

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

SOMERLEYTON PARK

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

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**SOMERLEYTON PARK**

Name:	SOMERLEYTON PARK
County:	Suffolk
District:	East Suffolk (District Authority)
Parish:	Somerleyton, Ashby and Herringfleet
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.519999 Longitude: 1.6722401 National Grid Reference: TM 49230 97685 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000188 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

## Details

A formal C19 garden partly by W A Nesfield, with pleasure grounds and walled gardens containing plant houses probably influenced by Joseph Paxton, set in a park of C17 origin with C19 alterations.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Sir Thomas Wentworth purchased the Somerleyton estate from the Jerningham family at the beginning of the C17. His son John inherited in 1612 and subsequently passed the estate to his own son, another John, who managed it until his death in 1651. It was sometime during the first half of the C17 that the Wentworths constructed a mansion house at Somerleyton and surrounded it with innovative gardens: a geometric 'Great Garden'; an orchard, the Firrendale Yard; and most remarkably, an irregular 'wilderness' garden. A map produced in the year following the younger John's death records that the estate was already a large one and that the house and garden were set in a 53ha deer park, newly created to accompany the mansion (1652 estate map). This all passed to John's nephew John Garney before being sold to Sir Thomas Allen of Lowestoft in 1669. The property remained in the hands of the Allen and Anguish family until 1844 when it was put up for sale. Very little documentary evidence survives to record what happened to the estate between the late C17 and late C18; no written records, maps or illustrations have so far been found. A selection of county maps published during this period do not help to illuminate the landscape since some record a park at Somerleyton and others do not. Both the 1805 Enclosure map and the 1844 Tithe map record only a small park with field boundaries closely related to the 1652 survey (Williamson and Taigel 1992).

In 1844 Sir Samuel Morton Peto purchased Somerleyton and he began an extensive phase of rebuilding and remodelling. The present mansion was constructed by the architect John Thomas in 1844, retaining the C17 house at its core. The park was greatly extended from 53ha to c 140ha, an area almost entirely enclosed by a low brick wall. Complex formal gardens were laid out beside the mansion, partly to a design by William Andrews Nesfield (1793-1881). The wider estate was also improved and a model village, also by Thomas, was constructed. The character of the surroundings of the mansion today (1998) owes more to the time of Sir Morton's ownership than to any other period. Over-expenditure on Somerleyton however forced Sir Morton to sell up in 1862 at which time it was purchased by Sir Francis Crossley. His son, Sir Savile Crossley, became the first Baron Somerleyton in 1916. The estate remains (1998) in private hands.

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
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## DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Somerleyton Park lies midway between Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth on the northern edge of the Waveney estuary, c 6.5km from the coast on the B1074 Oulton to St Olaves road. The park covers c 80ha with a 9ha garden and pleasure ground at its core. The B1074 forms the southern and western boundaries, Green Farm Lane the eastern boundary and estate farmland and woodland the northern boundary. The whole is set in a rural part of Suffolk, surrounded by farmland dotted with occasional woods and scattered small villages. The model estate village of Somerleyton sits immediately beyond the south-west edge of the park. The registered site is mainly flat to the east and more undulating to the west. The land rises up gently from the southern boundary road to a flatter plateau on which stands the main house. This landform, together with dense tree planting in the park to the north-west, precludes any grand views from the Hall but its position on the higher ground does allow views of the park to the south and west. To the east, flat land and tree clumps cut the view short, while the gardens and pleasure grounds lie mainly to the north and are backed by woodland plantations. The low park wall and the rising ground offer good views into the park from the southern boundary road and from here it is also possible to view the church in the park.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main drive enters the park on the south boundary. The B1074 was moved to this location in 1848 to allow the park to extend southwards and this new drive to be created. A pair of impressive ornamental lodges (listed grade II) of red brick with stone dressing and fish-scale tile roofs, sit beside wrought-iron gates. The drive runs north, lined by a recently planted avenue of lime (1980), before sweeping round to reach the gravelled courtyard on the east front of the Hall. The courtyard is enclosed by a 1.3m high stone wall with second set of wrought-iron gates (John Thomas, listed grade II). Parallel to the main drive on its west side are the remains of a double avenue of lime dating from c 1700, which runs from the garden terrace west of the Hall through the south park. It is not clear whether this ever lined a drive or whether it is the remains of a long grove, which originally included elm as well as lime. The feature is terminated by a marble statue of a Roman centurion by John Thomas (listed grade II), the architect of the Hall.

A second drive, also created in 1848, enters the park at its north-west corner, with a single picturesque lodge in the rustic style to the north, and runs east to the kitchen gardens, stables and service buildings (listed grade II\*) before sweeping south to join the main drive at the east front of the Hall. There are three further minor entrance drives: two on the western boundary, the northern one leading to Park Cottage and the southern one to the Old Rectory; the third leads off the southern boundary road to the church of St Mary (listed grade II\*).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Somerleyton Hall (listed grade II\*) is constructed of red brick with stone dressings under a slated roof and lies slightly to the north of centre within the park. It was constructed for Sir Morton Peto in 1844 by John Thomas on the site of, and incorporating the core of, the original C17 manor house. The mansion is in the Jacobean style, mainly two-storey with a third attic storey. The entrance front to the east has a nine-bay centre with flanking wings of five bays to the south and three bays to the north, each with shaped end gables. The parapet and cornice to the front is broken by the Crossley family arms. Right across the east front is a single-storey stone loggia made up of a series of open arches either side of an elaborately carved projecting central porch with entrance door and cupola. Attached to the south wing is a large, square, Italianate tower topped by urns. The garden front to the west is symmetrically arranged with eleven bays, each end bay being wider and of three storeys, and a central three-storey stone porch open to the ground floor. Attached to the north front is the stable court (listed grade II\*) in the same style as the Hall. This incorporates an octagonal clock and bell tower, the clock being by Vulliamy. The stable courtyard is entered through an arched gateway from the Hall court, with a second arched gateway at the north end of the east range.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The main garden front lies to the west of the Hall. It comprises a raised gravel terrace with retaining wall (listed grade II) and steps which lead down to a simplified parterre garden originally designed by W A Nesfield in c 1855, bordered to north and south by raised grass banks. The garden and park to the west are divided by a curved, balustraded terrace with stone seats and urns at each end (listed grade II). The southern end contains two statues by Thomas (listed grade II) which look down the line of the old lime avenue, while the northern end continues the gravel path up a series of steps to a stone seat. The parterre is composed of beds cut into grass, filled with clipped yew, roses and bedding,

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
*SOMERLEYTON PARK*

decorated with urns, troughs and an equatorial sundial (all listed grade II). Attached to the north end of the Hall, also facing west, is a long, glass-covered corridor, the remains of the Winter Garden and Palm House (listed grade II). It returns westwards to enclose the original area of the Winter Garden which was completely covered with glass. This was demolished in 1915 and today (1998) it is planted as a sunken garden. At the western tip of the Winter Garden the gravel terrace is crossed by a tall yew hedge with clipped archway which joins the building to a brick pergola which runs west and completes the north boundary of the formal garden. The pleasure grounds lie through the archway.

The pleasure grounds sit to the north of the Hall. Attached to the north-west corner of the stable court is the Aviary, c 1846 by Thomas, built of wood and originally glass (now perspex) with an octagonal tower at the north end. This looks onto an area of gently rolling lawn planted with exotic and ornamental trees and shrubs, known as the North Lawn. Some of the trees, namely *Platanus x hispanica*, *Castanea sativa*, *Cedrus libani*, and *Fagus sylvatica* are of a girth which suggests they may have been retained from an earlier garden. A statue of Atlanta (listed grade II), signed 'G Natorp 1895', is situated on the lawn here, 80m north of the yew arch. The central walk through the North Lawn runs from the yew arch, past the Aviary, to the ornamental entrance of the kitchen garden and this, together with the other paths through the pleasure grounds, is unchanged in line from those shown on the 1st edition OS 6" map of 1885. Approximately 60m north-east of the statue of Atlanta, on the south-east corner of the kitchen garden, is a small garden enclosed by a yew hedge, immediately north of which stands the Maze. This was designed by Nesfield in c 1855 and is composed of high yew hedges which lead to a central mount topped by a Chinese pagoda. In the area between the Maze and the kitchen garden is another small garden compartment, of the same date as the Maze, surrounded by tall yew hedges with herbaceous borders and a metal pergola covered with a variety of ornamental climbers, including a wisteria of a great age.

To the south of the Hall is a small garden with lawn, a modern tennis court and a swimming pool (mid C20), beyond which lies an ornamental woodland walk in which stands a late C19 summerhouse in the Picturesque style, currently (1999) under restoration.

**PARK** Somerleyton Park covers c 80ha and is filled mainly with oak, beech and sweet chestnut, with some lime. Much of what is seen today is attributed to Sir Morton Peto's work in the mid C19 although there are traces of the earlier C17 park within today's landscape and many of the trees he used to expand the park were taken from existing field boundaries as mature specimens. It is bounded to the north and partly to the east and west by deep perimeter belts. By contrast the south is open to the landscape of the Waveney valley in the distance. Within the park are some substantial areas of woodland planting, most notably Church Grove and East Wood, both of which contain hazel and sweet chestnut coppices. To the east of the Hall the land is flat with a scattering of trees; the easternmost section is currently (1998) in arable production. The south park, to the east of Church Grove, contains a good number of trees and clumps, some of which date from before Sir Morton's time. St Mary's church (listed grade II\*) is situated here, some 200m north of the southern boundary road and just to the east of Church Grove. The south-west section of the park contains the Old Rectory (listed grade II), an C18 building which sat in glebe land until it was absorbed into the park some twenty years ago. At this time, the church retained a small area of land on the western boundary and erected a modern (late C20) bungalow. The land is gently undulating in this corner of the park and more widely scattered with parkland trees. The west park includes the land immediately west of the garden which is known as the Deer Park and represents the remains of the original park at Somerleyton. This area is well covered by trees, some of a great age, and beyond it near the western boundary are perimeter tree belts within which lie Park Cottage and the Game Larder, both mid C19 buildings by John Thomas (both listed grade II). The north-west corner of the park, beyond the north drive, is currently in arable production (1998), whilst the rest of the northern part of the park is heavily wooded and includes a new public car parking area to the north of the kitchen garden. The park wall extends from the North Lodge along the west boundary, crossing the road at Somerleyton Green to take in a small triangle of land before returning east along the south boundary, rejoining the road and running almost to Carpenter's Shop Farm.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The walled kitchen gardens (listed grade II\*) comprising three compartments lie c 150m north-north-west of the Hall. The main enclosure in the centre is entered on the south side from the pleasure grounds through an arched gateway with portico, decorated with cornice, urns and bronze aloe plants. On the south side of this wall are two ranges of

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**SOMERLEYTON PARK**

glass plant cases built with cast-iron frames. Within the main enclosure the central path is lined by deep herbaceous borders and continues northwards towards a door in the north wall. Either side of the borders are grass areas planted with fruit trees. On the south face of the north wall are very fine ranges of glasshouses (grade II), with ridge and furrow roofs, which mirror the style developed by Joseph Paxton at Chatsworth in the same period. Sir Morton Peto, who was responsible for this part of the kitchen garden, helped to finance the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851 and is known to have been a close associate of Paxton; it is likely therefore that the Somerleyton glasshouses were, at the very least, influenced by Paxton's work. The northern compartment beyond this wall contains a range of potting and store sheds and both this and the main compartment date from c 1846. To the west is a further walled compartment, added between 1882 and 1900 along with a picturesque gardener's cottage beyond the wall. This compartment contains a central gravel path running north/south which is lined by espaliered fruit trees. It leaves the kitchen garden to the south through wrought-iron gates flanked by bronze busts and the path leads into the pleasure grounds.

#### REFERENCES

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Maps [all held in East Suffolk Record Office] Survey of the Wentworth estate in Lothingland, 1652 (AR 295) J Hodkinson, *The County of Suffolk, 1783 Tithe map, 1844* (544/36(7))

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Description written: September 1998 Amended: June 1999 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: December 1999

## 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.