

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CRICHEL HOUSE

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

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Name: CRICHEL HOUSE

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Crichel

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Witchampton

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.870340
Longitude: -2.0082905
National Grid Reference: ST 99513 07871
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000716
Date first listed: 19-Dec-1986

Details

An C18 landscape park forming the setting to a mansion remodelled by Humphry Sturt from 1772.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

During the medieval period, the manor of More Crichel was held by the Cifrewast family, the last of whom, William Cifrewast, died in 1582. The estate was subsequently sold to Sir Nathaniel Napier, son of Sir Robert Napier, Chief Baron of the Exchequer in Ireland and owner of Middlemarsh Hall, Minterne Magna, Dorset (Oswald 1959). Sir Nathaniel built a new house at Crichel, the appearance of which is recorded in an early C18 painting (Harris 1979). Sir Nathaniel was succeeded by his son, Sir Gerrard, who in 1641 was knighted and created a baronet for his services to King Charles I. He was in turn succeeded in 1672 by his son, the second Sir Nathaniel Napier, who extended the house built by his grandfather, and probably laid out the formal terraced gardens shown in an early C18 view (CL 1908). In 1742 this house was destroyed by fire, and a new house was constructed by Sir Nathaniel's grandson, Sir William Napier, perhaps using plans provided by the Bastards of Blandford Forum (Oswald 1959). Sir William was succeeded in turn by his younger brother and nephew, but in 1765 the male line of the Napiers became extinct and Crichel was inherited by another of Sir William's nephews, Humphry Sturt of Horton, Dorset. At Horton, Humphry Sturt's father and grandfather had built a mansion and an observatory tower, and created an extensive lake (ibid). These were abandoned after Sturt inherited Crichel, which now became his principal seat. The mid C18 house was substantially enlarged c 1770, perhaps following designs by Stephen Wright, while some of the later interiors have been attributed to James Wyatt (ibid). Humphry Sturt also appears to have extended the park and lake as a setting for his improved mansion. This scheme entailed the removal of the old village of More Crichel and the construction of a new 'model' village at New Town. Humphry Sturt died in 1786, and was succeeded at Crichel by his younger son, Charles. Charles Sturt preferred however to live at one of his father's other properties, Brownsea Castle, on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, while Crichel was let for a time to the Prince of Wales for the use of his daughter, Princess Charlotte (CL 1908). Modest alterations were made to the House by Thomas Hopper in 1831, and by William Burn for H G Sturt in 1869, but the park remained substantially unaltered. In 1876

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Charles Sturt's grandson was created Lord Alington, and c 1880 he rebuilt the chancel of the parish church; this had survived the removal of the village and was a feature in the pleasure grounds. The second Lord Alington, who inherited Crichel in 1904, commissioned Harold Peto (1854-1933) to lay out a formal parterre or Italian Garden below the south front of the House c 1905. Following neglect and decline during the Second World War, this garden was removed c 1970. The second Lord Alington died in 1919, and Crichel was inherited by his son, the third Lord Alington. In the mid C20 the House was occupied by Cranborne Chase School, but c 1960 Lord Alington's daughter, the Hon Mrs Marten, who had inherited Crichel in 1940, took up residence once again, together with her husband, Lieutenant-Commander G G Marten. Crichel remains (2004) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Crichel House is situated c 2km north-north-east of Witchampton and c 2.25km south-south-west of Gussage All Saints. The c 124ha site is adjoined to the east by agricultural land and to the north by the Timber Yard and other service areas. To the south the site adjoins New Town. The south-west boundary is marked by a minor road leading west from New Town to Crichel Lane, the latter forming the western boundary of the site. The north-west boundary is formed by Longman's Road, which separates the site from a further area of former parkland (outside the area here registered). The site is undulating, with the ground falling away towards the lake to the south-east of the House, which was formed by damming a tributary of the River Allen which flows immediately south-east of the site. There are southerly views through the park and across the lake. Ground to the north-west of Longman's Road, and an extended east drive and plantation leading to Didlington Lodge, were incorporated into the park during the C19, together with ground to the east of The Plantation and a drive leading north-east to Mill Hill Lodge. These areas lie outside the registered site, but form part of its setting.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal approach to Crichel House is from New Town to the south. The entrance is marked by a lodge and arched gateway designed by William Burn and McVicar Anderson in 1874 in a neo-Norman style (Pevsner and Newman 1972). From this entrance a drive extends c 1.2km north, sweeping through the park to reach the carriage turn below the west facade of the House. From the carriage turn a further drive leads c 100m north-west to the late C18 stables and carriage houses (listed grade II) which are arranged around a central courtyard entered beneath a tower at the centre of the south range. The stables formed part of Humphry Sturt's improvements following his inheritance of the estate in 1765.

Further drives lead north-west to the Long Crichel entrance, north-east to Mill Hill Lodge, and east-south-east to Didlington Lodge (listed grade II) on the B3078 road. All these lie outside the area of the site here registered. The east (Didlington) drive, probably developed in the mid C19 and certainly completed by 1887 (OS), sweeps round the southern end of the lake, turning north-east and east to pass through an area of plantation and a double avenue before reaching the lodge which comprises a picturesque part-timbered and tile-hung structure of a single storey and an attic. The lodge is flanked by brick walls (listed grade II) with stone copings and ornamental iron crestings, before which lie panels of grass enclosed by turned timber bollards linked by chains (all listed grade II).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Crichel House (listed grade I) stands on higher ground towards the northern boundary of the site, and to the north-west of the lake. The mid C18 house is constructed in rendered brick with ashlar dressings and ornaments under slate and lead roofs which are concealed behind balustrades. The building stands on a rusticated basement and has rusticated quoins. The principal facade faces south towards the park and is a symmetrical composition with a pedimented centrepiece, the ground floor of which comprises a recessed portico supported by Ionic columns. The portico is flanked to east and west by Venetian windows, while two flights of curved steps descend from the portico to the lawns. The east facade also has a central pediment which contains a centrally placed Palladian doorway surmounted by a Venetian window. The west or entrance facade has a centrally placed C19 single-storey portico. The north facade was refaced in the late C20 following the demolition of C19 service quarters.

Crichel House assumed its present form c 1770 when a building of 1743 was substantially extended for Humphry Sturt. Portions of the original house, constructed for Sir William Napier, are visible in the south portico.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Extensive lawns lie to the south and east of the House, with a ha-ha to the south separating the pleasure grounds from the park. Some 100m south-east of the House stands the former parish church of St Mary

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(listed grade II*), the sole survivor of the village of More Crichel which was cleared by Humphry Sturt in the late C18 (Pevsner and Newman 1972). The church, reconstructed in 1850 and 1880, and now (2004) redundant, is constructed from stone in Gothic style, with an octagonal stone bellcote at the south-west corner of the south transept. The church serves as a picturesque incident in the designed landscape.

A further area of informal pleasure grounds extends to the north of the House, with lawns, specimen trees and shrubs, and curvilinear walks. This area probably assumed its present form in the C19 and is shown on the late C19 OS map (1887).

The early C18 view of the C17 Crichel House (Harris 1979) appears to show the building from the east, with a walled forecourt and a terraced garden immediately below the House. A further garden with a terrace and a pavilion is indicated to the south of the House. This scheme was entirely removed during the C18, perhaps by Humphry Sturt at the time of his enlargement of the House, c 1770. The late C18 mansion is shown in an engraving published by Hutchins (1774) with a drive encircling it, and undulating lawns descending to the lake which is crossed by a triple-arched bridge; the engraving omits the church. In 1905-06, the second Lord Alington commissioned Harold Peto to lay out a formal garden below the south facade of the House. This comprised a geometrical parterre surrounded by panels of lawn and specimen topiary. Enclosed by balustrades to the east, south, and west, the garden, known as the Italian Garden, was planted in such a way as to retain the view from the House to the lake. A domed rotunda at the south-east end of the garden overlooked the lake in the valley below. This garden was illustrated and described in articles published by *Country Life* in 1908 and 1925, but it fell into decline during the Second World War and was subsequently removed c 1970.

PARK The park, which is today (2004) in mixed agricultural use, lies principally to the south of the House, with a sinuous lake extending through a valley which drops away to the south-south-east. The lake is fed from the north by a stream, while the outflow joins the River Allen to the south. The eastern bank of the lake is planted with mixed woodland, The Plantation, while further areas of ornamental woodland including Cuckoo Pound and the Dark Walk serve to screen the south-east and west boundaries of the park. Much of the park has been in arable cultivation for much of the C20, but it retains a number of specimen trees, including mature Lebanon cedars by the lake.

The park appears to have been developed by Humphry Sturt in the late C18 from an existing, smaller park which is recorded on a plan of 1765-7 (private collection). This park presumably formed the setting for Sir William Napier's house built in 1742, but may originally have been associated with the C17 house. The mid C18 map shows a lake or pond to the south-east of the House, and a smaller park extending to the south and south-west of the House. The south-west corner of this park appears to correspond approximately to the junction of Longman's Road and Crichel Lane. The land to the south of this park, and to the east of the lake, is identified as forming part of Crichel Farm. This park was extended southwards by Humphry Sturt, probably as far as New Town. Further extensions were made during the C19 to the north-west, east, and north-east until the park attained the extent recorded on the late C19 OS map (1887). During the C20, many of these later additions were gradually disparked and returned to cultivation.

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled garden is situated c 150m north-east of the House and is enclosed by brick walls of late C18 or early C19 construction. Approximately rectangular on plan, the kitchen garden has been developed for ornamental cultivation in the late C20.

REFERENCES

J Hutchins, *History of Dorset* (1774 edn) *Country Life*, 23 (18 January 1908), pp 90-6; 57 (16 May 1925), pp 766-74; (30 May 1925), pp 874-81 A Oswald, *Country Houses of Dorset* (2nd edn 1959), pp 165-9 N Pevsner and J Newman, *The Buildings of England: Dorset* (1972), pp 298-300 J Harris, *The Artist and the Country House* (1979), p 138 T Mowl, *Historic Gardens of Dorset* (2003), pp 128-9

Maps Moor Critchill Park & Water with the Lands In Hand, 1765-7 (private collection)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1887, published 1890 2nd edition published 1902 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition revised 1901, published 1902-03

Illustrations View of Crichel House, early C18 (reproduced in Harris 1979) Engraved view of Crichel House from the south, late C18 (published in Hutchins (1774 edn); reproduced in CL 1925)

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Archival items Photographs of Crichel House, early C20 (published in Oswald 1959, pls 194-99)

Description written: November 2004 Amended: December 2004 (PAS) Register Inspector: JML Edited: May 2005

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.