

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

THE CHANTRY

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THE CHANTRY

Name: THE CHANTRY

County: Somerset

District: Mendip (District Authority)

Parish: Whatley

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.214740
Longitude: -2.4024434
National Grid Reference: ST 71987 46248
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1001140
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

Early C19 picturesque pleasure grounds incorporating a group of grottoes, associated with an early C19 villa.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The site of The Chantry may have belonged to a chantry chapel founded by Sir Oliver de Cervington, c 1350, in the nearby church of Whatley (CL 1961). By the early C19, the land had passed into the ownership of James Fussell, a prosperous iron-master, whose family had established a group of iron works in the vicinity of Mells since the mid C18. One of these works was situated at Chantry, where an artificial lake or reservoir in the steep-sided valley provided water power. James Fussell appears to have lived in a house adjacent to the works until c 1825, when he completed the construction of a villa on high ground above the valley (ibid). The villa was built to the design of a Bath architect, John Pinch. The villa was provided with a landscape setting which incorporated the reservoir as an ornamental feature, approached by a series of picturesque walks which also provided access to a group of grottoes and other rustic stone structures. These appear to have been completed by c 1830. Towards the end of his life, in 1844, James Fussell commissioned Sir George Gilbert Scott to design a new church which was constructed within the grounds to the north-west of the villa (outside the area here registered).

At his death in 1844, James Fussell, a bachelor, bequeathed The Chantry estate to his nephew, the Rev James G C Fussell, who also served as first incumbent of the new parish created for the church. The Rev Fussell was also, from 1852 to 1883, one of H M Inspectors of Schools; in 1857 he founded an experimental industrial school at The Chantry (outside the registered site) which was intended to educate girls who wished to become governesses and teachers (ibid). One of the pupils, Helen Mathers, described The Chantry and the Rev Fussell in her best-selling novel, *Comin' thro' the Rye* (1875). The Rev Fussell was succeeded at The Chantry by his son, James T R Fussell, a barrister, who died in 1927. With his death the family's association with The Chantry ended, the iron works already having gone bankrupt in the 1890s. The Chantry was sold and passed through several hands, until it was acquired in the mid C20 by the novelist Anthony Powell (b 1905) and his wife, Lady Violet Powell. Today (2003) the site remains in divided private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Chantry is situated at the centre of the hamlet of Chantry, c 1.5km west of Whatley. The c 12ha site is bounded to the north by the village street of Chantry, a minor road which runs east from Little Elm to Whatley, while the east boundary is formed by a minor road, Stony Lane. To the south-east and west the site adjoins agricultural land, while to the north-west it is bounded by the mid C19 Church of the Holy Trinity, the site of which formed part of the original Chantry estate laid out by James Fussell c 1825. The southern boundary is formed by a minor road which runs east from Little Elm to Nunney. The boundaries of the site are marked by stone walls c 2.5m high which were constructed in the early C19 by James Fussell; these survive in various states of repair. The site comprises a generally level area to the north of The Chantry, and a steep, south-facing slope below the house. This slope forms the north-west side of a steep-sided valley which extends from south-west to north-east through the site and contains a tributary stream of the Mells River; this was dammed in the late C18/early C19 to form Chantry Pond, a reservoir which formerly powered the Chantry Ironworks immediately east of Stony Lane (outside the registered site boundary). There are significant southerly views from the house, across a small park, to the valley and the pond.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The Chantry is approached from the village street to the north, at a point immediately west of its junction with Stony Lane. The entrance is marked by a pair of rusticated ashlar piers which support a pair of wrought-iron gates, the piers being flanked by rubble-stone walls incorporating a Gothic-style timber door (all listed grade II). A two-storey stone lodge (listed grade II) stands immediately west of the entrance. Constructed in stone and render, the Classical-style lodge has windows set in segmental-headed recesses, recalling the architectural details of the main house. The lodge and entrance were designed for James Fussell by John Pinch c 1825. From the entrance, the drive sweeps south-south-east and south-west through an area of shrubbery to approach an elliptical carriage turn below the north facade of the villa. The carriage turn encircles an elliptical lawn and from it a walk leads north-west to a wrought-iron gate providing private access to the grounds of Holy Trinity church (listed grade I). Some 30m north-east of the carriage turn, a service drive diverts from the main drive and leads c 100m south-south-east to reach the early C19 stables and coach house (listed grade II); these also were designed for James Fussell by John Pinch, c 1825.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The Chantry (listed grade II*) is a neoclassical villa built into a steep, south-facing slope towards the northern boundary of the site. Constructed in Bath stone ashlar, the sloping site allows the rusticated basement to be exposed as an additional storey on the south facade. The north or entrance facade comprises two storeys, with the central bay rising to three storeys. The ground-floor windows are set in segmental-headed recesses, while the front door is protected by a semicircular Roman Doric portico surmounted by low wrought-iron railings. The south or garden facade has a two-storey and basement segmental bow surmounted by stone balustrades. The windows of the principal floor on the south facade have low wrought-iron railings set on the sills. A single-storey hipped-roof wing adjoins the west facade. The villa, which retains many original internal fittings, was built for James Fussell c 1825 to the design of the Bath architect John Pinch.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The informal pleasure grounds are situated principally to the north, east, and south-east of the house, forming an area parallel to the eastern, Stony Lane boundary of the site which extends into the valley, screening the west side of the kitchen garden and leading to Chantry Pond.

Mixed ornamental shrubberies incorporating specimen trees and conifers adjoin the drive leading from the lodge to the villa. Adjacent to the carriage turn, the shrubbery opens onto a lawn which allows views north from the house to a small park or paddock. Walks lead east and south-east from the house through a narrow strip of mixed shrubbery, which in part serves to screen the stables from the villa. There are westerly views from this walk across a further small area of park south of the villa. The shrubbery walk, which is in places adjoined by early C19 rustic rockwork, continues parallel to the boundary of the park, turning west and south to pass round the north and west walls of the kitchen garden, which is thus effectively screened from the house and park. Descending south, the walk reaches the dam at the north-east end of Chantry Pond, an artificial reservoir of informal outline which occupies the head of a steep-sided valley extending from south-west to north-east. The south-east and south banks of the lake are wooded, while there are further areas of shrubbery and ornamental planting to the north and north-west. The pleasure-ground walk extends along the north-west bank of the lake to reach a rustic stone arch (listed grade II) which leads to a shallow valley containing a small tributary stream; this ascends north-west from Chantry Pond to a further

artificial pond. Beneath mature yews, a series of rustic rockwork features including niches, caves, and two grottoes are built into an artificial rocky cliff (all listed grade II*). One grotto is a complex structure comprising two storeys and incorporating alcoves, rock seats, and cave-like recesses. The walk winds through these features, affording picturesque glimpses of the lake and valley and forming a circuit which returns to the principal walk on the north-west bank of the lake. The walk extends along the north-west bank, passing after c 150m the ruins of an early C19 rustic stone boathouse with a triple-arched facade facing the lake. The north-west end of the lake (now heavily silted and overgrown) is marked by an early C19 rustic stone bridge which carries the walk to the south bank of the lake. The walk to the south of the lake is today overgrown and impassable.

The pleasure grounds were laid out from c 1825 to provide a setting for James Fussell's new villa and incorporated the existing reservoir, Chantry Pond, which provided water power for Fussell's iron works slightly lower down the valley. The disposition of the pleasure grounds has changed little since the early C19. The designed landscape associated with The Chantry shares features in common with the contemporary landscape at Hapsford House (qv), c 3km north-east, which incorporates a grotto and an ornamental treatment of the Mells River. Here the river was harnessed to power a woollen mill belonging to George George, builder of Hapsford.

PARK There are two small areas of park or ornamental paddock associated with The Chantry. To the north and north-west of the villa, a generally level area of pasture with scattered trees extends north to the early C19 stone wall (listed grade II) forming the boundary between the site and the village street. The mid C19 Church of the Holy Trinity (listed grade I) stands at the north-west corner of this area of park, the associated churchyard having originally formed part of Fussell's early C19 landscape. To the south of the villa is a further area of south-facing sloping park. This area is enclosed to the east and south-east by the pleasure-ground walk, while to the south-west and west it adjoins agricultural land which is partly screened by groups of specimen trees. There are southerly views from the park into the valley below, and to Chantry Pond.

The two areas of park were laid out in the early C19 as part of the landscape developed by James Fussell to complement his new villa. The disposition of park in relation to the pleasure grounds and other elements of the landscape has changed little since the early C19.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden is situated c 200m south-east of the house, on the south-facing slope adjacent to Stony Lane which forms the eastern boundary of the site. The garden is approximately rectangular on plan and is enclosed by high stone walls. The garden is screened from the house and park by the pleasure-ground shrubbery walk, which extends round the north and west walls. The garden is laid out with a terrace and arbour against the inner face of the north wall, marking the site of C19 glasshouses, and a central circular dipping pool. To the east of the garden, and with access from Stony Lane, is a service or frame yard (now domestic gardens) and the early C19 gardener's cottage. To the south of the walled garden is a further, approximately semicircular area of garden which may have been used as a fruit garden in the early C19. A flight of stone steps at the southern end of this garden descends into a rockwork grotto tunnel which emerges into the pleasure grounds above Chantry Pond. The kitchen garden, gardener's cottage, service yard, fruit garden, and grotto formed part of James Fussell's early C19 scheme associated with the construction of The Chantry.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 129 (1 June 1961), pp 1266-7; 130 (24 May 1962), pp 1254-5 R Athill, Old Mendip (1964) J Bond, Somerset Parks and Gardens (1998), p 110

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1889 2nd edition revised 1902, published 1904

Description written: February 2003 Register Inspector: DAL Edited: September 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.