

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BLACKWELL

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

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Name: BLACKWELL

County: Cumbria

District: South Lakeland (District Authority)

Parish: Windermere

National park: LAKE DISTRICT

label.localisation: Latitude: 54.342918
Longitude: -2.9242759
National Grid Reference: SD 40010 94546
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001553
Date first listed: 08-Aug-2001

Details

Formal gardens surrounded by parkland, laid out to a design of 1900 by Thomas Mawson, accompanying a country house by Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Sir Edward Holt, a wealthy northern industrialist, commissioned the architect Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott (1865-1945) c 1898 to design a country house situated on the hillside above the east shore of Lake Windermere. Baillie Scott's house, which was designed as a country retreat for Sir Edward and his family, was built of local materials in the Vernacular Revival style, on a site overlooking the lake. The garden was laid out c 1900 by Thomas H Mawson (1861-1933), whose landscape design practice was in the nearby town of Windermere. Mawson laid out a formal terraced garden immediately below the house, with the accompanying parkland carefully planted with trees to frame certain dramatic views from the house, its approach, and the garden, both towards the lake to the north, west, and south-west, and towards the hills to the south-east.

Mawson's book *the Art and Craft of Garden Making* was published also in 1900 and various opinions he expressed are exemplified in the garden at Blackwell. In 1906 Baillie Scott published his own book, *Houses and Gardens Arts and Crafts Interiors*, and various opinions which he expressed in this work are manifested in the siting of Blackwell house within its park and garden.

Following the loss of his son during the First World War, Sir Edward and his family gradually visited Blackwell less and less, until his own death in 1931. The house became a school during the Second World War and continued as such until the 1970s. During the 1960s the Holt family sold the property and after the closure of the school, the ownership of the grounds became divided. The house has recently been refurbished and has opened as a public art gallery (2001).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Blackwell lies on a hillside above the east shore of Lake Windermere, 2km south of the town of Bowness, in a rural setting. The c 9ha site is bounded to the east at the northern end

by the A5074, and to the south of this by a lane, the B5360, giving access to the A592 lakeside road to the south-west. This boundary is generally marked by a drystone wall. To the west and north the site is bounded by undulating pasture which falls away towards the lake to the west, and to the north. The site falls generally to the west and south, with its high point to the north-east of the house marked by a substantial clump of trees. Long views extend from house, garden, and park to the distant lake and mountains.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach enters the park off the A5074 c 200m north-east of the house, the entrance being set back from the road and marked by a pair of stone gate piers set between walls curving out to the roadside. Inside the gateway, to the south of the drive, stands a single-storey rendered lodge, with a pyramidal roof which sweeps down to cover a verandah around the building. From here the north drive leads west through the park for 100m, at which point it curves gently south, rising up the hillside, with long views, carefully framed by mature trees, opening westwards towards the lake. The house appears to rise up above the drive as the slope is ascended. Baillie Scott in *Houses and Gardens* (1906) specifically addresses the approach to a house from below, saying, 'It will be found that while the approach from a higher level suggests snugness and homely comfort in the house, in the approach from below these qualities are exchanged for dignity and impressiveness of effect'.

Some 50m north of the house the drive enters a long, narrow outer forecourt, laid to gravel. The outer forecourt is bounded to the north by iron fencing, to the west by a low stone terrace wall dividing it from the parkland below, to the east by a terraced grass slope rising up the hillside, and to the south by a further stone wall. At the centre of the southern wall stands a gateway, marked by a pair of tall stone gate piers, set with ball finials and supporting iron gates, giving access to the main forecourt. The almost square main forecourt is bounded by low stone walls, with, at the north-east corner, a mature horse chestnut set in a panel of lawn, and at the south-east corner a recent (2001) terrace to allow disabled access to the house. This terrace replaces a further panel of lawn on which formerly stood a mature sycamore (Baillie Scott 1906). The forecourt leads to the main entrance to the house at the centre of the north front, up a short flight of stone steps. Long views extend from both the outer and main forecourts to the west across Lake Windermere towards the mountains beyond, particularly the Old Man of Coniston, and also northwards along the northern half of the lake and its flanking mountains.

A further drive enters the site c 175m south-east of the House, off the B5360 lane leading south-west towards the lakeside. Again the entrance is set back from the lane, and is flanked by low stone piers with ball finials. West of the entrance and above it stands a two-storey, rendered south lodge which is attached to the former stables (now converted to domestic use) to the west. From here the east drive, lined by iron railings, sweeps north-west up the hillside, between the lawns of the lodge garden to the west and the park to the east. Some 30m east of the house the drive turns west, with a long view across the main forecourt and park beyond to the distant lake and the mountains. At this point a spur leads south to give access to the former stable block, and to the west of this spur the drive leads south into a new (2001) car park on the site of a former shrubbery (OS 1915) which was later occupied by a bungalow. The east drive enters the main forecourt on the north front via a pair of stone gate piers with ball finials, set in the east wall of the forecourt.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Blackwell (Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott 1898-1900, listed grade I) stands at the centre of the site. Faced with painted roughcast walls with stone dressings, it was erected in Vernacular Revival style for Sir Edward Holt as a country retreat. The entrance front is to the north, and the west and south fronts overlook the terraced gardens and park. A service wing occupies the east end of the building. Blackwell is considered to be Baillie Scott's finest surviving work in England.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The formal gardens, designed by Thomas Mawson, lie adjacent to the west and south of the house, with an area formerly laid to shrubbery with mature trees, now (2001) a landscaped car park, to the south-east of the house.

The garden door in the south front gives access from the great hall to the south terrace. The door opens onto a short flight of stone steps leading down to a broad stone-flagged path, beyond which lies a large rectangular lawn. At the west end of the path stands a small, early C20 stone sundial on a pedestal, possibly by Baillie Scott. The south terrace is bounded to the west by a stone retaining wall, and to the east by a grassed bank topped with a holly hedge screening the car park, formerly the site of the shrubbery which screened the stable block beyond (OS 1915). To the south the terrace falls away as a steep grass slope to

a stone retaining wall and beyond this to a path running the length of the terrace from east to west, both features being recent additions (2001). Beyond this is the park. The west wall of the south terrace is stepped down at its south end to reflect the slope of the lawn. From the south terrace views extend south across the park to distant hills and west towards the lake and the mountains beyond. The west edge of the south terrace also overlooks the west terrace below. A house, built in the late C20, stands close to the south-east corner of the south terrace, in an area which formerly linked the south terrace with the kitchen garden to the south-east.

The west terrace is entered from the south-west corner of the forecourt via the forecourt terrace. A short flight of stone steps leads down alongside the north front of the house to the narrow forecourt terrace running parallel to the west wall of the forecourt. The forecourt terrace, laid to gravel with a recent border along its east side (Kim Wilkie, 2001), is divided from the forecourt by the retaining wall which forms the west boundary of the forecourt. The terrace is bounded to north and west by low retaining walls overlooking the park and west terrace respectively. The steps from the forecourt continue down from the south end of the forecourt terrace to the main west terrace.

The west terrace, designed as a double tennis lawn, is laid to lawn and bounded to the north, west, and south by drystone retaining walls, supporting it above the park beyond. The centre of the north wall contains a projecting semicircular platform on which may originally have stood a seat. The east boundary of the west terrace is formed at the north end by the retaining wall with the forecourt terrace, to the south of this the sheer west front of the house, and to the south again, by the high drystone retaining wall of the south terrace above. A small room at the bottom of the west front opens onto the terrace lawn, possibly having been designed as a tennis pavilion.

Baillie Scott regarded the garden as an extension of the rooms of the house, 'to provide outdoor apartments for the use of the family in fine weather', as well as providing fruit and vegetables for the household (Houses and Gardens 1906). Mawson, in an article of 1908 entitled 'The Practice of Garden Design', recommended the use of formal terraces to complement the formal lines of a house and encouraged the designer to keep the plants subordinate (JRHS 1908). This was the case at Blackwell, where plants appear to have been subordinate to the imposing terraces, and the lawns which overlay them.

PARK The park surrounds the house and gardens. It is laid to pasture with many mature specimen trees, set singly and in clumps, and serves as a frame to views from the drive, house, and gardens. These trees appear to have been very carefully placed to ensure that views in certain directions are achieved. One clump in particular stands c 100m south of the house, breaking views straight out from the south front and directing the gaze to the south-east and south-west instead. A further clump standing south-west of the house, just below the west terrace, breaks the broad views west over the lake. Planting in the north section of the park and along the north boundary forms a frame to distant views from the north front of the house to the lake and mountains beyond.

KITCHEN GARDEN The rectangular kitchen garden lies 50m south-east of the house, to the south of the south lodge and attached former stable block which form part of the north boundary of the garden, with the east boundary formed by the lane. The south boundary backs onto a small farmyard, and the west boundary was formerly marked by a band of orchard trees (OS 1915).

REFERENCES

T H Mawson, *Art and Craft of Garden Making* (1900) H M Baillie Scott, *Houses and Gardens Arts and Crafts Interiors* (1906, reprinted 1995), pp 118-28, 232-5 J Roy *Horticult Soc* (1908), p 389 J D Kornwolf, M H Baillie Scott and the arts and crafts movement (1972), pp 184-9 D Haigh, *Baillie Scott: the artistic house* (1995), p 91 J Lovie, *Blackwell, Storrs, Cumbria, Historical study and site assessment* (1998) [copy on EH file]

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1919 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition revised 1915

Description written: June 2001 Amended: October 2001 Register Inspector: SR Edited: January 2002

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.