

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

WALPOLE PARK

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**WALPOLE PARK**

Name: WALPOLE PARK

County: Greater London Authority

District: Ealing (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.508922  
Longitude: -0.30976783  
National Grid Reference: TQ 17397 80242  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1000847  
Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

## Details

The grounds of the C18 Pitzhanger Manor, which were altered by John Haverfield for Sir John Soane who remodelled the mansion at the beginning of the C19. The property passed into public ownership at the beginning of the C20, the grounds becoming a public park and the mansion becoming first a public library and then a museum.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

A substantial structure is recorded on the site of Pitzhanger Manor in the mid C17 when a Richard Slaney paid Hearth Tax on a building which contained sixteen hearths. The property passed through several owners until, in 1711, it came into the possession of Jonathan Gurnell, a prosperous merchant. After the death of Gurnell's widow the property passed to their surviving son, Thomas. In 1768 Thomas Gurnell employed the architect George Dance the Younger to make designs for improvements to the house and offices, after which considerable alterations and additions were made.

After the death of Thomas Gurnell in 1785 the property passed to his son, Jonathan, who died six years later. The house was held in trust for Jonathan's only child who was not of age. Attempts were made to let the property but it would appear that for most of the last years of the C18 the house stood empty and the trustees decided to sell.

Pitzhanger Manor was bought by Sir John Soane (1753-1837) in 1800. He demolished most of George Dance's building but retained the southern extension, replacing the main block with one of his own design. In the same year Soane employed John Haverfield to produce new designs for the grounds which were delivered by September 1800 (guidebook). The new mansion was used to display Soane's art collection and for entertaining, his Lincoln's Inn house being retained as the family residence. By 1809 Soane was only occasionally at Pitzhanger and in June of that year he instructed James Christie to sell the house and the estate. Once again the property passed through a series of owners until, in 1843, it was sold to the politician Spencer Walpole and became the home of his four unmarried sisters-in-law, the daughters of the Rt Hon Spencer Perceval. Prior to the death aged ninety-five of the last-surviving Perceval sister, Frederika, in May 1900, her nephew, Sir Spencer Walpole, had begun negotiations with Ealing District Council for the sale of the house and the estate. The sale negotiations were completed early in January 1900 and, following Miss Perceval's death, alterations were carried out. The then Borough Surveyor, Charles Jones, was responsible for the designs for the alterations to the house and grounds and in April 1902 the building was opened as a public

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library. At the time of the sale, the property was variously referred to as Manor House Park (Middlesex County Times, 19 May 1900) and Perceval Park (Middlesex County Times, 28 July 1900). The name Walpole Park was adopted after communications between the last owner and Ealing Borough Council towards the end of 1900 (Middlesex County Times, 6 October 1900).

Further major alterations to the library building were completed by 1940 and then, in 1984, the Central Library was moved to new premises in Ealing. The following year a continuing programme of restoration and repair to both the mansion and the grounds began. The restored manor house was reopened as a museum and centre for cultural events in the late 1990s. The grounds continue (2000) in the ownership of the London Borough of Ealing.

**DESCRIPTION**

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Walpole Park is situated c 12km to the west of the centre of London, c 500m to the south-west of Ealing Broadway. Ealing Common lies 1km to the east, Gunnersbury Park (qv) lies 1.5km to the south-east, and Hanwell 1km to the west. The level, roughly triangular, c 12ha site is largely enclosed within iron railings with part of the C18 brick boundary wall (listed grade II) surviving for c 45m to the west of the main entrance. The site is bounded to the north by Mattock Lane. Ealing Green and the backs of buildings along the southern part of Ealing Green, including a school and the old Ealing Film Studios, provide the boundary to the east. The boundary to the south is defined by Lammas Park Road, and that to the west by the backs of houses on Cumington Road. The boundaries, especially those to the north and south-east, are screened with shrubs.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main entrance to Walpole Park is through an entrance archway (listed grade I) on Mattock Lane, to the north-east of the mansion. The archway, refurbished in the late C20, is of a rustic classical style, of rubbed red bricks with pilaster strips of knapped flints. Contemporary iron gates hang from the piers with single pedestrian gates of the same design to either side. Built by Sir John Soane, the entrance replaced an earlier one to the east and is guarded to the west by his small, single-storey, brick-built lodge (listed grade II). The drive enters the forecourt from under the archway and curves to the south, around a central oval lawn with cut beds, to the entrance front of the mansion. The forecourt is enclosed within low walls topped with iron railings. A second entrance from Ealing Green was made in the 1920s when the boundary wall was broken and a gateway which forms part of a war memorial was inserted. Curved walls inscribed with the names of the fallen, designed by Leonard A Shuffrey, flank the iron gates which hang from stone piers topped with urns. The curved walls terminate with a pair of similar piers set in the brick boundary wall of the forecourt. There are two lesser entrances to the park, one from Lammas Park Road in the south-west corner of the site and one from Mattock Lane in the north-west corner. Both were made in the early C20.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Situated in the north-east corner of the site is Pitzhanger Manor (listed grade I), a small mansion with a three-bay facade which has four Ionic columns to the east front. The centre block is of yellow brick enriched with stone and is largely the work of Sir John Soane between 1800 and 1803. The southern wing of red brick with a slate roof survives from the earlier house, designed by George Dance the Younger for Thomas Gurnell, and mostly demolished in 1800. The section of the mansion to the west replaced Soane's colonnade which linked the main block to the servants' wing. The colonnade was demolished and the existing rooms built sometime during the occupancy of the Perceval sisters (1844-1900). After the property passed into public ownership the Borough Surveyor, Charles Jones, created an extension to the west of Dance's wing. He also demolished outbuildings and the servants' wing to the east and built a new lending library, which was replaced in 1940 by a larger structure on the same site. This building, which is attached to the original Manor, was used until c 1960 as a public library; since 1994 it has been used to house a local museum. Pitzhanger Manor is open to the public.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** From the main entrance a path leads west between, to the south, the mid C20 extension to the Manor and, to the north, Soane's C19 lodge, through lesser C20 iron gates into the pleasure grounds. A tarmac path, lined with shrubs to the north, continues westwards past, to the south, an oval cut bed dedicated to the passengers from the Caribbean who in 1948 arrived on the SS Windrush to work in England. The path continues for a further c 10m to a small circular, stone-lined fishpond (early C20), where it divides. The branch to the south runs between the west front of the Manor and a rectangular lawn. This lawn, set below the west front, is decorated with beds first made in the 1940s, the most recent circular one, in line with the centre of the Manor, having been made c 1998 and planted with a silver birch tree as a memorial

to HRH Princess Diana. The lawn is dominated by two cedars of Lebanon. The one to the south dates back to the period of Gurnell's ownership; the second cedar, to the north-west, is younger. Shrubs and other specimen trees partially screen the lawn to the north and south. In a small alcove to the north of the small fishpond is an early C19 Portland stone seat (listed grade II). The centre of the backrest is decorated with a carved grotesque mask. The approach to the seat from the path is stone paved and contained within low stone walls.

The main tarmac path leads west between grass verges with cut beds for c 20m where it again divides. The main branch continues west, over the top of a low rustic classical bridge (listed grade II\*). This is of rubble with flint and dressed-stone features on the southern parapet and in the three arches, the centre arch being the larger. A drawing of 1800, made by one of Soane's assistants, shows a bridge of simple unadorned design. It would appear that Soane resurfaced the structure with rubble, flint, and dressed stone to suggest an appearance of greater antiquity (guidebook). The Coade stone vases which decorated the parapet during the early C20 have been removed from the bridge. The bridge passes over the eastern end of a small stream which emits from a small cascade c 100m to the west. The stream was originally a small serpentine lake made as part of Haverfield's improvements for Soane of 1800. From the bridge the path continues west into the park, passing to the north a bronze portrait bust by Frank Bowcher, a monument to Charles Jones who was responsible for transforming the private garden into a public park.

The path which branches south from the main path runs down a flight of shallow steps and continues around a sunken rock garden made on the banks of the stream. The area was replanted as a sunken garden in the 1920s, retaining Soane's rustic bridge at the northern end. To the east of the rock garden is an evergreen hedge, planted during the 1920s, which separates the rock garden from the rectangular lawn.

To the west of the rectangular lawn the paths which encircle the sunken garden join up and link with the path running along the west front of the Manor. They continue south for c 20m to a group of tall wire enclosures which house a number of small animals and birds. Adjoining the enclosures to the south is a children's play area. To the west of the enclosures is an early C20 wooden shelter. The tarmac footpath continues west and south into the park.

**PARK** The c 10ha park lies mainly to the south-west of the Manor and is laid to grass crossed by axial avenues with lesser paths around the perimeter. Occasional veteran trees, possibly relicts from the C18 field boundaries, survive in the central area. The axial paths, which were laid out after 1900 (*Middlesex County Times*, 28 July 1900), are lined with young trees. The path to the south-west of the wooden shelter, which leads to the Lammas Park Road entrance, is planted with trees, each of which commemorates a past mayor of the borough. From the Lammas Road entrance a perimeter path continues north-west for c 200m before curving north. The trees along this path were donated as memorial trees by members of the public in the later part of the C20. To the north-west of the Lammas Park Road entrance is a wooden pavilion built to provide facilities for the tennis courts which, between c 1920 and the late 1990s, were situated near the western boundary. The perimeter path continues north to the entrance at the west end of Mattock Lane where it crosses a tarmac path which originates from an axial path to the east. Some 100m to the south-east of the Mattock Lane entrance is the lake. This stone-edged, elongated oval lake has a serpentine western edge and a small plain fountain set between two oval islands which support shrubs and small trees. Water was mentioned in the Sale catalogue of 1832: 'The residence stands on the verge of an extensive lawn gently inclining to a sheet of water', and the 1st edition OS map of 1865 shows a long narrow ribbon of water, the fishpond, on the site of the present lake. It is probable that by the beginning of the C20 the fishpond had dried up. In the winter of 1904-5 works were undertaken by the Borough Council, using the long-term unemployed to provide 'the one thing wanting in the Park' (Jones c 1910). The lake was made and waterfowl were donated. To the east of the lake stands the late C20 open-air theatre and cafe. After c 50m the perimeter path to the north of the theatre joins up with the path from the north side of the pleasure grounds.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** To the south of the Manor is the kitchen garden. Partially enclosed within high brick walls (listed grade II), the entry to the garden from the north is through an opening decorated by a classical doorway (listed grade II). A late C20 wooden pergola stands inside the entrance. The rectangular garden is laid out with rose beds cut into lawns enclosed within tarmac paths. The kitchen garden was shown on Rocque's map of 1746 and some of the walls are thought to date from this time (Leary, nd). By 1832 a hothouse and grapery had been added. The kitchen garden was abandoned when Ealing Council bought the property and it was reopened as a rose garden in 1920.

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REFERENCES

Middlesex County Times, 6 January 1900; 5 May 1900; 12 May 1900; 19 May 1900; 26 May 1900; 2 June 1900; 27 July 1900  
C Jones, A Decade of Progress (c 1910) D Stroud, Sir John Soane and the Rebuilding of Pitzhanger Manor (in *In Search of Modern Architecture: a tribute to Henry Russell Hitchcock* (Arch History Foundation of New York 1982)), pp 38-51 D Stroud, Sir John Soane, Architect (1984) Pitzhanger Manor An Introduction, guidebook (revised edition, post 1987) B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 3 North-West* (1991), pp 169-72  
Maps J Rocque, *An exact Survey of Twenty Miles around London*, surveyed 1741-5, published 1746 Plan of a Copyhold estate, prepared for the sale by auction of Pitzhanger Manor, 1832 (Sir John Soane Museum) [reproduced in guidebook]  
OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1865 2nd edition published 1896 3rd edition published 1914  
Description written: March 2000 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: June 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.