

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

GARSINGTON MANOR

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Name:	GARSINGTON MANOR
County:	Oxfordshire
District:	South Oxfordshire (District Authority)
Parish:	Garsington
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.712606 Longitude: -1.1590874 National Grid Reference: SP 58196 01876 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001095 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

Formal, early C20 Italianate gardens surrounding a C16/C17 manor house, designed by Lady Ottoline Morrell with the assistance of Philip Tilden.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Garsington Manor House was probably built in the late C16, using the site of monastic buildings formerly owned by Abingdon Abbey. By 1625 the estate was owned by the Wickham family, who rebuilt it c 1630. In 1780 Anne Wickham, the heir to the manor, married Thomas Drake Tyrwhitt-Drake of Shardeloes, Bucks (qv), in whose family the manor remained, largely tenanted and unaltered, until the early C20. Philip Morrell (1870-1943), of the local brewing family, bought the house and surrounding estate for £8400 in 1913 and moved into it in 1915, together with his wife Lady Ottoline (1873-1938) and daughter Julian. The Morrells were part of the Bloomsbury 'set' and entertained the Bloomsburyites and many like-minded artists here, including Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon and T S Eliot. Aldous Huxley is said to have made the Manor House the setting for his *Crome Yellow* (1921). Philip and Lady Ottoline developed the formal elements in the garden, until in 1928 the house was sold to Dr Heaton of Christ Church, Oxford (qv), who added several features. It was sold again in 1954 to Mrs Heaton's brother, Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, founder of St Anthony's College, Oxford, who was regularly visited here by Sir Harold Macmillan. The Manor remains (1997) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Manor House stands at the south edge of the village of Garsington, 4km south of Wheatley and 6km south-east of the centre of Oxford. The 4ha site is bounded to the north by the lane from Garsington to Chiselhampton, and on the other sides by agricultural land. The ground slopes south from the house, which lies close to the north boundary, levelling out as it reaches the orchard running along the south boundary. The setting is rural, with the village church close by to the north-west, and long panoramic views to the south to the Wittenham Clumps on the Sinodun Hills, and beyond these the Berkshire Downs in the far distance.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance, off the Garsington to Chiselhampton lane, lies c 20m from the north, entrance front of the house. The rectangular, gravelled forecourt is entered through a pair of panelled stone gate piers with ball

finials (late C17/early C18) supporting iron gates, flanked by low ashlar walls topped by iron railings (all listed grade II). The west and east edges of the forecourt are defined by clipped yew hedges leading down to the north front. Standing more than 6m high, these hedges are possibly over 200 years old. An extension of the north boundary wall runs south forming the west side of the forecourt, enveloped on the east side by the adjacent yew hedge and exposed on the west side as part of the adjacent brewhouse service yard boundary.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Garsington Manor House (listed grade II*) stands on a plateau close to the north boundary of the site, on a south-facing hillside which continues to rise north of the lane from the village. The late C16/early C17 stone house seems to have been remodelled in the late C17 for the Wickham family (Garsington Manor, leaflet 1994), eliminating an internal courtyard, and now (1997) consists of a double cube of two storeys with gabled attics. At the centre of the north, entrance front, the round-headed main doorway is protected by a wooden hood above. The broad south front overlooks the south garden, with long views across the distant countryside, while the narrow east front overlooks the terrace and east garden beyond, with a central garden door flanked by massive projecting chimneys giving access from the house.

The stone-paved and walled terrace is dominated by the south-facing stone and tiled Italianate loggia (Philip Morrell/Philip Tilden c 1925, terrace and loggia listed grade II* as part of the house) forming its northern boundary. The loggia's south-facing front has a raised centre of three arches, flanked by terms set against rustic pilasters with stone pineapple finials, and a hipped, tiled roof. The terrace is supported on the south side by a curving stone wall, with a double flight of steps aligned on the centre of the loggia flanking a central niche with a mask set over a stone basin. The steps give access down to the upper lawn along the south front of the house and further, informal steps lead down to the Italian Garden. At the east end of the terrace, aligned on the garden door, stands a pair of tall, ashlar gate piers with pineapple finials, flanked by low stone walls topped by iron railings; these give access to the east garden below and are aligned on its central path.

The C18 stone stables (listed grade II) stand 30m north-east of the house; of one storey plus a loft, they are now used partly as a garage. They stand on the north boundary, adjacent to the north-east corner of the forecourt, in their own small yard. The yard is entered from the road by an entrance in the north-east corner, with a gateway in the south boundary wall giving access to the house and terrace. The former bakehouse and attached outbuilding (listed grade II) stand 10m north-west of the house, in a yard adjacent to the west side of the forecourt. The C16 to C18 stone buildings, of L-plan, are reached from the road by a gate in the north-east corner of the yard adjacent to the forecourt.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens are divided into several linked, formal and informal elements ranged along the south-facing hillside, reached from the house via the east garden door onto the terrace. The formal south garden is divided into three main sections descending the slope, flanked to the west by an informal wooded wild garden with fishpond and dell and to the east by the formal east flower garden and croquet lawn.

The uppermost section of the south garden is laid to level lawn, bounded to the north by a stone-flagged path and to the south by a clipped yew hedge with a broad central gap, standing at the top of a low, stone retaining wall. The gap in the hedge allows views down the sloping middle lawn below, to the Italian Garden beyond. The middle lawn, flanked by two sets of steps edged by short evergreen oak avenues, is bounded to the south by a further clipped yew hedge above a low, stone retaining wall. Below this lies the Italian Garden, set across the south axis of the house and dominated by the rectangular pool. The pool, which almost fills the area, is edged with dressed limestone and surrounded by a grass path. The boundary to the west, south and east is formed by further clipped yew hedges, these containing niches with statuary (listed grade II). Beyond the south hedge and running parallel with it stand two further parallel yew hedges, forming a narrow, concealed evergreen passage at the top of a stone retaining wall, with small, arched clairvoies cut through the southernmost hedge at head height, giving views out to the distant Wittenham Clumps and the Berkshire Downs. The pond reflects the house above, the surrounding statuary, and the small wooden summerhouse known as The Temple set within the east hedge (possibly built by D H Lawrence, CL 1982). A central, stone-paved, rectangular island contains a reclining female figure, set on an oval pedestal ornamented with festoons (included with the other statuary, listed grade II).

The pond is part of a sequence of water features fed by a spring in The Gizzel, an upper pond west of the house. From here a stream progresses through the Dell below, to the fishpond, and is channelled into the rectangular pond of the Italian Garden. The

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ponds are shown in the 1624 Wickham estate map and may be part of the earlier monastic features, that in the Italian Garden being formalised by the Morrells during their creation of the area with Philip Tilden during the 1920s. The Italian Garden is said to have been inspired partly by the gardens of Lady Ottoline's aunt, Mrs Henry Scott, at the Villa Capponi near Florence, and was probably laid out by Lady Ottoline herself (CL 1997).

The flower garden or parterre, reached from the east end of the stone terrace, is bounded by stone walls to the west and north, by a stone farm building to the east, and by a stone retaining wall on the south side. Before the Morrells' ownership the area was used as a walled vegetable garden. Initially they laid it out with twelve beds, increasing this to the present twenty-four small, rectangular flower beds, most edged by low, clipped box hedges, containing fastigate clipped yews at the corners. The beds are divided from each other by gravel paths, and a central grass path flanked by clipped yew hedges continues the west/east axis from the house and east front of the terrace. Steps at the south-west and south-east corners, linked by a line of ornamental cherry trees, give access to the croquet lawn below. The C17, or older, square stone dovecote (listed grade II) stands at the east side of the croquet lawn, whilst Juniper Walk runs down the west side, with eight short sets of steps, each flanked by fastigate junipers, separated by grass paths. Various openings from the west side of Juniper Walk give access to the descending elements of the south garden. East and south of the croquet lawn and west and south of the Italian Garden, informal lawns run down the slope to the orchard, lying on level ground along the south boundary.

REFERENCES

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Maps A survey of the Lordship of Garsington, the estate of Richard Plummer, 1739 (private collection) R Davis, *A New Map of the County of Oxford ...*, 1797 Enclosure map for Garsington parish, 1823 (Oxfordshire County Record Office) A Bryant, *Map of the County of Oxford ...*, surveyed 1823 Tithe map for Garsington parish, 1844 (Oxfordshire County Record Office) Morrell Estates at Garsington (plotted on 1880 25" OS map) (Oxfordshire County Record Office) Sale catalogue plan of Garsington Manor, 1913 (Oxfordshire County Record Office) A Jones (CPRE), *Garsington Manor Gardens*, 1990 (copy on EH file)
OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881-2 2nd edition published 1901 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: December 1997 Amended: March 1999; April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: January 2000

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.