

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ROUSDON

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

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Name: ROUSDON

County: Devon

District: East Devon (District Authority)

Parish: Axmouth

County: Devon

District: East Devon (District Authority)

Parish: Compyne Rousdon

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.708647
Longitude: -3.0017394
National Grid Reference: SY 29364 90369
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001441
Date first listed: 10-Dec-1999

Details

Parkland and pleasure grounds laid out in the 1870s, surrounding a mansion of c 1874-8 designed by the architect Ernest George for Sir Henry William Peek.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Henry William Peek (1825-98) was the son of James Peek of Watcombe in Devon, who made his fortune by importing tea. After he inherited his father's business, Henry rapidly expanded it into groceries, and founded the famous Peek Frean Biscuit factory. In 1868, when he became MP for the mid-Surrey constituency, he bought the Rousdon estate, which consisted of the entire parish of Compyne Rousdon. A few years later, he commissioned the architect Ernest George (1839-1922) to design a mansion and various other estate buildings, including a village school and rectory. Works at Rousdon started in 1872 with the building of the Church of St Pancras, which replaced the ruined chapel of Compyne Rousdon. Subsequently the mansion was built, along with a stable block, three lodges, a model farm, a large walled garden, a summerhouse, a water tower, a pumping station and an engineer's cottage. Gardens were created to the south, east and west of the mansion, surrounded by parkland bounded by a belt of trees. W E Bailey was appointed as head gardener (*Gardeners' Chronicle* 1903). Along the steep, wooded Rousdon Cliffs, a network of paths was created which led down onto the beach at Charton Bay.

In 1938 the Rousdon estate was bought by Allhallows School, and the mansion and various estate buildings were converted and partly extended. In the mid C20 various new school buildings were built on the site. Recently (1999), Allhallows School closed and the site was sold at auction. It is now (1999) in multiple ownership, and there are plans to convert the existing buildings into housing and to build a substantial number of new dwellings on the site.

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In the late C20 the Rousdon Cliffs were designated as a National Nature Reserve, and have since been managed by English Nature.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The mansion and park of Rousdon, a site of c 100 ha, lies in the parish of Compyne Rousdon, along the coast of East Devon, west of Lyme Regis. The main part of the site lies c 500 m above sea level, and slopes gently down in a south-easterly direction towards the steep Rousdon Cliffs. The site offers extensive views to the east over the Dowlands, and to the south over Charton Bay and the English Channel. To the east and west the site is bounded by farmland, while to the north runs the A3052, dividing the site from the village of Rousdon to the north.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the site is situated along the A3052 to the north of the site. It is flanked by stone gate piers, with North Lodge (listed grade II) to its west, and leads to an approach drive. The northern part of the drive has grass verges and late C19 parkland railings to either side. After c 100m it curves to the west leading into an area of woodland, after which it turns back southwards to lead to the forecourt to the north of the mansion. The southern part of the drive is flanked on either side by three square-shaped clumps of trees (platoons), which are surrounded by late C19 parkland railings. The northern part of the drive was formerly laid out in similar fashion (see OS 1st and 2nd editions), with two platoons on each side of the drive, these having since been felled.

There are two secondary entrances to the east and west of the site, each flanked by stone gate piers with decorative wooden gates. Each entrance has a pair of adjoining lodges of the late 1870s: the West Lodges and the East Lodges (listed grade II). These each give access to a straight avenue (or drive) which runs through the centre of the site, along the north side of the mansion. Under the ownership of Allhallows School, the West Lodges were in use as boarding houses and they were extended in the 1950s and 1960s to the north-east, the extension now (1999) screened by a leylandia hedge to the east.

The site can also be approached from the beach via the footpaths at Rousdon Cliffs which lead to the parkland to the south-east of the mansion. There the paths link up with a track that runs along the far eastern boundary of the site and leads up to the East Lodges.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Rousdon mansion (listed grade II*) stands in the centre of the site. It was Ernest George's first major country house (Cherry and Pevsner 1989), and is built of flint rubble with freestone dressings. The roof is covered with plain tiles, with red-brick dressings and tall chimney stacks. The north front has a large timber-framed gable supported on a two-bay arcade which forms a porte-cochère covering the main entrance. The entrance to the mansion lies on the axis of the drive leading to the North Lodge. To the east of the porte-cochère lies the Great Hall with three large windows and a bay window with mullions and transoms. Adjoining to the east stands a large tower with a roof terrace (covered by a pyramidal roof), from which there are extensive views over the park and the sea.

Along the east front are the library and former room of Sir Henry Peek, which windows offer a view of the pleasure grounds and archery lawn on this side of the mansion. The asymmetrical south front has three distinctive bay windows overlooking the park. To the east is a small balcony and an octagonal turret (in the late C19 occupied by Lady Peek), which offer extensive views over the parkland and the sea.

The servants' quarters and adjoining stable block are situated to the west. In the courtyard of the stable block is an octagonal stone fountain. Adjacent, to the south-west of the mansion, stands the former Church of St Pancras (listed grade II*), with to its north a small rectangular churchyard with lych-gate. To the north-west of the mansion is Home Farm, a model estate farm. It has various outbuildings including a barn, slaughterhouse, dog kennels and blacksmith's workshop (listed grade II). Immediately to the north of the mansion is a late C20 sports hall, built for Allhallows School.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the north of the mansion is a walled square courtyard with an entrance flanked by double gate piers and an ornamental wooden gate. The courtyard is now (1999) tarmacked and used as a parking area. In the east wall of the courtyard is another entrance flanked by gate piers that leads to the archery lawn to the east of the mansion. The lawn is surrounded by a clipped yew hedge and a walk and to the north by trees and shrubs. At the eastern end steps lead up to the site of the former Astronomical Observatory, now (1999) partly built over by late C20 boarding houses and a private dwelling. On a large, square-shaped terrace to the south of the archery lawn, on a lower level, stands the 1960s' Lillies Building,

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with to its south two tennis courts. This terrace, which offers extensive views to the sea, was formerly laid out with trees and shrubs and a perimeter walk and formed part of the pleasure grounds (OS 1889).

Along the east and south front of the mansion runs a balustraded terrace, which leads to the Broad Walk to the south. From the Broad Walk there is a fine view towards the decorative entrance of the walled garden to the west, framed by a series of mature pollarded trees which pre-date the late C19 park design. To the south-west of the mansion is an ornamental pond (now, 1999, standing dry), lined with concrete with a stone chert edging. The pond is screened to the south and east by trees and shrubs. As shown on the OS 1st edition (1889) it was formerly crossed by a small footbridge. Adjacent to the pond to the south-west stands the Venning Building of 1962, which covers part of the pleasure grounds and parkland.

PARK The park to the north of the mansion is bounded to the east and west by a belt of trees with a perimeter walk. Along the eastern boundary, c 400 m to the north of the East Lodges, are the remains of a water tower, built by Henry Peek in the late C19 (OS 1889). In the tree belt along the western boundary, south-west of North Lodge, is a pond, now standing dry. The parkland to the south of North Lodge has various clumps of trees and there are three free-standing stones (indicated on the OS 1st and 2nd editions, purpose unknown). Home Farm is situated c 100 m north-west of the mansion, to the south of Farm Road. The land to the north and east of the Farm is partly pasture and partly farmed. To the west of Home Farm is a single dwelling called Rooks Acre. Immediately to the north of the West Lodge is the site of the nursery that formed part of Henry Peek's estate (OS 1889). The parkland to the east of Home Farm has since 1937 been in use as playing fields by Allhallows School, accompanied by a War Memorial Cricket Pavilion, opened in 1953.

The parkland to the south of the mansion slopes southward in the direction of the cliff edge and a disused quarry, (named Old Quarry on the OS 1st edition). The parkland in this area has three substantial clumps of trees surrounded by parkland railings. The south-west corner of the park is bounded by a tree belt with a walk that starts from the south-west corner of the kitchen garden and leads eventually to the cliff to the south. At the end of this walk, halfway along the cliff edge, there is a fine view of the mansion and the kitchen garden to the north, framed by the clumps of trees. To the south-east of the mansion a path (formerly a stream?) leads towards a late C19 stone bridge. The road that runs over the bridge links up with several paths that lead down the wooded Rousdon Cliffs to the beach below. Along the cliff path to the north-east are the remains of a late C19 summerhouse, or bathing house (now, 1999, ruinous). Immediately to its north-east is an area with a circular-shaped stone pond (now filled in) surrounded by mature yew trees. Below stands the chimney of the former Pumping Station, followed further along the path by the remains of the Engineer's Cottage (OS 1889).

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled garden of c 2ha (listed grade II) lies to the west of the mansion, and has since the late C20 been laid out as a sports field. Except for the north wall, which is constructed of stone chert, all walls are constructed of red brick and have large ramped buttresses on the outer sides. The kitchen garden can be entered through the east and west walls. The decorated entrances have moulded brick arches, and are each covered by a porch with a half hipped tile roof, resting on four columns. In the southern wall is a smaller, third entrance with a cast-iron gate, now (1999) blocked due to changes in ground level. The north-east corner of the garden is linked to the former gardener's cottage, from which steps lead into the garden. On the south-west and south-east corners stand two small gazebos with pyramidal roofs. From the gazebos there are fine and extensive views over the park and the sea beyond. Immediately to the north of the walled garden, and to the east of the gardener's cottage, are a series of buildings comprising workshops, potting sheds, and a greenhouse. The latter has a stone chert base with brick coping and dressings, and a mechanical ventilation system by T Neil & Sons of London. This greenhouse is one of the series of greenhouses which were situated in this area. In the late C19 the garden had a formal layout and was divided in four rectangular beds intersected by paths.

REFERENCES

W D Conybeare and Prof Buckland, *Memoirs and Views of landslips on the coast of East Devon* (1840) *The Building News* 26, (1874), pp 693-4 *Gardeners' Chronicle*, i (1903), pp 17-18 J R Winter Coxhead, *The History of Allhallows School*, (2nd edn 1972), pp 41-8 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Devon* (1989), pp 704-6 M Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (1979), p 418 *Trans Devonshire Assoc* 125, (1993), pp 31-47 T Gray, *The Garden History of Devon An Illustrated Guide to Sources* (1995), p 195

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Maps OS 6" to 1 mile 1st edition surveyed 1878, published 1890 2nd edition revised 1903, published 1906 OS 25" to 1 mile 1st edition surveyed 1878, published 1889

Archival items Sale particulars for the Rousdon Estate with photographs and plans, 1937 (62/9/2 box 7/44; 3180Z/E1; 547B/3814i), (Devon Record Office)

Illustrations A large print (undated), a medium-sized print (c 1874) and a small photograph (1898), (West Country Studies Library, Exeter) Aerial photograph of c 1935 (private collection) [reproduced in *Trans Devonshire Assoc* 125, (1993), p 44]

Description written: October 1999 Amended: November 1999 Register Inspector: FDM Edited: September 2000

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.