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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

KILLERTON HOUSE

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Name:	KILLERTON HOUSE
County:	Devon
District:	East Devon (District Authority)
Parish:	Broad Clyst
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.794561 Longitude: -3.4632948 National Grid Reference: SS 96964 00465 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000694 Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

Details

An early C19 woodland garden and pleasure ground associated with the Veitch family, with an early C20 terrace designed by William Robinson adjacent to the house, set within wider parkland which developed from the late C17.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

A house was built on the site in the mid C16 by a lawyer, Edward Drewe, who acquired the property through marriage. In the early C17 it was sold to John Acland, whose principal residence was Columbjohn, 1.5km west-south-west of Killerton. Sir Hugh Acland (1637-1713) abandoned Culmbjohn in favour of Killerton c 1680. Estate maps for Columbjohn and Killerton (1756) provide evidence for the early C18 landscape: rectangular enclosures to the east and west of Killerton House appear to represent formal gardens, and a formal avenue running through enclosed agricultural land linked Killerton and Columbjohn to the west. To the north, north-west and east of the House an area of 135 acres (c 56ha) on Dolbury Hill is shown as enclosed park. This park is shown on Benjamin Donn's Map of Devon (1765), where a small tower west of the park pale probably corresponds to an octagonal brick and stone structure which stood on a knoll 930m west of the House. This structure, now demolished, figured in a painting of the Killerton landscape by William Tomkins (1730-92) which now (1998) hangs in the House.

Sir Thomas Acland (1723-85) employed John Veitch (1752-1839) in 1770 to lay out a landscape park which was intended to form the setting for a new mansion. Veitch's park enclosed c 500 acres (c 208ha) around Dolbury Hill, the summit of which, Killerton Clump, was planted with beech to emphasise its height. The main Exeter to Cullompton road to the south-east of the House was moved east as part of the park improvement. John Johnson was commissioned to remodel the existing house as a temporary residence in mid 1778. The stables c 260m east of the House were built by Johnson in 1779-80, and the walled garden 50m north east was constructed c 1782. The 1801 OS Drawing shows parkland flowing round the House, together with significant areas of woodland planting on Dolbury Hill, including Mount Pleasant (later Mount Peel). The octagonal folly in Cross Parks to the west of the House survived in 1801, and this area appears to have been developed as parkland by the early C19. Veitch developed pleasure grounds from 1808 to the west and north-east of the House for Sir Thomas Acland and his wife, Lydia Hoare, on land enclosed from the late C18 park. Features included gravel walks, shrubberies and a grove of tulip trees near the House. A further area, known as Lady Acland's Shrubbery, was planted to the north-east of the House, which

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
KILLERTON HOUSE

became the site for the Chapel designed by C R Cockerell in 1840-1. Plans attributed to William Sawrey Gilpin (1762-1843) for a new drive from Killerton to Columbjohn (1820) were not implemented. An orangery was built north-west of the House in 1808, and the appearance of the pleasure grounds and park was recorded in a series of pencil sketches, *Fragments of Killerton* by John Gendall (1831-2). Under the direction of John Veitch's son, James, the pleasure grounds and areas of the park including the Plain, c 650m north-north-east of the House, were planted with trees and shrubs newly introduced to cultivation by Veitch's expanded nursery which had relocated from Budlake to Exeter in 1832. Plant-hunting was continued in the early C20 by Sir Francis Acland, who sponsored expeditions by F Kingdon-Ward.

Sir Charles Acland who succeeded in 1898 remodelled the House, and in 1900 commissioned William Robinson to advise on its immediate setting. Overgrown shrubbery was cleared and the 100m terrace south and south-west of the House was built, while the head gardener, John Coutts, developed an old quarry 200m north-west of the House as a rock garden c 1900. Sir Francis, fourteenth Baronet made minor changes in the pleasure grounds which included the construction of a ha-ha between the early C20 carriage court and the south park, and the demolition of the early C19 orangery in 1937. The Killerton estate was given to the National Trust by his son, Sir Richard Acland, in 1943. Programmes of replanting in the park, particularly since the construction of the M5 motorway to the east c 1970, and the introduction of new planting schemes by Graham Stuart Thomas and John Sales on the terrace have been undertaken by the Trust.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Killerton is located 0.5km west-north-west of the hamlet of Budlake in the parish of Broad Clyst, and c 2km south-west of the village of Silverton. The site, comprising c 100ha, includes the dramatic outcrop of volcanic rock, Dolbury Hill, together with land running north and west into the valley of the River Culm. The north, west and south-west boundaries of the site are fenced, while the south boundary follows a minor road and is enclosed by metal estate fences. The east boundary also follows a minor road and is marked by a stone wall c 2m high and by timber fencing. The site has wide views in all directions from the high ground north of the House, together with significant views south-west, south and south-east from the House and terrace, framed by Ashclyst Forest to the south-east and Danes Wood to the south-west, which are outside the site boundary.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is approached from a minor road which follows the southern boundary of the site from Budlake west to Columbjohn. A single-storey stuccoed lodge (listed grade II) built in 1825 by C R Cockerell stands to the north of the entrance which is marked by a pair of granite obelisks (listed grade II) c 3m high which support simple early C19 wrought-iron gates. The drive enters the south park between a pair of mature Turkey oaks, and passes south of the late C18 stables (listed grade II) and estate yard. Following a level course west-south-west for c 350m, the tarmac drive enters the early C20 carriage court which is retained to the south and east by a stone ha-ha (1931). The gravel turning circle is bordered by lawn to the south-east, and by ilex oaks and shrubbery to the north. The gardens are separated from the carriage court by an early C20 stepped stone wall with ball finials and pierced wooden gate.

East of the entrance to the main drive, and adjacent to a stone water trough commemorating Ellen Acland (d 1924), the Lower Drive, now a gravelled track, leads c 400m south-east through an area of early C19 parkland with specimen trees, to join the B3185 Exeter road at Lower Budlake.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Killerton House (listed grade II*) is a rebuilding of an earlier house undertaken in 1778-9 by John Johnson as a temporary residence for Sir Thomas Acland. Following the abandonment of James Wyatt's scheme for a house on a new site in 1779, Johnson's house was retained, and enlarged in 1830. Further additions including a billiard room to the north-east of the original block were made in 1900 by Prothero and Philpot of Cheltenham, and a new entrance hall was designed by Randall Wells in 1924. Johnson's house comprises two storeys under a hipped slate roof, the walls being stuccoed with stone dressings. The south facade, originally the entrance front, retains the original recessed front door flanked by early C19 ships' cannon from a family yacht. The west front was extended north in the early C19, when the balcony and verandah supported on open-work iron columns was added.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Lying principally to the south, west and north-west of the House, the pleasure grounds are separated from parkland to the south by William Robinson's 100m terrace of 1900. Stone retaining walls with low

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
KILLERTON HOUSE

stone parapets support a lawn 4m deep below the south front of the House. Narrow planting beds run parallel to the parapet and the House walls, and a gravel walk 3m wide separates the border below the House from the lawn. At the south-west corner of the House the terrace wall is broken by a stone bastion containing a semicircular seat and sundial, from which there are significant views across the park. To the west of the House the terrace extends c 80m with a herbaceous border to the north separating a gravel walk from the lawns. To the south a symmetrical arrangement of stone-edged panel beds are all planted with herbaceous plants, shrubs and roses in a late C20 scheme devised by Graham Stuart Thomas and John Sales to replace Robinson's early C20 rose garden. A pair of fine relief decorated Coade stone vases (1805) are placed centrally to the east and west of the panel beds. The terrace walk leads to an area of lawn planted with specimen trees and shrubs which has views over a late C20 ha-ha to the park.

The walls of the House support various climbers including Virginia creeper, wisteria, magnolia and solanum. Below the west facade a gravel walk rises north with late C20 mixed planting adjacent to the verandah, to reach an east/west walk which is punctuated by a pair of carved stone urns c 80m west of the House. Lawns with a mature liriiodendron and groups of rhododendron sweep south-west and north-west from the House to an area of denser shrubbery adjacent to the west boundary c 250m from the House. A series of east/west walks including Veitch's early C19 Beech Walk traverse the slope north-west of the House, linked by serpentine north/south paths.

Other features include the Bear's Hut or Ladycot (listed grade II*) c 280m north-north-west of the House. Built c 1808, this rustic single-storey timber and thatch building comprises three rooms including a 'hermit's cell', decorated with materials including deer skins, wickerwork, fir cones and deer knuckle bones. An icehouse (listed grade II) was built in 1808 into the slope above a former quarry 30m north of the Bear's Hut, and was converted into a rock garden c 1900. Rocky outcrops are picturesquely planted, with a central pool fed by an artificial stream running down the rock face. A fragment of the Giants' Causeway incorporated in the scheme was placed here in the early C19 by Sir Thomas Acland, tenth Baronet. Sir Thomas is commemorated by a granite Celtic cross (listed grade II) which stands on the western boundary of the pleasure grounds overlooking Cross Parks 270m north-west of the House. North-east of the Memorial Cross the early C18 sunken deer fence which formed the boundary of Veitch's 1770 park remains as a planted ditch within the pleasure grounds, the boundary having been moved west c 1808.

A further area of pleasure ground separated from the park by metal deer fences surrounds the Chapel of the Holy Evangelists (listed grade I) which was built in 1840-1, 400m north-north-east of the House in an existing shrubbery garden. Early C19 shrubbery sweet chestnuts, tulip trees and Lucombe oaks survive, together with later C19 specimen conifers. Mid C19 metal and wire fencing to the north, east and south of the Chapel supports mature wisteria.

PARK South Park to the south and east of the House slopes gently north/south and is today (1998) pasture with scattered specimen trees including Turkey oaks, cedars and mature sweet chestnut pollards. A pond c 260m south-east of the House was formed in 1845-6 and contains an island with a mid C19 small stone duck house and a dogs' cemetery. Parkland with scattered trees extends east adjacent to the early C19 lower drive.

The substantial area of early C19 parkland on the slopes of Dolbury Hill to the north of the House has been reduced by significant areas of mid and late C19 tree planting. The flat summit of Dolbury Hill and the Iron Age fortifications (scheduled ancient monument) retain some early C19 beech planted by John Veitch which form Killerton Clump, together with later C19 specimen conifers. Planting on the Clump is now contiguous with areas of mid and late C19 planting on the west and north-west slopes of Dolbury Hill including Deodara Glen 250m west of Killerton Clump which was planted in the mid C19 with Deodar cedars and other conifers to imitate a Himalayan valley and which has been restored in the late C20. Mount Peel, originally Mount Pleasant, a knoll 450m west of the Clump was developed in the mid C19 with yew trees to form a viewpoint west across the Culm valley, while Park Wood, 660m north-west of the Clump, has been largely replanted with Douglas fir in the late C20 following storm damage. Veitch's sunk deer wall (1810) is evident on the north and north-west boundary of Park Wood, planted on its outer side with deciduous trees to effect a smooth visual transition to the agricultural landscape of the Culm valley. The slopes to the north, north-east and east of Killerton Clump retain a parkland landscape with scattered groups of mainly deciduous trees in pasture, with wide views across the surrounding agricultural land. The Plain, a level plateau north-north-west of the summit

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
KILLERTON HOUSE

of Dolbury Hill retains some late C19 conifers from an arboretum developed by the Veitch nursery for Sir Thomas Acland c 1870, and is now pasture. Cross Parks slopes south from Columbjohn Wood to the west of the pleasure grounds and extends west to Columbjohn chapel and gateway 1.4km south-west of the House. Now (1998) in agricultural use with enclosures of pasture, and limited arable to the south, there has been extensive late C20 planting to restore the late C18 park landscape shown in Tompkin's painting and which was reflected on the OS Drawing (1801). The site of the C18 folly on the eminence 930m west-south-west of the House is marked by limited planting including a mature cedar. In Columbjohn Wood a network of C19 paths survives which link it to the early C19 planting on the west slopes of Dolbury Hill.

KITCHEN GARDEN Some 350m north-east of the House, the late C18 kitchen garden is now (1998) used as a car park. Enclosed by brick walls c 3m high, an opening in the south-west corner admits vehicles, and original gateways survive in each wall flanked by clipped buttresses of bay while figs are planted in wall angles. Gravel tracks are bordered by grass, and there is an east/west symmetrical planting of ornamental trees centred on a circular dipping pool with a tufa-clad fountain in the middle of the garden. An opening in the north wall leads to an irregular-shaped nursery or fruit garden enclosed by holly hedges, which is now (1998) terraced for additional car parking. To the east of the kitchen garden a further area of nursery remains with late C20 glasshouses and gardeners' offices.

REFERENCES

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Maps A Map of Killerton, 1756 (Devon Record Office) A Map of the Barton of Culm John, 1756 (Devon Record Office) B Donn, A Map of the County of Devon, 1765 Drew and Cox, Broad Clyst Tithe map, 6 chains to 1", surveyed 1842 (Devon Record Office)

OS Surveyor's drawing, 1" to 1 mile, 1801 (British Library) OS Old Series, 1" to 1 mile, published 1809 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1887-8, published 1891 2nd edition revised 1904, published 1906 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1884, published 1885

Illustrations William Tomkins (?), oil painting of Cross Parks from the east showing the folly, nd (C18), (National Trust Collection) W W J Gendall, *Fragments of Killerton*, 1831-2 (private collection)

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Description written: September 1998 Amended: June 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.