

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

POPE'S GARDEN

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Name:	POPE'S GARDEN
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Richmond upon Thames (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.442408 Longitude: -0.33320430 National Grid Reference: TQ 15939 72808 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000826 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Early C18 garden and grotto made by the poet Alexander Pope largely on land separated from the mansion by a public road. The garden survives only as part of the archaeological record. Pope's Grotto tunnel, which provided access between the two parts of the garden, survives with C19 additions and modifications.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Thomas Vernon, a resident of Twickenham and a major land owner, had been acquiring land in the area since 1700. By 1718 he owned a line of six or seven riverside properties, upstream from Twickenham itself, in an area traditionally known as Cross Deep. In 1719, the poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744) leased three adjoining cottages, one of which Vernon had built specially for him. Pope, along with his mother and elderly childhood nurse, took up residence towards the end of 1719. Pope had plans for a larger, more prestigious house however and immediately demolished one cottage and partially demolished another. He employed the architect James Gibbs (1682-1754), to remodel the house, which stood on the smaller, riverside part of the estate. A certain amount of land across the Hampton to Richmond road, at that time little more than a rural lane, may have come with Vernon's lease, but Pope soon acquired a further c 2ha of agricultural land which he leased, in stages, from Vernon and other owners. The riverside garden was small and quite public, being on view to all the river traffic and overlooked by neighbouring properties. One of Pope's first tasks was to obtain private access from the house to the larger garden and to achieve this he had a tunnel built under the road. The garden beyond the road, although small, allowed Pope to indulge in his love of classical design. Pope's villa became a cultural centre in contemporary artistic and literary society. A plan of the garden as it was left at his death was made in 1745 by his gardener John Serle; the plan accompanied Serle's tribute to Pope which took the form of a tourist guide (Serle 1745). A fuller, written description appeared in the Newcastle General Magazine in January 1748, the author being only identified as 'T'.

After Pope's death in 1744 the lease of the property reverted to Vernon who soon sold it to Sir William Stanhope. Stanhope undertook a major rearrangement of the garden and surrounded it with a wall. He also acquired the leases of the various sections that made up the main garden and bought more land to the west of the property and it was here, in the north-west corner of

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Pope's garden, that he built a second tunnel (listed grade II*) under Radnor Road. In addition to works in the garden Stanhope extended the villa, adding wings, altering its facade, and making alterations and additions to Pope's Grotto.

Stanhope died in 1772 and during the next thirty years the property passed through a number of owners. In 1807 it was bought by Baroness Howe; almost immediately she demolished the superstructure of the villa, building a replacement just to the south. Irritated by the number of people who still visited the site in memory of Pope, she removed most of the decorations that adorned the Grotto and further altered the garden.

In due course Lady Howe's house was demolished, being replaced by the one existing today (2000). Built by Thomas Young to the design of Henry Edward Kendall junior the house was later altered to accommodate first a convent and then a school. During the C19 the garden to the west of Cross Deep was divided and part, to the south, sold off for development. That which was left was altered to suit the needs of the convent and now (2000), under separate ownership from the house, also houses a school. The grotto tunnel was lengthened during C20 road widening and is the one readily discernible feature remaining from Pope's garden.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The site of Pope's garden is situated on the west bank of the River Thames, c 500m to the north of Strawberry Hill (qv) and 1km south of Twickenham. Cross Deep (A310) divides the villa from the site of the garden. Pope's Grotto runs under Cross Deep linking the two sites. The small (c 300m sq) riverside site is bounded to the west by Cross Deep road and to the north by the southern boundary fence of the neighbouring property, 17 Cross Deep. The north bank of the River Thames provides the boundary to the east and the northern fence line of Ryan House makes for the southern boundary. The larger, c 1ha main garden lies to the west of Cross Deep road. The back gardens of houses in Pope's Grove make for the southern boundary, Radnor Road the western boundary, and Grotto Road the northern boundary. The ground to the east slopes gently to the river while the grounds to the west are largely level.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main garden was historically approached through the grotto tunnel which itself is approached from within the grounds of St James Independent School for Boys, access to the school being from the east side of Cross Deep road. The entrance to the grotto, an archway facing the river, is set under C20 buildings which mask the view to the river. The entrance is guarded by hinged and folding iron gates which may have been the ones described on Samuel Lewis' plan of 1785 (Beckles Willson 1998).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The remains of Pope's Grotto (listed grade II*) run for c 19m from below C20 buildings, under Cross Deep, west to the site of Pope's main garden. The entrance gates open onto a loggia paved with Portland stone. The loggia extends north/south, leading to rectangular chambers at either end, a central chamber leading from the loggia to the tunnel. In the ceiling of the loggia there is a carved stone representing the Crown of Thorns and, over the inner arch leading to the central chamber, a shield depicting the Five Wounds of Christ. It is considered (ibid) that these probably date from the mid to late C19. Statues of Christ and the Virgin Mary were recorded as being in the grotto in 1888 (Richmond and Twickenham Times). Lying in the centre of the loggia there is a section of tree trunk, traditionally a remnant of one of the two willow trees planted by Pope on the river bank (Beckles Willson 1998). The southern chamber has a brick floor with a full-height marble statue of the Virgin Mary standing in a niche to the rear. This chamber was shown on a late C18 plan (Lewis, 1785) as The Cave of Pope, at that time being more circular with urns and a bust set in niches in the south wall. The floor of the chamber to the north is laid with stone slabs with the statue of St James of Compostella in the niche to the rear. The 1785 plan shows this area, probably little altered from Pope's time, with a bath set against the north wall. The central chamber, much reduced in width since the C18, and the tunnel have vestiges of rustic arcades and columns along the side walls with few of Pope's geological specimens still in place. A widening of the tunnel after c 6.5m marks the lobby which formed the entrance to Pope's garden. The final c 10m, the C19/20 extensions, is noted by the change from knapped flint decoration to pebble-dashing.

Pope completed his villa with a grotto in the basement and the tunnel became a natural extension of this. Pope decorated the tunnel in two phases: between 1720 and 1725 he concentrated on ornamenting the tunnel and the chambers at either end using flint, marble chippings, and glass furnace slag. The chamber to the east was decorated with a variety of shells, minerals, and pieces of mirror glass. The chamber at the west end, now destroyed, had a spring in the centre and was decorated with Sponge stone and minerals. The brickwork of the lobby at the garden entrance (to the west of Cross Deep), had seats on either side and

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was decorated with shell, flint, and iron ores. A spring in this lobby provided a satisfying addition to the atmosphere Pope was trying to create. In a letter to Edward Blount, dated 1725, Pope described the grotto in lyrical terms (Beckles Willson 1998). Between 1725 and 1739 Pope made use of the grotto and sporadically embellished it with materials offered by his friends. Between 1739 and 1744 he worked on additional rooms to the east, decorated this time using mineral and other geological specimens which reflected his new interest in geology. By March 1743 Pope had finally completed the west front with stone from Widcombe. After Pope's death in 1744 the grotto became a tourist attraction and it was noted (Serle 1745) that most visitors left with a sample of the decorative material. The plan of the grotto drawn by Samuel Lewis in 1785, forty-one years after the death of Pope, when the site was owned by Sir William Stanhope, shows it nearly ten feet (c 3m) longer than when drawn by Pope in 1740. Sir William also added various statues and a mirror in the ceiling of the tunnel where it widened near the centre. The grotto survived the demolition of the villa in 1807 as it was still needed to provide access to the garden. The western end of the tunnel was extended twice more, once in the mid C19 and again in c 1910. During the C20 the grotto at the eastern end of the tunnel became encased within new buildings.

The grotto remains (2000) in private ownership and a restoration plan has been prepared (Woudstra 2000).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The small garden on the bank of the Thames is largely taken up with C20 buildings which overlook the riverside. The garden to the west of Cross Deep is largely taken up with C20 school buildings, the remaining space being laid out with sports facilities, tennis courts, and a playing field. At the north-west end of the garden stands a brick-built cupola (listed grade II).

Little fabric from Pope's garden now (2000) survives above ground. The entrance to Lord Stanhope's tunnel survives at the north-west end of the garden. However archaeological investigations undertaken in 1994 (Pre-Construct Archaeology 1994) recorded that although much of the east and central part of the garden had been destroyed by intensive gardening, the west side contained C18 landscape features. These included a well-constructed gravel path, thought to relate to the Pope's or possibly Stanhope's garden, and a collapsed subterranean feature, possibly a chamber or a tunnel (ibid).

Pope's garden included a Theatre, an Arcade, a Bowling Green, a Grove, and a 'What Not' (Pope to Lord Strafford 1925, quoted in Blest Retreats 1984). Sir William Stanhope extended the garden by c 1ha of land to the west of the main garden, across Radnor Road (Beckles Willson 1998). In the spirit of Pope, Stanhope built a tunnel under Radnor Road in order to connect the main garden with his new acquisition, which during the C19 became known as 'Stanhope's Cave' (sale catalogue 1873). The text accompanying the sale catalogue describes the area around the Cave as having 'Mazy Walks through diversified Rockery Work leading to a dripping well'. The 1873 plan shows that by this time the western 15m was laid out as a formal kitchen garden with a fountain in the centre. To the east of the kitchen garden was a Croquet Lawn separated by a hedge from 'Pope's Grove', a largely open area with a small collection of conifers to the north-east. These details cease to be recorded on subsequent OS maps, and Stanhope's extension to the west of Radnor Road had been developed for residential housing by the beginning of the C20 (OS 1916).

REFERENCES

J Serle, 'The Cave of Pope: a prophecy' A guide to Mr Pope's Garden (1745) Newcastle General Magazine, January 1748, pp 125-8 Richmond and Twickenham Times, 4 August 1888 Blest Retreats, A history of private gardens in Richmond upon Thames, (Richmond upon Thames Library and Information Services 1984), pp 23-6 An Archaeological Field Evaluation in Alexander Pope's Garden, (Pre-Construct Archaeology 1994) A Beckles Willson, Alexander Pope's Grotto in Twickenham (1998) M Batey, Alexander Pope: The Poet and the Landscape (1999) J Woudstra, The Restoration of Pope's Grotto in Twickenham (April 2000)

Maps [reproduced in Woudstra 2000] John Serle, Plan of Mr Pope's Garden as it was left at his death, 1745 Enclosure map, 1818 Parish Plan, 1849 Plan attached to Chancellor's Sale catalogue, 1873

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1863 2nd edition published 1894 3rd edition published 1916 1934 edition

Description written: September 2000 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: November 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.