

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HERGEST CROFT

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
HERGEST CROFT

Name: HERGEST CROFT

District: County of Herefordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Kington

District: County of Herefordshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Kington Rural

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.199780
Longitude: -3.0495471
National Grid Reference: SO 28365 56247
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000885
Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986

Details

C19 and C20 arboretum and gardens, in late C20 said to be one of the finest collections of exotic trees and shrubs in private hands, associated with two private houses in ownership of single family. Grounds include Park Wood, probably once part of a deer park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Richard Banks (1791-1841) came to Kington in 1814 and bought a half-share in a legal practice owned by James Davies. Davies was also involved in banking and industrial speculation, and amassed a considerable fortune. On his death that was divided between Banks' three sons, one of whom, Richard William Banks (1819-91), inherited the bank, Ridgebourne House, and the land on which Hergest Croft was later built. Banks, a distinguished geologist and amateur archaeologist, moved to Ridgebourne House in 1857 and undertook some planting of exotic trees.

His son William Hartland Banks (1867-1930) married in 1893 and began to build Hergest Croft in 1895. Planting of the grounds there was started by Banks, a banker, traveller, amateur photographer, gardener and plant collector, and his wife Dorothy Alford (d 1937). They purchased extensively from the Veitch Nurseries at Kingston-on-Thames (Surrey), notable for its introductions of Himalayan and western Chinese specimens, up to and including the dispersal sale of 1913. Later plant introductions by collectors such as Rock, Forrest and Kingdon Ward are also to be found, especially in Park Wood. The next owner was their son Richard Alford Banks (1902-1997). Until 1954, when the family returned to live at Ridgebourne, day-to-day management of the gardens was undertaken by George James, head gardener 1923-54. Thereafter, and until 1988, R A Banks himself was responsible for planting and extending the gardens. His particular interest was maples and birches; Hergest contains the National Collections of those genera and of zelkovas. From 1964 he was joined by his son William Lawrence Banks (b 1938), who was later assisted by his wife Elizabeth Banks, landscape architect. They took over fully in 1988. The gardens have been open to the public since the 1920s.

DESCRIPTION

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
HERGEST CROFT

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Ridgebourne, and Hergest Croft 300m to the west, lie on the Welsh border c 32km north-west of Hereford and c 64km due west of Worcester. They are on the west side of the town of Kington, the church of which Ridgebourne overlooks. The Ridgebourne-Hergest Croft grounds, in all c 20ha, occupy the lower eastern slope of what rises to the west as Hergest Ridge (423m). The houses themselves lie at c 220m, with panoramic views south to the Black Mountains. To the south the ground falls away to the River Arrow, while north of the complex the eponymous ridge drops sharply away into the valley of the Back Brook.

The main grounds around the houses are bounded to the north and south by minor roads which meet at the east end of the site, adjoining Kington church. The western half of the Ridgebourne-Hergest Croft grounds, including Park Wood, adjoins farmland.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Ridgebourne is approached by a gated entrance to the rear of the house on Ridgebourne Road. That gives access to the stables and to the main entrance on the east front of the house. The gates and piers are in the style of John Nash, who may have provided the designs for enlarging the house c 1806. A curving approach drive from the south, with rusticated stone gate piers and iron gates by Bolton and Paul, was created in the mid C19. In the 1960s that drive was lined with Paper Bark maples. Hergest Croft is approached from the rear, off Ridgebourne Road, via a gateway with brick piers of c 1900.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The core of Ridgebourne is of c 1680. It was extended to the east and remodelled internally and externally c 1806 in the style of John Nash (1752-1835). A rear yard and stables may also be by Nash. About 1860 a western extension was added by Richard Drew, a pupil of William Butterfield, Drew working on many estate houses and other buildings for R W Banks. It remains in private ownership. Hergest Croft was begun in 1895 to a design by Drew. It is of two-and-a-half storeys, in brick and stone with a tile-hung first floor and terracotta details, and in a rather severe Arts and Crafts style. On the north-west corner is a conservatory with vinery of 1906. The family lived in the house until 1940 when it was requisitioned. After the war it was occupied by a school and later the county archives before being converted to five flats in 1974. The main reception rooms contain a tea room and other visitor facilities.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS A stone ha-ha, probably built when the house was remodelled c 1806, separates Ridgebourne's gardens from the park. A sunken path looping across the south lawn, a circular flower bed (evidence of others visible in grass) in the same lawn, and shrubberies with specimen trees north-east and especially west of the house probably also date from that time. Plantings of specimen trees and shrubs, especially on the south lawn, are of the C19 and C20.

The gardens of Hergest Croft contain a few C19 specimen trees and some C19 hedgerow beech but most of the garden's development and the planting dates from the period after the house's construction in 1895. South of the house, and approached off a verandah, is the terraced Lawn, originally a double tennis court. It is bordered to three sides by a wall of trees and shrubs selected for their varied green foliage. From the bottom of the garden there is a fine view across parkland to Hergest Court. The vista is framed by a series of clumps of single genus exotic trees, deliberately planted by W H Banks to create an informal avenue in the field between Hergest Croft and Hergest Court. On the east side of the Lawn is successively the old Rose Garden with cable-edged terracotta edging stones to the beds; the Old Rockery (pre 1899), with a dripping well and rill; and the Matterhorn, a second late C19 rockery. Around the periphery of the Lawn runs the Eastern Path. South of the Croquet Lawn is the Daisy Border, a long straight path with shrub borders to either side leading to an iron gate to the Park crowned with a griffin's head, the Banks' family crest. North of the Daisy Border and west of the Lawn is the Croquet Lawn (post 1903), a rectangular compartment surrounded by high clipped yew hedges and decorated with vases of August-flowering lilies. North of the Croquet Lawn is the Sycamore Walk, named after a sycamore of c 1800 at its western edge. Running uphill west from the more formal gardens around the house (Croquet Lawn, Sycamore Walk) and from iron gates purchased from the Wembley Exhibition of 1924-5, is an avenue of conifers planted from 1898 onwards (known at first as The Avenue of Crates). Surrounding the avenue is the Azalea Garden, also developed from the late C19. North of the Azalea Garden, and between it and Ridgebourne Road, is the Maple Grove. This began to be planted in the early 1980s with Western Chinese specimens following the re-opening of China to plant collectors.

North-west of Hergest Croft is a late C19 potting shed, with weatherboarded walls and a clay-tiled hipped roof.

PARK A strip of grazed parkland c 250m wide arcs south of the two houses and slopes gently down from them. Its development probably began in the C19, the fields adjoining Kington church (the location of cottages representing the last vestiges of 'Old

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
HERGEST CROFT

Kington') being purchased and added to the park c 1870. From at least that time specimen trees were planted both as groups of single or related genera and to screen and form views, notably from Ridgebourne to Kington church and from Hergest Croft to Hergest Court. In addition there are several older, former hedgerow trees, including several pollard oaks.

About 1km south-west of Hergest Croft and separated from its grounds and the above mentioned parkland by the open grassland of Haywood Common is Park Wood, purchased in 1912 by W H Banks. Mid C19 field names indicate that this is but a part of a once larger park, perhaps a medieval deer park associated with Hergest Court c 700m to the south. A stout 1m high drystone wall runs around the north and west sides of the wood, taking in Upper Park Wood; its function would appear to be to clearly separate the wood from the common abutting it to the north. The northern half of Park Wood is retained as a natural beech and oak wood. Since 1912, and with extensive terracing carried out from 1919, the remainder of the wood, which drops into a coomb with ponded stream, has been developed as an arboretum with a very wide variety of rhododendrons and specimen trees. Above the coomb on the south edge of the Wood, in an area called the Chinese Path after the predominantly Chinese plants collected there, is the Log Cabin, built in 1948.

Haywood Common presumably represents land cleared from the large block of woodland of which Park Wood represents the last portion. It remained common in 1996. It is permanent grassland with specimen trees, many planted c 1900, although with some earlier beech. Hill Farm, on the north-east side of the common, was designed by Richard Drew.

KITCHEN GARDEN Ridgebourne's kitchen garden, laid out 1800-1810, lies 250m east of Hergest Croft. It is surrounded on all four sides by hedges, and has a stone gardener's house by Richard Drew on its north side. Internally it is divided into three, with vegetables to the west, an orchard in the centre, and herbaceous borders to the east where there is also a tennis court. Glasshouses in the north of the garden are C20. Hergest's kitchen garden, created c 1926 when Ridgebourne was let and abandoned c 1940, lay on the north side of Ridgebourne Road. Its brick gardener's house was designed by Richard Drew.

East of Hergest Croft, running between it and the kitchen garden, is an orchard.

REFERENCES Hergest Croft Gardens, guidebook, (L Banks 1991) Hergest Croft Gardens, guidebook, (L Banks 1996) Country Life, 157 (27 February 1975), pp 28-31 R Sidwell, West Midland Gardens (1981), pp 58-63

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: Herefordshire sheet 17 NW, 1st edition published 1888 Herefordshire sheet 17 NE, 1st edition published 1889 OS 25" to 1 mile: Herefordshire sheet 17.6, 2nd edition published 1903

Archival items Family records and photographs at Hergest Croft (private collection)

Description written: 1998 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: August 1999

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.