

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

POWDERHAM CASTLE

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Name: POWDERHAM CASTLE

County: Devon

District: Teignbridge (District Authority)

Parish: Kenton

County: Devon

District: Teignbridge (District Authority)

Parish: Powderham

County: Devon

District: Teignbridge (District Authority)

Parish: Starcross

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.645786
Longitude: -3.4661779
National Grid Reference: SX 96433 83926
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000698
Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

Details

Mid C19 formal terraced gardens by Charles Fowler and early C19 pleasure grounds and picturesque improvements, set in a deer park landscaped in the mid and late C18.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

At the Conquest Powderham was held by William de Hou, but later reverted to the de Bohuns, earls of Hereford and Essex. Lady Margaret de Bohun married Hugh Courtenay, later second Earl of Devon, in 1325, bringing Powderham to that family. The Courtenays were already a significant family, having acquired extensive estates in Devon through marriage with Hawise, Lady of Okehampton, in the C12. The present Castle was established, possibly on the site of an earlier structure, by Sir Philip Courtenay, sixth son of the second Earl and Lady Margaret, c 1391. Completed c 1420, the Castle stood adjacent to a creek leading from the Exe estuary, known as the Haven, which were used in its defences. John Leland, writing in the 1540s, described the Castle as having 'a Barbicon or Bulwark to bete the Haven' (Chandler 1993). There is little documentary evidence relating to the C15, C16 or C17 landscape. Sir William Courtenay (1709-62), third baronet, was created first Viscount Courtenay in 1762 and was responsible for the initial remodelling of the Castle and grounds in the mid C18. This was continued by the second

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Viscount (1742-88), who built the Belvedere west of the Castle in 1771-4, and created belts and clumps in the park to frame vistas within and beyond the estate, as shown on an estate survey of 1787. Thomas Gray prepared a plan of the New River in the late C18, and may have been responsible for draining marshes and extending the park south of the Castle, and remodelling the pleasure grounds (private collection). The Rev Swete, visiting in 1798, noted the picturesque qualities of the landscape, which were reflected in his series of watercolours, and others by W M Craig, c 1800. Estate accounts show payments to local and London nurserymen in the late C18 and early C19, but in 1810 scandal forced the third Viscount into exile, and Powderham entered a period of stagnation. The Tithe maps of 1839 and 1840 suggest that the landscape had changed little since c 1800, and J C Loudon visiting in 1842 noted the neglect into which the grounds had fallen following the death of the third Viscount and ninth Earl in Paris in 1835. From 1836 Charles Fowler altered the Castle for the tenth Earl, creating a new entrance and forecourt to the west and formal terraced gardens to the east, partly developing plans produced by William Sawrey Gilpin c 1837 (Piebenga 1994). The late C19 OS maps show little change from the 1787 estate plan, and in turn there have been few changes of significance in the C20. Powderham remains (1999) private property.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Powderham Castle is situated on the west bank of the Exe estuary, 0.5km east of the village of Kenton, to the east of the A379, and c 1km south of the village of Powderham. The c 250ha site comprises some 10ha of formal and informal gardens, pleasure grounds and kitchen gardens, and c 240ha of parkland and woodland. The site is bounded to the east by a minor road and the mid C19 South Devon Railway which adjoins the Exe estuary. To the south and the north-west it is enclosed by stone walls fronting the A379, and to the south-east and south-west by agricultural land and domestic properties. To the west, the River Kenn and the associated mill stream mark the extent of the site, while to the north the site adjoins agricultural land on Exwell Hill, and a minor road running east from the A379 to Powderham village. The site slopes steeply up to the ridge of Powderham Hill c 250m north-west of the Castle. This extends north-west to the site boundary with wooded, south-west-facing slopes, while park and agricultural land to the north rise to Exwell Hill c 2km north-north-west of the Castle. The park north and east of the Castle is relatively level, while to the south-east and south it falls gently to the marshes and River Kenn, rising again to the boundary. There are wide views from the Castle, terrace gardens and Belvedere north, east and south-east across the park and River Exe to the east shore, Exmouth and the sea. From Powderham Old Plantation views south-west extend over agricultural land, C19 villas to the north of Kenton, and to woodland on the Mamhead estate (qv), c 3km south-west of the Castle.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is approached from the A379 to the south. A picturesque mid C19 lodge (listed grade II) stands immediately east of the entrance which is formed by double white-painted timber pale gates supported on simple tapered stone piers, flanked to east and west by single pedestrian gates. The tarmac drive extends c 300m north through an avenue of limes and oaks, crossing the late C18 New River on a late C18, red-brick, three-arched bridge (listed grade II). The drive continues c 130m north to the C18 red-brick stables (listed grade II*), converted into a dwelling in the mid C20 and set in late C20 gardens. The drive ascends c 100m north-east, partly on an early C19 ramped incline enclosed by stone walls terminating in massive octagonal stone piers with stepped pyramidal caps, to reach the forecourt designed in the 1830s by Charles Fowler (listed grade I). The forecourt is entered through a gatehouse placed centrally in the embattled west curtain wall, with low square towers at the north-west and south-west corners. To the north the forecourt is enclosed by the Steward's House and a further gatehouse leading north to the Powderham Drive, and to the south by an irregular service range. The Powderham or North Drive leads c 550m across the park to reach a white-painted timber gate with spear-headed finials supported by spear-headed timber gate posts. The drive opens onto a spacious green planted with Lucombe oaks, opposite a picturesque thatched C18 cottage (listed grade II). The early C19 north drive replaced an earlier approach which led south-west across the park from an entrance c 300m south-east of Powderham church, to the east side of the Castle (estate plan, 1723). Following advice from W S Gilpin (1762-1843), the new drive was formed through an avenue of Atlas cedars (lost 1990). A further drive approached the Castle from the west, entering the site at Arch Lodge, an early C19 thatched cottage orné (listed grade II) c 1.5km north-west of the Castle. In the C19 this drive, which survives in part as a track, was linked to carriage drives in Powderham New Plantation west of the A379 by an early or mid C19 arch, rebuilt c 1950.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING Powderham Castle (listed grade I) stands on a terrace above the former course of the River Kenn some 80m to the south, and above the deer park to the east. The present structure, built from granite and other stone with embattled parapets, late C18 and C19 gothic windows, and a roof line enlivened with turrets, incorporates elements of a fortified manor or small castle founded by Sir Philip Courtenay c 1390. Originally entered from the east through a walled courtyard and gatehouse, the east tower over the former entrance and a similar tower on the west facade were rebuilt in the C18. The medieval east forecourt was removed in the mid C18 when new rooms were added to the east and north-east of the medieval house. In 1795-6 James Wyatt added the Music Room north of the Library for the third Viscount. The Castle assumed its present form with the west entrance and forecourt and service quarters to the south as part of extensive alterations carried out by Charles Fowler for the tenth Earl c 1835.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Formal mid C19 terraced gardens lie to the east of the Castle, with informal pleasure grounds to the west and south-west, and a further detached pleasure ground, the American Garden, c 1km north-west. The east terrace is retained by rubble-stone embattled walls to the north, east and south with corner turrets to the north-east and south-east, and has a stone-flagged upper terrace to the west with wide stone steps descending to an upper lawn enclosed by the Castle. Stone steps flanked by tall octagonal stone piers are aligned on the east door, and lead to a central gravel walk. The walk is flanked by topiary dolphins in yew, and rectangular lawns with geometric panel rose beds and further topiary. Gravel perimeter walks to the north, east and south allow wide views across the park to the Exe, Exmouth and the sea. The terrace garden was formed in the 1830s, possibly as a result of advice from W S Gilpin, as part of Charles Fowler's remodelling of the Castle. The informal pleasure grounds south of the Castle comprise lawns with specimen trees and shrubs descending to a late C20 informal lake created on the original course of the River Kenn. West of the Castle, further informal pleasure grounds retain C18 and C19 specimen trees including a group of cork oaks, and a mid C20 tennis court. The pleasure grounds replaced an earlier formal garden, probably a kitchen garden, shown north of the stables on the 1787 estate plan and the Tithe map (1839). Further formal gardens to the north of the Castle (estate plan, 1723) were removed before 1787.

The American Garden c 1km north-west of the Castle is a pleasure ground with early and late C19, and C20 ornamental trees and shrubs, enclosed from Powderham Old Plantation by metal estate fencing. A carriage drive constructed c 1800 runs parallel to a serpentine pool formed from a mill stream feeding a saw mill immediately south-east of the American Garden. The drive enters the Garden from the east through early C19 wrought-iron gates with concentric circular motifs supported on circular stone-capped piers formerly surmounted by Coade stone statues dated 1808 (now removed to the Castle for security). To the west the drive passes out of the Garden through early or mid C18 wrought-iron gates with spear finials and matching side panels. Some 50m north-east of the serpentine pool, a gothic single-storey brick Tea House of c 1800 with an embattled parapet is built against the south-west-facing slope with a vista across the pool and adjoining farmland to Ringsdon Clump c 1.25km south-west. The Tea House has a projecting central half-octagon bay and a series of full-height gothic arched windows overlooking the Garden. The design of the American Garden as a secluded retreat within the wider landscape has been linked to the influence of William Beckford of Fonthill, Wiltshire (qv), a close associate of the third Viscount (Pearson Assocs 1995). The Garden has been extensively reclaimed and replanted since 1995. Powderham Old Plantation on the south-west-facing slopes of Powderham Hill is now (1998) a mixed plantation with a series of mown grass walks which survive from a late C18 circuit of walks and drives (estate plan, 1787).

PARK Lying to the east, north and north-west of the Castle, the park retains a deer herd and remains pasture with groups of predominantly deciduous trees. East of the Castle groups of trees, including Lucombe oaks, frame vistas to the Exe, while the road and railway on the eastern boundary are concealed by C19 banks and retaining walls. Some 500m north-west of the Castle the park on the north-east-facing slopes of Powderham Hill is divided into a series of pasture enclosures, while c 850m north-west of the Castle the late C18 Belvedere (listed grade II*) stands on the ridge. Built by the second Viscount in 1771-4 of rendered brick with gothic doors, windows and other decorative details in Portland stone, the Belvedere is triangular on plan with octagonal corner turrets and comprises two storeys with an embattled parapet, with higher corner turrets similarly embattled. Originally accommodating a first-floor ballroom with ornamental plasterwork, the structure was damaged by fire c 1945 and is now (1998) a roofless shell. From the Belvedere there are wide views north-west, through north, to south-east

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encompassing ornamental planting on Exwell Hill (c 800m north-west), the Exe and settlements on its east shore, and the estuary mouth c 3km south-east. The minor road on the north boundary of the park is largely obscured from the tower by the topography and ornamental planting on the lower slopes. The design of the Belvedere is said to be derived from Henry Flitcroft's triangular tower of 1752 at Shrub Hill, Virginia Water, Windsor (qv) (Cherry and Pevsner 1989). South of the Castle, the marsh adjacent to the late C18 New River and east of the Kenton Drive was separated from the park by a late C18 sunk fence (estate plan, 1787), possibly as part of a scheme by Thomas Gray (plan in Castle). It was incorporated into the park by the late C19 (OS 1st edition 1888).

KITCHEN GARDEN Some 530m north-west of the Castle, the kitchen garden stands at the foot of the south-facing slope of Powderham Hill, and is enclosed by stone-coped, buttressed red-brick walls c 3m high which incorporate bricks re-used from the earlier walled garden north of the Castle (D Presswell pers comm, 1998). The new kitchen garden was built to the designs of Charles Fowler in 1843-4 as part of a scheme to provide work for local labourers (Courtenay Archives). The garden is entered through arched doors in the south and west walls. Irregular on plan, tapering to the west corner, the garden retains mid C19 lean-to brick and timber glasshouses against the south face of the north-east wall. These retain their original winding gear for ventilation and cast-iron heating pipes. The walls of frames and further glasshouses also survive. These structures formed part of Fowler's mid C19 scheme for the kitchen garden. Brick sheds forming a root room, fruit room and boiler room behind the glasshouses have been converted in the late C20 into a dwelling. Wall-trained fruit trees survive on the north and east walls, with standard fruit trees forming an orchard at the west end of the garden. A mid C19 brick and tile two-storey gardener's house stands outside the garden, adjacent to its south-east corner. Today (1998) the kitchen garden is laid to grass as a children's play area, with enclosures for domestic animals, some of which incorporate the brickwork of former frames.

OTHER LAND North of the park and c 2km north-west of the Castle, Exwell Hill retains C19 ornamental planting which is significant in views from the Belvedere. Some 450m south-east of Exwell Hill and c 1.3km north-west of the Castle, the Round House (listed grade II), an C18 circular brick structure, said to be the remains of the Castle dovecote (Pearson Assocs 1992), extended in the C19 and converted into a house, acts as an eyecatcher. Further C19 ornamental planting at Discombes c 1km north-north-west of the Castle also features in views from the Belvedere.

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OS Surveyor's drawings, 2" to 1 mile, 1801-4 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1888, published 1890 2nd edition published 1906 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1888, published 1890 2nd edition revised 1903-4, published 1905

Illustrations F Towne, Powderham Castle from the west, 1774 (private collection) W M Craig, Powderham Castle and Park, 1796 (private collection) Rev J Swete, series of watercolour views of Powderham Castle and Park, 1795, (564M/F9, 61, 75), (Devon Record Office) Rev J Swete, series of watercolour views of Powderham Castle and Park, 1797, (564M/F16, 15, 39, 43, 51, 53, 65, 69), (Devon Record Office) Rev J Swete, series of watercolour views of Powderham Castle and Park, 1798, (564M/F15, 162, 166, 167, 172, 176), (Devon Record Office) W M Craig, two views of Powderham Park, 1800 (private collection) Lady Elizabeth Courtenay, two views of Powderham Park, 1879 (private collection)

Archival items Correspondence and other material relating to the work of Charles Fowler at Powderham Castle, mid C19 (Courtenay Archives)

The Devon Record Office holds an extensive collection of papers relating to Powderham Castle. These include: Devon Estate papers and accounts, early C18 to early C19 (1508M/Devon/Estate/Account Books); Devon Estate papers, including accounts and items relating to gardens, late C18 to mid C19 (1508M/Devon/Add Estate/E 3-22); Powderham Gardens and Plantations Accounts, July 1837 (1508M/Devon/Add/Manorial/M2/1); Accounts, including personal accounts of third Viscount with items relating to garden expenditure at Powderham, accounts with London nurserymen, florists, Exeter nurserymen, 1788(1806 (1508M/London/Accounts 15); Estate and personal accounts, including items relating to gardens, mid C19 (1508M/London/Family/Household and Personal/10; Estate/Powderham Castle, 3-17).

Description written: February 1999 Amended: May 1999; July 1999; May 2000 Register inspector: JML Edited: July 2000

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.