

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

RIVERHILL HOUSE

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RIVERHILL HOUSE

Name: RIVERHILL HOUSE

County: Kent

District: Sevenoaks (District Authority)

Parish: Seal

County: Kent

District: Sevenoaks (District Authority)

Parish: Sevenoaks Weald

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.245614
Longitude: 0.20890454
National Grid Reference: TQ 54271 51922
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000294
Date first listed: 21-Jul-1988

Details

Gardens and pleasure grounds developed mainly from the mid C19 onwards and including some early plant introductions, surrounding a country house set in C18 parkland.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Previously the site of a Tudor farmhouse owned by the Petts family, Riverhill was acquired by the Children family who, shortly after 1710, replaced the building with a new house in the Queen Anne style. In 1840, John Rogers (1807-67), a scientist and botanist and a patron of the plant collectors of the day, bought the Riverhill estate from the Woodgate family who had inherited the property from the Childrens through marriage. He carried out extensions and alterations to the House, and in 1842 began to plant the gardens. John Rogers married Harriet Thornton of Clapham and they had twelve children, the eldest of whom, John Thornton Rogers, succeeded in 1867. Alterations to the House and planting in the gardens have been continued by successive generations of the Rogers family, with further additions to the House c 1900. Examples of early introductions survive in the grounds including two original introductions by Robert Fortune and some early Hooker rhododendrons. The site remains (2001) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Riverhill House is situated in a rural location just beyond the south-east edge of Sevenoaks, to the north-east of the A21. The c 30ha site is bounded to the west by Riverhill road, to the south by a minor country road, and to the east by farmland. The northern boundary is formed by the minor road which divides the park at Riverhill from Knole Park (qv). Set on the well-wooded south side of the greensand ridge (the planting of which

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suffered severe damage in the storm of October 1987), Riverhill House enjoys extensive views over the falling ground and countryside to the south.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main drive leads off Riverhill road past a lodge located c 150m to the north-west of the House, and runs south-east to arrive at the forecourt below the north front. The line of the earlier road, 'Harold Road', which went out of use with the building of the turnpike road in 1710, can be traced as a deep cut within the western shelter belt, a little to the east of the present road. The drive is carried across the cut by an C18 rusticated stone bridge standing c 100m north-west of the House.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Riverhill House (listed grade II) is a large country mansion built of coursed rubble masonry with flint galletting under a hipped slate roof. It is constructed in three storeys with a projecting three-storey porch on the north, entrance front. The building is of several dates, the core being erected in c 1710 for the Children family, with mid C19 alterations for John Rogers and late C19 projecting extensions added by his successors.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The falling land beneath the south front is terraced by means of a substantial balustraded rubble-stone retaining wall. Designs for further terracing, which was felt to be needed to give a suitable foreground to the view, were drawn up in 1844 by John Nasmyth (Wright 1985). A wooden summerhouse stands at the south-east corner of the top terrace. Below the terraces lies an open lawn, bounded on its south side by a thick belt of trees. On the west side of the House the terraces give onto an area of pleasure grounds and a small rockery. Before John Rogers began the development of these gardens in the mid C19 the area between the south garden and the road to the west had been an C18 wilderness with gravel walks and mixed tree and shrub plantings.

To the east of the House, on the south side of the walled gardens, is an area of ornamental shrub planting and the rose walk, below and to the south of which is the Home Farm complex. The gardens continue eastwards, past the C18 boundary, as the 'woodgarden', an area of informal pleasure grounds and lawns developed by Colonel J M Rogers early in the C20 on the site of the old pheasantry. The area was badly damaged in the storm of October 1987 but has since been extensively replanted. South of the wood garden is an early C20 rock garden, now (2001) overgrown.

PARK The open parkland lies mainly to the south of the House with the smaller north park being mostly covered by Park Wood. The south park falls away to the southern boundary and is scattered with a small number of parkland trees, enclosed to the south and west by thin boundary plantations. An engraving of 1780 (Baker) shows sweeping parkland approaching the east, south, and west fronts of the House, part of which was retained during the mid C19 development of the grounds by John Rogers.

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled kitchen garden lies c 50m to the north-east of the House, set into the steep hillside. It is levelled and has been divided into rough terracing, now (2001) laid to grass. The garden dates from the C18 and is probably contemporary with the house built by the Children family in the early C18.

REFERENCES

T Wright, *Historic parks and gardens in Kent* (1985) *The Field*, (23 August 1986), pp 42-5 Riverhill House, garden guide, (c 1980s)

Illustrations J Baker, engraving of Riverhill House and parkland, 1780 (private collection) I J Rawlings, engraving of Riverhill House and its setting, 1800 (private collection) Painting of house with Jungle Area, c 1840 (private collection) Drawing of the altered house and grounds, 1870 (private collection)

Archival items John Rogers, *Garden journal*, 1838-60 (private collection) Colonel Rogers, diary, 1900-45 (private collection) Photographs, 1900 and 1950 (private collection)

Description rewritten: April 2001 Amended: November 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.