

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ASHTON WOLD

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

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Name: ASHTON WOLD

District: North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Ashton

District: North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Lutton

District: North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Polebrook

District: North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Tansor

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 National Grid Reference: TL 08703 87864
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

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label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
 Grade: II
 List Entry Number: 1001715
 Date first listed: 25-Nov-2010

Details

Ashton Wold House is a country house with formal garden designed by William Huckvale in 1901 for Nathaniel Charles Rothschild. The house and gardens are set within a predominantly wooded landscape, but with meadows and pasture to the south and south-east and with lakes beyond the meadow to the south.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT The Ashton Estate, including Ashton Wold, was purchased and developed mainly as a sporting estate following its acquisition by the banker, Lionel Rothschild, in 1860, and was later transformed into a model estate with country house for his grandson, Charles Rothschild. This area of Northamptonshire was enclosed by Act of Parliament in 1810, and the map of the Enclosure Award shows the area of the Wold with clearly delineated boundaries and tree-lined rides or avenues from north to south and east to west, encircled by trees at their crossing. Before enclosure the high ground of Ashton Wold was under open pasture, although within it there were three separate areas of old enclosures. One of these, to the north-east of Ashton Wold House and outside the registered area, contains ridge and furrow (visible on aerial photographs), and extensive ridge and furrow present in the woodland to the south indicates that much of it was at one time under cultivation. The

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only other features shown on the 1810 map are three small circular fox coverts. The Wold seems to have formed the sporting element within the wider Ashton Estate; the only buildings at that date in this part of the estate were those of the farm tucked into the south-east corner of the main rides crossing. This appears on both the sale map of 1858 and the conveyance map of 1860, which also show the Wold south of the east-west avenue as woodland crossed by rides. This area, Polebrook Hill and Wold Wood, are specifically referred to in the sales particulars as 'well known famous Covers, and are intersected by Walks and Glades convenient for shooting: and connected with it are some extensive broad Avenues of Large Elms with Turfed Glades, affording pleasurable, picturesque, and secluded Drives and Walks'. Wold Wood is the main area now classified as Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland, and is also designated as a SSSI (Ashton Wold, 1000301).

Although the 1858 sale particulars describes the Ashton Estate as 'very valuable and important', with sporting advantages, there is a confession that there 'is no House on the Property adapted for the occupation of a Gentleman'. The Wold formed the sporting element within the wider Ashton Estate, and was the main source of interest for Lionel Rothschild and his son Nathaniel Mayer, 1st Lord Rothschild (1840-1915), who otherwise showed little interest in the estate; the only structural work undertaken in the late C19 was the building of a hunting lodge on the site of the present house. However, when Nathaniel Rothschild's son Charles encountered Ashton Wold on a butterfly hunting expedition with his friend, the Vicar of the nearby village of Polebrook, he was so enchanted by it that he asked his father to build him a house there, and in 1900 the Rothschild's architect William Huckvale was commissioned to design not only a house with terraces and formal walled gardens and kitchen garden, but a full complement of estate buildings including a head gardener's house, accommodation for under-gardeners, lodges, a gatehouse and a model farm by the avenues crossing. These were largely complete by 1901, with water and electricity delivered to houses, gardens and greenhouses from an old mill on the River Nene, west of Ashton village. Electricity was generated here by water turbines, backed up by diesel, and was used to pump water to a water tower and so to the estate buildings. By 1927 the formal gardens to the east of the house were complete, and the woodland had been extended to the fields immediately to the west and east of the existing woodland, Wold Wood, and to the north-east of the model farm. Also by 1927 two lakes had been created 2kms to the south of the house, at the end of a peninsula of rough pasture and light scrub over ridge and furrow. The lakes were overlooked by a boat-house and a nature observation summerhouse.

The planting of the formal gardens and the wider landscape were largely the work of Nathaniel Charles Rothschild (1877-1923), his wife Rozsika, and later his daughter Miriam. Charles worked full-time for the family banking firm, was the leading expert on fleas in the country, and was also a renowned naturalist and pioneer conservationist, responsible for forming the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves in 1912 (now the Royal Society for Nature Conservation). He brought to the landscape of Ashton Wold the interests of a naturalist, and while the terraces and walled gardens around the house took a conventional Edwardian form, and the greenhouses held his collections of rare cacti, orchids and waterlilies, the wider landscape was designed to provide natural habitats to attract wildlife.

Following his death in 1923 and that of his wife Rozsika in 1940, their daughter Miriam (1908-2005) inherited the estate. The house was commandeered for use as a hospital during the Second World War, and dispersed accommodation blocks were built in Ashton Wold woods for the RAF and the American Eighth Air Force billeted at nearby Polebrook Airfield. The gardens and estate suffered considerable damage and neglect, and although the kitchen gardens were returned to productivity after the war, the formal gardens were not restored. Fruit trees were planted on the terraces, and in the following years Miriam's interests turned to wildflower gardening. She developed a preference for wildness over formality, covering the house in a tangle of carefully chosen creeping and flowering plants and transforming the terraces and lawns with wildflowers. Her advocacy of wildflowers was highly influential in the gardening world, but she is best known for her work as an entomologist, and particularly as an international expert on fleas, continuing her father's research. She was a fellow of the Royal Society, was awarded eight honorary degrees and was appointed DBE for her services to the study of natural history.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Ashton Wold occupies an area of high ground about 4.5kms to the east of Oundle, and about 2.5kms to the east of the village of Ashton.

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The site covers an area of about 207ha. Its main entrances are from the east and west. From the west, access is from the public road out of Ashton village, which continues as a private road after West Lodge (this lodge is outside the registered area, but is listed at Grade II). As it approaches the estate buildings the road divides, the north fork passing through the Gatehouse and curving around the front of the stable block to join the chestnut tree-lined avenue that runs straight from west to east, where it joins the road to Warmington at the East Lodge (also listed at Grade II). The main approach to the house is via a track running south from the avenue which enters the more formal gardens around the house through wrought iron gates. The south fork is the service entrance to the site, and travels behind the stables, beside the north wall of the kitchen garden and its potting sheds, joining the polite access track at the entrance to the house courtyard. An avenue running from north to south from the Warmington road crosses the main avenue at a roughly central point, and carries a public footpath.

The park is bounded on the east by the minor road between Hemington and Warmington, and to the south by the Lutton road. At the west entrance to Ashton Wold the north boundary follows the curving line of the drive to the north-east before turning north to take in the small rectangular pond, then travels east to enclose the woodland called The Gorse. To the south of the west entrance the boundary follows the service road east, turning south to the west of the gardeners' cottages. The boundary is otherwise irregular, and formed by farmland and field boundaries. The main area is defined by the historic Wold of the 1810 Enclosure Award map, with the addition of the lakes and Lake Fields to the south of Ashton Wold House, and the field to the south-east of the house and gardens, between the oak-tree-lined boundary to the west and the woodland to the east. To the north, the boundary also takes in the small triangle of woodland known as Stamford Corner.

Two areas are excluded from the registered area. The first, 1 & 2 Bluestone Cottages and their gardens on the Lutton Road are on the periphery of the designed landscape. The second, containing the agricultural buildings of Ashton Wold Farm, is immediately to the north of Home Farm. The character of this area is compromised by a modern grain store and remains of World War II huts.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS There are a number of listed buildings and structures associated with the park and garden, including, most notably, Ashton Wold House. This was designed by William Huckvale in a neo-Jacobean style, based on Northamptonshire examples. It is built of coursed rock-faced limestone with ashlar limestone dressings, its roofs covered in Collyweston limestone slates. Originally two and a half stories, in 1971 Miriam Rothschild commissioned Claude Phillimore to reduce its height to one storey with attics. The terrace walls and steps are included in the Grade II listing of the house, and the formal garden structures are also all listed together at Grade II. The wall that forms the south boundary to the formal gardens is separately listed, as is the walled kitchen garden, with its associated bothys and greenhouses. Other Grade II listed estate buildings directly associated with the house and within the area recommended for registration include the Gatehouse, Steward's House, stable complex, petrol store, water tower and Head Gardener's Cottage (Greenwood Manor). Set within the wider landscape, Woodend Cottage, East Lodge, and the summerhouse/nature observation hide by the south lake are also listed at Grade II. The buildings of Home Farm, the model farmstead at the avenue crossing, are listed at Grade II*, with the exception of the cart shed, which is Grade II.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The formal gardens are set within a woodland enclave, with deodar cedars and blue spruce providing the main backdrop. These cover about 2.0 ha, and consist of three terraces to the south and two to the east of the house, the first banked, the second retained by a random rubble limestone wall, with steps between terraces. The final terrace to the south is retained by the garden boundary wall. These terraces originally contained flower beds and borders, visible as slight depressions, but are now planted with groups of trees, while the sward is sown with wildflower mix. There is a small circular reed and thatch bothy at the west end of the middle south terrace; this is not listed. To the east of and below the terraces are three walled gardens, roughly equal in size and linked by steps. The first, to the north, which now contains a swimming pool (built after World War II), was originally the rose garden; the sundial survives. To the south of this was the rock garden with a central thatched dovecot reached by a causeway of stepping stones; it was originally surrounded by a pond with smaller ponds to the corners of the garden, their stone edges still defined. The third garden contains a large rectangular lily pond, much overgrown. This is the lowest of the gardens, and its west wall also retains the third terrace to the south of the house. An opening in the wall gives access to steps up to the terrace, and a wrought iron gate in the centre of the south wall

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opens onto a path leading down to the lakes. The east boundary of the formal walled gardens is marked by low tumbled walls, which in the water garden once supported pergolas draped with climbing plants.

PARK Running beside the main west-east avenue are ditches, which also survive to preserve in part the circle of trees around the avenue crossing. The north section of avenue survives as a track, lined with young chestnuts, but to the south the line of the avenue has moved slightly to the west. At the south-east corner of the avenue crossing, by Home Farm, is a large pond. The remainder of the registered parkland is under mixed woodland, apart from two fields to the west and one to the east of the north avenue, and the meadows or pasture to the south and south-east of the house and formal gardens. The wood to the south-east of the avenue and Home Farm is designated as a SSSI; the core of this and the small woodland at Stamford Corner are classified as Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland. Much of the woodland is the subject of a Restrictive Covenant granted to the National Trust in 1945 made between Dame Miriam Rothschild and the National Trust.

To the south of the house a wedge-shaped piece of meadow merges into hawthorn scrub and woodland concealing the two lakes from the house. The furlongs of very pronounced Northamptonshire ridge and furrow can be seen throughout the woodland. A path to the lakes from the formal garden follows a boundary lined with old oak trees. The path approaches first the smaller of the two lakes, swings round to the north of the summerhouse and nature observation hide and so to the thatched boathouse on the north shore of the larger lake. The lakes are fed by two streams, one of which is culverted to the north of the small lake. A line of poplars and cedars mark the north and west boundaries of the lakes, to the south of which is an area of woodland, Lake Fields, bisected by a track. There is also a small rectangular historic pond on the north-west boundary of the park, north of the main group of estate buildings, which is shown on the 1810 Enclosure Award map.

KITCHEN GARDEN Immediately to the west of the house is the kitchen garden. Potting sheds line the north wall, on the south side of which were greenhouses, recently demolished. Freestanding green houses survive in the north-east corner, and a sundial stands in the centre, where paths cross.

REFERENCES Enclosure map of Lordship of Oundle with Ashton (1810). Northamptonshire Record Office 2858. Map of estates belonging to William Walcot, (1811). Northamptonshire Record Office 3703. Map of Ashton Estate by Messrs Hayward, Surveyors, (1853). Northamptonshire Record Office 1728a. Catalogue of sale of Ashton Estate, (1858). Northamptonshire Record Office ZB 706/24. Map accompanying Conveyance of Ashton Estate to Lionel Rothschild. Northamptonshire Record Office 5173 (1860). Map of Ashton Wold in Ashton Wold House (c1901). Rothschild, Miriam, *The Rothschild Gardens* (1996), 82-107 & 169. 'The Hon. Nathaniel Rothschild', obituary in *The Times*, 15 October 1923. 'Dame Miriam Rothschild', obituary in *The Guardian*, 22 January 2005. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography website: <http://www.oxforddnb.com>.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION The early C20 garden and parklands at Ashton Wold are designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * Group value: They form part of an important and unusually intact and coherent Edwardian model estate. The gardens and wider designed landscape form the setting for the Grade II listed house and a number of other listed buildings; the formal garden structures are also listed at Grade II. * Intactness: The plan of the designed landscape, as well garden structures and features within the park survive largely intact. * Association and influence: Its design and development reflects the interests of its owners, Charles Rothschild, and Dame Miriam Rothschild, both nationally respected naturalists and conservationists. Dame Miriam's advocacy of wildflower gardening was particularly influential, thus endowing this landscape with extra interest on the basis of her pioneering ecological work.

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.