

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PRIORY GARDENS, ORPINGTON

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Name:	PRIORY GARDENS, ORPINGTON
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Bromley (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.380234 Longitude: 0.10584646 National Grid Reference: TQ 46649 66680 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001444 Date first listed: 22-Dec-1999

Details

Pleasure grounds and a park, since 1952 a public park, largely developed to their present layout from the late C19. The pleasure grounds continue to reflect the influences of the Arts and Craft Movement and the last private owners' interest in Italian Gardens. Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe designed the Theatre Garden.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The core of the house, since the mid C19 known as The Priory, dates back to the C13 when it was owned by the Church. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries the manor, land, and revenue became the property of the Crown and was immediately leased to the Hart Dyke family of neighbouring Lullingstone. Within three years they had built a new house next to All Saints' church, retaining the 'Prior's Apartments' as the Rectory. By 1630 the Honourable Richard Spence (d 1661), the third son of Baron Spence of Wormleighton in Warwickshire, held the lease of the house. His daughters Mary and Margaret were co-heirs and the lease passed to Mary's husband, William Gee I of Bishop Burton, Yorkshire. The house remained in the Gee family for nearly 200 years. In 1780 Richard Gee received the Beddington estate, with Royal licence to take upon himself the name and arms of the Carew family according to the wishes of his second cousin, Sir Nicholas Hackett Carew, who had no male heirs. The estate at Beddington, Surrey was a large one with a fine formal garden. The contemporary day book of the local nursery man, James Petty of Cockmanning's Nursery, records several purchases made by Richard Gee or Gee Carew as he became known. From these records it is evident that he had a large vegetable garden and orchard. After the death of Gee Carew the property was sub-let to a number of tenants until 1864 when the leasehold interest was enfranchised and the following year was sold to Dr Herbert Broom who was very enthusiastic about the history of The Priory. It is thought that he was responsible for laying out the garden in the antique style (Walford 1883).

In 1919 The Priory became the home of Cecil Hughes and his wife. Hughes was a successful publisher, keen landscape painter (he often visited Italy to paint), and collector of artifacts, some of which he used to decorate his garden. In the early 1930s he became Hon Treasurer to the Landscape Institute where he met and became friendly with Geoffrey Jellicoe and Jock Shepherd, two of its most distinguished representatives. Mrs Hughes was a keen horticulturalist and was very much influenced by Gertrude Jekyll who was a personal friend. After Cecil Hughes died in 1940 his widow and children left The Priory and the building was

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let to Orpington District Council for use as offices. The Council purchased the building in 1947 and the grounds in 1959. After an extensive programme of improvements the grounds were opened as a public park in 1962. In 1959 the south wing of The Priory was demolished and a new public library constructed on the site. Orpington Museum opened in The Priory in 1965.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Priory Gardens are situated to the north of the centre of the town of Orpington which is on the extreme outskirts of Greater London bordering Kent. Bromley is 5km to the north-west and Sidcup c 6km to the north. Farnborough, Kent lies 3km to the south. The c 6ha site is bounded to the north-east by Court Road, the A224 Orpington Bypass which was built on land formerly part of the park. Church Walk, a footpath, provides the boundary to the east, and Ramsdon Road and Church Hill the boundary to the south. The rear of commercial developments situated along Orpington High Street form the boundary round from the south-west to the north. The level rectangular site is predominantly enclosed within iron railings with a concrete slatted fence to the east and brick walls (listed grade II) near to The Priory in the south.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the gardens and pleasure grounds is from Church Hill to the south. First recorded on the OS 1st edition map of 1860, the entrance was described in 1935 (Street) as having lofty Victorian iron railing gates (now, 1999, gone). The drive is screened on the west side by a high yew hedge. Part of the matching hedge to the east has been replaced with lime trees. From the gate the drive runs north for c 20m before dividing, a lesser path leading north to the gardens and pleasure grounds and the main branch turning west in a wide sweep up to the east entrance. The forecourt of the house is now (1999) used as a car park for Orpington Museum. The main entrance into the public park, formed after the local authority acquired the site in 1959, is approached from the junction of Court Road and the High Street to the north of the site. A paved pathway leads between raised plant beds to large ornamental gates. The gates, which date from the C18 and were originally at the neighbouring High Elms estate, are now hung between high C20 brick wings.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The building known as The Priory (listed grade II*) originated in the C13, was rebuilt in the C15 and enlarged in the C17. It acquired the name 'The Priory' during the Victorian era; prior to that it had been called 'The Rectory' or 'The Parsonage' and although it had strong connections with the Church, monks never lived there. The irregular, L-shaped, two-storey building is mainly constructed of flint rubble bonded with mortar, whilst the corners and windows are of ashlar. The Priory's south end has exposed timber framing and close studding with some brickwork behind. The casement windows have two or three obtusely pointed lights. The south wing which included the kitchens and servants' quarters was demolished in 1959 in order to build a new library. The twin chimney stacks were reconstructed in the early 1980s and the roof re-tiled in 1988. The Priory is now (1999) the home of Orpington Museum.

To the south and south-west of the house is a range of timber-framed outbuildings (listed grade II). The earliest part of the two-storey buildings, the central gateway, dates from 1471. The two flanking ranges on either side were added later, replacing an older barn contemporary with the gatehouse.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS From the west front of The Priory a hoggin path leads north through a brick-built arch to the gardens which lie to the north, north-east, and north-west of the house. The gardens are walled and divided into individual compartments; grassed terraces to the north-east; the north lawn to the north of the house; and the parterre garden to the north of this lawn. The Theatre Garden and the rose garden lie to the north-west. To the north-east of the house the ground drops down to the west with a pair of grassed terraces, the lowest retained by a brick wall topped by an herbaceous flower bed. The terracing, made by Cecil Hughes, enabled the sloping ground to the north of the house to be levelled. Cut beds now (1999) decorate the centre of the resulting lawn. The c 25m long terraces are bounded to the east by the remains of the C18 brick boundary wall (listed grade II). A gravel path runs along the top of the terrace, parallel to the boundary wall, and continues through a brick arch into the next compartment. Here, wide stone-paved terraces (c 25m long) are shaded by trees and three flight of steps lead west down to the lower lawn. The steps to the south survive from the 1920s but the centrally placed pair of more ornate stone steps, which lead down from the east of a C20 wooden shelter, were made by 1961 (OS) and are dedicated to the memory of Mr and Mrs Hughes, the last private owners of the site. A paved path runs along the southern edge of the lower lawn. The lawn was, until the late C19 (OS 1909), the south end of a meadow which is included on the plan of 1634. The area

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PRIORY GARDENS, ORPINGTON

is decorated with a parterre garden made in the Arts and Crafts style with low brick walls, stone paving, and cut beds planted with herbaceous plants. The garden, originally made in the 1920s by Cecil Hughes, was renovated and replanted in the mid 1990s. The parterre garden can also be reached from shallow stone steps leading down from the north lawn. The steps were constructed on the site of an C18 ha-ha designed to allow views from the house across the meadow to the north. The low piers at the top of the steps were originally (1920s) decorated with bronze lions, part of the collection of ornaments used by Hughes to decorate the garden. The lions and other garden ornaments were removed when Hughes' widow left The Priory in 1940.

To the west of the north wing of the house the path leads north, past the lower lawn and the Theatre Garden, into the park. Situated to the east of the path, the Theatre Garden was designed by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe c 1927. Jellicoe (1900-96), who was a family friend and knew the site from his social visits, designed the area with a raised grass platform to the south and stone steps as seats for the audience to the north. The theatre, rebuilt in 1997, was used by the Hughes' family for outdoor entertainment. To the north of the theatre is a late C20 herbaceous garden made on the site of the 'box office' garden, a small rectangular area enclosed by yew hedges, made by Hughes to complement the Theatre Garden. Adjoining the 'box office' to the north is the rose garden, bordered by a brick pergola which was refurbished in 1999. The rose garden was made on the site of the 1920s tennis court garden and the brick piers survive from that time. The path continues to the west of the rose garden where it branches around a triangle of lawn decorated with a circular cut bed before leading west out of the site by the High Street gate. Formerly decorated with a circle of cypresses around a statue of Father Time in the centre, Hughes used this as a focal point from the terraces above the parterre garden. The main path continues north to the park.

PARK The parkland extends for 300m north of the pleasure grounds. The boundary to the north of the meadow was, according to the estate title deeds (1885), extended to include the lakes and land to the east of the meadow. The meadow, now the central grassed area of the park, is enclosed within waist-height iron railings which provide a dog-free area. This area is bordered on the east side by a path known from the C19 as Monk's Walk which runs north for c 150m from the pleasure grounds to the south-west corner of the larger of two lakes. To the east of Monk's Walk is an area of meadowland, bordered to the east by Church Walk. This area of ground was included in the park by 1947 when the property was extended by Orpington and District Council. To the west of the central area, on the site of the C19/C20 kitchen garden, is the current (1999) gardeners' depot and children's playground. A path runs north along the west side of the central area for c 150m where it divides, the main branch continuing north-west past the smaller (0.25ha) of two pieces of the water. Enclosed by trees it has a small island in the centre. The eastern branch of the path runs along the south side of the main lake to join with Monk's Walk. To the north, more or less the whole width of the park is taken up by the c 1ha lake. Screened in places by ornamental trees and decorated with two islands, the lake is divided into two unequal parts by an ornamental cascade (originally made in the C19 as a sluice to control the level of the water). The water for the lake springs from a natural underground reservoir which forms the source of the River Cray. Records show that the lakes existed in the Middle Ages when they were used as fishponds. The OS 1st edition map (1860) shows the large piece of water as one very irregular lake and a further piece of water in the north-east corner of the central meadow. By 1896 (OS), when the lakes had been bought into the estate, a sluice had been made, dividing the large water into two, the larger part having achieved the regular outline which survives today (1999). The water to the north-east of the meadow had been filled in by 1997. The path to the north-west of the meadow crosses over the top of the cascade before dividing. The main branch leaves the park by the Court Lane gate, while the second branch continues around the large pond before joining up with Monk's Walk.

REFERENCES

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Maps Glebe Terrier, 1634 (Bromley Local Studies Centre) Tithe map for Orpington parish, 1840 (Bromley Local Studies Centre)

OS 6" to 1 mile 1st edition published 1860 2nd edition published 1896 3rd edition published 1909 1933 edition

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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.