

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

MEREWORTH CASTLE

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
MEREWORTH CASTLE

Name: MEREWORTH CASTLE

County: Kent

District: Tonbridge and Malling (District Authority)

Parish: East Peckham

County: Kent

District: Tonbridge and Malling (District Authority)

Parish: Mereworth

County: Kent

District: Tonbridge and Malling (District Authority)

Parish: Watringbury

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.253414
Longitude: 0.38516827
National Grid Reference: TQ6654453174
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000938
Date first listed: 01-May-1986

Details

An early to mid C18 landscaped park laid out around a contemporary early C18 Palladian villa house by the architect Colen Campbell, with additional, formal terraced gardens laid out in the mid to late C19 and early C20 around the house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Mereworth was held by the de Mereworth family from the mid C12 to the late C14, passing by marriage first to the Beauchamps and then in 1435 to Edward Nevill, a son of the Earl of Westmorland. The estate descended through the Nevills until it passed by marriage in the C16 to Sir Thomas Fane, whose son was created Earl of Westmorland in 1624. It was not until the succession of Vere, the fourth Earl however that the Fane family came to live at Mereworth. His son, the fifth Earl, Mildmay Fane, died in 1715, leaving his estates to a younger brother, John Fane, who engaged the architect Colen Campbell (1676-1729) to rebuild the house as a replica of Palladio's villa 'La Rotonda' at Vicenza. Contemporary references (Gough MSS, Bodleian Library) indicate the association of the landscape designer Charles Bridgeman (d 1738) with Mereworth and in 1752 its house and gardens were visited and described by Horace Walpole (CL 1920). John Fane became the sixth Earl in 1736 and died in 1762, after which Mereworth passed by marriage to Francis Dashwood of West Wycombe (qv) and then in

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
MEREWORTH CASTLE

1781, through the Fane line, to Thomas Stapleton. On his death in 1831, Mereworth passed to his granddaughter who in 1845 married Evelyn Boscawen, later (1852) to become sixth Viscount Falmouth. During their ownership and that of the succeeding seventh Viscount and his wife, considerable changes to the setting of the house and the establishment of surrounding formal gardens took place. Following the death of the seventh Viscount in 1918, Mereworth passed through the hands of a number of owners including, in the mid C20, Mr Michael and Lady Anne Tree, who made further, minor alterations to the formal gardens. In the mid 1970s the estate was purchased by Al Tajir Ltd and it remains (1997) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The registered site of Mereworth Castle lies to the north and south of the main A26, Tonbridge to Maidstone road on the south-east edge of the village of Mereworth, the principal portion containing the house, gardens, and park lying south of the road. The 130ha site, which comprises 4ha of formal gardens around the house, c 10ha of kitchen gardens, orchard and associated Home Farm buildings, and c 116ha of parkland with lakes and woodland, lies in the broad, shallow valley of an eastward-flowing stream tributary of the River Medway, the valley sides sweeping upwards to wooded crests which form the north and south horizons of the site.

The southern, principal area is bounded to the north and in the north-west corner by an internal tree fringe along the A26 and to the east by minor lanes from which the park is separated in the north-east corner by fields and gardens associated with properties on Pizien Well Road. To the south and west, the woodland and grassland of the park merge into Peckham Fields Wood and adjacent farmland. The narrow strip of the site north of the A26 is bounded by orchard and kitchen garden walls, beyond which are further orchards and farmland, while further north, the site is abutted by a golf course on the east side and a housing estate on the northern boundary.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The house, gardens, and park are approached from the A26 to the north, a surfaced drive entering through wrought-iron gates on the northern boundary c 400m north-north-west of the house and following a southerly course across the chain of lakes before striking due east along the north front of the stables and the northern ha-ha wall which encloses the forecourt to the house. The drive turns south to cross the ha-ha on a causeway and passes between a pair of mature cedars to enter the forecourt on the north front of the house which is laid out with an oval grassed turning circle flanked by further lawns abutting the pavilions to east and west. At the causeway, the drive is joined by a second approach drive, which runs due south from wrought-iron gates on the A26, on the axis of the principal, north front of the house. This axial route is shown as the only approach in 1769 (Andrews, Dury and Herbert), but is not shown on subsequent maps again until 1898 (OS). The present, westerly drive is shown on Mudge's map of 1801 and appears then to have existed in parallel with the axial drive from 1898 until the present (1997).

The axial drive also extends north of the road, continuing for some 1.1km to the site boundary on the crest of the ridge. Laid out by John Fane in the early to mid C18 (it is shown as a tree-lined avenue on Andrews, Dury and Herbert's map of 1769), it extended until the late C20 some 350m further north to a lodge (now, 1997, gone). The drive entrance is flanked on its road frontage by a pair of two-storey, three-bay rendered lodges (listed grade II), each with a projecting pedimented porch facing south onto the road. North of the lodges the drive passes through walled orchard land, on the east side of which is the walled kitchen garden, then through the remnants of a further orchard before climbing the last 300m to the boundary as a broad grassed walk flanked to either side by a belt of coppice woodland containing, on the west side, remnants of lines of mature sweet chestnut trees.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS Mereworth Castle (listed grade I) stands on level ground towards the centre of the park. Replacing an earlier house on the site it was built in 1723 by Colen Campbell as a copy of Palladio's villa for Paolo Amerigo near Vicenza. Its 27m square, 16.5m high, pale pink-painted stuccoed form, which was surrounded by a moat subsequently infilled c 1860, is surmounted by a hipped slate roof with dome and lantern. To north and south, broad flights of stone steps lead up to its otherwise identical elevations which each have an Ionic portico, entablature, and window surrounds constructed in Portland stone. To its north-east and north-west the villa is flanked by a pair of detached pavilions (listed grade I), added c 1740-50, each of a central cube form with a rendered finish and a low, pyramidal roof and with a deep pedimented Tuscan portico on the east and west elevations facing into the forecourt. The north and south elevations have deep, arcaded loggias. The north-east

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
MEREWORTH CASTLE

pavilion contains a room decorated as a shell grotto while adjacent to the west side of the west pavilion are two single-storey brick and timber stable and outhouse wings, the northern wing now (1997) in a ruinous state.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The formal gardens are laid out on two terraces (shown established on the OS 1st edition map surveyed 1867-8) to the south and east of the house, which are raised on the random-coursed stone wall of a surrounding ha-ha. On the south side, the staircase from the portico descends onto a rectangular upper terrace, enclosed by stone walls surmounted by balustrading, which is laid out to lawn and a central axial lily pool and from which steps lead down into the gardens on the east and west sides of the main terrace. These gardens, laid out, together with those on the upper terrace, by Lady Falmouth from c 1889 until c 1920 (CL 1920), are planted as a parterre with rectilinear patterns of clipped box hedging, lawns, and gravel paths and with a columnar cypress as a focal point in the south-east and south-west corners.

The eastern, raised terrace extends some 210m eastwards from the east side of the forecourt and the east pavilion. From the pavilion's arcaded loggia a gravelled walk, bordered by lawn and flanked by tall, clipped yew hedges, extends 180m along the length of the southern edge of the terrace to terminate at a stone seat within a hedged niche. On the north side of the walk is a series of enclosed gardens which, with the walk, were also laid out by Lady Falmouth. The westernmost of these, reached from the walk down steps beneath an arch in the yew hedge, is laid out as a rectangular sunken lawn enclosed by further yew hedging, that along the east side pierced with a row of clairvoies. An opening on the north side gives access and a vista to the park and the lakes. East of the sunken lawn and enclosed by yew hedging is a 45m square rose garden with a central timber-framed aviary, erected in the mid C20 by Lady Anne Tree, surrounded by rose beds laid out in scroll and heart-shaped patterns cut into lawn. The rose garden is flanked to east and west by narrow, hedged side enclosures, each with a central north/south gravelled path and planted with, in the west garden (adjacent to the sunken lawn), beds of mixed shrubbery and in the east garden, mixed borders and roses trained on low wires. North of the rose garden, the bank above the enclosing ha-ha wall is planted with shrub groups and trees, including several mature conifers. At the far east end of the eastern terrace and partly breaching the eastern ha-ha wall is a rectangular, high-walled enclosure, entered through doors in the west and east walls and containing a sunken rose garden with two tiers of perimeter rose beds and a central lawn, built between 1909 and 1938 (OS).

PARK The park surrounds the house and its terraced gardens on all sides. To the north, the stream flowing eastwards through the park is dammed at the eastern end to form a 0.8km long series of three linear lakes (shown established on Andrews, Dury and Herbert's map of 1769), each linked to the next by late C19 rockwork cascades (OS 1896) and with the central lake crossed by the axial drive on a causeway. From the crossing points of both drives there is a vista westwards over the lakes to St Lawrence's church (built by John Fane to replace the previous church which had stood adjacent to the west pavilion) in Mereworth village. The lake edges are intermittently and lightly fringed with trees including groups of weeping willows and poplar. On the north-east shore of the easternmost lake, above the dam, is a small Chinese-style bridge, erected by Lady Anne Tree in the mid C20 and now in a ruinous state. East below the dam, the stream runs through woodland and carr to the site boundary. The parkland surrounding the lakes to the north-west, north, and north-east is open in character, laid to permanent grass and dotted with a number of groups and clumps of trees planted in the late C20 and with, adjacent to the present drive, a few mature conifers.

To the immediate north-west of the house are the red-brick buildings and yards of the Home Farm, established by the late 1860s (OS 1872), and an adjacent brick and timber-clad indoor tennis court, erected between 1909 and 1938 (OS). West of these the parkland is divided into several hedge-lined fields (established between 1867 and 1896, OS) and now cultivated for a hay crop. Some 70m south-west of the southern terrace is a wooded mound containing a brick-lined icehouse which is depicted on the OS map of 1872.

South of the house the valley slopes rise to form an amphitheatre of open, grassed parkland, the bowl of which was laid out in the mid C18 with a formal hedge or tree-lined enclosure with a central pond. This feature, which is shown on Andrews, Dury and Herbert's map of 1769 and is described by Walpole (CL 1920), is now (1997) gone. The slopes are framed by enclosing ridges planted with belts of mixed woodland, including mature conifers, the belt to the east shown on the map of 1769 as cut by a pattern of formal walks, now gone. One of these formed a vista from the house and park to the Triumphal Arch (listed grade II), a brick building faced with sandstone ashlar situated in the southernmost corner of the site, c 930m from the house.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
MEREWORTH CASTLE

Constructed c 1725, it is now hidden from view and in a dilapidated state. Within the western woodland belt, c 500m south-west of the house, is a rendered, octagonal building, now in a ruinous state, described as a temple by Walpole in 1752 (CL 1920).

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden lies on the north side of the A26, c 70m to the north of the east lodge. It is c 160m in length and of a roughly rectangular shape which narrows towards the southern end. It is fully enclosed by high red-brick walls (listed grade II), shown established by 1867-8 (OS 1872) and laid out with a series of C20 glasshouses, now (1997) in a dilapidated state. Built against the mid-point of the eastern wall (part of which is late C18) is a mid to late C19 brick and rendered cottage (known as The Bothy, listed grade II) with a thatched roof and two cone-roofed turrets bracketed to the south-east and south-west corners. In the extreme north-east corner of the garden is a single-storey brick gardener's cottage (listed grade II).

REFERENCES

Country Life, 120 (12 June 1920), pp 808-16; (19 June 1920), pp 876-83; (26 June 1920), pp 912-19 P Coats, Great Gardens of Britain (1963), pp 282-7 C Hussey, English Country Houses: Early Georgian, 1715-1760 (1965), pp 58-65 J Newman, The Buildings of England: West Kent and the Weald (1969), pp 403-05 B Jones, Follies & Grottoes (1974), p 156

Maps J Andrews, A Dury and W Herbert, A Topographical Map of the County of Kent, 2" to 1 mile, 1769 W Mudge, Map of Kent, 1" to 1 mile, 1801 C Greenwood, Map of the County of Kent from an actual survey made in the years 1819 and 1820, c 1" to 1 mile, 1821

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1867-8, published 1872 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1909 1937/8 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1896 3rd edition published 1909 1938 edition

Description written: December 1997 Register Inspector: VCH 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.