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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

TAPELEY PARK

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

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Name: TAPELEY PARK

County: Devon

District: North Devon (District Authority)

Parish: Instow

County: Devon

District: North Devon (District Authority)

Parish: Westleigh

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.041754
Longitude: -4.1833136
National Grid Reference: SS4703529202
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000704
Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

Details

An early C20 formal terraced garden designed by Sir John Belcher and mid C19 pleasure grounds and lake, set within parkland of C18 origin.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The estate at Tapeley is of medieval origin, having been owned by the de Tapplegh family, coming by the early C14 to the regionally powerful Giffard family. The present house and landscape were developed from the early C18 when Commodore William Cleveland acquired the estate from the Giffards in 1702. Cleveland, one of Queen Anne's naval commanders, is said to have observed an existing substantial farmhouse on the site from the Torridge estuary, which it dominates (CL 1988). William Cleveland's son, John, served as Secretary to the Admiralty from 1751 to 1763, and the C18 park appears to have been developed either at this time, or by his son, John Cleveland II, who was MP for Barnstaple in the late C18. No documentary evidence has been traced relating to the development of the C18 landscape, but a series of four paintings by William Tomkins (c 1770) shows park or pleasure grounds north-west of the house with gravel walks, scattered trees and a painted wooden seat to take advantage of fine views of Appledore, Instow, Bideford and the Torridge estuary. Augustus Cleveland inherited the property in the early C19 and was responsible for developing the lake and woodland garden in the valley north of the house in the 1840s (inscription on monument). Augustus Cleveland's son, Archibald, died aged twenty-one at Inkerman (1854), and in 1855 the estate passed to William Christie, who was married to the Cleveland heiress. In 1894 Lady Rosamond Christie commissioned Sir John Belcher to remodel the house and lay out formal terraced gardens to the south. Following the death of Augustus Christie in 1930 and Lady Rosamond in 1936, Tapeley passed to John Christie, who since 1920 also owned the Glyndebourne Estate, Sussex (qv). During the Second World War the house was used by Lady Astor to house children bombed-out in her Plymouth constituency,

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and from 1946 to 1955 it was used as a home for the Invalid Children's Aid Association. For two years the house was used as an hotel, before reverting to a private residence which it remains today (1998).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Tapeley is situated c 2.5km north-east of Bideford and some 0.5km north-east of the village of Westleigh, to the east of the former A39 coastal road linking Bideford and Barnstaple. The c 96ha site comprises some 9ha of formal and informal gardens and pleasure grounds, and a further 87ha of parkland, plantations and agricultural land. The coastal road and boundary plantations form the west boundary of the site, while to the south it is enclosed by banks planted with mature pines adjoining a minor lane leading from Westleigh to Treyhill. To the north and east traditional hedge banks adjoin agricultural land, while to the south-east a length of stone wall c 100m in length forms the boundary between the park and agricultural land. The house and west park occupy a broad, high ridge which falls steeply to the north and south; they enjoy wide views north-west, west and south-west across the Torridge estuary and out to sea, and across Bideford. The parkland to the south and east rises to the boundaries, with woodland in a stream valley to the south-west. In addition to significant westerly views, there are views north across agricultural land to the hamlet of Huish, south-west towards Westleigh church, and south to mature pines on the site boundary.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal approach is from the coastal road on the west boundary of the site, at a point c 950m west-south-west of the house. South-west of the entrance stands an Italianate-style lodge of c 1840 (listed grade II). A pair of rusticated stone gate piers decorated with carved swags and surmounted by stone sphinxes support wrought-iron gates with fleur-de-lys finials, and are flanked by stuccoed wing walls surmounted by stone balustrades (all listed grade II). The gateway and lodge are set back from the road behind gravelled quadrants, and the gate is flanked by a pair of cannons. The tarmac drive ascends south-east c 200m before turning east and continuing c 700m to reach the gravelled carriage court south of the house, and is flanked by mature trees and evergreen shrubs for some 500m, after which the south side of the drive is open, allowing views south and south-west across the park. Some 800m east of the lodge a service drive runs north and north-east from the main drive for c 130m below a stone ha-ha which forms the boundary of the lawn west of the house, to reach the early C19 brick stables (listed grade II). A further service drive approaches the kitchen garden from the south-east, entering the park by a C19 lodge on the minor lane forming the southern site boundary c 1km east of Westleigh. The mid C19 Tithe map shows a southern approach which joined the course of the present drive c 130m south-west of the house. Largely removed during the C20, this drive, which appears to have formed part of the mid or late C18 park, passed south and south-east, crossing an C18 stone viaduct (listed grade II) to reach South Lodge c 400m south of the house, where a stone lodge cottage and gate remain.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Tapeley Park (listed grade II*) is of early C18 origin and probably represents the rebuilding of an earlier house purchased by William Cleveland in 1702. C18 paintings by William Tomkins show the house as a seven-bay pale stuccoed villa with its entrance to the west. Additions including the dining room were made on the east side of the house by John Cleveland II in the late C18, and further substantial alterations were made for William Christie in the mid C19. These included casing the house in red brick and applying stone pilasters (Cherry and Pevsner 1989). The house assumed its present form between 1898 and 1916 when Sir John Belcher remodelled it in a loosely Queen Anne style, moving the entrance to the south front and adding loggias to the west and east facades. The house comprises three storeys lit by sash windows, with a hipped slate roof concealed behind a brick parapet.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The formal and informal gardens lie to the north, east and south of the house, with a large lawn to the west which is separated from the park by a stone ha-ha, below which runs the service drive. Some 15m north-east of the house the C18 brick dairy (listed grade II), possibly constructed as an orangery, is a two-storey brick building under a hipped slate roof with a central carriageway leading north to a service court. South of the dairy a lawn c 30m wide extends below the east facade, with a deep herbaceous border backed by a west-facing planted wall along its east side. Above this wall a bank is planted with mixed shrubs and trees, through which a series of walks lead south-east into the shrubbery in which the late C18 icehouse (listed grade II) is situated c 100m east-south-east of the house.

The late C18 or early C19 Shell House (listed grade II) stands c 150m east of the house at the eastern end of the shrubbery garden. An unusual structure of circular plan and built from rubble stone with a monopitch slate roof, two gothic-arched doors

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and two small diamond-shaped windows, the interior is lined with calcified limestone and shells. The building retains limited views south and south-west over falling ground to the park. Some 30m below the Shell House a semicircular stone-walled niche appears to have been built as a seat with views west down the valley. A gravel walk flanked to the south by mature pines extends west from the Shell House c 50m to a circular beech hedge-enclosed area with random stone paving and narrow semicircular beds. The circular enclosure terminates a long flight of stone steps, constructed c 1918, which descend c 50m to the formal terraces south of the house and are articulated by landings.

Belcher's terraced garden of 1894 to 1916 comprises three deep terraces descending from the carriage court south of the house, linked by axial brick steps (all listed grade II) aligned on the porch. Entered from the carriage court through low wrought-iron gates between piers surmounted by low obelisks, brick steps descend to the first terrace which is largely laid to lawn, with a south-facing rockery border below the stone and brick-coped retaining wall to the north and a fuchsia hedge to the south. At the east end of the terrace the early C20 Tool House (listed grade II) by Orphoot is constructed in stone rubble and brick with a Dutch gable, below which is a seat recess. Further brick steps flanked at the bottom by Irish yews descend to the second terrace planted with a south-facing mixed border. West of the second terrace an early C20 tunnel of ilex oak descends to an intermediate brick-paved terrace on which stands The Toot (listed grade II), an early C20 summerhouse flanked by Irish yews to the west of the third terrace. This small, rectangular, rubble-stone building under an ogee hipped slate roof with ball finial has a tripartite open front with a central arch supported on columns, while the brick-floored interior has a timber bench seat and a window in the west wall allowing a view west down a wooded valley. The third terrace is enclosed to east and south by clipped beech hedges and is largely laid to lawn with perimeter mixed borders. A centrally placed early C20 stone baluster sundial (listed grade II), a pair of monolithic granite columns carved with entwined dragons (listed grade II) c 5m east of The Toot and a symmetrical arrangement of Chusan palms survive from an elaborate early C20 formal scheme. Wrought-iron gates hung from tall, square, rubble-stone piers with ball finials (listed grade II) are axially placed on the south boundary and allow views into the park beyond. The gates are flanked by a series of ten low yew topiary 'urns', while at the east end of the terrace a semicircular pool contains a lead urn on a stone pedestal (removed 1998). Behind the pool axially placed brick steps ascend to an arched gateway containing a wrought-iron gate, which leads to a small early C20 brick and timber glasshouse set into the bank at the west end of the shrubbery garden. West of the formal terraces the Wild Garden is an area of mature trees and evergreen shrubs falling south towards a stream, which has been developed in the late C20 as a children's play area. Beyond this lies the late C20 Agro-Forest Garden, developed using permaculture techniques.

In a valley c 100m north of the house lie pleasure grounds laid out in the mid C19. A gravel path descends from the north-east corner of the west lawn through mature deciduous trees underplanted with evergreen shrubbery and ornamental subjects to reach the lake c 200m north of the house. Secondary walks or carriage drives run east and west along the valley through woodland, gradually descending to meet further drives at the same level as the lake, creating a circuit. A sluice feeds a pool east of the lake, which in turn feeds the lake from which it is separated by a dam carrying a drive to the north bank. On the north bank c 250m north of the house, a mid C19 statue commemorates the creation of the lake and pleasure ground, and the death of Archibald Cleveland. The north and south banks are planted with mature Thuja and other specimen trees and evergreen shrubs. PARK Lying to the east, south and west of the house, the park occupies undulating land which rises to ridges to the south and west, with a wooded valley falling south-west from the house where the park merges with mature pines and woodland north of the drive. South-east and south of the house the park remains pasture with scattered trees which merge with woodland c 400m south-west of the house, while c 500m south of the house boundary planting, including groups of mature pines, stands on the skyline. Parkland west of the house remains pasture with mature and young trees, and is separated from the west lawn by a ha-ha and service drive, while to the north and west it falls steeply to Tapeley Wood. Some 500m west-north-west of the house a rubble-stone plinth with battered walls and projecting corner buttresses (listed grade II) supported a mid C19 granite obelisk built to commemorate Archibald Cleveland (destroyed by lightning in 1933). The corner buttresses retain stone cradles formerly supporting cannons. There are wide views north-west, west and south-west from the west park and the site of the obelisk.

KITCHEN GARDEN Some 150m south-east of the house, the kitchen garden is enclosed by C18 walls c 3m high, those to the north, south and west being of buttressed rubble stone with pantile coping, that to the east of brick with brick coping (listed grade

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II). An C18 brick and thatch tool shed (the Tool House, listed grade II) adjoins the garden at the north-east corner to which it is connected by a plank door, while an early C20 prefabricated glasshouse with curved concrete ribs rising from a brick base (listed grade II) stands against the north wall, with brick and concrete frames to the south. The garden remains (1998) in cultivation and is laid out with cruciform rolled gravel paths, kerbed beds and a central, circular, stone-edged dipping pool. Mature fruit trees survive, together with wall-trained fruits including a mature fig adjacent to the Tool House. A range of brick sheds and offices stand against the outer face of the north wall, and late C19 brick kennels and stable shelter (listed grade II) remain c 20m north-west of the kitchen garden. A further garden area south of the kitchen garden contains a late C20 swimming pool.

REFERENCES

Architectural Review 61, (1927), pp 210-13 B Jones, Follies and Grottoes (1974), p 315 Country Life, 182 (30 June 1988), pp 192-5 B Cherry and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Devon (1989), pp 778-9 Tapeley Park, Inspector's Report, (English Heritage 1990) S Pugsley (ed), Devon Gardens An Historical Survey (1994), p 108 T Gray, The Garden History of Devon An Illustrated Guide to Sources (1995), pp 216-17 Tapeley Park, guidebook, (Tapeley Park nd)

Maps Tithe map for Westleigh parish, c 1840 (Devon Record Office) OS Old Series 1" to 1 mile, published 1809

Illustrations W Tomkins, four views of Tapeley Park, c 1770 (private collection)

Archival items Christie family papers including accounts and building plans (B170 add/36), (North Devon Record Office)

Description written: December 1998 Amended: May 1999; July 1999 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.