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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Garden at Kingcombe

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

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Name:	Garden at Kingcombe
County:	Gloucestershire
District:	Cotswold (District Authority)
Parish:	Chipping Campden
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.052242 Longitude: -1.7998450 National Grid Reference: SP1382239336 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1455869 Date first listed: 04-Oct-2018 Statutory Address 1: Kingcomb Lane, Kingcombe, Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire, GL55 6UN

Historique de la conservation

The garden at Kingcombe was created on former agricultural land which was unoccupied until the construction of Kingcombe House in the mid-1920s. The house, designed by Leslie Mansfield for Gordon Russell, was completed in 1926, and Russell took up residence in May of that year. (Sir) Gordon Russell (1892-1980) was an eminent designer and craftsman who was born in London. His father purchased the Lygon Arms Hotel in Broadway in 1904, where the family came into contact with the Arts and Crafts movement designers and makers of the Guild of Handicraft, the community of craftspeople brought to Chipping Campden from the East end of London by C R Ashbee in 1902. Gordon served as an officer in the First World War, and was awarded the Military Cross in 1918. On his return home, he set up as a furniture maker and designer in the Arts and Crafts tradition, becoming highly successful and beginning a company which continued into the C21. During the Second World War, Russell was instrumental in developing utility furniture, becoming chairman of the Utility Furniture Design Panel. After the war, he was appointed Director of the Council of Industrial Design (later the Design Council), and first chair of the Crafts Council. He wrote extensively on furniture and design and was awarded a knighthood in 1955 for services to design.

Russell, writing in his autobiography in 1967 (see SOURCES), stated that 'We had not thought of the house and garden together, which seems very odd to me now.' He began to work on the area around the house, and used the natural topography to guide the overall layout: 'As the ground was flat in one direction and sloped in another it was natural to terrace it and gradually some sort of order appeared...'. Dry stone walls, using stone quarried locally at Campden, Broadway and Snowhill, were constructed to retain the terraces. Russell's taste was influenced by the cottage garden planting of Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson, and he was struck by reading about the Italianate taste which was influencing English Arts and Crafts gardens: 'To link house, garden and landscape into one harmonious whole and to plan the garden as a series of outdoor rooms was a new idea which appealed to me.' The site, at the top of a slope with an abundant water supply from a number of springs, lent itself to the creation of an Italian-inspired garden at Kingcombe.

Russell's reading included works on garden design by Geoffrey Jellicoe, whom he had previously met at a party, resulting in an invitation to Kingcombe to discuss the garden. Jellicoe first visited in September 1931, tentatively approving Gordon

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
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Russell's emerging plan for the terraced garden design. Jellicoe designed the feature which would unite and terminate the terraces at the western end, the Italian Steps: a flight of broad and shallow stone steps enclosed by walls and hedging, with water running through a series of stone troughs on either side, from the top to the bottom of the terraces, opening up a walk from the level of the lane to the lawn below. A long lawn was laid, leading to the garden front of the house, running parallel to the road, with an herbaceous border alongside. This was overlooked by a high terrace, for which Russell carved a series of stone benches where long views could be taken in over the garden and out into the countryside towards Chipping Campden. Two parallel yew hedges created a long narrow Italianate garden with a strict axial path. To the west of the Italian steps, a flat-roofed summer house included a carved green man from whose mouth issued the spring water which fed the troughs alongside the steps, and to the west again, Jellicoe urged Gordon Russell to plant a stand of beech trees as a shelter belt at the corner of the plot, to act as a windbreak and mask the junction of Dyer's Lane and Kingcomb Lane. The eventual plan for the garden which Jellicoe and his partner Russell Page devised as a result of their work at the site with Gordon Russell was put together in 1936; it carefully related the gardens to their site and rooted the design in the landscape. A plan preserved in the archives of the Sir Gordon Russell Museum is neither signed nor dated, but shows the house as it was before the 1937 extensions, and is therefore closely dateable; it includes the terraced gardens already designed by Jellicoe, together with the rose garden and flower garden alongside the house; and a second water garden which was also to his design, running southwards from the end of the ancillary range, beginning with a geometric, zig-zag channel crossed by bridges, and a chain of irregular pools running out into the meadow. At right angles, the water would run into a long, almost straight canal hugging the lower terrace along its length. This plan appears to have been only partly executed, with the design of the zig-zag pools later modified and softened, though the canal was built as planned.

The garden was not completed before the outbreak of war, and during the period 1939-1945, the lawns and flower beds were given over to the growing of vegetables and houses for poultry, though the landscaping was maintained as far as possible. After 1945, the garden was restored and extended by Gordon Russell, probably in three main phases. The eastern end of the formal canal was disguised by a grotto-tunnel into which the water disappeared, with a children's castle built in stone on top. Below this, creating a final terrace, Russell built, with his own hands, a ten-foot high retaining wall running 110 feet along below the canal, to create a new, grassy terrace at the foot of the existing garden; it was completed in 1950. A series of concrete pools overhung by tufa rocks was created at the eastern end of the garden, in place of Jellicoe's planned zig-zag ponds. A small, enclosed 'Japanese' garden was made in the courtyard between the three wings of the house and the road, with a formal, square pool with water lilies and paved surround. As a designer and craftsman, Gordon Russell made a wealth of carved features around the garden, including stone lintels and benches, all carved to his own designs, and made to suit their spaces. Russell carved his own bespectacled portrait head as a conduit to sit just under the house; his grandchildren were regularly sent to collect a jug of spring water from his mouth for the dinner table. The conduit fed the pools to the north-east of the garden.

Russell became interested in the plastic qualities of concrete in the post-war years, leading to further additions to the gardens, made in cast concrete using stone dust to match the colour of the limestone used for the existing features. The yew walk was softened by the addition of cast concrete planters in a variety of shapes, moulded using different methods of shuttering, including wattle, basketry and railway sleepers, creating a less formal, more meandering route through the space. The most striking addition was an arcade of thirteen parabolic concrete arches on slender piers, set against the terrace of the cherry walk above the canal; Russell was working on this feature in 1967. The retaining wall of the terrace between the piers was embellished by hundreds of glass wine bottles claimed from the Lygon Arms, set end-on into a matrix of concrete. Concrete was also used for the piers of a pergola added in 1971 at the end of the terrace overlooking the canal. Russell's 1967 development plan for the garden concentrates on the planting, using the mature deciduous trees in the meadow below the terraces to frame views, and simplifying the planting closer to the house.

Sir Gordon Russell and his wife, Toni, lived at Kingcombe for the remainder of their lives. Subsequent owners have made very little in the way of alteration, though the summer house has lost its roof, and the green man carving has been moved to its interior. A new vegetable plot has been set up to the south west of the Italian steps, and a new opening created from Kingcomb Lane into a yard in a clearing in the beeches to the south-west of the upper terraces. A new main entrance and approach to

the house was added in the early C21, creating a wider opening to the north-east of the house and bringing a new driveway following the upper contour towards the north-eastern end of the building.

Details

An Arts and Crafts influenced garden for a smaller country house, designed initially by Geoffrey Jellicoe and Russell Page for and with (Sir) Gordon Russell, circa 1927-1936, with later additions and alterations by Sir Gordon Russell, from the 1940s to the 1970s.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Kingcombe lies at the lower edge of Dover's Hill, site of the Cotswold Olympicks. The site, which is on falling ground, is bounded to the north-west by Kingcomb Lane, and to the south-west by Dyer's Lane. The garden is roughly rectangular, with a meadow shelving away further to the south-east. The area of the designed landscape is approximately 1.3ha. The formal gardens to the south-west and south of the house lie on the upper four terraces; beyond is a meadow with some specimen trees. Views from the gardens look north-west up to the summit of Dover's Hill, and to the south and south-west, distant views of Chipping Campden form the backdrop to the meadow and its trees.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance is from Kingcomb Lane, a short distance to the north-east of the house; the drive runs along the upper terrace to terminate in a parking area just east of the house. A modest pedestrian access historically gave access to the house from Kingcomb Lane. A further vehicular entrance has been created off Kingcomb Lane to the south-west of the house, beyond the formal garden, giving access to a yard adjacent to the road.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The garden surrounds Kingcombe, a Grade II- listed house built in 1924 for Sir Gordon Russell and his wife Toni, designed by Leslie Mansfield, in a Cotswold Arts and Crafts style. The L-shaped house with a detached linear ancillary range was extended in several further phases in the mid-C20. The house is built on a platform at the highest point of the plot, with two wings built into the rising ground between it and Kingcomb Lane. The gardens surround the house, with features linking house and garden.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens fall into several areas, the principal section lying to the west and south of the house. This terraced garden, divided into a series of 'rooms' in the Arts and Crafts tradition, extends from the garden front of the house to the Italian Steps to the west: a flight of broad and shallow stone steps enclosed by walls and hedging, with water running through a series of stone troughs on either side, from the top to the bottom of the terraces. Alongside the house at the upper level is a paved kitchen court, with a recessed shelter carried on stone piers, incorporating a concrete lintel cast against wattles. Steps rise over the structure to a high, narrow terrace, running the length of the terraces to meet the top of the Italian Steps. From the slate walk there are views over the garden and the meadow beyond to the town of Chipping Campden in the distance. The terrace immediately overlooks a long lawn with an herbaceous border running its length along the northern side. This includes, at the south-western end, an enormous yew topiary peacock shown on Gordon Russell's garden plan of 1967. The next, narrow, terrace is bounded on all sides by very high yew hedging, the earlier formal beds replaced with concrete planters creating a softer effect and more meandering walk. An opening in the hedge gives onto the rose garden, set in the re-entrant angle between the wings of the house, the central lawn with hedging to the south and a rose border to the other sides. To the south of the hedged garden, the next terrace houses the cherry walk, with a pergola with concrete piers added in 1971 at its western end, accessed from the Italian Steps via an opening with an elaborately-carved lintel incorporating the dates 1921 and 1971, and Gordon and Toni Russell's initials. Under the arch are carved Geoffrey Jellicoe's initials and the date 1971, indicating that he was still visiting the site this late in its development. The cherry walk incorporates, as the edge of its terrace, the top of the concrete arcade above the canal, which includes polygonal concrete pads on each of which sits a terracotta pot reportedly designed by Gordon Russell. The arcade of thirteen parabolic concrete arches on slender piers is set against a retaining wall embellished by hundreds of glass wine bottles end-on into a matrix of concrete. This arcade, now painted white, reflects in the surface of the canal. At the western end of the canal terrace, a square, paved platform forms the terminus of the Italian Steps. At the eastern end, the canal disappears into the grotto-like base of a folly ruined castle, with concrete steps inside.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
Garden at Kingcombe

On a level with the canal lies a grassy terrace, the last in the drop; this is retained by a ten-foot high limestone wall, and has a short flight of steps winding down around its eastern end to the meadow below. At the opposite end, in line with the Italian Steps, a short flight of stone steps is let into the slope of the ground to continue the walk down the steps into the shelving meadow below the terraced garden, which occupies the remainder of the site; this incorporates a number of mature trees which were either planted or retained by Gordon Russell to extend views of the garden. They provide natural framing to east and west and concentrate views into the landscape beyond. At the eastern side of the garden, extending from the spring under the house, is a chain of irregular concrete pools overhung by tufa rocks. This drops down through the slope of the garden, forming a natural boundary to the designed landscape.

The western side of the Italian Steps is bounded by high, limestone walls. A wide entrance with a carved lintel gives access through a good timber plank door into the present yard amongst the beech shelter belt in the north-western corner of the garden, at the junction of Dyer's Lane and Kingcomb Lane. Off the next level of the steps are the walls of the former summer house, dating from before 1937, which has lost its roof and been converted for use as outdoor entertainment space. The carved green man is now installed in the interior of this space. The southern wall has been modified and a large quatrefoil opening to almost full-height offers views over the garden and landscape beyond. Below this is a recent vegetable garden.

A small 'Japanese' courtyard garden lies between three wings of the house and Kingcomb Lane to the north, with a formal, square pool and slightly overhanging paved surround.

Summary

An Arts and Crafts influenced garden for a smaller country house, designed initially by Geoffrey Jellicoe and Russell Page for and with (Sir) Gordon Russell, circa 1927-1936, with later additions and alterations by Sir Gordon Russell, from the 1940s to the 1970s.

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

The garden at Kingcombe, designed initially by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe and Russell Page for and with Sir Gordon Russell, circa 1927-1936, with later additions and alterations by Sir Gordon Russell, from the 1940s to the 1970s, is included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest at Grade II, for the following principal reasons:

* Designer: the earlier phase of the garden was designed by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe and Russell Page, whose work is well represented on the Register; the later phases were by Sir Gordon Russell, also a renowned designer and maker, who also documented the development of the garden in his autobiography;

* Design interest: it is a significant work that embodies fundamental Arts and Crafts ideas about garden design, incorporating Italian influences in the terraced garden designed by Jellicoe; the later developments by Sir Gordon Russell enhance the earlier work, and are redolent of his character, interests and work as a maker;

* Lack of alteration: there has been almost no alteration to the terraced garden, and the post-war development of the garden by Sir Gordon Russell is also very little altered since he completed it in the 1970s; * Rarity: Kingcombe is an increasingly rare survival of an Arts and Crafts garden laid out in the 1930s, in this area where the movement was so important and influential;

* Group value: it has strong group value with the Grade II listed house, in Arts and Crafts style, designed by Leslie Mansfield for Sir Gordon Russell and built in 1924, to enhance which the garden was made.

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Other

Archive photographs and plans, archive of the Sir Gordon Russell Design Museum, Broadway, with thanks.