

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

TEMPLE DINSLEY

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**TEMPLE DINSLEY**

Name: TEMPLE DINSLEY

County: Hertfordshire

District: North Hertfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Preston

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.910082  
Longitude: -0.27987524  
National Grid Reference: TL 18420 24903  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II\*  
List Entry Number: 1000919  
Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

## Details

A country house of early C18 origin, substantially enlarged by Edwin Lutyens 1908-11, at which time he and Gertrude Jekyll collaborated on the creation of the formal garden around the house. The house and garden are surrounded by C18 parkland.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor house of Temple Dinsley was rebuilt by Benedict Ithell in 1714, following his purchase of the manor in 1712. Before this there appears to have been little garden surrounding the C17 house, which had a walled entrance forecourt largely surrounded by a paling fence enclosed by a line of trees (Chauncy 1700, reproduced in CL 1911). The manor passed through several hands during the remainder of the C18 and C19, being in the possession of H G Fenwick by the early C20. In 1908 Fenwick employed Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) to enlarge the house substantially and remodel it. At this time Lutyens collaborated with Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) in creating formal gardens to the west and north of the house, providing a further extension to the house in 1911. The house became a school in 1935, in which use it remains (1999).

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Temple Dinsley lies adjacent to the east side of the village of Preston, 5km south of the centre of Hitchin, at the north-east end of the Chiltern Hills. The c 50ha site is bounded to the east, south and west by lanes, that to the west, School Lane, being one of the main village streets of Preston which is partly marked to the south of the house by a red-brick wall (E L Lutyens c 1908, listed grade II). To the north the boundary is marked by agricultural land. The ground is gently undulating, rising to the north-west of the house, with a pronounced valley extending north-east from the north side of the gardens, down which distant views of Letchworth are visible. The setting is rural, with further buildings by Lutyens for Fenwick lying adjacent to the south boundary, these being the former model farm, Ladygrove Stud Farm (also known as Minsden Farm, now converted to domestic use) and Kiln Wood Cottage (both E L Lutyens 1912-13, listed grade II). Lutyens and Jekyll were also working on the gardens at Putteridge Bury (qv), 6km to the west, at around the time Lutyens was employed in further extensions at Temple Dinsley.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main approach enters off School Lane, 250m south of the house, set back off the road between two brick-built gate piers with stone dressings flanked by a brick park wall (E L Lutyens c 1908, all listed grade II).

The northern section of the wall extends north alongside School Lane; the southern section leads south, with a further gateway (E L Lutyens c 1908, listed grade II) set into it close to, and in similar style to the main gateway. The southernmost of the two gateways, opening into the south park, led to the former Temple Farm Homestead (now gone). The south drive curves northwards across the park, down a slope to the gravel forecourt lying on the south, entrance front, enclosed by brick walls. The south end of the drive was formerly (OS C19) flanked by an avenue of trees. The lowered south wall of the forecourt supports wrought-iron railings, at the centre of which lies the entrance to the forecourt, flanked by wrought-iron gates and piers with an overthrow (listed grade II\* with the house), giving access to the main door at the centre of the south front. Iron pedestrian gates are set into the west and east walls where they meet the south sides of Lutyens' cross wings. In the early C20 (CL 1911) the southern half of the forecourt was laid to lawn divided by the gravel drive leading to a carriage sweep in the northern half. Luxuriant herbaceous borders ran along the inner sides of the west and east walls.

The east drive enters at a two-storey lodge standing 450m east of the house, adjacent to the St Paul's Walden to Gosmore lane. From here a straight drive extends north-west, flanked by an avenue set in strips of mown grass, along the south-west side of Summerhouse Plantation. Views extend from the eastern section north-east towards Letchworth. At the west corner of the Plantation the drive turns south-west down a slope, passing two oval pools at the edge of the park, giving access to the service yard on the east side of the house. The drive continues south to join the south drive 50m from the house. In the C18 and C19 (Dury and Andrews, 1766; OS C19) the east drive was flanked by a straight avenue, replanted in the late C20.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Temple Dinsley (1714, enlarged and remodelled by E L Lutyens 1908-9, listed grade II\*) stands towards the west side of the site. The early C18 core of the two-storey brick building is flanked by Lutyens' cross-wings, with a kitchen wing (1908) and nursery extension (1911) both attached to the east. The extension links with the C18 former stable block adapted by Lutyens and since converted to domestic accommodation. In the late C19 (OS), a substantial wing projected south from the south-east corner of the house along the outer side of the east forecourt wall; this was demolished before 1900 (OS C19).

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens are divided into a series of interconnected compartments largely related to the west and north fronts of the house, laid out by Lutyens with planting designs by Gertrude Jekyll, c 1909-10. The garden structures are listed grade II\* with the house.

A doorway at the centre of the west front opens out into the formal Paved Rose Garden. A stone-paved path, flanked by narrow borders and beyond this panels of lawn, leads to a square parterre laid out with a geometric pattern of rose beds surrounded by further stone paving. The south side of the garden is bounded by a brick retaining wall, beyond and above which lie the Diamond Garden and Pool Garden. The north side is bounded by a brick wall into which is set a covered loggia, overlooking the centre of the rose beds, separating two garden houses. The loggia is supported on the south side by white pillars and flanked to west and east by the garden houses: square, brick garden pavilions with pyramidal roofs, each with a door opening out into the loggia. The west side of the Paved Rose Garden is bounded by a low, brick retaining wall with a flight of stone steps at the centre leading up to an open lawn enclosed by brick walls, the former Herbaceous Garden. In the early C20 this area contained broad herbaceous borders running west from the steps to the west wall along the north and south walls. The borders flanked a central path aligned on the door in the west front. The contours of the path are still visible (1999). The garden wall enclosing the former Herbaceous Garden is of C18 origin, and enclosed the former walled kitchen garden, the east wall of which stood close to the site of the west front of the adjacent cross wing of the house.

A second east to west axis runs parallel and adjacent, overlooking the Paved Rose Garden and Herbaceous Garden from the south. At the east end of this axial layout, the Diamond Garden is entered from the western forecourt gate, and also from the south-east corner of the Paved Rose Garden. From a stone path connecting these two entrances a broad flight of stone steps with tile risers leads south up to a raised lawn flanked by rose borders. This lawn overlooks the forecourt to the east, and the park to the south, being bounded on these two sides by brick retaining walls. From the top of the steps a stone path leads west between raised brick and stone rose beds to a further short flight of stone steps up to the Pool Garden. This is dominated by a swimming pool with a concrete surround set in lawn overlooking the Paved Rose Garden and loggia, below to the north. Formerly, as laid out by Lutyens, the body of water was an informal ornamental reflecting pool, and was enclosed by stone paths set in grass.

At the west end of the Pool Garden a flight of steps set in a low, brick retaining wall leads up to the Spring Garden, laid to lawn with a stone path leading west into the Small Herbaceous Garden, now (1999) laid to lawn and partly enclosed by clipped hedges. Formerly a path led west across the Small Herbaceous Garden, flanked by herbaceous borders. The west side of the Garden is bounded by a stone cross path which leads north into and across the Herbaceous Garden, and west of the path the Garden is bounded by the tall, brick garden wall standing adjacent to the village green.

A stone cross path at the east side of the Spring Garden gives access via a gateway to the park to the south, and to the Herbaceous Garden to the north down stone steps set into the dividing wall. The cross path continues north across the Herbaceous Garden, leading down stone steps between brick gate piers set into the north wall and down to the Side Path, which connects the west garden boundary with the Pergola Garden to the east. The cross path from the Spring Garden crosses the Side Path, leading north to the curved, stone Magnolia Steps which lead down to a stone-paved area. Here, two circular beds containing mature bush magnolias flank to west and east a small paved area, with a further flight of curved stone steps leading down to the north into the Rose Garden. The Rose Garden is laid to lawn and largely enclosed by clipped yew hedges with entrances set at the centre of each side. Formerly (early C20) this was planted with a pattern of rose beds. The northern entrance leads into woodland, the western entrance gives onto stone steps leading up to the informal Top Lawn, and the eastern entrance leads to a lawn set with several mature trees including a large holm oak overlooking the formal Pergola Garden.

A doorway at the centre of the north front opens out onto the formal North Terrace. Stone steps lead down to a stone terrace with a pattern picked out in bricks, flanked by Lutyens' west and east cross wings and bounded to the north by a terracotta balustrade on top of a brick retaining wall supporting the terrace above. Two flights of stone steps oppose each other as they lead down from either end of the stone terrace, to a further stone terrace bounded to the south by the brick retaining wall which here has a hemispherical arch in which a small circular pond is partly recessed. To the south of this lies a narrow rectangular formal lawn flanked by herbaceous borders, these in turn flanked by retaining walls supporting stone paths leading north from the steps which lead down from the top terrace. These paths are bordered by lawns leading along the north front of the projecting cross wings. A flight of stone steps leads down from the central lawn of the North Terrace to the Pergola Garden, a rectangular sunken lawn surrounded by raised brick terraces on the north, east and south sides, and by a grass bank on the west side. A grass path runs along the top of the west and north terraces, and a stone path along the east and south terraces. A flight of stone steps leads down to the lawn from the centre of the west side, with a broader, central flight on the north side aligned on the centre of the house, and a further, narrower flight to the west of this. The east terrace is covered by a pergola with brick piers, with alternate circular and square piers and wooden cross members linking the tops of the piers. At the south end of the pergola a flight of stone steps leads south up to the easternmost of the two lawns flanking the central North Terrace Lawn. A further flight of stone steps leads up from the south side of the sunken lawn in the Pergola Garden, to the western of these two flanking lawns.

At the north end of the pergola stone steps lead up to the Belvedere (Lutyens c 1908), a small, square stone building with a pyramidal roof, which is offset to the east of the pergola, overlooking to the south the Small Orchard which bounds the Pergola Lawn below to the east. The Belvedere overlooks the park to the east, with long views to the north-east along a valley, beyond the park towards Letchworth. The broad steps on the north side of the Pergola Garden lead north up to the Orchard, which itself slopes up to the north, overlooking the Pergola Garden and north front, and bounded to the west and north by woodland and to the east by a clipped yew hedge covering a brick retaining wall. It is now (1999) laid to rough grass, having lost almost all of the orchard trees. Views extend east and north-east, as from the Belvedere, which stands at the south-east corner.

In the late C19 (OS), a small garden lay immediately north of the house, covering the area now occupied by Lutyens' cross wings and North Terrace. The Side Path led west alongside the kitchen garden on the west front, giving access to a path through a narrow belt of wooded pleasure grounds on the west boundary which led northwards to the Dower House. South of the kitchen garden lay a rectangular compartment containing a rectangular pool on the site of that in the C20 Pool Garden. The Orchard, the Pergola Garden and other compartments north of the Side Walk, together with much of the enclosing woodland, were created on land taken in from the park by Lutyens and Jekyll.

**PARK** The park, laid to pasture and woodland, bounds the house and gardens to the east and south, and is divided by the east drive into north and south halves. At the centre lies Summerhouse Plantation, planted in the early to mid C20. The southern

half of the park contains some mature specimen trees, with the remains of an avenue leading south-west from the east drive 200m east of the house, aligned on the site of the former Temple Farm Homestead (now gone). A brick icehouse (C18, listed grade II) lies 250m east of the house, south of the east drive. The Piggery (E L Lutyens c 1908, listed grade II) stands 240m south-east of the house. It is a small, red-brick farm building with a steep, pyramidal tiled roof, built as an eyecatcher within the park, particularly from the house and south drive.

The northern half of the park contains the Dower House (early C18 and early C19, listed grade II), a large, irregular, red-brick house of two storeys standing 300m north of Temple Dinsley house on lower ground.

In the late C19 (OS) the south park contained the remains of several avenues, including a fragment of a double avenue lying c 150m south-east of the house, on which it was aligned, together with the avenue flanking the south end of the south drive, and the avenue extending south-west from the east drive to the former Temple Farm Homestead. This farm, demolished in the early C20, formerly occupied a prominent position c 250m south-east of the house (Dury and Andrews, 1766; OS C19).

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The brick-walled, rectangular former kitchen garden, converted in the early C20 into Lutyens' Paved Rose Garden and Herbaceous Garden, extends west from the house, still largely enclosed by the remains of the C18 and C19 walls (OS 1884).

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, 29 (22 April 1911), pp 562-72; 40 (30 December 1916), pp 2-6 L Weaver, Houses and Gardens by E L Lutyens (1913), pp 221-31 G Jekyll and L Weaver, Gardens for Small Country Houses (5th edn 1924), pp 219-20 J Brown, Gardens of a Golden Afternoon (1982), p 170 Temple Dinsley History & Restoration Proposals (1992)

Maps Dury and Andrews, A topographical Map of Hartford-shire, 1766

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884 2nd edition published 1899 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1924

Description written: March 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: October 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.