

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

THE COURTS, HOLT

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Name:	THE COURTS, HOLT
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Holt
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.354632 Longitude: -2.2017161 National Grid Reference: ST8605061748 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001230 Date first listed: 01-Sep-1987

Details

An early C20 formal garden, surrounding a house of c 1720, first laid out in 1900-10 by the architect Sir George Hastings and further completed by Lady Cecilie Goff between 1921 and 1943, and her daughter Moyra Goff in the mid and late C20.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Courts, built c 1720 and incorporating earlier fabric, was the home of a wealthy local clothier from nearby Bradford-on-Avon, which at the time was one of the most prosperous wool towns in the area. The Courts also served as the village law court where cloth weavers could settle their disputes. It was bought by John Davis c 1797 and it remained in his family until 1900. He probably built the cloth mill next to the house, which, following the decline in the wool trade, was demolished by his grandson c 1888. During the late C19 the house had various tenants.

In 1900 The Courts was bought by the architect Sir George Hastings, who altered the house and laid out the garden, partly covering the site of the former mill. He used the existing stream to create a water garden with various ponds and canals and in 1909 built a Georgian-style conservatory. Hastings also introduced a collection of garden ornaments brought from Ranelagh House in Barnes, London. In 1910 The Courts was bought by the Misses Barclay and Trim, and in 1921 by Major T C E and Lady Cecilie Goff. The latter was a keen gardener, strongly influenced by Gertrude Jekyll. At The Courts, Lady Cecilie created various 'garden rooms' surrounded by clipped yews and box hedges, which in style and layout are similar to the contemporary gardens at Hidcote in Gloucestershire (qv) and Great Dixter in East Sussex (qv).

The Courts has been in the ownership of the National Trust since 1943. Major Goff's daughter, Moyra Goff, remained the life tenant until her death in 1990.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Courts, a site of 2.8ha, lies in the centre of the village of Holt, which is situated between Bradford-on-Avon and Melksham. To the north-west the garden is bounded by a stone wall which runs along the full length of The Walk. To the north-east runs a private road, lined with mature lime trees, and to the south-east the site is bounded by farmland. Along the far south-west boundary, which is lined by mature lime trees and parkland fencing, runs Bradford Road with the village green adjacent. To the south of the site stand the vicarage, St Katharine's Church, and two private dwellings.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to The Courts is a pedestrian entrance which lies in the far north corner of the site along The Walk. A cast-iron gate, flanked by stone gate piers, opens to an avenue of pleached lime trees leading to the north-east front of the house. During the C18, this entrance marked the start of a carriage drive leading to a forecourt to the north-east side of the house where the front lawn lies.

A second entrance, for cars, is situated c 5m further to the south-west along The Walk and leads to the north-west side of the house. The site can also be entered from Bradford Road, through a field gate contemporary with the fencing along this boundary, giving access to the Arboretum.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The two-storey house (listed grade II*) stands in the north corner of the site. The north-east front has a central door with five windows which overlook the lawn laid out in front of it. The narrow east facade was formerly attached to the mill, demolished by 1888, which stood on this side. The south facade is irregular and has a loggia resting on Ionic columns in the far south corner. The latter was added by Sir George Hastings in the early C20 and overlooks the garden. At the back of the house, to the north-west, stands the Gardener's Cottage and various outbuildings, with the conservatory added by Sir George Hastings in 1909 attached to the south-east end.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The pleasure grounds which surround the house form an L-shaped ground plan and are divided into various 'garden-rooms', screened by hedges and intersected by paths. The stones used for the paths and terraces throughout the garden were brought by Lady Cecilie Goff from the jail at Devizes when this was demolished in the 1920s.

To the north-east of the house lies a lawn with, in the far north-east corner, a fernery with a small pond which leads to the Pillar Garden. This square-shaped area is laid out as a lawn with eight stone pillars in the centre. These allegedly used to have chains hung between them for the drying of cloth produced at the mill (guidebook 1999). In the centre stands a decorative stone ornament. The lawn is surrounded by herbaceous borders and is screened by clipped hedges to the north-west. To the south runs a small canal which feeds the two ponds further to the east. These are supplied with water from the stream that runs underneath the village of Holt, which was used to power the mill formerly attached to the house. The first pond, called the Lily Pond, is rectangular and surrounded by a grass walk. To its north lies a border with trees and shrubs which runs along the northern boundary of the site. The border is screened by mature lime trees beyond it. A small cascade from the Lily Pond leads to the adjacent informal pond, called the Lower Pond, through which the dye and waste from the mill used to flow. The pond has a stone surround installed in 1994, which replaced the former wooden surround. The Pillar Garden and the two ponds are bounded to the south-west by a walk that runs from the front lawn in a south-easterly direction, with an early C20 temple (listed grade II) installed by Sir George Hastings placed at the far end. The walk is lined by borders on both sides and screened by topiary yews, with the Arboretum lying beyond to the west of it.

To the south-west of the house lie two square lawns, intersected by a straight raised walk lined by eight iron posts and borders on both sides. The walk runs from the conservatory in a south-easterly direction, and on the steps at the north end stands a stone dog. Between the house and the conservatory is a small paved terrace with a formal pond fed by a small fountain placed against the wall. From the raised walk there are fine views to the south front of the house and to both lawns. In the centre of the first lawn, immediately south of the house, stands a column supporting the bust of a man (listed grade II). This probably dates from the C18 and was taken from Ranelagh House, Barnet in London, and placed here in the early C20 by Sir George Hastings. In the east corner of the lawn is a small knot garden. There are fine views from the south-east front of the house and from the loggia to the early C20 Venetian Gates (listed grade II) situated at the far end of the lawn. The decorative wrought-iron gates and steps lead to the Arboretum that stretches out below to the south-east. The second lawn, to the south-west, is bordered to the north-east by eight broad obelisks of clipped yews, and to the north-west by a row of pleached limes. In the west corner stands a grotto with a seat, mainly made from tufa and formerly with a thatched roof. Along the south-west side of the lawn central steps, flanked on either side by a border and yew topiary, lead to a raised terrace with a central sundial, screened by a circular-shaped yew hedge. A small gap in the hedge leads to a small sunken garden with a small pond, with beyond it an orchard with old apple cultivars and a line of espaliered pears. The orchard forms the transition between the formal garden and the Arboretum laid out beyond it, entered by a free-standing small decorative wrought-iron gate. The Arboretum, occupying

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the southern part of the site, was planted in 1952 by Moyra Goff and contains various fine tree specimens, such as a fern-leaved and copper beech, monkey puzzle, catalpa, acers, walnuts, and cherries.

KITCHEN GARDEN The rectangular-shaped kitchen garden, now (1999) laid out as an orchard, lies to the south-west of the house, along The Walk. The boundary wall on this side of the garden functions as a garden wall to the kitchen garden and is lined with brick. To the south-east the kitchen garden is screened by a c 2m high yew hedge. This area was at one time in use as a formally laid-out vegetable garden, intersected by paths.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 93 (1 January 1943), pp 26-9; (8 January 1943), pp 74-7; 185 (28 November 1991), pp 34-7; (9 January 1991), p 66; no 31 (30 July 1998), pp 46-9 Victoria History of the County of Wiltshire VII, (1953), p 9 Gardeners' Chronicle, (18 April 1964), pp 361-2 M Allan, Fisons Guide (1970), pp 86-7 N Pevsner and B Cherry, The Buildings of England: Wiltshire (2nd edn 1975), p 272 G S Thomas, Gardens of the National Trust (1979), pp 126-7 J Sales, West Country Gardens (1981), pp 204-07 The Courts, Holt, guide leaflet, (National Trust 4th edn 1999)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1926 edition

Archival items Photographs of the garden, 1930s-40s (National Trust collection)

Description written: November 1999 Amended: December 1999 Register Inspector: FDM Edited: April 2005

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.