

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

ASCOTT HOUSE

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**ASCOTT HOUSE**

Name:	ASCOTT HOUSE
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Mentmore
District:	Buckinghamshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Wing
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.896028 Longitude: -0.69953374 National Grid Reference: SP 89582 22741 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000593 Date first listed: 30-Aug-1987

## Details

A late C19 park and garden including formal features, informal lawns and woodland, with late C20 additions. Nurseryman Sir Harry Veitch contributed to the late C19 planting.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The house was enlarged from a farmhouse by George Devey c 1874-88, for Leopold de Rothschild, a member of the internationally prominent Jewish banking family, for use mainly as a hunting box with accompanying domestic and hunting stables, lodges and other estate buildings. The gardens and much of the park were laid out at the same time. There appears to have been no earlier designed park or garden on the site. Devey provided designs for the gardens, c 1880, but Leopold de Rothschild seems to have directed the work himself, with help from Sir Harry Veitch of the nursery firm Veitch and Sons. In 1949 the late Anthony de Rothschild gave the house and grounds to the National Trust.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The c 110ha site is located half a kilometre east of the village of Wing, 3km south-west of Leighton Buzzard. It is bounded to the north by the Aylesbury to Leighton Buzzard road (A418), to the west by Well Lane, to the south by a meandering brook, and to the east by farmland. The surface of the lane may have been lowered during the C19, creating a clear view from the west end of the house.

The site lies on the edge of the Vale of Aylesbury and encompasses high ground which is part of a ridge, to utilise views across sloping land to west, south and east. The house is sited on the southern edge of the ridge; the land slopes gently down to the south-east and more steeply so to the west. The agricultural setting is highly visible from the site to the west, south and east, including parts of the now largely agricultural Wing Park (C16) west of the site.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main entrance to Ascott House lies c 300m north of the house, off the A418, marked by white-painted wooden gates and brick gate piers (Devey post 1874, listed grade II). The approach drive passes the single-storey, brick and half-timbered Main Lodge (Devey 1870s-80s, listed grade II) and the Coach Stable Yard (Devey 1870s-80s,

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listed grade II) in similar style, running through a wooded, informal grassed area containing exotic trees such as blue Atlantic cedars and Wellingtonias. At the bend south, c 150m from the north entrance of the house, there is a view south-east across parkland to the Vale of Aylesbury. The approach then passes a further stable block (Devey 1870s-80s, listed grade II, converted for domestic use) immediately north of the house, to reach a turning circle outside the entrance on the north front. A marble fountain (c 1890, listed grade II) lies at the centre, surrounded by a circle of lawn. From here the drive continues 75m south-west to Well Lane, where there is a thatched lodge and entrance.

A second, longer drive, lined with an avenue of C19 limes, enters the site in the north-east corner, past a two-storey, half-timbered lodge (Devey 1870s-80s, listed grade II). The drive curves gently south-west for 1km, giving views of the park and Vale of Aylesbury to the south-east. This appears to have been the original main drive, and was certainly in place by the 1880s (OS). It is now used as a farm track and access to Ascott Kennels.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Ascott House (listed grade II\*) sits on high ground in the north-west corner of the site, on a long terrace, surrounded by its pleasure grounds, facing south-east across parkland towards the hills opposite. The house dates from c 1606, originating as a modest timber-framed farmhouse bought by Baron Nathan Meyer de Rothschild in 1873. After his death, a programme of massive enlargement was begun c 1874 by George Devey and his associates for Leopold de Rothschild, who lived at Gunnersbury House, Middlesex, and wanted Ascott mainly for use as a hunting box. This building phase continued until 1888, encasing the original house so that it virtually disappeared, swallowed by the present mock Tudor 'palace-like cottage', as Mary Gladstone described it (Pevsner 1994). There is an important view south-west from the west end of the house into Wing Park, with Wingpark Clump forming a feature, and particularly to the C16/C17 garden earthworks of the earlier Ascott House (now, 1997, gone) sited c 400m south-west of the current house.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The ornamental gardens encircle the house. The south-east front of the house and the formal garden elements overlook the park with views across to the Chiltern Hills to the south-east. The C19 area close to the house has, since 1986, been developed by designer Arabella Lennox-Boyd into a series of planted 'rooms'. A croquet lawn has been created (late C20) immediately west of the house. The C19 ornamental features are scattered away from the house. They include an informal lily pond, built as a skating pond with a thatched changing room, lying c 100m north of the house and approached from the north front of the house by a late C20, serpentine-hedged, straight grass path; a fern garden east of the house planted with evergreens in a late C20 formal design; a topiary sundial south-east of the house; the bronze and marble Venus Fountain (Waldo Story c 1890, listed grade II) in a circular basin south-east of the house, enclosed by a broken circle of c 3m high clipped yew hedges; Madeira Walk adjacent to the north side of the Venus Fountain enclosure, flanked by herbaceous borders and a brick retaining wall to the north, with a covered wooden seat known as the Tea House at the east end.

The Dutch Garden is a late C19 formal feature with gravel paths and formal bedding beds laid out in grass. The approach from the house, c 130m to the north, arrives at a high point at the north end, from where the whole axial layout is visible. A double curved flight of stone steps down into the Dutch Garden encircles a small grotto with a pool inside (c 1890, listed grade II). The grotto is constructed of large rough lumps of stone and tufa and planted with ferns and other foliage plants. Some 20m south of this is a tall bronze and marble fountain and quatrefoil basin (Waldo Story c 1890, listed grade II). The grass circle surrounding the fountain is surrounded by bedding beds and edged by the central gravel path which runs south-east past another circular island bedding feature before terminating at a clipped yew hedge.

Many formal hedges separate the garden features so that each one is discrete. The panoramic views south and south-east from the lawns and several of the formal features are a significant feature. The lawns between the formal garden features are planted with exotic and native specimen trees, many of which remain from the late C19, and have coloured or variegated foliage. The garden as a whole is generously planted with ornamental trees and shrubs. An open woodland area and shelter belt north of the lily pond buffer the house and gardens from the A418 road.

In the 1880s an informal terrace was laid out around the house, with lawns and scattered ornamental trees. Few of the formal features had been created by 1885 (OS 1st edition), and the gardens only extended to the north and west. By 1900 (OS 2nd edition) the main park and garden structure were largely complete. Unusually, in the overall design the informal garden areas were close to the house. The formal features formed a barrier between the house and its relaxed surrounds, and the park. The

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garden was noted in the late C19/early C20 for elaborate bedding displays (particularly in the Dutch Garden), the collection of water lilies in the lily pool, unusual use of coloured foliage trees and shrubs, bizarre topiary and a 'happy combination of the natural and the artificial' (CL 1897). As the house was, initially, used in the winter and remained so for many years, this may have influenced the extensive use of evergreen trees and shrubs in the garden and pleasure grounds, particularly evergreens with variegated and yellow foliage. The gardens have continued to be maintained to a high standard, and the bedding displays, although simplified, are still notable.

**PARK** The park lies to the south-east and north-east of the gardens. It is split into two distinct areas: the earlier (c 1874(85), north-east park is sited along a flatter area of the ridge and retains more mature specimen trees. A plateau cuts in an arc through Round Spinney, providing panoramic views from the park and drive. This part of the park is currently pasture. The later (c 1890s), south-east park is more agricultural in character, with several large clumps of trees and some arable land. It slopes from the gardens down to the valley in a wide sweep, but is cut visually by a low ridge which runs south-east from Round Spinney. Sited away from the principal views from the park and garden into the Vale of Aylesbury, the park entrances and buildings, including cottages and the estate office, are all conceived in a picturesque vernacular style like the main house, hunting stables and kennels. A cricket pitch and rustic pavilion lie east of the stables.

In 1885 (OS) the park flanked the long drive from the north-east entrance to the house. By 1900 (OS) the park had been extended south as far as the brook, enhancing the view from the gardens down the south-east-facing slope.

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, 2 (28 August 1897), pp 210-12; 8 (25 August 1900), pp 240-6; 159 (18 March 1976), pp 662-4 N Pevsner and E Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (1994), pp 253-8 National Trust Information File (unpublished)  
Maps Enclosure map for Wing parish, 1798 (Buckinghamshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880 2nd edition published 1899

Description written: January 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: June 1999

This list entry was subject to a Minor Enhancement on 25/04/2019

## 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.