

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BALLS PARK

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

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Name: BALLS PARK

County: Hertfordshire

District: East Hertfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Hertford

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.790224
Longitude: -0.063819222
National Grid Reference: TL 33635 11947
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000523
Date first listed: 01-Dec-1990

Details

A country house surrounded by early C18 formal gardens and the remains of a park, reworked in the early C20.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Sir John Harrison (d 1669), financier, built a new house c 1640 in the middle of a warren. By 1700 (Drapentier) the house was surrounded by a walled enclosure which was subdivided into several sections by walls, including a forecourt, a small parterre laid to lawn cut into geometric shapes by paths, an orchard and service yards. Beyond this within the warren several avenues were aligned on the house. Harrison's second wife, Mary, occupied the house after his death until her own death in 1705. The house was enlarged and altered during the first quarter of the C18 for Mary's son, Richard Harrison, during which time the warren was laid out as a park. The walled gardens which surrounded the house were probably also altered at this date. The estate was bought in 1901 by B S Faudel-Phillips who had already resided in it for some time. Faudel-Phillips laid out a series of flower gardens in the early C20. The estate is in divided ownership, the house being used for further education as part of the University of Hertfordshire (1999).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Balls Park lies 500m south-east of the centre of Hertford, at the edge of the town. The c 25ha site is bounded largely by its former park and farmland (in places developed in the C20), except to the north where it is bounded by the B1197 and, for a short length, the A414 dual carriageway. The park is level except where it slopes down towards the eastern boundary. The setting is partly rural and partly urban, with the C20 development of outer Hertford close by to the north and west, and views extending east over the surrounding countryside.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The house is approached via drives from White Lodge on Mangrove Lane, 400m west of the house (outside the area here registered), and Red Lodge (mid C19, listed grade II) off the London Road, c 300m north of the house. The entrance at Red Lodge is marked by curved, brick screen walls flanking a pair of pedestrian gates which in turn flank iron carriage gates (all listed grade II with the lodge). The public road which ran down the west side of the gardens was moved to the line of Mangrove Lane in the 1840s. Both drives arrive at a carriage sweep on the north front of the house, with a short flight of stone steps leading up to the front door.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING Balls Park (c 1640, attr Peter Mills, altered early C18, listed grade I) stands in the centre of the site with the main gardens to the south. It is a two-storey, red-brick house with a substantial C18 former service and stable wing (converted to kitchens and bedrooms C20, listed grade II) attached to the north-west. The house was built on a courtyard plan, with a central courtyard which was roofed over in the early C19.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS From the garden door at the centre of the south front of the house a short flight of stone steps leads down to a terrace walk. At the west end of the terrace, 40m west of the house, stands an early C18 iron-work screen and gate with overthrow flanked by dwarf brick walls (listed grade II). The gateway leads to a level lawn. South of the terrace lies the south lawn, decorated with topiary yews which remain from Faudel-Phillips' scheme, which is bisected by a broad path which leads south to the spoon-shaped Canal. The Canal, aligned with the centre of the south front, lies in an area planted with ornamental trees and shrubs, separated from the lawn by a dry ditch running west/east. It is screened by a hedge line from the fields beyond to the south.

In the mid C18, as depicted by Dury and Andrews (1766), the south end of the Canal was square, with curved edges extending out from the centre of the west, south and east sides. The Canal was flanked by wilderness areas, each crossed by a star-shaped arrangement of walks radiating from close to the centre of the area. The larger, western wilderness also contained serpentine walks to the west and south. The wildernesses and Canal were enclosed by parkland.

A small building, 'Ben's Cottage' (C18, extended C19 and C20, listed grade II), stands to the west of the south lawn, 130m south-west of the house. The two-storey brick cottage has a prominent porch and is divided off from the rest of the site by yew hedging. Adjacent to this to the south lies the rectangular, sunken Rose Garden, or Ben's Garden (c 1910, listed grade II), also yew-hedged. The upper, outer terrace encloses the lower, middle terrace to which it is linked by central flights of stone steps set in the north and south sides. These lead down in turn to the central sunken parterre. The retaining walls are of red brick with broad, stone coping. The sunken parterre is laid out with two cruciform stone paths. At the centre they encircle a circular bed, in the early C20 a small pool (CL 1912).

PARK The main area of surviving parkland lies to the east of the gardens, sloping down to the ditch which marks the eastern boundary of the site. From here are the last remaining of the views out over the countryside for which the property was known in the 1700s.

The house and gardens were originally surrounded by parkland (OS). A school and associated playing fields however now occupy the north-west corner of the site and much new building and car parking has been developed by the University, particularly to the west of the house. These areas are not included within the boundary of the registered site.

KITCHEN GARDEN To the east of the south lawn are the high brick walls of the early C18 kitchen garden. The rectangular enclosure, subdivided into two by an internal wall, was laid out as flower gardens early in the C20, and is used for tennis courts and as the gardens of the two-storey, brick, Gothick-style gardener's cottage (C18, altered C19 and C20, listed grade II). The western wall, decorated with piers surmounted by stone balls, extends south beyond the enclosed area, a pair of ironwork gates forming an opening through it.

REFERENCES

H Chauncy, *Historical antiquities of Hertfordshire* (1700), p 265 *Country Life*, 31 (20 April 1912), pp 578-87 *Gardeners' Chronicle*, i (21 March 1914), pp 205/6 *Gardener's Magazine*, (6 March 1915), pp 118/19

Maps Dury and Andrews, *A topographical Map of Hartford-shire, 1766* A Bryant, *The County of Hertford, 1822*

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1925 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1898

Illustrations Drapentier engraving, published in Chauncy (1700)

Description written: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: November 2000

Legal

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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.