Sussex Gardens Trust

Parks and gardens of local importance in Sussex

Parks and Gardens of the Sussex Coast
Research and Recording project

UPPERTON GARDENS AND HARTFIELD SQUARE, EASTBOURNE



1931



2025

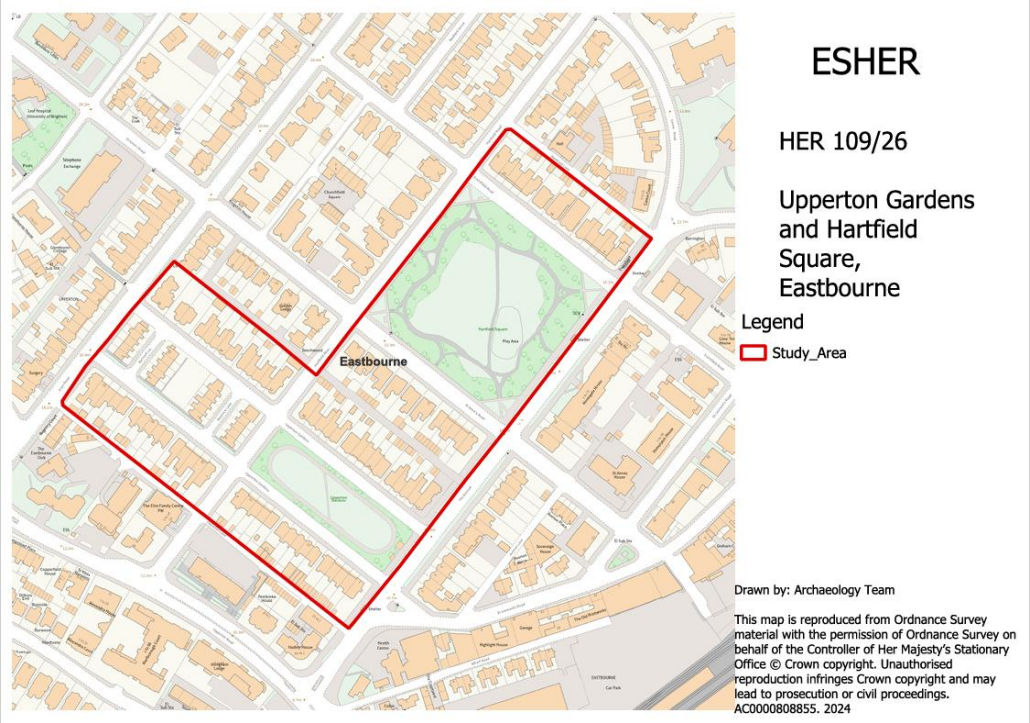
SUSSEX GARDENS TRUST

East Sussex County Council

west sussex county council

THE GARDENS TRUST

SITE BOUNDARY (1)



SITE BOUNDARY (2)



INTRODUCTION

Background to the 'Parks and Gardens of the Sussex Coast' Project

Our project aim, to research and record the parks and gardens of the Sussex coast, began in 2013 and is nearing completion. Most of the sites recorded are now in public i.e. local authority ownership where their special historic development is not necessarily recognised and therefore conserved. We hope our reports will help improve knowledge and guide their future management.

The variety and period of sites is huge, from C19 and early C20 town squares, 'Old English' and Italianate-style gardens with ponds, pergolas and seating, gardens with salt-resistant traditional bedding and C21 ecological planting, to large parks which began life as farmland owned by influential local families and aristocracy and provided the recreation and leisure space for new urban development.

The administrative areas covered are: Worthing and Adur jointly-run DC, Arun DC, Brighton and Hove City Council, Eastbourne and Lewes jointly-run DC, Rother DC and Hastings Borough. Only Brighton and Hove and Hastings hold a list of local heritage assets (see Historic England's guidance for a definition of local heritage assets and how to identify and protect them . https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/local-heritage-listing-advice-note-7/)

Brighton and Hove City Council's list is the most comprehensive (https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/planning/heritage/local-list-heritage-assets) so our project has not addressed their sites although we may select a few of the more major ones for a deeper level of research in the future.

Content

All research – in local and national archives and on site – is undertaken by a team of volunteers who have received training from professionals expert in appraising designed landscapes who have worked extensively for English Heritage (now Historic England) on sites on its National Heritage List for England. All reports are peer-reviewed.

Each report comprises the following:

- A site boundary map drawn on the current Ordnance Survey map.
- The area within the boundary represents the area of designed historic interest; it does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.

- A current aerial photograph with the boundary shown.
- An overview and statement of significance based on the guidance set out in the *National Policy Planning Framework* – the government's guidance for local planning authorities in discharging their planning responsibilities.
- A written description, derived from documentary research and a visual site survey, the format following that used by Historic England for sites on the national *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2nd edn.

Supporters and Acknowledgements:

The Trust would like to thank the volunteers, owners, local authority staff (especially the East and West Sussex Historic Environment Records) and the many Friends groups who have participated in this project and given time and effort to completing this challenging task.

Further information is available from: www.sussexgardenstrust.org.uk

UPPERTON GARDENS AND HARTFIELD SQUARE

COUNTY East Sussex

ESCC HER REF 138925

DISTRICT Eastbourne Borough

OS GRID REF TQ 628004

OVERVIEW

Late C19 squares representative of Eastbourne's squares and terraces by the partnership between the Duke of Devonshire and the Gilbert family. Their garden areas were laid out to a typical mid/late C19 design with perimeter trees and serpentine paths. Hartfield Square and its garden remain largely unaltered, but only the southern half of Upperton Gardens survives.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architectural/artistic: The two squares' buildings and layout, although developed by the same partnership as Howard and Wilmington squares (on the seafront) and still formally rectilinear, are more spacious and more varied in the use of brick, timber and stucco. Their garden areas are laid out to a typical mid/late C19 design with perimeter trees and serpentine paths. Hartfield Square and its garden remain largely unaltered; only the southern half of Upperton Gardens survives but a few of its mature trees appear to date from the 1880s and early 1890s.

Historic interest: Both squares are representative of Eastbourne's several squares and terraces by the partnership between the Duke of Devonshire and the Gilbert family. Although the Gilberts were the 'lesser' partner in terms of wealth and status, the joint ambition was to build 'mansions and palaces fit for gentlemen'. The Gilbert family were also generous benefactors to the town.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The land on which Upperton Gardens and Hartfield Square were laid out was owned by the Gilbert family who were established in the Upperton area from the late C17.

Barrister Nicholas Gilbert married into another landed family, the Gildredges, gradually acquiring title to the Gildredge estate which lay in Hailsham and Willingdon as well as Eastbourne. Then in agricultural use, Wright writes of the land in *Bygone Eastbourne* that 'the old mill by fine elm trees, Upperton Farm must be noted'. The development of the Upperton area, which began in the 1870s, seems to have been undertaken as a joint project between Carew Davies-Gilbert and the 7th Duke of Devonshire whose lands lay to the south of Upperton and extended to the seafront. Carew had inherited land and property from his grandmother, Mary Ann Gilbert (1776–1845) via her uncle Charles whose trustees had further added to the family's landholding into the 1870s (ESRO GIL Archives hold records of the Davies Gilbert family dating from 1508).

The Duke's surveyor, Henry Currey, worked alongside the Gilbert's architect and surveyor, Nicholas Whitely, and although the Gilberts were the 'lesser' partner in terms of wealth and status, the joint ambition was to build 'mansions and palaces fit for gentlemen'. The family were generous benefactors too, contributing the land for the building of the Princess Alice Memorial Hospital on Carew Road, opened in 1883 (demolished in the early 2000s). Indeed, when Eastbourne achieved borough status that same year the gold mace and chain were paid for by the duke and Carew Davies Gilbert, the items being presented at the Devonshire Park Pavilion in Devonshire Park with a banquet (Wright).

A 'Building Plan of part of the Manor of Eastbourne, the property of the Trustees of the late Charles Gilbert Esquire, designed by Nicholas Whitley' (Davies Gilbert's surveyor) was drawn up in 1870 but work had not begun by 1874 except to The Avenue, a main road which runs along the south-east side of both squares. Whitely annotates his colour plan to describe it as a 'planted street of 80 feet wide four rows of trees'. A further contemporary map by engineers and surveyors Lee Walton (300 feet to one inch drawn up in 1873) and the OS 1st edition map surveyed in 1875/76 and published in 1879 both confirm the absence of progress. Building must have begun soon after; by 1898 (OS 2nd edition surveyed 1898) both squares, with their houses and central gardens, are complete, including the erection of St Anne's church on the north-western section of Upperton Gardens. The church, in Gothic style by G. C. Haddon, was begun in 1880 and further extended in 1898. On completion, the two sections of Upperton Gardens (divided by Hartfield Road) comprised perimeter paths with intermittent deciduous and evergreen trees planted alongside, although the south-eastern section had, additionally, subsidiary paths dividing the central space into three. Hartfield Square's garden displayed a more complex layout, the serpentine perimeter path's pattern said to resemble the Gilbert family's emblem of a rose.

The Davies-Gilberts appear to have remained involved in the management of the squares, for example approving detailed layout plans and drawings with elevations and sections in 1879 as received by Eastbourne Corporation in November of that year. Family members are listed as living in Upperton Road and selling properties in Upperton Gardens until 1926. Subsequent alterations were minor: a small rustic half-timbered kiosk designed in 1906 by P.D. Stonham FRIBA (1877–1942) as a cabman's shelter was erected at the south-east end of Upperton Gardens (3rd edition OS map revised 1908). A second one in a similar style dates from the 1920s and houses a sub-station. Both squares' gardens are shown in 1925 (OS 4th edition) as more densely treed by this date, Hartfield's particularly.

Further alterations resulted from mid-C20 bomb damage in WWII although the railings were probably removed as part of the war effort. Eastbourne lay on the 'tip and run' route for bomber planes returning from raids on London. On the morning of Wednesday 2 October 1940, Special Constable Harry Etherington saw four bombs fall in the area of Upperton Gardens; number 16 was hit though Henry Able and his wife survived. St Anne's Church was bombed on 11th August 1942, set on fire and gutted. After its demolition in 1955 some of its fittings were used to build a new church in East Wittering (*Sussex Parish Churches*, ref 2). Four terraces of houses with a central communal open space (with no public access) were built in the 1960s on the church site with Beatrice Lane and Bernard Lane inserted at 90 degrees across the former area of the Gardens (this part of Upperton Gardens is excluded from the designated area).

SITE DESCRIPTION: UPPERTON GARDENS

Location, Area, Boundaries, Landform, Setting

Upperton Gardens lie immediately off the north-west side of The Avenue (A2040) north-west of Eastbourne's railway station. The garden's c138m x c48m rectangular plan covering 0.66ha (3.13acres) is bounded by roads: to the north-east and south-west by Upperton Gardens and by Hartfield Road to the north-west. The ground slopes very gently and evenly from north-west to south-east. The garden's perimeter is enclosed by trees and shrubbery and a low red-brick wall mainly capped with half-round coping bricks, these with flattened tops to accommodate former railings (now gone but with holes still evident). The houses surrounding the square, comprising contemporary terraces each of 4 dwellings with pitched roofs, white render and bay windows form the setting.

Entrances and Approaches

There are 4 entrances, 2 on each long side of the square and located approximately one third and two thirds of the distance north-westwards from The Avenue. These are framed by square brick pillars capped by square, four-way weathered stone caps, each side of the square having one entrance with tall pillars (c1.8m) and one with low (c0.6m) pillars. Informal entrances with internal ground levels raised to boundary wall height have been created in places. The entrance locations survive from the original layout (OS 2nd edition revised 1898).

Gardens

The whole garden is laid to mown grass. A continuous tarmac path, laid out c2m inside the boundary brick wall, follows the entire perimeter (as shown on the 1898 OS edition) although the original subsidiary paths defining a central lozenge of lawn and a circle at either end of the garden (shown still extant on the revised OS edition of 1938) are now gone, replaced by a diagonal path linking one side of the perimeter path with the other. The boundary belt of trees and shrubbery contains trees planted at a regular interval, several of which, specifically limes, at least one elm and evergreen oaks, appear from their height and girth to survive from the original planting between 1880 and 1898. The majority, including some free-standing trees within the grassed area appear to date from throughout the C20.

Standing on the extreme south-western boundary of the garden are two rustic half-timbered kiosks facing onto The Avenue's pavement. The south-western one, approximately 3.5 x 2m in plan is roofed in cedar shingles with a little gable, below which panels open to reveal a snack bar counter. The kiosk was designed in 1906 by P. D. Stonham as a cabman's shelter. The north-eastern building (floor plan approximately 3m x 4m), an electricity substation, is of similar design but with a brick plinth and a small 'Venetian' window and dates from the 1920s. (Upperton Area Conservation Appraisal paragraph 3.54 (ref 17).

SITE DESCRIPTION: HARTFIELD SQUARE

Location, Area, Boundaries, Landform, Setting

The square's 1.55ha (3.82acres) garden lies immediately off the north-west side of The Avenue (A2040) approximately 330m due north of Eastbourne's railway station. At approximately 139m x 145m the garden forms an almost perfect square, its land rising slightly from south-east to north-west. It is bounded by roads: Hartfield Road to the north-west, St Anne's Road to the south-west and Eversfield Road to the north-east.

The garden is enclosed by low red brick walls, those around the north-west (and partially also the south-west and north-east) side functioning as retaining walls to accommodate the lower internal round level. These walls have internal buttresses at 3m centres. The half-round copings (with flattened tops) on all the walls have regularly spaced depressions indicating former railings. The garden is set within tree-lined streets with a mixture of semi- and detached brick and timber fronted houses with pitched roofs and gables.

Entrances and Approaches

Of the 9 entrances, one at each corner and one at the central point of each of the square's sides, 8 are original to the construction period (between c1880 and 1898 OS 2nd edition) and one, from Eversfield Road, was added later (date unknown but C20). The 8 original entrances vary in width; are all framed by square brick pillars (which also vary in width) with four-way weathered stone caps (similar to those in Upperton Gardens) several with remnants of hinges indicating former gates. The four corner entrances are 'squared off' to create an approach via an external triangular grassed apron and wider entranceways.

The entrances are described in an anticlockwise order from the south-west corner:
At 2.28m, this is the widest and serves as the main entrance. It is framed by 0.7 x 0.7m square pillars, each with a surviving metal socket. The threshold is formed from a large block of stone with a bolt hole which formerly held double gate bolts. Immediately inside (and facing) the entrance), mounted on the face of a block of granite, is a 40cm aluminium heraldic plaque designating the garden as a Queen Elizabeth II Field in Trust. The entrance midway along The Avenue is 1.2m wide with full height, capped brick pillars (0.46m sq) again with evidence of a former gate. The south-east corner entrance at the junction of The Avenue and Eversfield Road is 1.12m wide. Approximately 2m further north-west into Eversfield Road the low wall is pierced by a 4m wide maintenance entrance framed by wooden pillars and accessed by a two-barred, padlocked, metal gate. Beside the entrance is a hollow, Im high, 0.3m diameter, fluted metal post, probably a sewer vent pipe and now rusting with its green paint flaking. Its maker's plate reads 'Ham Baker & Co Westminster' in raised lettering. Adjacent is a metal plate of similar diameter by the same maker, set in the ground (Ham Baker & Co, ref 13.)

The midway entrance on Eversfield Road, via a single stone step down directly off the road, is 1.13m wide, its capped pillars 0.8m sq. The north-east corner entrance at the junction of Eversfield Road and Hartfield Road has an additional brick- built central pillar, 0.9m high with no stone cap. The low wall beyond the pillar on its south side has been partially rebuilt (evidence of non-matching brickwork). The entrance midway along Hartfield Road on the north-west side is 1.17m wide and has a spigot on one of its pillars, probably indicating where the top horizontal bar of former railings were

attached (the railings would therefore have been 0.8m high from the plinth to the base of the stone caps). The wall has been recapped on one side. Seven brick steps inside the entrance lead down into the garden, reflecting the levelling of the natural slope of the ground in laying out the garden. The north-west corner entrance, at the junction of Hartfield Road and St Anne's Road is 1.16m wide and similarly has an 8 step flight down into the garden. Tubular metal handrails are set into the brickwork of the enclosing walls. A metal socket and hinges indicate former gates. The south-west entrance midway along St Anne's Road has a stone threshold and steps down into the garden and a C20 wrought-iron gate.

Gardens

The overall pattern of paths and planting survives largely intact from the layout recorded in 1898 (OS 2nd edition published 1899). The garden is laid to grass with a serpentine perimeter path, approximately 2.14m wide and surfaced in finely crushed aggregate edged with oblong, dressed white stones set into the ground. The spaces between the path and the boundary wall vary in depth with its looping route and are lightly wooded with trees of varying species, size and ages and understorey. A subsidiary serpentine path crossing the garden diagonally north to south connects to the perimeter path; a second east–west diagonal path which created a central focal point is now gone. A small group of trees and shrubbery survives to mark this point. Spurs of path connect the perimeter path to each of the entrances. East of the diagonal path, adjacent to the main (south-western) entrance, is a children's play area enclosed within 0.9m high hooped metal railings.

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Building Plan of part of the Manor of Eastbourne, the property of the Trustees of the late Charles Gilbert Esquire, designed by Nicholas Whitley, surveyor, 1870. Eastbourne Heritage Centre, 2 Carlisle Road, Eastbourne

Map recording bomb hits in the Upperton area during WWII. Eastbourne Heritage Centre

Ham Baker & Co was founded in 1893 as water and waste-water equipment manufacturers, now based in Stoke on Trent.

Maps

Tithe Map 1842 (The Keep ESRO TD/E85)

New map of Eastbourne and its vicinity on a large scale, shewing the houses, roads, footpaths &etc. Accurately reduced from the General Maps prepared for the Local Authorities, which have been specially approved by the Surveyor 1873. Scale 300 feet to an inch. Lee & Walton, Engineers and Surveyors, Great College Street, Westminster, SW

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