

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

AMMERDOWN HOUSE

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

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AMMERDOWN HOUSE

Name: AMMERDOWN HOUSE

County: Somerset

District: Mendip (District Authority)

Parish: Buckland Dinham

County: Somerset

District: Mendip (District Authority)

Parish: Hemington

County: Somerset

District: Mendip (District Authority)

Parish: Kilmersdon

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.273667
Longitude: -2.4121043
National Grid Reference: ST7134952805
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1001136
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

Early C20 formal gardens designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, surrounding a late C18 mansion by James Wyatt set in a late C18 park.
HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1778, Thomas Samuel Jolliffe married Anne Twyford, daughter and heiress of the Rev Robert Twyford of Kilmersdon, and through her acquired property including an area of sheep walks which formed the nucleus of the Ammerdown estate. Ten years later, in 1788, and following the death of his mother-in-law, Thomas Jolliffe commissioned a design from James Wyatt for a large villa to be built at Ammerdown. This was set in a park which swept up to the walls of the house, and which was laid out on part of the agricultural land inherited by Jolliffe through his wife, and which he had been improving since 1778. To the north-east of the house, a walled garden with an ornamental orangery set in its southern wall was constructed; this garden was, until the mid C19, the extent of any pleasure ground or garden associated with the house (CL 1929).

Thomas Jolliffe, who served as an MP, died in 1824, and Ammerdown was inherited successively by his sons Col John Jolliffe (d 1854) and the Rev Thomas Jolliffe (d 1872), who erected a column in the park in memory of their father. During the mid C19 a small area of pleasure grounds, separated from the park by a ha-ha, were laid out between the house and walled garden.

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Both brothers died without issue, and the estate passed to their cousin, Sir William George Hylton Jolliffe Bt, MP, who in 1866 was created Baron Hylton in right of his mother. Lord Hylton's eldest son had been killed in 1854 during the Crimean War, and in 1876 he was succeeded by his second son, Hedworth Hylton, who undertook a programme of alterations to the house in 1877. The third Lord Hylton inherited Ammerdown from his father in 1899, and together with his wife, Lady Alice Hervey, undertook a further programme of alterations to the house. In 1901 they also commissioned Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) to design new formal gardens which, through their careful arrangement of vistas, provided an effective link between the house and the orangery in the late C18 walled garden (ibid). There is no documentary evidence to suggest that Gertrude Jekyll advised on the planting of the new gardens, but rather this appears to have been undertaken by Lady Hylton (ibid).

Today the site remains (2003) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Ammerdown is situated c 1km east of Kilmersdon, to the south-east of the B3139 road and to the west of the A362 road. The c 180ha site comprises c 6ha of formal gardens and pleasure grounds, and c 174ha of parkland, ornamental plantations, and lakes. With the exception of the north-west corner, where it is adjoined by Gagman Coppice, the site is bounded on each side by public roads: to the north-west the B3139 road, to the north-east and east the A362 road, to the south a minor road known as New Road, and to the west a further, unnamed minor road. The site is enclosed by a variety of fences and hedges. The landform is undulating, with a valley falling away to the south-west of the House. The ground rises towards the eastern boundary, with boundary plantations screening the adjacent road forming a backdrop to the park. There are extensive westerly views from the eastern park across the surrounding country, and towards the park associated with Babington House (qv), c 1.5km south-west of Ammerdown.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Ammerdown House is approached from the B3139 road to the north-west, at a point c 150m east-north-east of the junction of that road with Knobsbury Hill. The entrance is marked by a two early C19 cottage orné-style lodges (Radstock Lodges, listed grade II), between which stand four ashlar piers, the inner pair surmounted by bronze lions holding heraldic shields, which support a pair of wrought-iron pedestrian gates; the central gates are missing (2003) (all listed grade II). From the entrance, a tarmac drive extends c 200m east-south-east and is adjoined to the south by parkland, and to the north by a mixed ornamental plantation. The drive divides c 130m north-north-west of the House, one branch sweeping south-south-east to approach the late C18 stables (James Wyatt, converted to study centre mid C20, listed grade I with House) and the carriage turn beneath the west facade of the House, the other branch continuing in an easterly direction for c 150m, to pass to the north of the walled garden and south of Nap Wood, before emerging into the park. The drive again divides, with a branch (now a track) leading south-east through the park, passing through Coldbath Plantation and to the south of the Jolliffe Column, to reach an entrance at the south-east corner of the park situated adjacent to the junction of the A362 and New Road. This entrance is marked by an early C19 lodge (listed grade II). A further spur leads from the drive to an entrance at the northern tip of the site, adjacent to the junction of the A362 and B3139. This entrance was formerly marked by a pair of lodges which stood to the north-west and south-east of the B3139 (OS 1904).

There is a further entrance, now disused, from the B3139 on the western boundary of the site, c 50m north of Ammerdown Bridge. This is marked by a pair of early C19 classical lodges (Kilmersdon Lodges, listed grade II*), between which stands a pair of ashlar piers which support a pair of wrought-iron carriage gates and pedestrian gates (all listed grade II*). The Kilmersdon Lodges and gates were designed for Thomas Jolliffe by James Wyatt in 1788 and formed the principal late C18 entrance to the site; it is shown as such on the Tithe map of 1839. The entrance has been disused since the mid C20 and the lodges are today derelict (2003).

The alignment of the drives was altered during the C19, with significant changes being made between 1839 (Tithe map) and the early C20 (OS 1902). Further alterations were made to the approach immediately west of the House, probably as part of Lutyens' improvements (Andrew Jolliffe pers comm, 2003).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Ammerdown House (listed grade I) stands on a level site from which the ground falls away to the south-west, towards the north-west boundary of the site. The Neoclassical-style house comprises three storeys and is constructed in Bath stone ashlar, which is rusticated on the ground floor. The lower floor is lit by Venetian windows set in segmental-headed

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recesses, while the windows on the upper floors, which diminish in size with each storey, are set in moulded stone architraves. The House is surmounted by an entablature, cornice, and parapet. The south, east, and west facades are of similar design, while a service wing extends to the north, linking the House to the former stables.

Ammerdown House was designed for Thomas Samuel Jolliffe in 1788 by James Wyatt (1747-1813). The building was constructed by Joseph Towsey of Blandford Forum, and as originally built, had the character of a villa, being only three bays long and two bays deep. It was extended to the north-west and south-west in 1857, while the recessed centre to the west facade which was thus created was in-filled by Lutyens in 1901. The addition of the smoking room and service quarters to the north-west of the House took place in 1877.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens and pleasure grounds are situated principally to the south and east of the House. To the west of the House, adjacent to the carriage turn, an area of lawn is planted with specimen trees and conifers, at the southern end of which stands an C18 fountain (listed grade II). This area to the west of the House is separated from the formal gardens to the south and east by an early C20 stone wall which extends from the south-west corner of the House. To the south of the House a level terrace is laid to lawn, replacing a formal garden comprising geometrical box-edged beds separated by gravel walks (CL 1929). The terrace is retained to the south by a stone ha-ha allowing views across the park; this wall was constructed in the mid C19 and was incorporated by Lutyens into his early C20 formal garden scheme (all structural elements of the formal gardens, statues, and gates are listed grade II*). The south terrace returns below the east facade of the House, and is laid out with a symmetrical formal garden comprising lawns planted with mature specimen Portugal laurels, divided by a walk extending east from the south-east corner of the House. Each lawn was formerly laid out with a central circular bed surrounded by quadrant beds (*ibid*), while the northern lawn retains a central stone figure of Hermes. To the north, the garden is enclosed by an early C20 pergola comprising stone columns and timber up-rights supporting a timber superstructure, which is aligned west on the House and east on a statue. The pergola extends east of the line of the ha-ha retaining the east terrace, and from its eastern end a grass ramp, replacing semicircular grass steps, descends to a rectangular lawn allowing views south to the pleasure grounds and park. To the north of the pergola is a further area of lawn ornamented with a stone statue of Psyche. Stone steps at the south-east corner of the House descend to a gravel walk which extends c 50m east, dividing the formal lawns on the east terrace, before descending a flight of convex semicircular stone steps to reach the rectangular lawn. Beyond this lawn the walk descends via a flight of concave semicircular stone steps to the Italian Garden, an area enclosed by high, dense clipped yew hedges. The area within the hedges is geometrical in outline, with tall buttresses of yew separating deep recesses. The garden is laid out with a central circular fountain pool, and four radiating box-edged parterre beds, each with a late C18 Coade stone statue at its outer angle. The statues originally stood at the base of the Jolliffe Column in the park and were removed to their present location by George, Lord Hylton in 1925 (Andrew Jolliffe pers comm, 2003). The eastern axis of the walk leading from the House is projected through the Italian Garden to an early C20 wrought-iron gate which leads to a ride extending eastwards into the park. Two symmetrically arranged openings lead south from the Italian Garden to reach a double flight of stone steps which affords views of, and access to, the pleasure grounds and park. A similar arrangement of openings to the north leads to grass walks enclosed by yew hedges. That to the north-west leads to a flight of stone steps which ascends to a circular lawn enclosed by high yew hedges and formerly laid out with box-edged geometrical rose beds. The centre of the enclosure is marked by a stone baluster, formerly surmounted by an astrolabe (CL 1929). The opening to the north-east leads to a similar flight of steps which ascends to a rectangular lawn enclosed by yew hedges, with a raised border to the east retained by a stone wall. To the north-east of the lawn, low early C20 wrought-iron gates lead to a grass walk which extends c 75m north-east through an area of lawn to reach stone steps which ascend in several flights to the late C18 orangery. The steps are flanked by clipped globes of box, rosemary, and standard lilacs, conforming to the early C20 scheme (*ibid*). The orangery (listed grade II*) is attached to the south-west wall of the walled garden and is constructed in stone under a hipped stone-tiled roof with five full-height round-headed windows to the south-west; it was constructed c 1793 for T S Jolliffe.

The formal gardens assumed their present form from 1901, when Lord and Lady Hylton commissioned Edwin Lutyens to provide a design which would resolve the unsatisfactory relationship between the House and the orangery, and provide a formal setting for the House (Butler 1950; Brown 1982). Lutyens incorporated within his scheme the south and east terraces and their

stone retaining walls, which had been constructed in the mid C19, probably with the advice of Joseph Jopling (Bond 1998). The Tithe map (1839) indicates that the mid C19 terraces were preceded by a small area of pleasure ground to the north-east of the House, and a terrace below the orangery.

To the south of the formal gardens an area of informal pleasure grounds comprises lawns planted with specimen trees and shrubs. Immediately below the retaining wall of the south terrace, a straight walk extends from west to east and is terminated to the east by an early C20 stone arbour or seat recess (listed grade II), designed by Lutyens. To the south-east, a late C18 or early C19 informal pond, originally situated in the park, is incorporated into the pleasure grounds. To the east of the House the pleasure grounds comprise further lawns and ornamental planting, together with several formal walks lined by pleached limes and other subjects, which serve to project the axes of the walks within the formal gardens into the park beyond. The pleasure grounds form part of the early C20 scheme designed by Lutyens for Lord and Lady Hylton (OS 1904).

PARK The park extends to the west, south, and east of the House. The undulating pasture is lavishly planted with scattered trees, many of which are remnants of hedgerows removed in the late C18. To the north of the House, Nap Wood and Terry Hill Plantation, mixed ornamental plantations, are situated on rising ground and form a backdrop to the park and gardens. The west, east, and south boundaries of the park are screened by further plantations, while to the south-west, where the ground falls away, a more open boundary to the park allows vistas over the surrounding landscape. A circular clump c 250m south-east of the House commemorates the visit of HRH Princess Margaret to Somerset and Ammerdown in 1953, while c 300m south-east of the House, Coldbath Plantation and Bath Wood Plantation occupy a west-facing slope and serve to frame south-easterly views from the House to the Jolliffe Column. This monument stands c 500m south-east of the House and comprises a tall, tapering column rising from a terraced base set on stone steps (all listed grade II*), which was formerly surmounted by a glass and cast-iron observation chamber (CL 1929). The Column was designed for Col John Jolliffe by Joseph Jopling in 1849, to commemorate Jolliffe's father, T S Jolliffe (d 1824) (Bond 1998).

Within Coldbath Plantation, c 300m south-east of the House, a path ascends to an elliptical pool edged with rustic stonework, and enclosed by early C19 wrought-iron and wire-work railings. Stone steps descend into the pool at its eastern end, adjacent to the site of a small early C19 bathing pavilion. Nothing survives above ground from this structure apart from rubble and slates. The bathing pool and bath house were constructed for T S Jolliffe in the late C18 or early C19, and are shown in an engraving of 1824 (private collection), and on the Tithe map (1839). A further artificial pool is situated on the north-west boundary of the plantation, below the north-west-facing wooded slope.

The park was formed c 1788 by Thomas Samuel Jolliffe from agricultural land, to serve as the setting for his new house. Jolliffe was also responsible for forming the principal plantations within the park and the boundary planting. Many of the scattered trees within the park survive from agricultural hedgerows cleared away by Jolliffe during the process of imparkment (CL 1929). The park is shown in essentially its present form on the Tithe map of 1839.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden is situated c 120m north-east of the House. Rectangular on plan and enclosed by rubble-stone walls (listed grade II* with orangery), the garden is laid out with a central north to south axial walk and a centrally placed circular pool (dry, 2003). The walk is terminated to the north by an early C20 wrought-iron gate set in an elliptical-shaped opening. The remains of glasshouses and bothies stand against the north wall of the garden. The kitchen garden was constructed in the late C18 for T S Jolliffe, and was incorporated into the early C20 garden scheme by Lutyens. The south-facing slope to the east of the garden is planted with standard fruit trees, while a walk lined with Irish yews links this area to the pleasure grounds east of the formal gardens.

REFERENCES

C Holme, *Gardens of England in Southern and Western Counties* (1907), pls 5-8 *Country Life*, 65 (16 February 1929), pp 216-23; (2 March 1929), pp 292-8; (9 March 1929), pp 330-5 A S G Butler, *The Architecture of Sir Edwin Lutyens ii*, (1950), p 12, pls 15-25 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol* (1958), pp 78-9 J Brown, *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon* (1982), pp 79-81 J Bond, *Somerset Parks and Gardens* (1998), pp 92-7, 119-22, 135

Maps Tithe map for Kilmersdon parish, 1839 (M5221/1), (Somerset Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition revised 1902, published 1904

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Illustrations Engraving of the cold bath and bath house, 1824 (private collection)

Description written: February 2003 Amended: March 2003, July 2003 Register Inspector: DAL Edited: May 2004

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.