

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ST GILES' HOUSE

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
ST GILES' HOUSE

Name: ST GILES' HOUSE

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Edmondsham

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Gussage All Saints

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Gussage St. Michael

District: Dorset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Wimborne St. Giles

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.916908
 Longitude: -1.9674011
 National Grid Reference: SU0238813050
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

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Inventory of Great Britain
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Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000723
Date first listed: 19-Dec-1986
Date of most recent amendment: 11-Feb-2013
Statutory Address 1: St. Giles House, Wimborne St. Giles, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 5NA

Historique de la conservation

In the late C14 the manor of Wimborne St Giles passed by marriage from the Plecy family to Sir John Hamley. When Sir John died in 1398, the property was inherited by his daughter by his second marriage, who was the wife of Robert Ashley. The estate has remained the property of the Ashley and Ashley Cooper family ever since. In the late C16, the estate was inherited by Sir Anthony Ashley, Clerk to the Privy Council, who is said to have introduced from Holland, and grown at St Giles, the cabbage (CL, 1904). When Sir Anthony died in 1627 the estate passed to his only daughter who was married to Sir John Cooper of Rockbourne, Hampshire, and was mother to Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper. He was an ambitious politician who served first the Crown, and later Parliament during the Civil War, and who was created Lord Chancellor and Earl of Shaftesbury in 1672. The first Earl died in exile in 1682 after being involved in a plot to remove James II. The Earl's grandson, also Anthony Ashley Cooper, who succeeded as third Earl in 1699, suffered from inherited asthma and spent much time at St Giles, where, having been tutored by John Locke (1632-1704), he wrote a series of philosophical tracts which were published as *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711). In *The Moralists* (1709) the third Earl set out an aesthetic philosophy which influenced the move towards a more natural style of garden design in the C18. The third Earl died at Naples in 1713, and was succeeded by his son who began a campaign of improvements at St Giles. The parish church was rebuilt in 1732 (CL, 1943), and in 1740-4 Henry Flitcroft (1679-1769) was commissioned to make extensive alterations to the mid C17 house built by the first Earl. At the same time, the fourth Earl made significant alterations to the first Earl's gardens. Bishop Pococke, visiting in 1754, noted a serpentine 'river' with an island on which stood a castle, a castellated gateway, Chinese bridge, a stone bridge, a circular pavilion dedicated to Shakespeare, and other features (Oswald, 1959). A grotto, decorated by 'Mr Castles of Mary le bone' was constructed in 1751-3, in part using exotic Jamaican shells given to the Earl by his neighbour, Alderman Beckford of Fonthill, Wiltshire (qv) (Mowl, 2003). Lady Shaftesbury was a friend of the composer G F Handel (1685-1759) who was frequently entertained at St Giles (CL, 1915; Mowl, 2003).

The fourth Earl died in 1771, and was succeeded by his son. The fifth Earl left no son, and in 1811 the estate passed to his younger brother. The seventh Earl (1801-85) was the noted C19 social reformer and philanthropist who chaired the Lunacy Commission from 1834, and piloted the Lunacy Act (1845), and the Factory Acts (1847, 1850, 1859) through Parliament. The Coal Mines Act (1842) prohibited the employment of women and children under 13 in the mines. The Earl commissioned P C Hardwick to make alterations to St Giles in 1854. The estate continued in the possession of successive Earls of Shaftesbury throughout the C19 and C20. In the early C20, a formal sunken garden was created east of the house, while the kitchen garden was converted into an ornamental flower and fruit garden. The house was reduced in size in the late C20 and was in 2004 unoccupied.

Details

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LOCATION,AREA,BOUNDARIES,LANDFORM,SETTING St Giles House is situated on Cranborne Chase,c.2km south-west of Cranborne,and c.11km north of Wimborne Minster.The c.230ha site comprises some 30ha of gardens and pleasure grounds,and c.200ha of parkland,plantations and ornamental drives.The site is bounded to the east and south-east by the B3078 road which leads north from Wimborne Minster to Cranborne,while to the north the boundary is formed by a minor road leading west from the B3078 road to the village of Wirborne St Giles,which adjoins the site to the north-west.To the west and south-west the site adjoins agricultural land.A circuit of carriage drives to the north-west of the house and park extends c.2.5km north-west to Ackling Dyke,a Roman road leading north-east from Badbury Rings to Old Sarum;the area of agricultural land enclosed within the circuit of drives is not included in the registered site.The registered site contains a number of scheduled and unscheduled barrows and a camp that abuts the east boundary.The Round House or Philosopher's Tower to the east of the B3078 road is included in the registered site as an outlying structure.The park and pleasure grounds occupy generally level ground.To the west the site falls gently to the River Allen,which flows from north-west to south-west through the pleasure grounds;the ground rises to the south-west beyond the river.The extended carriage drives follow a ridge of high ground,affording extensive views across the surrounding undulating chalk downland which is rich in tumuli and other prehistoric remains.From the pleasure grounds and park the ruins of Knowlton Church and a group of tumuli planted with yews(outside the area here registered)serve as an eye-catcher,while land to the east of the B3078 road(with the exception of the Round House,outside the registered site)formed a C16 or earlier deer park.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance to St Giles House is from the village of Wimborne St Giles to the north-west.A minor road extends along the eastern side of the village green,passing immediately west of the early C17 almshouses built by Sir Anthony Ashley,and the parish church of St Giles which was rebuilt by the fourth Earl of Shaftesbury in 1732.The road leads to an entrance marked by an early or mid C19 single-storey red brick lodge in cottage or nee style which adjoins a pair of wrought-iron carriage gates supported by brick and stone piers.Beyond the entrance a tarmac drive extends c.100m south through an area of evergreen shrubbery and trees to reach a pair of late C18 or early C19 single-storey stone and stucco lodges (derelict 2002) which flank a pair of stone piers supporting wrought-iron carriage gates.The drive continues south-south-west beyond the lodges,entering the pleasure grounds north of the house and after c.200m turning sharply east to reach a circular carriage turn below the north facade of the house.Further entrances are situated to the south,south-east,east,north-east and north sides of the park.The north entrance,immediately north-east of the kitchen garden,is marked by a late C18 or early C19 single-storey octagonal lodge.The north-east or Cranborne Lodge,the south-east lodge and south or Wimborne Lodge are also of late C18 or early C19 construction,and are marked on the Tithe map(1839).The east entrance is marked by an early or mid C19 cottage-ornee style lodge of predominantly brick construction.Drives lead from Wimborne Lodge,the south-east lodge,and the north lodge through the park,while a drive extending north-east and east from the carriage turn passes to the south of the early C17 riding house,stables and barns(all listed Grade II*)which are arranged around a courtyard c.150m north-east of the house.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING St Giles House(listed Grade I)stands on a level site towards the western boundary of the park.Constructed in brick with ashlar dressings under hipped slate and lead roofs,the house comprises two storeys and an attic lit by dormer windows.The north entrance façade has a central stone doorcase with a round-headed doorway surmounted by a pediment supported on rusticated Tuscan columns.The parapet is castellated,while the windows are articulated by ashlar architraves.The east façade,facing towards the early C20 sunken garden and the park,has rusticated quoins and a further centrally-placed door case,in this instance surmounted by a broken scrolled pediment.The plain parapet is surmounted by a series of ball finials.The south façade,facing down towards the pleasure grounds is of similar design to the east façade.A service wing projects at the south-west corner of the house.The house was originally constructed in 1651 by Sir Anthony Ashley,later fifth Earl of Shaftesbury,who may have employed John Webb on the interiors(listed building description).The mid C17 house was extensively altered for the fourth Earl in 1740-4 by Henry Flintcroft,while further extensions and alterations were made in the late C18,perhaps by Sir John Soane,and again in 1813-20 by Thomas Cundy. Further alterations were made for the seventh Earl by P C Hardwick in 1854.The C18 work included the addition of the castellated parapets,while the early C19 improvements included the roofing-over the C17 central courtyard.Service quarters built in the early and mid C19 to the north-west of the original house were demolished in the 1970s.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS A small formal garden is situated to the east of the house, while the informal pleasure grounds around the lake extend to the south of the house. A stone flagged terrace extends below the east façade of the house, overlooking an approximately square sunken garden, the sides of which are retained by low brick walls. A flight of stone steps descends from the east terrace to the sunken garden, the central point of which is marked by a circular, stone-kerbed pool. A grass walk extends east along the central axis of the eastern side of the garden, which affords views across the park, from which it is separated by a ha-ha. The sunken garden, which is no longer cultivated (2002), was laid out c 1900, and is illustrated in early C20 photographs published by *Country Life* (CL, 1904, J 915). To the north, the garden is adjoined by an area of level lawn which is bounded by the drive leading from the carriage turn to the stables north-east of the house. An early C20 wrought-iron gate and overthrow stands isolated on the northern edge of this lawn. A further area of level lawn extends to the south of the sunken garden to the Long Walk. The east terrace returns below the north or entrance facade of the house. A concrete ramp, replacing earlier steps, ascends from the gravelled carriage turn below the terrace. An area of grass extends to the north of the carriage turn, while c.100m north of the house, a C19 avenue of limes leads to the parish church. The tower of the church serves as an eye-catcher from the north terrace. Further areas of lawn extend to the west of the carriage turn, dropping gently to the River Allen. A further terrace extends below the south facade of the house. Steps descend to a lower terrace, and then to an approximately square area of level grass. Early C20 photographs show this area to have been laid out as a formal flower garden (CL, 1904, 1915), while one version of an engraving published in 1750 shows a series of formal glacis or terraces below the south facade of the house (private collection). To the south of the lawn, a broad, level grass terrace, the Long Walk extends c400m from east to west. Lawns, planted with specimen trees extend to the south of the Long Walk, and are bounded to the south-west by the lake, and to the south by a sinuous canal which extends c.300m east from the body of the lake. The western end of the canal is crossed by a stone bridge with balustraded parapets. Although altered in the C20 (CL, 1904), this bridge is probably of mid C18 origin, and may be the stone bridge noted by Bishop Pococke in 1754 (Oswald, 1959). At the eastern end of the canal, an area of shrubbery and specimen trees contains the mid C18 grotto (listed Grade II*), a free-standing rustic stone structure which contains three compartments. The central compartment is decorated, with exotic shells, fossils and minerals, and leads to a small eastern chamber with a tiled floor and fireplace. The two outer compartments are decorated with flints. Although repaired in 1959 and re-roofed in the late C20, the grotto is now (2002) overgrown with ivy and in a state of dereliction. The building was constructed for the fourth Earl in 1751-3 at a reputed cost of £3,000 (DRO:Ph 843) by 'Mr Castles of Marylebone' (Oswald, 1959), who perhaps decorated a structure by Joseph Lane (1717-1784) with the shells supplied by Alderman Beckford (Mowl, 2003). To the east of the grotto, an area of evergreen shrubbery and trees projects c.270m into the park. Within this area a declivity contains a further grotto which is entered through a rusticated stone arch. These features are not shown on an estate plan of 1788 (Mowl, 2003), and may have been added to the pleasure grounds in the late C18 or early C19. The southern side of this plantation is separated from the park by a ha-ha, which extends c.270m south-south-west into the park. The 1788 estate survey indicates that this ditch formed the eastern boundary of an approximately triangular-shaped plantation or wilderness, the southern tip of which corresponded to the tumulus which survives c.430m south-east of the house. The tumulus appears to have been surmounted by the mid C18 'round pavilion' dedicated to the memory of Shakespeare which was noted by Bishop Pococke in 1754 (Oswald, 1959; Mowl, 2003). The wilderness, which is shown on a survey of 1794 (DRO:Ph 430), was removed in the early C19, and is not recorded on the Tithe map (1839). The artificial lake to the south-west of the house extends c.540m from north to south-south-west, and has an approximately circular island at its northern end. The island does not retain the ruined castle shown in the 1750 engravings; the Chinese bridge which formerly provided access to the island (engraving, 1750), also does not survive. The lake is narrow and sinuous, and was described by C18 visitors as a serpentine river; its present form corresponds to that shown on the Tithe map (1839), and on the 1794 and 1788 estate surveys. The east and west banks of the lake are planted with trees and evergreen shrubbery, while a further area of C19 mixed woodland, the Pinetum, extends south-east of the lake. From the stone bridge at the western end of the canal, a straight gravel walk leads c.500m south-south-west to join the carriage drive encircling the eastern side of the park at the south-west corner of the Pinetum. This walk corresponds to eastern boundary of the mid C18 pleasure grounds as recorded on the 1788 estate survey (Mowl, 2003). Mixed woodland to the west of this walk, and to the south-east of the lake, corresponds to a regular plantation shown on the 1788 survey. A walk continues round the southern

end of the lake, passing the outflow into River Allen which is treated as a cascade, and returns along the western bank of the lake. Some 160m south-west of the house, the walk passes the mid C18 castellated gateway (listed Grade II). Constructed in 1748 by a mason called Marrett, perhaps to the design of Henry Flintcroft, whose gateway at Redlynch Park, Somerset (qv) this structure recalls, the 'Great Arch' comprises a pair of circular turrets with a banded rustication linked by a rusticated stone arch. Now (2002) heavily overgrown with ivy, the Great Arch formerly framed a vista to a circular structure standing against a small plantation on high ground c.430m, north-west (estate survey 1788; Tithe map, 1839). The site of this structure corresponds approximately to the late C20 dairy unit. The lake and island, the canal, grotto, east lakeside walk, cascade and the Great Arch survived from the fourth Earl's mid C18 rococo pleasure grounds, and correspond to the features described by Bishop Pococke in 1754, and by Dr Evans, Archdeacon of Worcester, who described the garden in August 1755: 'The Gardens are extremely elegant with a good River meandering thro' the midst of them: Temples not expensive but light & easy: and a most beautiful Grotto of the finest shells, which is said to have cost near £3,000' (DRO: Ph 843). The surviving features can be identified on the 1788 estate survey. The rococo gardens were altered and simplified in the early C19 (Tithe map, 1839), and new areas, including the Pinetum, were formed in the mid and late C19 (OS, 1886).

THE PARK The park lies to the east of the house, and today (2002) remains pasture with scattered trees and clumps. The park is enclosed to the south and east by a belt of mixed woodland, Drive Plantation, through which a carriage drive passes. This drive extends north beyond Cranborne Lodge, and west beyond the River Allen, of mixed plantation which extends c.10km outside the park. The drives and rides follow a ridge of high ground above the head-waters of the River Allen, and afford wide views across the surrounding landscape to a series of church towers and to various tumuli and other prehistoric earthworks. The drive makes use of the Roman road, Ackling Dyke c.3km north-west of the house (a scheduled monument). The circuit of carriage drives and rides appears to have been developed in the early C19: it is not shown on the 1788 and 1794 estate surveys, but is recorded in its present form on the OS Surveyor's Drawing (1807-08). The park to the east of the house is dominated by a double beech which extends on axis with the east façade of the house from the boundary of the formal gardens to the B3078 road which forms the eastern boundary of the site. The western half of the avenue has been replanted in the late C20, while more mature trees survive in the eastern half. The avenue is shown on the 1788 estate survey, and is said to have replaced an avenue of walnuts planted by the first Earl in the mid C17 (CL, 1915). By the late C18 the avenue, recorded as a single line of trees on each side, had been thinned, and a clump of trees had been formed in it c.400m east of the house. This arrangement is also shown on the Tithe map (1839), but the avenue had been restored by the late C19 when a drive had been constructed passing through it to the B3078 road at Avenue Lodge (OS, 1886). The park contains several tumuli and other earthwork features, while the clump c.290m north-east of the house shelters a group of late C19 dog's headstones. An area of level ground to the east of the kitchen garden and c.400m, north-east of the house has been laid out in the mid or late C20 as a cricket pitch with timber pavilion. The park is of uncertain origin. A deer park existed to the east of the B3078 road by the early C16 (Shirley, 1867). It is probable that the present park was formed by the first Earl when he constructed the house in the mid C17, although whether it replaced the earlier park is unclear. The park was enhanced by the fourth Earl in the mid and late C18 and early C19.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden is situated c.160m north-east of the house and immediately east of the stables and riding house. Approximately rectangular on plan, the garden is enclosed by brick walls 3m high. The interior of the walled enclosure is divided into four unequal areas by further, similar brick walls. The garden is no longer in cultivation (2002), but is laid to grass. Some standard fruit trees survive in the north-eastern compartment, the north-east corner of which is marked by a two-storey octagonal pavilion with a pyramidal roof, which may have served as a tool and dovecote. The 1788 estate survey shows the kitchen garden in its present location, and with the same internal division. The survey indicates that each compartment was divided into planting beds by paths. A similar arrangement is recorded on the Tithe map (1839), and on the late C19 OS (OS, 1886). The garden was re-planted as a flower and fruit garden in 1909 (Oswald, 1959). It is uncertain when the garden was constructed, but it is possible that it is contemporary with the first Earl's C17 riding house which adjoins it to the south-west.

OTHER LAND To the east of the B3078 road, c.1.5km east-south-east of the house, the Round House or Philosopher's Tower is included in the registered site as an outlying structure. The building is square on plan, and comprises a single storey raised on

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a basement. Constructed in brick with a carved stone panel of the third Earl's arms, the building has a domed tiled roof with a ball finial, and is lit by tall sash windows. A pair of chimneys serve fireplaces. The building was constructed c.1700 for the third Earl, who is said to have written many of his philosophical treatises here. It stands in the C16 deer park, which was presumably then still emparked, and may have been intended as a gazebo, or have replaced an earlier stand within the park.

Summary

Parkland and pleasure grounds developed between the late C17 and C19, retaining significant mid C18 landscape structures.

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.

Reasons for Designation

St Giles House is included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Grade II* for the following principal reasons:

EARLY AND REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLE: it is a particularly important multi-phased designed landscape, incorporating pleasure grounds and parkland first developed in the late C17 and throughout the C18 and C19, for a very important country house of exceptional interest.

HISTORIC ASSOCIATION: it has strong and long standing historic associations with one of the most important and influential aristocratic families in England.

GROUP VALUE: it forms the essential setting to a Grade I listed mansion and has additional strong group value with significant mid C18 landscape structures situated within it.

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