

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PORT ELIOT

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Name:	PORT ELIOT
District:	Cornwall (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	St. Germans
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.407227 Longitude: -4.3191674 National Grid Reference: SX3530058944 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000426 Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

Details

Late C18 parkland for part of which Humphry Repton produced a Red Book in 1793, together with late C18 and C19 pleasure grounds and C20 woodland gardens.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In c AD 909 King Edward the Elder established a Cornish diocese, with the mid C9 Celtic monastery of St Germanus serving as its cathedral. This diocese was merged with that of Exeter in 1046, and the church of St Germans became a priory of secular canons and subsequently, in 1170, a house of Augustinian canons. At the Reformation, the monastic property, known until then as Porth Prior, was granted to the Champernowne family, who in 1564 sold it to a Plymouth merchant adventurer, John Eliot (CL 1948; Pett 1998). The priory buildings which lay to the north of the church were converted to domestic use, where in the early C17 John Eliot's nephew, Richard, was recorded by Carew as living in 'great hospitality'. Richard Eliot died in 1609 and was succeeded by his son, Sir John Eliot, who served as Member of Parliament for St Germans from 1614 until his death in 1632. Sir John opposed Charles I and the influence of the Duke of Buckingham; in 1628 he was committed to the Tower of London for his 'undutiful speeches', and remained there until his death. Sir John was succeeded by his son, also Sir John, who similarly served as MP for St Germans before his death in 1685, when the estate passed to his son, Daniel Eliot, MP. At Daniel Eliot's death in 1702, Port Eliot was inherited first by his cousin Edward (d 1722), who began to develop formal gardens around the house, and was subsequently made over to his son James (d 1742). After James Eliot's death the estate reverted to his uncle, also Edward, who in 1784 was created Baron Eliot. Lord Eliot made significant changes to the pleasure grounds and park at Port Eliot, in 1792 commissioning Humphry Repton (1752-1818) to produce proposals in the form of a Red Book (private collection) which was completed in 1793. Repton returned to Port Eliot in 1802 (Stroud 1962). Lord Eliot died in 1804 when he was succeeded by his third son, John, who in 1815 was created Earl of St Germans. The second Lord Eliot and first Earl undertook significant alterations to the house, stables, and other buildings under the guidance of Sir John Soane (1753-1837), while undated and unsigned early C19 plans for the improvement of the pleasure grounds are attributed to W S Gilpin (1762-1843). The first Earl died without issue in 1823, when he was succeeded by his brother. The second Earl made further alterations to the house in 1829, using as his architect Henry Harrison; he was succeeded as third Earl by his son in 1845. Port Eliot has continued in the Eliot family throughout the C19 and C20, and today (2000) remains in private ownership.

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Port Eliot was the first of a group of sites in Cornwall at which Humphry Repton advised in the late C18 and early C19. These include Antony House (qv), Catchfrench (qv), Tregothnan (qv), and Trewarthenick (qv); the owners of these estates were connected by family and political ties. Repton's presence in Cornwall perhaps arose from the marriage of the first Lord Eliot's eldest son (d 1797) to Harriet Pitt, daughter of William Pitt, Prime Minister and Earl of Chatham, whom Repton had advised at Holwood House, Kent in 1791.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Port Eliot is situated immediately north of the village of St Germans and the B3249 road, and to the west of the tidal River Tiddy. The c 180ha site comprises some 20ha of gardens and pleasure grounds, and c 160ha of parkland. To the east and north the site is bounded by the River Tiddy, while to the north-east and north-west it adjoins agricultural land. To the west, south-west, and south the boundary is formed by the B3249 road, while to the south-south-west the site adjoins properties in the village of St Germans. Immediately south-west of the house the site adjoins the churchyard of the parish church of St Germans, and to the south-east the boundary is formed by Old Quay Lane. The site is undulating, rising to Great Hill c 1.25km north-north-west of the house. From this high point the ground drops north, east, and south-east to the River Tiddy. A further valley crosses the site from west to east c 800m north-west of the house; a stream which flows from west to east through this valley is dammed to form a lake and fishpond. A shoulder of high ground rises to the south of this valley, which opens to the east into a level area known as The Lawn north of the house; this was reclaimed from a tidal creek in the late C18 by the first Lord Eliot. To the east and south-east of the house the ground rises steeply to a level plateau, before dropping steeply north and east to the River Tiddy. There are extensive views south-east and east across the site from Great Hill Plantation, while there are also significant views north, east, and south-east from the pleasure grounds east of the house. The mid C19 St Germans railway viaduct, built by I K Brunel (1806-59), forms a prominent feature in views south-east from the pleasure grounds and The Battery c 530m south-east of the house. The C12 parish church of St Germanus with its two towers (listed grade I) dominates views of the house from the north, while the wooded north-facing slope rising to the south of the church and B3249 road forms a backdrop to the house and park when seen from the north.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Port Eliot is today (2000) approached from a minor road which leads north-east from the B3249 road in St Germans village. The drive enters the site immediately to the west of the stables (listed grade II*) c 270m north-west of the house. The stables and coach houses comprise two parallel ranges to the north and south of a central yard, with gate piers forming an entrance at the east end. The stables are constructed in stone in Gothic style; they were built by Soane for the first and second Earls in 1802-6. From the house the buildings form a picturesque incident on the skyline. The tarmac drive descends c 130m south-west from the stables before turning south-east and continuing for c 100m through lawns planted with specimen trees and shrubs to reach the gravelled carriage court below the west facade of the house; this was formed as part of the alterations to the house by Henry Harrison in 1829 which included moving the entrance from the east to the west facade. Some 80m south-west of the house, Town Lodge (listed grade II*) stands to the west of the parish church on the north-east side of the B3249 road. The Lodge comprises a pair of two-storey square-plan blocks linked by a single Tudor-gothic carriage arch surmounted by a carved heraldic achievement. Constructed in greenstone ashlar with limestone dressings, the Lodge is symmetrical, with crenellated parapets and a pair of oriel windows lighting the first floor. The carriage arch is closed by a single C19 metal gate. The Lodge was constructed c 1840 to the design of an unknown architect, perhaps as part of the rearrangement of the entrance to the house to the west facade. Beyond Town Lodge the drive extends c 130m north-west parallel to the boundary of the site, before reaching a junction at which a branch leads off north-west and north-east to reach the stables, while the main drive sweeps east for c 100m to reach the carriage court.

Further drives enter the site from the north and west. The north or Tideford Drive enters the site at Tideford Lodge (listed grade II), a mid or late C19 two-storey slate-stone and granite lodge which stands c 10m south-east of Tideford Bridge (listed grade II), c 1.25km north-west of the house. From the Lodge, the drive passes east along the northern edge of Mill Hill Wood, parallel to the River Tiddy. Turning south-east, the drive continues parallel to the river, through areas of meadow which occupy a north-east-facing slope, the summit of which is crowned by Great Hill Plantation. Passing through Tinnars Quarry Plantation c 1.2km north-north-west of the house and Craggs' Wood c 1km north-north-east of the house, the Tideford Drive emerges

onto The Lawn c 650m north-north-east of the house, where it continues along the eastern boundary for c 400m. Passing a gate which leads east to the pleasure grounds and a riverside walk or drive, the Tideford Drive sweeps south-west along the southern boundary of the park, passing below a ha-ha which separates the north lawn from the park, to reach the carriage court west of the house.

The west or Furze Park Drive enters the site at Furze Park Lodge (listed grade II) which stands to the east of a junction of the B3249 road with a minor road leading west to Trerule Foot. The Lodge comprises a linked pair of mid C19 gothic stone cottages which are asymmetrical in appearance. Beyond these the drive divides, one branch leading north-east for c 300m through woodland to emerge on to a ridge of high ground from which there are views north-west across agricultural land towards Bodmin Moor, and south-east across the park; sweeping north, this carriage drive, which is today (2000) a track, joins a network of walks and rides which pass through Great Hill Plantation and Mill Hill Wood. The main Furze Park Drive leads c 930m east from the Lodge through Furze Park Plantation and Penmadown Wood to reach Cathacombe Lodge (listed grade II), a picturesque mid C19 two-storey structure which stands to the east of an artificial pond c 930m north-west of the house. Beyond Cathacombe Lodge the drive sweeps south-east to pass south-west of the lakes below and to the north of Barn Meadow Plantation, before turning south to follow the western boundary of The Lawn north of the house and joining the principal approach immediately north-east of the stables.

Penmadown Lodge (listed grade II), a mid C19 gothic lodge of similar design to Furze Park Lodge, stands on the B3249 road c 930m south-east of the latter. Penmadown Lodge leads (2000) to a track which follows the southern boundary of the park to join the Furze Park Drive north-east of the stables.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Port Eliot (listed grade I) stands on a level terrace c 20m north of the C12 church of St Germanus (listed grade I) and the southern boundary of the site. The house has an irregular plan, with an approximately rectangular principal block flanked to the north-east by a projecting wing with a full-height segmental bay to the north, and a service range to the north-west. The service range comprises two parallel blocks linked to the west by a Tudor-gothic arch surmounted by a crenellated parapet; the north-east and north-west wings enclose a forecourt which is open to the north. The house is constructed in stone and rendered stone with limestone dressings beneath crenellated parapets. The south facade is terminated to west and east by turrets, while the centre breaks forward; the first floor is lit by gothic-shaped sash windows. The east facade has an off-centre full-height canted bay window which is also lit by gothic sash windows. The north facade is partly rendered, while the segmental full-height bay to the north-east assumes the appearance of a tower with attic and basement windows. The west facade is symmetrical, with a centrally placed porte-cochere.

Port Eliot contains the medieval core of the Priory of St Germans which was dissolved in the mid C16 and subsequently acquired by John Eliot. Further monastic buildings stood to the south-east of the present mansion, linking the house to the church; these are shown in a drawing by Prideaux (1716), but were removed in the early or mid C18 by James Eliot (CL 1948). Edward Eliot (inherited 1744, d 1806) made alterations to the house in the mid and late C18, possibly to his own designs. In 1792 he invited Humphry Repton to advise on the park and pleasure grounds. Repton's Red Book (1793) also includes proposals for a south-west wing linking the house to the church; these were not implemented. Instead, in c 1802 Lord Eliot commissioned plans for alterations to the house from Sir John Soane; these included the construction of a new entrance from the east, and the circular ballroom to the north-east. Further alterations were made for the second Earl of St Germans in 1829 when the London architect Henry Harrison constructed a new entrance on the west side of the house, and the service wing to the north-west.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The informal gardens and pleasure grounds lie to the west, east, and north of the house, with a further area of lawn to the south separating the house from the church. This was formed c 1785 when Lord Eliot levelled the former graveyard (Lake 1868), and is approached from the carriage court to the west of the house by a flight of stone steps. A gravel walk extends below the south facade of the house which is planted with several mature evergreen magnolias, and returns below the east facade which is similarly planted. To the east of this walk a lawn slopes gently up to a further gravel walk which leads c 160m north-east to join the Tideford Drive at the northern tip of the pleasure grounds. To the east of this walk the ground rises steeply and is planted with mixed trees and ornamental shrubs, through which terraced walks ascend to the pleasure grounds which occupy the level summit of a shoulder of high ground to the east of the house. These informal

pleasure grounds are also reached by a gravel walk which ascends a slope c 30m south-west of the house and c 30m east of St Germanus' church. Some 30m north-east of the house a mid or late C20 swimming pool is situated within a low stone-walled rectangular enclosure. To the north of the pool stands a stuccoed classical pavilion, while to the south, the apsidal end of the pool is ornamented with a fountain in the form of a lead putto. The swimming pool was converted from an extended ornamental pond which formed the centrepiece of a small enclosed formal garden constructed c 1930.

The pleasure grounds comprise a series of curvilinear walks which pass through areas of lawn and mature mixed woodland underplanted with collections of rhododendrons, camellias, and azaleas. Some 130m east of the house an area partly enclosed by clipped *Lonicera* hedges is laid out with a series of small paths dividing beds planted with flowering shrubs and herbaceous subjects. To the north of this early C19 flower garden is an early C20 Japanese garden ornamented with a stone lantern adjacent to an informal pool; the pool is one of two in the pleasure grounds which are said to have originated as C18 watering-pools for deer before this area was enclosed from the park in the late C18 or early C19 (Pett 1998). A rustic stone summerhouse dated 1932 (date stone) stands to the north of the Japanese garden. Above a picturesquely planted quarry, located north-east of the house; there are extensive views north up the valley of the River Tiddy.

To the south-east of the house the walk leads c 80m to a lawn immediately to the north of the Orangery (all listed grade II*). A flight of stone steps ascends from the walk to a single-storey segmental domed bay set in the centre of the north facade of the Orangery. Rectangular on plan and constructed in rendered brick and rubble, the Orangery has a hipped slate roof and a stone-flagged interior. The south facade is lit by tall sash windows with ornamental glazing to the central, eastern, and western bays. The interior of the building has timber treillage mounted on the walls. To the south, the Orangery overlooks a small garden enclosed to the east by the west wall of the kitchen garden, and to the south and west by tall yew hedges, against which are arranged a group of four Roman-style stone busts on tapered pedestals (listed grade II*). The garden is laid out with cruciform gravel walks which divide four geometric panels of lawn. At the centre of the garden a circular pool and fountain is enclosed within clipped box hedges. Mid C20 photographs show the lawns as box-edged beds planted with roses (CL 1948). The Orangery was constructed c 1790 as part of the improvements to the grounds undertaken by Edward, first Lord Eliot, and was restored c 1970.

To the north-east of the Orangery and kitchen garden lies an approximately elliptical-shaped bowling green with an early C19 pedimented painted timber and trellis summerhouse to its north-west. Continuing south-east and east the principal walk through the pleasure grounds passes a late C20 maze c 400m south-east of the house. Created by the present owner, the maze comprises a series of geometrically patterned brick paths divided by clipped beech hedges. The centre of the maze is marked by a late C20 wire sculpture of the Minatour by Ryder. Beyond the maze the walk descends a south-east-facing slope to reach the river and the early or mid C19 Battery (listed grade II), situated on the shore c 530m south-east of the house. The Battery comprises a low crenellated stone wall retaining a terrace on which stand six cannons facing the river. To the west of the terrace is an approximately rectangular area of lawn enclosed to the north and south by shrubbery and trees; at the centre of the lawn stands a granite baluster. The lawn is enclosed to the west by a two-storey stone cottage and further shrubbery. There are extensive river views from the Battery, these being dominated by Brunel's mid C19 St Germans railway viaduct.

From the Battery a walk extends north-east parallel to the river. Sweeping north-west and continuing parallel to the water, the walk reaches the mid C19 Boathouse (listed grade II) c 350m north-east of the house. The Boathouse is rectangular on plan and is constructed in rubble stone with relocated granite arches, with a two-span roof which was formerly thatched. The Boathouse stands on a level grassy promontory with a slipway leading north to the River Tiddy. It occupies the approximate site proposed by Repton for an elaborate 'Water Lodge' (Red Book 1793) comprising a boathouse, dock, lodge, and bath; this was not executed. To the south of the Boathouse and the walk opens the quarry. The quarry floor is laid to grass and planted with a group of tree ferns, while the rock faces are partly planted with evergreen shrubs, pines, and *ilex* oaks. The walk continues c 100m north-west to reach a C19 ornamental cast-iron gate which leads to the Tideford Drive and The Lawn.

To the north of the house a level terrace is retained by stone walls which break forward in a bastion to the north. The terrace is laid to lawn; an axial flagged walk leads from the house to a pair of low wrought-iron gates which give access to a shallow flight of stone steps which descend to a further lawn retained to the north by a ha-ha. The terrace and lower lawn take the place

of an enclosed garden and a semicircular bastion or quay from which steps descended to the tidal creek north of the house; this arrangement, which was removed when the creek was filled in c 1800, is shown in Prideaux's drawing of 1716, and a painting of c 1790 (CL 1948).

The informal pleasure grounds replace formal terraced gardens which are shown to the south-east of the house on an engraving of 1734 (S and N Buck). These were probably developed by Edward Eliot (1683-1722), who also intended to form the tidal creek north of the house into a 'bason' with a sluice to retain a constant level of water and a series of formal ramparts or terraces to the north, east, and west; this scheme was not implemented (Pett 1998). Edward, first Lord Eliot undertook improvements to the grounds following his succession in 1744, including the development of informal pleasure grounds to the south-east of the house. The plan of Port Eliot included in Repton's Red Book (1793) indicates that the pleasure grounds conformed approximately to their present area, but without the extension to the south-east leading to the Battery. Repton's proposals for the pleasure grounds, including that for the 'Water Lodge', were largely unimplemented, and further proposals for improvements were made by W S Gilpin in the early C19. The pleasure grounds continued to be developed in the C19 and C20.

A further summerhouse, St Germans Hut, is situated on Battern Cliffs c 4km south-west of the house (Cottage Gardener 1860); this lies outside the area here registered.

PARK The park lies to the north and north-west of the house and is divided into two areas: The Lawn to the north of the house, and the wider parkland to the north-west. The Lawn is an approximately level area of meadow planted with scattered specimen trees, formed c 1800 by the draining of a tidal creek extending west from the River Tiddy. To the north The Lawn is enclosed by Craggs' Wood, a mixed plantation which occupies a shoulder of high ground extending east to the river. Here a disused quarry, today (2000) overgrown, has picturesquely arranged rocks. This area was developed by Edward, Lord Eliot in the mid or late C18 as a 'sublime' walk, with a summerhouse, which no longer survives, perched above the quarry. This work had been completed before 1792 when Repton visited Port Eliot and commented that 'the bold and masterly stile in which the rock scenery of Port Eliot has been handled would make it presumptuous in me to suggest any hints on the subject' (Red Book 1793); Repton included a view of 'The Craggs' and the summerhouse in his Red Book. To the west of The Lawn, c 530m north-west of the house, an irregularly shaped lake is retained to the east by a dam on which runs a drive leading north to Lithiack, the home farm. Here a group of buildings includes an early C19 ornamental dairy (listed grade II), an early C19 calf house possibly designed by Soane (listed grade II*), and an early C18 stable, pigeon loft, and yard (all listed grade II). The farm buildings form a picturesque group on the north side of the lake, and are backed by Dairy Wood, a mixed plantation which ascends the south-west-facing slope immediately to the north. The drive continues to the north of Lithiack to reach a further group of C19 and C20 farm buildings at Penimble; these are screened from view by Penimble Plantation. There is a further, smaller lake immediately north-west of the main lake. The disposition of The Lawn and the lakes broadly corresponds to the proposals made by Repton in his Red Book (1793) with the exception that Repton proposed a single lake, and made no suggestions as to the ornamental treatment of the farm buildings at Lithiack.

The park to the north-west of the house is in mixed agricultural use with areas of pasture with scattered parkland trees to the west of the lakes, while areas further from the house are in arable cultivation. The park is divided by blocks of mixed plantation which rise from the valley extending west from the lakes to high ground to the north and north-west. Views north and north-west from the house and The Lawn are thus framed by woodland including Great Hill Plantation, Bramble Park Plantation, and Furze Park Plantation. Some 500m north-west of the house a spur of high ground is crowned by the approximately elliptical Barn Meadow Plantation; this woodland appears to predate Repton's visit to Port Eliot in 1792, for his plan of the plantations (Red Book) shows a circular group of trees in this location, which he proposed to extend in order to diminish their geometrical effect but this scheme was not implemented. Some 1.25km north-west of the house, the Shepherd's Cottage (listed grade II) stands at the head of a valley which descends south-east towards Lithiack and The Lawn. The cottage is an early or mid C19 picturesque two-storey stone structure which incorporates earlier materials. While it is not visible from the house, it serves as a picturesque object from viewpoints within the park. Repton's proposal for an octagonal 'Prospect Room' on the south-facing slope of Great Hill Plantation to serve as an eyecatcher from the house was not implemented (Red Book 1793).

The west and north-west park was developed in the early C19, perhaps influenced by Repton's proposals. At the time of Repton's visit to Port Eliot in 1792 this area remained in agricultural use and was divided into small fields by Cornish hedges. Repton commented that it was not possible to mark out routes for new drives until the hedges were all removed but a series of new plantations were proposed to frame vistas. The final development of the park appears to have been undertaken by Edward, Lord Eliot (d 1804) and his sons, the first and second Earls, in the first half of the C19, largely following their own plans.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden is situated c 130m south-east of the house and immediately to the east of the Orangery. Approximately rectangular on plan with a rounded corner to the south-east, the kitchen garden is enclosed by brick walls c 4m high which are coped with slates (listed grade II). The garden is divided into four approximately equal rectangular enclosures by a cruciform arrangement of walls. The north-west and north-east enclosures are today (2000) laid out as ornamental gardens with herbaceous borders, shrubs, and specimen trees, while the south-west and south-east enclosures are laid to grass with fruit trees trained against the walls. Against the inner face of the north wall of the north-west enclosure stands a C19 lean-to timber and brick glasshouse (restored late C20). A mid C19 brick Tudor-gothic arch in the north wall of the north-east enclosure is closed by timber doors with ornamental iron furniture; this leads north to the bothies and service sheds which are screened from the pleasure grounds by a belt of evergreen shrubbery and ilex oaks. To the south-east of the kitchen garden is an approximately rectangular orchard which is enclosed by further walls.

The kitchen garden was constructed in the mid or late C18 by Edward, Lord Eliot, and is shown in its present form on the plan appended to Repton's Red Book (1793); the walled orchard to the south-east was added to the kitchen garden in the mid C19.

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.

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- [Archival items] H Repton, Red Book for Port Eliot, 1793 (private collection)
[Archival items] W S Gilpin (?), Notes on the improvement of the pleasure grounds at Port Eliot, c 1825 (private collection)
[Illustration] E Prideaux, Drawing of Port Eliot from the north, 1716 (published in Architect Hist 1964)
[Illustration] H Repton, engraved by J Peltro, View from a Quarry at Port Eliot, a Seat of Lord Eliot in Cornwall, c 1800 (private collection)

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[Illustration] N and S Buck, Engraving of Port Eliot from the north, 1736 (private collection)

[Illustration] Oil painting, Port Eliot from the north, c 1790 (private collection) [reproduced in CL 104 (15 October 1948), p 781]

[Map] H Repton, Plan of plantations at Port Eliot, Red Book for Port Eliot, 1793 (private collection)

[Map] OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1907

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