

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CLEVEDON COURT

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CLEVEDON COURT

Name:	CLEVEDON COURT
District:	North Somerset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Clevedon
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.441898 Longitude: -2.8376914 National Grid Reference: ST4187571767 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000565 Date first listed: 30-Apr-1987

Details

Early C18 terraced gardens, with mid C19 ornamental woodland, around a C14 and later country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

At the time of the Domesday survey, Clievdeon was held by Ildebert from Matthew de Moretania. The family changed their name to 'de Clivedon' shortly after, and it was Sir John de Clevedon who built Clevedon Court, the manor house of Clevedon in c 1320. He is thought to have added to and incorporated the mid C13 tower, which forms the eastern end of the Court, the ancient battlement of which still forms the eastern boundary of the garden. After the de Clevedon line died out, the estate descended by marriage to Thomas Wake of Blissworth, Northamptonshire, who died in 1459. This family remained Lords of the Manor of Clevedon until 1630 [survey date given in refs as 1629], when they sold it to John Digby, first Earl of Bristol. The survey carried out at the time of the sale refers to 'two gardens, an orchard, a fayre court... besides 60 acres of wood and coppice'. In 1709 the estate was purchased by a successful Bristol merchant, Abraham Elton, who was made a baronet in 1717. His son, Sir Abraham Elton II, repaired the house and created the present terraced gardens, in part out of the pre-existing, defensive earthworks. His work was recorded in an anonymous oil painting of 1721, which now hangs in the Court. After his death his son, Abraham III, inherited but had little interest in the estate and after his death in 1761 his brother Abraham IV took over and was responsible for a good deal of work in the 1760s. His son, the Rev Sir Abraham Elton V, who inherited in 1790, took little interest in the estate, although he was responsible for the enclosing of Clevedon [should this be COURT?] Hill in 1803. His second wife, Mary Stewart (d 1849), was a noted and successful topographical artist, whose Panoramic Views of Edinburgh were engraved by Hullmandel. She recorded the house and garden in a number of drawings and lithographs, and she also designed picturesque woodland walks on the Hill (guidebook 1968).

The sixth baronet, Sir Charles Abraham Elton, succeeded in 1842. He was a scholar, poet, and journalist who knew many of the figures in the literary world. By the marriage of his sister he was uncle to Arthur Hallam, the subject of Tennyson's In Memoriam, who was buried in the Elton vault in St Andrew's church. Tennyson stayed at the Court in 1850, when he visited the tomb, and William Makepeace Thackeray was also a regular visitor. Elton was a friend of Charles Lamb and the description of the old-fashioned terraced garden in one of the Essays of Elia, 'Blakesmore', written in 1824, is thought to have derived from a conversation between the two of them. In c 1857, the area immediately north of the house was laid out as an extensive parterre, which remained in place until removed a century later. In the late Victorian period, a bedding arrangement was laid out on the

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CLEVEDON COURT

central terrace which elicited the scorn of Gertrude Jekyll in *Wall and Water Gardens* (1901). J D Sedding, who was married to a cousin of Sir Edmund Elton, was a frequent visitor and refers to the 'hanging gardens' of Clevedon Court in *Garden Craft Old and New* (1892). The estate continued to descend in the Elton family but when Sir Arthur, the tenth baronet succeeded his father in 1951, the family asked the Treasury to accept the house in part payment of death duties, and arrangements were made for it to be taken over by the National Trust (guidebook 1968). The woodland gardens to the north were leased to Avon Wildlife Trust, now The Wildlife Trust, in the 1990s.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Clevedon Court stands 1.5km east of the seaside town of Clevedon, at the foot of the western end of a ridge of hills that runs some 17km east to the Avon Gorge near Bristol. Clevedon Court Garden and the woodland pleasure grounds cover c 80ha. The registered site is bounded to the north by Nortons Wood Lane, to the north-east by a track on the east side of Court Hill, to the south-east by the edge of a motorway cutting and fence-lines, to the south by Tickenham Road, and to the west by the rear of properties in the neighbouring residential area. The house stands at the foot of a steep south-facing and heavily wooded ridge, Court Hill, which rises to the north. To the south are the low-lying levels of Clevedon, Nailsea, and Kenn Moors, and 12km in the distance, the Mendip Hills. Apart from the M5 motorway, which runs north-east/south-west past the southern boundary of the site, passing some 300m south of the house, the setting is rural to the north, south, and east. Some 400m to the west is the suburban development at the eastern edge of East Clevedon.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal approach is from the Clevedon to Tickenham road, 50m south of the house. The short straight drive enters past a mid C19 Tudor-style lodge (listed grade II) and turns west into a forecourt in front of the principal, south front. A pedestrian entrance adjacent to a small car park is located 600m north-west of the house on All Saints Lane. This has a wooden gate and wooden steps leading up to Court Wood and The Warren, giving access to the network of walks on the ridge.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Clevedon Court (listed grade I) was built in the early C14 for Sir John de Clevedon, and is 'one of the most valuable relics of early domestic architecture in England' (listed building description). Alterations and a new west wing were built c 1570 for John Wake. In the early C18 Sir Abraham Elton II carried out major renovations. The west front was rebuilt in 1761-88 and again in 1862 and throughout the C19 there was a series of minor alterations, all preserving its picturesque irregularity.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The main garden is located on the north side of the house, and is bounded by Court Wood some 80m to the north. Immediately outside the north front is a narrow flagged area bounded by a stone wall, 2m high, which retains the main lawn. Stone steps lead up to this lawn which slopes northwards and has an inverted D-shaped gravel path containing a stone fountain, formerly the centrepiece of an 1850s parterre (CL 1899). On the east side of the lawn a crenellated wall runs north to a crenellated tower (listed grade II*), some 30m north of the house, part of the mid C13 development at Clevedon Court. The straight side of the D runs east/west across the upper part of the lawn, beyond which the slope continues to a red-brick retaining wall of the first terrace, known as the Pretty Terrace. This terrace may have been used as a bowling green in the early C18. At the east end of the terrace, some 40m north-east of the house, is a stone-built summerhouse with a round-arched door to the terrace. At the west end of the terrace, some 50m north-west of the house, is a free-standing octagonal summerhouse, the Octagon (1760s, listed grade II), with sash windows and a pyramidal roof behind a cornice and parapet. Both buildings date from the time of Sir Abraham Elton IV, probably the 1760s, and were recorded in drawings by his son-in-law, Oldfield Bowles, in 1788 (guidebook 1968). To the north, the Pretty Terrace has herbaceous borders at the foot of the rubble-stone wall (possibly C18, listed grade II) retaining the top terrace, known as the Esmond Terrace after the novel Henry Esmond (1852), parts of which Thackeray wrote on the terrace. The flat pilaster buttresses of the wall appear to be the same as those shown in the 1721 painting. The Esmond Terrace comprises a grassed walk some 3m wide, on the north side of which Court Wood descends via a steep bank.

South of the house is a forecourt, which extends south for some 25m to a stone retaining wall, below which is a lawn with specimen trees. Immediately west of the house is a lawn from which there are extensive views westward along the wooded foot of the hill towards Clevedon. The views were opened up by the removal of early C18 enclosures by Sir Abraham Elton IV in

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CLEVEDON COURT

the 1760s. In a field c 100m south of the house, on the south side of Tickenham Road and outside the site here registered, is a pond and earthwork remains of three more ponds, presumably part of the C13-C14 phase of landscaping at Clevedon.

OTHER LAND North and north-east of the gardens the land rises into dense woodland, comprising Court Wood and Norton's Wood, dating from the mid C19. The woods are overgrown but management by The Wildlife Trust since the 1990s has cleared many paths and features which were previously obscured. A main ridge-top track runs east/west from 1.5km north-east of the house to the pedestrian entrance 600m north-west of the house. There are many subsidiary walks branching from the main track, taking in viewpoints and other features of interest. From the northern terrace of the gardens is a zig-zag walk, a branch from which follows a former drive to a stone bridge leading to a picturesque former quarry 350m north-east of the house. There are two more stone bridges at path intersections in this general area and remains of stone walls and stone edging alongside some of the paths. Paths also lead to the north-west of the house to take advantage of views to the west, over Clevedon to the sea. One path leads through Double Rocks, a natural outcrop, on the west-facing slope of Court Hill and further north, over the crest of the ridge to Conygar Quarry. The paths contain a number of simple stone seats at viewing points, often sheltered by plantings of holm oak. A wide range of mature specimen trees are scattered through the predominantly holm oak woodland, including Wellingtonia, red oak, Monterey and Austrian pines, Lebanon cedar, and Araucaria, beech, hornbeam, and oak. The understorey contains Portuguese laurel, yew, and holly. These trees and shrubs chiefly date from Sir Arthur Elton's period (1850s-83). In one season, he planted 3000 Austrian pines and countless Bhutan pines. To the north of the ridge is a collection of rhododendrons collected by Sir Arthur and planted in acid soil on the opposite side of paths to lime-loving plants and beech trees, to demonstrate his knowledge and understanding of local geology and soil conditions. The Warren on the top of Court Hill, formerly retained as a sheep walk with wide views in all directions, now contains forestry plantations and scrub-growth from c 1970s.

Collinson in 1791 referred to the slopes being 'wildly scar[r]ed with craggy rocks, intermixed with fine herbage' and illustrations of the early C19 show them as bare downland, although possibly with some woodland planting immediately north of the garden (Pearson Assocs 1992). Under the direction of Mary Stewart, the second wife of the Rev Sir Abraham Elton V, the hillside was first planted in 1823-42 when the complex series of drives and paths was laid out. At the western end of the ridge is the site of Wake's Tower, shown in the 1721 painting, which probably originated as a watch tower guarding the Bristol Channel. In c 1738 the Elton family replaced it with a summerhouse, which had 'gone to ruin' by the time it was visited by Collinson in 1791. The site of the tower remained a key viewing point in Lady Mary's design. Further paths continued to be developed in the mid C19. After the construction of St Andrew's church in 1860, the Eltons walked to church along the Church Path, which was lined with Arbutus. A number of the paths, originally surfaced with stone chippings, were covered in turf in the second half of the C19 by Sir Arthur Hallam Elton to make them into rides for his children's ponies. A series of photographs by W H Barton in the Elton Collection records Lady Mary's walks in the 1880s and postcards from the turn of the century showing views across Clevedon to Court Hill are captioned 'Little Switzerland', a testament to the picturesque effect achieved by the Eltons.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden, 120m east of the house, was developed with housing in the mid to late C20 and is outside the site here registered. Glasshouses in the slip garden north of the main garden owned by the National Trust were demolished in the 1990s.

REFERENCES

J Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* iii, (1791), pp 166-9 J D Sedding, *Garden Craft Old and New* (1892), p 141 Country Life, 6 (1899), pp 692-5; 117 (1955), pp 1672-5; 118 (1955), pp 16-19 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol* (1958), p 186 Clevedon Court, guidebook, (National Trust [Sir Arthur and Lady Margaret Elton] 1968) G S Thomas, *Gardens of the National Trust* (1979), pp 119-20 J Sales, *West Country Gardens* (1981), pp 140-3 Court Wood, Clevedon: *Historic Survey and Restoration Plan*, (Nicholas Pearson Associates 1992) M Elton, *Annals of the Elton Family* (1994)

Maps Tithe map for Clevedon parish, 1839 (Somerset Record Office)

OS Surveyor's drawing, 1810 (British Library) OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1887, published 1888 2nd edition published 1904

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CLEVEDON COURT

Illustrations Anon, Oil painting, 1721 (Clevedon Court) J Skinner, Sketch of the south front, 1819 (British Library) M Elton, South & West Front of Clevedon Court, 1824 (Clevedon Court)

Archival items Survey of the Manor of Clevedon, 1629 (Somerset Record Office) W H Barton, photographs, c 1880 (Clevedon Court)

Description written: November 2002 Register Inspector: DAL Edited: September 2003

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.