

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ALDERMASTON COURT

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Name:	ALDERMASTON COURT
District:	West Berkshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Aldermaston
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.378722 Longitude: -1.1431050 National Grid Reference: SU 59735 64756 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000530 Date first listed: 30-Sep-1987

Details

Mid and late C19 gardens and park, surrounding a mid C19 country house, with the remains of C17/C18 pleasure grounds relating to the former C17 manor house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Aldermaston Park was first mentioned in 1299, continuing in use as a deer park into the C17 (VCH 1923). In 1636 Sir Humphrey Forster rebuilt Aldermaston manor house, and the Forsters remained in ownership until, in 1752, Ralph Congreve of Staffordshire succeeded to the estate (Reading Mercury 1884). The Congreves seem to have made additions to the estate, including, probably, the creation of the lake during the late C18 (Rocque, 1761). In 1843 the house was largely burnt out. Daniel Higford Burr, who bought the estate c 1849, rebuilt the house on a site 150m south of the old one, creating formal gardens around it. The estate was sold to Charles Keyser, whose son sold it in 1939. The house was requisitioned during the Second World War, when an airfield was constructed in the park to the south. Following the War the house was sold into corporate use, and was subsequently converted for use as a hotel and conference centre, in which use it remains (1998), the former parkland being developed as a military installation.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Aldermaston Court lies 11km east of Newbury, at the south side of the village of Aldermaston. The 70ha site is bounded to the north partly by the village and also by the lane leading east to Silchester which curves around to form the east boundary. A brick wall bounds the site intermittently along this lane for c 500m. The west boundary is formed by the A340 road to Basingstoke, and to the south the site is bounded by a military installation which covers a large part of the former parkland; this was developed from the Second World War onwards. The land slopes down from the south to the north-west and north-east, with long views across the Kennet Valley to distant ranges of hills. The setting is partly agricultural, with the village to the north and extensive military installations to the south.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance, approached from the north along Aldermaston's main street, The Street, stands at the north-west end of the pleasure grounds, 600m north-west of the house. The drive enters between two large, red-brick, Jacobean lodges (c 1636, listed grade II*) which dominate the south end of The Street. Tall, red-brick, early C18 gate piers attached to the lodges support iron gates with an elaborate overthrow (also early C18). The lodges formerly were linked to form part of a U-plan Dower House from which the centre was removed, the gates being installed from Midgham House in

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the early C19. The drive curves south-east through the pleasure grounds, carried across a small pond lying north of the main lake via a single-span, red-brick bridge (c 1894, listed grade II) standing 400m north-west of the house. The drive continues south-east, rising gently up the hillside, in places flanked by evergreen shrubs, passing to the north of the former stable block (now offices, 1998) standing 150m north-west of the house, and the adjacent substantial, late C20 office building to its west, which partially obscures views over the lake beyond. North-east of the former stables, adjacent to the north boundary, lies a late C20 car park. The drive reaches the top of the hillside, curving south and west through an open, level lawn containing a pett's cemetery at its north end, arriving at an entrance courtyard adjacent to the east front of the house. The courtyard is enclosed by brick walls, with an arched balustrade divided up by square brick piers (c 1850, listed grade II* as part of the house). Now laid to tarmac, the courtyard leads to a half octagonal porch enclosing the main entrance on the east front. A short spur joins this drive 300m north-west of the house, having entered off Church Road to the north, adjacent to Church Lodge (1848, listed grade II), built in Tudor style of red brick with stone dressings. This entrance is now superseded by a major, late C20 entrance lying adjacent to the east, with an associated drive crossing the main drive, continuing south to the stable block and offices. A further drive (disused, 1998) enters off Church Road, c 250m north-east of the house, through a stone gateway (known as the Charity Gates) set into the brick boundary wall, and composed of two pedimented stone piers with arched niches (C18, listed grade II) which support wrought-iron gates. The drive runs south, partly flanked by mature sweet chestnut trees, curving west to join the main north drive 50m east of the east front. Formerly (OS 1882) this gave the main access to the east front of the house, before the southern section of the north drive was constructed (in place by 1911, OS).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Aldermaston Court (P C Hardwick 1848-51, listed grade II*) stands towards the centre of the site, at the west edge of a plateau which slopes down to the lake to the west, from where a long view extends north-west across the Kennet Valley. The L-shaped, brick-built, Tudor-style house, dominated by a four-storey tower on the west front, partly encloses the entrance courtyard to the east, with access from doors in the west and south fronts to the adjacent garden terrace and lawns beyond. A wing extends north from the house, with a former service courtyard (recently converted to conference facilities, 1998) lying adjacent to the north-east. This house replaced a Jacobean house built by Humphrey Forster in 1636 on the site of an earlier building. The old house stood 150m north of the present building, close to the west end of the church (Pugh 1988), and was largely burnt out in 1843.

The rectangular stable block (c 1800, listed grade II) stands 150m north-west of the house, built of red brick and of one storey. It was formerly U-shaped, with wings extending south at either end to enclose a courtyard (OS 1882), and has been substantially altered during the late C20. The stable block now contains the entrance archway to the north side of an ornamented courtyard, on the west side of which stands the late C20 office block, entered from the courtyard and sited on the east bank of the lake.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens lies adjacent to the west and south fronts of the house, the two fronts being connected by a garden terrace with a broad gravel path lying adjacent to the building. To the south the path gives onto a level lawn, now covered by a tennis court and croquet lawn, bounded to the south by a clipped beech hedge.

The gravel path on the south front turns north along the west front, edged to the west by a herbaceous border supported by a brick retaining wall. A central set of steps leads down to a lawn which slopes down to the lake to the north-west. The lawn closest to the west front was formerly enclosed by a fence or hedge (OS 1882; gone C20). The gravel path on the terrace continues north down two flights of steps, from where it is flanked by conical, clipped yew specimens, and bounded to the west by the lawn. At its north end the latter was formerly laid out with formal features (OS 1882), but is now a plain sward, with mature trees along the west side. The path and lawn terminate c 50m north of the house at a gravel cross path running west to east along the bottom of a brick wall which supports at its east end an ornate, mid C19, cast-iron greenhouse (wall and glasshouse both listed grade II) with a two-span roof and ornamented glazing bars, ridge crest and wooden doors. The cross path leads east beyond the glasshouse, across the north drive, continuing through the centre of an area of C17/C18 pleasure grounds, flanked by the remains of an avenue of mature yew trees, terminating at the former drive south from the north-east entrance.

The pleasure grounds, largely laid to mature woodland with many mature yews, are bounded to the north by the northern boundary wall, to the east and south by the north-east drive, and to the west by the churchyard and north drive, and are bisected south-west to north-east by an avenue of mature limes. In the mid C18 this area existed in similar form, including the south-

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west to north-east cross path, suggesting it may have related to the site of the former house to the west (Rocque, 1761). The west to east cross path may have been aligned on the east front of the earlier house.

A path around the lake extends west from the edge of the lawn running down from the west front of the Court, passing the icehouse lying c 150m west of the house. It continues west along the south end of the lake, turning north along the wooded west bank, and then east, along the top of the high earth dam, overlooking the lake from its northern end. To the north of the lake lie two smaller ponds, fed by the lake, the southern one, bisected by the northern drive, feeding the larger, northern one. A walk runs along the west bank of the northern pond, bounded to the west by a raised bank on which stands a row of mature lime trees.

PARK The truncated remains of the once extensive park lie to the west, south and east of the gardens and pleasure grounds.

An informal, level lawn, planted with mature specimen trees, extends 275m south from the croquet and tennis lawns by the south front, to the south boundary, flanking the remains of the great avenue which formerly extended south through Aldermaston Park (OS 1882), aligned on the south front. This lawn formerly contained huts and other buildings connected with the Second World War use and subsequent development, but now (1998) is largely open, with nearly all these buildings having been removed. It is flanked to west and east by woodland.

A spur off the north-east drive 100m east of the house leads east down the hillside through wooded parkland to the cricket ground on the east boundary, 500m from the house.

Formerly (until c 1939) the park extended a further 1.5km south of the present boundary, dominated by two broad avenues, set in cruciform pattern, with, at the intersection, a large open circular area bounded by a line of trees (OS 1882). This area is now covered by the Aldermaston military installation, although Keeper's Lodge still stands at the south-west corner of the site, adjacent to the A340 road, marking the western extent of the former west to east avenue.

In the mid C18 (Rocque, 1761) the park did not extend as far south as in the late C19 (OS 1882), and seems to have been partly bounded by a park pale fence.

KITCHEN GARDEN The former kitchen garden lies on the north boundary, off Church Road, 400m north-west of the house and outside the area here registered. The area is now partly built on, and the remaining land is divided into domestic gardens. The brick boundary wall survives on all but the north side, and the gardener's cottage stands at the north-east corner adjacent to the road, together with several service buildings at the west end of the south wall.

REFERENCES

Victoria History of the County of Berkshire 3, (1923), pp 386-90 Illustrated London News, 2 (14 January 1843) Country Life, 6 (26 August 1899), pp 240-4 Aldermaston House and Estate, Reading Mercury & Berks County Paper, 25 October 1884 (reprint of article held at Local Studies Library) N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Berkshire (1966), pp 62-3 P Pugh, The Manor Reborn (1988)

Maps J Rocque, Map of Berkshire, 1761

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1882 2nd edition published 1913 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1911

Description written: June 1998 Register Inspector: SR Edited: March 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.