

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CANNIZARO PARK

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

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Name: CANNIZARO PARK

County: Greater London Authority

District: Merton (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.421630
Longitude: -0.23100724
National Grid Reference: TQ 23097 70664
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000797
Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Ornamental gardens and pleasure grounds developed from the early C18 up to the mid C20, and since 1948 used as a public park.
HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1705 William Browne, a wealthy London merchant, bought the Warren estate which was situated on the southern edge of Wimbledon Common. The 121ha estate was of poor quality land, almost certainly once part of the Common (Milward 1991). The estate was created in the early 1570s by Sir Thomas Cecil (later Lord of the Manor of Wimbledon) and at that time was known as Old Park. Some time during the early part of the C18 Browne built two new houses along the road known as West Side Common. He lived in the Mansion House, known since at least 1898 as Westside House (OS). The second house, built to the east of the Mansion House, was known as Warren House and was leased to Browne's wealthy friends who were finding Wimbledon a convenient retreat. Access from the city had become much easier with the opening in 1729 of a bridge across the River Thames at Putney; this meant Wimbledon was now within an hour's drive, upon a good road, of London. On the death of William Browne in 1738 his son sold the entire Warren estate to Thomas Walker, Surveyor-General of George II's Land Revenue, Member of Parliament, and a friend of the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole. A wealthy man, Walker had estates in Surrey, Essex, and Suffolk as well as a town house in London and other land near Wimbledon village. Like Browne, Walker almost certainly lived in the Mansion House and leased Warren House to friends. Walker was the last of the owners of the Warren estate to live for any length of time in Wimbledon and when he died in 1748 the estate passed to his nephew Stephen Skinner, a West India merchant who lived on his large estate at Wanstead and leased out both Wimbledon houses. His example was followed by all the later owners of the Warren estate. The lessees of the property included Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville who between 1785 and 1806 made Warren House into one of the leading social centres near to London. Prime Minister William Pitt was a frequent guest and George III was entertained on several occasions. Between 1817 and 1841 Warren House was leased to Francois Platamone (from 1830 the Duke of Cannizzaro). Platamone, a Sicilian, married the heiress Sophia Johnstone and it was the association with the couple which gave Warren House its new name of Cannizzaro House (a mis-spelling of the family name).

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In 1920 the owner, Sir Reginald Plunkett-Erle-Drax, started to sell off the estate, separating in the process Westside House and grounds from Cannizaro House and its park. Much of the outlying land was sold for development. The new owner of Cannizaro House and grounds was Kenneth Wilson, a wealthy businessman with interests in shipping. The Wilsons improved the interior of the House and employed George Dillistone, a landscape gardener, to lay out a new garden, helped by their own head gardener Richard Allison. The new gardens were the venue for many garden parties which raised money for local charities and Girl Guides were invited to hold an annual summer camp in the grounds.

During the Second World War the park was used for Home Guard exercises and during the Blitz several bombs and incendiaries fell near the House. In 1944 an unmanned V-1 rocket landed just beyond the kitchen garden. After the Wilsons died the property was inherited by their daughter, then the Countess of Munster, who in 1948 sold the House with 13.5ha of land to the Corporation of Wimbledon. The grounds were opened to the public and under the care of J G Berry, Deputy Director of the Parks Department, the grounds soon regained their reputation for being a place of great beauty with one of the finest collections of rhododendrons, azaleas, and other rare plants in the south of England. The site remains (2001) in public ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Cannizaro Park is situated on the outskirts of Wimbledon Common, c 600m to the west of Wimbledon village. The c 13.5ha site is enclosed within walls and railings and is bounded to the west by the Royal Wimbledon Golf Club and to the north-west by allotment gardens. Camp Road lies to the north and the backs of houses in West Side Common road provide the boundary to the east. The rear gardens of houses in Chester Road and Sycamore Road make up the boundary to the south-east, and gardens to the rear of properties on the north side of Dunstall Road the boundary to the south. The largely level site falls to the south and the south-west from around the House.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The park is approached from West Side Common road. The main entrance, through wrought-iron gates hung on plain brick piers topped by stone, is immediately north of the House. The gates, which bear the monogram 'EKW' (Ernest Kenneth Wilson) were brought by the Wilsons when they moved from Roehampton House to Cannizaro in 1920, but were not placed in their present position until 1948.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Cannizaro House, today (2001) a hotel, stands on the east side of the site and has its own entrance from West Side Common road, c 20m to the south of the public entrance. Limited car parking for the hotel is set within clipped hedges to the east of the House. The House is built of brick with two main floors and a balustraded attic storey. The garden front looks over the west lawn towards ornamental woodland and has a two-storey central bow with two rectangular, single-storey bays set either side of the bow. In the late C20 the upper storeys and the bow were faced with white stucco. The south front has a portico (painted white), while the north and east fronts are plain.

Cannizaro House was built as Warren House in the early part of the C18, when it was described as 'a low building' (Milward 1991). The central bow had been added to the garden front by the mid C19 (Tithe map, 1848), and at some time in the first half of the C19 a long verandah was also added to the garden front (OS 1865). The name Cannizaro House was adopted in 1874, having been referred to as Cannazero House (after the early C19 leaseholder, the Duke of Cannizaro) in the 1841 Census returns. In October 1900 the House was gutted by fire and in the following year the leaseholder, Colonel Mitchell, set about rebuilding the House on a similar plan but with a glass conservatory replacing the verandah to the garden front (OS 1911); by 1933 the glass structure had been removed (OS). When the park was sold in 1947 the House was leased by Wimbledon Corporation to Surrey County Council and from 1950 to 1977 it was used as an Old People's Home. The Home was closed in 1977 and for the next ten years the future of the House was uncertain. In 1985, the Council leased Cannizaro House to an hotel group and, after renovations and enlargement, it was opened as an hotel in July 1987.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS From the main entrance a tarmac path, bordered with formal bedding displays, leads west for 25m before dividing around a small quatrefoil pond. A modern sculptured fountain in bronze, designed by Richard Rome, has been installed in the pond (January 2001), following a competition organised by the Friends of Cannizaro and supported by the Constance Fund. The path continues for a further 25m running along the north side of the House; it then divides, the path to the south leading to the west lawn while the path to the north runs past the gothic aviary. Built c 1948 as a miniature Pisa cathedral (The Garden 1981), the aviary houses (2001) a colony of multicoloured budgerigars. Some 15m to

the north of the aviary is a small rectangular garden; formerly a tennis court, the garden contains a collection of ornamental trees and shrubs and a bust of the last Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, who visited Wimbledon when he came to the United Kingdom as a refugee in 1936. The path continues north through an avenue of trees for c 75m before turning to the west where, after c 30m, it divides, a lesser path to the south meandering south-west across the west lawn. The primary path runs west for a further c 80m before terminating at a C19 statue of Diana (listed grade II) standing c 200m north-west of the House. The statue was moved to the woodland c 1980 from its place in front of the bow on the west front of the House. To the north of the east/west path a lesser path leads to Keir Garden, a triangle of ground set in the north-east corner of the site. Inside the partially walled area is the rose garden, Keir Cottage (set in the wall adjoining Camp Road), and the mid C19 chapel, the latter restored c 1950 for use by Girl Guides. The Keir, a neighbouring property, was bought by the then owner of Cannizaro, E Kenneth Wilson c 1932. The house was converted into flats but the gardener's cottage and the 0.5ha walled garden were added to the grounds of Cannizaro. At the entrance to the rose garden the lesser path cuts across the main east/west path and continues in a south-westerly direction down through an avenue of maples, the majority of which were planted by E K Wilson between 1920 and 1930.

The Maple Avenue runs down to the south-west through woodland and grass clearings for c 200m before dividing: the path to the north-west leads back to the allotments, the path to the south-west leads to the pond which lies c 150m west of the House, with semi-mature swamp cypress beside it. From just above the south-east corner of the pond, York stone steps lead north-east up to the west lawn where a tarmac path leads north-east back to the House. Immediately south of the pond on the site of the old kitchen garden is the Italian Garden. Steps at the southern end of the Italian Garden lead to the wild garden, the Azalea Dell, and Lady Jane's Wood which were largely developed by the Wilsons at the same time as the Maple Avenue. Lady Jane's Wood was named as such by Viscount Melville after his second wife Jane, daughter of the second Earl of Hopton. After the park was opened to the public in 1948 the collection of azaleas, rhododendrons, and other rare plants regained some of its 1930s' reputation as a place of great scenic beauty and botanical interest. Paths lead south-east from Lady Jane's Wood through the Mediterranean Garden up to rising ground surmounted by the Belvedere standing c 300m south of the House. A high retaining wall, topped by stone balustrades, supports a rectangular platform decorated with eight free-standing columns. Built in the late 1970s, the Belvedere acts as an eyecatcher at the south-east end of the Mediterranean Garden. From the Belvedere the main path winds along the top of a ridge above the Mediterranean Garden before leading onto the west lawn to the south-west of the House. A lesser path leads south-east from the Belvedere into a small spur of land planted out in the early 1990s with ornamental trees and shrubs and named the Retreat.

From the portico on the south side of the House a flight of six shallow stone steps lead down to a formal sunken garden with paved walks flanked by stone-edged beds planted with seasonal plants. The centre of the garden is laid to grass decorated with geometric cut beds. At the southern end of the garden a set of steps, which match those below the House, lead up to a summerhouse. Evergreen shrubs provide a backdrop to the mid C20 building which is decorated with columns that match the portico on the south front of the House. A path which runs around the perimeter of the garden leads, via a low C20 wrought-iron gate in the south-east corner, to a small formal 'Dutch garden'. The sunken garden and the Dutch Garden were made for Mrs Wilson in the early 1930s.

KITCHEN GARDEN Situated c 180m south-west of the House is the site of the late C18 kitchen garden. The ground slopes down from the north with the northern part laid to grass. The ground to the south, the Italian Garden, is enclosed within low brick walls topped with a stone balustrade. The garden within these walls is laid out with grass plats cut by gravel paths which in part reflect the circular flower bed in the centre. Laid out in the late C20, the Italian Garden replaced the mid C20 local authority plant nursery which in turn replaced the kitchen garden and an extensive range of glasshouses added between the mid C18 and 1939 (OS 1865-1933).

REFERENCES

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B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 2 South* (1983), p 457
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Maps J Rocque, Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark, published 1746 Tithe map for Wimbledon parish, 1848 (Morden Local Studies Centre)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1865 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1916 1933 edition

Description written: March 2001 Amended: October 2001 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.