

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SAUNTON COURT

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

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Name:	SAUNTON COURT
County:	Devon
District:	North Devon (District Authority)
Parish:	Braunton
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.118711 Longitude: -4.2058601 National Grid Reference: SS 45711 37806 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000700 Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

Details

An early C20 formal terraced garden and kitchen garden designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens surrounding a medieval manor house which he remodelled and extended in 1932, together with informal C20 gardens.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Saunton Court appears to have been built in the C15, but may have earlier origins. Owned by Sir Robert Chichester in 1545, the property passed to the Luttrell family in the C17. In the early C19 F W Stockdale noted that Saunton Court was 'an ancient mansion, very delightfully situated'. By the mid C19 Saunton formed part of the extensive estate belonging to the Christie family of Tapeley Park, Instow (qv), and the house was let as a farm to the Tucker family. An estate plan of 1896 shows the arrangement of the farm, the site of the present gardens to the south-east forming the yard which was enclosed by two ranges of farm buildings on the site of the early C20 terraces. A further yard with a granary to the north-west of the house occupied the site of the early C20 kitchen garden.

Saunton Court was acquired by G Rankin c 1930, and he commissioned Lutyens to remodel the farm as a country house, creating formal terraced gardens on the site of the farmyard and buildings to the south-east, a kitchen garden to the north-west, and informal gardens in the orchard below the house to the south-east. The site has passed through several hands during the C20, and remains in private ownership today (1998).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Saunton Court is situated c 3.5km north-west of the village of Braunton, to the north of the B3231 which follows the coast from Braunton to Croyde. The site comprises some 3ha, and is bounded to the south and west by a minor agricultural lane, and to the south-east by Hannaburrow Lane, now a minor road but until the C19 the principal route north to Ilfracombe. To the east and north the site is enclosed by fences and traditional hedge banks, while to the north-west the kitchen garden walls adjoin an area of steep pasture with semi-heathland vegetation. The site occupies a valley which runs north-west to south-east, the gradient decreasing towards its southern boundary. There are views from the upper parts of the site around the house and on the terraces south to the sand dunes of Braunton Burrows and to the sea. To the north-east of the house but outside the registered site, Lankham Brake, an area of mixed woodland, is

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significant both for providing shelter to the garden and framing views from the house and terraces. Woodland on the slope to the south-west of the site performs a similarly significant role.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is approached from a minor lane leading north from the B3231 some 270m south-south-east of the house. Now an agricultural track leading to fields north and west of Saunton Court, the lane is excluded from the site. It is bounded to the east and north-east by a traditional field boundary bank, partly planted with ornamental herbaceous plants, which forms the western boundary of the site. After c 220m the lane broadens to form a turning area to the north-west of the early C20 garages, which are formed from converted cart sheds. Continuing north-west, the concrete-surfaced lane is enclosed to the north by the retaining wall of the garden terraces, below which is a mown grass verge and a mixed border. The two-storey gazebo with a ground-floor arch enclosed by wrought-iron gates which lead to the gardens terminates the wall to the south-east. The gazebo was formed by Lutyens from the existing gig house and balances the single-storey porch with a hipped roof supported on circular stone pillars which shelters the principal entrance to the site to the north-west. A pierced timber door in the rear wall of the stone-flagged porch leads to a broad stone-flagged terrace which extends across the south-east facade of the house, and which allows access to the two-storey porch sheltering the front door, and to a service court at the south-west end of the house.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Saunton Court (listed grade II*) is a rubble-stone, slate-roofed manor house dating from the C15, possibly with earlier origins. Originally built as an open hall with a two-storey porch on the south-east facade leading to a through passage, and with cross wings to north-east and south-west, the house was extensively remodelled and extended in an informal neo-Georgian style by Lutyens in 1932. To the north-east Lutyens added a single-storey range parallel to the original house, which together with the 1932 kitchen block forms an open courtyard to the rear of the house. Many of the timber sash windows throughout the house appear to date from the 1930s' renovation, and the interior was almost entirely remodelled by Lutyens. The walled kitchen garden immediately to the north-east of the house and the formal terraces to the south-east also formed part of Lutyens' 1932 scheme.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The formal and informal gardens lie to the south and south-east of the house. The south front of the house overlooks a broad terrace lawn which was created by Lutyens from the earlier farmyard, and which is enclosed to the north-east and south-west by stone walls set behind herbaceous borders. A broad stone-flagged walk placed axially to the south-east facade leads c 30m south-east to a pair of stone gate piers with pyramid caps and ball finials which support a pair of wooden gates with ornamental turned bars (listed grade II*). At the south corner of the lawn, the upper section of the gazebo formed by Lutyens from the earlier gig house is entered by convex stone steps on the north-west side, and has a clock face on its north-east facade (listed grade II*). The lawn terrace is bounded to the north-west by a broad stone-flagged walk which leads from the entrance gate north-east below the walls of the house c 40m to a double flight of stone steps (listed grade II*), the lower flight half convex, the upper flight half concave, which ascend to an upper lawned terrace. This upper terrace is enclosed to the north-east by a border backed by a stone wall, and a further flight of stone steps at the south end of the lawn ascends to a further narrow grass terrace which has a stone-paved semicircular recess to the north-east below mature conifers, and a pair of stone gate piers to the north-west which close a path leading to the kitchen garden to the north-west of the house. The formal gardens descend in two further terraces south-east of the terrace lawn. Stone steps descend from the stone gate piers south-east of the house to a mown grass walk flanked by stone-edged herbaceous and mixed borders. The Walk extends c 50m north-east to a pair of low stone gate piers surmounted by carved stone pineapples. Wooden gates lead to an area of informal planting, beyond which to the north lies a former paddock, now (1998) planted with young specimen trees. The south-west end of the second terrace is paved with large stone flags with steps leading down south-west to the lower storey of the gazebo, and further steps leading south-east to the lowest terrace.

Enclosed to the south-east by a yew hedge c 1.5m high, the south-west end of the lower terrace is laid out as a rose garden with rectangular beds set in lawns flanking a central flagged walk which leads c 30m north-east to a flight of stone steps flanked by stone gate piers which support low wrought-iron gates. Some 15m from the south-west end of the terrace a stone-kerbed rill flows south-east across the terrace from a circular stone-edged pool which is half set within a concave semicircular recess (listed grade II*). The pool is fed by a lead goat-mask spout which is set on the keystone of the recess arch, and the rill descends

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to a semicircular pool in the informal pleasure grounds below the terraces in a simple cascade. The stone steps terminating the north-east end of the lower terrace ascend to a level lawn, perhaps an early C20 bowling lawn, which is enclosed to the north-west by the low stone retaining wall of the rectangular flower garden which is laid out with a central oval pool and concrete paths separating geometric beds. Low stone retaining walls enclose the garden on the north-west, north-east and south-east sides, and to the north-east there is a timber seat constructed to a Lutyens design. Late C20 trellises supporting roses separate the flower garden from the former paddock to the north.

The informal gardens in the gently sloping valley south of the terraces have been developed in the C20 from the C19 farm orchard, and several standard fruit trees remain from this earlier phase. A circular concrete-edged pond is situated c 80m south-east of the house. Some 25m in diameter with an island, this pond dominates the upper section of the informal garden and was developed from the irregular farm pond shown in this location on the 1904 OS map. It is unclear whether it formed part of Lutyens' 1932 plan, or whether it was remodelled for use as a reservoir by American troops during the Second World War (The Best of Braunton). Some 50m further south a hard tennis court has a stone pavilion on its east side with a pair of circular rubble-stone pillars supporting the slate roof. The unlisted pavilion appears to date from the early 1930s and may have formed part of Lutyens' scheme. The informal gardens are planted with groups of ornamental shrubs and specimen trees, many of which have been introduced in the late C20. A group of mature pines c 130m east-south-east of the house screens the garden from an early C20 house on high ground to the east of Hannaburrow Lane. A brick and timber lean-to glasshouse against the rear elevation of the garages c 80m south of the house and 30m west of the pond appears to date from the 1930s.

KITCHEN GARDEN Created in 1932 by Lutyens on the site of a farmyard and granary to the north of the house, the kitchen garden is enclosed to the north-west, north-east and south-west by coped walls c 2m high constructed from granite blocks. The wall to the north-east is curved to follow the line of a projecting spur of hill which adjoins the garden to the north. The garden ascends the slope north-west of the house in a series of terraces, the lowest of which forms a grass walk extending along the length of the north-west facade of the house. It is enclosed to the south-east by a hedge, and to the north-west by a stone retaining wall which supports mature espalier pears and is surmounted by a yew hedge. Stone steps terminate the north-east end of the terrace walk, ascending to the upper level of the kitchen garden and to a walk which leads to the gardens on the north side of the house. A fruit store, later used as an air-raid shelter, is built into the natural rock of the hillside which here adjoins the garden. In a recess below the terrace at the north corner of the house is a free-standing early C20 brick and timber glasshouse. A stone-flagged stepped path connects the south-west end of the terrace walk to an arched door in the north-west wall of the kitchen garden. The garden is now largely planted with standard fruit trees and soft fruit bushes, with some mature plums trained against the south- and south-east-facing walls.

REFERENCES

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Description written: November 1998 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.