

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

WOOTTON MANOR

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

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**WOOTTON MANOR**

Name:	WOOTTON MANOR
County:	East Sussex
District:	Wealden (District Authority)
Parish:	Long Man
County:	East Sussex
District:	Wealden (District Authority)
Parish:	Polegate
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.821546 Longitude: 0.22138615 National Grid Reference: TQ 56564 04796 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001693 Date first listed: 31-Jan-2005

## Details

An early C20 garden designed by Detmar Blow, surrounding the C17 Wootton Manor, extensively remodelled and extended by Detmar Blow in 1915-19.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Wootton was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as a manor of four and a half hides, held directly of the Crown by William the Conqueror's half-brother, Robert, Count of Mortain. From 1174 to 1610 Wootton was held by the Falconer family and their descendants, the Michelgroves and the Shelleys. The present house is on the site of the medieval house, and a little to the south of the ancient Farne Street, a Roman road which by the C13 was known as the 'old road'. The C13 demesne had a hunting charter and its own chapel (Chapel of St Giles). In 1610 the property was sold to Richard, third Earl of Dorset, whose family (the Sackvilles) had owned the neighbouring manor of Folkington since 1543. Financial problems led to the sale of both manors, with Wootton being sold in 1612. Between 1612 and 1653 Wootton was owned by Richard Thorpe but let to Anthony Stapley. In 1653 the manor was bought by William Thomas of West Dean, who had recently bought Folkington. In the mid C17, Thomas or his son, Sir William, built a Mannerist manor house on the foundations of the older house. This incorporated some of the medieval features, including parts of the Chapel of St Giles which had been suppressed in 1546.

The two manors belonged to relatives of the Thomas family until 1838, when they were sold to Thomas Sheppard, MP for Frome, who rebuilt the house at Folkington. Sheppard's son, Frederick, died in 1875, and in 1876 the manors of Wootton and Folkington were purchased by James Eglinton Anderson Gwynne. He died in 1915 and was succeeded by his third son, Rupert Sackville Gwynne MP, who had taken up residence at Wootton in 1905 with his wife, Stella Gwynne (née Ridley).

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Their daughter, the famous cookery writer Elizabeth David, was brought up at Wootton. The property has remained in the ownership of the Gwynne family and their descendants since the 1870s.

Rupert and Stella Gwynne's friends included the painter Cedric Morris (who painted Wootton in the 1920s), the writer and plantsman William Robinson, and the architect Detmar Blow (1867-1939). Blow's work incorporated the ideas and ideals of Ruskin, Webb, and Morris, and the 'dreams of an Arts and Crafts elysium, formed 'from the stone, the wood, the wax, lying nearest to hand, moulded with simplicity of heart' (CL 1986). These ideals were also close to the hearts of Rupert and Stella Gwynne who, in 1915, commissioned Blow to restore and extend the manor house at Wootton. The result is described as:

a particularly fine work of the arts and crafts-inspired architect Detmar Blow ... inspired by the vernacular traditions of this part of Sussex, which derive from a number of sources, not least the relationship of domestic buildings to agricultural producing land ... The relationship of these buildings [the outbuildings], the surrounding farmland, and the main house, is a vital part of the architectural inspiration, and indeed the existing quality of the group. (Jeremy Musson, Assessment by the Victorian Society) The ideals were continued in the garden and in the park, where the Gwynnes kept herds of red Sussex cattle and black St Kilda sheep.

In addition to the house exteriors and interiors and the garden buildings, Blow also worked on the gardens. By that time he had designed waterfall pools at Charles Hill Court, Elstead, Surrey in 1900, the East Garden at Eaton Hall (laid out as a series of garden rooms, divided by clipped yew hedges), for the second Duke of Westminster in 1911, and gardens or garden areas for several of his country house commissions, including Fonthill House (formerly Little Ridge, Wiltshire), Hatch House, Wiltshire, and Horwood House, Buckinghamshire. At Wootton Blow found a simple garden layout; this he extended, introducing paths, gates, topiary, terraces, garden buildings, and garden furniture to his own design. Blow used the concept of garden rooms to provide a formal structure which was then planted informally. Self-seeded plants supplemented the planned planting. The planting plan is likely to have been the work of Stella Gwynne, a painter and passionate plantswoman.

Wootton Manor remains (2004) in private ownership and is currently in the early stages of restoration.

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Wootton Manor, with gardens of c 2ha, is set in an area of c 25.5ha of park and farmland forming the registered site. The site lies in a rural area of East Sussex, at the northern end of the hamlet of Folkington, and c 8.5km to the east of Lewes. The house stands on a greensand ridge that slopes gently to the south with views to the Downs. The site is bounded by farmland to the west, north, and east, and by Lewes Road (A27), with farmland and the Downs beyond, to the south.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The entrance to Wootton Manor is to the south-east, from where a drive leads off Lewes Road and immediately across a red-brick hump-backed bridge over the London to Eastbourne railway line, with tall brick entrance piers at the north end, topped by stone ball finials. The house is seen briefly from the start of the drive that leads north-west for c 250m before turning to run west for c 250m to the outbuildings. The drive leads north through an outer courtyard with a dairy, designed and built by Blow, under an archway to the inner (stable) courtyard with its C18 barn, and under a second archway to the entrance forecourt. The courtyards are paved to Blow's design with patterns of bricks, granite setts, and cobbles, inset with millstones, and the buildings are either C19 or early C20, again mostly modified or designed by Blow. The drive circuits the entrance forecourt, which is laid out with a rectangular lawn with rounded corners, the edges of which are marked by stone bollards linked by a chain. The house stands on the east side of the entrance forecourt, with the range of outbuildings to the south. An C18/early C19 outbuilding, known as the Chapel, stands on the north side. This was probably modified by Blow in 1915 and forms the closing feature of the vista through the archway into the stable yard. The red-brick building has a tall central block with a hipped roof.

This approach was laid out in the early C19, when the Lewes turnpike road was opened, and replaced the medieval track that led directly to Wootton from Folkington to the south. Blow used the C19 approach but modified it around the house after changing the entrance front from the east to the west. The principal aspect of the house remains the outlook to the south-east, over the parkland and the wider landscape beyond.

Another drive from Lewes Road, c 700m west of the main approach, runs north for c 550m before turning east-south-east for c 200m. The drive then leads north through the farmyard and then north-east to an entrance forecourt on the west side of the house. **PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS** Wootton Manor (listed grade II\*) stands at the north-east end of a range of outbuildings and courtyards. The mid C17 three-storey, red-brick farmhouse is rectangular in plan, with plain tile hipped and gabled roofs, hipped dormers, and brick stacks; it was restored by Blow in 1915. To the north and south of the main house are extensions by Blow, to which Blow added a further large wing to the south-west, and another wing converted from a barn to the north-west. This wing incorporates the remains of the medieval chapel. The wings flank a raised terrace on the entrance front of the house (which Blow changed from the east to the west front). The brickwork used in the C17 was exactly copied by Blow in the extensions and the south-west wing. The house has single-storey porches on both the west and east fronts.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The raised terrace between the wings on the west, entrance front of the house is reached by a flight of steps from the entrance forecourt. It is enclosed by brick and flint walls and a double wrought-iron gate (designed by Blow), and is laid out on several levels with brick paving.

The gardens are laid out to the north, east, and south-east of the house. To the east of the central portion of the house is a large terraced area, with stone paving in front of the house, giving way to brick paving to the east, decorated with patterns of small millstones edged with bricks or circular patterns of setts. To the east of this is an area of lawn bounded to the east in part by a ha-ha giving a view of the park between two yew trees, the rest of the boundary being a simple wooden fence. To the south of this garden area and divided by a brick path and further yew trees, is a garden laid out with a series of alternating lawns and patterned brick paths, the central one edged with cobbles and the flanking paths un-edged, which run roughly north to south. In the early C20 there were flower borders between the lawns and the flanking paths but these were removed when the gardens were simplified in the late C20. The east side of this area is fenced and overlooks the park, and a fence along the south side divides it from a small paddock. On the west side the lawn slopes down to the range of offices and cottages to the south of the house. The changes of level around the house are managed by a path at the lower level, and a retaining wall, housing a water tank over which is a brick terrace, enclosed on three sides by brick walls with wrought-iron panels. The terrace and garden are reached through an arch and up a flight of steps.

A path leads around the north wing of the house that was added by Blow c 1919-20, and is divided from the kitchen garden to the north by a yew hedge. To the north-east brick paths, running west to east, cross a lawn. Between this lawn and the kitchen garden, a broad path leads from an arch immediately north-east of the main part of the house to the site of a hexagonal brick and timber summerhouse with a tiled roof (taken down late C20 and stored awaiting restoration). The patterned brick and stone path is decorated with circular areas of paving, and has an informal avenue of hornbeams. There were formerly flower borders along the edge of the path (recorded in a watercolour of c 1930), and self-seeded plants in the paving. Before reaching the site of the summerhouse the path crosses a large, roughly oval terrace, with a small brick and timber garden shelter on the south side; this terrace was formerly surrounded by double pillars supporting climbing roses. The path terminates at the site of the summerhouse, which is backed by woodland. To the west of the oval terrace a path leads to a sunken water garden, with stone steps leading down to a rectangular pond. The path terminates at a double wrought-iron gate leading out to an area of woodland to the north-west of the house. To the north of the water garden a path led into a woodland garden (currently overgrown). To the east of the oval terrace was an area of formal garden bordered by yew hedges and crossed by paths; this is also now overgrown. The main path running west to east was terminated at the east end by the ruined end of a building converted into an eyecatcher (taken down late C20 pending restoration). The path running north to south along the east side of this area had a pergola along it, and to the west of this small paths crossed two garden areas, with a statue in the centre. Between the two small gardens was a wide grass path that was terminated at the north end by a curving yew hedge.

**PARK** To the east and south of the house is the 'front park', consisting of fields under permanent pasture, planted as parkland from the early C19. The fields to the south, south-east, and east (Little Stroods, Great Stroods, Chambers Piece, Hall Field) are ancient meadows, and the field to the south-west (Cherry Croft) was cultivated prior to the early C20. The park is bounded by a belt of trees along the southern edge and in the south-west corner, and planted with single mature specimen trees. The London to Eastbourne railway line (London, Brighton and South Coast Railway 1848) cuts across the southern end of the site.

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**KITCHEN GARDEN** An area of kitchen garden and orchard, enclosed by a yew hedge, occupies ground to the north of the house (and immediately south of the water garden).

**REFERENCES**

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Maps Gardner and Gream, *Survey of the County of Sussex ...*, 1791 Tithe map for Folkington parish, 1839 (TD100), (East Sussex Record Office)

OS Surveyor's Drawing, 1813 (British Library Maps) OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1874 2nd edition revised 1898, published 1899 3rd edition revised 1908, published 1909 1925 edition

Illustrations Watercolour of garden, c 1930 (private collection)

Archival items Detmar Blow's drawings, RIBA Drawings Collection at the V&A Inventory for Wootton Manor, 1710 (W/INV 108), (East Sussex Record Office) Photographs of Wootton Manor, 1991 (RCHME 91/01581 BB91/11865-11911; 12354-80), (NMR, Swindon) Information (manuscripts, paintings, early C20 photographs, 1950s aerials, and research notes) supplied by Sabrina Harcourt-Smith, Wootton Manor (private collection) Sibylla Jane Flower, *Wootton Manor*, unpublished article, c 2000 (copy at Wootton Manor) Jeremy Musson, *Victorian Society Assessment*, c 2000 (copy at Wootton Manor)

Description written: October 2004 Amended: January 2005, March 2005 Register Inspector: CB 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.