

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WELL HALL PLEASAUNCE

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Name:	WELL HALL PLEASAUNCE
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Greenwich (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.456430 Longitude: 0.048549202 National Grid Reference: TQ 42425 75040 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000850 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

The grounds of a C16 moated manor house. The house, rebuilt in the C18, was demolished in the 1930s. The grounds were first opened as a public park in 1933.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Evidence for the occupation of the site of Well Hall Pleasaunce can be traced back to 1253 (East: APD 1999). In the mid C16 it was the seat of William Roper, son-in-law and biographer of Sir Thomas More. The property remained in the Roper family until 1733 when it was sold to Sir Gregory Page who pulled down the C16 Well Hall, built within a moated area, and replaced it with a new residence also known as Well Hall. This lay to the east of the site, between Well Hall Road and the moat. The property, which included the Hall and adjoining farm buildings, continued in the ownership of the Page family, but was largely rented out. Tenants included, from 1899 to 1922, the journalist Hubert Bland (founder of the Fabian Society) and his wife, the children's author Edith Nesbit. From 1815 the land surrounding Well Hall was increasingly used for housing. In particular, land on the east side of Well Hall Road, nearly opposite the site, was taken up by a government housing scheme. The population of the new estate was expected to exceed 6000 but an article, written around the time the development was completed, highlighted the lack of recreational facilities (Culpin 1916). By 1930 virtually all the land adjacent to the Well Hall estate had been developed for housing and the site, by then in a dilapidated condition, was sold by the Page family to Woolwich Borough Council (WBC). The new owners had purchased the property largely in response to the Well Hall Restoration Committee, formed with the purpose of the repair of the one of the oldest buildings, the Tudor Barn. The Borough Council intended to build a branch library on the site and 'that the grounds be laid out as an old-world garden' (Libraries Committee Minutes, 1933), for use as a public park to be called Well Hall Pleasaunce (Eltham Times, 2 June 1933). Well Hall and most of the remaining farm buildings were demolished, the exception being the Tudor Barn, which was converted into an art gallery. In 1932 the Council allocated land to the north of the moat for a library and museum. Plans made by the then Borough Engineer H W Tee and dated 12 and 26 May 1935 show the major features of the gardens as made, but credit for the scheme should be shared with J Sutcliffe (Tee's predecessor), whose name appears on earlier plans (1931). The first portion of the park was opened to the public on Thursday 25 May 1933, improvements, including the addition of a small strip of land to the south and south-west, continuing until 1936.

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In May 1934 Well Hall Pleasaunce was described as 'the jewel of the Council's open spaces' (Kentish Independent 1934). The Tudor Barn and Art Gallery were opened on 23 May 1936 but the proposed library and museum were never built. In the summer of 1936 the local newspaper called the park 'the Borough's most popular rendezvous' (Eltham Times, August 1936).

Over the succeeding years extensive repairs and replanting were undertaken. Tennis courts to the south-west of the site were lost when the Rochester Road relief road (A2) was constructed in the 1970s.

The site, which remains a public park, is currently (2000) undergoing a further programme of restoration. The work, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is intended to reinstate and repair many of the features of the 1930s.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Well Hall Pleasaunce is situated in densely populated south-east London. The town of Woolwich is c 3km to the north and Falconwood 2km to the east. Eltham Palace (qv) lies 1km to the south-east. The c 5ha site is bounded by Well Hall Road (A208) to the east. The southern boundary is dominated by the Rochester Road (A2) to the south but the actual boundary is marked by a small lane (Well Hall Lane). Kidbrooke Lane forms the north boundary and the sports ground of Greenwich University provides the boundary to the west. The largely level site is enclosed within iron railings.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the Pleasaunce is situated to the north of the site where C20 iron gates set in matching railings lead off Kidbrooke Lane. The entrance opens onto a tarmac path which curves gently around the west side of the Tudor Courtyard to the Tudor Barn where it divides, the main path leading to the Barn and the branch path turning west and continuing into the park.

Some 25m to the south-east of the main entrance a lesser iron gate in the railings in Kidbrooke Lane provides a secondary pedestrian entrance. A further pedestrian entrance from Well Hall Road to the east leads past the public toilets (c 1936) and then into the park. A gate leading north from Well Hall Lane into the Italian Garden is no longer in use but a car park (constructed 1936) off Well Hall Lane provides access to this side of the site.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Situated to the north of the site is the Tudor Barn (listed grade II*). The two-storey, red-brick building has a tiled roof. C16 angle turrets to the west gable survive; those to the east were restored c 1980. There are moulded brick coping to the gable ends. The south elevation has thirteen relieving arches and eleven windows, four in original surrounds. At the west end of the building is a massive offset chimney stack. The area around the building is paved. The C16 barn was part of the enclosed farmyard of Well Hall Farm. In the C18 stables were added to the north of the farm. The stables, Hall, and most of the farm buildings were demolished in the 1930s and in 1936 the Tudor Barn was converted into an Art Gallery and Restaurant.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens are divided into a number of linked compartments which largely reflect Tee's design of 1935.

The Tudor Courtyard was laid out in 1936 on the site of the old farmyard. It is a largely grassed area, surrounded by paved paths, with Irish yews in three of the corners. A plaque in memory of Councillor W Barfoot (1872-1941), a strong advocate of the Borough's efforts to acquire additional open space, is set in decorative stonework (rebuilt c 1940) to the north of the Courtyard, opposite the Tudor Barn.

The land to the north of the Tudor Courtyard and east of the moat is laid to grass cut by tarmacked serpentine paths and decorated with specimen trees. The entrances from Kidbrooke Lane lead into this area. The path from the secondary entrance leads south and after c 15m divides, the branch to the west leading to the Tudor Barn, a serpentine path to the east continuing to the south through a grassed and wooded area into the main body of the garden. The wooded area was part of the garden of Well Hall and many of the specimen trees date at least from the C19. From the 1930s onwards shrubs and flowering trees were planted in the area.

From the west side of the Tudor Courtyard a tarmacked path runs west for c 10m, following the end of the northern arm of the moat, before turning south. The path continues for c 30m, running between the western boundary of the site and the western arm of the moat, to the Woodland Glen. The ground to the east of the path, now (2000) laid to grass and shrubs, was in 1936 the Swannery where, in addition to peacocks, ducks and swans were housed. The Swannery was removed in the 1950s and a path between the Tudor Barn and the Woodland Glen was established. The Woodland Glen, a rectangular strip of land planted with

grass, shrubs, and trees runs to the south-west, away from the west side of the moat. Serpentine paths and a winding stream (now, 2000, dry) cross the Glen. The character of the area, described in 1936 as grassy and planted with spring bulbs (Scott Wilson 1999), has been retained but the rustic bridges which crossed it in four places have been replaced in more recent times. The winding concrete-lined stream may have had its origins in the stream that ran along the western edge of the site and fed the moat. The south side of the Tudor Barn overlooks the C16 brick-lined moat (listed grade II*) which encloses a paved square of land, Moat Island. The island was the site of the C16 Well Hall, demolished in 1733 by Sir Gregory Page who rebuilt his house to the east of the moat. The island then became part of the gardens of the Hall until 1933 and a bridge on the east side connected the two (Tithe map, 1839). In 1935 the island was laid to grass with a peripheral path shaded by trees retained from the C19 Moat Island garden. From the 1940s, the island was used for entertainment. In 1948, a temporary bandstand erected during the Second World War was replaced by an outdoor theatre which was enlarged in the early 1960s, at which time virtually all the island was paved. The theatre was burned down c 1980 and has not been replaced. Two bridges provide access across the moat, the one to the east being retained from the garden of Well Hall. The bridge across the western arm was made c 1950 to provide access to the Woodland Glen.

To the west of the Woodland Glen a peripheral serpentine path continues for c 100m to the south-west before turning sharply around a now (2000) dry pool, to continue north-east for c 100m along the south-east side of the Glen, to the Rose Garden. To the south-west of the Glen is the semi-derelict (2000) site of the nursery. From 1934 the nursery supplied trees, shrubs, and bedding plants for Well Hall and other sites within the Borough. The extensive range of glasshouses was enlarged and added to in 1936, 1950s, and 1970s, but had been removed by c 1990. To the east of the site of the nurseries, screened by the shrubs of the Woodland Glen to the north, is the site of the putting green. Now (2000) an open lawn, the putting green was part of the last phase of the development of the park and opened in 1936. To the north-east of the site of the putting green is the Bowling Green (opened 1935), with, to the west, the brick pavilion which had by 1950 replaced a thatched pavilion. The thatched pavilion, built in 1935, was destroyed in the Second World War. To the south of the Bowling Green is a grassed area, with to the south a pond (now, 2000, dry) and a rockery, both created in the 1980s. This area was formerly the site of the Heather Garden, opened in 1936, with an extensive rockery surrounding a large pond. The area was altered c 1950 and again in the 1980s. To the north-east of the site of the Heather Garden is the brick and wood Pergola which provides a division between it and the Italian Garden. Constructed in 1936, the Pergola was at that time planted with roses and wisteria. The oak beams having been replaced once, only the wisteria survives. The Italian Garden, which runs east/west along the southern boundary, includes the Pergola, the central Lily Pool, and the Sunken Garden to the east. The paved area around the now (2000) dry pool is surrounded by grass and cut beds. The rectangular pool was constructed by 1936 with a single central fountain. During the 1980s three fountains, rockwork, and lily planters were installed. Shallow steps lead east, down to the circular Sunken Garden. Shaded by mature evergreens the Garden is laid to grass with cut rose beds. It is thought that the Garden was first planted with herbaceous and sub-tropical plants (Scott Wilson 1999) and was planted with roses c 1960. A continuous route around the park was lost in the 1950s when a path to the north of the Sunken Garden was closed.

A flight of wide stone steps leads down from a paved area to the north of the Lily Pool to the Rose Garden. Enclosed by C18 brick walls (listed grade II*), the Rose Garden is divided into four by paved paths with a central fountain (now, 2000, dry). The design of the Rose Garden, quarters planted with roses and edged with low box hedges, survives from 1936. The Rose Garden lies within the former walled kitchen garden of the C18 Well Hall. As first laid out it retained a number of features including fruit trees, the path system, and the central double-tier fountain. As part of the development of the Rose Garden, the central pool was renewed and the garden planted out with 500 varieties of roses. The fountain was subsequently altered to a single tier and rockwork edging around the pool removed. A thatched rustic shelter shown on a postcard c 1940 (Scott Wilson 1999) was altered and finally removed by 1979. To the west, the brick wall between the Rose Garden and the Bowling Green has been lowered. The entrance in the south-west corner, which provides access between the Rose Garden and the Heather Garden, was added during the 1960s, while the archway in the north-east corner of the walled area, leading to the Woodland Glen, was made at least by 1936 (Plan, Tee 1935). A small paved triangular area to the east of the arch is known as the Antiquarian Corner.

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This area, enclosed within a low stone wall (rebuilt in the 1980s), was identified on Tee's plan of 1935 and occupies the site of C19 glasshouses within the walled garden of Well Hall.

From the Rose Garden, a tarmac path which encloses the rose beds continues to the east through an arch in the garden wall and connects with a similar path running north/south to the east of the wall. The area between the east wall of the former kitchen garden and Well Hall Road is given over to an area of grass decorated by cut beds planted out with seasonal plants, the centrepiece being the Floral Shield. Designed in 1935 to contain the Woolwich Borough Coat of Arms, the shield-shaped bed was originally flat on the ground. The western edge was subsequently raised in order that the Shield could be better viewed by pedestrians.

To the south of the Shield is the Rockery. The streams of water and two connecting pools are now dry (2000) and the narrow winding path which linked with the Sunken Garden to the south is blocked. The Rockery is planted with numerous shrubs, four mature Irish yews, and a large mature poplar tree. The Rockery predates the Sunken Garden to the south by about three years. Details of the plantings are uncertain but the yews which form an arc around the poplar tree are believed to date from the 1930s, while the poplar tree is thought to date from the time of Well Hall (Scott Wilson 1999).

REFERENCES

E G Culpin, A Park is Wanted, c 1916 (quoted in Scott Wilson 1999) Eltham Times, 2 June 1933 Kentish Independent, 21 May 1934 Well Hall Pleasaunce, Greenwich, Draft Report, (East: Architecture Planning and Design 1999) Well Hall Pleasaunce, Greenwich, Draft Report, (Scott Wilson Consultants 1999) [The above reports contain copies of maps and other references.]

Maps J Rocque, Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark and the country near ten miles around, surveyed 1741-5, published 1746 Well Hall estate map, 1748 (in East: APD 1999) Tithe map, 1839 (in East: APD 1999) J Sutcliffe, Proposed Development of Grounds of Well Hall, Scale 1:500, 1931 (in East: APD 1999) H W Tee, Well Hall Pleasaunce, Eltham, Scale 41.66 feet to one inch, 1935 (in East: APD 1999)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1867 2nd edition published 1897 3rd edition published 1916 1936 edition

Archival items Libraries Committee Minutes, 1933 (quoted in East: APD 1999)

Description written: June 2000 Amended: July 2000 Edited: February 2002

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.