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

College quadrangles and garden, laid out C16-C18.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

St John's College was founded in 1557 by Sir Thomas White, a London merchant and Lord Mayor of London, having obtained from Christ Church in 1555 the site and buildings of St Bernard's College, which he used as the basis for St John's buildings and garden. The southern half of the garden was in the possession of the adjacent Durham College (now Trinity College, also founded in the 1550s) before Henry VIII assigned it in the 1540s to St Bernard's College; c 1558 the dividing wall was built between Trinity College and St John's. The founder seems to have acquired the land for the current gardens, including the President's Garden, before his death in 1567, also completing the buildings of Front Quad which was begun during the C15 as part of St Bernard's. Canterbury Quad, adjacent to the east of Front Quad, was largely built by Archbishop Laud, 1631(6). The garden, of formal layout, ran east from Canterbury Quad as far as Parks Road, being expanded to the north and doubled in size by 1675 (Loggan), and re-landscaped in informal style in the late C18 or early C19. The garden and quadrangles remain part of the college (1997).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING St John's College lies at the centre of Oxford, adjacent to the east side of St Giles, on level ground. The 2ha college is bounded to the north by its own 1990s college buildings, separated from the garden by a high stone wall, and beyond this Museum Road, to the east, adjacent to Parks Road, by a continuation of the stone wall, and to the south by the C16 stone wall which separates St John's from the adjacent Trinity College. The college is set within a group of city centre colleges, the closest of which are Trinity (qv) and Balliol to the south, Wadham (qv) to the east, and Keble to the north.

ENTRANCES, APPROACHES AND QUADRANGLES The college is approached from the west, off St Giles, through an enclosed forecourt defined by a low rubble wall (C16, listed grade II) on the north, west and south sides, with a break in the west wall for access from the road. The raised forecourt lies separated from the college entrance gateway by the parallel public path, and is the only remaining example of a once common feature in St Giles: an enclosed forecourt. The entrance is through the

central tower in the west range of the square Front Quad (C15-C17, listed grade I), enclosed by two-storey stone ranges, with, at the centre of the paved and cobbled open square, a circular panel of lawn, this arrangement being laid out c 1930s (Garden Master pers comm, November 1997). From Front Quad a passageway in the east range gives onto the square Canterbury Quad (1631-6, listed grade I), dominated by two loggias, to west and east, above each of which are two elaborate central niches with statues of Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria. Below each niche is an elaborate archway, the western one giving access from Front Quad and the eastern one giving access to the garden via a passage through the centre of the east range. The two archways are linked by a broad paved path separating two rectangular panels of lawn which otherwise fill the Quad. The fan-vaulted passage through the east range gives onto the south half of the garden, emerging through an ornamented wrought-iron gate and grille set into an ornamental stone archway at the centre of the garden front.

GARDENS The gardens lie east of the college buildings. The almost square Fellows' Garden is surrounded by high stone walls (C16 and later, listed grade II), including the Sprot Wall (dated 1613, built by Edward Sprot, listed grade II) along the north half of the west side, separating the Fellows' Garden from the President's Garden to the west. The southern half of the west side is bounded by the garden front of the east range of Canterbury Quad, with five oriel windows. The entrance tower of Wadham College to the east can be seen, as can the adjacent buildings of Trinity College to the south; otherwise there are no views out of the garden. The Fellows' Garden is divided into two halves by a serpentine path running west to east, connecting with a perimeter path. The southern half contains an open lawn extending east away from the garden front, bounded by a wide variety of ornamental exotic trees and shrub borders, which merges into the northern half, containing a greater concentration of shrub beds and trees enclosing smaller, informal lawns. At the north-west corner is a rock garden, recreated in the late C20 on the site of a mid C19 rock garden by Dean Bidder, a Fellow and Bursar of the college. The northern half of the east edge of the garden is dominated by an informally planted, C17, raised terrace walk, set back from the perimeter wall. The path along the top is flanked by various species of mature trees.

The Fellows' Garden, developed during the C17 (Hollar, 1643; Loggan, 1675), was seemingly doubled in size by the addition of the north half to the existing south half which was divided into three rectangular areas, largely planted with trees in regular formation. By 1675 the north half was separated from the south by a wall, the area to the north having been laid out in formal style, with, at the east end, the raised terraced walk with small bastions at the north and south ends, and a central flight of steps on the west and east sides. This design remained until the late C18, although the terrace appears to have lost its bastions and steps (Davis, 1797). The Fellows' Garden was landscaped in the late C18 or early C19, when the central wall was removed, and the whole area opened up; Sprot's Wall however was retained, separating the Fellows' Garden from the President's Garden.

The President's Garden, lying immediately north-west of the Fellows' Garden, was enclosed at the same time as the north half of the Fellows' Garden. It was laid out in formal style (with topiary pyramids during the late C17 and early C18), in quarters, until the late C18 or early C19. Still enclosed, by stone walls to the north and east, and college buildings to the south and west, it is largely laid to lawn with specimen ornamental trees.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 66 (2 November 1929), pp 606-14 Victoria History of the County of Oxfordshire 3, (1954), pp 251-64 N Pevsner and J Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), pp 194-201 M Batey, *Oxford Gardens* (1982)

Maps Agas/Bereblock, *Map of Oxford*, engraved 1728 from 1578 original Hollar, *Map of Oxford*, 1643 Loggan, *Map of Oxford*, 1675 R Davis, *A New Map of the County of Oxford ...*, 1797 A Bryant, *Map of the County of Oxford ...*, surveyed 1823

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881-2 2nd edition published 1901 1926 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: November 1997 Register Inspector: SR Edited: March 2000

Legal

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