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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

COMBE HOUSE

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	COMBE HOUSE
County:	Devon
District:	East Devon (District Authority)
Parish:	Gittisham
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.773733 Longitude: -3.2194116 National Grid Reference: SY 14114 97837 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000691 Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

Details

C17 and C18 parkland surrounding C17 walled gardens and terraces.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the C11 a house on the site of the present dwelling belonged to the De Lumine family. Passing to Sir Henry Willington in the early C13, Combe was subsequently acquired by the Beaumont family. The present house contains remnants of a building which predates the house constructed by Humphrey Beaumont in 1572. The last of the Beaumonts dying in 1591 without an heir, the property was left to Thomas Beaumont of Leicestershire, who despite sharing the family name, was no relation. In 1615 he sold Combe to Nicholas Putt of Berry Pomeroy, Devon. Following support for the Crown in the Civil War, Thomas Putt was created a baronet at the Restoration, and the house was remodelled internally. Thomas Putt (1722-87), a barrister, undertook extensive work on the grounds at Combe from his inheritance in 1757, including the planting of the Beech Walk on Gittisham Hill, and the construction of the terraced gardens which are shown on a survey of 1787. Popularly known as Tom Putt or 'Black Tom' Putt, he was also responsible for developing the apple which bears his name. In 1846 the estate was inherited by the Rev Henry Maker who spent lavishly, developing the estate's sporting potential and keeping a private pack of hounds at Combe. The property remains (1999) in private ownership, with Combe House and its immediate grounds being let to an hotel, and the remainder of the gardens and parkland now associated with an early C20 house which was built on the hillside north-east of Combe House.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Combe House is situated c 1km south-east of the village of Gittisham, and some 2km south-west of the town of Honiton. The c 75ha site comprising some 5ha of formal gardens and pleasure grounds, and 70ha of parkland and woodland, is bounded to the north by Parsonage Lane, a minor road running from Gittisham to Rapshayes Farm, to the north-west by a stream which flows north towards Gittisham, and to the east by a minor road which runs south-south-east from Rapshayes Farm to the A375 Sidmouth road on the summit of Gittisham Hill. Other boundaries adjoin agricultural land and are formed by fences, banks and hedges. The grounds at Combe House occupy the west-facing slope of Gittisham Hill which rises steeply from the valley floor c 200m east of the House. The land rises to the

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south of the House, with a steep-sided combe extending towards Combe Farm south of the House. The site enjoys wide views north-west across Gittisham and the countryside beyond to the Blackmoor Hills. North-east of the site the late C18 Beech Walk extends c 0.75km as a minor public road to join the A375 c 1km south of Honiton. Bellview Plantation and associated woodland c 800m south-west of the House but beyond the area here registered is significant for the setting of the park

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is approached from Gittisham village street at a point c 160m east of the parish church. Concave stone wing walls project from stone gate piers surmounted by urns, while within the site a single-storey, white-painted, early C19 'Tudor' lodge stands to the west of the entrance. A green-painted arched porch faces the tarmac drive, which extends c 240m south-east through evergreen shrubbery and mature trees before entering the park through a white-painted timber gate and cattle grid. The drive continues c 670m south-east through the park, passing through a further timber gateway and crossing a rustic stone bridge after c 375m, before turning east for c 240m and finally ascending c 50m north to reach the entrance and carriage turn to the west of the House. A service drive extends c 100m east and north to the early C19 carriage house and stable blocks (listed grade II) immediately east of the House, which replaced earlier stables south-west of the House. A further drive extends south c 260m to connect the House with Combe Farm which lies outside the registered site. The drive continues c 0.75km south beyond the registered area to join the B3174 road some 3.25km east of Ottery St Mary.

The late C18 Beech Walk runs north to south near the summit of Gittisham Hill and now (1999) serves as access to an early C20 house known as Beech Walk which stands c 200m east-north-east of Combe House. The largely level drive passes c 300m through mature beech wood underplanted with laurel, and c 200m through the mid and late C20 gardens of Beech Walk.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Combe House (listed grade I) stands on a west-facing level platform cut into Gittisham Hill. The present H-plan house incorporates medieval elements but is essentially the C16 house developed by the Beaumont family. Remodelling was undertaken by Sir Thomas Putt in the mid C17, and again after 1757 by 'Black Tom' Putt. The plan prepared at the time of Putt's death in 1787 shows the House to have assumed its present plan, but before conservative remodelling by the Rev Thomas Putt c 1812. A more ambitious scheme drawn up by Sir John Soane in 1805 was not implemented.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Lying to the south, west, north and north-east of the House, the gardens and pleasure grounds are separated from the park by late C20 timber fences to the west, and by C19 metal estate fencing to the north. Evergreen shrubbery south-east of the House screens a level tennis or croquet lawn from the stables, while to the west further lawns slope down from the carriage turning to the park. North of the House west-facing sloping lawns are planted with mature cedars and other specimen trees, and enclosed to the north, east and south by red-brick walls c 3m high (listed grade II). A mid or late C18 classical greenhouse or orangery (listed grade II) built for 'Black Tom' Putt stands at the north-west corner of the lawns. The orangery is now (1999) partly unglazed. The upper, eastern section of the north garden retains a cruciform pattern of gravel walks with a central circular flower bed containing a circular pool surrounded by rustic rockwork. Against the inner face of the north wall a late C19 timber and brick lean-to glasshouse survives, with a C19 timber and brick vinery containing iron vine supports to its east. Bases of brick-walled pits and frames stand south of the two glasshouses. Associated sheds and boiler houses remain on the outer side of the north wall in an area of C19 specimen trees, conifers, shrubs and rhododendrons through which curvilinear walks shown on the late C19 OS map can still be traced.

A late C20 timber door in a centrally placed brick doorway in the east wall leads to a further two walled and terraced garden enclosures. The lower garden is enclosed to the north and west by brick walls and to the east by a rubble-stone wall (all listed grade II). To the south a late C20 box hedge is planted on a raised bank. The enclosure is laid to grass with a small number of standard fruit trees, wall-trained fruit trees against the inner face of the north wall, and specimen shrubs in borders below the west, north and east walls. A raised terrace to the east of the compartment is planted with nine specimen yews (five dead, 1999), and is reached by axially placed steps. A centrally placed gateway in the east wall is flanked by C17 brick piers (listed grade II*) with stone quoins and stepped caps surmounted by carved stone obelisk finals and leads to the upper garden enclosure or Vineyard. This C17 irregularly shaped walled enclosure built of flint rubble contains four grass terraces retained by rubble-stone walls (listed grade II*) arranged on two levels, separated by a central sloping grass walk approached from the west by a flight of stone and concrete steps. At the north-east corner of the upper enclosure the Vineyard Cottage (listed grade II) is a

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square two-storey structure of C17 origin which perhaps contained a wine press and allowed views across the gardens and park from its flat roof. A stair turret rises above the roof, with a door allowing access onto the roof.

The sloping ground below the early and mid C20 house Beech Walk and above the C17 and C18 walled gardens is laid out as C20 gardens with a terrace west of the house, tennis courts to the north, and flowering shrubs and specimen trees to the west and south.

PARK The park is laid out in a series of grass enclosures and paddocks, with scattered trees and areas of woodland to the north, south and south-west of the House. On the southern boundary of Cross Park Copse c 290m north-east of the House individual trees are planted within the adjoining park to conceal the fence line. Cross Park Copse, Roadwood Copse c 260m south-east of the House and Lynch Copse c 450m south-west of the House are planted on rising ground and frame the House and park. Yew trees c 80m south-west of the House may be related to a pre-1787 formal layout, while in the combe c 200m south-south-west of the House there is evidence of a breached dam adjacent to a mature cedar south-east of the remaining pond c 130m south-west of the House. A further artificial narrow pond or canal c 240m west-south-west of the House is aligned on the west facade of the building. Some 350m north-west of the House an irregularly shaped pond is now (1999) heavily silted and partly overgrown. Retained by a dam at its northern end, the pond is surrounded by C19 planting including specimen Wellingtonias and other conifers. A further area of park lies c 240m east of the House beyond the gardens of Beech Walk. This west-facing sloping pasture is planted with scattered trees, with small areas of woodland on the highest ground against the eastern boundary of the site. This upper park can be seen from the late C18 Beech Walk which adjoins its western boundary.

KITCHEN GARDEN No kitchen garden survives at Combe House, although the walled garden enclosures north and north-east of the House contain elements of productive horticulture, including glasshouses, frames and fruit trees. A small area to the north of the stables and service court is enclosed by a brick wall to the north and a stone wall to the east, and contains the brick footings of further glasshouses against the inner face of the north wall. An overgrown area c 50m east of the House appears to have been an orchard and vegetable and market garden in the early C20, while a late C20 orchard and kitchen garden is established c 60m north-north-west of Beech Walk.

REFERENCES

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Archival items Marker family papers including personal and estate papers (1077), (Devon Record Office) Accounts of the Rev H W Marker, 1860-75 (1077, boxes 6, 26 and 28), (Devon Record Office) F W L Stockdale, MS History of Devon, early C19 (f 429), (Devon and Exeter Institution) Photographs of Combe House and garden structures (NMR)

Description written: April 1999 Amended: May 1999 Register Inspector: JML Edited: July 2000

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.