

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

VEN HOUSE

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
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VEN HOUSE

Name: VEN HOUSE

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Purse Caundle

County: Somerset

District: South Somerset (District Authority)

Parish: Milborne Port

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.964902
Longitude: -2.4541071
National Grid Reference: ST 68207 18485
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001157
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

Remnants of early C 18 formal gardens, together with remnants of a contemporary formal park landscape.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Ven, or Fenn, existed as a hamlet in the mid C13 (VCH 1999). By the C16, the manor belonged to the Carent family, who sold it to Sir Edward Carteret in 1679. When Sir Edward died c 1683, his son, Sir Charles Carteret first mortgaged the property to Thomas Medlycot and subsequently sold it to Thomas' brother, James Medlycot, the son of a lawyer and politician, and grandson of a City of London dyer (Bond 1998; VCH 1999). James Medlycot commissioned Nathaniel Ireson of Wincanton to build a new house at Ven in the early 1720s. Richard Grange was commissioned to lay out formal gardens and woodland walks. This work is recorded on a series of plans (CL 1911) which show a formal approach from the north and a terrace and steps leading to a walled lawn and parterre to the south of the House. A plan of 1739 shows a walled kitchen garden beyond the stable court to the east of the House, while to the west was an elaborate scheme of walks, serpentine paths, statues, pavilions, and a canal. It is unclear however whether the gardens to the west of the House were ever fully realised in the form shown by Grange (VCH 1999). During the late C18 and early C19, the formal gardens were removed, leaving only the walled enclosure to the south of the House, the kitchen garden, and other vestiges. C 19 views show the House standing among lawns and shrubberies (ibid). In 1835, Decimus Burton produced a scheme for remodelling the House which included the construction of a conservatory to the south-west of the original house, together with a new service court to the east. During the C 19 the park was extended to the south-west, and axial avenues were planted, perhaps replacing early C18 features (ibid). Ven was cited as an example of a surviving formal garden by Reginald Blomfield (1892), and was described in *Country Life* (1898, 1911). Ven descended through the Medlycot family throughout the C 18 and C 19. Between 1918 and 1925 much of the estate was sold, and from the early C20 the House was let to a succession of tenants. Sir Hubert Mervyn Medlycot sold Ven in 1957, and the House passed through several hands in the second half of the C20. In the 1990s new formal gardens were laid out within

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the surviving framework of the early C 18 gardens, while further alterations were made to the House and service quarters. Ven remains (2004) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Ven House is situated c 0.5km east of the centre of Milborne Port. The site is divided into two unequal areas by the A30, London Road, which passes from north-west to south-east c 80m north-east of the House. The c 76ha site comprises 6ha of formal gardens and pleasure grounds, and c 70ha of parkland. The site is enclosed by a variety of fences and hedges, and to the west adjoins domestic properties in Milborne Port. To the south-west the site adjoins a minor road leading south from Milborne Port to Goathill, while the south-east boundary is formed by London Road; elsewhere, the site adjoins agricultural land. The site is generally level, rising gently towards its south-west and north-east boundaries.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Ven House is approached from London Road to the north-east at a point c 300m south-east of its junction with High Street and East Street. The entrance is marked by a pair of C18 wrought-iron gates supported by a pair of rusticated Ham stone piers which are in turn flanked by stone balustrades terminating in cut and squared stone sweeps (all listed grade I). From the entrance a drive leads c 50m south-west between areas of level lawn to reach a gravelled carriage turn beneath the north-east facade of the House. The stable and service court (listed grade I), rebuilt by Decimus Burton in 1823, is situated to the south-east of the House and is entered through an arch set in a two-storey pavilion. The court was altered in the late C20 (VCH 1999). A service drive providing access to the kitchen garden leads southwest from London Road at a point c 150m south-east of the principal entrance. A further entrance, marked by an early C19 lodge, leads into the site from Brook Street to the west of the House

The principal entrance was constructed c 1823 when the present London Road was formed, cutting through the early C18 formal approach. The early C 19 entrance may make use of elements of the early C18 entrance which was situated on a road which ran through the park c 300m north-east of the House linking East Street, Milborne Port, and the Old Road. This road survived to be shown on the Tithe map (1839), but had been removed by the late C19 (OS 1887). Richard Grange's plan shows that the early C18 entrance comprised a pair of gates and piers flanked by pedestrian gates and concave quadrant walls surmounted by railings. The entrance led to a drive aligned on the north-east facade of the House, which extended between lawns surrounding simple geometrical ponds or planting beds. The lawns were enclosed to north-west and south-east by straight avenues which extended north-east to clairvoies overlooking the road. The drive entered a walled forecourt north-east of the House through further gates supported by rusticated stone piers; these may correspond to those at the present principal entrance. Grange's plan indicates that the forecourt was laid out with an elliptical carriage turn enclosing a lawn. The approximate line of the early C 18 approach is marked in the park north-east of London Road by a late C 19 avenue.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Ven House (listed grade I) stands on an artificially raised terrace towards the centre of the site. The building is constructed in red brick with Ham stone dressings and ornaments under a hipped slate roof which is concealed by parapets. The House is rectangular on plan with curved wings extending north-east and north-west to a pair of two-storey rectangular pavilions (listed grade I). A further two-storey corridor (listed grade I) extends south-west to connect the House with a conservatory (early C 19, listed grade I) built of brick, Ham stone, and glass. The principal block comprises three storeys rising from a rusticated basement, while the entrance and garden facades to the north-east and south-west are articulated by giant pilasters rising through two storeys. The pilasters support a stone cornice and panelled pilasters which separate the attic windows. The balustraded parapet supports a series of terracotta urns. The south-east and north-west facades are of more plain design. An early C 19 service and stable court (listed grade I) is situated to the south-east of the House.

Ven House, an important example of an early C 18 country house, was constructed by Nathaniel Ireson of Wincanton for James Medlycot, and was completed c 1735. The building was altered in 1836 when Decimus Burton (1800-8 1) made changes to the interior and added the conservatory and linking corridor.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Formal gardens are situated to the north-east and south-west of the House, with further areas of more informal pleasure grounds to the north-west and south-east.

To the north-east of the House, the drive is flanked by areas of lawn planted with mature specimen cedars. An avenue of clipped yews extends north-east on the axis of the entrance to the stable court (CL 1911).

A stone-flagged terrace (listed grade I) extends the full width of the south-west facade of the House, overlooking an enclosed lawn. The terrace is enclosed to the south-west by a low stone balustrade. To the south-east the terrace is terminated by broad flights of stone steps which descend to the pleasure grounds, while to the north-west it adjoins Burton's early C19 conservatory. A further broad flight of stone steps of sweeping design descends on the central axis of the House to the lower lawn, which is enclosed to north-west and south-west by early C 18 brick walls (listed grade II). The walls are broken by a series of ashlar piers, while the south-east wall contains a gateway flanked by piers surmounted by ball finials. Stone steps descend at the southern end of each wall to the pleasure grounds. To the south-west the lawn is enclosed by a raised grass walk enclosed on its north-east side by a late C20 stone balustrade. A centrally placed flight of stone steps descends from this walk to the level of the lawn, replacing, at the lower level, a C 19 curved stone bench seat (listed grade II) which is shown in late C 19 photographs (CL 1898). Similarly, mop-headed Portugal laurels on the raised walk shown in early C20 photographs have been removed (CL 1911). The enclosed lawn has a central circular pool containing a carved figure of Neptune, and a central gravelled walk extending from the terrace to the raised walk. The gravel walk is flanked by panels of lawn planted with topiary yew obelisks, and low yew-hedged enclosures. The lawn was laid out in its present form in the late C20. Late C 19 and early C20 photographs show a much simpler arrangement with cruciform walks converging at the central pool, which at that time contained a C19 two-tier stone fountain (CL 1898, 1911). Richard Grange's plan (1739) shows the south garden laid out with ramped boundary walks, and a symmetrical arrangement of lawns containing serpentine flower beds flanking a central canal extending from north-east to south-west (CL 1911).

To the west of the House is an area of informal pleasure ground comprising lawns, shrubberies, and mature trees, through which a serpentine stream flows from south-east to north-west. This replaces a complex baroque scheme shown by Grange (1739), with a wilderness with serpentine walks and groves to the north of the House, and a formal canal extending north-west from the House. The present serpentine pool is the remnant of this feature. The formal gardens, if ever fully completed (Bond 1998), were removed by the time the Tithe map was surveyed in 1839.

A further area of informal woodland pleasure ground is situated to the south-east of the House. A walk extends south-east from a gate leading from the south-west walled garden to the boundary of the pleasure grounds. The axis of this walk is projected further south-east by an avenue in the park (OS 1887). The walk is adjoined to the north-east by a stream which flows through the pleasure grounds from south-east to north-west before entering a culvert passing beneath the south terrace and re-emerging in serpentine pool in the western pleasure grounds. At the southern corner of the kitchen garden the stream is crossed by a stone double bridge (listed grade II). Probably of C18 construction, the bridge is L-shaped on plan and has two arches, the larger forming the entrance to the culvert. The area to the east of the House appears as an approximately square enclosure on Grange's plan (1739), but is not otherwise delineated (CL 1911).

PARK The park is situated principally to the north-east of the House, beyond London Road, with a further area extending south-west from the House.

The north park rises gently towards its northern and eastern boundaries, where it is enclosed by a belt of mixed plantation. The park remains principally as pasture, with scattered specimen trees. An avenue extends north-east through the park to East Hill on the axis of the north-east facade of the House. With the exception of this avenue, which is first shown on the OS map of 1887, the north park is shown on the Tithe map (1839) much as it survives today, with the boundary planting and scattered clumps of trees shown on the rising ground northeast of the House.

The south park also rises gently towards the south-west boundary. This area is in mixed agricultural use, with an avenue extending the south-west axis of the House and folinal garden leading to the Goathill road. It is unclear when the south park was first enclosed, but it appears to have reached its full extent in the late C19 (OS 1887; VCH 1999).

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden is situated c 50m south-east of the House, immediately south-east of the service court. The garden is approximately rectangular on plan and is enclosed to the north, south, and west by red-brick walls c 4m high (listed grade II) surmounted by ashlar coping. To the east the garden is enclosed by a lower rubble-stone wall (listed grade

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II). Gateways in the centre of the north and south walls are closed by wrought-iron gates supported by brick piers surmounted by stone ball finials. A similar elaborate wrought-iron gate in the centre of the east wall is supported by ashlar piers surmounted by urn finials (piers and gates all listed grade II). The kitchen garden remains in cultivation, although now (2004) used largely as an ornamental garden. A summerhouse, said to be constructed from elements of the demolished house at Bowood, Wiltshire (qv), was constructed in the kitchen garden in the late C20 (VCH 1999). A further, approximately triangular walled enclosure is situated to the north of the kitchen garden and is similarly enclosed by red-brick walls (listed grade II). This area has traditionally been used as a nursery garden (OS 1887).

The kitchen garden was constructed in the early C18 as part of Grange's scheme for the gardens. It is recorded on the Tithe map (1839), but the nursery garden to the north is not marked; this is first shown on the 1887 OS map.

REFERENCES

R Blomfield, *The Formal Garden in England* (1892), p 111 *Country Life*, 4 (29 October 1898), pp 528-32; 29 (24 June 1911), pp 924-34 C Holme, *Gardens of England in the Southern and Western Counties* (1910) N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South and West Somerset* (1958), p 327 J Bond, *Somerset Parks and Gardens* (1998), pp 70, 122, 133 *Victoria History of the County of Somerset VII*, (1999), pp 143-5

Maps Tithe map for Milborne Port parish, 1839 (M5269/1), (Somerset Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1887 1930 edition

Illustrations Watercolour view of Ven House from the north, 1843 (published in VCH 1999, pl 127)

Archival items The Medlycot family archive, including early C18 building and garden records for Ven House, is held at the Somerset Record Office (DD/MDL). R Grange, *Plans of the gardens at Ven House, 1739* (private collection) [published in CL 1911]

Description written: May 2004 Amended: October 2004 Register Inspector: JML Edited: February 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.