

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

GARDENS TO FORMER AMWELL HOUSE  
INCLUDING SCOTT'S GROTTTO AND GAZEBO

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**GARDENS TO FORMER AMWELL HOUSE INCLUDING SCOTT'S GROTTO AND GAZEBO**

Name:	GARDENS TO FORMER AMWELL HOUSE INCLUDING SCOTT'S GROTTO AND GAZEBO
County:	Hertfordshire
District:	East Hertfordshire (District Authority)
Parish:	Ware
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.806653 Longitude: -0.033523680 National Grid Reference: TL 35675 13830 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000918 Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

## Details

Extensive mid C18 grotto with a summerhouse, standing in the remaining fragment of the contemporary gardens to Amwell House.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Quaker John Scott (1731-83) moved in 1740 with his father and older brother, both called Samuel, to Amwell End at the edge of Ware. When Samuel Scott senior died in 1768, John inherited the Amwell estate, his elder brother becoming a Quaker preacher in Hertford. During the 1760s John rebuilt Amwell House, and in the early part of the decade also laid out the garden, which extended up the hill behind the House to the south-west, and began constructing the Grotto. Scott is thought to have been responsible for building the new Ware to Hertford road, which passed the bottom of the garden, and may have used the spoil from the Grotto to lay down part of the road (guidebook 1995).

John Scott constructed the Grotto, the largest in England, in two parts. In 1764 he wrote to Joseph Cockfield, a Quaker friend, 'I have finish'd my Shell Temple, both the Inner Room or Grotto and the Portico, and now begun another Cavern or Subterraneous Grot in the side of the hill behind the former.' He asked Cockfield to purchase melted glass and rockwork as decoration, and asked another friend, John Turner, in Devon, to collect shells and minerals. Scott described the Grotto in its original setting in a poem, called The Garden:

Where, 'midst thick oaks, the subterraneous way  
To the arch'd grot admits a feeble ray;  
Where glossy pebbles pave the varied  
floors, And rough flint-walls are deck'd with shells and ores,  
And silvery pearls, spread o'er the roofs on high,  
Glimmer like faint stars in a twilight sky;  
From noon's fierce glare, perhaps, he pleas'd retires,  
Indulging musings which the place inspires.  
The Grotto was visited by many people during Scott's life, with 3000 names in the Visitors Book which he kept (HRO). Dr Johnson visited several times and pronounced the Grotto 'a Fairy Hall', adding that 'none but a poet could have made such a garden'.

After Scott's death the property was inherited by his daughter Maria, who married a wealthy Quaker, John Hooper. Upon her death in 1863 the property was split up, and the Grotto was parcelled in with the garden of a Victorian house, 'The Grotto'. During the late C19 the Grotto was opened by the owner to the public. In 1906 Amwell House became the Ware Girls' Grammar School.

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In the 1960s the Victorian house was demolished and most of the remaining garden of Amwell House built upon. The Grotto suffered some damage, and lost its porch and vestibule. At this time Amwell House became part of Ware College of Further Education, when the associated stables and outbuildings standing adjacent to the west were demolished. The Grotto was subsequently acquired by the local authority, and the damage was restored in the 1990s, together with the building of a new, larger porch in similar style to the earlier structure. Amwell House is now (1999) part of Hertford Regional College, and the Grotto remains in local authority ownership.

**DESCRIPTION**

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Scott's Grotto stands in Scott's Road, within the remains of a small area of Scott's original garden at the south-west corner, in a residential area close to the south-west edge of the town of Ware. The small, approximately rectangular site is bounded to the east by Scott's Road, and on the other three sides by mid to late C20 housing plots, from which it is separated by wooden fencing. The Grotto is set into a steep, north-east-facing hillock, at the top of which stands the C18 summerhouse. The setting is urban, with views, somewhat obscured by mature trees, from the top of the hillock north-east over Ware towards the parish church. Amwell House (early C18 and later, listed grade II\*), in the garden of which the Grotto was built, stands 250m north-east of the Grotto, outside the area here registered. The house stands adjacent to the Ware to Hertford road, overlooking Amwell End road leading into the centre of Ware. It consists of a rectangular, brick-built, three-storey central block flanked by two two-storey wings (the wings foreshortened late C20).

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The Grotto is approached via Scott's Road to the east, down a serpentine flight of steps to the north-east, arriving at the entrance on the north-east side of the structure. The Grotto is set into a hillside, where the entrance is protected by a flint porch built in 1990. The porch replaces the original smaller porch and vestibule (demolished in the 1960s) and echoes materials and decorative patterns used on the former structure and within the Grotto.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** The Grotto (1760s, listed grade I) lies 250m south-west of the House, at the east end of the present grounds which surround it, close to Scott's Road. Until the mid C19 the Grotto was part of the c 4ha Amwell House garden. The Grotto was constructed by John Scott during the mid to late C18 at the south-west corner of the garden, and is aligned on the centre of the south, garden front of the House.

From the porch (1990-1) four passages of varying lengths extend into the chalk hillside to the south-west. The two outer passage entrances form the ends of a circuit of passages linking five subterranean chambers, all of which retain their original decoration intact, except for the largest, the restored Council Chamber. A further chamber is reached from one of the central passage entrances. The chambers are also linked by several smaller ventilation and light shafts. A plan of 1900 by R T Andrews names the chambers. These are not the C18 names, but serve as a useful reference. The Grotto can be toured in a clockwise manner, beginning with the entrance to the south-easternmost passage.

A flint-lined passage with niches set into the sides, decorated with shells and minerals, leads down to two adjacent small chambers, one circular, the other square, both flint-lined with three small seat niches set into the walls. The circular chamber, the Refreshments Room, is ventilated and slightly lit by two shafts entering directly from the garden. The square chamber, Committee Room 2, is less highly decorated, but has shell motifs above the seats. From these two chambers a passage leads straight to the circular Committee Room lying at the centre of the Grotto, containing further seat niches and decorated with isolated shells set in plaster. A spur off the passage between the two Committee Rooms leads further into the hillside, ventilated and slightly lit by a shaft which links two of the earlier passages.

The passage enters the circular Robing Room, known earlier as the Palm Pillar Room due to its central timber column and radiating struts (all no longer extant). This is the deepest chamber, 32m from the Grotto entrance and 11m below the summit of the hill. It is decorated with swirling lines of silvery ormer shells and black knapped flint set in plaster. A ventilation shaft links this chamber directly with the porch, via the Committee Room, having first passed through the isolated Consultation Room, which is only entered via a passage from the porch.

A long, angled, flint-lined passage leads from the Robing Room to the Council Chamber, the final chamber on the circuit, and the grandest of the all six chambers. This circular room, 4m in diameter, contains six seat niches set into the walls which are heavily decorated with shells and minerals (partly restored in 1990). The domed roof (reconstructed 1990) is supported by a

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drum which is also highly decorated with shells, finishing with a ring of ormers and barnacles. Each niche is decorated with a different and elaborate pattern of shells and minerals. There are about fifty varieties of shells in the decoration of this chamber, with minerals including quartz, mica and Hertfordshire Puddingstone, and the decorative floor laid with a pattern of pebbles. From the Council Chamber a passage leads up to the porch, emerging via the right-hand passage entrance. Of the two other passage entrances, one leads to a very short passage with no main chamber, the other leading to the Consultation Room which was Scott's first structure, his Shell Temple. The ventilation shaft leading to the Robing and Committee Rooms originates in the Consultation Room and its passage.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** From the entrance to the Grotto, a serpentine path leads south-west up the steep, wooded hillside, passing a small, flint-lined alcove seat (1990, on the site of a mid C19 or earlier structure), and then, set in the garden of no 28 Scott's Road to the north, a larger, circular, flint-covered rustic summerhouse (John Scott c 1766, largely rebuilt 1990, listed grade II), this latter standing outside the area here registered. The path leads to the level top of the hill on which stands the single-storey, octagonal gazebo (John Scott c 1768, restored 1990, listed grade II\*), built in Gothick style. The flint gazebo stands in a small lawn largely enclosed by trees, and a double flight of flint steps curves up to the entrance on the south side. Windows are set into the west, north and east sides. From here Scott commanded a panorama from Hertford, across Ware to Great Amwell, the subject of his long poem, Amwell.

Further vestiges of the C18 and C19 gardens surround Amwell House, outside the area here registered, including the south lawn adjacent to the south front, a pond west of the House, and a small, square garden house with a pyramidal roof (restored 1955; CL 1955).

The large-scale OS map of 1852 shows the layout of the whole garden before it was sold into divided ownership. The House was divided from the main pleasure ground to the south-west by the open south lawn and a paddock to the west which contained a pond linking the two areas. South-west of these open areas the complex pleasure ground, leading south-west up a hillside, seems to have been densely planted with trees and shrubs, through which ran a network of straight and serpentine paths linking various features including several summerhouses, a conservatory, rustic seats, and, towards the south-western boundary, lawns planted with trees. At the south-west corner of the pleasure ground circuit lay the Grotto, just below the summit of the hill, reached via a broad, straight path from the north-east, overlooking the south front of the house, and itself overlooked by the Summer House (now known as the gazebo) and two seats above.

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, 118 (14 July 1955), p 90 B Jones, Follies & Grottoes (1974 edn), pp 169-71 B Cherry and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire (1977), pp 381-2 Scott's Grotto, guidebook, (The Ware Society 1995)

Maps R T Andrews, Scott's Grotto, Ware, Herts, 1900 [copy in guidebook]

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1878 2nd edition published 1898 1938 edition OS 50" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1851, published 1852

Description written: June 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: October 2000 This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 02/08/2016

## 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.