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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

AVENUE HOUSE GROUNDS

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Name:	AVENUE HOUSE GROUNDS
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Barnet (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.597403 Longitude: -0.19364833 National Grid Reference: TQ 25212 90274 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001430 Date first listed: 20-Jul-1999

Details

A late C19 villa garden developed by the ink manufacturer Henry Stephens with advice from Robert Marnock in the 1870s and early 1880s, which was opened to the public in 1900 on a regular basis, and subsequently in 1928 became a public park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Avenue House, a villa built in 1859, was bought by Henry Stephens, son of the inventor of blue-black ink, in 1874. Subsequently, Stephens started with the enlargement and improvements of both house and grounds. In 1878, he asked the editor of *The Garden*, William Robinson, for advice on how to create a suitable garden for his new villa. Robinson recommended his friend, the landscape gardener Robert Marnock (1800-89). Stephens, in his commissioning letter to Marnock, described the three disused gravel pits in the grounds of Avenue House as 'an opportunity for picturesque treatment'. The garden may be seen as an expression of Marnock's later style, as described in 'Marnock's maxims' by Mungo Temple, published in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* in 1890. It included lawns, ponds, mounds and rockwork, a network of informal paths and steps, a paddock and a kitchen garden (called *The Bothy*) (Chris Blandford Assocs 1998). Various fine and exotic tree species were also planted, and in order to complete the layout of the small estate, Stephens introduced a water tower with adjacent laundry, a lodge, a coach house and a stable block.

After Stephens left Avenue House in 1900 he bequeathed the House and 10 acres (c 4ha) of the grounds to the people of Finchley on the condition that it should be 'open for the use and enjoyment always of the public under reasonable regulations' (ibid). Subsequently, the grounds were opened to the public on Thursday afternoons. In 1918, after Stephens' death, the House was requisitioned as a hospital by the Air Ministry. In 1922 Finchley Urban District Council sought to take possession of the property with a view to selling it for development. The Air Ministry however did not vacate the building until 1925. A lengthy legal battle then took place between Finchley UDC, Stephens' executors and local people which resulted in the villa garden being re-opened to the public by Finchley UDC as Avenue House Grounds on 3 May 1928. At that time, advice on the maintenance of the grounds was given by W J Bean, the curator of Kew Gardens, who praised the gardens and its collection of trees (ibid). In 1929 the paddock to the east of the site was developed as the Sports Ground. By 1936 (OS), the land north of the Avenue and on the eastern part of the Sports Ground had been developed for housing.

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From 1933 Avenue House was used as a public library and in 1939 it became the local Air Raid Precautions Head Quarters. After the Second World War, Finchley's municipal offices were moved to Avenue House following wartime damage to the town hall. Subsequently it has been in use as a museum and Avenue House Grounds are managed by the London Borough of Barnet as a public park. The concern over the fulfilment of the terms of Henry Stephens' will has remained an issue to the present day (1999). The Sports Ground (outside the registered area) is held separately on a long lease. Recently (1999), following a successful bid to the Sports Lottery Fund, it has been improved and a new clubhouse with parking area has been built.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Avenue House Grounds, a site of c 5ha partly surrounded by housing, is situated in the parish of Finchley, a North London suburb. The southern boundary is formed by East End Road, and the northern boundary is formed by The Avenue. The Avenue is a public road, closed off to vehicles, which runs between Manor View to the east and Regent's Park Road to the west. It has been a public road since at least the C19, and remained so during the time Henry Stephens lived at Avenue House. It was formerly incorporated into the layout of the grounds, running through the former paddock, now the Sports Ground, situated to the east, and along the northern part of the garden to the west. The site has mid to late C20 functional railings on all sides. The late C19 boundary railings were removed during the Second World War, as were the dwarf railings within the grounds, except for those surrounding the pond.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to Avenue House Grounds is situated along East End Road in the south-west corner of the site. There it leads through a parking area onto the terrace and lawn to the north-east of Avenue House. In the late C19 the grounds were entered at the gate, flanked to the west by a lodge, situated further east along East End Road. Three other entrances to Avenue House Grounds were laid out after the grounds were opened to the public in 1928: one in the north-west corner of the site, one halfway along The Avenue to the north, and one off East End Road to the south.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Avenue House, a villa built in 1859, stands in the south-west corner of the site on a raised terrace overlooking the grounds to the north-east. The south front to East End Road has Italianate stucco and a gabled east wing. The garden front to the north, described by Cherry and Pevsner as 'eclectically picturesque' (1994), is L-shaped and in its angle stands a rustic Italianate tower with projecting eaves. The addition to the east end is of 1884, and is built of stone with mullioned windows and a corner bay overlooking the garden from a large drawing room. To the east of Avenue House stands the lodge, the coach house and stable block with hayloft, probably designed by Rodgers Field. These form a U-shaped group of buildings surrounding a small courtyard, now (1999) tarmacked but formerly cobbled.

PLEASURE GROUNDS Avenue House Grounds is bounded to the south and west by a narrow belt of trees, mainly planted in the late C19. It has a perimeter walk linking to a network of smaller paths and steps flanked in parts by natural stone rockwork. The planting and most of the path layout of the villa garden at Avenue House has remained unaltered since being laid out in the late 1870s/early 1880s (OS 2nd edition). From the raised terrace on which the House stands, in the south-west corner of the site, a lawn gradually slopes down in an easterly direction. In the eastern part of the lawn, just north of the stable block, is an irregularly shaped pond planted with various water plants and bamboo. The lawn and the pond are screened to the north and east by mounds of various sizes which are planted with mixed shrubs and trees. The largest mound in the garden is situated in the north-west corner and is called Monkey Hill, referring to the Monkey Puzzle trees which once stood on it. From the House runs a straight walk eastwards, along the north side of the stable block and past the brick base of a former aviary, built in the 1930s and now (1999) containing beds planted with herbs. A spur north of the walk leads to The Bothy which stands immediately west of the adjacent Sports Ground, with to its south the Water Tower (ruinous 1999), and the site of the adjacent laundry. Formerly this walk ran along the full length of the site leading to the former paddock, now the Sports Ground, thus creating a long vista from the terrace of the House. Today it links up with the path running immediately to the east of The Bothy and thus forms part of the perimeter walk of the garden. Immediately to the west of The Bothy is a small mound planted with trees. To the north of The Bothy is a small lawn with a children's playground introduced in the late C20, built on the site of an earlier one, possibly of the 1930s.

KITCHEN GARDEN The square-shaped kitchen garden, called The Bothy, was built in 1882. It is now (1999) derelict and the glasshouses have been demolished. It comprises four walls with corner towers, a gardener's house, storage for carts, and an

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aquatic tank. It is made of mass concrete and its style has a Moorish influence expressed in the tripartite form of the castellated walls and towers.

REFERENCES

The Garden, 36 (23 November 1889), pp 490-1 [Marnock's obituary, written by William Robinson] R Desmond, Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturists (1977), p 420 P Musgrove, Avenue House, Finchley (1989) B Cherry and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: London 4 North (1994), p 123 Assessment report on Avenue House, (English Heritage 1995) [held in EH Historian's file BAR 24] Avenue House Heritage Lottery Bid: Historic Landscape Survey and Restoration Plan for London Borough of Barnet, (Chris Blandford Associates 1998)

Maps Finchley Tithe map, 1841 (TA/FIN), (LMA)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1863 2nd edition revised 1894-6 3rd edition revised 1912 1936 edition

Henry Stephens' correspondence (1870s(82), describes the works carried out at Avenue House (Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office)

Description written: June 1999 Amended: July 1999 Register Inspector: FDM Edited: January 2001

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.