

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

MENABILLY

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Name:	MENABILLY
District:	Cornwall (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Fowey
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.336227 Longitude: -4.6763531 National Grid Reference: SX 09638 51904, SX 10278 50909 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000651 Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

Details

C19 woodland garden, pleasure grounds, and parkland.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the early C16 Philip Rashleigh, a merchant from Barnstaple, Devon, began trading from Fowey. Through his son's marriage with Alice Lanyon the family acquired property in Cornwall, and was able to build a new town house in Fowey. In 1596 Philip Rashleigh's grandson, also John, purchased property at Menabilly, outside Fowey and began to build a new house which was completed by his son Jonathan. During the Civil War the house was looted; it was restored and improved in 1710-15 by Jonathan Rashleigh II and his son Philip, to whom the estate was given in the early C18. Philip Rashleigh II was also responsible for developing the pleasure grounds which benefited from the coastal climate; Borlase noted (1727) that 'every thing that belongs to the flower-garden, and grows in any part of England, will thrive and flourish here'. Philip Rashleigh III, who inherited Menabilly in 1764, continued the development of the grounds, constructing a grotto near the coast at Polridmouth and, in the late C18, calling in Thomas Gray to landscape the grounds. Gray's work at Menabilly was criticised by Philip Rashleigh's cousin, Sir Colman Rashleigh of Prideaux, who commented that 'in destroying the formal features of that place entirely divested it of the charm which belonged to it in a more formal condition. It is now nothing more than a house in a tame, flat field, at least as far as Mr Gray's alterations are concerned' (Memoirs, CRO).

Philip Rashleigh died in 1811 when the estate passed to his nephew, William (b 1777), who was already noted for his interest in new and exotic plants. William Rashleigh maintained close connections with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (qv), exchanging plants and seeds and developing a valley garden at Menabilly which was known as Hooker's Grove as a compliment to his friend, Sir Joseph Hooker (1817(1911)); by 1822 Loudon identified Menabilly as a 'show-place' in his gazeteer of Cornish gardens (Loudon 1822). When William Rashleigh died in 1855 his son, also William, built a new marine villa, Point Neptune, at Readymoney Cove west of Fowey in preference to residing at Menabilly. At Point Neptune he developed an ornamental carriage drive and built a family mausoleum on St Catherine's Point. William's brother, Jonathan Rashleigh V (1820-1905) inherited in 1871, and together with his son, Jonathan VI (b 1845), made significant additions to the plant collections at Menabilly including many bamboos and eucalyptus. In the 1930s the house was left unoccupied, and in 1940 it was let to the author, Dame Daphne Du Maurier (1907-89), who drew upon Menabilly for inspiration in her novels *Rebecca* and *The King's General*. Today (2000) the site remains in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Menabilly is situated c 2km west of Fowey and c 0.5 km south-east of the village of Polkerris. The c 65ha site comprises some 15ha of pleasure grounds and c 50ha of parkland and ornamental plantations adjoining a network of carriage drives. To the north, north-west, east, and south-west the site adjoins agricultural land, while to the west the boundary is formed by a minor road which runs south from Polkerris to Menabilly Farm. The northern boundary to Ash Wood and Menabilly Wood is formed by a sunk fence, as is the south-east boundary of Tregear's Wood. To the south the site adjoins the beach at Polridmouth. The site comprises level ground to the north-west, which drops away steeply to the east and south-east where a valley extends south-south-west through the site from East Lodge to Polridmouth. A stream flowing through this valley is dammed to form a chain of pools. There are significant views south from the pleasure grounds to the coast at Polridmouth and south-west to the Gribbin Tower, a navigation marker on Gribbin Head. A view west from West Lodge to St Austell Bay is today (2000) obscured by vegetation.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Menabilly is approached from the minor road which forms the western boundary of the site at a point c 400m south of Menabilly chapel. The entrance comprises a pair of square-section granite piers surmounted by ball finials which support an early C19 metal gate. The gate piers are flanked by low granite quadrant walls which support white-painted railings (replaced late C20), which in turn terminate in a further pair of square-section piers. Within the site and to the east of the entrance stands West Lodge (listed grade II), a picturesque two-storey structure built in granite ashlar with a single-storey pentagonal verandah to the south affording views across the park. West Lodge is probably of C18 origin but was rebuilt in its present form in the early C19 for William Rashleigh I.

From West Lodge the tarmac west drive leads c 400m south-east through the park before joining the east drive and sweeping c 240m east-south-east to reach the carriage turn below the south facade of the house. The stables, today (2000) known as Rashleigh Cottage, are situated c 30m south-west of the house adjacent to a service drive which passes c 300m west from the stables along the southern boundary of the park to reach the minor road on the western boundary of the site. This drive is today (2000) a track.

The east drive enters the site from the junction of the A3082 road and the B3269 Passage Lane c 1.5km north-east of the house. The entrance is marked by East Lodge, a picturesque two-storey structure of early C19 origin (altered late C20). Beyond the Lodge the drive, today (2000) a track, passes c 1.4km south-west through Menabilly Wood, a mixed plantation underplanted with specimen rhododendrons. The drive follows a stream which flows south-west through the valley, and passes over a footpath on a C19 stone bridge c 400m south-west of East Lodge. The drive crosses the stream on C19 stone bridges at two points c 1km and 1.6km south-west of East Lodge. Beyond the second bridge the drive passes immediately south of South Cot and sweeps north-north-west for 400m before entering the park and sweeping south-west for c 350m to join the west drive c 190m west-north-west of the house. The east drive appears to have been developed by Philip Rashleigh III or William Rashleigh in the late C18 or early C19; the ornamental planting in Menabilly Wood formed part of the early and late C19 improvements made by William Rashleigh and Jonathan Rashleigh.

A further drive leads south-east and south through the pleasure grounds from Rashleigh Cottage to Polridmouth. This drive is today (2000) a track.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Menabilly (listed grade II*) stands on a spur of level ground from which the land drops away to the north-east and east. The house comprises four ranges built around a central courtyard, with a further L-shaped wing extending to the north-east and a balancing L-shaped range of service quarters to the north-west of the main house. The two-storey south or entrance facade is constructed in coursed stone under a hipped roof which is partly concealed behind a moulded cornice and parapet. It is lit by tall sash windows, while a centrally placed door has a pilastered doorcase with a broken pediment. The east or garden facade is of similar design, while the north-east range comprises two storeys above a basement; it also has hipped slate roofs and tall sash windows.

Menabilly was originally built in the late C16 or early C17 for John Rashleigh II. This house was severely damaged during the Civil War, and was rebuilt to its present courtyard plan in 1710-15. Further extensive alterations were made for William Rashleigh in 1821, while the north-east and north-west ranges were built in the mid C19.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The informal pleasure grounds and woodland gardens are situated to the north, east, and south of the house and comprise areas of level ground immediately adjacent to the house, and the valley to the north-east, east, and south-east of the house. In addition, Menabilly Wood to the north-east of the house includes ornamental trees and conifers which are underplanted with C19 specimen shrubs.

A lawn bordered to east and west by mixed ornamental trees and shrubs extends c 160m south from the house to a walk or drive which leads south-east to Hooker's Grove. Adjacent to the drive stands a granite cross (listed grade II). To the south-west of the drive is a further area of lawns and ornamental planting. The lawns return below the east and north facades of the house and are similarly bordered by mixed ornamental trees and shrubs.

A series of curvilinear walks lead through the informal pleasure grounds on the north-east- and south-west-facing slopes of the valley to the north-east of the house; these continue south into the valley south-east of the house. Here, further ornamental trees and conifers are underplanted with a collection of C19 rhododendrons and other ornamental shrubs. This area is known as Hooker's Grove, commemorating William Rashleigh's friendship with Sir Joseph Hooker and the supply of plants to Menabilly from Kew in the mid C19. In the valley below Hooker's Grove a stream is dammed to form a chain of three pools, the southern and most extensive being retained by a concrete dam above Polridmouth beach. Some 720m south-east of the house are the ruins of a late C18 grotto (listed grade II). Octagonal on plan, the grotto is constructed from rounded quartz boulders with joints sneaked with sea shells; each wall is surmounted by a small gable. The pyramidal roof no longer survives, and the interior was formerly ornamented with a collection of shells and minerals gathered by Philip Rashleigh III in the mid and late C18, together with a circular table composed of polished Cornish granites. The grotto was in poor condition by 1940 (Pett 1998). Constructed for Philip Rashleigh III in the late C18, an early C19 watercolour (in Pett 1998) shows the grotto linked to a wall surmounted by rocks and pierced by a gothic arch flanked by whale bones. To the east of the remains of the grotto stands Polridmouth Cottage, a two-storey stone structure of early C19 origin which overlooks the lower pool and the beach.

In the late C18 Philip Rashleigh III and his advisor, Thomas Gray, removed formal gardens associated with the early C18 house, laying out lawns, shrubberies, and plantations. Sir Colman Rashleigh described traces of formal gardens showing in the lawns during dry weather (c 1845), and commented that Gray was 'all for shaving the lawn and dotting it with clumps and confining it with a belt' (Memoirs, CRO). Philip Rashleigh's pleasure grounds extended through the valley south-east of the house to include the grotto and foreshore at Polridmouth. Philip Rashleigh undertook extensive planting in the pleasure grounds, some plants probably being obtained from William Townsend Aiton (1766(1849) at Kew as well as local nurseries (DD/R 5685/1, CRO). Sir Colman Rashleigh commented (c 1845) that 'Mr Rashleigh has indeed relieved the monotony and tameness [of the grounds] by the groups of shrubs which he has planted and scattered throughout the Pleasure Ground' (Memoirs, CRO). Philip Rashleigh's improvements were continued by William Rashleigh who inherited Menabilly in 1811; he was responsible for sustaining and the developing the plant collections (Pett 1998). Further development of the plant collections took place under Jonathan Rashleigh V and Jonathan Rashleigh VI in the late C19 and early C20; this included the formation of an important collection of bamboos, and the expansion of the early and mid C19 collection of rhododendrons (DD/R 5688, CRO). Late C19 correspondence refers to an avenue of *Dracaenas* in the pleasure grounds (location unknown), the bamboo collection, and groups of alternate blue and pink hydrangeas planted around the edges of the main lawns (FS/3/1190, CRO).

PARK The park is situated on a gentle east-facing slope c 80m west of the house, and remains (2000) pasture with scattered specimen trees and conifers. It is crossed from north-west to south-east by the west drive, from which there are views east across the park to Ash Wood c 200m north-east. To the north-west the park adjoins Cocklehorn Plantation, a mixed wood through which a walk passes to emerge into a meadow which it crosses to reach Menabilly Chapel c 880m north-west of the house. The Chapel, which stands in a walled enclosure planted with C19 specimen trees, conifers, and shrubs, was built by William Rashleigh c 1814 (Lysons 1814).

The agricultural land to the north of the park and to the south of the Chapel preserves ornamental clumps of mature pines, while there is further, similar ornamental planting in the agricultural land to the east of the park, and on the west-facing slope above and to the east of Ash Wood (all outside the site here registered).

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The park appears to have assumed its present form as part of the improvements undertaken by Thomas Gray for Philip Rashleigh III in the late C18; the planting was developed in the early and mid C19 for William Rashleigh.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden is situated on a south-facing slope c 200m south-west of the house. Approximately rhomboid-shaped on plan, the garden is enclosed by stone walls c 3m high. It is no longer in cultivation (2000) and is in an overgrown condition.

REFERENCES

W Borlase, *The Natural History of Cornwall* (1758), p 228 D and S Lysons, *Magna Britannia* (1814), pp 316-17 C S Gilbert, *Historical Survey of Cornwall* ii, (1820), p 874 J C Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Horticulture* (1822), p 1247 F W Stockdale, *Excursions in Cornwall* (1824), p 41 Lake's *Parochial History of Cornwall* ii, (1868), p 32 *Gardeners' Chronicle*, i (1886), pp 817-21; i (1903), pp 234-6 N Pevsner and E Radcliffe, *The Buildings of England: Cornwall* (2nd edn 1970), pp 116-17 B Jones, *Follies & Grottoes* (1974), pp 288-9 S Pring, *Glorious Gardens of Cornwall* (1996), p 20 D E Pett, *The Parks and Gardens of Cornwall* (1998), pp 155-8

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881

Illustrations G Boney, watercolour view of the grotto, Menabilly, 1805 (reproduced in Pett 1998, p 156) Aerial photographs, 1959 (HAW 9399/28, 29), (NMR)

Archival items *Memoirs of Sir Colman Rashleigh*, mid C19 (FS/3/1127/1), (Cornwall Record Office) Correspondence from Jonathan Rashleigh V to Kew Gardens, late C19 (FS/3/1190), (Cornwall Record Office) Rashleigh family collection including planting records, nursery catalogues, and correspondence (DD/R), (Cornwall Record Office)

Description written: December 2000 Amended: March 2001 Register Inspector: JML Edited: October 2001

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.