

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

GARDENS AT OAKWOOD/BATHWICK
TOWER AND SMALLCOMBE HOUSE

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Name:	GARDENS AT OAKWOOD/BATHWICK TOWER AND SMALLCOMBE HOUSE
District:	Bath and North East Somerset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.377233 Longitude: -2.3363109 National Grid Reference: ST 76689 64296 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001703 Date first listed: 16-Sep-2008

Details

An early-C19 villa garden created by the painter Benjamin Barker, further improved in the early 1830s following alterations to the villa by the architect Edward Davis.

HISTORY Oakwood (and Bathwick Tower) forms part of a group of early-C19 Italianate villas with mature gardens, situated on Bathwick Hill and mainly designed by Henry Edmund Goodridge (1797-1864), which include Montebello (now called Bathwick Grange), Fiesole (now a YMCA) and the semi-detached pair La Casetta and Casa Bianca (all listed at grade II). Although it is not certain whether Oakwood was designed by the youthful Goodridge too, its architectural detailing and overall design very much reflect his manner and style.

In 1814, Oakwood (then known as Smallcombe Villa), was bought by the landscape painter Benjamin Barker (younger brother of the better known painter and lithographer Thomas Barker), and his brother-in-law, the flower painter James Hewlett. Barker, also known as the 'English Poussin' created a garden at Oakwood, which was visited by Queen Charlotte in 1817.

In 1833, Benjamin Barker sold Smallcombe Villa to Thomas Emmerson, who renamed the house Smallcombe Grove. That same year, Emmerson employed the architect Edward Davis (c1802-1852), a pupil of John Soane who had designed several villas on nearby Entry Hill, to extend the villa and remodel its interior. The remodelling was executed in a Picturesque and eclectic style, and consisted of a west-facing wing to the north side of Barker's villa, with a first floor loggia (now filled in) facing the garden; the eastern arm of the extension housed a picture gallery. As part of the remodelling by Edward Davis, the gardens were further improved. Interestingly, the small garden bridge (qv) south of the villa appears to have the same architectural detailing as the balustrade to the terrace and balcony on the south elevation of the villa.

In 1856, the antiquary and cartographer John Britton recorded in his Autobiography that 'at this delectable retreat I spent many happy hours, in company with some of the Bath 'Worthies'. In that same year Smallcombe Grove was sold and renamed Oakwood. As shown on a plan of the garden drawn by the Bristol-based architect William Bruce Gingell, accompanying the sale particulars of 1856, the garden was laid out as a miniature park with informal walks and a series of linear ponds to the west of the villa. It also marks the site of the flower bed (qv) and fountain (qv) south of the villa and a lozenge shaped kitchen garden. By 1885, as confirmed by the first edition Ordnance Survey, the garden layout had remained largely unaltered, except for the introduction of a tennis lawn and a group of outbuildings and glass houses south of the ponds. Also, the pond nearest to the

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house appears to have been removed, and the plan form of the kitchen garden is different, when comparing it to the 1856 plan by Gingell, suggesting it was probably enlarged or altered.

In 1879 Oakwood was extended by the architects firm Gill & Browne with further servants' accommodation created by adding another storey to the wing designed by Davis. In 1896 the architect John McKean Brydon added another wing to the south, covering a former terrace with conservatory which is shown on the OS map surveyed in 1885. In 1928 the villa was bought by General Booth and became a nursing home for retired Salvation Army officers. In 1992-3 Oakwood was re-converted to a house and restored by Forsyth Chartered Architects. The rear servant's quarters and coach house were converted into flats, now known as Bathwick Tower. The western half of the garden has been in separate ownership since the early 1990s.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The garden at Oakwood is situated on Bathwick Hill in Bath, well known as an area with a series of important C19 Italianate villas set in mature gardens. The garden is laid out on a hill side, gently sloping in a southerly direction, offering extensive views of the City of Bath. Along Bathwick Hill, to its north, it is enclosed by a wall (qv), and to the south it is screened by woodland, including Smallcombe Wood.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the site is via the villa, however it can also be accessed via a decorative arched doorway in the north boundary wall along Bathwick Hill, and via an entrance in this wall at the far north-west corner of the site, now leading to Smallcombe House (now in separate ownership). In the 1990s, a further entrance was created in the north boundary wall leading to a garage and parking area immediately west of the villa.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The early-C19 Italianate villa (qv) forms the main focal point for the garden. It stands in the far north-east corner of the site and has a broad terrace to its south and west, with steps leading into the garden. From the balcony, loggia and windows on the south and west elevations are fine views of the garden and of the City of Bath beyond.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Steps from the terrace surrounding the villa lead into the garden, which lies to its south and west. From the south front of the house a path along the east boundary of the site, leads to an early-C19 fountain, probably a former raised flower bed, (qv) circa 5m south of the villa. It is set into the hill side and surrounded by a gravel terrace enclosed by a retaining wall. Further to its south is another early-C19 fountain (qv) consisting of a circular pool with a central basin on a fluted stem. The path continues further south with one branch leading to the site of the former kitchen garden, clearly visible as a terrace set into the hillside, and of which some fragments of wall have survived. Another branch of the path leads into the western part of the garden, which has a network of serpentine paths leading around a series of irregular shaped ponds (early-C19) and lawns on either side of it. South of the ponds is the site of a former tennis lawn introduced in the late-C19. The ponds are linked by small cascades, and over the second bridge from the east is a small early-C19 bridge (qv) with pierced parapets matching those to the balcony on the west elevation of the villa. From the bridge is an important view towards the villa and the garden stretching out in front of it. The remaining ponds to the west are now situated in the grounds of the garden to Smallcombe House, which was built in the early 1990s on the foot print of former glass houses and outbuildings. Visual links, as best viewed from the bridge, between the two parts of the garden that are in separate ownership have been retained. From the bridge the path continues and curves in an easterly direction leading the visitor along the north boundary wall towards the west front of the villa. Though some of the original tree planting in the garden was lost during the Great Storm of 1991 (see plate 35 in *Parks and Gardens of Avon*, 1994), and some inappropriate tree planting has taken place since then, the garden retains some fine mature specimen trees, and its boundary planting, including the woodland to its south has survived.

KITCHEN GARDEN In the far south-east corner of the garden is the site of the former kitchen garden (covering circa 0.5ha), its outline clearly visible on the ground and with some fragments of its former wall remaining.

SOURCES WB Gingell, *Plan of House & Grounds called Smallcombe Grove near Bath*, 1856. S Harding and D Lambert, *Parks and Gardens of Avon* (1994), pp 74-75. M Forsyth, *Pevsner Architectural Guides-Bath* (2003), pp 200-201. S Sloman, Thomas Barker (1767-1847), painter and lithographer, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004-8). T Mowl and C Fry, *Oakwood, Bathwick Hill, Bath: An Appraisal of the Historic Gardens* (2008, for Bath and North East Somerset Council).

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION The garden at Oakwood, now known as Oakwood and Bathwick Tower, merits designation on a national level for the following principal reasons:

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* Despite the C20 alterations that have affected the site, the original design intentions and outline of this early-C19 Italianate villa garden, a type of site that is particularly vulnerable to development and change, are easy to trace. * It has a strong historic association with the landscape painter Benjamin Barker, also known as the 'English Poussin', who first improved it after he bought it in 1810, and with the architect Edward Davis, a pupil of John Soane, who improved the villa in circa 1833. * It forms part of an interesting group of C19 Italianate villa gardens on Bathwick Hill in Bath, Oakwood being perhaps the most elaborate and ambitious in design, giving this area a distinctive and unusual character in wider landscape terms. * It forms a very important setting to the early-C19 villa now known as Oakwood and Bathwick Tower (qv) and its associated garden features (qv), contributing to the understanding of the historic development of the site and to its overall design.

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.