

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

ATHELHAMPTON

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**ATHELHAMPTON**

Name:	ATHELHAMPTON
District:	Dorset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Athelhampton
District:	Dorset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Puddletown
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.748107 Longitude: -2.3293983 National Grid Reference: SY7685794330 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000430 Date first listed: 19-Dec-1986

## Details

Late C19 formal gardens laid out to a scheme by Francis Inigo Thomas, with early C20 additions laid out with advice from Thomas Mawson.

**HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT** The manor of Athelhampton, the name of which derives from its Saxon owner, Aethelric, was owned in 1086 by the Bishop of Salisbury. It subsequently passed to the de Loudres family, and the de Pydeles, whose heiress married Sir Richard Martyn of Waterston, Dorset (qv) c 1350 (guidebook). The present house was begun c 1485 by Sir William Martyn, who was also licensed to form a deer park in 1495 (ibid). When Nicholas Martyn died in 1595, the estate was divided equally between four heiresses, and remained divided until 1848. The house itself was sold in 1665 by Sir Ralph Bankes of Kingston Lacey, Dorset (qv), who had acquired it through marriage, to Sir Robert Long of Dracot Cerne, Wiltshire. The Long family did not reside at Athelhampton, and the house was used as a farmhouse. In 1812 the property was inherited by the fourth Earl of Mornington, nephew of the Duke of Wellington, and in 1848 the fifth Earl sold it to George Wood, who undertook repairs and alterations to the fabric of the house.

In 1891, Athelhampton was acquired by Alfred Cart de Lafontaine, who the same year began a systematic restoration of the house, and commissioned F Inigo Thomas (1866-1950) to lay out a series of formal gardens to the south of the Hall. Athelhampton was among the first of Thomas' garden commissions, which subsequently included Barrow Court, Somerset (qv) and Chantmarle, Dorset (qv). In about 1901, Lafontaine commissioned Thomas Mawson (1861-1933) to prepare plans for the entrance, drive, and gardens to the north of the Hall (Mawson 1926, 1927). The published plans (Mawson 1926) indicate that this scheme was only partially implemented. The Hall and gardens were described and illustrated in *Country Life* in 1899 and 1906. Athelhampton was sold in 1918 to George Cochrane, who in 1920-1 built a new north wing. The property was sold in 1930 to the Hon Mrs Esmond Harmsworth who entertained figures such as Noel Coward, Douglas Fairbanks, and Aly Khan at the Hall (guidebook). In 1946 Athelhampton was sold to Sir John Blunt, who sold it on in 1949 to the publisher Rodney Phillips. In 1957, Athelhampton was acquired by Robert Victor Cooke, a retired surgeon who restored the Hall in order to house his

extensive collection of art and artefacts. Following the death of his wife in 1964, in 1966 R V Cooke conveyed the Hall to his son, Robert Cooke MP (later Sir Robert Cooke), who continued the restoration and made additions to the gardens with advice from Sir Harold Hillier (1905-85). Sir Robert died in 1987, and following the death of his widow in 1995, the property passed to his son, Patrick Cooke. Athelhampton remains (2004) in private ownership.

Athelhampton was well-known to the author Thomas Hardy (1840-1928); he painted a watercolour view of the Hall in 1859, and it appears in his short story *The Waiting Supper*, and in two poems, *The Dame of Athelhall* and *The Children and Sir Nameless* (CL 1984).

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Athelhampton is situated c 1km east of Puddletown, to the north of a minor road running east from Puddletown to Burleston and Tolpuddle, which was formerly the A35 road. The c 6.5ha site comprises some 2.5ha of formal gardens and c 4ha of informal pleasure grounds. To the south the site is bounded by the former A35 road, from which it is separated by a mixture of walls, fences, and hedges, while the northern and eastern boundary is formed by the River Piddle or Trent. To the west the site is bordered by a drive leading north from the former A35 road to the Home Farm. The site is generally level, with views northwards across water meadows and agricultural land. To the south, beyond the former A35 road, the ground rises towards High Wood, Cowpound Wood, and Henroost Wood; these, together with surrounding agricultural land (all outside the area here registered), comprised part of the late C15 deer park associated with Athelhampton.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Athelhampton is approached from the former A35 road which forms the southern boundary of the site, at a point c 1km east of Puddletown. The entrance is marked by low crenellated quadrant walls pierced by quatrefoil openings, which flank a pair of octagonal stone piers surmounted by fleur-de-lys finials standing to each side of the entrance; this wall was constructed in the mid C20 by Sir Robert Cooke using masonry from the old Palace of Westminster. The entrance leads to a gravel drive which passes through a short avenue of sycamore and horse chestnut to reach a Tudor-gothic archway, set in a stone wall and closed by massive timber doors (all listed grade II\* with garden structures), which encloses the south-west end of the forecourt to the south-west of the Hall. The gravelled drive continues north-east through the forecourt to reach a circular carriage turn below the Hall. The drive is flanked by areas of lawn while the forecourt is enclosed to the south-east by a stone wall and yew hedges which screen the formal gardens, and to the north-west by the early C17 thatched stables (listed grade II\*) and an arcaded brick and stone wall.

As originally constructed, the forecourt was entered from the south through a mid C16 gatehouse, which survived until demolished in 1862 (guidebook); its appearance was recorded in a series of sketches made in 1828 by J S Buckler. A small chapel stood at the south-east corner of an outer court, which was entered through an arch in approximately the position of the present arch leading to the forecourt. The drive assumed its present form c 1905-06 under the guidance of Thomas Mawson, who replaced a drive running parallel to the public road from a point c 150m west of the present entrance (OS 1887, 1902) for the present direct approach from the road (Mawson 1926, 1927). It is unclear from Mawson's description of his scheme (Mawson 1926) whether the present archway and doors leading to the forecourt formed part of his work, or had been constructed by Inigo Thomas following Buckler's sketch of the C16 outer court entrance.

A further drive formerly approached the Hall from the former A35 road to the south-east, at a point opposite the parish church of St John, and immediately west of a former toll house which was subsequently adapted as a lodge (OS 1902). The drive led c 100m north-north-east, passing between the formal gardens and the kitchen garden, before crossing the River Piddle to approach the north-east side of the Hall; this section of the drive survives as a garden walk. A continuation of this drive survives today (2004), sweeping west and south-west between the River Piddle and the pleasure grounds north and north-west of the Hall, to reach the stables and carriage house north-west of the entrance to the forecourt. This drive appears to have developed in two phases, the initial section from the road to the Hall being shown on the 1887 and 1902 OS maps. The second section of the drive enclosing the northern pleasure grounds was developed after 1902 (OS) and before the sale of the property by Lafontaine in 1918 (Sale particulars), perhaps with the advice of Mawson although it is not shown on his published plan (Mawson 1926).

A track leading south from the former A35 road at a point opposite the entrance of the former drive to the Hall extends c 1km south to Milom Lane, passing through the ground imparked in the late C15 by Sir William Martyn. This track, which is of uncertain origin but is shown on the 1887 OS map, appears to have served as an approach to the Hall. It is not included in the registered site.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Athelhampton Hall (listed grade I) stands towards the centre of the site, immediately south of the River Piddle. Constructed in limestone ashlar with Ham stone dressings under gabled tile and stone slate roofs, the house is irregular in plan. The late C15 hall range forms the core of the house, with a full-height crenellated entrance porch and an oriel window facing the forecourt to the south. The early C16 west wing comprises two storeys and an attic lit by gable dormers. The gables are ornamented with heraldic devices. The east wing, facing the formal gardens, similarly comprises two storeys and an attic lit by dormers. The facade is balanced by a pair of full-height gables and canted crenellated turrets at its northern and southern ends, while a centrally placed gothic arched door provides access to the gardens. The north wing is irregular in plan and partly encloses a central courtyard which is open to the west. The north wing, and the northern end of the east wing, were constructed in the early C20, replacing a group of C18 and C19 extensions which enclosed a central court (guidebook).

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The formal gardens are situated to the south-east of the Hall, with further areas of more informal pleasure ground to the north, west, and south-west. The structural elements of the formal gardens are all listed grade II\*.

From the circular carriage turn beneath the south facade of the Hall, a gravel walk leads south-east for c 20m, flanked by panels of lawn, that to the north-east being planted with a mature cedar of Lebanon, to reach a stone Tudor-gothic arch surmounted by a pair of low obelisks, which leads to the Corona. This garden is circular in plan and is enclosed by a rubble-stone wall with a scalloped top, the raised sections being surmounted by a series of stone obelisks. The wall is backed by high yew hedges. The garden is laid out with a central circular pool with a lead vase-shaped fountain, surrounded by gravel walks and four stone-edged quadrant beds. The Corona is the focal point of Inigo Thomas' late C19 garden scheme, from which its other elements radiate. To the south-west, a flight of stone steps ascends from the Corona to reach an elaborate wrought-iron gate and overthrow, supported by a pair of square Ham stone piers surmounted by lead urns, which leads to the Great Court. This garden is square on plan and is enclosed to the north-west and south-east by a yew hedge, and to the north-east by a stone wall. The garden comprises a central sunken lawn planted with a symmetrical arrangement of twelve monumental pyramids of clipped yew around a central pool and tazza fountain. The lawn is enclosed by a slightly raised gravel walk, while to the south-west, a centrally placed flight of stone steps ascends to a raised, stone-flagged terrace which overlooks the garden. The terrace is enclosed to the north-east by a balustrade broken by regularly spaced stone piers surmounted by stone obelisks. The piers bear, on their outer or north-east side, a series of lead masks which formerly spouted water into a narrow canal below the terrace's retaining wall. This canal is now (2004) converted into a planting bed. To the south-west the terrace is enclosed by a stone parapet surmounted by regularly spaced stone obelisks, the central point of which is marked by a slightly recessed stone bench seat flanked by further obelisks. This seat is placed on the central south-west to north-east axis of the formal gardens, and enjoys a reciprocal vista to the doorway on the north-east side of the Private Garden. The terrace is terminated to the north-west and south-east by a pair of square, pyramid-roofed pavilions which are of identical plan but different ornamentation. Each has Corinthian corner pilasters and cornices, together with a door surmounted by a semicircular tympanum facing the terrace, and mullion and transom windows in the other faces. The tympanum of the north-west pavilion, known as the House of Joy and Summer, is carved with a smiling face, while that of the south-east pavilion, the House of Sorrow and Winter, has a face surrounded by icicles. As laid out by Inigo Thomas in 1891, the Great Court had a series of geometrical box-edged flower beds between the pyramidal yews; these were removed in the C20 as the yews assumed their present scale (CL 1906; guidebook)

To the south-east of the Corona, a Tudor-gothic arch leads to the Lion's Mouth, a small garden totally enclosed by stone walls, with a semicircular stone-kerbed pool to the south-east backed by an alcove and wall fountain placed on the central axis running through the Corona to the forecourt. The pool is flanked on each side by stone archways leading to the Lime Walk. The garden is laid out with rock-edged perimeter beds planted with a late C20 collection of plants, some acquired from the Abbey Garden at Tresco (qv).

A wrought-iron gate supported by square Ham stone piers surmounted by carved stone figures leads north-east from the Corona to the Private Garden below the east facade of the Hall. This garden is rectangular on plan, and is enclosed by rubble-stone walls. A stone-flagged terrace adjacent to the Hall is separated from the rest of the garden by a low stone balustrade, with an opening aligned with the garden door. The garden enclosure is laid out with perimeter borders and gravel walks. The central panel of lawn is slightly sunken, and surrounds a centrally placed rectangular pool with apsidal ends. A round-headed arch closed by an elaborate wrought-iron gate with bells placed at the centre of the south-east garden wall is flanked by a pair of bronze satyr masks. This archway, which is dated 1891, is on the axis of a late C20 canal c 20m south-east. The canal is flanked by panels of lawn and standard specimen *Magnolia grandiflora*, while the vista south-east from the Hall, through the Private Garden and across the canal, is terminated by a stone arch erected in 1999 (guidebook).

To the north-east of the Private Garden, and approached through a gateway in the north-east wall of the garden, are two late C20 formal garden areas, the White Garden to the north-west, and the Rose Garden to the south-east of a grass walk which extends north-east from the Private Garden. This grass walk turns south-east to reach the Octagonal Cloister Garden which comprises a double row of pleached limes planted in an octagonal pattern, surrounding a central octagonal stone-edged fountain pool. This garden was created by Sir Robert Cooke in 1971 (ibid). The octagonal pool forms the north-east termination of a vista which extends south-west through the late C19 Lime Walk, to a marble statue of Queen Victoria by F J Williamson, which was placed in the garden by Sir Robert Cooke. To the south-east of the Lime Walk is the Beech Walk, planted by Sir Robert in 1975 (ibid), and an area of informal lawns and ornamental shrubberies extending to the boundary with the former A35 road adjacent to the C19 toll house or lodge. This area was developed as garden after the removal of an earlier drive in the late C20.

The Great Court, Corona, Private Garden, and Lime Walk, together with the forecourt, comprise the scheme designed by Inigo Thomas and laid out for Lafontaine in 1891. The White Garden, Rose Garden, Octagonal Cloister Garden, and the informal pleasure ground south and east of the Hall were developed in the late C20 by the Cooke family with advice from Sir Harold Hillier.

Further areas of informal pleasure ground are situated to the north and north-west of the Hall. An approximately elliptical-shaped lawn is laid out on level ground enclosed by the north drive and a bend of the River Piddle. Some 20m north-west of the Hall, an early C16 circular stone dovecote (listed grade II\*) stands on the lawn, backed by quadrant yew hedges which frame the entrance to the Yew Walk. This extends c 100m south-west to join the drive north-west of the stables adjacent to a bridge leading to River Cottage. A further quadrant yew hedge encloses the north-east side of the lawn, partly screening the drive. Beyond the lawn, adjacent to the drive and the River Piddle, are areas of rock garden, together with ornamental shrubberies. Thomas Mawson produced a scheme for the area to the north and west of the Hall c 1905, with a lawn to the north of the Hall enclosed by a pergola and a pavilion to the north-east, together with a yew walk to the south-west, and extensive areas of kitchen garden to the west and orchard to the north. Of this scheme, only the yew walk appears to have been implemented approximately as proposed (Mawson 1926). The other elements of the pleasure ground north and west of the Hall appear to date from the 1920s and the late C20, replacing an area of orchard shown on the 1887 and 1902 OS maps.

**PARK** There is today (2004) no park associated with Athelhampton. Sir William Martyn was licensed to create a deer park in 1495, enclosing an area of ground to the south of the former A35 road, probably extending as far as Milom Lane (outside the area here registered). Further ground to the west and north of the Hall, to the north of the former A35 road, was also imparked (guidebook). This park is recorded by both Saxton (1579) and Speed (1610), but had been disparked by the C19 (Shirley 1867). Traces of park pale survive adjacent to the mid C19 parish church of St John, to the south of the former A35 road.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen garden is situated c 150m south-east of the Hall and to the east of the formal gardens. The kitchen garden is square on plan and is enclosed by brick walls c 3m high with a wrought-iron gate set in an archway in the north-west wall. The garden remains in partial cultivation (2004) and retains a cruciform arrangement of walks with a central pool and fountain. A range of early C20 glasshouses stands against the inner face of the north-east wall, while borders extending parallel to the walks are backed by yew hedges. To the north-east of the garden there is a frame yard.

The kitchen garden was constructed between 1902 (OS) and 1918 (Sale particulars) on a site which previously lay outside the gardens (OS 1902). The late C19 kitchen garden appears to have been situated to the north and west of the stables and coach

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house, as three ranges of glass are marked to the south of the dovecote on the late C19 and early C20 OS maps (OS 1887, 1902). The present kitchen garden is not shown on Mawson's scheme of c 1905 (Mawson 1926), and its designer has not been identified, although on stylistic grounds it might be attributed to Mawson. On his published plan, Mawson proposed extensive kitchen gardens to the west and south-west of the stables, and to the north-west and south-east of the Yew Walk, in part utilising the existing area of productive garden (OS 1902). Neither these proposals, nor a further area of productive garden proposed for ground to the west of River Cottage, were implemented.

#### REFERENCES

E P Shirley, *Some Account of English Deer Parks* (1867), p 94 *Country Life*, 6 (2 September 1899), pp 272-8; 19 (2 June 1906), pp 786-94; (9 June 1906), pp 835-42; (23 June 1906), pp 906-12; 175 (10 May 1984), pp 1310-14; (17 May 1984), pp 1374-7; (24 May 1984), pp 1478-82 G Jekyll and L Weaver, *Gardens for Small Country Houses* (4th edn 1920), pp 105, 208 T H Mawson, *The Art and Craft of Garden Making* (5th edn 1926), pp 70, 73 T H Mawson, *The Life and Work of an English Landscape Architect* (1927), pp 85-6 J Newman and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Dorset* (1972), pp 80-3 *Athelhampton House & Gardens*, guidebook, (2003)

Maps C Saxton, *Map of Dorset, 1579* J Speed, *Dorsetshyre, 1610* T H Mawson, *The Gardens At Athelhampton Hall Near Dorchester - Plan Showing Proposed Alterations To Drive* (published as fig 91 in Mawson 1926)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1887 2nd edition revised 1901, published 1902 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition revised 1901, published 1902

Illustrations J S Buckler, sketches of Athelhampton, 1828 (reproduced in CL 1984 and guidebook, 2003) E Blore, drawing of the gatehouse, Athelhampton, c 1830 (reproduced in CL 1984 and guidebook, 2003) Thomas Hardy, watercolour view of Athelhampton Hall from the south-east, 1859 (Dorset County Museum)

Archival items Sale particulars, 1918 (Dorset Record Office)

Description written: May 2004 Amended: December 2004 (PAS) Register Inspector: JML Edited: April 2005

## 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.