

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

**ST CATHERINE'S COURT**

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Name:	ST CATHERINE'S COURT
District:	Bath and North East Somerset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	St. Catherine
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.429343 Longitude: -2.3192314 National Grid Reference: ST 77903 70086 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000568 Date first listed: 30-Apr-1987

## Details

C17 terraced gardens around a country house, overlooking a small landscape park.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the C13 the site belonged to the Benedictine monastery at Bath and there was a manor house in existence. In 1536 St Catherine's Court was leased to Thomas Llewellyn who retained the property after the Dissolution. The manors of St Catherine's and Kelston however were granted by Henry VIII to his tailor, John Malte, who paid £1311 and adopted Awdry, an illegitimate daughter of the king. By marriage the property passed to John Harrington whose son, also John, invented the water closet in 1596. In 1591 the Court was leased to John Blanchard of Marshfield whose family bought the property and created the terrace gardens in 1610. The estate eventually passed by marriage to the Parry family. By the C18 the estate was in decline and the house was divided, one half being occupied by a local farmer. In 1841 the Court was acquired by Colonel J H Strutt and restoration began. In 1912 Richard Strutt made additions to the house and redesigned the approach to the gardens. The property remains (2002) in private ownership.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** St Catherine's Court is located in an isolated and sharply incised valley 6km north of the village of Batheaston and 8km south of the village of Marshfield. The formal terrace gardens occupy an area of c 1ha around the house and overlook a landscape park of c 4ha. The north-east boundary of the site is formed by a very minor single-track road which winds through the valleys between Batheaston and Marshfield. Elsewhere the site adjoins woodland and agricultural land. The surrounding landform is of steep hillsides under pasture or woodland with a sparse scattering of houses and farms. The house is backed by hills to the north and west and there are extensive views to the east where a small valley makes an opening in the surrounding ridges. To the south-east the land drops away into the gently sloping park before rising again to a tree-lined ridge some 500m away.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The approach on the single-track public road from Batheaston to the south offers, on rounding a sharp bend, a sudden and dramatic view of St Catherine's Court on the hillside, silhouetted against the sky. North-east of the house is the principal pedestrian entrance, up a small flight of stone steps from the public road and through an ornamental iron gate set beneath an arch and between stone piers with flanking walls (early-mid C19, listed grade II). North-west of this entrance are South Lodge and North Lodge, two contiguous stone cottages, and the main vehicle entrance with iron

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gates and stone piers. A gravel drive enters adjacent to a stone tithe barn (C15, listed grade II\*) and turns south up an incline which passes below and east of St Catherine's church (C12 and C14, listed grade II\*). It then runs past the stone retaining wall and steps of the lower garden terrace (C17, listed grade II\*) and the entrance of a former chapel, to the front door of the house. The lower terrace wall has a niche with fountain head and basin.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** St Catherine's Court (listed grade I) is a many gabled, three-storey house which dates from the C16 with many later alterations, particularly from the C19, in the Tudor style. It is built of Cotswold stone with a stone roof. According to Pevsner (1958), the adjacent St Catherine's church was built or enlarged by Prior Cantlow of Bath in c 1490 and the Court may contain parts of a priory grange from this period, 'especially the masonry of the Hall'. He says the Court was 'enlarged and made more monumental in the C17' for William Blanchard who probably also laid out the terrace gardens. The house was altered in the C19 and 1900 by C E Bateman and a conservatory was added in the south-east corner in the early C20. The house has undergone extensive restoration in the last fifteen years by the present (2002) owner.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens at St Catherine's Court comprise a series of formal gardens on four main terraces rising c 80m up a hillside south-west of the house and a long, narrow topiary garden extending for c 100m to the south-east on a lower level, below the house terrace. All the formal terraces are arranged about the same north-west to south-east and north-east to south-west axes as the house, with all built elements arranged to conform to the lines of the main building. The 'main part' of the structure of the gardens is, according to Country Life (1906), 'Jacobean' in origin. The terraces are built around three sides of the house, with only the main, north-east front which lets onto the entrance drive and forecourt excluded. From the south-east corner of the house, a gap between a yew hedge and the house leads to the gardens and this point provides a wide view of the surrounding countryside to the east and the small park to the south-east. A balustraded terrace runs past a conservatory, built off the south-east corner of the house. A double flight of steps leads down to a gravel path which runs for c 100m between lawns and planted beds with topiary in a south-easterly direction. The steps are aligned to the central axis of this topiary garden and to a garden seat built into the south-east front of the house below the ballroom window. The formerly wooden balustrade of these steps has recently (2002) been replaced with stone balusters and capstones to match the terraces on the south-west and north-west terraces. At the south-west corner of the south-east terrace is the bottom of a set of turf steps with stepped stone balustrade, surmounted with stone balls, which lead up and south-west for c 30m to the upper formal gardens. Until recently this was a turf stairway with the proportions of a staircase but has recently been rationalised (c 2001), in the interests of ease of maintenance, into four much larger flats with grass slopes between.

Turning to the north-west, at right angles from the foot of the turf stair, is the rest of the lower or house terrace. A path leads c 50m along the south-west face of the house to the open north-west terrace garden which consists of four grass plats arranged symmetrically around a paved cross. At the head of a flight of stone steps which lead down and north-east to the gravelled drive, are two leylandii trees which have been tied together and are being trained into an ogee-shaped topiary arch. To the north-west, on the retaining wall, are two very large yews clipped into the shape of truncated pyramids. A short half-terrace built off the north-west corner of the quadrangle leads to the loggia, a stone summerhouse with stone half-columns, containing two family gravestones. In line with, and opposite, the steps down to the drive, a flight of stone steps leads south-west and upwards to a narrow terrace, c 6m wide, and via a further flight to the upper terrace garden between balustraded walls with urns and balls (late C17, listed grade II\*), backed by a clipped bay hedge between two large cylinders of clipped yews. The upper terrace garden is laid down to lawn with the lines of former straight axial paths visible in the turf. This area was formerly a bowling green (C17/C18) and, more recently, a croquet lawn (late C19/C20). To the south-east is a low terrace wall with stone scrollwork permitting views over the parkland to the south-east. The walls to the north-west are c 4m tall and finished in plain rubble. Those to the south-west are the same height with stone balustrades and open-grown yew trees with further flights of steps leading south-west into the higher, less formal, reaches of the garden. A compartment, 70m south-west of the house, above the upper terrace garden, contains a disused stone-built Victorian bathing pool in the north-west corner. The overflow from this spring-fed pool fills two informal ponds in the retaining grass bank beyond the south-east wall of the upper terrace. The grass bank contains a notable veteran sweet chestnut tree and other planting. A stream, ornamented with rockwork, links the two pools. One further flight of steps leads up to the orchard, an area of rough grass and fruit trees which commands extensive views over the gardens.

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
*ST CATHERINE'S COURT*

PARK A small late C19/early C20 park lies to the south-east of the house and the terrace gardens, occupying a shallow dip in the land and rising to a treed ridge in the south. It is of modest proportions and is used as pasture and contains a pair of mature beech trees and assorted pines and firs, giving an ornamental counterpoint to the countryside views to the east and providing the foreground of views of the house from the south-east approach.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 4 (24 December 1898), pp 792-6; 13 (18 April 1903), pp 494-6; 20 (1 December 1906), pp 738-48 R Blomfield, The Formal Garden in England (1901), p 115 Gardeners' Chronicle, i (1902), p 343; ii (1909), p 361 H I Triggs, Formal gardens in England and Scotland (1902), pp 13-14 R S Nichols, English Pleasure Gardens (1903), p 139 G Jekyll, Garden Ornament (1918), pp 52, 55, 72, 75, 282 Lady Rockley, Historic Gardens of England (1938), pp 112-13 N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol (1958), pp 253-4 N T Newton, Design on the Land (1971), p 188 S Harding and D Lambert, Parks and Gardens of Avon (1994), pp 17, 87-8

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1903/5

Description written: October 2002 Register Inspector: SH Edited: September 2003

## 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.