

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

**ST LEONARD'S GARDENS**

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Name:	ST LEONARD'S GARDENS
County:	East Sussex
District:	Hastings (District Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.851860 Longitude: 0.55380347 National Grid Reference: TQ 79859 08923 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001385 Date first listed: 25-Jun-1998

## Details

Private subscription gardens, laid out in association with several villas in 1829 by James Burton as the centrepiece to his new town of St Leonards and later, in 1880, being purchased by Hastings Corporation and opened as public gardens.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

St Leonards Gardens were formerly part of Gensing Farm, part of which, following the death of the owner, Charles Eversfield in 1818, was purchased by James Burton in 1828 for the purposes of laying out a new town centred on the gardens and on land to their east and west along and behind the seafront. By 1829, the St Leonards Hotel (now the Royal Victoria) and the Assembly Rooms (the principal, axial building between the south end of the gardens and the sea ( had been completed, as had two colonnaded terraces, the Marina, to east and west along the front. The continuation of building through 1830-31 included the completion and opening of the gardens (designed by a Mr Leaf), which were intended as subscription gardens for residents and hotel guests, and the erection two villas, North Villa (Gloucester Lodge) and Allegria (built by James Burton for himself), within their western boundary. Although the St Leonards Improvement Act was passed in 1832, the gardens were the property of the Burton family and a suggestion made by the Commissioners in 1843 that the gardens be opened to the public was not acted upon. They remained as subscription gardens until their purchase in 1880 by Hastings Corporation when they became public and were renamed St Leonards Gardens. They remain (1997) owned and maintained by Hastings Borough Council.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** St Leonards Gardens lie c 40m to the north of the main east/west A259 coast road, within the western continuation of the built-up area of Hastings and some 2km from its centre. The 3.5ha registered site lies within a narrow, steep-sided natural valley which extends due north inland from the coast road, the gardens being laid out on the northward-rising valley floor and the steep, lower, east- and west-facing valley sides. The entire perimeter of the roughly oval-shaped site is bounded by roads. On the eastern side, the boundary abutting Maze Hill is now open at the northern end (a lithograph of 1834 after John Foulon shows it surrounded by a wall) and enclosed by C20 iron railings at the southern end, while along the western boundary, sandstone walling and fencing overhung by trees and shrubbery encloses the private gardens of the several villas within the site from Quarry Hill.

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**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The principal entrance to St Leonards Gardens is at the southern end, through the central archway in the South Lodge (listed grade II). Built in 1829 by James Burton as East and West Lodges, the archway, framed by giant, fluted Doric columns, is flanked by two, two-storey, slate-roofed lodges. Although the north and north-east boundaries now (1997) offer open access, several paths lead to pedestrian gates in the railings along the eastern, Maze Hill boundary and, at the extreme north end, to a free-standing iron pedestrian gate and gate piers. The villas on the west side of the gardens are approached from gateways and short drives (the c 1830 sandstone archway over, and the retaining walls along, the drive into Allegria Court listed grade II) off Quarry Hill.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** The several villas within the registered site stand above the valley and, although now (1997) largely screened by trees and shrubbery, overlook the gardens. Of the four on the western side, the northernmost, Gloucester Lodge (listed grade II), faces south over the gardens and is an L-shaped, Tudor-Gothic-style, three-storey stuccoed building, originally known as the castellated villa and probably designed by Decimus Burton (1800-81, son of James) in 1829. Some 100m to its south is Allegria Court (listed grade II), a two-storey stuccoed house built c 1830 by James Burton for himself and facing east over the gardens. South of Quarry Court (which lies outside the registered area) is the Rectory, shown on the estate map of 1846. On the east side of the gardens and overlooking them from its principal, west-facing front and surrounding private garden is the Clock House (listed grade II\*), an early gothic-revival house with a small tower at the west end, built by James Burton in 1828 and possibly designed by Decimus Burton.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** Immediately inside the gardens, on the north side of East and West Lodge, a flight of stone-edged steps leads up from the path onto a large, open, oval-shaped lawn, shown on the plan of St Leonards of 1829 and enclosed by 1874 (OS 1st edition) with sinuous belts of shrubbery and featuring a thatched summerhouse (noted, along with 'rustic seats, jets d'eau and flowers too various to enumerate', in pocket guides to Hastings of 1830 and c 1845) in the north-east corner (shrubbery largely gone by 1910, the summerhouse surviving until the mid-1960s). Northwards from the Lodge, the path diverges to east and west of the lawn and is enclosed from the site boundary by low, sandstone retaining walls and dense banks of trees and shrubbery. At the north end of the lawn the paths encircle a roughly pear-shaped pond, shown in a similar form on the 1829 plan, edged now (1997) with low, metal, bow-topped fencing and enclosed on the west and north-west sides by trees and ornamental shrubbery. North of the pond, the east and west paths continue northwards, passing either side of a further, narrow stretch of lawn. The west path is enclosed on the west side by the densely planted bank sloping steeply down from Allegria Court while the east path is bounded on the east side by a raised shrubbery (below the garden of the Clock House) planted with aromatic plants, which was laid out as a border for the blind in 1939. The lawn, now dotted with a few trees, was laid out with islands of bedding in the mid-C20 (1946 postcard illustration).

North of the lawn and on rising ground, the two paths to its east and west encircle further small, informally shaped areas of grass with, to the north-east, a staircase of several flights of steps leading north-eastwards up a long, steep bank onto Maze Hill. Paths leading northwards along the grassed face of the bank from two landings on the staircase survive from a former, more intricate series of winding paths with a central seat, the path shown on a plan of St Leonards of 1846 and described in a guide of 1875 as 'the Maze'. This was reduced to its present layout between 1910 and 1928. A single path flanked by a further, narrow stretch of grass and by belts of trees and shrubbery climbs northwards to a gate at the northernmost tip of the gardens with, on its eastern side (40m due east of Gloucester Lodge), a small pitch-roofed shelter with rustic timber supports which marked the northern limit of the Maze. Its site is shown occupied by a building in 1873 (OS 1st edition). West of the site of the Maze and enclosed from the public paths by a wire fence and shrubbery, the grounds of Gloucester Lodge (originally part of the Gardens but fenced off by 1899 and now in private ownership) are laid out to a central, oval lawn which was the site of a pond from 1829 until sometime between 1873 and 1899. At the north end of the lawn and built into the dam wall of the former pond is a stonework niche flanked by flights of steps (built between 1899 and 1910) rising onto the terrace on the south front of the Lodge. The grounds of the Lodge also contain a granite drinking fountain, erected in memory of James Burton in 1880.

**REFERENCES**

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Nairn I and Pevsner N, *The Buildings of England: Sussex* (1965), 527-9 *Country Life*, 155 (21 February 1974), 384-6; (28 February 1974), 432-4 Manwaring Baines J, *Burton's St Leonards* (1990) *St Leonards Gardens...Draft Restoration Proposals*, (Hastings Borough Council 1997)

Maps Plans of the St Leonards estate dated 1829 and 1846 (Hastings Museum)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1873-5 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1910 4th edition published 1928 5th edition published 1932 6th edition published 1938

Archival items [all held at Hastings Museum] Extracts from guides to Hastings and St Leonards dating from 1830 to 1895  
Illustrations of the Gardens dating from 1830 to the late-C20

Description written: December 1997 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: March 2000

## 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.