

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

MELLOR'S GARDENS

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Name:	MELLOR'S GARDENS
District:	Cheshire East (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Rainow
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.283986 Longitude: -2.0814048 National Grid Reference: SJ 94670 76338 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001284 Date first listed: 14-Dec-1993

Details

Pleasure grounds laid out in the mid C19 to a design based on the journey of Christian in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (1678).

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

James Mellor (d 1828) moved to Hough-Hole House with his family in 1796 in order to build a cotton mill a little further down the Ingersley Valley.

The pleasure grounds were laid out around an existing chapel from the 1850s onwards, by James Mellor (b 1795), son of the first James, who lived at Hough-Hole House until his death in 1891. Mellor was a religious man and follower of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a leading C18 philosopher, who believed that the natural world is an allegory of the spiritual world. The garden is designed so that the visitor can enact the journey of Christian in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (1678), from his entrance through the Wicket Gate after fleeing from the City of Destruction, to his eventual arrival at the Celestial City, features of the garden corresponding to the descriptions in the book. The book was chosen to help convey the teachings of Swedenborg, and the visitor's journey through the garden thus represents a spiritual journey; Mellor called it 'a Garden of Correspondence relating to things of the World and Scriptural History' (Garden History 1987, 159). The site became a popular local attraction and was well visited on Sundays and, particularly, Good Fridays.

From the early 1920s the house was occupied by two schoolteachers, the Misses Russell, first as tenants of the Mellor family, then as owners. They planted up the gardens but left the basic design intact. By the time of the death of the second Miss Russell the garden had become overgrown. In 1979 the property was purchased by new owners who carried out an extensive programme of restoration. The garden remains (1990s) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Mellor's Gardens, c 0.8ha, is located to the north-west of the village of Rainow, 4km north-east of Macclesfield, on the western edge of the High Peak District. The gardens, which are roughly triangular in shape, are bordered by Sugar Lane to the south-west, Hough-hole Farm to the north and open farmland to the east.

ENTRANCE AND APPROACHES The entrance to Mellor's Gardens is through a gate off Sugar Lane, which leads north-west off the B5470.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING Hough-Hole House (listed grade II), originally a farmhouse, dates from the late C17. It was altered by James Mellor (d 1828), when he moved here in 1796. Further alterations were carried out c 1980. It is attached to a mill, now converted (late C20) to form part of the house.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS From the entrance gate, the visitor joins the 'Holy Way', first crossing the 'Slough of Despond', on the west side of the house, originally Mellor's vegetable garden but now drained for use as a gravelled drive. A door at the north end of the house leads into the garden proper. Here a route leads round the grounds, the focus of which is a pool. The land to the north of the water rises steeply; to the south is an informal area of lawn.

The first feature the path leads to is the stone-built stables, standing to the east of the house, which were intended to represent the 'House of the Interpreter'. Steps lead up the west-facing slope, the path leading to a cross, now just a shaft, and the 'Cave of the Holy Sepulchre', represented by a hole down through the dam, into which Christian's burden fell. Here also is a glazed summerhouse (extensively restored) which stands beside the mill pool.

The path leads along the northern edge of the water, with steeply rising land to the north. A choice of routes is then offered by way of three sets of rough stone steps, that to the left being the path of 'Destruction', that to the right, 'Danger', whilst the central flight leads to the 'Arbour', and beyond that, the 'Hill Difficulty'. From the summit of the 'Hill', at the north-east corner of the site, there is a view back south-west to the 'Palace Beautiful', the back of Hough-Hole House.

A path leads down the eastern boundary, over the 'Wobbly Bridge' which crosses the stream which feeds the lake. The Lodge is represented by the stone potting shed which stands at the east end of the mill pool, but in this part of the garden a second theme comes in, and the shed doubles as 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' (Uncle Tom's Cabin was published in 1852). The 'Wobbly Bridge' is intended to symbolise the breaking ice of the Ohio river, over which Eliza escaped with her baby from slavery in one of the Uncle Tom stories. A second bridge provides a safer route.

From the shed there are views west, past a pool which lies to the east of the house below the level of the dam. The path continues along the south side of the pool, through the 'Valley of Humiliation' and the 'Valley of the Shadow of Death', and so past the 'Mouth of Hell', a niche to the side of the path, and the 'Cave at the end of the Valley', an opening covered by a wooden hatch over the sluice of the mill pond. From here it continues to 'Vanity Fayre', the area behind the former mill.

Returning, the path crosses the 'Plain of Ease', with the 'Hill Lucre' being the grass bank of the dam. 'Lot's Wife', a plain black pillar, now lacking its accompanying inscription, stands at the southern end of the dam, along which the path leads north, through the 'Meadow by the River of God', to a flight of steps up the south-facing bank. At the top of the slope is a walk westwards to steps leading up to a level lawn, 'By-path Meadow', which doubled as Mellor's tennis court.

In the original scheme a path led across this, out of the gardens, to Hough-hole Farm, the 'Doubting Castle', which lies 300m to the north-west (outside the boundary here registered). Back down from the Meadow, the path takes the visitor down a steep grassy bank with an artificial mound. This represents the 'Delectable Mountains', Christian having been shown a graveyard from Mount Caution, where men, blinded by 'Giant Dispair', were stumbling amongst the tombstones. The Mount at Hough-Hole also looks down to a graveyard.

The next feature is a south-facing stone-built summerhouse, the 'Howling House', equipped with an unglazed window slot to allow a breeze to play an Aeolian Harp, and fitted with a fireplace which appears to have allowed smoke to fill up the room. To the west of this is an area representing the 'Country of Beulah', where stand three pedestal tombs (all listed grade II) carved with long inscriptions, and the graves of several of the Mellor family. Mellor carved the gravestones himself, including his own (date omitted), and printed his own funeral sermon fifteen years before his death, choosing as his text, 'Set thine house in order'. West again, the route crosses the 'Dark River', leading finally, past a sundial (listed grade II), the sandstone capstone of which is carved with the inscription: 'Jemmy, Jemmy mind your own peace', to the 'Celestial City' on 'Mount Sion'. This two-storey building (listed grade II), dated 1844, stands upon a ridge above the entrance court. It was built onto the first floor of a barn, and a steep spiral staircase leads up the outside to provide access to the single room. This was used both as chapel and observatory. On Sundays, Mellor would conduct parties round the garden and preach to them in the Chapel, the goal of the visitors' journey round the garden. Over its door is inscribed: 'With all thy getting, get understanding'.

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In addition to the allusions to Pilgrim's Progress, each part of the gardens was given a biblical name. The mill pool was known as the Pool of Siloam, the set of steps up the dam by the overflow, Jacob's Ladder, and the main slope to the north-west of the house, Mounts Gerizim, Pisgah and Nebo.

The garden was planted primarily with flowers and shrubs mentioned in the Bible, for example, two Robinias, and a vine near the inscription 'Mount Carmel, Vineyard of God'. Sixteen inscribed stones survive in the garden, with a mixture of biblical quotations and pieces of family history, but a number of other features, such as the wooden posts painted with the names of the tribes of Israel, have gone.

REFERENCES

Country Life, no 51 (December 17 1987), pp 44-7 Garden History 15, no 2 (1987), pp 157-166 R C Turner, Mellor's Gardens (1989)

Maps Tithe map Rainow, 1850 (EDT 339/1-2),(Cheshire Record Office)

Description written: February 1999 Register Inspector: CB Edited: April 1999

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.