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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CHENIES PLACE (WOODSIDE)

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Name: CHENIES PLACE (WOODSIDE)

District: Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Chenies

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.677922
Longitude: -0.53332735
National Grid Reference: TQ0150698702
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000594
Date first listed: 30-Aug-1987

Details

A small, late C19 garden by Edwin Lutyens, thought to be the earliest collaboration between Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The history of the site before the 1880s is obscure. It was owned by the Bedford Estate as part of estate holdings in Chenies village. During the 1880s and early 1890s the house was a boarding school for young ladies (Dunne 1888). In 1893 Adeline, Dowager Duchess of Bedford (widow of the tenth Duke who died earlier that year) moved to Woodside, and commissioned Edwin Lutyens (1866-1944) and Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) to design the garden (although no planting plans by Gertrude Jekyll appear to survive for this garden). In 1896(7 C E Kempe remodelled the house. The Duchess died in 1920, and in 1946 the property was leased by Air Commodore C E Benson from Metropolitan Railway Country Estates and was bought by him in 1954. The house and grounds are now (1997) in divided ownership, the western portion of the house known as Chenies Place, the eastern portion still known as Woodside.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Chenies Place lies at the northern end of the Chiltern village of Chenies, 5km east of Amersham. The c 4ha site is bounded to the south by the Chesham to Chenies lane, to the west by a lane leading north to Mill Farm, to the north by water meadows of the River Chess, and to the east by further agricultural land. The site is set on the south side of the Chess valley, with water meadows to the west, north and east, and woodland to the south, and the shallow River Chess flowing from west to east though the bottom of the valley. The land slopes down, south to north, to the mill race of the Chess which runs from west to east through the northern end of the site, with Dodds Mill adjacent to the north-west corner.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main pedestrian entrance to the site lies 15m south of the house, off the Chenies lane, through a late C20 replica of the original wooden, semicircular-canopied, Lutyens gateway, with brick walls on either side. Straight gravel paths lead north to the south and west fronts of the house. The original gateway lies south of the service wing, forming a second, east entrance to the south garden. A short carriage drive leads north from the Chenies lane to the carriage court, thence to the east end of the adjacent service wing and around to the carriage yard north of this wing. An informal gateway lies at the south-west corner of the garden, close to the junction of the Chesham to Chenies lane and the lane to Mill Farm.

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Several paths into the garden meet at this entrance, said to have been used by the Duchess as the beginning of a circuit of the gardens (Sir J Quinton pers comm, April 1997).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The house (listed grade II), known as Chenies Place, lies at the south end of the site, with a long narrow wing, known as Woodside, attached to the east end. It is an irregular, red-brick building, of two storeys, with shaped gables and diagonally set chimney stacks. Kempe's 1896-7 remodelling in the Arts and Crafts style was followed by the addition of the prominent wing on the north-west corner in very similar style (date and designer unknown), also with a door leading to the terrace. A wooden garden seat is let into the south wall, next to the south door, below a dentilled hood on carved brackets. On the south front of the service wing, a colonnaded garden room (1910-14) faces south, originally open, now with wood and glass doors behind the columns. The main fronts of the house, on the west and south, relate well to the south and west elements of the garden. The north front, although it overlooks the majority of the garden and is quite prominent in views within the garden, shares less immediate links with the garden.

The L-shaped stables lie at the south-east corner of the site, adjacent to the kitchen garden, reached by a short drive east from the carriage entrance off the Chesham to Chenies lane. They have been converted to domestic use and are known as The Court House.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The garden surrounds the house to the north, west and south. The formal south garden, defined to the east and south by red-brick walls, buffers the house from the road, and contains lawn, straight gravel paths and a large cedar tree. It is divided in half by a yew hedge running from north to south. Adjacent to the south wall of the house is a 3m wide brick-paved area. The path from the south, pedestrian entrance runs north and spurs east at right angles, to join the brick-paved area by the south door, the main entrance to Chenies Place. The path continues north around the west front of the house, into the main part of the garden, west and north of the house. The west front of the house overlooks a terrace with a brick-paved area, in matching style to that south of the house, set into lawn. The terrace is bounded on the north by a brick wall covered by climbing roses. From the terrace further steps lead west up to a lawn bounded on the north side by a box hedge, which stands at the top of a steep 2(3m high slope. The south-west and west boundaries are screened by mature trees and shrubs. The principal formal feature of the garden, Lutyens' axial path from the house north down to and across the Chess mill race, unites house, garden, mill race and the strip of land on the north bank. Stone steps from Lutyens' west door lead down to the axial path where a further two sets of stone steps lead north from the house down to a gravel path lined with herbaceous borders and backed by formal, clipped yew hedges. Large, open lawns flank these hedges, bounded by trees and shrubs, some of which are rare specimens introduced in the mid C20 by Air Commodore Benson, a grandson of the owner of Westonbirt Arboretum, Gloucestershire (qv). The yew-enclosed walk, with views north to the meadows and hillside beyond, opens out into the level, yew-hedged pond court with seats set into the outer corners and a grand, central stone arbour (Lutyens 1893, listed grade II), paved in similar manner to the other brick-paved areas. The centre of the arbour is paved, but originally contained a pond designed by Lutyens. Four large, raised stone planters flank the corners of the arbour.

The pond court leads north onto a brick footbridge (Lutyens 1893, listed grade II) which crosses the mill race on an axis with the main path. The bridge has a wooden coping, pairs of seats at either end, a small wooden balcony on the east side and brick paving. The mill lawn lies north-west of the bridge, terminated at the west end by Dodds Mill, and bounded to the north by a red-brick wall with stone coping which is part of the mill complex. The view north from the bridge to the water meadows and hillside above is broken by a late C20 tennis court. North-east of the bridge lies a level lawn and some 100m downstream a second footbridge (late C19/early C20, listed grade II), in similar style to the west footbridge but without the balcony. The lawn was intended by Lutyens to contain a formal rose garden, and in 1923 (3rd edition OS large-scale map) two straight paths ran parallel to the water, possibly part of the rose garden scheme. The northernmost of the two paths has been lost, but the southern one connects the two bridges, the path leading back across the easternmost bridge into the lawns of the main (south) garden area. A straight path, now grassed over, runs east from the pond court at the north end of the east lawn. This is the remains of the substantial river garden, now all removed, which contained herbaceous borders, again backed by yew hedges, and terminated at the east end at a seat. West of the pond court is an informal water garden fed at the west end by the mill race, with a shallow,

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serpentine water course and a small island, all planted with herbaceous plants. Originally the water garden was planted with irises, marsh marigolds, arums, rushes and arrowheads (Brown 1982).

It is said (Sir J Quinton pers comm, April 1997) that the Duchess devised her own circuit of the garden, which took in much of the work done for her by Lutyens. She would enter the garden through the south-west entrance, either by foot or in a small trap, and cross to the far side of the mill race at the west end by the mill, continuing along the north bank of the mill race, and returning across the eastern footbridge, then south-west to the house to complete the circuit.

KITCHEN GARDEN The west to east path which runs south of the house is aligned with the central path in the large, 0.5ha, kitchen garden, which is divided into six quarters and bounded by a brick wall with stone coping. It is now a domestic garden.

REFERENCES

F Dunne, Personal recollections (1888), pp 47-8 *Country Life*, 39 (17 June 1916), pp 767-8; 176 (22 November 1984), p 1544

L Weaver, *Houses & gardens by Sir Edwin Lutyens* (1925), pp 7-11 J Brown, *Gardens of a golden afternoon* (1982), pp 54-5

N Pevsner and E Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (1994), pp 232-3

Maps Plan of the Garden at Woodside, Chenies, (Weaver 1925, fig 17)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1883 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1897 3rd edition published 1923

Description written: November 1997 Amended: July 1998; April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: June 1999

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.