

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

NAPSBURY HOSPITAL

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Name: NAPSBURY HOSPITAL

County: Hertfordshire

District: St. Albans (District Authority)

Parish: London Colney

County: Hertfordshire

District: St. Albans (District Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.723787
Longitude: -0.31206101
National Grid Reference: TL 16686 04133
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001400
Date first listed: 26-Aug-1998

Details

An echelon-style mental asylum, designed in 1900 and opened in 1905, surrounded by grounds in informal style designed c 1902 by William Goldring.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Middlesex County Asylum, Napsbury (as it was known until c 1930) was designed in 1900 by Rowland Plumbe to supplement the County Council's Springfield Asylum in Wandsworth, the agricultural estate of Napsbury Manor Farm having been acquired for this purpose in 1898. Plumbe produced a design to accommodate 1152 patients, based on a visit to various Scottish asylums, some of which had developed a type of asylum plan based on the continental colony system. As a result, Plumbe's design (innovative in England) included detached, villa-style wards for private and pauper patients scattered in the grounds, used in tandem with the main complex laid out in a dog-leg echelon. A further innovation was the provision of a separate, substantial admissions hospital close to the main entrance to the site.

The prominent landscape designer and garden writer William Goldring (1854-1919) laid out the grounds (Order of Service and Proceedings ..., 1905) 1902-5, incorporating existing trees to help create a mature landscape setting for the new buildings. His informal design took into account the Suggestions and Instructions of the Commissioners in Lunacy (revised 1898), and was surrounded by associated farmland. This is thought to be Goldring's only complete, surviving hospital landscape design and is one of only two known examples of public landscapes designed by him.

In 1908 Plumbe designed an extension to accommodate a further 600 patients, and a nurses' home was added in the 1920s/30s. The former admissions building was partly demolished in the 1990s. The hospital is to be closed c 2000.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Napsbury Hospital lies on the southern edge of St Albans, 3km from the town centre, and adjacent to the suburb of London Colney lying to the east. The c 100ha site is bounded to the east and north by the B5378 Shenley Lane, to the west partly by the main London to St Albans railway line and on the other sides by agricultural land which was formerly part of the hospital site. The land is largely level, with a slight slope to the south, and views south across the M25 (not visible) and agricultural land beyond, to the ornamental water tower of the former Shenley asylum standing at the top of a distant north-facing hillside. Views also extend south from the elevated ground at the north end of the north park, over the hospital grounds and beyond to the Shenley hillside. The setting is agricultural and urban.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main, east entrance lies at the centre of the east side of the site, off the B5378, c 500m east of the north front of the main asylum, marked on the north side by the two-storey Arts and Crafts-style brick and rendered East Lodge. A substantial oak gateway formerly stood at the entrance, with tall wooden gate piers, surmounted by lanterns, supporting wooden carriage gates, these flanked by pedestrian gates and ornamental fencing (Order of Service and Proceedings ... , 1905). From here the drive, lined to the north by a single line of red horse chestnuts, curves west, passing to the north of the former admissions hospital. A spur south encircles the building, giving access to a villa ward standing 100m south-east of the admissions block. The main drive, here flanked by mature trees and shrubs, continues west, past a villa to the north, to the main asylum. A carriage sweep off the drive encloses a semicircular lawn planted with mature trees including a copper beech, and leads to a stone porte-cochère below a brick clock tower at the centre of the administrative block. The main drive continues westwards, past a clump of Scots pines and two villas standing adjacent to each other to the north. From here a lawn opens up to the north, the drive running along its south side and terminating at the south side of the former isolation hospital, 300m north-west of the north front of the main asylum.

The former southern approach enters the southern farmland as a track off Shenley Lane, 1km south-east of the main asylum. This runs west for c 250m before turning north-west adjacent to South Lodge (c 1905), a building similar in style to East Lodge, standing isolated in farmland. From here the former drive, now (1998) a track, leads north-west through the fields, entering the ornamental landscape 400m south-east of the north front of the main asylum. From this point on, still in use, it continues along the east side of the former men's airing courts, joining the east drive 200m east of the north front of the main asylum. A spur west off the south drive runs past the south front of the main asylum, giving access to the playing fields and nurses' home to the south, formerly (before the 1908 extension) continuing west and north around the outer edge of the grounds to re-join the main west/east drive (Order of Service and Proceedings ... , 1905). This western section remains as a path along the outer, west side of the women's airing courts.

The north drive enters the site c 1km north of the main asylum, off Shenley Lane. North Lodge (1905), built in similar style to East Lodge, stands 150m south-west of this entrance, at the south end of a row of attendants' cottages. From here long views extend south and south-east. The drive runs south-east along the west side of the park, flanked to the west by further staff cottages, the former kitchen garden and the farm buildings, and to the east by the remains of a line of mature trees (mostly limes) set in grass. Colvend, the former Bailiff's house, stands in its own grounds enclosed by mature trees, 450m from the main asylum, at the east side of the drive. From the farm the drive extends south through pasture, partly flanked by trees, to join the east drive 100m north of the north front of the main asylum.

The north and south drives, based on a former straight road to St Albans (OS 1883), were used as the spine of the ground layout, being realigned in serpentine fashion towards the centre of the site to curve around the north-east corner of the main asylum.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS The main asylum (R Plumbe 1900) stands towards the centre of the site, built in echelon form, largely of two storeys in red brick. A central administrative and service block, with a tall water tower, is flanked to the east by the former male accommodation pavilions, linked by a long corridor, and to the west by the former female accommodation pavilions, linked in similar fashion. In 1908 Plumbe extended the female accommodation to the west by adding three further pavilions linked to the original pavilions by an extension of the corridor. The north side of the asylum was designed to accommodate the approaches and entrances, together with service functions, the south, west and east sides overlooking patient recreation areas. The two-storey former admissions hospital (R Plumbe 1900, partly demolished 1990s) stands c 200m east of the main asylum in its own grounds, designed for the reception of new patients and the accommodation of short-stay patients. Built in similar

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style to the main asylum, it was laid out on an H-plan (the south wings gone, 1998), and is entered on the north side via the carriage drive south off the east drive.

GARDENS The gardens consist largely of a series of former airing courts for the patients' recreation, lying to the south of the two main buildings, although those of the former admissions block have been partly demolished. In the main asylum, two sides of each L-shaped pavilion open directly into the adjacent airing court. Laid to lawn, with many mature trees and serpentine paths, several airing courts contain thatched wooden shelters, octagonal or rectangular (most in some disrepair or derelict, 1998). Each court formerly had its own shelter in similar style, but several, particularly on the men's side, have been largely lost, only the floors remaining. Adjacent to the two southern fronts of each pavilion lies a broad tarmac terrace, linking the pavilion with the lawn beyond. The airing courts attached to the west wing are still enclosed and separated by ornamental iron railings with gates (in a style which appears in several other places within the site); those courts attached to the east, men's wing have lost the railings and all but the southernmost of the shelters, although the bases of the other two remain.

The airing courts were laid out by Goldring incorporating recommendations made in the Commissioners in Lunacy's Suggestions and Instructions (revised 1898), amplified in H C Burdett's seminal text *Hospitals and Asylums of the World* (1891): 'The courts should be laid out as gardens, and orchards, and lawns. The walks should be twelve or fifteen feet wide, and laid down to asphalt or concrete. All the courts should have sun-shades and kiosks'. Goldring provided the airing courts as required and planted their margins mainly with deciduous trees, with groups of ornamental conifers sited nearer the buildings. The south front of the main asylum is dominated by the central main hall, in front of which lies a grass tennis court on the site of a former rectangular lawn, flanked by mature trees. Beyond this to the south lies the cricket pitch, flanked by belts of mature trees, with a thatched cricket pavilion at the east side. From here views extend south over the farmland towards the hills to the south and the water tower of the former Shenley Asylum. The former nurses' home (1920s/30s) stands west of the cricket pitch, enclosed by trees, on land formerly used for sports. A further sports pitch occupies the open space to the east of the cricket pitch. The former admissions hospital retains the remains of several airing courts, together with a rectangular thatched shelter on the west side and many mature trees, particularly on the east side where a belt screens the adjacent road.

PARK North of the two main asylum buildings the grounds are laid out in a more open manner with paddocks, lawns and open parkland. The five three-storey, brick-built villas, together with the former isolation hospital to the north-west, stand in their own grounds separated by larger lawns and paddocks containing and enclosed by mature trees, all linked by a system of looping subsidiary drives. A spur north off the north drive, flanked by a mature lime avenue, leads north to Orchard House, the former Superintendent's house (built 1905) standing 300m north of the main asylum, in its own garden. The house, in similar style to the lodges and Colvend, stands on a lawn enclosed by a belt of mature trees and shrubs at the southern edge of the open parkland. The parkland, bounded by the north drive to the west, Shenley Lane to the north and east, and paddocks to the south, slopes gently up to the north. The area contains several scattered groups of trees and is under arable cultivation.

Formerly Napsbury Siding (now gone) gave rail access for service purposes from the main line to the west, running south-east from the former Napsbury Station, standing 700m north-west of the north entrance, and crossing the hospital grounds to arrive at the north front.

KITCHEN GARDEN/FARM The former kitchen garden and farm buildings lie along the west side of the north drive. The kitchen garden, surrounded by hedges and now derelict, lies 400m north of the main asylum, the southern section containing derelict glasshouses. An orchard runs along the north side of the former kitchen garden, extending from the railway to the north drive, with an open field to the north.

The hospital farm, to the south of the kitchen garden, incorporates C18/C19 farm buildings; the former farmhouse has been pulled down. Plumbe erected further agricultural buildings, including, on the south side of the yard, a red-brick and rendered thatched dairy in Picturesque style, visible from the paddock to the south.

REFERENCES

H C Burdett, *Hospitals and Asylums of the World II (asylums)*, (1891), pp 1-3, 13, 39-40, 54-8 Commissioners in Lunacy, *Suggestions and Instructions*, (1856, revised 1887, 1898) Order of Service and Proceedings, Description and Photographs of

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Napsbury Asylum, etc (1905) *The Builder*, (17 June 1905), p 651 J Taylor, *Hospital and Asylum Architecture in England, 1840(1914 (1991), p 153*

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1883 3rd ed. published 1925 OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1924 1938 edition

Archival items Sale particulars, Napsbury Farm, 1837 [copy on EH file]

Description written: July 1998 Register Inspector: SR Edited: November 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.