

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

COLETON FISHACRE

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

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**COLETON FISHACRE**

Name:	COLETON FISHACRE
County:	Devon
District:	South Hams (District Authority)
Parish:	Kingswear
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.345798 Longitude: -3.5329270 National Grid Reference: SX 91025 50666 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000690 Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

## Details

An early C20 Arts and Crafts garden comprising formal terraces around a house built in 1925-6 to the design of Oswald Milne, in a coastal valley which has been developed as informal gardens with rare and tender trees and shrubs from early C20 designs by Edward White.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Coleton Fishacre was marginal agricultural land and woodland associated with Coleton Farm until it was acquired by Rupert and Lady Dorothy D'Oyle Carte in 1923-4. The site was quickly developed as a coastal residence reflecting the new recreational interests of the period, with facilities including a bathing shelter, sun-bathing platform, sea-water swimming pool and yacht landing stage in Pudcombe Cove, which formed the southern boundary of the site.

A new drive into the combe was constructed to the east of Coleton Farm in early 1925, while the house was started in May 1925 and was completed in June 1926. As construction took place, existing areas of woodland on the north, north-west and south-west sides of the combe were developed as shelter belts, with new planting comprising mainly Monterey pine and ilex oak. The terraces to the south of the house, the Rill Garden to the west, and the gazebo to the south-east are contemporary with the house and are attributed to Oswald Milne, while the shelter belts and disposition of the valley garden were planned by Edward White. Subsequent development of the garden and the introduction of the rare and tender trees and shrubs which now characterise it was undertaken by Rupert D'Oyle Carte and Lady Dorothy from 1926 until their separation in 1937; their planting is recorded in a series of garden notebooks. Rupert D'Oyle Carte continued to live at Coleton Fishacre until his death in 1948, but the gardens suffered from a degree of neglect during the Second World War when the staff was reduced from eight to one. In 1949 the estate was sold to Rowland Smith, a motor dealer from Hampstead, who occupied the house until his death in 1979. During Smith's ownership the site was rarely open; he sought privacy and aimed to keep the garden as little changed as possible. Despite this policy, by the 1970s the garden was becoming overcrowded and in need of renovation, while much of the lower valley garden was used as an enclosure for Jacob sheep.

The estate was purchased by the National Trust from Rowland Smith's heirs in 1982. Initial reclamation and renovation was undertaken in 1983-5 by the National Trust's head gardeners, Dick and Jane Taylor, and has been continued more recently by

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David Mason. The National Trust has sought to consolidate the original early and mid C20 planting, while introducing new planting in keeping with Lady Dorothy's interest in semi-tender plants.

**DESCRIPTION**

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Coleton Fishacre is located 2km east-south-east of Kingswear and 0.5km south-east of the hamlet of Kingston. The 8ha site is principally enclosed by timber and wire fences screened by evergreen shelter planting to the north, east and south. The site occupies a coastal combe formed by a stream flowing south-east to the cliffs surrounding Pudcombe Cove, which formed the original south boundary of the garden. The late C20 south boundary is set back c 50m from the coast and late C20 coastal footpath, although access is maintained between the garden and the Cove. The rocky headlands east and west of Pudcombe Cove and Blackstone Rocks and the Mew Stone outside the bay are significant in view from the garden.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The site is approached from a minor road 0.5km south of Kingston and 1km north-east of Brownstone. Entered through wooden gates supported on cylindrical stone piers flanked by curved stone wing walls and six wind-blown pines, the tarmac drive descends for c 200m between mown verges and clipped hawthorn hedges revealing wide views south to the sea before passing to the east of Coleton Farm. Adjacent to the farm the drive is enclosed by fuchsia hedges with a mature beech marking an old field boundary to the south-east framing a view to the sea. Beyond the farm, the drive is fenced to the east revealing meadows, while to the west it is enclosed by ornamental trees and shrubs. Descending south for a further 100m the drive turns south-east for c 200m before reaching a simple timber gate which marks the entrance to the gardens around the house. Flanked by mown grass to the north and south, the drive continues past the chauffeur's cottage and garages on the south, beyond which lies the late C20 car park. Enclosed to the north by horse chestnuts along a fenced boundary, and a group of ornamental cherries to the south-east, the drive approaches a walled carriage court to the north-west of the house. Stone gate piers with simple ball finials mark the entrance to the court which is paved with radiating granite sets. The walls of the house are planted with climbers, and the inner walls of the carriage court are also planted with figs and other tender shrubs. An arched entry at the north end of the entrance facade leads to the service yard behind the east wing.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Described by *Country Life* in 1930 as an important example of a modern country house, Coleton Fishacre (listed grade II) was built in 1925-6 to the design of Oswald Milne, a pupil of Edwin Lutyens. The house is low and set into the hillside for shelter, and through its plan and details harmonises with its setting. Constructed of slate rubble quarried on site under a Delabole slate roof, the house has an asymmetrical Y plan with south-west and north-east wings enclosing the carriage court, and south-west and a longer east wing enclosing terraces to the south. The east wing has a semicircular two-storey bay with a conical roof, while the south-west wing has a carved stone panel sundial by H W Palliser at first-floor level. There is a single-storey and attic wing set back at the east end of the east wing which has an open loggia at ground-floor level. The entrance facade has a two-storey three-sided porch with a hipped roof set in the obtuse angle between the north-east and south-west wings. Vernacular inspired Arts and Crafts details appear throughout the house, and the library contains an overmantel wind map painted by Spencer Hoffman in 1927 which shows the site within its coastal setting.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** Below the south facade two terraces retained by slate rubble walls were designed by Milne to provide an architectural setting for the house and as a vantage point for views over the valley garden, and, at the time of construction, for views to the sea. The upper terrace comprises a lower section of c 10m to the south-west, and a higher section c 20m in length to the east, linked by stone steps. Each section has a stone-flagged walk between panels of mown grass. Borders below the house walls are planted with tender herbaceous plants, shrubs and climbers, and a mature leptospermum grows in the flagged walk as shown in photographs published by *Country Life* in 1930. Semicircular stone steps at the south-west end of the upper terrace lead to a lower terrace where a grass walk is bordered by herbaceous plants to the north and dierama on the south or outer side. The walk turns north-east and then east, echoing the plan of the house, with corners and changes in direction marked on the outer side by staddle stones. Approximately 5m from the west end of the east section of the lower terrace, a half-domed niche backs a semicircular stone-edged pool, and shelters a stone carving of an otter by Bridget McCrum which replaces a similar early C20 statue by H W Palliser. The lower terrace connects to the east with the Bowling Green Lawn, a rectangular terrace enclosed to the north by a planted drystone wall, bank and shelter planting, and to the east by

shrubs including myrtle. Similar shrubs grow below the terrace wall to the south, sheltering the lawn. Stone steps at the centre of the west side of the lawn rise to the upper terrace and a broad paved area in front of the open loggia at the east end of the house. Stone steps at the south-west corner of the Bowling Green descend to an area of lawn which slopes down to the principal walk and stream which run through the valley garden. The lawn is planted with specimen trees including a liriiodendron planted in 1926, while against the retaining wall of the lower terrace a deep border is planted with herbaceous and tender plants in predominantly warm colours. A rectangular pool is fed from the pool on the terrace above, and monumental stone buttresses punctuate the flanking borders. An early C20 rill connecting the rectangular pool with the stream has been removed, and views from the terraces over the valley garden to the sea which were illustrated by *Country Life* in 1930 have been lost through tree growth in the valley.

The Gazebo Walk leads south-south-east from the east end of the Bowling Green with Mediterranean foliage plants on a bank below shelter planting to the north. Gradually turning south-east, the gently sloping grass walk reveals a pentagonal stone-paved gazebo which frames a dramatic view of the sea and the Mew Stone. Square stone piers support timber beams covered with vines and wisteria, and low stone parapet walls back timber seats. Views back to the house photographed in 1930 (CL) have been lost due to the growth of trees and conifers on the slope below the Gazebo Walk. To the north of the Gazebo Walk a minor path leads north-east through early C20 shelter planting to Paddock Wood, an area of late C20 shelter planting which replaces early C20 trees lost through storm damage. The walk continues east to reach a long series of steps which follows the eastern boundary of the garden south to join the principal walk c 350m south-east of the house. Beyond the gazebo, a series of grass walks lead east and south-east along the north side of the valley through ornamental trees and shrubs. Below the gazebo, the quarry from which the stone for the house was removed has been planted with *Agapanthus*, *Phormium*, heaths and a fig tree. The principal walk running through the valley leaves the drive to the north-west of the carriage court. To the south a broad, stone-flagged walk, The Seemly Terrace, is planted with foliage plants and leads to a flight of circular stone steps which descends to the Rill Garden below the west side of the house. Enclosed by stone walls c 2m high, the Rill Garden was originally planned as a rose garden, but now (1998) contains four beds planted with semi-tender plants, together with tender shrubs and climbers on the walls. A canalised stream flows in a deep stone-kerbed channel from a cistern and pool at the north-west end of the garden, through a series of shallow cascades and a circular pool with a concave stone rim. Continuing south-east through a similar short length of canal, the stream emerges from the Rill Garden between a pair of square stone piers, descending in a cascade to a natural stream and pool below the house and lawn. Circular stone gate piers flank entrances to a stone-flagged walk which traverses the Rill Garden near its narrower south-east end, leading to a series of mown grass walks which form terraces planted with ornamental trees and shrubs on the south side of the valley. The upper walks afford views across the valley garden to the house, and after c 120m reach a rocky outcrop, Newfoundland, near the southern boundary of the garden. Steps descend to the stream, passing the exposed roots of a mature beech which pre-dates the construction of the garden.

The principal walk follows the course of the stream along the north side of the valley, passing pools immediately below the house and c 100m south-east. Beyond the lawn below the terraces the walk passes through a series of glades with planting including bamboo, rhododendrons and rare specimen trees and shrubs. After c 200m the planting recedes and the walk passes through an open area of mown grass which slopes up to the north. Today (1998) the walk crosses the stream on a timber bridge and continues south to the timber gate which gives access to the coastal footpath. The stream to the east of the walk is planted with tree ferns and shrubs including camellias and hydrangeas; to the west an open grass glade is enclosed to the north and west by pines and shelter planting.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The site has never had a kitchen garden. The late C20 car park 150m west of the house is planted as an orchard of Devon cider apple varieties which replaces an orchard shown in this location in 1938.

**OTHER LAND** Turning south c 300m south-east of the house, the principal walk leaves its original course, which continued south-east beyond the late C20 garden boundary to the headland east of Pudcombe Cove, where there was an early C20 viewpoint. This area remains within the registered boundary. Today (1998) the principal walk continues beyond the late C20 garden boundary on the west side of the stream which is bordered by hydrangeas and fuchsias as it passes through early C20 shelter planting of ilex oak and pine to reach the cliffs above Pudcombe Cove. A steep concrete path descends the cliff face

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which is planted with pyracantha and fuchsia, to steps which lead to an early C20 concrete bathing pavilion faced with sea-smoothed stones, a concrete sun-bathing platform and sea-water swimming pool.

REFERENCES

The Builder, (17 June 1927), p 966 Country Life, 67 (31 May 1930), pp 782-9; 181 (26 February 1987), pp 78-80 G C Taylor, The Modern Garden (2nd edn 1937), p 39 The Garden 3, ii (February 1986), pp 55-61; 120, viii (August 1995), pp 500-7 B Cherry and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Devon (1989), p 525 P Ottewill, The Edwardian Garden (1989), p 130 Coleton Fishacre Garden Guide, guidebook, (National Trust 1996)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1864(87, published 1889 1938 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1862, published 1864 2nd edition revised 1904, published 1906

Archival items Garden notebooks c 1925-37, (National Trust Collection)

Description written: September 1998 Amended: May 1999; May 2000 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.