

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Melbury Park

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*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
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Melbury Park*

Name: Melbury Park

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Evershot

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Melbury Bubb

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Melbury Osmond

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Melbury Sampford

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Stockwood

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.856049
Longitude: -2.6028185
National Grid Reference: ST5766506455
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000531
Date first listed: 01-Jul-1986
Date of most recent amendment: 30-Jun-2014
Location Description: Melbury Park, West Dorset, Dorset

Historique de la conservation

The Melbury estate has been owned by sixteen generations of the Strangways family, since 1500 when Henry Strangway bought the estate from the Brounings family. In their time the Brounings had probably built a manor house, and had rebuilt the church of St Mary near Melbury Turbeville. Henry Strangway died in 1504 and the estate passed to Sir Giles Strangway (d.1547), an official at the court of Henry VIII. He rebuilt the manor house in the 1530s, and most likely created a formal garden with two hexagonal-shaped banqueting houses (one of which survives). He also created a deer park, as recorded by John Leland in his 'Itinerary' of 1534-43 following his visit to Melbury in c1540, and the small settlement of Melbury Turbeville was cleared in the process. Lodge Farm, situated in the south-west part of the original deer park may have been built as the Deer Keeper's Lodge. In 1596 Sir John Strangways (1584-1666) succeeded. He was imprisoned in 1627 for opposing a loan

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demanding by Charles I to fund the Spanish War. In 1644 Melbury House, despite Sir John being a royalist, was occupied by Royalist Forces causing considerable damage. Following sequestration the Estate was put in the hands of the local Standing Committee. It was this that probably led to a period of neglect/destruction and the deer park was temporarily dismantled. After payment of a fine, Sir John was released and returned to Melbury, where he planted three commemorative oaks in the shape of a triangle, near the Deer Keeper's Lodge. The deer park is depicted on John Speed's 'Map of the County of Dorset' published in 1662, though that does not show much detail. In 1675 the estate passed to Thomas Strangways (1643-1715) who in 1692 re-fronted the east elevation in Classical style to designs by John Watson. As depicted on a painting of Melbury by Thomas Hill dated 1698, the new entrance front overlooked a formal courtyard accessed via the Lion Gate. A long avenue planted with Elm, led from Bubb Down Common and the road between Yeovil and Dorchester to the stream in the valley east of the house, crossed by a brick ten-arched bridge. At this time other formal rides in the park were also created. In 1726 Susannah Strangways (1690-1758), who had married Thomas Horner (1688-1726) of Mells Park, Somerset, inherited Melbury and took the name Strangways-Horner. After her husband's death in 1741 she returned to Melbury where she improved and extended the formal gardens and park, assisted by the family's steward George Donnisthorpe. An undated and unsigned garden plan of c1742 shows a lawn and 'grand slope' south of the house, overlooking an apsidal-ended rectangular pool with a stream leading from a circular island with, west of the house, a wilderness with a bowling green at its centre and including the two much older hexagonal banqueting houses. A further unsigned and undated plan, also of c1742 shows a formal canal north of the bridge. Estimates, other correspondence, and surviving features suggest that much of this was implemented in the 1740s. The plan is annotated: 'The necessity of extending the serpentine river is that you may have a full view or prospect of it from the bridge that the canal may appear to be a piece of water unbounded'. A brick sunken ha ha was built running from the edge of the courtyard to the north-west of the house, extending due south and running south of the formal pool up to the church. A walled kitchen garden was also built, replaced by a new one nearer to the house in the years after 1800. As recorded in a number of accounts the park was extended east-wards in 1742, and vistas were created by grubbing trees in Great High Wood, probably in order to create the Etoile, described by Horace Walpole after his visit in July 1772, and first depicted on the 1780 estate plan. In 1758 Elizabeth Strangways-Horner (1723-1792), who in 1736 had married Stephen Fox (1706-1776) of Redlynch, Somerset, inherited the Melbury estate. Fox had been created Earl of Ilchester in 1756, and in the 1760s they acquired further land to expand Melbury. They started improvements to the gardens and Lower Park, which were continued by their son Henry Thomas, 2nd Earl of Ilchester (1747-1802) when he came to Melbury after his mother's death in 1792. As depicted on the 1780 estate plan, the gardens and park became more 'natural' and the formal canals were turned into a series of large informal lakes. Further lakes and cascades, including a serpentine walk, were introduced in the east part of the Great High Woods (the Etoile). In the late 1780s and 90s the deer park was further extended to the east and west, including extensive tree planting. And, as indicated by the 1798 'Plan of the Old and New Roads from Evershot to Melbury Osmond', routes through the park were restricted and/or moved. In 1794 the second Earl removed the ten-arched bridge to the east front of the house and re-landscaped and altered the lakes. He constructed a new walled kitchen garden north-west of the house (completed by 1808), which resulted in the demolition of part of the ha ha, one of the hexagonal banqueting houses, and the earlier kitchen garden further to the north-west of the house. As indicated by the 1808 Ordnance Surveyor's drawing, by then the park had two lodges: High Wood Lodge to the east and Lion Lodge to the south. The third Earl, Henry Stephen Fox-Strangways (1787-1858), continued planting further woodland blocks first started by his father, mostly at Bubb Down and in the deer park and introduced a lot of specimen trees. The fourth Earl, William Thomas Fox-Strangways (1795-1865), a noted diplomat and botanist, introduced exotic plant species in the park and gardens, continued by the fifth Earl, Henry Edward Fox-Strangways (1847-1905) who inherited the estate in 1865. The fifth Earl enlarged the house in 1872 to designs by Anthony Salvin with further additions by George Devey in 1884-5. He also extended and restored the church in 1870-8, made changes to the park's circulation, built a number of cottages / lodges, including Chetnole Lodge, and extended the deer park. In the park he introduced Wheatley Lake (1865, later called Lucerne Lake) and Jubilee Pond (1889), and created a new entrance from the north of the village of Melbury Osmond, flanked by Yeovil Lodge, which led to a long drive planted with horse chestnuts (completed by 1887). Station Lodge was also built, situated near Hollywell Railway Station on the line opened in 1857. In the late C19 the fifth Earl extended the deer

park eastwards, and added Sika deer and red deer to the fallow deer that had been kept since the 1540s. Shooting and hunting became important recreational activities in the park. In 1899 Melbury House featured in *Country Life*, and in 1908 the Victoria County History of Dorset listed its number of veteran trees. In 1905 the sixth Earl, Giles Stephen Fox-Strangways (1874-1959) inherited Melbury; he let the house from 1928. During the First World War the east extension to the deer park appears to have been abandoned. During the Second World War, prior to D-Day, Melbury House and its park were occupied by the American Forces. After 1959 many parkland trees in the Lower and East Parks were felled, and some conversion to conifers took place, including the eastern half of the Circle (the former Etoile) in Great High Woods, narrowing the widths of the rides. In the 1960s the gardens at Melbury were restored by Lady Theresa Agnew, the daughter of the seventh Earl, who built a stud north-west of the house. In the 1970s Dutch Elm disease affected trees in the Lower Park and during the 1990s storms the beech belts on the west boundary suffered extensive damage. After 1989 the house was restored by Bertram and Fell and since 1991 a major park restoration programme has been undertaken.

Details

A deer park originating from the early C16 with late C18 landscaped gardens created from a late C17 and mid C18 formal layout, with extensive woodland and C19 and C20 planting of rare trees and shrubs, owned, landscaped and managed by the Strangways family since 1500. **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The park covers c600ha, and is situated in a rural area in West Dorset, mainly in the parish of Melbury Sampford, with parts also falling within neighbouring parishes. It is surrounded by farmland forming part of the wider estate, with the village of Melbury Osmond situated to its north, Evershot to its south and Melbury Bubb to its east. The A37 runs through the far eastern part of the site flanked by Bubb Down Plantation marking its eastern boundary. It is believed that the extent of the site more or less covers that of the original deer park originating from the early C16. The site retains a number of important historic views, as depicted by artists in the C18 and C19. **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** From the north the site is approached via an entrance off the A37, flanked by Yeovil Lodge (dated 1887, listed Grade II). This gives access to a long tree lined drive, passing Drive End Lodge (early C17 with mid C19 alterations, listed Grade II), and leading further south through the park for c m to the north front of Melbury House. Further south along the A37, at the north-east corner the site, is a further entrance marked by Chetnole Lodge (listed Grade II). Dated 1870, it is contemporary with works to the house by Anthony Salvin. From Evershot to the south, the site is accessed via the Lion Gates (late-C17 Ham stone piers topped with standing lions, with a later gate, listed Grade II), moved to this position in the 1770s from their original location east of the house. The entrance is flanked by Lion Lodge, originating from the late C18 or early C19 with later alterations. A tree lined drive runs northwards through the park and to the house. From Holywell to the south-east, the site can be accessed via an entrance flanked by Station Lodge dated 1859 (listed Grade II). In the late C17 the main approach to the park was from Bubb Down to the east, from where a long avenue planted with a double row of Elm trees led through the park and crossed a ten-arched bridge over a formal canal, to the new east front of the house with its forecourt adorned with the Lion Gate (see above). **PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Melbury House (listed Grade I) is a C16 courtyard house with castellated prospect tower built for Sir Giles Strangways in the 1530s, remodelled in the late C17 with Classical style south and east elevations facing the gardens, and with further alterations and extensions dating from the late C19. It stands in the centre of the park, on an eminence with slightly falling ground on all sides. Immediately north is the Stable Yard (listed Grade I), built in Ham stone ashlar with slate roofs. It includes the late C17 west block of the former north courtyard to the house, and has an early C19 stable yard to its west. Adjacent, to the south-east of the house, stands the C15 Church of St Mary (listed Grade I) and altered and extended in 1874. Within the churchyard stands a mid C17 table tomb to William Heel (listed Grade I). **GARDEN AND PLEASURE GROUND** Gently sloping lawns lie to the south and east of the house extending westwards to a pleasure ground south of the walled garden (see below) planted with mature specimen trees. The pleasure ground is enclosed to the west by a sunken ha ha created in the 1740s by Susannah Strangways-Horner (restored in the late 1990s). Near the south-west corner of the walled garden stands an octagonal, castellated two-storey banqueting house, known as The Turret (listed Grade II*). It was built in c1530 by Sir Giles Strangways, with Gothic decorations added in the C18. Originally a pair, it formed

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part of the C16 formal gardens first laid out by Sir Giles and later adopted in Susannah Strangways-Horner's garden. Circa 150m south of the house lies an artificial lake, known as Melbury Lake, which was probably first created from a series of Medieval fishpond's. At its far west end stands a stone rubble-domed structure, its function and history unknown, but believed to be a garden feature dating from the mid or late C18. Melbury Lake was altered several times in the late C17, when it formed part of the formal layout of the gardens and the east approach with the ten-arched bridge which crossed a canal east of the house. Melbury Lake was again transformed in the 1740s by Susannah Strangways when it formed an important formal water feature in her new garden. In the early 1790s, as part of the extensive landscape works carried out for the second Earl of Ilchester, both the canals were turned into informal lakes. Beyond the lawns east of the house is the Valley Garden, incorporating a section of the eastern stream that runs through the park (see below) and includes a serpentine walk and a significant number of exotic tree- and plant species. Circa 250m north of the house is Valley Pond, an informal lake created in the mid C18, re-instated in the mid 1990s, with c50m beyond it to the north-east, the C18 thatched Valley Cottage, formerly of two estate cottages with attached laundry (listed Grade II). **PARK** The park incorporates a number of valleys and glades, the main ones being that of the two streams in the east and west part of the park. The streams feed a number of artificial lakes within the park, including Lucerne Lake to the east, Highwoods Pond and cascade to the north-west, and a series of three smaller ponds to the southwest, called Skating Pond or Ice Pond (fed by springs), Turtle Pond and Trout Pond. Lucerne Lake (formerly called Wheatley Lake), was constructed in 1865 and has a circa late C19 thatched boathouse at its north-west corner. Highwoods Pond and its cascade were introduced in the late C18, and restored in the mid 1990s. Skating Pond or Ice Pond dates from the C19 (restored in the mid 1990s), and is associated with the estate's historic ice production. Trout Pond and Turtle Pond were created in the C19 and were restored and replanted in the 1980s. Beyond the valleys with the two streams, to the east, south and west, the land rises again, and is planted with considerable areas of mature woodland including Great High Wood (an Ancient Woodland site), with the Etoile, later also known as The Circle, situated to the north-west. The latter comprises of a central clearing with radial avenues cut through the woodland, first created in the 1740s by Susannah Strangways-Horner when the deer park was extended. To the south-west lies Stuttcombe Bottom with Lewcombe Woods beyond, and to the south-east is Banger's Moor, with Evershot Hill Plantation beyond. Bubb Down along the east boundary is a chalk outlier forming one side of an afforested combe planted from the late C18 to the mid C19. The park has a significant number of veteran parkland trees and a number of formal avenues (see approaches above), including also Stavordale Avenue, a late-C19 lime avenue commemorating the birth of the fifth Earl's eldest son. In the southern part of the park approximately 500m south-east of the house, is an underground domed brick ice house, probably dating from the late C18. **KITCHEN GARDEN** The rectangular shaped kitchen garden immediately west of the house covers an area of c1ha. It is enclosed by red brick walls in English bond, with Ham stone copings (listed Grade II) with attached to the outside, a contemporary Gardener's Cottage (listed Grade II) and a two storey Bothy (listed Grade II) added in the mid to late C19. Subdivided by hedges, it remains partly in use as a kitchen garden and nursery, with the eastern part now (early C21) in use as a private garden, including a tennis court. The kitchen garden was completed in 1808 (instigated in 1800 by the second Earl of Ilchester) and replaced an earlier kitchen garden that was situated further from the house to its north-west.

Summary

A deer park originating from the C16 with late C18 landscaped gardens created from a late C17 and mid C18 formal layout, and with extensive C19 and C20 planting of rare trees and shrubs, owned, landscaped and managed by the Strangways family since 1500.

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.

Reasons for Designation

Melbury Park in West Dorset is included on the Register at Grade II* for the following principal reasons: * Date and rarity: as a deer park originating from the C16, with additional significant designed landscape phases dating from the late C17 and C18, its overall layout survives remarkably intact with fully readable landscape phases; * Documentation: the historic development of the site is particularly well documented; * Historic interest: it is a rare and representative example of a rural designed landscape that has remained in continuous ownership of the same family since 1500; * Group value: its associated house, outbuildings, garden structures and lodges, mature (and ancient) woodlands, and the surrounding estate it lies at the heart of, survive remarkably intact and together form a particularly strong group.

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