

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

STANMER PARK

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
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STANMER PARK

Name: STANMER PARK

District: The City of Brighton and Hove (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

County: East Sussex

District: Lewes (District Authority)

Parish: Ditchling

County: East Sussex

District: Lewes (District Authority)

Parish: Falmer

County: East Sussex

District: Lewes (District Authority)

Parish: Westmeston

National park: SOUTH DOWNS

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.878783
 Longitude: -0.11557500
 National Grid Reference: TQ3266910501
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

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label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
 Grade: II
 List Entry Number: 1001447
 Date first listed: 20-Jan-2000

Details

An C18 landscape park on the Sussex Downs, surrounding an early C18 country house, with informal gardens and pleasure grounds. Charles Bridgeman advised on the layout in the 1720s, in conjunction with the architect Nicholas Dubois, who built the house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Michelborne family owned Stanmer Manor from 1615, it being sold in 1700 to Peter Gott, Receiver General of Sussex, for £8000. Upon Gott's death, the manor was sold in 1713 to Henry Pelham of Lewes (VCH) who employed c 1721 the Frenchman Nicholas Dubois (c 1665-1735), the Office of Works' Master Mason, to build a new house on the site of the earlier manor house. Henry Pelham died in 1725, and Thomas, his youngest brother, inherited the estate. Dubois worked on the site until 1727, in conjunction with Charles Bridgeman (d 1738), the pair having possibly collaborated at other sites (including Cassiobury, Hertfordshire, qv; Willis 1977). Dubois appears to have laid out the gardens, kitchen gardens, ponds and a bowling green (Abbs 1999), and Bridgeman was called in in 1726, probably to advise on tree planting (Willis 1977). Also in 1726, Thomas Pelham, who had business connections in Constantinople, acquired exotic trees and other plants for the park and gardens from Turkey, via Messrs Chadwick and Toole of Smyrna (Sussex Archaeol Collect 1979). By 1730 the rebuilding and landscaping, including the formation of the roads and ponds, were nearing completion (ibid).

In 1737 Thomas Pelham died. His son, Thomas II (1728-1805, cr first Earl of Chichester 1801) inherited the estate, although until he came of age in 1748 the estate was cared for by guardians, who appear to have continued to lay out and maintain the park (ibid). Thomas II continued the embellishment of the park, which is shown in detail on an estate map by Figg (1799).

During the C19 the Pelhams continued to develop the estate, with the rebuilding of the church (1838), additional woodland planting, and a small formal lawn created adjacent to the house probably during the mid C19 and extended in the early C20. During the Second World War the estate was requisitioned and parts used as a firing range, resulting in the complete felling of Horseshoe Plantation. In 1947 the Chichester estate sold the Stanmer estate for £225,000 to Brighton Council, in whose ownership it remains, the house presently (1999) disused and much of the park being public open space. The park woodland was badly affected by the storm of 1987, but much replanting has been carried out (1999).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Stanmer Park lies adjacent to the north-east edge of Brighton, 5km from the town centre, and 7km west of the county town of Lewes, at the heart of the Sussex Downs. The c 485ha site is bounded to the south-west by Coldean Lane, to the west by Ditchling Road, to the north-east by downland agricultural land, to the south-east by the 1960s University of Sussex campus, and to the south by the A27 Brighton to Lewes road. The park is bounded in part by the remains of a flint wall, particularly on the south-west and sections of the west and north-east boundaries, and on the south boundary between Lower Lodges and the Sussex University campus entrance. The park covers undulating downland, the southern part occupying a valley which extends north-westwards, dividing at the village of Stanmer into two further valleys which extend north-west and west. The southern corner of the site has been sliced through from north-west to south-east by the A27 dual carriageway (1980s), dividing off Coldean Wood and the associated land, and the site of the C18 Menagerie.

The setting is largely rural downland, with the urban fringe estates of Brighton adjacent to the south and south-west. Sussex University campus occupies the former south-east corner of the park, incorporating park trees and a flint cottage which appears to have been a lodge to a perimeter drive (OS 1879). South-east of the A27, Brighton University buildings occupy Falmer Hill, both buildings and hillside being prominent in views south-east from the house, garden and pleasure grounds. Further views extend north-east from the higher ground in the park across the Downs, and west and south-west from the upper ground in the west side of the site across the Downs and Brighton towards the sea.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach, from the south-east, enters the park off a slip road giving access from the adjacent A27 road, c 1km south-east of the house, to the lower, south-east drive. The entrance is flanked by Lower Lodges, a pair of single-storey, white-painted brick lodges (C18, listed grade II). The Lodge gardens lie to the south-east overlooking the A27, each being enclosed by curved iron railings standing on low brick walls. The drive immediately adjacent to the north-west of the Lodges is flanked by two mature lime trees. From here the drive extends north-west through the valley bottom, flanked by loosely scattered parkland trees set in mown grass. Some 400m south-east of the house the drive, at this point still flanked by trees, divides and the western arm straightens, it being aligned on the tower of Stanmer church. This arm of the drive turns west-north-west 100m from the house to curve across an informal open lawn to a carriage sweep on the north-east, entrance front of the house. A C19 portico encloses the entrance which overlooks the lawn to the north-east (containing a cricket pitch), the park hillside beyond and the church and churchyard to the north. Where the drive divides, 400m south-east of the house, the eastern section continues north-west around the east and north sides of the churchyard, meeting the south end of the village street.

A second approach, from the west, enters off the Ditchling Road, 1.3km north-west of the house, giving access to the west, upper drive. From this point panoramic views extend north-west and west across the Downs and south-west across Brighton towards the sea. A short drive leads east off the road, through the remains of a small block of woodland, to Upper Lodges, a pair of two-storey, white-painted brick lodges flanking white-painted wooden gates. From here the upper drive curves north-east, down between Pudding Bag and Upper Lodge Woods, emerging into the park 1.2km north-west of the house, from where there are extensive views over the park to the east, and south-east towards distant downland, including Falmer Hill and Firle Beacon. The drive runs down the valley side, bounded to the south by a narrow woodland belt, reaching the north end of the village street 400m north of the house. It continues south through the street to the church, where it turns south-west, flanked by

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flint walls, turning south 60m from the house and crossing the lawn to arrive at the carriage sweep on the north-east front. A spur off the upper drive, where it turns south to the carriage sweep, continues south-west, giving access to the stables standing north-west of the house, and the kitchen gardens to the west of this.

A network of further tracks crosses the estate, particularly in and around Great Wood.

The present drive system as shown on Figg's map (1799) remains largely unaltered (1999). The lower drive was slightly altered at the north-west end during the early to mid C19 (Figg, 1799; OS 1879), when the straightened fork off it was made, aligned on the church, and the earlier serpentine line which approached the house directly was truncated. The approach to the Upper Lodges off Ditchling Road has been slightly altered, as, in the late C19 (OS 1879) the approach drive was aligned on Ladies Mile road to the south-west, giving access to the village of Patcham and the London Road.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Stanmer House (Nicholas Dubois 1720s, listed grade I) stands towards the centre of the park, in the bottom of the park's south-east valley close to the junction with the two upper valleys. The two-storey brick house is faced with cream sandstone and contains fine interiors. It consists of two wings, to the north-east (entrance front) and south-east (garden front), which are all that remains of the 1720s courtyard plan, with formerly a substantial servants' wing to the north-west (now gone). The house enjoys an extensive view south-east from the garden front across the garden and park to Falmer Hill beyond (with the late C20 Brighton University development below the brow of the hill prominent in the view).

The two-storey stable block (C18, listed grade II*) stands 30m north-west of the house. It is reached from the extension south-west of the upper drive which leads to the central, north-west range of three, which are arranged in U-shape. A tall carriage arch at the centre of the north-west range gives access to the stable courtyard to the south-east, enclosed on three sides by the ranges. The fourth, open side to the south-east overlooks the former courtyard area of the house, and formerly gave access to a service yard and beyond this the service range attached to the house (gone, 1999) (Figg, 1799; OS 1879).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens lie to the south-east and south-west of the house, occupying part of the lower north-east slope of Great Wood Hill to the south. Adjacent to the south lie the wooded pleasure grounds which occupy part of the north-east slope of the Hill, leading up to Great Wood.

The garden is divided into two main sections consisting of formal and informal lawns. A formal, level lawn, entered from the south side of the carriage sweep at the east corner of the house, lies on the south-east front of the house (which front has no garden door). A stone-flagged path adjacent to the south-east front is separated from the almost square lawn beyond by a clipped hedge, and a low, informal retaining wall bounds the south-west side of the lawn. At the centre of the lawn lies a stone pond with the remains of a fountain. Formerly paths ran around the perimeter of this part of the lawn (OS 1879), which was constructed in the early to mid C19 (Figg, 1799; OS 1879). A late C19 or early C20 continuation of the lawn, possibly a croquet lawn, extends south-east, cut into the hillside where an informal bank remains to the south. The whole lawn is bounded to the north-east by a narrow belt of trees and shrubs which is punctuated by a brick-piered screen and gateway (early/mid C20) standing c 20m east of the house. Long views extend from these lawns across the park to Falmer Hill. In the late C18 (Figg, 1799) this area was laid to an area of informal lawn or pasture which contained several clumps of trees, and extended north-east as part of the lawn through which the lower and upper drives approached the house.

A small flight of stone steps leads south-west from the formal lawn up to an informal lawn which extends c 200m south-west up the hillside to the edge of the pleasure grounds. It is planted with many mature specimen trees, including three large Lebanon cedars standing on the lawn, and a beech tree standing close to the house, which may remain from the C18. To the south-west lies a belt of trees and shrubs, in which the boundary is marked by the remains of a flint wall (in poor condition, 1999). The north boundary is largely defined by a flint wall which runs between the site of the end of the former service wing of the house, westwards to the kitchen garden. Formerly (OS 1879) this lawn was laid out with a network of informal paths which led generally up the hillside giving access to the pleasure grounds beyond. Figg (1799) shows the area laid out in very similar manner to now (1999), with five prominent circular plantings, three of which may correspond to the sites of the large, possibly C18, cedars which stand here, and smaller individual trees scattered around, leading up to the belt at the south-west boundary. A serpentine path ran west from the house along the north boundary of the lawn close to where the flint wall now stands, giving access to the south-east corner of the walled garden, and also to an adjacent entrance to the pleasure grounds.

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The pleasure grounds extend for c 1km along the north-east side of Great Wood hillside, running parallel with the lower drive in the valley and the kitchen gardens, and bounded by open parkland to the north-east and Great Wood to the south-west. Two main paths run from north-west to south-east along the contours. The lower path is reached from the garden via an informal path through the belt at the south-west boundary. The path extends south-east close to the park edge, set on a terrace cut into the hillside. A c 3(4m high Coade stone monument (1775, listed grade II) stands c 250m south of the house, set several metres to the north of the path, overlooking the lower drive valley. The monument consists of an urn on a triangular plinth resting on legs in the form of three tortoises (now, 1999, headless). It was erected by Thomas II, the first Lord Pelham, and his wife in memory of her father Frederick Meinhart Frankland. The path continues south-east close to the lower north-east edge of the ornamental woodland known as the Arboretum which is set within the south-east end of the pleasure grounds. This contains evergreen shrubs including yew, holly, ruscus and box, and non-native trees and shrubs set in grass and planted during the C19 and C20. The path curves around and up the hillside c 650m south-east of the house to join the upper pleasure ground path which runs along the north-east boundary of Great Wood close to the brow of the hill, forming the south-west boundary of the Arboretum. Distant panoramic views of the Downs extend for many kilometres north-east and east beyond the park from the upper path. Some 400m south-west of the house a cross-path links the upper and lower paths, possibly the remains of a serpentine path which led from the garden across the pleasure grounds and Great Wood to the former Menagerie (now gone) in the park to the south-west (Figg, 1799).

The pleasure grounds are clearly shown by Figg (1799), laid out in similar manner to now (1999), the lower path running close to the parkland with controlled views into it. Parallel to the two main paths ran several serpentine paths, now (1999) no longer visible.

PARK The park is laid, in the south-east half, to pasture, lawns and playing fields, with arable land mainly occupying the north-west half. It contains many clumps and single trees, with extensive perimeter belts and woodland, and panoramic views of the Downs and Brighton from many of the upper parts of the hillsides. The park is dominated by the picturesque Stanmer village (largely C18, most individual buildings listed grade II) which flanks the village street 250-400m north of the house, and is bounded at the south end by the little flint and stone parish church (1838, listed grade B) with a shingled spire. The village (which had shrunk considerably during the C17) was rebuilt in the C18 to the east of the earlier settlement (Sussex Archaeo Collect), the site of which is now a pasture field with earthwork remains of the earlier structures bounded to the west by a flint wall. The church stands within the churchyard, adjacent to the village pond to the east, and was rebuilt in Early English style on the site of a C14 building by the third Earl of Chichester. The south boundary of the churchyard is bounded by a sunk wall and ha-ha, allowing an uninterrupted view of the church and churchyard from the north-east front of the house.

Great Wood and its surroundings cover a hilltop. The Wood is important in sheltering the valleys to the north-east and north, whilst offering extensive views from the woodland edges in all directions across the Downs. Several tracks lead through the Wood, many of these remaining from the C18 layout (Figg, 1799), including Millbanke's Walk, from which panoramic views extend south-west and west across the Menagerie and Coldean Wood to Brighton. The Menagerie, lying c 800m south-west of the house, was formerly reached from the house via a serpentine path across the pleasure grounds and Great Wood. It is now (1999) occupied by an area of allotments where formerly stood C18 menagerie buildings and an associated open paddock within Coldean Wood, later replaced by a C19 pheasantry and farm (Figg, 1799; OS 1879). Adjacent to the north-east of the Menagerie stands a group of late C20 hostels, Varley Halls (outside the area here registered).

KITCHEN GARDEN The rectangular kitchen garden, apparently laid out by Dubois in the 1720s (Abbs 1999), lies 200m west of the house and contains a commercial nursery, including a large area of mid to late C20 glasshouses. The area is enclosed by a flint wall faced with brick on the interior, and was formerly divided into two equal sections by a wall (now gone) between the north and south boundary walls (Figg, 1799; OS 1873). The flint and brick gardener's cottage stands against the centre of the north wall, with potting sheds and offices to the east of this. An area of former orchard lies beyond the south wall, with mid to late C20 nursery grounds to the north within which lies a double herbaceous border flanking a grass walk.

REFERENCES

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P Willis, Charles Bridgeman (1977), pp 63-4, pl 55a Sussex Archaeol Collect 117, (1979), pp 195-9; 127, (1989), pp 189-210
Victoria History of the County of Sussex 7, (1940), pp 238-9 B Abbs, East Sussex Register Review, (unpublished study for English Heritage 1999)

Maps Figg, Stanmer Estate, 1799 (ACC 3714/4), (East Sussex Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1879 2nd edition published 1899 1912 edition 1933 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1873

Archival items Pelham papers, including accounts, maps and garden records, C18(C20 (East Sussex Record Office)

Description written: October 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: February 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.