

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

DUNCHURCH LODGE

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Name:	DUNCHURCH LODGE
County:	Warwickshire
District:	Rugby (District Authority)
Parish:	Dunchurch
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.337860 Longitude: -1.2833098 National Grid Reference: SP 48928 71328 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001281 Date first listed: 16-Sep-1993

Details

Early C20 gardens and pleasure grounds laid out by Thomas H Mawson to accompany an early C20 country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1804, the site, then farmland known as Lyons Close (Booth, 1717) belonging to Elizabeth, Duchess of Buccleuch, was purchased by Richard Tawney on behalf of the Directors of the Oxford Union Canal Company. The Directors built a substantial house, known as Dunchurch Lodge, on roughly the site of the present mansion, which was leased to Tawney on a 1000 year lease. On Tawney's death in 1832 Dunchurch Lodge reverted to the Directors of the Canal Company, who let it to a variety of tenants. In 1868 it was converted into a preparatory school, in which use it continued until 1883 when the estate was sold to John Lancaster of neighbouring Bilton Grange (qv). Lancaster, a self-made iron and coal magnate and former MP for Wigan, died in 1884, and following a legal judgement regarding his property, the Bilton Grange estate was offered for sale in 1887 (Edwards 1996). Lancaster's sons, John and George, were able to reserve Dunchurch Lodge and Bilton Grange Farm (renamed Dunchurch Lodge Farm) from the sale. The Lodge was again let until 1890, when it was destroyed by fire (Rugby Advertiser). It remained a ruin until 1906 when John Lancaster commissioned the Liverpool architect Gilbert Fraser (1873-1957) to prepare plans for a new house on the site. The building was completed in 1907, and in 1908 Thomas H Mawson (1861-1933) was called in to landscape the grounds. Using the family firm, Mawson Brothers of Windermere as contractors, Mawson drew up and implemented a complete scheme for the site. The commission was described in detail in the 4th and 5th editions of Mawson's book *The Art and Craft of Garden Making* (1912, 1926) as an example of a design appropriate to a 'new country seat'. Lancaster, an invalid as early as 1908 (Mawson 1927), died in 1918, and with no direct heirs the estate was sold in 1919 to Major Harold Cayzer, a shipping magnate. Cayzer died in 1948, and the estate was sold to the English Benedictine Order in 1949. The Order in turn sold the property to the English Electric Company in 1950, which used the house initially as an apprentice hostel, and subsequently as a management college. The site remains (1999) in commercial use.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Dunchurch Lodge is situated c 500m west of the village of Dunchurch, some 3km south-west of Rugby. The c 12ha site comprises c 2ha of formal terraces and walled gardens, c 6ha

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of pleasure grounds and c 4ha of paddocks. The site is bounded to the north by a recreation field, and to the north-north-east by the Bilton Grange estate (qv). To the north-east and east the site adjoins farmland associated with Dunchurch Lodge Farm which lies c 350m north-east of the house (outside the site here registered). To the south and south-west the site is bounded by farmland, and to the west and north-west by C20 housing on Waring Way. Vicarage Lane passes through the site from south-west to north-east at a point c 240m north-west of the house. The house, terraces and pleasure grounds lie slightly below the crest of a south-east-facing escarpment, and thus enjoy long views across farmland to the south and east, into Northamptonshire, the boundary of which county lies c 1.25km south-east of the house. The ground to the north and north-west of the house is generally level and screened by mature trees.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Dunchurch Lodge is approached from the A426 Rugby Road to the north-west. The entrance is flanked by quadrant lawns separated from the road by chains supported on wooden posts, behind which stand concave brick wing walls c 1.25m high. These terminate in brick piers surmounted by ball finials which support a pair of wrought-iron gates (listed grade II). Within the site stands a pair of brick lodges (listed grade II) with distinctive attic dormer windows set in the Westmorland slate roofs. Each lodge stands in its own garden comprising lawns and shrubs, which are screened from the drive by a dense planting of rhododendron. The lodges, built as estate workers' cottages (Mawson 1926), are today (1999) used as offices. The tarmac drive follows a straight course south-east for c 100m, before sweeping gently south-south-east for c 130m to reach a pair of C19 wrought-iron gates (listed grade II) which lead to Vicarage Lane. The north-west drive is flanked by areas of lawn to north and south, and is screened from the recreation ground to the north and late C20 domestic properties to the south by evergreen shrubbery including early C20 hybrid rhododendrons, and mature deciduous trees. The land required for this approach, previously allotment gardens, was purchased by John Lancaster from the Duke of Buccleuch in 1909 (deeds).

To the south-east of Vicarage Lane the drive enters the grounds immediately adjoining the house through a pair of elaborate early C20 wrought-iron gates with an ornamental overthrow, which are supported by stone piers ornamented with carved swags and vase finials (listed grade II). The piers terminate low, stone, concave wing walls which stand behind quadrant lawns. Within the site and to the north of the drive stands Inner Lodge (listed grade II), an early C20 brick and stone structure with attic dormers set in holly-hedged gardens. Proceeding on a level, straight course the drive passes south-east through a double avenue of limes for c 130m to reach the north-east facade of the stable court which stands to the south-west of the drive. Beyond the stables the drive drops gently and sweeps east and south-east through banks of mature shrubbery and specimen trees to reach the carriage court to the north-east of the house. The carriage court is enclosed to the east, south-east and south by low brick walls with stone balustrades and coping, and to the north-west by the single-storey brick and stone dining room which was built in 1950. Openings to the south and east lead to steps which descend to the garden terraces, while a further opening to the north-east leads to semicircular steps which descend to an avenue extending c 130m north-east. This avenue is today (1999) planted with mixed ornamental trees, replacing an early C20 planting of elm which, as a result of disease, was felled in 1979. Today the carriage court has a central area of tarmac surrounded by planting beds. Early C20 photographs show that the carriage court was entered from the drive to the north through a pair of elaborate wrought-iron gates with an overthrow supported on square stone piers. A similar gate screen with a pedestrian gate stood at the south-east corner of the carriage court and both sets of gates and piers were given to the Borough of Rugby in 1950 when the north gate was removed to make way for the dining room. The northern gates were moved to Caldecott Park, Rugby; the whereabouts of the south-east gate is unknown.

From the stables a service drive descends south-west to reach the north side of the walled garden, with a spur leading south to the kitchen court. Early C20 photographs show timber gates supported on brick piers with stone ball finials marking the transition from the lime avenue to the lower drive leading to the house, and the service drive. This arrangement of gates does not survive (1999). Today, the early C20 service drive has been realigned to serve as access to late C20 car parks located to the west of the walled garden and stables, a mid C20 residential block west of the stables, and a late C20 reception area north-east of the walled garden.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Dunchurch Lodge (listed grade II*) stands on a level terrace, below and to the south-east of which the ground falls sharply revealing views across the gardens and surrounding country. The present Queen Anne Revival mansion was built to the designs of Gilbert Fraser, a Liverpool architect, in 1906-7, and is constructed in red brick with Storeton stone

dressings (The Studio 1911). The building is of two storeys, with dormer windows set in a hipped slate roof, and is roughly L-shaped on plan. The east or entrance facade is symmetrical, with a pair of full-height canted bay windows flanking a single-storey stone porte-cochère with carved Renaissance-style decoration. The garden or south facade has three similar symmetrically placed bay windows, with a garden door and staircase window set in an ornamented stone panel between the central and eastern bays. To the west of the house there is a recessed court, originally enclosed to the south by the house and to the north by the service wing and the wall of the kitchen garden, today replaced by late C20 office buildings. The single-storey service quarters lie to the north of the main house. A single-storey, red-brick, stone and slate-roofed dining room was built in 1950 to the north-east of the original house, but in a style closely modelled on the original building.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The formal terraced gardens lie to the south and west of the house, with further informal pleasure grounds on the south- and south-east-facing slope below. The upper terrace extends to the full width of the house, and is enclosed to the east, south and west by stone balustrades (listed grade II). A wide flagged walk flanked by grass panels runs the length of the terrace, with a similar walk leading to the garden door. There are flower beds below the house and adjacent to the balustrades. At the east and west ends of the flagged walk, stone steps (listed grade II) descend to wing terraces which are retained by low brick walls, and which connect to east and west with walks which skirt the lower terraces to reach the pleasure grounds below. The east terrace is planted to the north with box-edged rose beds, and is aligned to the east on a circular flagged 'Sun Dial Court'. Enclosed by low box hedges and mature Japanese maples, the Sun Dial Court contains an early C20 'Helio-chronometer' (listed grade II) set on a fluted stone column ornamented with carved swags which stands on a double stepped circular stone base. The western wing terrace is enclosed to the north by a high brick wall which separates the terraces from the gardens to the west of the house. An arched doorway closed by an oak, square-lattice door set in a stone pedimented surround leads from the wing terrace to gardens west of the house. The pierced door is aligned on a similar door which leads north to the kitchen garden, thus providing a vista from the terrace which is terminated by the pyramid-roofed fruit room built against the north wall of the kitchen garden. The doors and vista were illustrated by Jekyll and Weaver in *Gardens for Small Country Houses* (4th edn 1920).

Centrally placed stone steps (listed grade II) descend from the upper terrace to a flagged landing on a narrow grass terrace which connects at its eastern end with a walk which ascends to the Sun Dial Court. From the grass terrace splayed stone steps flanked by stone ball ornaments descend to the tennis lawn which is enclosed to the east, south and west by yew hedges. To the east and west of the tennis lawn narrow yew-hedged enclosures, now (1999) laid to grass but formerly with herbaceous borders flanking a grass walk (Mawson 1926), have apsidal ends, originally closed but now opening onto walks leading into the pleasure grounds. From the tennis lawn semicircular stone steps (listed grade II) aligned on the central axis of the house and terraces, and flanked by specimen golden conifers, descend to the informal pleasure grounds. These comprise a south-east-facing sloping lawn, with groups of ornamental trees and shrubs arranged to the north-east and south-west of the central vista, which leads down to an elliptical lake c 130m south-east of the house. To the south of the lake a belt of trees underplanted with rhododendrons and azaleas is separated from the water by a grass walk, while on the central axis of the garden stone steps (listed grade II) flanked by balustraded recesses ornamented with stone obelisk finials descend to the water. A summerhouse to the south of the lake, and formal hedges framing the lake to the south, east and west which are shown on Mawson's published plan of the gardens, were not implemented (Mawson 1912, 1926). Beyond the lake to the south-east, and screened by a belt of woodland, is a further, natural pond which was intended to be accompanied by a rock garden (Mawson 1912, 1926); this was not executed. The gravelled perimeter walk describing a figure of eight around the lawns and pleasure grounds does not survive, although its course can be traced in the lawn (1999).

To the west of the house, and entered through the pierced wooden door leading from the western wing terrace, lies a group of four partly enclosed gardens designed to provide 'snuggness in all weathers' (Mawson 1926) on an exposed site. The door leads to a flagged walk, with a small panel garden with geometric flower beds set in grass below the west facade of the house. Semicircular stone steps (listed grade II) descend west to a lawn enclosed to the north by a low brick retaining wall and yew hedge, and to the south by a similar hedge. A late C20 stone-flagged walk leads west c 50m to join a similar path which leads north to the car parks. This enclosure was originally a rose garden (Mawson 1912, 1926; The Studio 1911) with geometric box-

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edged beds arranged in a diamond pattern, separated by flagged walks; this was removed c 1970 (T Cooke pers comm, 1999). The pergola and rose temple proposed by Mawson for the west end of the rose garden (Mawson 1926) was not executed. Stone steps ascend from the panel garden to the pool court, which is enclosed to the south and east by the house and to the north by the service wing and a late C20 office extension. A rectangular pool with flagged and stepped margins is fed by a lead lion-mask fountain set above an arched recess in a stone balustraded walk immediately below the house. This is partly obscured by a late C20 corridor which runs from north to south across the pool court linking the late C20 reception area to the house. To the west of the pool a rectangular bed planted with specimen shrubs replaces the early C20 lawn (The Studio 1911). A flight of semicircular stone steps descends west from the pool court to a bowling green which is enclosed to the north by the south wall of the kitchen garden, and to the south by yew hedges.

To the north of the mid C20 dining room, early C20 stone steps ascend to a tarmac walk which widens into a circular enclosure, before sweeping north-west to join the service drive c 40m north of the house. This walk is screened from the principal drive and the kitchens by early C20 specimen trees, shrubs and rhododendron hybrids.

PARK Two level paddocks lie to the north of the house and stables, flanking the lime avenue. The paddocks were adapted as polo fields for Major Cayzer after 1919, and continue in this use as sports fields today (1999). The larger, north-east paddock is enclosed to the north-east and north-west by belts of mainly deciduous woodland which screen the site from a drive serving Dunchurch Lodge Farm. Some 270m north-west of the house stands a mid C20 single-storey timber pavilion and a single-storey brick mower shed of c 1920. A late C20 hard tennis court has been constructed at the southern end of the north-east paddock. The smaller, south-west paddock is enclosed to the north-west by a belt of woodland which screens Vicarage Lane, and to the south-west by a hedge.

KITCHEN GARDEN Lying immediately to the north-west of the house, the kitchen garden forms an integral part of the overall design. The c 3m high walls (listed grade II) which enclose the garden are constructed in distinctive purple-brown brick which was specially chosen by Mawson to harmonise with the foliage and blossom of fruit trees (Mawson 1912, 1926); the walls have tiled copings. Doors at the south-west and south-east corners of the garden lead to the pleasure grounds. Today (1999) the garden accommodates late C20 office and conference buildings to the east and west set in late C20 ornamental gardens. The central section, below a range of early C20 timber and brick lean-to glasshouses (restored c 1993) which stand against the north wall of the garden, is laid out with lawns and a late C20 ornamental ironwork pergola designed by Cara Frost (guidebook), and late C20 aluminium sculptures by Roy Rasnussen (ibid). The glasshouses are flanked to the east by the pyramid-roofed fruit room, and to the west by a matching gardener's bothy (both listed grade II), beyond which is a range of potting sheds and offices (listed grade II). Early C20 photographs show that the kitchen garden was decoratively treated with a network of straight paths bordered by borders and espaliers trained on timber trellis and metal arches. The early C20 frame yard and orchard to the north and north-west of the kitchen garden are today (1999) car-parking areas.

OTHER LAND A two-storey cottage (listed grade II) c 270m north-west of the house and immediately south-west of Inner Lodge stands in simple gardens comprising lawns and ornamental shrubs. This building, constructed of concrete in 1904, was the first structure on the estate designed by Gilbert Fraser for John Lancaster (building plan, WCRO).

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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.