

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

BARROW COURT

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**BARROW COURT**

Name:	BARROW COURT
District:	North Somerset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Barrow Gurney
District:	North Somerset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Flax Bourton
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.414201 Longitude: -2.7026219 National Grid Reference: ST5123368588 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000562 Date first listed: 30-Apr-1987

## Details

A late C19 architectural garden, largely as designed by F Inigo Thomas, with late C18 parkland around a country house.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The first recorded Lord of the Manor of Barrow was Geoffrey, Bishop of Coutances (CL 1902), but by the C13 it was in Crown ownership and William Rufus granted it to Robert Fitzhardinge, via the marriage of whose granddaughter it came into the Gournay family. It was from this family that the neighbouring village of Barrow Gurney took its name. The house stands on the site of a Benedictine nunnery founded by the C14, and possibly as early as c 1200 (Iann Barron pers comm, 2002) whose first recorded prioress was Joan de Gournay. A deer park is known to have been established in the medieval period (Bond 1998), and The Conygar is recorded as the name of a wood c 300m south-west of the house on early OS maps. The estate went through various owners until the Dissolution, after which Henry VIII granted it to John Drew of Bristol, who converted the core of the present house between 1537 and 1539. In 1602 it was sold to Dr Francis James, a lawyer, who altered and extended the house to its present E-shaped form. In 1659 the estate was sold to William Gore, in whose family it descended through the C18 and much of the C19, although in the early C19 it was being used only as an occasional residence.

The Barrow Gurney estate, including the C16 Barrow Court, was acquired in 1881 by Antony Gibbs of Tynesfield, Avon (qv) who sold it in 1883 to his younger brother, Henry Martin Gibbs. He remodelled and refurbished the Jacobean house and between 1887 and 1891 rebuilt the adjoining church, before commissioning in 1892 F Inigo Thomas (1866-1950) to produce a comprehensive new garden design, in a series of interlinked formal compartments dominated by yew hedging and architectural features, which was completed by 1897. The house remained in the Gibbs' ownership until 1976, although it was used as a military hospital in the Second World War and was leased as a college of education from 1949 to 1976. In 1978, the house was converted into separate dwellings and the gardens are now (2002) maintained by the Barrow Court Residents' Association.

### DESCRIPTION

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**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Barrow Court is located on the Backwell limestone ridge c 1.5km north-west of the village of Barrow Gurney and 9km south-west of Bristol. The gardens comprise c 6ha with the landscape park extending to c 60ha. The irregular site is bounded to the east by Barrow Court Lane and is defined by a hedge north of the entrance lodge, while south of the lodge there is a 4m high wall pierced regularly with clairvoies and iron rails. The eastern part of the northern boundary of the park follows the southern edge of Breach Hill Wood, while at its western end it follows a C19 park railing fence, then the edge of the park along the woodland of Bourton Combe.

The park is located on the north-facing side of the Failand valley with views northwards to Tyntesfield, and eastwards. To the south and west the ground rises to a wooded ridge which bounds Bourton Combe.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main approach to Barrow Court is from Barrow Court Lane to the east. A gate lodge and archway dated 1884 (listed grade II) stand on the north side of the entrance, c 200m south-east of the house. On the south side just inside the gate is a pond, a larger version of which is shown on the view published by Collinson in 1791. A straight drive runs north-west from the lodge between regularly planted mature Scots pine and beech trees before passing through gate piers with iron pinnacles and gates into a walled forecourt on the south-east side of the house. At this point, the drive is sunk between two lawns to north-east and south-west, on which there are three Lebanon cedars.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Barrow Court (listed grade II\*) is located at the centre of the site here registered. It is a stone building with slate and tile roofs, and mullioned windows with relieving arches above. It was converted from the original Benedictine nunnery c 1537-59, with further alterations c 1602-10. A range was added to the south-west in the later C17. The house was refurbished and further extended in the late C19, when various Georgian alterations were removed. Its entrance front faces south-east and is a largely symmetrical composition, with an elaborately decorated Jacobean entrance to the porch in the central projection. The roofline includes ball finials to the gable ends, tall ashlar chimney stacks, and a central cupola. On the north-east side of the forecourt stands the church of St Mary and St Edward, rebuilt by Henry Woodyer in 1889. South-west of the house is a stable range built 1891 in a vernacular style (listed grade II).

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The principal gardens are laid out to the north-east of the house. The layout is formal and semi-symmetrical, with three levels of terracing, falling to the north-east. The north-east front of the house, which has no doorway to the garden, has a terrace immediately under its windows with a central gravel path running 120m from the church at its south-east end to a clairvoie at the north-west end. The terrace is bounded on its north-east side by a dwarf stone wall, and three flights of stone steps lead down to a second terrace some 80m wide. The central flight leads down to a formal pool (c 1892-7, listed grade II\*).

On this second terrace, the central pool is enclosed by yews, replanted c 1992, south-east and north-west of which are open grass plats with beds to the design of Inigo Thomas, now replanted as late C20 parterres. At its south-east boundary the terrace is separated from the churchyard by a stone wall which has a row of bee-boles built into it. It has a steep grass slope north-eastwards down onto a lawn located on a third and final terrace. Midway along the slope, aligned with the pond and upper central steps, two sets of stone steps, flanking a railed and paved terrace with a stone sundial, descend to the lawn. Under this paved area, there is a small semicircular pool fed by a stone-carved lion's head (whole complex c 1892-7, listed grade II\*). Along the top of the grass slope is a gravel path leading to stone-walled courts (c 1892-7, both listed grade II\*) at either end. The courts are similar in plan but substantially different in detail. The north-west court has an ornate stone-carved entrance arch, with finely carved wooden screens and settles and elaborate trellis-work inside. The south-east court, which has a plain entrance arch, is an outdoor dining room with a stone table and sheltered seat. Above the seat is a large stone panel with a high-relief carving of various fruit. The back of the south-east wall forms a memorial to the Gibbs family in the adjacent churchyard. Both courts have railings, with obelisk finials at each corner, and each court has a second archway facing north-east with a flight of steps leading to the third terrace.

The north-west boundary of the third terrace is formed by a semicircular exedra (c 1892-7, listed grade II\*). The exedra comprises twelve pillars, or terms, with busts carved by Alfred Drury. These represent the twelve months of the year as the twelve ages of woman, the pillars linked by 2.5m high railings on a dwarf stone wall. In the centre of the exedra, massive 5m high gate piers flank elaborate wrought-iron gates. The exedra links to a gazebo (c 1892-7, listed grade II\*) in the north-

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west corner of the garden, which faces the south-west court. The gazebo has a steep-pitched stone-tiled roof, with Venetian arched openings on three sides and a wooden settle facing the garden. To the north-west of the lawn, Thomas designed a yew hedge pieced by five openings to give a view of the exedra; only the north-east and south-west stubs of this now remain (Iann Barron pers comm, 2002).

South-east of the lawn are two parallel yew hedges, aligned on the church tower, and running from the south-east court to wooden boundary gates set between 5m high stone gate piers topped by massive ball finials. The yew hedges have a gap halfway along to allow for the main axis of the garden, running from the centre of the exedra to a semicircular corona, a stone-pinnacled, column-flanked recess containing a statue of Victory (c 1892-7, listed grade II\*). The corona is approached along a walk lined with limes, originally interspersed with standard laurels (Iann Barron pers comm, 2002), through an area of shrubs and specimen trees. Many late C19 trees remain, including two katsura, two cypresses, two Judas trees and a ginkgo. The corona is set into the south-east boundary wall, along which a secondary axis runs between a gazebo to the north-east (c 1892-6, listed grade II\*) and the Sundial Court, with steps, over-sized 5m high piers with ball finials, pool, balustraded terrace, and a stone-tiled Doric loggia (c 1892-7, listed grade II\*) to the south-west.

The garden boundary on the north-east side runs between the two gazebos and is formed by a low stone retaining wall above a ha-ha. The stone wall is topped by a balustrade interrupted at regular intervals by 2m high piers with ball finials.

To the south-east of the house, a rectangular lawn is raised above the level of the approach with 1m high retaining walls either side of the drive. South of the approach the lawn includes a ramped terraced walk running 50m south-eastwards along its southern edge, to iron gates, while immediately south of this is a modern tennis court. Some 100m west of the house is a C14 tithe barn (listed grade II\*), now converted to residential use, with a domestic garden to the west.

**PARK** The house is located in the centre of parkland which rises sharply south and south-westwards towards the site of the medieval conygar, and falls gently to the west and north. The southern park has a scattering of parkland oaks and beech, with a beech shelter belt along the eastern boundary with Barrow Court Lane. The Conygar has been planted to form a skyline of conifers; Bourton Combe, further south (outside the area here registered), appears to contain picturesque walks and rides associated with Barrow Court. On the eastern edge of The Conygar wood is a water-catch and underground reservoir built as part of Gibbs' improvements, to supply the house and gardens. It also supplies a disused swimming pool some 300m north-east of the house and more than twenty stone-built ponds with cattle ramps in the surrounding park and fields. A ha-ha immediately south of the walled garden, some 120m south-west of the house, separates the park from the gardens. North and west the park has a scattering of parkland standards; immediately west is a Scots pine shelter belt. Some 500m north from the garden is Breach Hill Wood, in the south-west corner of which, adjoining the registered area, are the remains of a stone-built Wendy House (c 1890s), with its own landscape of a miniature ravine and stone-edged walks. Some 300m north-east of the house are three large brick-built byres which are part of a model farm dating from the 1920s.

According to Bond (1998), a park at Barrow is referred to as early as 1296 but there is little information on its origins and it is unlikely that it was associated with the nunnery. It was probably a small seigneurial park rather than being of monastic or episcopal origin. The park in its present form seems to date from the late C18: no park is shown on Day and Masters county map of 1782, but Collinson's view of 1791 shows the old house in a landscaped setting.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen garden is laid out on the south-west-facing slope below the house. It is bounded to the north-west by a stepped stone wall. A north-east/south-west axis runs along a central path with espaliered fruit trees on 2m high iron frames, to a substantial gate with stone gate piers and elaborate wrought-iron gate. This leads in turn, via a short walk with espaliers and frames, to a gate and a pedestrian bridge over the ha-ha into the park. The kitchen garden is now subdivided by planting into domestic gardens. A bothy range and glasshouse on the north-east side and a gardener's cottage have been converted into dwellings.

#### REFERENCES

J Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* ii, (1791), pp 308-13 *Country Life*, 11 (18 January 1902), pp 80-7 R Cooke, *West Country Houses* (1957) N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol* (1958, reprinted 1979), pp 87-8 D Ottewill, *The Edwardian Garden* (1989), p 16 S Harding and D Lambert, *Parks and Gardens of*

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Avon (1994), pp 85-6 J Bond, Somerset Parks and Gardens: a landscape history (1998), p 116 Avon Gardens Trust Newsletter 25, (Autumn 2002), pp 22-32

Maps Day and Masters, Map of the county of Somerset, 1782

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1887 2nd edition published 1904 3rd edition published 1932 OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1931

Illustrations Engraving, Barrow Court in its park (in Collinson 1791)

Description written: December 2002 Amended: July 2003 Register Inspector: DAL Edited: September 2003

## 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.