

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

LYTES CARY

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LYTES CARY

Name:	LYTES CARY
County:	Somerset
District:	South Somerset (District Authority)
Parish:	The Charltons
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.036604 Longitude: -2.6679842 National Grid Reference: ST 53260 26573 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
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Details

Early C20 formal gardens and a park laid out by Sir Walter Jenner to his own design around a restored and extended C16 manor house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

William le Lyte held the estate now known as Lytes Cary in 1286, and his descendants remained in possession until 1755. In the mid C14, William's grandson, Peter, built a new stone chapel, and gradually successive generations constructed a courtyard manor house around it. This building was completed in the early C16, when John Lyte built a new south range with its distinctive Oriel Room, new porches, kitchens, and other accommodation. In 1558, John Lyte made over his property to his son Henry (c 1529-1607), a scholarly inclined man who in 1578 published the *Niewe Herbal*, a translation of a Flemish herbal written by Rembert Dodoens, which he dedicated to Queen Elizabeth and which probably influenced Shakespeare in his use of plantlore in his plays (guidebook). Henry Lyte also published *The Light of Britayne* (1588), which suggested that the British were descended from the ancient Trojans. Henry Lyte died in 1607 and was succeeded by his son Thomas, who studied genealogy and presented King James I with a family tree tracing his descent from Brutus, for which he was rewarded with the Lyte Jewell, a miniature portrait of the king set in gold and diamonds, now in the British Museum. By the mid C18, however, the family faced serious financial difficulties and in March 1755 Thomas Lyte and his son, John, relinquished their interest in the property. The manor house was let to a succession of tenants and by 1810 the north range had been demolished; the west range was also subsequently demolished and by 1835 when the house was drawn by John Buckler (National Trust) it was in considerable disrepair.

Lytes Cary continued to be let throughout the C19, before finally being sold in 1907 to Sir Walter Jenner and his wife Flora. A military man, Sir Walter was the son of Queen Victoria's physician, Sir William Jenner. His brother Leopold had recently acquired and begun restoring Avebury Manor, Wiltshire. Influenced by Arts and Crafts philosophy, Sir Walter and Lady Jenner commissioned the architect C E Ponting to undertake the restoration of the surviving elements of the C16 manor, and to rebuild the north and west ranges in a sympathetic late C17 style. At the same time, the Jenners began to develop formal gardens around the house, for although Henry Lyte was said by John Aubrey to have had 'a pretty good collection of plants' in the

C16 (guidebook), and his son Thomas had extensive orchards in the C17 (guidebook), any earlier garden had not survived the property's decline in the C18 and C19. The gardens developed by Sir Walter and Lady Jenner comprise a series of compartments and inter-related vistas, and are said to have been influenced by the design theories of Thomas Mawson (1861-1933) (ibid). The gardens reflect the approach to design advocated by the Arts and Crafts movement and were intended to form an appropriate setting for the restored and extended house.

Sir Walter and Lady Jenner's only son, Kentish, died in 1900, while their daughter, Esme, died in 1932. At his own death in 1948, Sir Walter left the estate to the National Trust which opened the older portion of the house and the greater part of the garden to the public, while letting the early C20 wings. In 1955 the tenancy was taken by Jeremy Chittenden (d 1997) and his wife Bidy, who continued to develop the gardens with the advice of the National Trust's Gardens Advisor, Graham Stuart Thomas. Today (2002) the site remains the property of the National Trust.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Lytes Cary is situated c 3.5km north-north-east of Ilchester and c 1.5km south of Charlton Mackrell, to the west of the A37 road. The c 15ha site comprises some 1.5ha of formal gardens, and c 13.5ha of park. The site is bounded to the west by fences and stone walls which separate it from a minor road leading north from the A37 road to the village of Charlton Mackrell. To the north, east, and south the site adjoins agricultural land, from which it is separated by hedges and fences. The site slopes gently from south-east to north-west, and while there are few external vistas from the formal gardens, there are wide views from the park north and north-west towards Charlton Mackrell and the surrounding country.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Lytes Cary is approached from the minor road forming its western boundary at a point c 1.25km south of Charlton Mackrell. The entrance is situated at the north-west corner of the park and comprises a pair of C18 tall, square stone piers surmounted by urn finials, flanked by lower quadrant walls (listed grade II). Immediately north-east of the entrance a terrace of three cottages with a gabled south facade bearing a date stone of 1868 overlooks the drive. The tarmac drive extends c 400m east from the entrance, parallel to the northern boundary of the park, before turning sharply south-south-east for a further c 200m where it is flanked by a late C20 avenue of limes planted by the late Jeremy Chittenden. The drive passes through a simple timber gate immediately north-east of the late C20 gravelled visitors' car park, to enter the pleasure grounds where it is flanked by areas of grass planted with mature specimen trees and shrubs. Turning sharply south-west, the drive passes between two rows of early C20 pleached limes, to enter the early C20 entrance court at the north-west corner of the house. This court is enclosed to the east by stone walls in which is set an opening flanked by piers surmounted by ball finials, while to the north and west it is enclosed by an C18 barn (listed grade II) and other outbuildings of various dates.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Lytes Cary (listed grade I) is built to a courtyard plan and stands towards the centre of the site. The house is constructed in local lias stone ashlar with Ham stone dressings under predominantly stone slate roofs, and comprises two storeys, with an attic storey in the north wing. The east wing, the entrance wing for the C16 manor house, comprises two gabled bays, that to the north forming the entrance porch surmounted by an oriel window. A further projecting gabled wing at the southern end of the range contains the C14 chapel, while the northern end of the range forms part of a mid or late C18 reconstruction to provide accommodation for the tenant farmer. The south or garden facade is lit by mullion and transom windows, and a two-storey oriel window with a crenellated parapet. The oriel is ornamented with the carved arms of John Lyte, who was responsible for constructing this range in the early C16. The western end of the south wing comprises part of the early C20 restoration of the house, as does the west range. The west range has a centrally placed arched doorway and is lit by large mullion and transom windows. The north range is lit by arch-topped windows with brick surrounds, and comprises the C18 farmhouse. The earliest part of the present house is the chapel which was built by Peter Lyte c 1343, while parts of the east range date from the late C15. The south range was constructed by John Lyte in the early C16 and the C18 rebuilding post-dates the family's relinquishment of the house in 1755. After purchasing the house in 1907, Sir Walter Jenner commissioned C E Ponting to restore the remaining elements of the C16 manor house, and to rebuild the west wing and parts of the north wing which had been demolished in the C19.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens are entered through a timber door set in an arch in a stone wall which extends east from the north-east corner of the house. A rectangular enclosure known as the Apostles' Garden extends below the east facade of the house; this is bounded by a privet hedge to the north and by a high stone wall to the south. To the east the garden is enclosed by a lower stone wall which is partly screened by a clipped box hedge. A stone-flagged walk extends east from the entrance porch to an early C20 wrought-iron gate supported by a pair of tall stone piers surmounted by ball finials (listed grade II) set in the eastern boundary wall. The gate leads to three semicircular stone steps which descend to an area of lawn separated from the paddock beyond by a ha-ha. In the paddock, an early C20 circular stone water tank (listed grade II), designed in the form of an C18 dovecote and probably inspired by an example at Avebury Manor which belonged to Sir Walter Jenner's brother, is placed on the central axis of the Apostles' Garden and the entrance porch. The central walk of the Apostles' Garden is flanked by panels of lawn and two parallel rows of six topiary yews representing the twelve Apostles. A further six topiary yew buttresses are planted against the southern wall of the garden, while further topiary specimens are placed near the house.

A door near the western end of the south wall of the Apostles' Garden leads to the Main Border, a rectangular area enclosed to the north by the high stone wall separating it from the Apostles' Garden, and to the south by a buttressed yew hedge. The point at which each yew buttress breaks forward is marked by a topiary finial, while each recess between the buttresses contains a centrally placed stone column plinth supporting a stone urn. To east and west the garden is enclosed by further yew hedges. A broad stone-flagged walk which extends from east to west through the garden enclosure is flanked to the south by a panel of lawn, and to the north by a deep mixed border planted with roses, ornamental shrubs, and herbaceous plants. The Main Border formed part of the early C20 garden designed by Sir Walter and Lady Jenner, but in 1965 Graham Stuart Thomas provided a new planting plan for the border itself; this was in turn reworked by Mrs Chittenden in 1996, following Stuart Thomas' original colour scheme.

The stone-flagged walk extends east from the Main Border, passing through an opening in the yew hedge at the eastern end of the garden to reach the White Garden, an approximately square area enclosed to the north by a high stone wall, and to the south, east, and west by yew hedges. The walk is adjoined to north and south by deep borders planted to a white colour scheme originally devised by Graham Stuart Thomas c 1965 and again replanted by Mrs Chittenden in 1999.

An opening in the hedge to the east of the White Garden leads to a flight of stone steps flanked by low stone balustrades with ball finials which terminates the walk leading through the Main Border and White Garden, and which ascends to the Raised Walk. From these steps there is a vista which extends west through the White Garden, Main Border, and along the south facade of the house to the doorway leading into the Private Gardens. The Raised Walk comprises a raised grass terrace retained to the east and west by stone walls, and enclosed to the east by a high clipped beech hedge and to the north by a stone wall. To the west it is edged by a row of specimen Irish yews underplanted with *Hypericum*. From the terrace there are views west across the Orchard, a square area of grass enclosed to the north, south, and west by yew hedges and planted with a variety of standard fruit trees which recall the species known to have been grown at Lytes Cary by Thomas Lyte in the early C17. At each corner of the Orchard, weeping ash are trained over frames to form small square arbours with cobbled bases. The weeping ashes were planted in 1973 to replace similar, early C20 features planted with weeping elm (guidebook). From each arbour mown grass paths extend across the Orchard forming a saltire pattern, the central intersection of which is marked by a stone baluster sundial set on a circular flagged base.

The southern end of the Raised Walk is marked by a yew roundel which, open to the west, overlooks the Long Walk, a long rectangular compartment enclosed to the north and south by high yew hedges, which extends along the south side of the Orchard. There is a reciprocal vista from the seat which is placed in the roundel along the length of the Long Walk. A flight of stone steps descends from the roundel to the level of the Long Walk, which is terminated to the west by further yew hedges with topiary finials which frame an opening leading to the Pond Garden. The Pond Garden comprises a square lawn enclosed by yew hedges with topiary finials at each corner, with a centrally placed circular pool with a raised stone kerb and a fountain in the form of a lead figure of Triton. The north-west and north-east corners of the garden are marked by stone urns, while the south-east corner is marked by a marble statue of Diana, and the south-west corner by a stone statue of Flora. An opening in

the western hedge, placed off-axis with the Long Walk, leads to a short, pleached hornbeam tunnel, which in turn leads to the Vase Garden, an approximately elliptical lawn enclosed by variegated Wiegela, with a large stone urn terminating the western vista through the hornbeam tunnel. The planting scheme in the Vase Garden was designed in the mid C20 by Graham Stuart Thomas (*ibid*). To the south of the hornbeam tunnel, low box bushes partly cover a group of early C20 dog grave stones.

A centrally placed opening in the north hedge of the Pond Garden leads to the Seat Garden, a further square area enclosed by yew hedges. Stone bench seats are placed at the central points of the east and west sides of the garden, while box-edged quadrant borders at the corners of the garden are planted with mature specimen *Arbutus* bushes and lavender. While the *Arbutus* date from the early C20 planting scheme, the corner beds were laid out in 2001 (*ibid*). From the Seat Garden a further opening leads north to the Croquet Lawn, a rectangular enclosure bordered to the east and west by yew hedges, and to the north by the south facade of the house. Specimen trees are planted at the corners of the lawn while a border below the south facade of the house, separated from the lawn by a western extension of the flagged walk in the Main Border, is planted to a late C20 scheme inspired by Henry Lyte's *Nieuwe Herball* (1578). A reciprocal vista extends south from the oriel window on the south facade of the house through the Croquet Lawn, Seat Garden, and Pond Garden; this was formed in the late 1960s with the advice of Graham Stuart Thomas (*guidebook*). At the north-west corner of the lawn a recess planted with three specimen Irish yews is backed by a stone wall partly screened by a box hedge. A timber doorway set in a stone arch in this wall leads west to the Private Gardens.

The Private Gardens comprise a group of enclosures at the south-west corner of the house and below the west facade. Immediately beyond the doorway from the Croquet Lawn, a stone-flagged area enclosed by a wall to the south and yew hedges and specimen shrubs to the west leads in turn to a small sunken garden enclosed to the east, south, and west by planted drystone walls and specimen shrubs, with a stone urn forming a focal point to the south. An opening in the west side of the sunken garden leads to a grass walk bordered to the north and south by clipped beech hedges. To the south, and screened by the hedge, is a tennis court and mid C20 swimming pool. A wet ditch to the south of the tennis court and swimming pool is planted as a bog garden and separates this area from the Vase Garden. To the north of the Beech Walk, an approximately square area of lawn surrounds a central stone column surmounted by a vase finial which is planted with *Clematis*. The lawn takes the place of an early C20 rose garden comprising diamond-shaped box-edged beds radiating from the central column (CL 1947).

The stone-flagged walk which extends the length of the south facade of the house returns below the west facade, separating borders below the walls from a rectangular panel of lawn; the walk is terminated to the north by a doorway leading to the stable and service court. A further flagged walk extends west from the door in the west facade, dividing the grass panel and leading to a flight of stone steps which descends to the Parterre. The Parterre is separated from the upper terrace by a stone wall, while the steps are flanked by low stone piers surmounted by lead vase finials. Further lead finials are placed at the north and south ends of this wall. The Parterre is laid out to a symmetrical plan and comprises four L-shaped stone-edged borders planted with roses and specimen shrubs; these are separated from a central square box-edged bed planted with a central weeping silver pear by stone-flagged walks. This specimen tree takes the place of a carved stone baluster ornament shown in late C20 photographs (CL 1982). To the north and south the central parterre is adjoined by rectangular grass panels surrounded by low box hedges, the corners of which are marked by topiary ball finials. The Parterre is enclosed to the north by a privet hedge and shrub border, and to the west by a further privet hedge. A wrought-iron gate set on the central axis of the parterre allows views west to the park. The formal gardens were laid out in their present form by Sir Walter and Lady Jenner after they acquired Lytes Cary in 1907 on a site which had reverted to agricultural or productive cultivation after 1755. It has been suggested that the form of the Raised Walk relates to a surviving C16 feature (Bond 1998), but this is uncertain. Following the bequest of the property to the National Trust in 1948, various changes were made to the planting of the gardens with the advice of Graham Stuart Thomas, while in the late 1960s the south vista through the Croquet Lawn, Seat Garden, and Pond Garden was opened-up by forming openings in the surrounding yew hedges (*guidebook*). In the late C20 further refinements were made to the planting scheme by the Trust's tenants, Mr and Mrs Jeremy Chittenden.

PARK The park lies to the west and north of the house and formal gardens, with a further area of ornamental paddock to the east of the house. The park slopes gently from south-east to north-west and undulates, reflecting the site of a medieval village and Roman villa (Scheduled Ancient Monument). The park is planted with groups of trees, with a mixed plantation on a knoll

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c 300m south-west of the house forming a prominent feature. Further groups of mature trees serve to frame vistas north-west towards Hally Hill, and to screen the buildings of Cook's Cary Farm to the west of the park. There are further views north towards Charlton Mackrell church.

The paddock to the east of the house and Apostles' Garden contains an early C20 water tank designed in the form of an C18 dovecote which serves as an eyecatcher from the house and garden. The vista towards the 'dovecote' is framed by an avenue of mid C20 horse chestnuts, which extends c 20m east beyond the structure as an avenue of early C20 limes.

The park and paddock form part of the scheme laid out by Sir Walter and Lady Jenner from 1907, which was intended to form an appropriate setting for the restored and extended manor house.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 102 (18 July 1947), pp 128-31; (25 July 1947), pp 178-81; (1 August 1947), pp 228-31; 172 (2 September 1982), pp 634-6 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South and West Somerset* (1958), pp 228-9 *Victoria History of the County of Somerset III*, (1974), pp 100-01 J Bond, *Somerset Parks and Gardens* (1998), pp 147-8 Lytes Cary, guidebook, (National Trust 2001)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1904

Illustrations J C Bucker, drawings of Lytes Cary, 1835 (National Trust)

Archival items Photographs of Lytes Cary, late C19 and early C20 (National Trust)

Description written: November 2002 Register Inspector: JML 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.