

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WOOD HOUSE

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Name:	WOOD HOUSE
County:	Devon
District:	West Devon (District Authority)
Parish:	South Tawton
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.747595 Longitude: -3.9076832 National Grid Reference: SX 65511 95957 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000485 Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

Details

Early C20 formal gardens and parkland designed and landscaped by Thomas Mawson and implemented by Robert Mawson of the Lakeland Nurseries, Windermere, surrounding a house designed by Dan Gibson with a ground plan by Thomas Mawson.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Historically, Wood was a substantial Devon farm centred on a late C16 or early C17 house, lying some distance from the village of South Tawton. The early C19 Tithe map (c 1840) shows a group of buildings on the site of the present house approached by a drive on the line of the present service drive. An orchard and kitchen garden lay to the south and south-west, while many of the other fields associated with the farm were in arable cultivation, reflecting the relative fertility of the site. The early C19 farm was let to Richard Lethbridge, whose family remained in occupation until the early C20. The 1st edition OS map (1886) shows significant alteration to the grounds at Wood, with the construction of the south-west drive and lodge, and the formation of the lake to the south-east of the house. In 1900 William Lethbridge, a successful barrister, consulted Thomas Mawson about further improvements to the estate (Mawson and Mawson 1926). Mawson introduced Lethbridge to the architect Dan Gibson (Mawson 1927), with whom he had earlier had a partnership, and with whom he worked at Graythwaite Hall, Cumbria and The Willows, Lancashire (qv). Mawson and Gibson collaborated on the comprehensive remodelling of the existing house (ibid). Gibson was responsible for the design of the new house, its furnishing, and the design of the home farm buildings and alteration of the lodge on the south-west drive, while Mawson made an initial ground plan for the house to ensure its relationship to his garden scheme. The house and new gardens were substantially complete by 1905, although Mawson returned to make further alterations to the south-west entrance. Mawson's landscape scheme was implemented by his brother Robert Mawson, of Lakeland Nurseries, Windermere, and was described by Thomas Mawson in an extensive, illustrated account of his work at Wood in the fifth edition of *The Art and Craft of Garden Making* (1926). William Lethbridge died c 1920, and the property remained in private hands until 1973 when it was sold and converted into a country house hotel. It was subsequently resold, and is now (1998) again a private residence.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Wood House is situated c 1.5km north of the village of South Tawton and c 5km south-south-west of the village of North Tawton, c 3km north of Dartmoor. The c 13ha site comprises c 4ha of formal gardens, pleasure grounds, lake and kitchen gardens, and a further 9ha of parkland and plantations. The site is enclosed to the west by a minor road leading from South Tawton north to Taw Green, and to the north and north-east by a further minor road. To the east and south the site adjoins agricultural land and is enclosed by fences and hedges. The site rises from the east and south towards the west and north boundaries, with a significant drop in level between the House and kitchen garden to the east. There are significant views south and south-east from within the site towards Dartmoor, and from the higher ground on the west side of the site towards woodland and agricultural land outside the site to the east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is approached from the minor road leading north from South Tawton to Taw Green, which forms its western boundary. Convex wing walls comprising rendered sections between rusticated granite pilasters flank square-section granite gate piers with soffit-moulded caps, now (1998) surmounted by obelisk caps with wrought-iron fleur-de-lys finials (removed from gate piers on the south-east drive); the gate piers were originally surmounted by covered lead urns with flame finials (Mawson and Mawson 1926). The gate piers support elaborate wrought-iron gates with a crest in the manner of an overthrow (all listed grade II). Quadrant-shaped lawns in front of the gateway are enclosed by low horizontal iron rails supported on low granite posts. Within the gates a single-storey, rough-cast lodge (listed grade II) designed by Dan Gibson stands to the south of the drive. From the entrance the tarmac drive runs c 100m north-east through evergreen shrubbery and mixed trees, before emerging into the park and turning north-north-east for c 260m before reaching the carriage court on the west side of the House. The drive is separated from the park to the east and west by metal estate fencing, and from a point c 200m south-west of the House is flanked by specimen trees and shrubs. The south-west drive existed by 1886, but its present form is the work of Mawson. The carriage court to the west of the House formed part of Mawson and Gibson's remodelling of the building, and replaced an earlier carriage court on the south side of the House which is shown on the 1886 OS map. An archway connects the early C20 carriage court with the north-west drive to the north of the House, which is again a remodelling by Mawson of an existing drive. The north-west drive enters the service court north-east of the House between granite gate piers (listed grade II*) designed by Mawson. A further drive approaches the House from the minor road forming the north and north-east boundary. Some 270m south-east of the House square-section granite gate piers surmounted by soffit-moulded flat caps (originally with the obelisk finials now on the south-west gates) support elaborate wrought-iron gates (all listed grade II*). The drive, now (1998) a track, runs west-north-west, passing over a single-arch granite bridge designed by Mawson (listed grade II*) c 150m south-east of the House before passing immediately east of the House to reach the farm buildings to the north-east. The farm drive separates the House and gardens from the kitchen garden.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Wood House (listed grade II*) is a comprehensive rebuilding and extension of an earlier house undertaken by the architect Dan Gibson for William Lethbridge between 1900 and 1905. The landscape architect Thomas Mawson prepared the initial ground plan for the house, ensuring its relationship to the terraces and garden scheme (Mawson 1927). The two-storey rough-cast, slate-roofed house is designed in a restrained Arts and Crafts Tudor style, with granite mullioned windows, gabled east and west wings, and massive circular chimney stacks. The House is roughly 'H' shaped on plan, with a projecting north-west wing which contains a circular-headed arch leading north from the carriage court to the north-west drive. The north-west wing leads to a loggia which connects at first-floor level with the gardens west of the carriage court. The service quarters lie to the north-east and are arranged around a service court and adjoin the stables, farm buildings and kitchen garden.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Lying to the north, west and south of the House, the gardens and pleasure grounds comprise a series of formal enclosures which lead south-east to an area of ornamental planting around the C19 lake. The North Garden comprises a level lawn retained by a low rubble wall north of the north-west drive, and is enclosed to the north and west by rubble-stone walls (listed grade II*), now (1998) coped with slates but originally thatched (Mawson and Mawson 1926). To the north-east the lawn is enclosed by the west wall of the stables, while to the south it is overlooked by the billiard room in the House. The north wall curves back behind a circular thatched summerhouse (listed grade II*), whose conical roof is supported

on two monolithic granite columns. There is a stone bench seat within the summerhouse, and to east and west it is flanked by round-headed niches which formerly contained statues (*ibid*).

The gardens west of the carriage court ascend on four terraces of varying depth with an axial vista extending from the west door of the House to the Tea House at the end of the cedar walk c 200m west. A grass bank to the west of the carriage court is retained by a rubble-stone wall, and a flight of axially placed stone steps ascend between square-section granite ashlar piers with flat caps (all listed grade II*) to a narrow terrace with a crazy-paved granite path running north/south below the tennis lawn (listed grade II*). This path connects via steps at its northern end with the loggia at the west end of the north-west wing of the House. A further flight of stone steps (listed grade II*) ascends to the double tennis lawn c 30m west of the House, which is enclosed by grass banks to the south, west and north, and yew hedges which rise to shaped square finials adjacent to openings on the east, south and west sides. Mawson's published plan of the garden (*ibid*) indicates pergolas on the north and south sides of the tennis lawn, but it is unclear whether these were realised. Plain stone steps (listed grade II*) ascend west from the tennis lawn to a further narrow north/south grass terrace enclosed by yew hedges. At its north end is a round-backed stone seat (listed grade II*) which allows an extended view south across the bowling green towards Dartmoor. The bowling green c 50m south-west of the House adjoins the southern end of the third west terrace, and comprises a rectangular, yew hedge-enclosed lawn, with a projecting rectangular bastion on the east side. To the west stands the Bowling Green Pavilion (listed grade II*), designed by Mawson as a 'loggia with raised terrace' (*ibid*). The Pavilion is conceived in a plain classical style in granite ashlar with a triple arcade of round-headed arches flanked by projecting north and south wings each with a single arch on the east side. The roof, reached by steps within the projecting wings, serves as a terrace allowing views across the bowling green and gardens towards the House and land beyond the site to the east. Steps at the south end of the bowling green descend to a shrubbery-enclosed lawn with a centrally placed granite sundial (listed grade II*, originally located on the formal terraces south of the House) c 65m south-west of the House (*ibid*). From the third of the western terraces, plain stone steps (listed grade II*) ascend to the cedar walk, a sloping grass walk or glade flanked by mature cedars, which leads to the Tea House (listed grade II*). A central room with a fireplace and other fittings is flanked to north and south by a semicircular roofed arcade supported by granite Tuscan columns. The arcade ends to south-east and north-east in granite ashlar walls ornamented with niches, while the final bays of each side of the arcade have been converted in the late C20 into service rooms. The building has a hipped roof of Cotswold stone slabs, which rises to a peaked roof over the central room. The Tea House has an axial vista down the western terraces to the House, while the cedar walk overlooks the park to the south.

Stone steps at the south-east corner of the carriage court lead down to a gravelled terrace which runs below the south facade of the House. The recess between the south-east and south-west wings is enclosed to the south by a low granite balustrade and convex semicircular stone steps ascend to a terrace paved with granite flags. The principal south terrace is terminated to the east by a pitch-roofed granite garden house which has a view from a mullioned window in its east wall across the kitchen garden. Steps descend below the garden house to the kitchen garden, and a further terrace below the east facade of the House. A croquet lawn extends south of the House, and is separated from the gravelled terrace by low stone walls and box hedges. To east and west the croquet lawn is flanked by slightly raised herbaceous borders and gravel walks approached from the south terrace by short flights of stone steps and supported by low granite retaining walls. The east and west walks are aligned on an identical pair of single-storey, square stone gazebos or summerhouses surmounted by low pyramid roofs and with elliptical-arched doorways. The gazebos stand to the east and west of a centrally placed circular lily pool surrounded by a granite kerb and gravel walk. A rusticated stone plinth in the centre of the pool formerly supported a bronze statue of a naked, helmeted youth carrying a spear by Derwent Wood (absent 1998). The pool lies in front of a semicircular exedra defined by plain granite posts linked by horizontal iron bars which served as a support for climbing plants and roses and terminated the vista across the croquet lawn from the House. A centrally placed wrought-iron gate and overthrow is supported by granite piers with ball finials, and leads to a flight of stone steps flanked by a pair of Irish yews. The steps descend to the sundial court, a garden with a sunken circular area originally focused on the granite sundial now located to the south of the bowling green. Banks to the north, west and east of the sundial court are planted with mixed shrubs and specimen trees, and retained by rustic granite walls which were originally planted as a wall garden. The retaining walls to the lower sundial lawn were similarly planted, and to

the south, the garden was originally enclosed by a yew hedge. All the structural elements of the formal terraces south of the House, including the missing statue by Derwent Wood, are listed grade II*.

A serpentine walk ascends from the north-west corner of the sundial court to the drive and western terraces, while to the south walks lead through an area of lawns and informal shrubbery to the C19 lake c 160m south-east of the House. A walk around the lake passes through specimen rhododendrons, azaleas and other trees and shrubs, to reach a small rectangular granite rubble summerhouse (listed grade II*) c 270m south-east of the House. The summerhouse has a hipped, thatched roof supported by monolithic granite piers, while the interior is lined with oak panelling and has a simple bench seat overlooking the lake. South-east and east of the lake Mawson created a bog garden around the stream which forms the outflow from the lake. A rustic oak bridge carried a path over the stream, while the lake-side walk was carried to the east side of the lake on a low timber bridge with simple rail parapets. A series of small cascades in the stream and mature conifers to the north-east of the lake survive from Mawson's scheme. The pleasure grounds around the lake are separated from the park to the west by metal estate fences.

PARK Lying to the south-west of the House and to the north-west and south-east of the principal drive, the park was developed by Mawson c 1900 from an area of paddocks and agricultural land. Known in the early C20 as The Lawn (OS 1905), the park remains pasture with scattered, mainly deciduous trees, with areas of plantation and shrubbery adjacent to the lodge to the south-west, and the south-east boundary with the pleasure grounds. An ornamental clump placed by Mawson lies c 240m south-south-west of the House in the south-east section of parkland, while the western boundary is screened from the adjacent public road by mixed trees and hedgerow shrubs.

KITCHEN GARDEN The irregularly shaped kitchen garden lies on the east-facing slope immediately below the service road to the east of the House. The kitchen garden is entered by an arched door set in the wall opposite steps descending from the garden house at the east end of the south terrace. Enclosed by granite rubble walls c 3m high (listed grade II; some sections of wall repaired 1998), Mawson's kitchen garden was laid out with a grid-pattern of walks which were lined with ornamental timber and iron fruit espalier supports and arches. Traces of these structures remain today (1998). At the north end of the garden a series of glasshouses and frames with associated structures were built, including two vinerys, a palm house and a house for ericaceous plants. Remains of these glass, timber and granite or brick structures survive, together with the granite men's shed, tool shed, mushroom and forcing shed, seed store, potting shed and two-storey boiler room (all listed grade II). To the north-west a square-plan fruit room stands adjacent to a semicircular wall-fountain and reservoir (all listed grade II). Enclosed by granite rubble walls, the reservoir was fed by a bronze lion's-mask spout on the monumental keystone (Mawson and Mawson 1926) of an arched panel which forms part of the rear wall to the structure. The bronze spout is now removed, and the pool dry (1998). A further arched door north of the fountain leads to the service yard north of the House. The kitchen garden is no longer cultivated (1998).

REFERENCES

T H Mawson and E P Mawson, *The Art and Craft of Garden Making*, (5th edn 1926), pp 42, 44-5, 48, 78, 89, 154, 223, 247, 393-400 T H Mawson, *The Life and Work of an English Landscape Architect* (1927), pp 46, 62, 69, 74 *Country Life*, 160 (10 June 1976), p 1579 G Beard, *The Life and Work of a Northern Landscape Architect Thomas H Mawson 1861-1933* (1978), pp 11, 66-7 H Jordan, *Thomas Hayton Mawson*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Univ of London 1988) B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Devon* (1989), pp 916-17 S Pugsley (ed), *Devon Gardens* (1995), pp 106-24 T Gray, *The Garden History of Devon An Illustrated Guide to Sources* (1995), p 243

Maps Tithe map for South Tawton parish, nd (c 1840), (Devon Record Office) T H Mawson, *Plan of a West Country Garden*, c 1900 (see Mawson and Mawson 1926, fig 480)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1886, published 1891 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1886, published 1888 2nd edition revised 1904, published 1905

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Legal

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