

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

COMBE BANK

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Name:	COMBE BANK
County:	Kent
District:	Sevenoaks (District Authority)
Parish:	Brasted
County:	Kent
District:	Sevenoaks (District Authority)
Parish:	Sundridge with Ide Hill
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.282072 Longitude: 0.11891984 National Grid Reference: TQ 47874 55791 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000365 Date first listed: 01-Dec-1988

Details

Gardens and pleasure grounds dating from the 1720s and, particularly, the 1740s, associated with a country house and set in a small park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Lt-Col John Campbell (1693-1770), later fourth Duke of Argyll, bought Combe Bank from William Ash in 1720 and the following year commissioned Roger Morris to build a new mansion. The family had close links with the Burlington Circle, Alexander Pope, and William Kent. Work on the gardens presumably stems from this time although most of the design dates from the 1740s. The fourth Duke's eldest son, also John, became Baron Sundridge of Combe Bank in 1766, eventually succeeding as Duke of Argyll on his father's death in 1770. The new Earl took up residence at the family home, Inverary Castle, and Combe Bank was given to the fourth Duke's third son, Frederick. John Adam (1721-92) was commissioned between 1775 and 1777 to prepare plans for altering the house, but these were not executed until the second half of the C19. Lord Frederick did however make some alterations to the house in the early years of the C19. He died in 1816 without a male heir and his daughter sold the estate to William Manning who, in 1830, became bankrupt and was forced to sell Combe Bank. It was purchased by Arthur Chichester who became first Lord Templemore in 1831. Chichester died in 1837 and his son only four years later, which led to the estate being put back on the market. It was purchased in 1845 by the Rev Augustus Clayton who lived at Combe Bank until 1864 when he sold it to William Spottiswoode, President of the Royal Society. During his ownership some of John Adam's designs for internal decorations to the house were carried out. Although Spottiswoode undertook some minor plantings, the structure of the grounds remained little changed from the mid C18 (LUC 1990). In 1883 William Spottiswoode died and for a while his son Hugh tenanted Combe Bank before selling it in 1906 to Ludwig Mond, a German-Jewish chemist and industrialist

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who settled in London in 1862, where he became a prominent businessman, philanthropist and art collector. Mond, and his son Robert who inherited in 1909, carried out extensive alterations to the gardens, building a rockery and a formal rose garden. Following the First World War Robert Mond put Combe Bank up for auction in 1921, divided into lots. The house and gardens did not find a buyer in the auction but in 1924 were purchased by the Society of the Holy Jesus Christ who founded Combe Bank School for Girls. The site suffered considerable storm damage in the late C20 and remains (2001) in divided ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Combe Bank lies on the north-west side of the village of Sundridge which is itself located on the western edge of Sevenoaks. The c 60ha site is bounded to the east by Ovenden Road, to the south by Main Road, Sundridge, to the west by gardens, and to the north by farmland. Combe Wood, which occupies the northern section of the park, is bisected by the M25. The house stands towards the eastern end of an elongated hill which runs east to west across the middle of the site. The position offers fine views over countryside, particularly to the west and to the south, across the River Darent which flows from west to east along the southern edge of the site.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to Combe Bank is from the east off Ovenden Road, to the north of the stable block (listed grade II) which was built in 1809. The road runs along the eastern boundary but is sunken so as not to interrupt the views out. From here a short drive leads to the turning circle below the east front of the house. The drive from the lodge at Brasted in the south-west corner of the site, which led across the west side of the park and round the north bank of the lake, is no longer in use.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Combe Bank (listed grade I) is a small, five-bay Palladian villa with two and a half-storey side bays under low pyramidal roofs and a two-storey centre with a pyramidal roof and central cupola. It was built for Lt-Col John Campbell by Roger Morris in 1721, extended to the north in 1807 by Lord Frederick Campbell when the drawing room and ballroom were added, and given further minor alterations shortly after it was purchased by Ludwig Mond in 1906. Further additions have been put on the north side since it became a school, and tennis courts and car parks added in the grounds.

The early C19 stable block (listed grade II) lies c 100m to the east of the house, on the eastern boundary of the site. It is built of coursed freestone under a low hipped slate roof and is arranged around a courtyard. It contains the remains of electrical installations by the physicist Michael Faraday who was a visitor to Combe Bank in the mid C19.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Beyond the turning circle below the east front is a level lawn. The urns (listed grade II) which now stand round the house were, in the mid C18, arranged in two rows down the sides of the east lawn and were flanked by shrubberies. A pair of summerhouses marked the lawn's eastern edge, one of which remains standing c 80m east of the house although somewhat modified from its original form. A path from Ovenden Road along the eastern boundary provides a pedestrian entrance into the east garden via a cutting lined with flints and rockwork. Two rusticated stone arches (listed grade II), the remains of a tunnel, carry garden paths over the cut. A little to the west is a cave around which a rockery (now derelict, 2001) was constructed by the Mond family in the early C20.

Below the west front of the house is a levelled area of lawn; beyond this to the south are shrubberies.

The slope to the south of the house is terraced to give three level walks running east to west, separated by banks which in the mid C18 were planted with flowering shrubs. The top path, the Beech or Green Walk, planted in c 1810, leads to The Platform at its western end, an area which was planted in the mid C18 as a formal grove. The round temple which now stands here was put up in the 1920s, possibly on the site of an earlier feature within the grove. At the eastern end of the garden terraces is the base of a Victorian palm house.

A set of caves located c 200m south-west of the house were excavated into the west end of the rocky ridge below the south terraces in 1815 or earlier. Three descending stone arches form the roof of the entrance to the main cave. An icehouse (listed grade II), dug directly into the rock, forms part of the complex. The surrounding plantings, which suffered severe damage in the 1987 storm, date from c 1810.

PARK The northern section of the park is entirely covered by the extensive Combe Wood (known as Comebank Wood to the north of the motorway) and the land between the house and the Wood, together with that to the east of the house, is under agricultural use and appears never to have been fully imparked. The Wood was cut through by a railway, now disused, the

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cutting for which was used in the late C20 to carry the M25. The land to the south and west of the house remains under grass and some mature park trees survive here. Lying to the north of the ridge on which the house and its gardens stand, and c 300m to the west of the house, is a lake, only the southern tip of which is visible from the house. Originally two smaller ponds, the lake was enlarged in 1745 as part of the mid C18 landscape works. Halfway along its northern bank is the rock-arch facade of a boathouse, while on the opposite bank is a semicircular stone seat.

KITCHEN GARDEN The C18 walled kitchen garden stands adjacent to Ovenden Road, c 300m to the south-east of the house. Houses have been built within its walls (late C20).

REFERENCES

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Maps J Andrews, A Dury and W Herbert, *A Topographical Map of the County of Kent*, 2" to 1 mile, 1769 J Sparrow, *Combe Bank estate plan*, 1773 (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone)

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Illustrations W Woolletts, engraving of Combe Bank, c 1760 (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone) F Wheatley, engraving of Combe Bank, 1787 (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone)

Description rewritten: March 2001 Amended: March 2001 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: November 2003

This list entry was subject to a Minor Enhancement on 25/04/2019

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.