

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

LITTLE THAKEHAM

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LITTLE THAKEHAM

Name:	LITTLE THAKEHAM
County:	West Sussex
District:	Horsham (District Authority)
Parish:	Thakeham
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.929359 Longitude: -0.42300262 National Grid Reference: TQ 10922 15618 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001214 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

An early C20 formal garden laid out in 1902-3 by Sir Edwin Lutyens with planting by the owner Ernest Blackburn, set in surrounding early C20 orchards.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Little Thakeham was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1902 for Ernest Blackburn who, in 1919, sold the house, gardens and grounds to the Aggs family. They sold the house and garden in 1979 to Mr and Mrs Ratcliff, who opened the Little Thakeham Country House Hotel, the Aggs family retaining the surrounding grounds and the coach house. The site remains (1997) in divided commercial and private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Little Thakeham lies on the north side of Merrywood Lane, 0.75km east of its junction with the B2139 Thakeham to Storrington road. The 8.5ha registered site, comprising a 1ha formal garden set within 7.5ha of orchards and a small area of informal lawns and shrubbery, lies on ground which is level at the northern end and then follows a gentle slope down towards the southern boundary. The site is bounded on the west side by a tree- and hedge-lined gravelled lane which forms the drive (it is also a public bridleway). To the south, a belt of woodland separates the site from Merrywood Lane while to the north and east agricultural fencing and fringes of trees or hedgerows largely enclose the site from the surrounding landscape of gently rolling mixed farmland and small woods.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The house and grounds are approached from Merrywood Lane to the south. The drive follows the course of the bridleway northwards for 200m before turning eastwards into the grounds and passing 100m along an avenue of walnut trees to the principal, north front of the house.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Little Thakeham (listed grade I) sits in a central position on the northern edge of the site, its views southwards largely limited to the garden and orchards with only occasional glimpses of the South Downs, some 3km distant, above the boundary woodland. The house, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) in 1902 (CL 1909), is of two storeys on a symmetrical, H-shaped plan and built in locally quarried coursed sandstone. The centrally placed porch on the north front is balanced on the south or garden front by a full height polygonal bay window. Connected to the main house on its east side

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is a long, two-storey, stone and tile-hung service wing, built by Lutyens on the foundations of the house begun for Blackburn in 1901 by the architect Hatchard Smith (The Field 1986). The main house was converted to use as an hotel in 1980 and the service wing to family accommodation in the early to mid C20.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The formal garden lies largely to the south of the house, its structure designed by Lutyens and the original planting carried out by Blackburn himself, who was a keen amateur gardener (Hussey 1950).

On the north side of the house an enclosed entrance forecourt garden is formed by coursed stone walls. Stone gate piers in the north wall, on the axis of the porch, give access from the drive while the walls enclosing the forecourt at its east and west ends, which are capped by little pitched tiled roofs, contain arched side entrances. The forecourt is laid out in four symmetrical quarters of lawn divided by stone-flagged paths and edged with low shrub and herbaceous planting.

Westwards from the forecourt, a flagged path running c 30m southwards along the wisteria-clad western elevation of the house is flanked on its west side by a broad herbaceous border, planted in the 1980s with species and varieties used in the early C20 by Ernest Blackburn (owner and Blackburn diaries in private collection). The border is enclosed along its west side by a castellated yew hedge, which is clipped to c 2m with 3m battlemented towers at intervals and which continues around to the south front of the house.

On its south side, the house overlooks a gentle slope which is cut into a series of three descending terraces, each supported by a bank faced with a low drystone wall, formerly planted with rock and alpine plants and now (1997) with taller shrub and herbaceous cover. The top terrace, which occupies the width of the main house and the western half of the former service wing, is partly enclosed by further clipped and battlemented yew hedging planted between 1913 and 1927 (photographs in Weaver 1913; Shepherd and Jellicoe 1927) on the drystone wall. The terrace is laid to flags, flanked to east and west by a square plat of lawn and with, in the centre, a rectangular rose garden divided by flags into eight squares, each of which contains a rose underplanted with lavender and other herbaceous plants. At the far east end of the terrace, beyond the eastern grass plat, is a lily pool and a water garden, both square in form and set in surrounding flags; the water garden is divided into two by a central stone channel and planted with waterside plants. From the north side of the lily pool, a bank of stone and tile steps, divided into three by platforms with terracotta pots, leads up to an apron of paving outside the former service wing.

From the top terrace and on the axis of the bay on the south front, a broad, flagged path, with three single-step changes of level, leads southwards across the narrow width of the second terrace. This is laid to lawn with one or two small ornamental trees and, flanking the path, two pairs of domed Japanese maples, planted in 1902 and 1914 (owner pers comm, 1997). The western end of the terrace contains a swimming pool surrounded with shrubbery, built in the mid C20. The axial flagged path continues from the southern edge of the second terrace level to run the full length of a great pergola which, flanked on its east side by the 60m x 40m principal lawn (which forms the third terrace level) and by orchards to the west, stretches 40m to the southern boundary of the garden. Constructed on a raised bank faced with abundantly planted drystone walls, horizontal square-section oak timbers rest on alternate square and round stone piers, spaced at c 2.7m intervals. The central path is edged with herbaceous borders with further borders running along at the foot of the walls. The pergola terminates in a raised flagged platform from which broad flights of stone steps lead east and west down to the lawn and to the orchard. A further, semicircular, segmented flight of steps leads down from the pergola onto the north-west corner of the lawn.

OTHER LAND South and west of the garden, the grounds are laid out with apple and pear orchards, planted in the early C20 and with, on the west side of the house, to the immediate south of the main drive, a cherry orchard. East of the house, the drive continues c 100m eastwards to the two brick and timber-faced courtyard ranges of the former coach house and stables, built by Lutyens in 1902 and converted to living accommodation, known as the Garden House, from 1974-5. The grounds to the east and south of the Garden House are laid out to further pear orchards, planted in the 1950s, part of those to the south occupying the site of an early C20 kitchen garden with a surviving stone and tile-walled dipping well, designed by Lutyens as a central focus (Weaver 1913). East of the principal lawn and running southwards for c 70m from the south-west corner of the Garden House to a tree-fringed pond is a nut walk, planted as a double avenue of coppiced trees.

REFERENCES

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Country Life, 26 (28 August 1909), pp 292-9 L Weaver, Houses and Gardens by E L Lutyens (1913), pp 103-16 J C Shepherd and G A Jellicoe, Gardens and Design (1927), pp 219-30 C Hussey, The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens (1950) I Nairn and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Sussex (1965), pp 349-50 J Brown, Gardens of a Golden Afternoon (1982), p 187, pls 11 and 12 The Field, (December 1986), pp 13-14

Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1875 3rd edition published 1911 1937 edition

Archival items The diaries of Ernest Blackburn, which include material on the planting of the garden, are held in a private collection.

Description written: November 1997 Amended: January 2000 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: June 2000

This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 10/05/2016

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.