

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

AYOT HOUSE

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

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Name: AYOT HOUSE

County: Hertfordshire

District: North Hertfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Codicote

County: Hertfordshire

District: North Hertfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Kimpton

County: Hertfordshire

District: Welwyn Hatfield (District Authority)

Parish: Ayot St. Lawrence

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.840434
Longitude: -0.26228113
National Grid Reference: TL 19815 17186
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000905
Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

Details

A mid to late C18 landscape park surrounding a country house and pleasure grounds.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1723 Cornelius Lyde bought the manor of Ayot St Lawrence. By the mid C18 (Dury and Andrews, 1766) a modest park had been laid out west of the House, through which the public road led south-east from Kimpton to the parish church of Ayot St Lawrence, and pleasure grounds enclosed the House. The land east of the House seems to have been agricultural land at this time. The manor passed to Lyde's nephew and son-in-law, Lionel, who subsequently dismantled the medieval parish church of St Lawrence, leaving it as a picturesque ruin, employing Nicholas Revett, 1778-9, to build a new church, also dedicated to St Lawrence, in Neoclassical style on the boundary of the park, with the main front, designed as a landscape feature, facing Ayot House across the park. The church is one of the earliest monuments of the Greek Revival. It is probable that the landscape park west of the House was improved and extended at this time, the park and gardens being depicted in an estate plan of c 1800 (HRO), including the pleasure grounds, kitchen garden, and the new church flanked by trees directly visible from the south-west front of the House.

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After Lionel Lyde's death in 1791, the estate passed through the hands of his descendants during the C19, becoming the property of the Ames family, in whose hands it remained until the early C20. By the late C19 (OS 1884) the park had been extended substantially to the north-east of the House, as far as Brimstone Wood, with a drive giving access from a lodge at Codicote to the north-east.

In the late C20 the House and associated service buildings were divided into several separate dwellings, in which use they remain (1999).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Ayot House and park are situated on the north side of the village of Ayot St Lawrence, with the villages of Kimpton 2km to the north-west, Codicote 2km to the north-east and Wheathampstead 3km to the south-west. The c 70ha site is bounded to the south by the main lane leading generally from west to east through Ayot St Lawrence, to the west partly by Prior's Wood, and on the other sides largely by agricultural land. Part of the south boundary leading east from the old churchyard to the south entrance is bounded by a flint and brick wall. The ground is largely level, occupying a plateau above the valley of the River Mimram to the east, with the remains of the north-east drive leading down the hillside from the park into the river valley. The setting is rural, with views east from the east half of the park and north-east drive over the Mimram valley.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach enters off the village road, 175m south-east of the House, between brick gate piers standing adjacent to a two-storey brick lodge (mid C19, listed grade II) in Tudor style. From here the south drive curves north and west, flanked by informal lawns, to a carriage sweep, itself surrounded by informal lawns, on the south-east front of the House. From the carriage sweep glimpses of the church on the west side of the park are visible. The House is entered via a C19, Doric sandstone porch.

The north-east drive, now (1999) a farm track, enters off the Kimpton Road 1.5km north-east of the House. Here, to the south of the drive, the entrance is marked by a single-storey, rendered and white-painted lodge, and from this the drive rises up the hillside to run along the edge of the plateau past the south side of Brimstone Wood. Some 150m north-east of the House the drive turns south, to join the south drive 140m from the House. A further, north drive enters the park 450m north of the House at Abbotshay Farm, extending south through the park, passing to the east of the walled kitchen garden to join the north-east drive 150m north-east of the House.

In the mid C18 (Dury and Andrews, 1766) the House was approached directly from the south via two drives off the village road, one of which entered at the east end of the old churchyard, and the other to the east of this. Both these entrances had been lost by the end of the century. By c 1800 (estate plan) the House appears to have been approached and entered from the north. Bryant's map (1822) shows that by the early C19 the drive system had taken on its present form, the House being approached and entered from the south drive, and the east drive having been built.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Ayot House (early-mid C18 with early C19 extension, divided into multiple dwellings late C20, listed grade II*) stands towards the centre of the site, surrounded largely by pleasure grounds. The three-storey, red-brick house stands west of the stable block (early/mid C18, listed grade II), from which it is separated by a drive from the north corner of the forecourt giving access to the service yard between the House and stables. The white-painted brick, two-storey stable block bounds the west side of the service yard. The west front of the stable block has a pedimented portico with four thin, wooden octagonal columns, and the block is surmounted by a leaded clock tower with a cupola and weather vane. Adjacent to the north-east of the stable block stands a timber-framed barn (C17, listed grade II).

East of the stables and service yard stands the Manor House (late C17 remodelling of C16 timber frame, listed grade II), within its own compartmented grounds. This two-storey, red-brick house was once owned by Sir William Parr, brother of Catherine Parr, last Queen of Henry VIII. Adjacent to the north stands a small brick barn (C16/early C17, listed grade II), now converted to garage use.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The pleasure grounds surround the House to the south, west and north. The area adjacent to the House is laid to informal lawn, extending to areas of mature broadleaf trees and conifers, overlooking the parkland to the west and north. The south-west front of the House enjoys a partially obscured view (1999) across to the late

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C18 parish church of St Lawrence standing on the edge of the west park, set in a churchyard and flanked by mature trees. At the south edge of the pleasure grounds, 100m south of the House, stand the derelict remains of the Old St Lawrence church (C12-early C15, listed grade II*) within an overgrown churchyard, linked to the House by a path north from the churchyard. The remains of the largely roofless building are constructed of flint-faced rubble, the roofed tower being the most complete part of the structure. The church was partly demolished by Sir Lionel Lyde in the 1770s, before he built the present St Lawrence's church on the west side of the park.

By c 1800 (estate plan) the House was surrounded by informal pleasure grounds with scattered trees at the north and south boundaries adjacent to the park. A clear view of the late C18 church of St Lawrence extended from the south-west front of the House and lawns, and the medieval church may also have been visible to the south, albeit partially screened from the House by several trees. Little had changed significantly by the late C19 (OS 1884; 1898). By this time a formal terrace ran along the south-west front, with a path from this leading south-west to a sundial set in the lawn (gone, 1999). A network of serpentine paths covered much of the lawn.

PARK The park is divided into west and east halves by the north and south drives connecting Abbotshay Farm with the south lodge. The largely level west half is laid to pasture divided by fences into smaller paddocks. Scattered mature trees stand in clumps and singles, the area largely enclosed from the adjacent land by belts of trees. The west half is dominated by the east front of St Lawrence's church (Nicholas Revett 1778, listed grade I), which stands at the west boundary of the park, 300m west-south-west of the House, within its own small churchyard. The churchyard is planted to north and south of the church with yews and other mature trees which frame the building in views across the park from the House. The central, pedimented temple front of the white-painted, stuccoed church is flanked by two small pavilions, to which it is linked by screens with two-column openings. The pavilions contain funerary urns. The churchyard is separated from the park by the remains of a ha-ha or ditch, which is crossed from the park via a stone footbridge to the north of the church, on which is placed an ornamental iron gate and flanking railings.

The undulating east half of the park is largely laid to arable, and contains Brimstone Wood on the north-east boundary. The spine of land carrying the east drive west from Ayot Lodge continues west for some distance once it has entered the east park, with views east across farmland to the River Mimram valley beyond.

In the mid C18 (Dury and Andrews, 1766) much of the west park appears to have been covered by woodland (possibly part of the present Prior's Wood on the west boundary), and the east park had not been laid out. By c 1800 (estate plan) the west park had been laid out much as at present with park trees, and with the new church and churchyard dominating the area. Bryant's map (1822) shows that the east drive and park had been laid out by that time, with little further change through the C19 (OS 1884).

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled kitchen garden (C18, listed grade II) stands 75m north-east of the House, 30m north of the Manor House. It is of square plan with rounded east corners, and shallow flat buttresses supporting the 4m high walls at regular intervals. Weatherboarded outbuildings stand attached to the north-west wall, marking the site of the former associated service yard which contained several glasshouses (OS 1894; 1898). By 1800 (estate plan) the walled garden had been enclosed by trees to the north, west and east, with a range of bothies or glasshouses attached to the south-west end of the south-east wall.

REFERENCES

Victoria History of the County of Hertfordshire 3, (1912), pp 59-61 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire* (1977), pp 79-80 Country Life, 162 (3 November 1977), pp 1302-4 H Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840* (3rd edn 1995), pp 806-8

Maps Dury and Andrews, *A topographical Map of Hartford-shire, 1766* (Hertfordshire Record Office) *A plan of Ayot St Lawrence Park for Lady Bolton, c 1800* (Hertfordshire Record Office) *A Bryant, The County of Hertford, 1822*

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1925 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1898

Description written: November 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: October 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.