

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

TORTWORTH COURT

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Name: TORTWORTH COURT

District: South Gloucestershire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Cromhall

District: South Gloucestershire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Falfield

District: South Gloucestershire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Tortworth

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.623639
 Longitude: -2.4437696
 National Grid Reference: ST 69376 91740
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

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label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
 Grade: II*
 List Entry Number: 1000394
 Date first listed: 09-Jul-1991

Details

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C17 park with 1840s terraced gardens, pleasure grounds, park, and arboretum, around a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Sir Robert Ducie, Lord Mayor of London, bought the manor of Tortworth in 1610. This included a C16 house, illustrated by Kip (Atkyns 1712) and now known as Old Court, located adjacent to St Leonard's church some 1.2km north-east of the present house (outside the area here registered). A medieval park and coney ground were associated with the manor house, and were located to the west of the church. In 1661, Sir Robert's grandson, William, obtained a licence to enclose Tortworth and Cromhall Parks and for over a century the two parks existed side by side. The park at Tortworth was located east and south-east of the old manor house and Cromhall Park occupied part of the present Tortworth Court landscape. A 1760 map of the manor of Cromhall Abbots shows Cromhall Park as a walled enclosure of c 135 acres (c 55ha) with a lodge, a lake, the Gall Pond, and an orchard (now Harris's Wood). The 1843 Tithe map shows a substantial house with gardens in Cromhall Park on the site of the walled garden in the present Tortworth Park. In 1848 the second Earl of Ducie abandoned the old-fashioned, low-lying Old Court and commissioned from Samuel Sanders Teulon (1812-73) a design for a new house, Tortworth Court, on the site of a hunting lodge in Cromhall Park. The estate was inherited by the third Earl in 1853 at the age of twenty-five, and he was responsible for the bulk of the ornamental planting, developed in amicable competition with Robert Holford of Westonbirt, Gloucestershire (qv). By 1921, when the third Earl died, the arboretum was widely admired for its collection. In 1939 the house was requisitioned by the Royal Navy and subsequently became an officers' training school. Soon afterwards, the Home Office took it over and adapted the war-time buildings erected in the park to the south-east of the house as Leyhill Open Prison. The Home Office sold the house and some 10ha of grounds in 1987. After a serious fire in 1991, the house was eventually acquired and converted to a hotel in 2000-1, in which use it remains (2002).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Tortworth Park covers 154ha and is located c 4.5km north-north-east of Bristol on a north/south ridge of slightly elevated ground overlooking the Severn Vale to the west. The northern boundary is delineated by the B4509, Falfield to Charfield road and the eastern boundary by a minor road which connects the B4509 with the B4058 at the village of Bibstone. The northern section of the western boundary is defined by a track and fence lines with a perimeter belt running south to Whitfield Lodge; the southern section of this boundary is marked by Gambrell Lane. The southern boundary is formed principally by a lane that runs west for c 350m from Park End just north of Bibstone to Lake Lodge; beyond this it becomes a track. The ridge on which the house stands falls steeply to the north and west and gently to the east and south. The dominant feature of the landscape is a 700m long serpentine lake in a deeply incised valley, c 280m south of the house, with hanging woods on its eastern bank. The valley continues south as a stream running through Sodam Mill (outside the area here registered). On the level ground east of the park, Tortworth Green and Tortworth Common are dominated by estate buildings and scattered ornamental planting. To the north the land falls away towards Tortworth Old Court and St Leonard's church with the Tortworth Chestnut, a renowned veteran tree, in the garden.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main vehicular access is via Moreton Lodge, c 600m east of the house, built in 1884 in an Arts and Crafts style by W D Caröe. This is a roughly straight approach to the house with Leyhill Prison, excluded from the area here registered, lying to the south. The line of a disused serpentine approach from a former lodge c 150m to the north of Moreton Lodge and 600m east-north-east of the house, can still be traced. A former lodge on the B4509, 600m north-east of the house, marks a disused entrance to the northern part of the park. The entrance to Leyhill Prison is c 300m south of Moreton Lodge, 600m south-east of the house. This entrance was a former approach to the house which ran north-west across parkland which is now occupied by prison buildings.

From the south-west and south are two longer and more scenic approaches. A drive enters the park at Whitfield Lodge, 750 south-west of the house, and runs north for c 150m where it crosses an outflow from the lake by a low three-arched bridge. The drive turns north-east for c 500m up a gentle incline in the parkland west of the house and then curves round the north side of the house, where it is flanked by yews, to arrive at the entrance court at the east front of the house. The approach from the south enters the park at Lake Lodge, 1.1km south of the house, and runs north-west along the eastern lake shore for c 450m to a bend at Old Man's Throat from where there is a surprise view of the house 800m to the north and a boathouse at the end of the lake,

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500m to the north. The drive then runs north, ascending for c 400m through Harris's Wood, parallel to the eastern lake shore. This approach is now blocked by the boundary fence of HMP Leyhill some 200m south of the house, although a track continues along the shore to the boathouse. Some 150m north of Lake Lodge is a junction where a track crosses a stream and runs west around the end of the lake to approach the house along the western lake shore, effectively completing a circuit of the lake.

A service access runs south along the western boundary of the site here registered, from the B4509 at the foot of Tortworth Hill, 500m north-west of the house. This served a gas-works, Gall Pond, barns, and a timber yard, 350m north-west of the house. This access continues south for a further 400m where it joins the approach from Whitfield Lodge.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Tortworth Court (1849-53, listed grade II*) is situated centrally in the northern half of the registered park. It stands at the northern end of a valley overlooking a serpentine lake to the south and commands views c 2km westward to Eastwood Park (1862), the former house of Lord Liverpool. Tortworth Court was built for the second Earl of Ducie by S S Teulon, his first large domestic project. The house is hugely irregular, with an enormous staircase tower, a series of domed turrets, and a square tower with a prospect room. The entrance front is approached from a walled forecourt, which is entered through an arch attached to a gatehouse (Teulon c 1850, listed grade II). The stone parapet of the arch is pierced with the word 'WELCOME'. On the north side of the entrance court is a free-standing conservatory (1874, listed grade II) built in 1874 to a design by Ewan Christian to replace a chapel by Teulon. Attached to the north side of the house is a court of stables, coach houses, and offices, now adapted and extended to form hotel accommodation (Teulon c 1850, listed grade II).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Gardens and pleasure grounds at Tortworth Court are located on all sides of the house. To the north-east of the house is a footpath which leads down into a valley, across a stream, and up the far side into an arboretum of c 10ha, in which large numbers of specimen trees and shrubs survive, intertwined with grass walks. The main pedestrian access to the arboretum is by a track half-way along the east drive, 300m east of the house, opposite gates into the prison. Immediately east of the entrance court of the house is a lawn with specimen trees and shrubs, now partly lost to car parking but including a fine Caucasian elm. This lawn is bounded by a ha-ha c 150m east of the house, beyond which and north of the drive is a further lawn with specimen trees including a notable Mirbeck oak. A dwelling associated with the hotel has recently been erected here (c 2001). South-east of the entrance court, hotel car-parking now dominates a former lawn with scattered specimen trees, including Lebanon cedar, weeping beech, and Lawson cypress.

The main pleasure grounds are located to the south of the house. On the south side of the house is a terrace, c 100m long and 20m wide, on a retaining wall topped with stone balls on plinths, with flanking flights of steps, designed by Teulon (c 1850, listed grade II). At the eastern end of the terrace is a recess, formerly holding a stone seat with griffins which faced along the walk. Below this is a large garden terrace, 100m long and 40m wide, which extends c 150m south of the house. It is planted with circular flower beds and has raised walks to either side and is bounded to the south by a retaining wall with a central flight of steps onto a sloping lawn, leading down to the lake. Teulon's designed view southward over the serpentine lake has been interrupted by a recently landscaped (c 2000) spoil heap which was created during building work at the prison in the early 1990s. A footpath runs to the south around the west side of the spoil heap and leads to the northern end of the lake, which snakes c 600m southward in a natural fold of the hills with hanging woods and rock outcrops on its eastern side. At the northern tip of the lake, c 320m south of the house, is a dam (c 1850) and, close by, a gothic boathouse (Teulon c 1850, listed grade II). A drive leaves the lakeside just south of the dam and ascends the western ridge to Bloody Acre where there are remains of earthwork ramparts around a prehistoric settlement. On the eastern side of the lake, c 200m south of the boathouse, are the remains of brick-built buildings from the Second World War, which were associated with the use of the lake. The southern end of the lake is partly silted up.

To the west of the house and garden terrace is a lawn with specimen trees, including a Roble beech by the steps ascending from the terrace, an iron-framed pergola planted with a laburnum walk c 20m long, and a C19 pets' graveyard. A shelter belt screens the lawn from the westward slope into the park. This lawn area has been halved by the development of hotel buildings (c 2000) though several specimen trees have been preserved north of the complex, including a Californian nutmeg and a Dawyck beech. Some 200m south-west of the house, on a spur overlooking the lake, is woodland containing specimen trees and shrubs,

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the remains of an American Garden planted in the mid to late C19. A former pedestrian link to this area from the gardens is blocked by the hotel's boundary fence.

PARK Tortworth Park surrounds the pleasure grounds on all sides. Some 100m to the south-east of the house a large area of parkland has been developed as HMP Leyhill, outside the site here registered but containing some notable trees, in particular a group of Wellingtonia 600m south-east of the house. To the east and north-east, in land bounded by roads, the park contains specimen trees, including Wellingtonias and other conifers, which are vestiges of former dense ornamental planting. The hillside parkland to the north and north-west is in arable production and has landmark Araucarias and some fine sweet chestnuts. The latter have been enclosed and are becoming engulfed in secondary woodland on the north-west edge of the Arboretum (2002). West of the house there is parkland surviving around estate barns and the approach from Whitfield Lodge. A belt of oak trees runs north/south along the drive from the Tortworth Hill entrance on the B4509. Parkland on the west-facing slopes below the house contains some old pollards and two clumps of sweet chestnut, Wellingtonia, Corsican pine, and Araucaria.

KITCHEN GARDEN The mid C19 kitchen gardens stand c 300m north-east of the house, with garden walls of a mixture of brick and stone abutting the B4509. The area is now dominated by horticultural and agricultural buildings belonging to HM Prison Service, including a complex of intensively managed glasshouses, modern storage buildings, and barns, with car parking on the site of a former nursery. The mid C19 head gardener's house stands on the western edge of the enclosure.

REFERENCES

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OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886/8 2nd edition published 1903 3rd edition published 1924 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886

Illustrations J Kip, engraved view of Tortworth Court, 1712 (in Atkyns 1712)

Archival items Early C20 photographs (GPS 338/1-13), (Gloucestershire Record Office)

Description written: October 2002 Register Inspector: DAL Edited: September 2003

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.