

Stockgrove House and Formal Gardens – HE Listing

OVERVIEW

Heritage Category: Park and Garden, Grade: II, List Entry Number: 1434590

Date first listed: 15-Nov-2016

Statutory Address: Stockgrove Park House, Stockgrove, Leighton Buzzard, Buckinghamshire, LU7 0BB



Location

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The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority. County: Buckinghamshire District: Aylesbury Vale (District Authority)

Parish: Soulbury, National Grid Reference: SP9158529514

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SUMMARY Formal gardens at Stockgrove House, designed by W Curtis Green, 1929-1938

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

The formal gardens at Stockgrove House, laid out between 1929 and 1938, are registered for the following principal reasons:

- * Design: they were designed by the architect, W Curtis Green, to both complement and provide the setting for Stockgrove House, which he also designed, and is listed at Grade II;
- * Degree of survival: all the principal components of the formal gardens survive substantially intact;
- * Group value: with the upper garden terrace and garden temple; the lower garden terrace, pool and pergola; Stockgrove House and its attached (former) swimming pool, walls, gates and gatepiers; the clock tower and former stable block; and the two lodges, gates and gatepiers, all listed at Grade II.

HISTORY

Stockgrove Park was incrementally created from farmland and woodland between the late C18 and early C20. The original Stockgrove Farm was bought by Edwin Hammer at the end of the C18 and replaced with a country house surrounded by a small pasture park, later enlarged by two arable closes on the south side. By 1879 it appears that the park had expanded to its fullest extent. In 1928 the estate was bought by Ferdinand Kroyer-Kielberg, who pulled down the existing house and commissioned William Curtis Green to design him a new Stockgrove House with formal gardens to south-east and south-west, as well as a number of other buildings on the estate. The house and formal gardens are the subject of an article published in *Country Life* on 30 September 1939. The Kroyer-Kielbergs sold the estate in 1949. The house is now (2016) in divided ownership, having previously been used as a school.

The formal gardens at Stockgrove House are shown on an Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1977 much as they are today, but with at least two phases of modifications to the square west garden, undertaken between 1947 and the present (2016). While occupied by the school, this garden was tarmacked and a large gymnasium built on the east side. This was demolished after 1996, when

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the house and gardens were acquired by developers and the garden divided into two areas of separate ownership.

Surrounding the formal gardens is an informal area of grassland with scattered trees, which may in part be relics of field boundary hedgerows, selected to form part of the late C18 or early C19 parkland. To the south is a tree-lined avenue, the northern end of the drive from the south entrance to the park; this is a residual feature, shown on OS maps from the late C19 onwards, and marks the boundary between Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. A second avenue of evidently young trees, aligned with the present gardens, appears on an aerial photograph of the mid-1940s, but no evidence of this survives. Beyond that is the wider parkland, now Stockgrove Country Park and Rushmere Country Park; neither of these form part of the registered area. The area included within the country park is a mixture of deciduous and coniferous woodland and heath, the ratios of which have changed over the last 100 years. Apart from the damming of the stream to create a lake, the woodland lacks any significant elements of formal or informal design. The only feature evidently contemporary with the house is the enlarged boating lake, about 380m to the south, on the west side of which is a platform. This represents all that survives of the boathouse, and formerly contained a thatched building, completely destroyed by fire in the 1960s.

William Curtis Green was born in Alton, Hampshire, in 1875. He initially studied engineering at West Bromwich Technical School, followed by architecture at Birmingham School of Art, and in 1895, the Royal Academy Schools. In 1898 he set up his own practice, and although he seems initially to have specialised in the design of the exteriors of transport buildings, power stations and factories, over his lifetime his work spanned a range of building types. These included new office buildings in the City of London, houses, churches and hotels (including, in 1930, the design of the exterior of the Dorchester Hotel). These are all represented in the approx. 30 listed buildings attributed to him.

DETAILS

LOCATION, SETTING, LANDFORM, BOUNDARIES AND AREA

Stockgrove Park House and its formal gardens are located about 1km to the south-east of the village of Great Brickhill, on level ground that falls away steeply to the south-east, but more gradually to the south-west and north-east. The formal gardens constitute the main surviving designed element of the landscape around the house, and occupy geometric compartments on its south-

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east and south-west sides: those to the south-east measure in total about 36m x 92m, those to the south-west about 31m x 74m. Cutting across the west corner of the south-west compartment is a further compartment, about 37m square, with rounded corners. Access to the house, and so to the gardens, is from the drive that leaves the Heath Road to the north. Dense, wide, yew hedges separate the formal gardens from the wider parkland.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The formal gardens are accessed directly from the separate parts of the subdivided house, which is approached by a drive through parkland and pasture from the Brickhill Road to the north.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Stockgrove Park, listed at Grade II, designed by W Curtis Green for F M Kroyer-Kielberg between 1929 and 1938, is a country house built of red brick with limestone dressings in a free Georgian style. It forms a U plan around three sides of a courtyard, with the main outward facing south-east and south-west elevations creating a backdrop to the formal gardens. At the north-west end of the south-west elevation is the former swimming pool, with a single-storey parapeted brick façade, behind which is a tiled and glazed roof with dormer windows. Immediately to the east of this is the south elevation of the house; this is of two storeys, and is asymmetrical, divided into two planes, with square, canted and semi-circular bays. In contrast, the south-east elevation is symmetrical, of two storeys with attics. The parapeted façade is of five bays to either side of a canted bay, the outer bays set back.

ORNAMENTAL GROUNDS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The formal gardens form four main compartments, the most ornamental of which are the three on the south-east side of the house. These include the main garden structures: the lower garden terrace, pool and pergolas; and the upper garden terrace and garden temple. These were designed by W Curtis Green and form two separate listings at Grade II.

The lower terrace is reached down steps from doors to either side of the central canted bay of the south-east elevation, which meet at a raised stone paved platform, from where a short flight of steps descends to ground level, to an area of paving which forms part of the pergola walk that links the three south-east compartments. There are three pergolas, two of which form the north-west side

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of the largest compartment on this side. The other three sides of this compartment are defined by square-cut yew hedges about 1m wide, which have openings to the north-east and south-west sides, flanked by tightly clipped rounded yew piers. On the south-east side are two semi-circular paved alcoves. The south-west opening gives access to steps down to the sunken long pool, and also allows a view across the pool to the geometric rose garden beyond, also enclosed by a yew hedge. This is crossed by two paths at right angles, subdividing the garden into four, each square of which is further divided geometrically, with each bed surrounded by low hedges. From the north-west end of the pool, stone steps with a stone capped brick balustrade rise to the upper terrace, retained by a brick wall. The pergola walk continues to the south-east of the steps. The garden temple is at the south corner of the upper terrace, overlooking the park. There is also an upper terrace at the north-east corner of the house, the retaining wall of which turns south-east to enclose the north-east end of lower garden terrace, curving out to form a semi-circular alcove at this end of the pergola.

To the south-west, the garden forms a rectangle, truncated at the west corner, and is on two levels, with upper and lower lawns. The former is divided into two parts, but defined only by size: the upper lawn that serves the drawing room, sitting room and library is both wider and longer than the lawn accessible from the swimming pool, but both parts are connected by a paved path that bisects their full length. The larger lawn is subdivided by other paths, forming square and rectangular compartments. One of these paths leads to steps down to the lower lawn. Low hedges and gates have been inserted to subdivide the lawn into three, according to ownership. The south-west boundary, between the formal gardens and parkland, is defined by a yew hedge similar to those on the south-east side of the house. The rectangle is cut across at the west corner by a square garden with semi-circular corners, the shape again defined by wide, square-cut yew hedges. The enclosed space is bisected from north to south by an inserted, slighter hedge: in the north-west corner of the west side is a small building, a garage, and the whole of the ground surface is covered in tarmac; the east side is laid to grass and the hedge to the south, which by 1977 had been removed, has now been replanted.

SOURCES

Books and journals

Oswald, A, 'Country Homes; Gardens Old and New. Stockgrove Park, Leighton Buzzard' in *Country Life*, , Vol. 86, (1939), 334-338

Websites

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Google Maps, accessed April 6th 2016 from <https://www.google.co.uk/maps>

Photos of earlier house, accessed 01/05/2016

from <http://www.shindles.co.uk/stockgrove>

Other

Rushmere Park, Oak Wood and Stockgrove Country Park Archaeological Survey.
Central Bedfordshire Council

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.

End of official listing

1 contribution on Formal gardens at Stockgrove House

