

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ALDENHAM HOUSE

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Name: ALDENHAM HOUSE

County: Hertfordshire

District: Hertsmere (District Authority)

Parish: Aldenham

County: Hertfordshire

District: Hertsmere (District Authority)

Parish: Elstree and Borehamwood

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.656018
Longitude: -0.30985254
National Grid Reference: TQ 17013 96600
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000902
Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

Details

The remains of a renowned late C19/early C20 arboretum and ornamental gardens, surrounded by late C18/C19 parkland, the setting for a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Two country houses developed close to each other on either side of Grubb's Lane in the southern part of the manor of Aldenham during the C16 and C17, these being united under the ownership of the Coghill family in the early to mid C17. The preferred residence of the family was Penn's Place to the north of the Lane, a substantial brick house surrounded by a moat, which, having been bought by the tenant Henry Coghill in 1640, came to be known as Aldenham Hall. The Coghills had acquired the adjacent Wigbournes to the south of the Lane in the early C17, which was rebuilt c 1672 by Henry Coghill, and was generally occupied by a younger son of the family. Wigbournes came to be known as Aldenham House. The estate passed by marriage into the Hucks family in 1735. By the late C18 (estate map, 1786) Aldenham House was surrounded by formal gardens and groves, with a small landscape park laid out to the east and south, and the former Penn's Place/Aldenham Hall having largely disappeared leaving little trace except for the moat, which still remains (1999). Henry Hucks Gibbs (1819-1907, cr first Lord Aldenham 1896) moved with his family to Aldenham in 1869, developing the park and gardens with his son Vicary Gibbs (1853-1932). Henry Gibbs kept a Year Book from 1869 to 1902, detailing alterations to the gardens as well as the House and estate. The whole garden was celebrated in the early to mid C20 for its variety, extent and extreme horticultural excellence, becoming 'the period's most discussed virtuoso garden' (Elliott 1986); the arboretum was particularly renowned. Edwin Beckett and Arthur J Sweet were Vicary Gibbs' most noted gardeners. In the mid C20 Aldenham House became the centre of the Haberdashers' Aske's School, in which use it remains (1999), with considerable associated mid to late C20 building to the north and south.

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DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Aldenham House stands 3.5km south-east of Aldenham village and 2km west of Borehamwood, at the southern end of Hertfordshire. The c 140ha site is bounded to the east by the A5183 Watling Street, to the north by Butterfly (formerly New Grubb's) Lane, to the west by the road connecting Elstree with Aldenham, and to the south by agricultural land and the village of Elstree. The land slopes generally down from south-west to north-east, with a slight valley stretching in this direction across the centre of the estate, and with a stream feeding a lake, Tykes Water. The immediate setting is largely rural, with beyond this C20 settlements including Radlett, Bushey and Borehamwood, and the M1 lying only 1.2km distant.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The north-west drive enters 350m north-west of Aldenham House off Butterfly Lane, between elaborate iron gates and gate piers with overthrow, flanked by stone piers supporting iron railings which lead to an outer pair of smaller piers in similar style (late C19/early C20). From here the drive runs south-east, passing the moated remains of Penn's Place to the east, 350m from the House. Some 200m north-west of the House the drive curves south, carried across a pond by a single-arch stone bridge in rustic style, passing the remains of rock features to the east of the drive and south of the pond. The drive curves south-east, arriving at a tarmac forecourt (now, late C20, a car park) on the south-west front of the House, enclosed by a low stone kerb. A spur leads south-east off the drive 120m north-west of the House, giving access to the north-west, service front of the House. The spur crosses the stream which runs through the remains of the rock features, carried by a further single-arch stone bridge in rustic style, smaller than that carrying the main drive but in similar style. This drive was created by Henry Hucks Gibbs 1889(90, when the Aldenham to Elstree road was moved c 150m westwards to its present position, and sunk out of sight of the west front, and Grubb's Lane was removed c 200m northwards to its present position (Garden Hist 1986).

The west drive enters 250m south-west of the House, off the Elstree to Aldenham road, at Aldenham Lodge, a single-storey, early C20 lodge. The entrance is flanked by iron gates supported by brick piers with stone ball finials, in turn supporting short lengths of iron railings, with the lodge to the north and the brick park wall extending south. From here the drive curves north-east, overlooking playing fields to the north and south, to join the north-west drive 50m north-west of the House. A small, red-brick lodge stands north of the west drive, 120m north-west of the House, built around a hexagonal centre with a pyramidal roof and prominent central chimney. This marks the site of the western entrance to the estate before Gibbs moved the road westwards in 1889(90 (OS), extending the drive south-west along its present course. The west drive was, before Gibbs' works, one of two drives entering off the Aldenham to Elstree road, the second entering from the south (see below). The two joined together formed a lazy curve up to the House.

The south-east drive enters 1.2km south-east of the House, off the A5183, past a two-storey lodge standing on the north side of the entrance. From here the drive curves in serpentine fashion north-west across the park, flanked by the remains of an avenue, arriving at Tykes Water Lake lying 400m south-east of the House. The drive is carried across the narrow waist of the lake by a three-arch brick and stone bridge with a brick parapet which is ornamentally pierced. The drive continues north-west, flanked by narrow belts of trees, passing the late C20 girls' school buildings to the north, and arriving at the gateway into the pleasure grounds 100m south-west of the House. Here, iron gates are supported by tall brick piers with stone caps, flanked by curved walls with pierced brick balustrade which lead north to a brick wall (in similar style) which bounds the south side of the gardens and pleasure grounds. The drive continues north through the pleasure grounds, arriving at the south side of the forecourt on the south-west front of the House. This approach was formed by Henry Hucks Gibbs in the late C19, incorporating the northern end of the south drive which approached off the earlier course of the Aldenham to Elstree road c 150m south of the House.

The north-east drive, now (1999) disused and partly lost towards its southern end near the House, enters the park at the north-east corner, at the junction of New Grubb's Lane and the A5183. The entrance is marked by a single-storey, white-painted lodge with a stone roof, in Picturesque style, and a white-painted wooden gate and gateway. From here the drive extends c 550m south-west before its course is lost. Formerly the drive joined the north-west drive 200m from the House. This drive was created in the late C19 by Henry Hucks Gibbs (OS).

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING Aldenham House (c 1672, altered C18, and probably by A Blomfield 1870-3, listed grade II*) stands towards the north-west corner of the site, surrounded by gardens and pleasure grounds and mid to late C20 buildings. It is a two-storey, red-brick building, with the entrance front to the south-west and garden fronts to the south-east and north-east, and service wings to the north-west.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS French windows on the north-east front of the House give onto a raised parterre laid out with rose beds, bounded to the north by late C19 and mid to late C20 buildings, to the west by the House, and to the south by the south lawn. The rose beds are laid out in a geometric pattern, set in gravel around a small, central stone pond. The parterre is flanked by borders to the north and south, with a small raised lawn to the west, and a dwarf brick retaining wall to the east. A broad gravel path runs along the north side, with a stone seat set into it. The path, flanked by dwarf brick piers above a flight of stone steps, leads from the french windows to the east edge of the parterre, 30m east of the House. From here the path descends via a flight of stone steps, continuing east through the south side of an open lawn bounded to the south by a clipped yew hedge. This hedge forms the north boundary of the rectangular former rose garden, now laid largely to lawn with informal island shrub beds and enclosed by a yew hedge clipped into undulating forms. The gravel path arrives at a gateway flanked by brick piers supporting iron gates 90m east of the House, the entrance to the woodland garden to the east.

A cross path leads south from the east side of the rose parterre, along the west side of the yew-hedged former rose garden and the east side of the square south lawn. It turns west 75m south-east of the House, continuing along the south side of the south lawn. The south lawn is bounded to the south by a shrubbery, beyond which stands a brick retaining boundary wall with a projecting terrace on an axis with the south-east front of the House. South-east of this lies a late C20 girls' school complex.

A raised earth terrace runs along the south-east front of the House and south side of the rose parterre. A broad gravel path runs along the top of it, overlooking the south lawn. A flight of broad, shallow steps at the east end of the terrace leads down to the path separating the south lawn and the yew-hedged former rose garden. At the west end the terrace gives access to the forecourt. Here the terrace turns south along the west side of the lawn, bounded to the west by a clipped yew hedge screening the lawn from the south drive.

West of the House lies an open lawn extending west to the main road, from which it is separated by a brick retaining boundary wall, giving uninterrupted views south-west from the House and lawn to the remains of a double avenue of Turkey Oak extending 550m south-west from the road. The eastern half of the double avenue containing the mature Turkey Oaks is separated by Dagger Lane from the western half (formerly planted with elms), where the trees have all gone and the area is now pasture (1999). This avenue was created by Henry Hucks Gibbs in the late C19, and extended south-west as a double or triple elm avenue between the forecourt and the road (OS C19).

The remains of a water garden created by the Gibbs family in the late C19, embellished by areas of ornamental rockwork (possibly constructed by James Pulham & Son), runs along the course of the north-west drive. A stream emerges c 120m from the House, between the drive and the site of the former kitchen garden, meandering northwards flanked by lawns planted with specimen trees and shrubs. It runs beneath the bridge which carries the former spur of the drive east into the kitchen garden, opening out into a series of ponds across which the drive is carried by the rustic arched bridge. The stream crosses beneath the drive again c 275m from the House, emptying into a roughly rectangular pond (formerly a swimming pool?) lying adjacent to the drive and enclosed by trees, which in turn empties into the moat of the former Penn's Place adjacent to the north. East of this, a rectangular playing field bounded to the east by woodland stretches south-east from New Grubb's Lane to east of the former kitchen garden site. This forms part of Vicary Gibbs' arboretum (Lord Aldenham pers comm, April 2000). The arboretum by 1918 is said to have contained 179 varieties of oak, 500 varieties of thorn (including berberis, mahonia etc) and many other species given by Vicary Gibb's horticultural friends (Lord Aldenham pers comm, April 2000). West of the drive lies an area of overgrown woodland which contains mature specimens of ornamental tree species, and was formerly laid out with glades running between groups of trees (OS 1898). A star-shaped pond lies within the woodland at the north-west corner. North and west of this lie playing fields, formerly open parkland planted with specimen trees (OS 1898), with a line of trees running along the road boundaries.

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PARK The park lies to the east and south of the House and gardens, laid to pasture with scattered mature park trees. A major woodland block which lies east of the gardens linked the gardens with the pleasure grounds surrounding Tykes Water (OS 1898). A maple and gorse avenue formerly extended north-east from the east side of the woodland to the Watling Street boundary (Lord Aldenham pers comm, April 2000). The garden was formerly connected with Tykes Water via a straight path from the gateway standing 90m north-east of the House, which turned south-east 400m from the House into an informally arranged band of woodland meandering down to the pleasure grounds around the lake. The bridge carrying the south-east drive divides the lake into two unequal halves, each surrounded by the remains of a perimeter walk set in wooded pleasure grounds with a shrub understorey. A rustic boathouse lies at the west side of the smaller, southern half, set into the raised bank, the facade created in rockwork. Home Farm lies within the park, 450m south-east of the House. Formerly known as Stapes Farm (OS 1878), it was rebuilt as a model farm by Henry Hucks Gibbs in the late C19. The park developed from the area south and east of the House shown on the 1786 estate map, which at that date included a rectangular canal lying to the north of the present Tykes Water. The Gibbs family enlarged it considerably in the late C19, also carrying out much planting, the park being dominated by the ornamental pleasure grounds around Tykes Water.

KITCHEN GARDEN The rectangular, walled kitchen garden formerly lay immediately north of the House. It has been demolished and the area now holds mid C20 school development.

REFERENCES

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Maps Dury and Andrews, A topographical Map of Hartford-shire, 1766 Luke Pope, Surveys and Plans of the Estates of Robert Hucks Esq at Aldenham in the county of Hertfordshire, 1786 (D/EAm/P1), (Hertfordshire Record Office)
OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1878 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1938 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1898

Description written: April 1999 Amended: October 2000 Register Inspector: SR Edited: November 2000

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.