

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

SWAFFHAM PRIOR HOUSE

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

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**SWAFFHAM PRIOR HOUSE**

Name: SWAFFHAM PRIOR HOUSE

County: Cambridgeshire

District: East Cambridgeshire (District Authority)

Parish: Swaffham Bulbeck

County: Cambridgeshire

District: East Cambridgeshire (District Authority)

Parish: Swaffham Prior

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.251541  
Longitude: 0.28623131  
National Grid Reference: TL 56161 63947  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1000396  
Date first listed: 16-Jan-1985

## Details

A house of predominantly C16 origin, but with evidence of an earlier core, surrounded by park and gardens laid out in the early C19 and enlarged in the 1880s, including the addition of a water garden.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the late C16 John Rant purchased the Swaffham Prior estate, on which stood a house and stable block built in c 1550. Four generations of his family, all called Roger Rant, succeeded to the estate over the subsequent 200 years, during which time various alterations and additions were made to the house in the early and late C17. The last Roger Rant died in 1747 and his widow sold the estate in 1751 to Dr John Peter Allix, Dean of Gloucester and Ely who lived in the nearby vicarage and purchased Swaffham Prior House for his son Charles on his marriage to Catherine Greene. Charles and Catherine made substantial alterations to the House, giving it a new Georgian facade. At this time the grounds were confined to an area of c 4ha but between 1814 and 1834 the Allix family laid out a small park. In c 1870 Charles Peter Allix made further alterations and extensions to the House and followed this in the 1880s by enlarging the park. He also created an elaborate water garden to the south-east of the House and planted an avenue in the park linking the House to the new Swaffham Prior Railway Station to the north-west. The Allix family continued to own the estate until 1982, although from 1900 onwards lived elsewhere and rented the property. During the Second World War the land army occupied the House and worked on the park. In 1982 the estate was divided into lots and sold. The House, grounds and part of the park were purchased by Mr and Mrs Michael Marshall who began a programme of restoration. The site remains (1999) in divided private ownership.

### DESCRIPTION

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**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Swaffham Prior House lies c 15km to the north-east of Cambridge on the minor B1102 Cambridge to Burwell road. The House and park are situated to the west of the village of Swaffham Prior which forms much of the north-east boundary, the south-east boundary being formed by the B1102, the south-west by farmland, and the north-west boundary by the disused Cambridge to Mildenhall railway line. The c 56ha park is roughly rectangular, set on relatively flat ground in a rural part of east Cambridgeshire characterised by open fields and long views. It is mostly enclosed on all sides by boundary plantations.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The site has two entrance drives, both off the B1102. East Lodge (listed grade II) lies c 250m to the east of the House, on the eastern corner of the park. It is an early to mid C18 brick and tile cottage which originally lay on the village High Street before its diversion in the late C19 when the park was enlarged slightly to the south and the cottage converted for use as a lodge. The drive runs west, past another former High Street property, the timber-framed Dove House Cottage (listed grade II), to arrive at the gravelled south-east, entrance front. It continues in a sweep past the House and stable block before turning south to exit the park towards the southern end of the B1102 boundary c 300m south of the House. Here it passes through elaborate wrought-iron gates (late C20) hung on early to mid C19 brick gate piers (listed grade II) which stand beside the early C19 South Lodge (listed grade II), a cream brick and tile single-storey square building with a canted porch to the front and gothic windows.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Swaffham Prior House (listed grade II) is a small country house of two storeys and attics, built in cream brick under a plain tile roof. The main entrance facade has nine bays, the central three projecting slightly and incorporating a Doric portico. Although Georgian in appearance, the original C16 Elizabethan E-plan house survives around an earlier core, engulfed in the C18 alterations which were carried out by Charles Allix, who in addition to adding the new style, also turned the House round to face south-east. There were Victorian additions in the late C19 and the north-west wing was added in 2000. Immediately to the south of Swaffham Prior House is a small timber-framed C16 house, with later C17 wing (listed grade II). The end gable of the later wing is surmounted by a clock turret, added in the late C19 when the building was converted for use as stables and outbuildings.

On the eastern boundary of the park (within the registered site) stands Baldwin Manor (listed grade II\*), the surviving c 1500 manor house associated with the estate, retained by the estate as a dower house until sold into private ownership during the mid C20.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens and pleasure grounds extend to c 4ha surrounding the House. To the south-east a sweeping lawn leads to a wooded pleasure ground where the elaborate Water Gardens were built in the 1880s by Charles Peter Allix. These comprise a series of informal pools, crossed by little brick footbridges and fed at the southern end by a cascade linked to an underground reservoir and diesel pumping system. The walk from the Water Gardens runs north across the drive and into a strip of late C19 wooded pleasure ground planted between the east side of the House and Baldwin Manor, following the line of a little canalised water channel which terminates in a woodland pool. Within these woods the remains of a laburnum-hung wrought-iron pergola survives amongst the pine, cedar, box and yew.

An open lawn presently lies off the north-west front, bounded by a c 80m long ha-ha c 130m from the House terrace which marks the boundary of the old garden prior to the early C19 establishment of the park. A new formal garden is planned for this area (2000).

**PARK** The park surrounds the House to north, south and west. The western section is predominantly woodland, mainly C19 plantations with later C20 additions of Norway spruce. Most of the park to the north and south (the southern area known as the Great Park) remains under grass, grazed by deer, and retains many mature parkland trees of mixed species including beech, ash, horse chestnut and oak, as well as some exotic species such as ginkgo and cedar. Restoration planting was carried out in the late 1990s following storm damage sustained in the 1987 storm. The Great Park is partly divided by deer fences and includes a small block of exotic planting known as The Horseshoe which dates from the early to mid C19 when the park was first laid out. The north park is cut through by a lime avenue which defines a walk from the ha-ha at the back of the House, north-north-west for c 400m to Swaffham Prior Railway Station. Charles Peter Allix assisted the development of the Cambridge to Mildenhall

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railway line and his son Charles Israel Loraine Allix cut the first sod when the village station was built in 1883. It opened in 1884 and the avenue to it was planted in 1890. The station closed in 1964.

The north-west corner of the park is now (1999) partly under arable cultivation and partly covered by a mid C20 Norway spruce plantation.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The walled kitchen garden covers c 1ha and lies c 40m to the south-west of the House, attached to the stables and garage block. Its date of origin is not clear but it probably dates from the mid C18 when the House was substantially remodelled. Some of the area within the single compartment is still (1990s) used for growing vegetables with the remainder laid to grass. Also within the walls stands the late C19 white brick and tile tool store and potting shed, with two arched openings on its south-east face looking onto flanking glasshouses of the same period. The remains of a rose arch and some clipped yew survive on the north-west side of the buildings. Beyond the north wall is a new (late C20) walled enclosure containing a swimming pool.

#### REFERENCES

N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Cambridgeshire* (1970), p 467 Roy Comm Hist Monuments of Engl Inventories: North-east Cambridgeshire (1972), pp 120-1 J Kenworthy-Browne et al, *Burke's and Savills Guide to Country Houses III*, (1981), p 25 Swaffham Prior House, guidebook, (1988) *Cambridgeshire Parklands*, (Cambridgeshire Record Office 1990), p 52 T Way, *Cambridgeshire parklands survey*, (Internal survey for Cambridgeshire County Council 1998)

Maps OS Surveyor's drawings, 1810, 1834 (British Library Maps) OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886 2nd edition published 1903 3rd edition published 1927 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886 2nd edition published 1901

Description written: March 2000 Amended: December 2000 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: January 2001

## 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.