

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

OLANTIGH TOWERS

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
OLANTIGH TOWERS

Name: OLANTIGH TOWERS

County: Kent

District: Ashford (District Authority)

Parish: Crundale

County: Kent

District: Ashford (District Authority)

Parish: Godmersham

County: Kent

District: Ashford (District Authority)

Parish: Wye with Hinxhill

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.194889
Longitude: 0.94779545
National Grid Reference: TR 06061 48093
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000295
Date first listed: 07-Dec-1988

Details

A country house with an early C20 water garden, set within a mid C19 park and pleasure ground established over earlier features.
HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1508 Sir Thomas Kempe built a new house, called Olantigh, on the site of an earlier building. This was sold to Sir Timothy Thornhill in 1607, who was succeeded by his son Colonel Richard Thornhill. Richard passed the property to his stepson Henry Thornhill who could not afford to live at Olantigh and let it to Sir John Bankes. Henry was succeeded in 1689 by his son, Richard Thornhill who was responsible for levelling the top of the Mount in the park to create a circular lawn encircled by trees. Richard's extravagant lifestyle forced him to sell the estate in 1717 when it was purchased by Jacob Sawbridge, the original Director of the South Seas Company. Sawbridge had ambitious plans to rebuild the house but his financial affairs prevented them from becoming reality. His son, John Sawbridge inherited in 1748 and began the refacing the house, but the substantial rebuilding was completed under the direction of his son, the second John Sawbridge, who succeeded in 1762. He greatly enlarged the house in the Georgian style and laid out new grounds. John Samuel Wanley Sawbridge-Erle-Drax-Grosvenor made further substantial additions and alterations both to the house and its grounds in the 1850s at which point it became known as Olantigh Towers.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
OLANTIGH TOWERS

The house burnt down in 1903 and was rebuilt between 1910 and 1912 on a smaller scale by John Sawbridge-Erle-Drax, a nephew of John Samuel Wanley Sawbridge. In 1913 the estate was leased by Mr J H Loudon who began the redevelopment of the gardens; in 1935 the estate was purchased by Mr F W H Loudon. During the mid C20 the west wing of the house was demolished and is now (2001) a swimming pool and sitting area. The site remains (2001) in single private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Olantigh Towers lies on the east side of the A28, Ashford to Canterbury road, c 9km north-east of Ashford. It occupies a rural location bounded to the north-west by the Great Stour river, to the south-west by farmland, woodland, and the Olantigh road, to the south by woodland, and to the east and north-east by a mix of farmland, woodland, and a minor country road. The house stands surrounded by pleasure grounds towards the western edge of the site, on the east bank of an arm of the Great Stour river. The park covers c 107ha and extends over the rising ground to the east on the far side of Olantigh Road which runs north to south through the park.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES A drive leads off Olantigh Road through mid C19 rendered brick gate piers surmounted by urns (all listed grade II) at a lodge located c 200m to the south-east of the house. It runs north-west across the pleasure grounds to arrive at the forecourt below the north-east front. A second drive branches off Olantigh Road at a point c 380m further to the south; this runs north to the stable block which stands immediately to the south-west of the house.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Olantigh Towers (listed grade II) is a country house built of red brick with ashlar dressings under a plain tiled and hipped roof. It has a two-storey main block, with a seven-bay front and two rear wings off the south-west front. The entrance on the north-east front is marked by a projecting central Ionic pediment, the doors being flanked by niches containing paired sculptures of children. Following a fire in 1903, Olantigh Towers was substantially rebuilt between 1910 and 1912 by A Burnett Brown and E R Barrow for W E Sawbridge-Erle-Drax, incorporating the surviving portico from the 1768 remodelling of the 1508 house.

The C18 stable block (listed grade II) lies immediately to the west of the main house. Its tower, which was added in the 1850s, is dominant in many of the views across the site.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Much of the garden surrounding Olantigh Towers is enclosed by a mid C19 wall (listed grade II). Below the south-east front of the house is a formal terrace leading onto a large lawn with a circular fountain basin at its centre. The terrace was laid out as part of the mid C19 developments. At the western end of the terrace is an elaborate underground room, with an ornamental front of possibly C18 date, which may have been an undercroft or the cellar of a garden building. Above it stands a rockery laid out by Mrs Loudon in the early C20.

On the north-east side of the house parterres, again focused on a fountain, lead into woodland groves planted in the 1850s on the rising ground from where there are views down to the house.

Beyond the north-east lawn, c 100m to the north of the house, in the space between the two arms of the Great Stour river lies a water garden and bog garden. It is laid out with streams, pools, and bridges, a group of yews which stood on the island in the mid C19 lake having been retained as a feature. This layout was started by the Loudons in the 1920s when the lake, created in the 1850s by the widening of a canalised branch taken off the river, was partly filled in. John Samuel Wanley Sawbridge made the lake to replace an earlier scheme of formal gardens to the north of the house. Some 250m to the west of the house and at the south-west end of the water garden lies an American garden, now (2001) overgrown.

A set of paths leads up through pleasure grounds on the slope to the south of the house, to Olantigh Mount, formerly known as Barrow Hill. The C19 arrangement seems to overlie earlier earthworks and the bowling green, a circle of rough turf at the top of the Mount, is said to have been laid out by Major Richard Thornhill at the end of the C17 (CL 1969).

PARK The park lies largely to the east of Olantigh Road and is planted with a few surviving beech and lime put in in the mid C19. Up until the late C18 the park extended only as far south as the Six Gate Clump, a beech plantation of this date (Inspector's Report 1988). It was then almost doubled in size by the imparking of land to the south. A shelter belt was planted alongside the road and Long Plantation was put in at the southern end marking the new boundary. This extension is now treeless and under the plough.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
OLANTIGH TOWERS

The park to the north of the track which leads east off Olantigh Road to the kitchen garden was in existence by the late C18 (Andrews, Dury and Herbert, 1769). It no longer retains any parkland plantings and the boundary between the parkland and farmland to the north-east has been removed.

KITCHEN GARDEN The c 3ha kitchen garden (listed grade II) stands c 550m east of the house on a rise in the land at a point midway along the eastern boundary. It was built in the mid C18 and is enclosed by a circular wall with a main entrance through a two-storey outbuilding on the north side. A second outbuilding is attached to the north-west and a single-storey glasshouse to the south-east. The area is currently (2001) used as a commercial plant nursery and is half filled with C20 glasshouses.

REFERENCES

W Watts, *Seats of noblemen and gentlemen* (1779), pl 78 *Gardeners' Chronicle*, ii (1884), p 601 *Country Life*, 146 (24 July 1969), pp 222-6; (31 July 1969), pp 282-5; (7 August 1969), pp 334-7 *Inspector's Report: Olantigh Towers*, (English Heritage 1988)

Maps J Andrews, A Dury and W Herbert, *A Topographical Map of the County of Kent*, 2" to 1 mile, 1769

OS Surveyor's draft drawings, 1789-1801 (British Library Maps) OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1878 2nd edition published 1898

Description written: April 2001 Amended: November 2001; February 2004 Register Inspector: EMP 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.