

The Landmark Trust

GODDARDS, ABINGER COMMON, SURREY

Goddards was built by Edwin Lutyens for Frederick Mirrielees in 1898-1900. Designed in his Surrey traditional style, it shows his mastery of local materials - stone, brick, roughcast and oak, and it is considered one of his most important early houses. The influence of Gertrude Jekyll, and her enthusiasm for the local vernacular architecture, which she shared with Lutyens, can be strongly felt at Goddards, where she planted the courtyard garden.

Lutyens' commission was to build a holiday rest home for 'ladies of small means', which would be a private charity of Mirrielees. The site was a plot of seven acres near Pasture Wood, Abinger Common, where the Mirrielees family were living. He was the kind of client that Lutyens liked best - he was a rich businessman who was prepared to invest in building and he respected good craftsmanship.

The original plan, Lutyens' first to be symmetrical, comprised a Common Room with two wings of bedrooms on each side, but no bathrooms or heating, as it was intended for summer use only. Much thought went into the ladies' entertainment on wet days in the country, and with this in mind the skittle alley on the ground floor and a gallery in the attic area to play games were built.

The house served its purpose well, and following a visit, Lutyens wrote "Went down to Goddards and went over the place. It seems very successful and the inmates love it and invariably weep when they leave it which is comforting. Mirrielees seems very happy with it too. ... We all played a game of skittles in my alley! I like using the things I make". Six visitors were the most that the house could comfortably hold then, and, as described in a Country Life article of 1904 they included "nurses from hospitals, ladies of small means who could not otherwise afford a holiday, East End workers exhausted by care for others" who for two or three weeks had "a bright social life there, readings, games and, perhaps best of all, a lovely garden".

In 1910 Mirrielees, now Sir Frederick, commissioned Lutyens to alter Goddards and turn it into a family house for his son, Donald, and his American wife. It seems, however, that they used the house only at weekends. Lutyens extended both wings to make a Dining Room and a Library, the Common Room became the Drawing Room, and two master bedrooms were provided on the first floor, together with bathrooms, central heating and electric light. At the same time he lowered the sills in the Common Room to strengthen its relationship to the garden. The 'ladies of small means' were moved to a converted barn at Pasture Wood.

Sir Frederick died in 1914 and his widow sold Goddards in 1927 to the Gibbs family, who in turn sold it to the Halls in 1953. Goddards was given to the Lutyens Trust in 1991 by Mr and Mrs M W Hall, in memory of their architect son, Lee Heath Hall. However, running the house without an endowment or experience proved too expensive and difficult for the small Trust, and in 1995 they handed it to the Landmark Trust on a long lease, keeping the Library as their headquarters.

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The House and its Restoration

There are three main elements of Goddards - the house itself, the garden courts and the pasture beyond. Each is defined by hedges, terraces and walls, connected by axial routes. Throughout, Lutyens drew on the vernacular traditions of Surrey, and applied the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement.

The main, west, front encloses the garden court. The two storey bedroom wings flank the single storey Common Room, with its sweeping low roof of Horsham stone slabs and clay tiles, and the fine mullioned windows are twice as large on the south facing side as on the opposite. Materials here are predominantly stone, brick and tile. The roughcast east facade, the entrance, is composed of two gables between twin brick chimneys, and the main entrance is off-centre to the left, breaking the near-symmetry of the elevation. Surrey is famous for its brick chimneys and those at Goddards are distinctive and powerful.

Detailing throughout Goddards is meticulously considered and crafted, as in all Lutyens houses. Distinctive materials and textures are used to effect, apparent in particular in the handling of the fireplaces of the Sitting Room, Common Room and Library, and the two main bedrooms upstairs, and door furniture.

External restoration work undertaken by The Landmark Trust on taking over Goddards included major repair of three of the tall chimneys, rebuilding the middle on the north side, repair to the roughcast and stonework, and replacement of guttering.

Internally, Landmark reversed the changes that had been made to the house in the 50s and 60s, and returned the plan to that of 1910. Upstairs, partitions were removed and rooms reinstated and re-ordered to provide improved accommodation, and the whole house was re-wired.

The restoration of the garden, which is being funded by the Rufford Foundation, is intended to reinstate the 'architectural' role of the hedges as originally intended, later planting alterations are being simplified, and beds are being replanted with the grey, silver and scented plants that were listed in Gertrude Jekyll's plan for Munstead Wood.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Goddards sleeps up to 12 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.