

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WEST DEAN

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WEST DEAN

Name: WEST DEAN

County: West Sussex

District: Chichester (District Authority)

Parish: Lavant

County: West Sussex

District: Chichester (District Authority)

Parish: Singleton

County: West Sussex

District: Chichester (District Authority)

Parish: West Dean

National park: SOUTH DOWNS

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.899363
Longitude: -0.77399242
National Grid Reference: SU8631211814
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000190
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

An early C19 ornamental garden, with late C19 and early to mid C20 additions, set within an early C19 landscaped park (of earlier origin) which was further developed and planted with an arboretum in the mid and late C19.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

West Dean is recorded in Domesday Book as a hunting park and one of the manors of Singleton, which was held for several centuries by the earls of Arundel and the dukes of Norfolk. In the late C16 or early C17, it became the property of the Lewkenor family, John Lewkenor building a house in 1622. The estate passed by marriage in 1738 to the Peachy family, Sir John carrying out alterations to the Jacobean house and beginning to lay out the grounds adjacent to it. On his death in 1765, the estate passed to his brother, Sir James Peachy, who was created Baron Selsey of Sussex in 1794. By the time of his death in 1808 he had rebuilt the house and kitchen gardens and extended the estate southwards to the coast and more than 20km eastwards beyond Pulborough. His son, the second Lord Selsey, further enlarged the gardens and began major planting in the park. West Dean

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remained in the Peachy family with further additions, including the Arboretum, being made to the grounds until the death in 1871 of Lady Caroline Vernon Harcourt, sister of the third and last Lord Selsey. The estate was sold to Frederick Bower, a China merchant, who continued to develop the gardens, opening them and the house to the public, but who disposed of much of the estate land. In 1891 he sold the remainder, with the house, gardens and park, to William Dodge James who further extended the property and, with his wife Evelyn, a close friend of the Prince of Wales, hosted celebrated house parties. James' only son, Edward, inherited in 1912 but only came into possession of West Dean in 1932. Minor additions were made to the gardens during his ownership and in 1964 he donated the major portion of the estate, including the house, gardens and park, to the newly formed Edward James Foundation, an educational charitable trust which, since 1971, has developed the property to house the present West Dean College. The estate remains (1997) in private, charitable ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING West Dean lies on the south side of the A286 Chichester to Midhurst road, between the villages of West Dean and Singleton. The 213ha registered site comprises c 8ha of formal and ornamental gardens, 1.5ha of kitchen gardens and c 203ha of parkland, arboretum and woodland, the eastern 20ha of parkland leased since 1967 to the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum. The site occupies the broad level floor of the east to west-running valley of the River Lavant, a seasonally flowing winterbourne, and the steep, undulating north-facing slopes of the South Downs which rise to a high crest on the southern boundary. Open downland, cut by steep-sided dry valleys and largely under arable cultivation interspersed with blocks of woodland and scrub, surrounds and encloses the site from distant view. An early C19, high flint wall encloses the site to the west and north-west, beyond which lie the houses and church of West Dean village (to the immediate north-west). East of the village, a short length of wall abuts the A286 and the buildings and yards of the Home Farm while along the remainder of the northern, and the whole of the eastern boundary, fencing and internal tree belts or woodland enclose the site from its encircling roads. To the south, the site woodland merges into a further strip of woodland.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The formal entrance to West Dean lies on the A286, towards the centre of the northern boundary. A drive enters through wrought-iron gates hung on square, flint-faced gate piers (probably built by Ernest George and Harold Peto in 1893, listed grade II) flanked by flint walls (listed grade II) immediately inside which, on the east side, is a two-storey, flint-faced, thatched cottage (probably designed by James Wyatt in 1804, listed grade II). The drive continues south-westwards, flanked by the East Lawn and, to the west, by the Cedar Lawn, which are dotted with specimen trees of mixed ages and species including several mature cedars, one surviving from a group planted in 1748 (guide leaflet). Passing the east side of the stable block, to the immediate south-east of which is the pentagonal car park laid out by Edward James in the 1970s, the drive turns west along the south front of the house to arrive at the porte-cochère, which opens onto a forecourt flanked by lawns lined with topiary domes and with a central well-head. This drive, laid out between 1800 and 1810 (estate maps) when the stretch of the present A286 east of the church was moved c 80m northwards from its previous line closer to the house, appears at that date principally to have served the stables, the house still being approached in 1810 on its south front by a drive crossing the park from west to east. This had gone by 1874 (OS 1st edition), when the present drive is shown as the main route. A new public entrance from the A286 into the gardens, some 360m further west, was created in 1995.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING West Dean (listed grade II*) sits on the level valley floor towards the centre of the northern edge of the site and enjoys extensive views southwards over its park and woodland. Completely remodelled and enlarged from a former E-shaped Jacobean house of 1621 (drawing by S H Grimm) by the architect James Wyatt (1748-1813) in 1805 (dated drawings, WSRO), it is a largely two-storey building faced with knapped flint, with a castellated parapet and casement windows with stone mullions and transoms. The present three-storey entrance tower and porte-cochère and the two-storey east wing were added in 1893 by the architects Sir Ernest George (1839-1922) and Harold Peto (1854-1933). Attached to the east elevation is an L-shaped, flint-faced stable yard, enclosed along the south side by a wing with a central entrance arch and along the east side by a wing with a similar arched entrance which is surmounted by a tower with a clock face and cupola. The house and stables have been converted since 1971 into accommodation and workshops for West Dean College and in 1992 the southern wing of the stables was extended to form a complete courtyard of workshops by the architect John Warren.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The ornamental gardens lie to the north-east and south-west of the house and stables. From the north elevation, lawns dotted with a few small specimen trees rise northwards up a gentle slope. On the east side they are enclosed from the Cedar Lawn by a north to south belt of shrubbery, laid out between 1874 and 1898, while on the west side, 30m north of the house, is a rectangular, single-storey brick Orangery (listed grade II as possibly a former palm house) which appears to be shown on the estate map of 1800 and which is now in use as a studio. North of the Orangery, on land added to the pleasure grounds after the realignment of the road c 1810 and laid out by c 1820 with island shrubberies (estate maps), the lawn is bisected east to west by a massive, 100m long pergola designed by Harold Peto in 1911 (and restored in 1990 after storm damage), its stone columns and timber horizontals swathed in climbing plants. Its western end is terminated by a gazebo with a knapped flint floor while towards its east end the paved floor of its corridor expands into a rectangle containing a lily pool. At its eastern end, steps lead down into the Sunken Garden, laid out on the site of a former rose parterre (shown on an estate plan of 1898) with raised beds of spring and summer bedding and with an offset pool added by Edward James in the 1930s. The garden is overlooked on the north side by a thatched rustic summerhouse, shown on the estate plan of c 1820. North of the pergola the lawns are levelled to form, at the west end, a bowling green with a further thatched summerhouse and, at the east end, a shallow amphitheatre. The lawns are enclosed from the boundary by a grassed Woodland Walk laid out between the perimeter tree and shrub belt, replanted after the storms of 1987 and 1990, and several large island shrubberies.

From the west end of the house the West Lawns running southwards to the River Lavant are overlooked by a raised terrace walk, established by 1874, which runs parallel against the north boundary wall and which is planted with a late C20 row of lime trees. A gravelled walk at the base of the terrace bank, edged with a restored pattern of bedding from 1898, leads westwards into the Spring and Water Gardens which are laid out to either side of a narrow, west-flowing, spring-fed stream. These gardens, created between 1810 and c 1820 (estate maps; Banks Assocs 1989) are planted with numerous bamboo varieties, maples, box, magnolias and herbaceous plants beneath a canopy of mature lime, plane and chestnut. At the western end several elaborate pumice and rockwork bridges and arches, restored in 1997, span the confluence of the stream and the Lavant. They are overlooked by a further rustic summerhouse and nearby on the stream bank is a beech stump encased in glass-fibre and resin for Edward James by the sculptor Ralph Burton. West of the Water Gardens, a gravelled path follows a winding course along a further arm of the Lavant, through an informal mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees which form the Wild Garden, at present (1997) under redevelopment to William Robinson's (1838-1935) principles of wild gardening.

PARK The park lies to the south-west, south and south-east of the house. Southwards from the River Lavant, which forms a natural ha-ha along the edge of the Front Lawn, grazed parkland (part of which was laid out as a golf course in the mid C20), planted with informal clumps and individual trees of mixed age and species (including replacements following the 1987 storm), extends up the sloping floor and east side of a deep combe or dry valley which is enclosed by wooded ridges to the east, south and west, the eastern plantation of Singletonhill extending to the eastern site boundary. South-westwards the planted parkland extends on rising ground to the western boundary belt (on the eastern edge of which are the remnants of an icehouse) and up over the knoll west of Great Combes wood, from which there are fine views of the house and gardens.

The present pattern of parkland and woodland planting was, with the exception of the Arboretum, established by c 1820 (estate map). Between 1835 and 1871, during the ownership of Lady Harcourt, St Roche's Arboretum, which lies at the southern end of the combe c 0.8km from the house, was developed around former early C19 parkland planting with a range of newly introduced exotic trees. It was expanded in the 1890s by William James with a collection of rhododendrons (planted in imported peat) and further developed by Edward James (who died in 1984 and is buried in one of its glades). Badly damaged by the storm of 1987, it is now more open in character with large glades and a lighter tree canopy. The lodge and gates at St Roche's gate on the eastern boundary were built between 1898 and 1910. The eastern parkland, between Singletonhill Plantation and the A286, which is more sparsely planted with clumps than the main park and is dotted with the buildings of the Weald and Downland Museum, was also added in the mid C19, its planting largely being done after 1896.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden lies 140m to the east of the house and stables. Roughly rectangular in shape, 150m long by 100m at its broadest, it was established on its present site between 1800 and 1810 (from its former position on the east side of the stables) and is enclosed by flint walls to the north and north-west and by red-brick walls on the remaining sides. It

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is divided into further sub-compartments by walls. The garden, which was fully restored in 1992 and is known as the Walled Garden, is entered through a gate in the west wall on the south side of the early C19, circular flint Apple Store with its conical thatched roof (listed grade II as a summerhouse). The southernmost compartment is laid out as a fruit garden quartered by box-edged paths and planted with trees in grass. The central section of the garden contains nursery, frame and pit yards with restored ranges of late C19 and early C20 glass and at the north end is a kitchen garden, laid out with formal beds of vegetables.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 6 (29 July 1899), pp 112-16; 170 (22 October 1981), pp 1378-81; (29 October 1981), pp 1462-5; 189 (2 March 1995), pp 42-5 I Nairn and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Sussex* (1965), p 369 West Dean Park, Masterplan (Elizabeth Banks Associates Ltd 1989) West Dean, guidebook, (The Edward James Foundation 1992) West Dean Gardens, guide leaflet (The Edward James Foundation c 1996-7)

Maps Estate maps of 1800, 1810 and c 1820 (West Sussex Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1874-5, published 1880 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition revised 1910, published 1914 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1874 3rd edition revised 1910, published 1914

Illustrations S H Grimm, Drawing of West Dean, (British Museum Add MSS 5672)

Description written: December 1997 Amended: January 2000 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: June 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.