

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

DOWNE HALL

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

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Name:	DOWNE HALL
District:	Dorset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Bridport
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.736099 Longitude: -2.7551993 National Grid Reference: SY 46803 93215 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001353 Date first listed: 04-Jun-1996

Details

Compact pleasure grounds and a park laid out in the late C18 to accompany a new house, together with early C20 formal gardens designed by E S Prior.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Downe Hall was built in the late C18 for William Downe, a member of a long-established Bridport family. Downe's chosen site immediately adjoins the northern edge of the town, and its elevated position affords long southerly views towards the sea. An early C19 description noted that 'It stands in the centre of a plantation beautifully disposed, and commands a prospect on every side that cannot fail of affording delight to the most fastidious eye' (Hutchins 1863). When the property was sold in 1837 the particulars again noted the 'extended and picturesque scene' and the 'bold and extensive view of the vast ocean' (Sale particulars, 1837). Downe Hall passed through several hands during the C19, and in the early C20 E S Prior (1852-1932) was called in to lay out formal gardens to the south of the Hall. This scheme was described and illustrated in an article by Prior published in *The Studio* (1901). During the C20 the property again passed through several hands, with some development taking place on the peripheries of the site in the late C20. Today (2003) the site is in divided ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Downe Hall is situated on a south-facing hillside immediately north of Bridport, 'approximating upon the Town' (Sale particulars, 1837). The c 6.5ha site is bounded to the south by a stone wall which retains the ground above the level of a back lane which is the western extension of Bedford Place. To the west and east the approximately triangular-shaped site is adjoined by housing and domestic gardens. The south-facing slope affords wide southerly views across Bridport towards the sea at West Bay.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Downe Hall is approached from the south-east corner of the site where a drive leads past a lodge, north along the eastern boundary of the site, passing Garage Cottage, to arrive at a carriage turn beneath the north facade of the Hall. A branch from the southern end of this drive leads west, through the perimeter planting, parallel to the southern boundary, then along the west side of the pleasure grounds, so forming a walk round the pleasure grounds. Previous to the construction of Prior's formal terraces, this walk led below the south facade of the Hall. This arrangement is shown on a plan of Bridport of 1832 and the Tithe map (1846).

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING Downe Hall (listed grade II*) stands on an artificially levelled terrace cut into the south-facing slope towards the centre of the site. The Palladian-style house is constructed in Portland ashlar and comprises two storeys with a rusticated basement and roofs concealed behind a balustrade. The south facade has a pedimented centrepiece supported by Ionic pilasters, with a later semicircular porch. The central block is flanked by a pair of lower side wings, while a service court is situated to the north-east of the Hall. The house was constructed on a virgin site in 1775-6 or 1789 (listed building description; Pevsner 1972) and was altered and extended at various points during the C19. The south porch was an addition of c 1807 (Pevsner 1972).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The formal gardens and informal pleasure grounds are situated to the south of the Hall. A paved walk extends below the south facade, beyond which is a terrace enclosed by a partly balustraded wall. To the east, a hedge and retaining wall divides the sundial lawn from the rose garden below, the latter set around a formal pool. The formal terraced gardens were constructed to the design of E S Prior c 1900.

From the terraces, the ground slopes away southwards, laid out with lawns and a variety of mature specimen trees and shrubs down to the perimeter planting. A grass bank runs from east to west across the lower lawn. The walk leading from the southern end of the drive forms a circuit round the southern and western sides of the pleasure grounds. The informal pleasure grounds are contemporary with the construction of the Hall.

PARK To the north of the Hall a yew hedge divides the forecourt from the small park beyond, which extends northwards over the steeply rising ground of Coneygar Hill. A series of rides, cut into the side of the hill, leads through a belt, Downe Hall Plantation, round the perimeter of the park. The routes offer long views out from the site, as well as vistas back to the Hall. The park is contemporary with the construction of the house, while the 1837 sale particulars refer to the 'splendid park grounds' accompanying the mansion. REFERENCES J Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset II*, (3rd edn 1863), p 31 *The Studio* (1901), p 183 J Newman and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Dorset* (1972), pp 113-14

Maps Plan of Bridport, 1832 (Dorset Record Office) Tithe map for Bridport parish, 1848 (Dorset Record Office) OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1888

Illustrations Engraving of Downe Hall from the south-west (published in Hutchins 1st edn 1774)

Archival items Particulars and Conditions of Sale of Downe Hall Mansion, 1837 (Bridport Museum) Early C20 photographs of Downe Hall (Dorset Record Office) Early C20 photographs of the formal terraces at Downe Hall (published in *The Studio* 1901)

Description written: December 2003 Amended: April 2004 (PAS) Register Inspector: JML 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.