

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

RANSTON

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

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**RANSTON**

Name:	RANSTON
District:	Dorset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Iwerne Courtney or Shroton
District:	Dorset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Iwerne Stepleton
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.907298 Longitude: -2.1947678 National Grid Reference: ST 86402 11999 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001256 Date first listed: 27-Apr-1992

## Details

A mid C18 landscape park laid out to accompany a new house of the same date.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Iwerne Courtney or Shroton was acquired in 1545 by Robert Ryves of Blandford, Dorset, and it remained with his descendants until 1781. The old manor house stood in the north-west corner of the park, adjacent to the parish church of St Mary. This house was demolished in the early C18, and in 1753 a new house was constructed for Thomas Ryves, possibly to his own design. The park was developed in the 1760s and 1770s as a setting for this new house.

When the estate was sold in 1781, it was purchased by Peter William Baker, agent to Mr Portman of Bryanston, Dorset. Baker was instrumental in the development of the Portman Estate in Marylebone, London, with Baker Street being named in his honour (Oswald 1959). Baker had the east front of Ranston cased in stone and added a pair of symmetrical single-storey wings in 1808 (ibid). Peter William Baker died in 1814, and the estate passed to his cousin, Sir Edward Littlehayes, who adopted the name of Baker. The house was remodelled in 1961-3 by Louis Osman, and new gardens in the vicinity of the house were laid out at the same period. The site remains (2003) in the ownership of Sir Edward's descendants.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Ranston is situated at the southern end of the village of Iwerne Courtney, c 5.5km north-west of Blandford Forum. The c 52ha site is divided by the A350 road which leads north from Blandford to Warminster. This road forms, in part, the southern boundary of the site, while to the north-west the boundary is formed by the village street of Iwerne Courtney. Elsewhere the site adjoins agricultural land from which it is divided by a variety of fences and hedges. Ranston lies in the undulating valley of the River Iwerne, which flows from north to south through the site. To the west of the house the ground rises gently, while to the east the valley side is steeper. To the south the Ranston estate adjoins that of Stepleton House (qv).

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
RANSTON

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The site is approached from the minor road forming its northern boundary, at a point opposite Ranston Farm. The entrance is marked by a picturesque gothic lodge, beyond which the drive leads south across the park to arrive at a carriage turn to the east of the house. An L-shaped range of buildings comprising stables and a coach house (listed grade II) stands c 40m south of the house; these were built by Peter William Baker in 1785 (inscription). The drive continues south and south-west from the house, passing through a further area of park, to reach the A350 road at the south-west corner of the site.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Ranston (listed grade I) stands towards the centre of the site on an artificially levelled terrace overlooking the lake formed from the River Iwerne to the west. The house has rendered walls with ashlar dressings under slate roofs concealed behind parapets, and comprises two storeys and a basement. The west facade is the only front to remain in its mid C18 form and comprises a central pediment supported by three giant fluted Corinthian pilasters. The basement storey and quoins are of rusticated ashlar, while the steps follow the form of a mid C18 flight which was removed in the C19. The north, east, and west facades were constructed in 1961-3 when the house was extensively remodelled by Louis Osman. These facades are C18 in style and incorporate much C18 material.

Ranston was originally constructed by Thomas Ryves of Blandford in 1753, possibly to his own design (Oswald 1959). The east facade was altered in 1808, and a pair of symmetrical single-storey wings was added; these were removed as part of the 1960s remodelling.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens immediately around the house are of generally simple form comprising areas of lawn and ornamental shrubbery, with a belt of trees and shrubbery extending south-west from the house to reach a bridge (listed grade II) which crosses a dam between the lakes c 250m south-west of the house. Known as the Palladian Bridge, this is constructed in ashlar and comprises three arches divided by plain pilaster strips. On their north faces (nearer the house) the arches are moulded, while the parapet comprises vase-shaped balusters. The bridge was constructed in the mid C18 as part of P W Baker's scheme for the setting of the new house. Beyond the bridge the walk continues south and west through a belt of ornamental planting, before turning north and east through the mixed boundary plantations to enjoy views of the house. The plantation forming the western boundary of the site is separated from the park to the east by a stone-walled ha-ha, and from the land beyond the site by an iron fence to the south and a stone wall to the north. Some 500m south-west of the house, the shrubbery walk passes a timber summerhouse which replaces or incorporates an earlier garden building. The shrubbery walk crosses the River Iwerne on an C18 flint bridge before continuing east to re-enter the pleasure grounds north-west of the house. The lawns to the west of the house are separated from the park by a balustrade which dates from the C18 or early C19.

The pleasure grounds and shrubbery walk appear to have assumed their present form as part of the mid C18 scheme to provide a setting for Thomas Ryves' new house. The area immediately around the house was redesigned in 1961-3 when the house was remodelled.

**PARK** The west park is divided from the east park by the A350 road which follows an old line; its visual impact is minimised by the use of a ha-ha and embankments. Both the west and east parks are enclosed by boundary plantations, while the west park contains two narrow lakes formed in the 1760s or 1770s by the damming of the River Iwerne which feeds into the northern end of the upper lake under a simple flint bridge. The lakes are divided by a weir on the downstream side of the Palladian Bridge south-west of the house, which is shown as a feature visible from the house in Hutchins' 1774 view of Ranston (Hutchins 1870; Mowl 2003). At the south-west corner of the east park, immediately east of the A350 road, Tray Town is a late C18 or early C19 thatched cottage orné which serves to mark the entry of the road to the park (Pevsner and Newman 1972).

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen garden is situated to the north of the house and is enclosed by C19 red-brick walls. The garden retains some early glass and a gardeners' bothy.

#### REFERENCES

W Watts, *The seats of the nobility and gentry* (1779), pl 8 J Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset IV*, (2nd edn 1870), p 93 A Oswald, *Country Houses of Dorset* (2nd edn 1959), pp 161-2 N Pevsner and J Newman, *The Buildings of England: Dorset* (1972), pp 237-8 Ranston House, Dorset, (Nicholas Pearson Associates 1992) [copy on file] T Mowl, *Historic Gardens of Dorset* (2003), pp 80-1

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
*RANSTON*

Maps Isaac Taylor, Map of the County of Dorset, 1765 C and J Greenwood, Map of Dorset, 1826 E Watts, Map of the parish of Iwerne Courtney, 1838 (Dorset Record Office) OS Surveyor's Drawings, 1805;09 (British Library Maps) OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1885, published 1891 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition revised 1900, published 1901  
Description written: December 2003 Amended: April 2004 Register Inspector: JML Edited: January 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.