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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ST AUDRIES (HOUSE)

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ST AUDRIES (HOUSE)

Name: ST AUDRIES (HOUSE)
County: Somerset
District: Somerset West and Taunton (District Authority)
Parish: West Quantoxhead
County: Somerset
District: Somerset West and Taunton (District Authority)
Parish: Williton

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.172298
Longitude: -3.2767162
National Grid Reference: ST 10841 42226
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.localisation: [51.1702614168754,-3.27020090406221], [51.1699528506602,-3.2697652834251],
[51.1700413491891,-3.26962328851297], [51.1701337433341,-3.26947530661806],
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[51.1704126976659,-3.27040033928576], [51.1704000026052,-3.27039185139463],
[51.1702614168754,-3.27020090406221]

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001155
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

Early and mid C19 gardens and pleasure grounds surrounding a mansion rebuilt by John Norton, together with parkland developed from the mid C18 and improved in the mid C19 to a scheme by Norton.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
ST AUDRIES (HOUSE)

In 1086 an estate known as Quantoxhead was held by William de Mohun of Dunster Castle (qv), who owned extensive property in Somerset. The estate remained the property of the de Mohun family until the mid C12, when it was occupied by Roger of Newburgh (VCH 1985). By 1215, the property, which was now known as Little Quantoxhead, was held by Robert de Cauntelo, whose descendants continued to hold the estate until the late C14, when it was acquired by Sir William Lucy (ibid). Sir William subsequently sold the estate, by now known as West Quantoxhead, to Sir Baldwin Malet, who settled it on his son John (knighted c 1391) (ibid). Sir John Malet's heirs continued to hold the property, known after c 1540 as St Audries, until the early C18. It was inherited in 1646 by Sir Thomas Malet, a judge of the King's Bench, who died in 1665 leaving it to his son, Sir John, who resided at St Audries. Sir John's grandson, William Malet, died in 1736, when the estate passed to his brother, the Rev Baldwin Malet, who sold it in the same year to James Smith (ibid).

James Smith died in 1748, leaving St Audries to his daughter Lavinia, who sold the estate in 1764 to Robert Balch, formerly of Bridgwater, who appears to have been her sitting tenant (ibid). Balch began the process of enlarging the park and improving the setting of the manor house in 1770 by diverting the road from Staple to West Quantoxhead village to a course further east (Bond 1998). Balch died in 1779 and was succeeded by his sons, Robert Everard (d 1799) and George (d c 1810), and his daughter Christina (d 1824). Christina Balch continued the improvements begun by her father, diverting the coast road in 1815. This road was in turn replaced by the turnpike road in 1828, by which time the estate had passed to Henry Harvey Balch. This final diversion enabled the village gradually to be cleared and the park extended to its present boundary during the 1850s (VCH 1985). In 1831 the property was sold to the Rev Elias Webb, who in turn sold it in 1835 to Sir Peregrine Fuller-Palmer-Acland of Fairfield, Somerset (qv), who bought it for his daughter Isabel. In 1849, Isabel married Sir Alexander Acland-Hood Bt and took up residence at St Audries. A programme of rebuilding, refacing, and extension was undertaken over an extended period from c 1835 to c 1870. The initial work was undertaken by Richard Craver of Taunton, but from c 1850 John Norton of London (1823-1904) was commissioned to provide plans for more extensive work. Norton was responsible for the contemporary rebuilding of Tyntesfield, Somerset (qv) for William Gibbs, where he designed several garden structures together with the Home Farm and lodges. Norton's work on the house at St Audries appears also to have been accompanied by improvements in the grounds including the construction of formal terraced gardens, general estate improvements, and a group of structures on the coast including a grotto and cascade. Norton was also responsible for rebuilding the parish church of St Etheldreda or St Audrey in 1856 (Pevsner 1958).

Sir Alexander Acland-Hood died in 1891 and was succeeded by his son, also Sir Alexander, who in 1911 was raised to the peerage as Baron St Audries. Lord St Audries died in 1917, and his son, the second Baron, sold the estate in 1925 to W A Tower of Littleport, Cambridgeshire (VCH 1985). The property was divided in 1934, when the house and much of the park was sold to the Misses L and K D Townsend for the accommodation of their school, while St Audrie's Farm was sold to its tenant. St Audries School remained in occupation until c 1990, when the house was sold to the Amitabha Buddhist Centre. It was sold again in 2001, and today (2002) the site remains in divided ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING St Audries is situated c 3km north-east of Williton, to the north of the A39 road which forms the southern and eastern boundaries of the site. The c 112ha site comprises c 5ha of formal gardens and pleasure grounds, and c 107ha of parkland and ornamental plantations through which a circuit of carriage drives and rides leads to the coast. The site is bounded to the south and east by the A39, from which it is separated by mid C19 stone walls, while to the north-east it is adjoined by agricultural land which drops steeply northwards towards the coast. To the west the site adjoins further agricultural land from which it is separated by C19 and C20 fences, and to the north the boundary is formed by the cliffs of the Bristol Channel coast. The site slopes from south-east to north-west, comprising a wide, bowl-shaped valley which narrows to the north-west where a stream flows through a steep-sided combe to emerge as a cascade on the coast. There are significant views north-west from the house and park towards the sea, while St Etheldreda's Church (listed grade II*, outside the area here registered) c 50m south-east of Church Lodge forms a significant feature in the landscape. The church was rebuilt by John Norton in 1856 as part of a scheme of improvements for Sir Alexander Acland-Hood, together with the former village school (listed grade II) c 150m south-west of the church, and a group of village houses (outside the registered site). To

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
ST AUDRIES (HOUSE)

the east and south-east of the site, Stowborrow Hill (outside the registered site), a steeply sloping wooded area rising to the south-east of the A39, part of the former C19 deer park (Shirley 1867), forms a significant element in the setting of St Audries. ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Today (2002), the principal entrance to St Audries is from the A39 to the south-east, at a point opposite a green which formed the centre of the mid C19 village of West Quantoxhead. The entrance is marked by elaborate cast-iron quadrant railings (listed grade II) which sweep back to line each side of a tarmac drive which extends c 150m north-west to reach Church Lodge (listed grade II), a picturesquely gabled stone lodge built by Norton c 1850. The drive passes to the south-west of St Etheldreda's Church, where the railings curve round in a semicircle adjacent to the entrance to the churchyard, and opposite, to flank a gate leading to the park. Further, similar railings enclose the south-east boundary of the churchyard, which, together with the railings flanking the drive, allow the church and the park to be seen from the A39 road. Adjacent to Church Lodge, the drive passes through an elaborate cast-iron gate (listed grade II) before entering the park and continuing for c 250m north-west to reach a junction c 150m south-east of the house. From this junction one branch of the drive leads c 100m north-west through the pleasure grounds to reach the stable court to the north-east of the house. The stable court is entered through a monumental crenellated archway flanked by a pair of smaller archways and ornamented with a carved stone coat of arms (all listed grade II), and was built by Richard Carver c 1835. Another branch of the drive sweeps south-west to cross the south or Williton drive c 100m south-west of the house before continuing c 900m north-west through the park to reach St Audrie's Farm (Home Farm). A further drive leads north-north-east and north-east from the junction south-east of the house to pass through the north-east park to reach the north-east or Fairfield Lodge c 600m north-east of the house. The south or Williton Lodge (listed grade II) is situated on the A39 at a point c 50m east of its junction with Staple Lane and comprises a picturesquely gabled two-storey stone structure which was built in Tudor-gothic style by John Norton c 1850. Immediately west of the lodge a wrought-iron gate supported by a pair of octagonal cast-iron piers (all listed grade II), all of similar design to those at Church Lodge and Fairfield Lodge, leads to a drive (now a track, 2002) which sweeps north-east and north for c 250m through West Wood. Emerging into the park, the drive continues north and north-east for a further c 250m, gradually revealing a dramatic view of the south-west facade of the house, before entering the pleasure grounds south-west of the house through further cast-iron gates and railings (listed grade II) of similar design to those adjoining Church Drive. The railings which enclose the south-west and south-east boundaries of the pleasure grounds were designed by Norton c 1850. The south drive terminates in a carriage turn below the south-west facade of the house.

The north-east entrance is situated on the A39 c 700m north-north-west of the Church Drive entrance, and is marked by further cast-iron piers supporting a gate of similar design to those at Williton Lodge and Church Lodge (listed grade II). To the north of the entrance, Fairfield or Stowey Lodge (listed grade II) comprises a further Tudor-gothic stone structure of similar design to Church Lodge and Williton Lodge. The gates and lodge were designed by Norton c 1850.

The entrances and drives serving St Audries assumed their present form in the mid C19 as part of a scheme of improvements designed by John Norton for Sir Alexander Acland-Hood, and made possible by the diversion of the early C19 coast road to the present course of the A39 in 1828, and the clearance of West Quantoxhead village during the 1840s and 1850s. Church Drive originated as a road running through West Quantoxhead to the medieval manor house, while the north-east drive conforms approximately to the course of the coast road formed in 1815 to replace an earlier road which ran closer to the house (Tithe map, 1840). The south drive is shown in approximately its present form on the Tithe map.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING St Audries (listed grade II) stands on an artificially levelled terrace in the east of the site. Constructed in red sandstone and limestone ashlar with Bath stone dressings under pitched tiled roofs, the Tudor-gothic-style house comprises two storeys with an attic lit by gabled dormers. The building is approximately H-shaped on plan, with the principal entrance situated in a four-storey crenellated tower on the south-west facade. The north-west facade overlooking the formal gardens has projecting wings to the north and south and is lit by a mixture of mullion and transom windows and oriels. The south-east facade facing the pleasure grounds is of similar design; a conservatory at the south-east corner of the building was removed in the early C20. To the north-east the house is adjoined by a service court, beyond which lies the stable court. The house assumed its present form in the early and mid C19, when an earlier building was extensively remodelled and extended. Following the acquisition of the property by Sir Peregrine Acland in 1835, Richard Carver of Taunton, a 'local representative of

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
ST AUDRIES (HOUSE)

the still pre-archaeological Gothicism of before 1840' (Pevsner 1958), built the service quarters and stables, while from c 1850, John Norton was responsible for recasing and extending the house, the additions including the great hall, south entrance, and north-west billiard room together with new bedrooms (The Architect 1872). The earlier house is shown as a simple classical structure in an engraving by T Bonner (Collinson 1791), while a plan of 1761 shows an H-shaped structure with a detached stable range to the north-east (Bond 1998); this arrangement is reflected on the Tithe map of 1840.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The formal gardens are situated to the north-west, south-west, and south-east of the house, while the informal pleasure grounds extend to the north, west, and east. The drive and carriage court to the south-west of the house are adjoined by areas of lawn and bordered by regularly spaced specimen Irish yews, while to the south-west and south-east the lawns are separated from the park by mid C19 cast-iron fences (listed grade II) designed by John Norton. Below the south-east facade, a level lawn and formal rose garden are separated from the surrounding lawns by yew hedges and, to the north-east, a stone wall which retains the ground beyond at a higher level. A flight of stone steps at the north-east corner of this garden ascends to a balustraded terrace overlooking the garden below, and an area of lawn planted with specimen trees and shrubs. This lawn, which adjoins the drive leading to the entrance to the stable court north-east of the house, corresponds to the site of the early C19 kitchen garden (Tithe map, 1840). To the north-west of the house, a further area of formal garden is separated from a croquet lawn and informal pleasure grounds by a low stone retaining wall. This garden is laid to lawn with a stone-kerbed central circular pool containing a fountain. A gravel walk leads north-west from the house, around the pool, and thence to a flight of stone steps which ascends to a terrace and Tudor-gothic-style orangery (listed grade II) on the north-west side of the garden. The orangery is constructed in limestone ashlar and is lit by tall, Tudor-gothic windows set beneath a parapet ornamented with carved pinnacles. Built in the early C19, probably to a design by Richard Carver, the orangery was converted for use as a school chapel in the 1930s, and has now reverted to secular use (2002). The orangery corresponds to a building shown on the Tithe map (1840) which overlooked an area of informal pleasure ground or lawn. The formal garden between the orangery and the house appears to be contemporary with Norton's remodelling of the north-west facade c 1850. To the north-east, the garden is enclosed by a stone wall which retains higher ground beyond. A late C18 or early C19 shell grotto (listed grade II) stands against this wall. Approached by a flight of stone steps and entered through a gothic arch in the south-east facade, the grotto is lit by gothic windows in the south-west and west facades. The approximately elliptical interior chamber is lavishly decorated with British and foreign shells, fossils, and minerals, while the ceiling is vaulted and ornamented with shell-encrusted stalactites. The floor is laid with coloured, patterned cobbles. Of uncertain origin, the grotto may have formed part of the late C18 landscape improvements undertaken by members of the Balch family, or it may have been constructed in the early C19 at the same period as the orangery. The wall against which the structure stands corresponds to one shown on the 1761 estate survey and the 1840 Tithe map, which separated the pleasure grounds from a lane running to the north of the house. To the south-east of the shell grotto, a further grotto is built into the retaining wall.

The informal pleasure grounds to the south-west of the house comprise lawns planted with specimen trees, including mature pollarded sweet chestnuts, and groups of ornamental shrubs. A late C20 sports building has been constructed in this area. To the west-north-west of the house there is a further area of informal pleasure ground comprising lawns planted with specimen trees and ornamental shrubs. A walk leads north-west through this area to enter Brimmet's Wood, an ornamental plantation on the south-west-facing slope north of the house. Further walks (now overgrown) lead through the plantation. The plantation corresponds to a wooded area shown in Bonner's late C18 engraving of the site (Collinson 1791), and on the Tithe map of 1840. A walk extends along the south-west boundary of the plantation, affording views over the park and leading to a gate and late C19 lodge giving access to the park.

PARK The park lies principally to the west, south, and north-east of the house, and is today (2002) in mixed agricultural use with significant areas remaining pasture with scattered ornamental trees. The park occupies a bowl-shaped valley which opens north-west towards the coast, and is enclosed to the south, west, north, and south-east by boundary plantations. To the south and south-west, West Wood comprises a mixed plantation through which run several walks and rides. Some 300m south-south-west of the house, just within West Wood and c 40m west of the south drive, are the remains of an informal lake (largely dry, 2002). The lake is shown on the 1840 Tithe map, and by 1886 had a boathouse at its north-west end (OS 1886). This structure

was lost by 1904 (OS). Some 200m west-south-west of the lake, Keeper's Cottage (listed grade II) is a picturesque two-storey gabled house which probably formed part of Norton's mid C19 estate improvement scheme. West Wood returns north along a ridge of high ground on the western boundary of the park. This narrow plantation of ilex oak, holly, and oak known as The Belt (OS 1886) shelters a drive which descends gently north-east to reach St Audrie's Farm and the coast. There are easterly views from the drive across the park towards the house, church, and the former deer park beyond the A39 road. A further area of mixed woodland known as The Plantation (OS 1886) extends The Belt eastwards along the top of the cliffs on the northern boundary of the site. Within the park, c 220m west of the house, a natural pond was formed into a swimming bath in the mid or late C19 (OS 1886). This pond is one of a chain of pools fed by a stream emanating from the lake and flowing north-west through the park. Some 750m north-west of the house, St Audrie's or Home Farm comprises a farmhouse and range of mid C19 model farm buildings including a former dovecote (listed grade II) with a distinctive pyramidal fish-scale-tiled roof. The farm buildings appear to have formed part of Norton's mid C19 estate improvement scheme for Sir Alexander Acland-Hood. Some 150m south-west of the farm buildings stands the former gas retort house (listed grade II) and the former gas holder (listed grade II). These mid C19 structures were designed by Norton and are screened from the house and park by Aldergrove Copse (OS 1886). To the north of the farm, a drive with cobbled gutters and flanked by stone retaining walls descends c 120m north through a narrow valley to reach the remains of a mid C19 stone slipway on the coast. The slipway, probably designed by Norton, was used for landing Welsh coal for use in the estate gas works. To the east of the remains of the slipway are the further remains of a substantial coastal grotto which was built by Norton in 1858 (VCH 1985). Some 30m east of the grotto, the stream which flows north-west through the park descends the cliff as a cascade. The stream appears to flow through an artificial channel to reach the cascade, but the chain of three pools shown on the Tithe map (1840) in the valley above the cascade had been removed by the late C19 (OS 1886).

The park assumed its present form from the late C18, and the area to the west of the house is shown in essentially its present form in Bonner's late C18 engraving (Collinson 1791). The area to the north-west adjacent to the farm was improved in the mid C19 (Tithe map, 1840), while the area to the south-east of the house which formed the site of the medieval village of West Quantoxhead was only taken into the park c 1850 when the final cottages were cleared and the church rebuilt by Norton.

Stowborrow Hill, an area of steeply sloping ground rising to the east of the A39, formed a late C18 or early C19 deer park (Bond 1998) which incorporated the site of a medieval warren c 300m east of the house. This area is today (2002) planted as mixed commercial woodland and is not included in the registered site. The Tithe map (1840) shows the area as open parkland with scattered trees and a plantation on the west-facing slope above the A39. The park is shown in Bonner's engraving (Collinson 1791) forming a backdrop to the park around the house; a small covered seat or temple depicted by Bonner in the deer park is not shown on the Tithe map (1840), and no trace of this structure remains above ground today. In the mid C19 the original deer park was extended south-east to incorporate Stowborrow Hill itself, and by 1911 supported 120 fallow deer and twenty-five red deer (Whitaker 1892; VCH 1911). Continuing in this use in the early C20, the deer park was connected to the park adjacent to the house by a bridge crossing the A39 c 250m north-east of the house; this was demolished c 1940 (Bond 1998).

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden is situated on high ground immediately north of the stable court. Rectangular on plan and enclosed by stone walls, the garden is retained above the level of the formal garden north-west of the house. The garden now contains a group of mid and late C20 institutional buildings and is no longer in cultivation. The kitchen garden appears to have been constructed in the mid C19 as part of John Norton's scheme of estate improvement for Sir Alexander Acland-Hood (OS 1886), and replaced an earlier kitchen garden which was situated north-east of the house (Tithe map, 1840). A range of bothies and stores, probably built to the designs of Norton, survives attached to the outer side of the west wall of the garden.

REFERENCES

J Collinson, *History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset III*, (1791), p 497 E P Shirley, *Some Account of English Deer Parks* (1867), p 97 The Architect 8, (21 September 1872), pp 154-6 Gardeners' Chronicle, ii (1884), pp 555-6; ii (1888), pp 627-8 J Whitaker, *A Descriptive List of the Deer-Parks and Paddocks of England* (1892), p 131 Victoria History of the County of Somerset II, (1911), p 569; V, (1985), pp 129-33 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South and West Somerset* (1958), pp 342-3 J Bond, *Somerset Parks and Gardens* (1998), pp 94-8, 110, 119

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
ST AUDRIES (HOUSE)

Maps Survey of West Quantoxhead and St Audries, 1761 (DD/AH 40/1: map 1761), (Somerset Record Office) Tithe map for West Quantoxhead parish, 1840 (Somerset Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886 2nd edition published 1904

Illustrations T Bonner, engraving, St Audries, the Seat of R Everard Balch Esqr, c 1791 (in Collinson 1791)

Archival items The Acland-Hood family archive including C18 and C19 estate papers, accounts, and plans is held in the Somerset Record Office (DD/AH).

Description written: December 2002 Amended: January 2003 Register Inspector: DL Edited: May 2004

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.