

Case Name: PAG: Larkbeare House

Case Number: 1490091

Background

Historic England has been asked to assess the gardens at Larkbeare House in Exeter, Devon for registration.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	Name	Heritage Category
1	Larkbeare House	Park and Garden

Visits

Date	Visit Type
22 January 2024	Full inspection
21 March 2024	Full inspection

Annex 1

The Draft List Entry are being assessed as the basis for a proposed addition to The National Heritage List for England.

Draft List Entry

Name: Larkbeare House

Location

Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon,

County	District	District Type	Parish
Devon	Exeter	District Authority	Non Civil Parish

History

Larkbeare House occupies the southern part of an earlier C16 estate of the same name. The earlier Larkbeare estate extended further to the north, and the remains of the C16 Larkbeare House survive at 38 Holloway Street (Grade II, List entry number 1306002). In the C16 the estate is known to have been occupied by the Hull family, and then by Sir Nicholas Smith, and it is shown on the Hooker-Hogenberg Map of Exeter, dated 1587. In 1737 the estate was sold to John Baring, who made his fortune in the woollen trade, and it is included on Hayman's Map of Exeter, dated 1805. The Baring family resided at Larkbeare until 1819, and it is understood that the southern part of the estate, which forms the current Larkbeare House, was sold to Charles Bowring (1769-1856) a successful fuller in the woollen trade, in about 1824, and was known as Little Larkbeare; a house was built to the north-east corner of the grounds. The current Larkbeare House, built in a different location to the previous house, was constructed on this site in about 1862 for Charles' grandson, John Charles Bowring.

John Charles Bowring (1821-1893) was the son of Sir John Bowring (1792-1872), a government adviser and diplomat, who became the 4th Governor of Hong Kong. John Charles accompanied his father to China in 1854, becoming a partner in the firm Jardine Matheson. He was a keen amateur botanist and during his time in the Far East was in regular correspondence with Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, the first director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. He was also in correspondence with the Exeter branch of the nursery Messrs James Veitch & Sons of Exeter and Chelsea, also sending them seeds and plants. As well as botany, Bowring had an interest in entomology (the study of insects), specifically coleoptera (beetles), leaving a large collection to the British Museum. On his return to England in 1861 he is understood to have brought with him ferns, mosses, and orchids.

Bowring commissioned the local Exeter architect and surveyor Ambrose Westlake to design Larkbeare House. The house was positioned on a newly created platform towards the northern part of the grounds and the gardens were landscaped to slope down towards the River Exe, covering the redundant lime kilns at St Leonard's Quay. A coach house and stables and a summerhouse, both buildings from the earlier estate on the site, were retained within a garden scheme laid out by Veitch's nursery. A newspaper article of 1863 states:

'On these grounds, that by-and-by will surround the house with arborescent and horticultural beauty, the genius of Mr. Veitch has been employed, and when nature has done her part it will become one of the most charming of spots where charming spots abound.'

James Veitch (1792-1863) established his nursery at Mount Radford, Exeter with his father, Scottish horticulturalist, John Veitch, in about 1830. In 1853, a second branch was established in Chelsea, managed by his son, also James. From about 1856 James' younger son Robert became involved in the management of the Exeter branch. James Veitch was a key figure in the sponsorship of the leading plant hunters of the day, and the family were responsible for the introduction of over 1200 plants to England. Following James death in 1863, the two nurseries became separate businesses. The Mount Radford nursery and James Veitch's

home Buckerel Villa (Grade II, List Entry number 1380192) were located less than a kilometre to the east of Larkbeare House.

The plan of the grounds included in the 1875 sales particulars for Larkbeare House provide evidence for the layout of the gardens. The plan includes a formal garden to the south, a conservatory and shrubbery to the west, and a bedding area to the east of the billiard room. It also shows extensive tree planting and a series of paths, with garden steps between the south garden and the west terrace. In addition, there was a kitchen garden and an ice house to the north and an additional kitchen garden to the south. To the north-west corner were a series of outbuildings including an orchid house, fern house, peach house, strawberry house, melon and cucumber house, and vinery, all heated with a hot water system. The plan also shows a summerhouse to the west. The grounds are bounded by a wall of Heavitree stone and limestone; parts of the wall may relate to the former estate on the site.

Larkbeare House was purchased by the city of Exeter in 1877 to be used as judge's lodgings for the Devon County Assizes.

The Ordnance Survey maps of 1890 and 1905 illustrate the continued survival of the layout and tree planting, although the glasshouses had largely been removed by the late C19. Alterations in the C20 included the removal of the remaining outbuildings to the north-west corner of the grounds for a housing development in the late C20; the demolition of the conservatory; and the establishment of additional car parking which has removed the planting area to the east of the billiard room, levelled the bank to the east side of the formal garden, and amalgamated the two paths to the south of the formal garden. The tree coverage has been reduced but it remains extensive with several specimen trees, including yews and holm oaks.

Details

Villa garden laid out by Messrs James Veitch & Sons of Exeter and Chelsea in about 1862.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Larkbeare House and its grounds cover an area of about 2.2ha. It lies about 750m to the south east of Exeter City Centre, and is bounded by Topsham Road to the north, Larkbeare Road to the east, the River Exe to the south, and Colleton Grove and Colleton Mews to the west. Most of its extent is defined by a boundary wall (Grade II, List Entry number 1266936). The house is positioned on a raised platform to the north of the site with the ground sloping away to the south and the west. To the south are views of the River Exe and Haldon Hills beyond; to the north-west are views of Exeter Cathedral, although reduced by later housing development; and to the north-east are views of St Leonard's Church (Grade II, List Entry number 1224193) which was built in two phases (1873 and 1883), replacing a classical-style church of 1831, that in turn replaced a medieval church.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The principal entrance to Larkbeare House is at the north-east corner of the grounds, off Topsham Road. At the entrance is a carriageway flanked by gate piers and an adjoining pedestrian entrance within a walled surround (the gates have been replaced). The drive, lined by dwarf stone walls, approaches the rear (north elevation) of the house before widening to form a forecourt in front of the east entrance. There are grass verges to either side with some mature tree planting. There is a single-storey mid-C20 prefabricated building to the west side.

There is an additional late-C19 pedestrian entrance on Larkbeare Road with a pointed brick arch opening and timber door. To the south-west corner, giving access to a small quay on the river, is an altered pedestrian entrance beneath a C20 cambered head of three rows of brick headers, which is approached by a cut-in path bounded by C20 brick walls. On the east side of the grounds is a C20 vehicular gateway with a pair of timber gates beneath a cambered brick head.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Larkbeare House, constructed of grey Torbay limestone, was built in about 1862 for John Charles Bowring. It was designed by the local architect and surveyor Ambrose Westlake in an Elizabethan style and was built at the same time as the gardens were laid out. The house is orientated with the principal rooms to the south. The conservatory to the west elevation was removed in the mid-C20.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

To the south of the house is an area of lawn that formed the formal gardens to the house. The platform is defined by a sloped bank to the south and west. The bank to the east has been levelled to create additional parking. The path to the east of this leads south. Below the formal gardens, the original two paths, aligned east to west, have been amalgamated to provide a wider drive for parking, and an exit route for vehicles via the west terrace. The east path continues southwards. To the south-east corner is a late-C20 single-storey building. The path continues across the southern edge of the grounds, with a sloped lawn area including a central copse of trees to its north, and then rises to join the west terrace. There is a flight of steps from the west terrace to the south path that runs between the south elevation of the house and the formal gardens. The gardens to the west of the house survive as lawn with some shrubbery planting; the conservatory has been removed. The single-storey stone building to the north-west was added in the late C19 or early C20, possibly as a wash house or laundry. Within the sloping area of land beneath the west terrace are the remains of a summerhouse of probably C18 date. The bedding area to the east of the billiard room has been removed.

KITCHEN GARDENS

The principal kitchen garden was situated to the north of the house and survives as a lawned depression, with the remains of a brick ice house concealed by later vegetation. The associated glasshouses to the west, along with the coach house and stables, have been demolished and this area is now occupied by part of a late-C20 housing development, obscuring views of Exeter cathedral, located approximately 650m to the north-west. The southern kitchen garden has been removed, and a gauging station inserted on this steeply-sloped section of the grounds.

Selected Sources

Books and journals

Pevsner, N, Cherry, B, *The Buildings of England: Devon*, (2004), 425

Baigent, E, 'Veith family (per. 1768-1929)' in Matthews, H.C.G., Harrison, B, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2004)

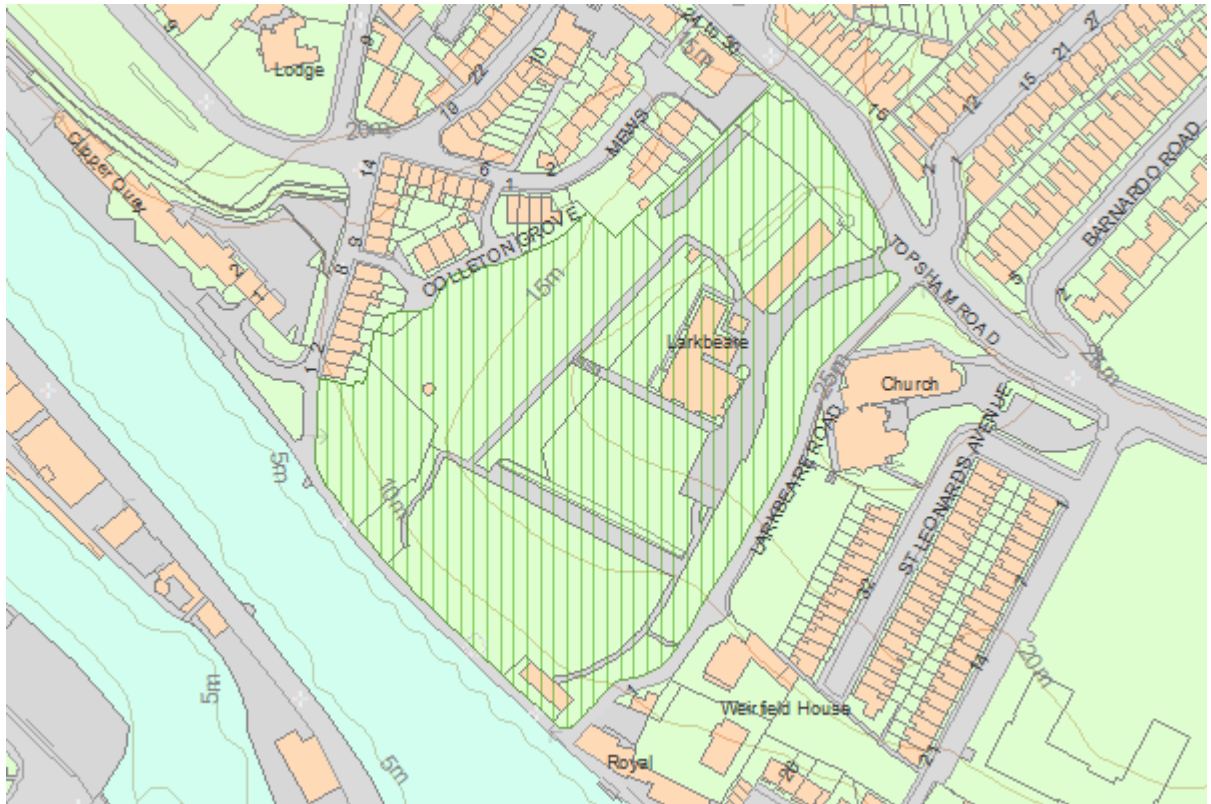
Other

'The New Mansion at Larkbeare', *The Western Times*, Exeter, Friday 6th February 1863, p6.

Devon HER, 'Larkbeare House Gardens, Topsham Road, Exeter' (MDV130620)

Devon Record Office, 'Sale Catalogue: Larkbeare in Exeter, with plan, 1875' (2541Z/1)

Exeter City Council, 'Southernhays and The Friars Conservation Area Appraisal'. (2002).

Map**National Grid Reference:** SX9233891904

© Crown Copyright and database right 2015. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF – 1490143_1.pdf.