

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CLEARWELL CASTLE

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CLEARWELL CASTLE

Name:	CLEARWELL CASTLE
County:	Gloucestershire
District:	Forest of Dean (District Authority)
Parish:	Newland
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.767235 Longitude: -2.6277954 National Grid Reference: SO5677407804 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000758 Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986

Details

Late C17 park around mid to late C19 terrace gardens of an early Georgian gothick mansion.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Clearwell Court was the site of the principal residence of the owners of the Clearwell estate from the mid C15 to the early C19. In the early C17, Clearwell manor was held by the Throckmorton family. In 1684, it was sold to Francis Wyndham (d 1716), of Uffords Manor, Norfolk, then passed in the direct male line to John (d 1725), then Thomas Wyndham (d 1752). Thomas Wyndham rebuilt Clearwell Court in 1727, as a large, castellated gothick mansion, to designs by Roger Morris. In the mid C19, the interior of the Court was refurbished by John Middleton for Caroline (daughter of another Thomas Wyndham), Countess of Dunraven, who held Clearwell from 1814 to her death in 1870. The terracing of the gardens was probably also carried out at this time (VCH 1996).

Clearwell remained in the Wyndham family until 1893, when it was sold to Henry Collins. It was sold again by Collins' mortgagees in 1907 and a large portion, including Clearwell Court, went to Col Alan Gardner, the then tenant of the Court. In 1908 the Court came to be known as Clearwell Castle and in 1911, the Castle and its park were sold to Charles Vereker (later Col). The Castle was gutted by fire in 1929 and repaired by Col Vereker. After Vereker's death in 1947, the Castle was sold to the County Council, then to a housebreaker, who stripped off the lead roof and removed the floors and fittings (Kingsley 1992; Colvin and Harris 1970). In c 1952 the Castle was saved from demolition when it was bought and restored by Frank Yeates, son of a former gardener on the estate. The Castle was sold in the early 1980s, when it became a hotel. It is now (2000) back in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Clearwell Castle stands to the south of the village of Clearwell, 3km south of Coleford and 8km south-east of Monmouth. The square-shaped registered area, of c 39ha, is enclosed by drystone walls to the north-east, north-west, and south-east, and by a post and rail fence to the south-west. A minor road from Trow Green to Clearwell runs along the north-east boundary, turning north to the village when it reaches the gates of the Castle. North-west of the gates, a track to the vicarage runs beside the park wall.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CLEARWELL CASTLE

The area here registered slopes gently down to the north-east towards the village of Clearwell, which stands in a deep valley running from north-west to south-east 350m north of the Castle. The park is surrounded by arable and pasture fields except to the south-west, where a large stone quarry extends up to the park boundary.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Some 150m north-east of the Castle, at the south end of Church Street, a triangular green (from which there is a good view of St Peter's church to the north) is separated from the road by wrought-iron fences. Three matching pairs of 2m high stone gate piers with ball finials (early/mid C18, listed grade II) which stand at the points of the triangle mark the start of three short drives. A mature oak tree stands by the central set of piers. A rubble-stone embattled wall c 4m high (early/mid C18, listed grade II) runs along the south-west edge of the green. The three drives converge on a raised embattled gateway with a pointed arch at the centre of the wall, with a smaller pointed arch (leading to the gardens of the lodges) piercing the wall to each side of the main gateway. All three gateways support matching wrought-iron gates. The entrance is flanked by early C19 lodges (listed grade II) built into the wall to the north-west and south-east. The two-storey lodges are built of stone and have hipped roofs (slate to the north-west and tile to the south-east).

From the lodges the drive continues south-west along an avenue of beech, sycamore, and ash trees (originally elms, Cooke 1913), enclosed by wrought-iron fencing. After c 100m it reaches a gatehouse with flanking stables (mid C18, listed grade II) built of rubble stone with an embattled parapet. The central gatehouse is of three storeys, with a pointed arch, and the stables are of two storeys with pitched slate roofs. The drive passes through the gatehouse arch to a rectangular gravel forecourt with a raised stone flower bed in the centre, north of the Castle. A gravel drive curves west, then south-east up to a turning circle (c 1m higher than the forecourt) at the west, entrance face of the Castle.

A small building with a double archway, remains of which can be seen built into the park wall, c 100m north of the gatehouse, is aligned with the arch of the gatehouse and may formerly have marked another entrance into the park (owner pers comm, 2000).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Clearwell Castle (listed grade II*) was built in 1727 by Roger Morris for Thomas Wyndham. It is built of Forest stone, with embattled parapets alternately carved with the Wyndham lion and is arguably the earliest Gothick Revival house in the world (Kingsley 1992). The west, entrance front has a central two-storey portion, flanked by symmetrical three-storey towers which are buttressed in their lower two sections. The central doorway is approached up a double flight of balustraded steps. The house stands on a slightly sloping site, hence the north face of the Castle is of four storeys. The side elevations of the Castle are irregular, possibly due to C19 extensions in the same style. The Castle was restored after a fire in 1929. It went through a period of ruin when the floors and roof were removed in 1948, but was restored in 1952.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Clearwell Castle's gardens (3.5ha) extend around all but its north-east side (where Castle Farm stands). West of the Castle, the lawns north, west, and south of the turning circle (a lawn with shrubs) are planted with shrubs and trees, including several mature yews. A screen of leylandii grows along the western edge of the garden, in front of a wrought-iron fence. On the lawn, c 30m north-west of the Castle, is a stone statue of a child and sphinx (C18, listed grade II). Some 20m south of this is a stone statue of Hercules (C18, listed grade II); this was probably brought from the western parkland after 1880 (OS 1884). This part of the garden is enclosed to the south by a c 1.5m high drystone wall, with a low ashlar wall beyond.

At the south-west corner of the Castle, rough stone steps lead up from the western garden to a series of broad terraced lawns south of the Castle. Directly in front of the south face of the Castle is a terraced sunken garden, designed to be viewed from the windows of the basement. This is enclosed to the south by a 60m long, low ashlar wall. A wide strip of gravel runs from east to west south of the wall. To its south is a sunken croquet lawn, which can be looked down upon from raised walks to its east and west. The western gravel walk runs for 90m - the entire length of the southern garden - and is separated from parkland to the west by a 1.5m high wall of cut stone and rubble. A narrow, stone-edged herbaceous border lies between the gravel walk and the wall. Stone steps lead up from the north-west corner of the croquet lawn to the north end of the western walk, where a stone bench stands to the south of a screen of leylandii. A gravel path leads west, then north from this point, back down to the gardens west of the Castle.

South of the croquet lawn, the ground rises to form two grass terraces. Eight mature golden yews are symmetrically planted on the terraces to give a vista between them from the Castle to the park. Steps lead up from the north-east corner of this terrace

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CLEARWELL CASTLE

to the eastern raised walk (now impassable). At the south-west corner of the southern gardens, the western gravel walk turns east, to run along the south side of the top terrace. South of the walk, a low stone wall encloses a small strip of lawn containing a small C20 greenhouse.

From the south-east corner of the southern gardens, the gravel walk leads east, to the south side of a small, kidney-shaped lake with a central island. The walk curves around the east side of the lake and continues north-east for c 100m, lined by coppiced limes, along the eastern boundary (marked by a low rubble-stone wall) of the gardens. North of the lake is a small circular lawn, quartered by stone-flagged paths. North of this, the gardens consist of lawns with occasional trees. At the south-east corner of the Castle, a line of densely planted yews, laurels, and other shrubs conceals a path which runs west to the Castle, going down rough stone steps to the north-east corner of the southern gardens. North of the path is a further small, sunken lawn, enclosed to the north by the tree-lined gravel path and, north of this, by the stone boundary wall of the gardens.

The terraces extending along the south-west axis of the Castle may be the only part of the garden to date from the C18, when extensive formal terraces, shown on Kip's early C18 engraving (Atkyns 1712), surrounded the house on three sides. The present form of the terraces, however, probably dates from the mid to late C19, when the Countess of Dunraven held Clearwell (VCH 1996).

PARK The roughly square park extends around all but the east side of the gardens. It is divided into large arable and pasture fields and edged to the south-east, south, and west by thin belts of trees along the park boundary. There are few mature trees in the park but those scattered trees remaining include ash, sycamore, and beech. Only a couple of small clumps remain.

In the early C17, there was a walled coney warren on the high ground west of Clearwell Castle and the land south of the house was a small park (*ibid*). In the late C17 a larger area, including the warren, was enclosed as a deer park. Kip's early C18 engraving (Atkyns 1712) depicts the park divided into compartments by rows and avenues of trees, with square clumps of trees within the compartments. No visible trace of this layout remains.

KITCHEN GARDEN Remains of two walled kitchen garden compartments stand 150m east of the Castle (outside the area here registered). The kitchen garden went out of use c 1947 (F Gunter pers comm, 2000) and only some of the walls remain, incorporated into the outbuildings and yards of Castle Farm. A disused gateway in the garden wall, c 100m east of the Castle, may have originally led into the kitchen garden. The creation of the kitchen garden in the late C17 or C18 involved the removal of a number of houses in the hamlet of Platwell (VCH 1996).

REFERENCES

R Atkyns, *The Ancient and Present State of Gloucestershire* (1712), pl facing p 574 A O Cooke, *The Forest of Dean* (1913), p 243 H Colvin and J Harris (eds), *The Country Seat* (1970), pp 145-9 D Verey, *The Buildings of England: Gloucestershire The Vale and the Forest of Dean* (2nd edn 1976, reprinted 1980), pp 160-1 H Phelps, *The Forest of Dean* (1982) Inspector's Report: Clearwell Castle, (English Heritage 1986) N Kingsley, *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire, Volume One, 1500-1660* (1989), pp 78-9 N Kingsley, *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire, Volume Two, 1660-1830* (1992), pp 104-5 Victoria History of the County of Gloucester V, (1996), pp 199-200, 204, 210-12

Maps Clearwell Court estate plan, 1911 (P88/M1 1), (Gloucestershire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1878-80, published 1884

Archival items Sale particulars, c 1985 (D5306/4), (Gloucestershire Record Office)

Description written: May 2000 Register Inspector: TVAC Edited: March 2003

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.