

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

OXEN HOATH

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OXEN HOATH

Name: OXEN HOATH

County: Kent

District: Tonbridge and Malling (District Authority)

Parish: Hadlow

County: Kent

District: Tonbridge and Malling (District Authority)

Parish: West Peckham

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.241027
Longitude: 0.33443761
National Grid Reference: TQ 63048 51683
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1001355
Date first listed: 18-Oct-1993

Details

Formal gardens laid out by William Andrews Nesfield in the late 1840s beside a country house set in C18 parkland.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Oxen Hoath manor house dates from the C16 and in 1621, when in the ownership of Thomas Choune, a survey was made which shows the house approached via a grand gateway to the west. By 1719 the property had passed into the ownership of Leonard Bartholomew and was illustrated by Badeslade who records a multi-gabled house standing in a formal setting approached via a double avenue to the south (Badeslade 1719, published 1750s). The house and grounds were again remodelled at the end of the C18 when the architect John Meadows was commissioned by the then owner Sir William Geary to update the mansion. A contemporary engraving by W Green, from a painting by J G Wood (see Hall 1993) shows the Georgian house in an informal setting of sweeping grass lawns. The property remained in the Geary family into the C19 and in c 1846 Sir William R P Geary brought in Anthony Salvin (1799-1881) to restyle the house in the French fashion, and William Andrews Nesfield (1793-1881) to lay out a formal garden. One of Nesfield's plans for a parterre and rosarium, signed and dated 1847, has survived; this shows that the southern part of the gardens survives almost unchanged today (2001). In the C20 the estate was sold into divided private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Oxen Hoath occupies a rural location c 7km north-east of Tonbridge and c 15km south-west of Maidstone. The c 110ha site is bounded to the east by farmland, to the south-west by Carpenters Lane, to the west by Oxenhoath Road, and to the north by farmland and woodland where the northern tip of the

site meets Gover Hill. The ground falls significantly from north to south, the house standing on the dip-slope of the greensand ridge overlooking the Weald of Kent.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The house can be approached from all the main boundaries. From the north, a drive leads from Gover Hill, past a lodge, down the track of an old avenue, formerly planted with a double row of Cornish elms and terminating with a row of ancient limes, concluding with a gateway flanked by stone gate piers (listed grade II) c 100m north-west of the house. The eastern drive commences at East Lodge, on the corner of Forge Lane and Matthews Lane c 700m north-east of the house, and runs west between newly planted (late C20) walnuts, replacing a double row of limes lost in the 1987 storm. The present (2001) main approach is from the west, the drive branching off from Oxenhoath Road at the mid C19 West Lodge (listed grade II), c 400m south-west of the house, leading to C18 gate piers (listed grade II) at the commencement of the Cedar Avenue where the latter bends north to meet the north drive before crossing undulating lawn, edged by a bank planted with shrubs and specimen trees and bordered by mature planes and limes, to the west front of the house. From the bend in Cedar Avenue the track of the old south drive descends across the park and the lower flat fields towards Hadlow, ending at the junction of Carpenters Lane and Common Road. The Cedar Avenue is flanked by a series of iron gates of a variety of dates and provenance. The elaborate wrought-iron gates and overthrow (listed grade II) to the main entrance leading to the west front are said to have been bought in the late C18 by Sir William Geary from the pre-fire Palace of Westminster.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Oxen Hoath (listed grade II*) is a large country house built of coursed rubble stone under a hipped slate roof. The three-storey building has central projecting bays on the west front with a central arched doorway and balcony above. The garden front to the south has eight bays with a bay tower on the south-east corner and a one-storey billiard room extension to the east, added by Burn and McVicar Anderson in 1878. The house contains remains of a late C16 building on a site that had been occupied earlier. It was extensively remodelled after 1757 and again in c 1846 by Anthony Salvin.

Some 100m to the south-west of Oxen Hoath stands the Dower House (listed grade II), a red-brick and tile building of C17 origin, possibly part of the outbuildings associated with the early C17 main house.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens at Oxen Hoath lie to the west and south of the house. The south gardens occupy the site of the early C18 walled enclosures although these had been removed some time before the mid C19 gardens were laid out. Grass terraces lead south down to a formal parterre which retains much of the planting and decoration given it by William Andrews Nesfield in the late 1840s, as well as the original basic design with scrollwork beds outlined with cast-stone kerbing originally set in white gravel and red-brick dust. There are further urns of cast stone on the parterre and adjacent principal paths, and the upper terraces to the east of the parterre support yew topiary. The southern end of the top terrace is extended southwards as a viewing bastion. While the two *Yucca gloriosa* flanking the main north/south axis of the parterre design have survived, as have the clipped yews, the row of standard rhododendron set in white pebbles which ran along the west and east sides of the main gardens have gone (Hall 1993). The low, stone retaining south wall dividing the gardens from the park continues to the east, separating the formal gardens from the C20 tennis courts and an extension of the pleasure ground, in the south-east corner of which stands a hexagonal thatched summerhouse.

The terrace walk below the south front of the house extends east, up a flight of steps, past a plane tree which appears to pre-date the mid C19 layout of the gardens, to a wrought-iron gate set in an C18 ornamental stone gateway (listed grade II) through the eastern wall. Immediately to the east of the house, and north of this cross-walk, was the site of Nesfield's rosarium, largely removed when the billiard room was built in 1878, leaving only Nesfield's bordering terraces and walls.

The walk along the south side of the parterre continues westwards between mature plane and lime, forming a link with the Dower House, the Cedar Avenue, and the avenue to the kitchen garden beyond. Flanking this south walk is a short formal avenue of juniper and round-headed clipped yews, surrounded by informally planted specimen trees and shrubs. The gates (listed grade II) to the south of the Dower House, leading from the south garden, are reputed to have come from Eltham Palace (qv) and are of late C17 or early C18 date.

On the west side of the Cedar Avenue the path, ornamented with round-headed clipped standard Portugal laurels and recently planted with Irish pyramid juniper, continues on a stone causeway to the cast-iron gate, the 'Auvergne Gate'. It bears the monogram of Sir William Geary, and was brought from France in the 1920s to be hung within an ornamental surround at the

entrance to the kitchen garden. Through the gate is a stone-walled enclosure, laid out as a flower garden which is divided off from the main walled area. To the north of the stone causeway walk lies the Dell Garden, planted up as an informal pleasure ground in the C19. To the west of the entrance to the Dell Garden is a further wrought-iron gateway (listed grade II) of mixed origin. In the Badeslade engraving of 1719 (Badeslade 1750s) the area below the west front, now (2001) occupied by lawns and shrubs, is shown as two walled gardens. A stone table top, dated 1724, which stands on a knoll seems to be a relic from the banqueting house illustrated by Badeslade. The table top bears a Latin inscription which, translated, reads: 'For wine sometimes, for friendship always'. A gate through a balustraded wall along the south side of the west front provides access to the main formal gardens below the south front.

PARK The park lies to the north, east, and south of the house, the major area being that to the south, stretching down as far as Carpenters Lane. Forming part of the view from the south front is the serpentine lake, located c 300m south of the house, which runs from west to east across the centre of the south park and is crossed in the centre by a stone bridge. The lake was formed from an existing oval-shaped canal shown on a plan of 1750, enlarged at some point during the later C18, and the house is designed to make full use of the views. The great gothic folly of Hadlow Tower forms an eyecatcher in the distant rural landscape.

KITCHEN GARDEN The brick-walled C18 kitchen garden lies c 300m south-west of the house. It has a central pool and whitewash on the walls indicates the position of glass ranges, only a small portion of which survive. The main orchard area is outside the wall to the south.

REFERENCES

J Harris, *The History of Kent* (1719), 235 T Badeslade, *Thirty six different views of noblemen and gentlemen's seats in the county of Kent* (1750s), pl 26 J Allibone, Anthony Salvin (1977), pp 87, 92, 172 E Hall, *Architectural Association Garden Conservation Newsletter* no 8, (1993), pp 3-6

Maps Estate map, 1621 (U31, P3), (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone) Estate map, 1750 (U31, P4), (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone) Estate map, 1843 (CTR 285B), (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone) W A Nesfield, *Plan of a parterre and rosarium for Oxenhoath, May 1847* (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1878

Illustrations T Badeslade, *View of Oxen Hoath, 1719* (in Badeslade 1750s)

Description rewritten: April 2001 Amended: May 2001 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: November 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.