

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

NETTLECOMBE COURT

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

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Name: NETTLECOMBE COURT

County: Somerset

District: Somerset West and Taunton (District Authority)

Parish: Monksilver

County: Somerset

District: Somerset West and Taunton (District Authority)

Parish: Nettlecombe

County: Somerset

District: Somerset West and Taunton (District Authority)

Parish: Old Cleeve

National park: EXMOOR

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.129715
Longitude: -3.3491137
National Grid Reference: ST 05693 37581
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001152
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

A late C18 park, incorporating extensive C16/C17 deer parks and wood pasture, around a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1066 Nettlecombe was held by Godwin, son of Harold. In 1086 the Domesday Survey described it as held by the King for a knight's fee. It was granted by the King to Hugh de Ralegh in 1160 and the grant of free warren was made to Simon de Ralegh in 1304. In 1440 the then owner, also Simon de Ralegh, died childless, leaving the estate to his nephew, Thomas Whalesborough. Thomas' son, Edmund, died during his father's lifetime and the estate descended to Edmund's sister, Elizabeth, who was married to John Trevelyan of Cornwall. Since 1440, the Trevelyan family has kept a record of the management of the estate, now held in the Somerset Record Office, Taunton. The first mention of a park at Nettlecombe appears in a survey of 1532, recorded as being of 80 acres (c 33ha) in a later survey of 1556, and deer were first recorded in 1593. Although deer parks are known to have existed at Nettlecombe since the late C16, the first conclusive evidence of a designed landscape appears in

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an engraving, published in 1787, by W Angus which shows a view from the south-east depicting mature parkland clumps. The park was enlarged with the addition of the Great Park in 1755 and South Park in 1792, in which year Thomas Veitch of Exeter provided estimates for landscaping and the stable block was erected by John Trevelyan. These changes are shown on an estate plan of 1796 which also shows the new parsonage, Combe, built following the removal of the village of Nettlecombe from the valley and enclosed by the church's glebe land, separating it from the parkland. Further improvements to the estate were made by Sir John Trevelyan from c 1828. The influential garden writer, John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843), visited Nettlecombe in September 1842 and commented on the exploitation of the natural beauty of Nettlecombe in favourable terms (Loudon 1990). The park and woodlands of Nettlecombe Court shown on the OS 1st edition 25" map of 1887 remain largely the same today, although many of the parkland trees have been lost. In 1931 Sir Walter Trevelyan died and left Nettlecombe to his daughter Joan, wife of Garnet Wolsey, a noted artist. Joan died in 1943 and Garnet in 1966, since when the estate has been held in trust by the Wolsey family. In 1963 the Court was used by St Audries School for Girls but since 1967 the estate has been leased to the Leonard Wills Field Centre for ecological study by children and adults. In 1984 the site was recognised as a site of national importance for its lichen interest, being designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1990. Management agreements with English Nature, the Countryside Commission, MAFF, and DEFRA are designed to conserve and enhance Nettlecombe's historic landscape and its ecological value (Pearson Assocs 1994, 2002).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Nettlecombe Court is located in a remote sheltered valley in the north slopes of the Brendon Hills in Exmoor National Park, c 6km south-south-west of Watchet and 20km north-west of Taunton. The park covers c 117ha, and contains pleasure grounds of c 4ha. The park is bounded to the west by a minor road, the B3190, to the east by Nettlecombe Park Road, and to the north by a minor road between Woodford and Keeper's Cottage in the east and a field boundary to the west. The southern boundary follows field boundaries to the garden of Combe Cottage and old glebe land north-west of the parsonage, Combe (c 1797, listed grade II), in the eastern section, and a field boundary south of a pond, c 250m north-east of the hamlet of Chidgley. The topography is dominated by steep but convex-sided hills which rise to smooth, rounded and wooded tops between which are deep combs.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The entrance to Nettlecombe is approached from the hamlet of Woodford, c 1km north-east of the house, on a minor road south of Woodford Cottages (1852, listed grade II) which were erected for Nettlecombe estate workers. The road meets the north drive to the house at Nettlecombe Lodge (probably Richard Carver c 1820, listed grade II), 250m south-west of Woodford. The drive proceeds c 750m in a south-westerly direction, passing, after 150m, east of Island Pond and, after 450m, Orchard Pond at the north end of the pleasure grounds. At the south end of the pleasure grounds, the north drive joins the west drive north-east of the churchyard, 50m east of the house. The drive passes east of the churchyard and through two stone gate piers (c 1790s), the east of which is surmounted by a lead sculpture of the head and forelegs of a rearing white horse. Past the gateway, the drive divides in two, one branch looping to the west to approach the south-east front of the house, the other continuing 850m south past the house to Combe Cottage and a further 350m to the parsonage, Combe, both buildings being outside the area here registered. The west drive approaches the south-east front of the house and then loops south and east around an oval lawn to regain the south drive after c 70m. The north drive was a public road until the 1790s when it was closed and the village of Nettlecombe, south of the house, was removed for the making of South Park. The former drive from the west is now an unmetalled and largely disused track running between post-mature oak trees, many of which have collapsed. This track enters the site 450m north-west of the house and runs east-south-east, turning south at the stable block to approach the house from the north, meeting the north drive at the churchyard.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Nettlecombe Court (C16, listed grade I), known since 1967 as the Leonard Wills Field Centre, sits at the bottom of surrounding hills in a group of buildings which include the church, walled gardens, stables, and cottages. The former manor house is a many gabled mansion of red sandstone, located immediately west of the church of St Mary the Virgin (C13/C14, listed grade I). According to Pevsner (1958), the existence of earlier buttresses on the south-east front suggests that the date of 1599 on the porch means that the Court was remodelled, rather than erected, in that year and that the west (actually south-west) front was 'Georgianized' before 1768. Loudon said in 1842:

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'The great novelty and charm of Nettlecombe are, that, the house being situated on a bottom, the scenery on every side is looked up to, instead of being looked over, the effect of which, united with the immense masses of wood, is romantic in a very high degree. Some of the valleys are so deep, that the sun does not shine into them, for between two and three months every winter'. (Loudon 1990)

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The pleasure grounds lie in a triangular area of c 4ha located 100m north of the house and include the former stable block, now known as Triggles, the Long Room and Studios (1792, listed grade II), the Garden Cottage (c 1820, listed grade II), and the pleasure grounds west of the north drive. A stone-edged leat, with a quartz cascade and quartz and millstone bridges, runs through the centre of the pleasure grounds and provides the focus for grass paths which wind between exotic trees and shrubs, now partly overgrown with scrub (2002). The pleasure grounds were laid out by Sir John Trevelyan from c 1828.

PARK The park extends from the house in all directions on rising ground. North-east of the pleasure grounds is the earliest imparked area, North or Old Park, which is in permanent pasture, sub-divided by modern fencing but retaining some old trees. North Park contains Island Pond, now enclosed by oak, alder, and laurel woodland. West of North Park and north of the house is agricultural land, outside the site here registered, which was part of the medieval deer park but was disimparked in the C18. West and south-west of the house is Great Park, an area of ancient wood-pasture imparked in 1755, which contains magnificent ancient maiden and pollard oaks. Also in Great Park, 300m south-west of the house, is the Flagstaff or Jenny's Grove, a small enclosure of mixed exotic trees formerly containing a flagpole. Great Park is divided longitudinally by the narrow valley of a spring which rises 50m south of Chidgley Pond which is ornamented with a waterfall, 1.2km south-south-west of the house. Some 750m south-west of the house is Park Wood, mostly replanted in the C19/C20, and Kingswood, the latter outside the area here registered but providing the setting of the landscape. A programme of replanting is replacing the large numbers of trees lost from Great Park during the second half of the C20. South Park is the major pasture area east and south-east of the Court, bordered to the south by glebe land that lies outside the park. The central part of South Park was added in 1792 and modified by Thomas Veitch of Exeter from that year with the removal of the village and old field boundaries and the planting of groups of trees on the knolls. Loudon wrote in 1842 of the estate parkland and wood-pasture:

'we were astonished and delighted with the view from the windows of the house, looking up the steep sides of the rounded hills that rose on every side, and which were mostly crowned with old oak woods... Rounded hills covered with grass to the top, with winding valleys having sloping sides; the valleys more or less wide, and the sides of hills differing in degrees to steepness; occasionally with water in the bottom in the form of a small stream or brook... Nettlecombe Court is a seat of great extent, and, though we took an extensive drive every day while we remained there, we did not see all the farm. The drives are exceedingly varied and beautiful, and exhibit fine combinations of parkland and woodland, comfortable cottages, and most substantial farm-houses and farmeries'. (Loudon 1990)

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled kitchen gardens (c 1828, listed grade II) occupy c 1ha of a south-facing hillside 250m north of the house, and c 50m north of the stable block. They are divided into two by an east to west wall and are currently down to grass. The precise date of the kitchen garden is unknown, though a general design plan of the new walled garden is dated 1828 and it is first shown on the Tithe map of 1839. An earlier walled kitchen garden survives as garages around a yard, immediately north of the Court, and was depicted on the estate plan of 1796. Loudon wrote in 1842:

'There is an admirable kitchen-garden here, with the walls covered with the very best kinds of peaches, nectarines and pears, all in fine order, while the fig ripens as a standard. We observed a very excellent kind of cabbage, which we were informed by the gardener, Mr Elworthy, was raised between the Paignton and Cornwall cabbages, and which is called the Nettlecombe cabbage'. (Loudon 1990)

REFERENCES

W Angus, *Seats of the Nobility* (1787), pl 33 J Collinson, *History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* (1791) *Country Life*, 23 (1 February 1908), pp 162-8 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South and West Somerset* (1958), pp 253-5 *Field Studies* 6, (1984), pp 117-48 *Victoria History of the County of Somerset V*, (1985), pp 107-20 J C Loudon, *In Search of English Gardens: The Travels of John Claudius Loudon and his wife Jane* (National Trust Classics 1990), pp 226-8 M Siraut, *The Trevelyan*

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Letters to 1840 (Somerset Record Office 1990) Nettlecombe Court: Replanting Proposals for the Walled Kitchen Garden, (Nicholas Pearson Associates 1994) Nettlecombe Park and Pleasure Grounds: Historic Landscape Survey and Restoration Plan, (Nicholas Pearson Associates 2002)

Maps Nettlecombe Estate Plan, 1796 (reproduced in Pearson Assocs 2002) Plan of new walled garden, 1828 (DD/WO/J8/2), (Somerset Record Office) Tithe map for Nettlecombe parish, 1839 (Somerset Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1891 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1887 2nd edition published 1904

Illustrations J Bennor, View of Nettlecombe from the south (in Collinson 1791) A Scalp, A view of Nettlecombe Court and Church from the south-east, 1796 (reproduced in Pearson Assocs 2002)

Archival items Letters from James Babbage to Sir John Trevelyan, 1834-77 (DD/WO/30/12, 36/3, 37/2, 37/15, 51/12, 54/3, 54/11, 55/2, 55/11, 56/4, 58/2), (Somerset Record Office) Estate records including John Babbage accounts, 1580-1835 (DD/WO/36/3, 40/2, 40/12, 49/7, 51/5, 51/8, 51/1255/11, 58.261/7/4, 61/7/4), (Somerset Record Office)

Description written: November 2002 Register Inspector: SH Edited: May 2004

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.