

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

ASHBY ST LEDGERS

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

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**ASHBY ST LEDGERS**

Name: ASHBY ST LEDGERS

District: West Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Ashby St. Ledgers

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.310122  
Longitude: -1.1600183  
National Grid Reference: SP 57364 68333  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1001024  
Date first listed: 25-Jun-1984

## Details

Formal statue lawn of c 1700 and extensive gardens, mainly formal, of 1904(35 by Sir Edwin Lutyens associated with a country house, also with much work by Lutyens. Gardens, over which Gertrude Jekyll was consulted, extend into informal park-like grounds with lake.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the late Middle Ages the manor of Ashby St Ledgers was owned by the Catesbys. After the Reformation they adhered to the Old Faith; Edmund Campion (d 1581) was sheltered here, and in 1605 the Gunpowder Plot conspirators had their first meeting at Ashby, then home to Robert Catesby. He died in a shoot-out after the failure of the conspiracy, and the manor was subsequently acquired by Sir William Irwing, who in 1612 sold it to a London draper, Bryan Ianson. It was his son, John, who built the main house in 1652. In 1703 Ashby was sold to another draper, Joseph Ashley. Exactly 200 years later, in 1903, the estate was sold to the Hon Ivor Guest, third baronet and MP, who in 1918 became the first Viscount Wimborne. A steel fortune, a directorship of Barclay's Bank, and eventually the income of the 83,000 acre (c 34,500ha) Wimborne estate enabled him, from 1904 onwards, to employ Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) in a series of commissions to remodel and enlarge the house and to lay out new gardens. In 1934 Lady Wimborne became patron to the composer William Walton (d 1983), and several of his best-known works were composed at Ashby over the following few years. The work commissioned from Lutyens on the house and its gardens was but a part of a wider scheme to build a model village at Ashby with a community of craftsmen, which Guest envisaged would include trades such as 'Tapestry, wrot [sic] iron, Barge building, boots, tapestries, linen, fabrics, clocks, etc etc. Great fun !' (Aslet 1982, 158). Although this was ultimately unrealised, several buildings in the village were constructed to Lutyens' designs. His last work at Ashby was a churchyard tomb (listed grade II) for Lord Wimborne, who died in 1939. A cloister (listed grade II) was left unfinished. The second Lord Wimborne sold the estate in 1976 to a pension fund and there was a possibility that the house was to be converted to commercial use. By 1998 however it had returned to private ownership and occupation.

### DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The village of Ashby St Ledgers lies east of the A361 from Rugby, 10km to the north, to Daventry, 6km to the south. The southern part of the park is crossed by the Jurassic Way, and two kilometres to the north-east is the Watford Gap. The manor stands at the east end of the Main Street, on the north side of

the churchyard. The site is bounded to the west and north by a minor road off Main Street, and otherwise by field boundaries. The area here registered is c 20ha.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The formal approach to the manor is from the south-west, via a 250m long avenue through a grass paddock from a gate off the north side of Main Street with tall, rusticated, ironstone piers (listed grade II) and bottle-shaped finials. Although in C17 style these, like the whole avenue approach, are early C20 and probably by Lutyens. The avenue leads to a gate (again probably by Lutyens) with possibly C17 piers (listed grade II) in the west wall of the manor's courtyard. There is also access to the north side of the complex via a gate 20m north of that into the courtyard. The service courtyard south of the main courtyard is entered via a gate with C17 piers (listed, with walls, grade II) on the west side of the churchyard. The service buildings include the half-timbered gatehouse (listed grade II), traditionally held to have been the meeting place of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators, a C17 dovecote (listed grade II) and C15 and later stables (listed grade II).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** The house, low, and mostly of ironstone, is ranged around two sides of a courtyard. It is a complex structure comprised of numerous individual buildings and ranges, many of which have seen alterations to their original form and function. Ianson's house of the 1650s (listed grade II\*) stands across the east end of the courtyard, facing the main gates. To its north, linked by a Lutyens' range, is the earlier Catesby dwelling. In the early C20 a jettied, C17 timber-framed building (listed grade II\*) was moved from Ipswich and added to the north-east corner of the range. Beyond, until 1968, projected a north wing by Lutyens. Running along the north side of the courtyard is a dining room (part of Lutyens' last work here) and service buildings.

Lutyens' work at Ashby included the Stone Hall at the west end of the east garden, the dining room, staff and guest rooms, and much of the service and dining room range north of the house. He opposed Lord Wimborne's scheme (part of what Lutyens called Wimborne's 'fuss fuss' ideas (Aslet 1982, 159)) to graft on the timber-framed house from Ipswich. In extensive alterations to the house by Jellicoe & Coleridge in the late 1960s much of Lutyens' work was altered, and some demolished.

North-west of the house is a C17 barn and a C17 dovecote (both listed grade II), and to the south-west the service courtyard.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The courtyard west of the house is paved with stone sets, different colours of which are used to create simple patterns. This, like the gateway and semicircular steps off its north side, is by Lutyens.

South-west of the house, and surrounded by a 2.5-3.5m high stone wall, is the rectangular Statue Lawn, c 40m north/south by 20m. At its centre is an early C18 limestone statue of Atlas on an ironstone plinth (listed grade II); four similar statues (all listed grade II) representing the seasons stand in the quarters. All are somewhat eroded. The Statue Lawn is probably of c 1700, and may represent an improvement made by Joseph Ashley who bought the place in 1703.

The main garden is the formal Canal Garden (listed grade II) east of the house, which continues the east/west axial alignment of the courtyard and avenue west of the house. Lutyens began work on it c 1909, and although the main elements were complete by 1912 additions continued to be made until c 1935. The planting was undertaken in consultation with Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932). Overall the Canal Garden is 100m long east/west and 35m wide, and is contained within tall yew hedges. A broad gap in these at the east end carries the main vista eastwards to the pavilion on the lake edge, 150m beyond the end of the garden. Running from north to south across the east front of the house is a straight path. At its north end, and giving access, via steps, to the Orchard, are wrought-iron gates on limestone piers (listed grade II), all of c 1935 and by Lutyens. Running off this path are the principal paths down the north and south sides of the Canal Garden and the compartments to its west. The westernmost of those is a 50m long lawn with central octagonal lead water tank (listed grade II) of 1776. Stone balustrading across its east end with semicircular steps to either side looks over a limestone-flagged terrace. Underneath the wall which supports the balustrading is a basin with carved head, while semicircular stone benches occupy recesses in the north-west and south-west corners of the parterre. Off the north side of the terrace convex stone steps lead to a circular platform, from which further concave steps lead down to a second small round platform overlooking the Orchard and the bridge (see below).

The main architectural feature of the terrace is a heavily carved, curving, stone bench seat. This is placed at the west end of, and looking along, the 50m long formal canal. This has an apsidal west end, while at its east end is a short cross arm and fountain. The canal, and the paths along either side of it are set c 1.5m below the rest of the garden. The principal east/west paths are at the higher level, and are flanked with herbaceous beds.

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
*ASHBY ST LEDGERS*

From convex steps off the circular platform on the north side of the terrace the line of a path, with cherry trees to either side, runs downhill, across the Orchard, of rough grass with mature fruit trees. Standing in the lower, northern, part of the orchard is a well-head (listed grade II), probably medieval and Italian. The path leads to a small, three-arched, ironstone footbridge with timber superstructure (listed grade II) of c 1920 by Lutyens. This carries the path across an artificial canal to a further area of grass and trees extending up to the north boundary of the site. The canal, 100m long, extends from fishponds to the east. It was already present in 1900.

The main north/south path across the west front continues south of the formal garden, dividing the Statue Lawn from a lawn with specimen trees which extends east to the south end of the lake. The path is aligned on an early C20 seat with columns and birdcage roof built against the gable end of the Gardener's Cottage. Ten metres east of that seat are steps up to a 50m long, C18 raised walk against the north wall of the kitchen garden. At the east end of the walk there is access to the upper floor of a square, early C18 brick gazebo (listed with walk grade II). This looks principally east, over a C20 hard tennis court (stone steps at north-west corner early C20 and possibly by Lutyens) to the countryside beyond.

**PARK** The grounds of the manor house continue for 300m beyond the formal garden, as lawn (now rough grass) with specimen trees and, along the north boundary, a shelter belt with mature trees. A roughly triangular, 200m long, fishpond lies in the northern part of this area. It was dug in the early C20. On its western edge, on the line of the main axis, is an C18 statue (listed grade II) within a C20 pavilion with birdcage roof. To either side, north and south, is a row of four poplars, framing the vista. The listing description mentions a further statue (listed grade II), on the axial line on the east side of the lake. The gently rising ground east of the lake is arable. The area here registered represents the area shown in 1901 by the OS as parkland. The arrangement of shelter belts shown at that date suggests that the small park may once have extended for a further 400m to the south-west, up to the line of the road leading south off Main Street.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The walled kitchen garden, still in use in 1998, lies south of the main formal garden. It is c 60m square; its north wall (listed grade II) is probably C18, the rest C20. In its north-west corner is the C17 ironstone and sandstone Gardener's Cottage (listed grade II). The north-east part of the garden contains a walled enclosure containing a later C20 swimming pool, accessible from the C18 gazebo. That part of the kitchen garden south of the swimming pool enclosure is laid to lawn.

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, 110 (17 August 1951), pp 496-9; no 14 (2 April 1987), pp 104/5 N Pevsner and B Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Northamptonshire* (1973), pp 90-3 C Aslet, *The Last Country Houses* (1982), pp 158/9 J Harris, *The Architect and the British Country House 1620-1920* (1985), pp 258/9 J Brown, *Lutyens and the Edwardians* (1996), pp 243-6  
Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1901 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1900  
Description written: 1998 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: January 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.