

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CASTLE TOR

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Name:	CASTLE TOR
District:	Torbay (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.463464 Longitude: -3.5025188 National Grid Reference: SX 93453 63705 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000131 Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

Details

A late 1920s terraced garden around a contemporary house, with architectural elements including terraces, pools and an orangery designed by Fred Harrild, and planting schemes and design details attributed to George Dillistone of R Wallace and Co, Tunbridge Wells.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Castle Tor, originally known as Glengorse, was built on a previously undeveloped site which formed part of Lord Haldon's estate in the parish of St Marychurch, to the north of Torquay. By the late C19 the estate was heavily mortgaged, and in 1894 it was necessary to sell all the remaining property including the undeveloped land to the north of Lincombe Drive, a late C19 public carriage drive. The OS 25" map of 1906 shows that the site remained undeveloped, with rough ground on the steep slope above Lincombe Drive, and agricultural land to the north.

From 1922 Horace Pickersgill, the son of a Leeds bookmaker, who had been advised to winter in Torquay, purchased some 33 acres (c 13.75ha) in the vicinity of Glengorse. The house and architectural elements of the garden were designed by Frederick Harrild, MA, FRIBA who had been articulated to Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1907. He set up his own practice c 1910, designing houses in Sussex and Devon, and by the late 1920s had an office in Totnes (Jane Brown pers comm, 1999). The house and garden were constructed between 1928 and 1934 by a local builder, William Amos Deakin. A perspective watercolour by Cyril Farey, Middle Terrace at Glengorse, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1933, but does not show the lower terrace; aerial photographs of c 1934 do however show the whole garden at the time of its completion. A further perspective by Farey shows the upper terraces and house from the south-east. On stylistic grounds the planting and detailed design of the garden at Castle Tor has been attributed to George Dillistone, partner in R Wallace and Co of Tunbridge Wells (Jane Brown pers comm, 1999). Pickersgill sold Glengorse in 1950 to Mrs Dorcas Croft of Birmingham, and the property subsequently passed through several hands. In about 1980 the property was divided for development, the original house retaining the upper terrace and the south-west half of the second terrace with the canal and orangery. A new house, Lincombe Keep, was constructed at the south-east corner of the site to the designs of John Pritchard in 1989-92. Built of the same stone as the garden terraces, the ground plan follows the line of the original terraces, and its castellated details respect the character of the early C20 garden structures. The apportionment of the gardens between the two houses was further adjusted in 1997, when the remainder of the second terrace

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was added to the garden associated with Lincombe Keep, the original house retaining the upper terrace. The site remains (1999) in divided private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Castle Tor is situated c 1.5km north-east of the New Harbour, Torquay on the south-east slope of Oxlea Hill. The 0.75ha site comprises steeply sloping formal gardens overlooking Ilsham Valley to the south-east, with views down a wooded combe to the sea c 500m to the south, and east to Lyme Bay. The site is bounded to the north by domestic properties in Oxlea Road, and to the east by a boarded fence fronting a footpath from Lincombe Drive. To the west and south-west the ground drops steeply below the garden terraces to a grass bank and shrubs, while the southern boundary to Lincombe Drive is enclosed by early C20 decorative wrought-iron railings set behind a clipped hedge and low stone wall. The steeply sloping site has dramatic views to the sea, and the ambitious design exploits its potential to the full, creating a complex series of related internal and external vistas.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is approached from Oxlea Road to the north. This early C20 residential street is lined by substantial early and mid C20 detached houses set in gardens. Rendered square gate piers surmounted by a pair of carved stone eagles flank the entrance, and a sloping concrete drive lined by specimen conifers descends 50m to a level carriage court which is entered through late C20 wrought-iron gates hung on square piers with ball finials. A further concrete drive leads south-south-east to a late C20 garage. To the south the carriage court is enclosed by a low stone parapet wall surmounted by three equally spaced circular stone arches. The central arch leads to a stone-flagged bastion from which a flight of stone steps descends south-west to join a principal flight of stone steps which descends from the western arch. Dividing and then rejoining into a single flight, the steps descend 20m in four flights through two further circular stone arches (all listed grade II), to reach a forecourt to the west of the house. The repeated arch motif echoes that adopted by Lutyens in the early C20 garden of Viceroy's House, New Delhi (John Wilson pers comm, 1999). Enclosed by stone walls c 2m high to west and south, and with a further circular stone arch above the south wall, the forecourt is stone flagged with a central decorative star motif in tile and slate. The series of circular stone arches below the carriage court is flanked by golden Irish yews and frames a view of the sea.

The late C20 house Lincombe Keep is approached directly from Lincombe Drive.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Castle Tor, originally Glengorse, was constructed to designs by Fred Harrild c 1929. The two-storey house is conceived in a loosely Arts and Crafts style, with slate pitched roofs, a slate-hung first-floor elevation to the south, painted rough-cast walls and leaded windows. Aerial views of c 1934 show the house as built, with short projecting gabled wings with first-floor balconies at the west and east ends of the south or garden facade and open loggias on the ground floor. A short wing to the north-west encloses the north side of the entrance court, while a separate two-storey staff annex stands immediately to the north-west of the main house. A single-storey canted bay window with a slate roof of exaggerated pitch projects from the east facade and overlooks the sunken garden. Later C20 alterations include the enclosure of the open loggias on the south facade and the replacement of a first-floor square bay window with a balcony. A mid C20 glass-roofed sun lounge was replaced with a slate-roofed, part glazed verandah in 1998. The house is unlisted.

Lincombe Keep, a late C20 house designed by John Pritchard stands 60m south-east of Castle Tor, and is constructed in the same Somerset limestone as the garden terraces into which it is built. Principally of two storeys rising to a three-storey block to the east, Lincombe Keep has castellated parapets echoing those of the adjacent gatehouse and terrace walls.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens to the south and south-east of Castle Tor comprise four terraces of varying widths which are retained by limestone walls (listed grade II). Terrace walls are slightly battered and have castellated parapets, the opening frequently infilled with decorative circular tiles. The parapets break forward on corbels, enhancing the martial character. The upper terrace has a stone-flagged walk below the south facade of the house and a lawn running c 30m east/west. Flower beds and grass panels enclosed by stone flags forming a castellated outline which are shown on aerial photographs (c 1934) do not survive. At the west end of the upper terrace a return leads to stone concave quadrant steps which connect to further splayed stone steps at the west end of the canal on the second terrace. To the east of the house a sunken rose garden (listed grade II) is enclosed by stone walls which incorporate planting holes. Now principally gravelled, the square sunken enclosure is flanked by four groups of three Tuscan columns supporting short oak beams. A stone-flagged walk axial to the east

facade leads to a central, circular, stone-edged depression, originally a fountain pool. Now dry (1998), this is planted with roses and contains a late C20 ornamental well-head. Some 25m east of the house stone steps descend to a triangular lawn enclosed by high hedges. Of uncertain origin, this area contains a late C20 glasshouse. Further stone steps descend within a gatehouse (listed grade II) surmounted by a circular stone arch, to emerge through an arch onto the second terrace.

The second terrace, c 25m deep, is divided into two areas by a mid C20 avenue of golden cypresses which borders a path composed of tile, slate and stone laid in a diamond pattern. To the east a circular lawn c 20m in diameter has its circumference marked by stone flags laid in a crenellated pattern. The circular garden is enclosed to the north and north-east by the retaining wall of the upper terrace which contains arched niches, and against which tender climbers and shrubs are planted. To the east the early C20 stepped parapet wall has been replaced by the north-west facade of Lincombe Keep. A stone-flagged walk below the walls is bounded on the inner side by a hedge of golden yew and a series of early C20 wrought-iron supports c 1.5m high, from which chains are suspended to support roses. The yew hedge is separated from the lawn by a mixed herbaceous border. Mid C20 photographs show the lawn divided by segmental flower beds. The west end of the second terrace is dominated by a 35m rectangular canal with rounded ends, and two sets of stepping stones. The Orangery (listed grade II) to the north-east of the canal is connected to the steps at the west end of the terrace by a subsidiary stone-flagged walk below the high retaining wall of the upper terrace. A Tuscan colonnade above a wide flight of stone steps gives access to the interior of the Orangery, while a broad flight of flagged steps, flanked by a pair of dolphin mask fountains feeding cascades formed from descending ovoid stone basins, leads to a series of rectangular stepping stones which connects with a paved walk and square bastion to the south of the canal. Topiary box spheres, yew birds and spirals survive from the original scheme (aerial photographs c 1934), but original flower beds to the north, south and south-west of the canal have been removed together with further topiary. A circular stone turret (listed grade II) 40m south-east of the house contains a spiral staircase descending to the third terrace which is now enclosed to the east by the late C20 house. Some 10m west of the tower the square bastion in the terrace wall contains a semicircular recess with a lead dragon gargoyle spouting water into a rectangular stone-edged pool; this matched a lead gargoyle on the circular tower, which has now (1998) been removed. The 'Musical Well' (listed grade II) c 10m south-east of the tower is a complex arrangement with a pool flanked by urns which formerly spouted water into shafts to produce a musical note, the whole surmounted by a stone arch supported by pinnacle shafts. Behind the Musical Well steps descend within a stone barbican (listed grade II) which houses a portcullis in an archway leading to the lowest terrace adjacent to Lincombe Drive. Separated from the road by an early C20 wrought-iron fence, this terrace is ornamented by topiary and a crenellated Lonicera hedge.

KITCHEN GARDEN Aerial photographs (c 1934) show that a triangular area c 10m north-east of the house was terraced and cultivated as a kitchen garden or nursery, with a frame ground c 20m north-east of the house. In 1950 the gardens required over 100,000 bedding plants, and it is possible that this area was used for their cultivation. The lower two-thirds of this area is the site of the late C20 garage and associated drive. The upper section survives with some standard fruit trees.

REFERENCES

Gardens and Gardening (1929), pp 11-14 'Glengorse is in the market', Torquay Times, 2 June 1950 'It's still like a Fairy Castle ...', Torquay Times, 22 April 1960 J Brown, Gardens of a Golden Afternoon (1982), pp 146-7 J Brown, Castle Tor, (proof of evidence to public inquiry 1987) [copy on EH file] B Cherry and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Devon (1989), pp 860-1 Country Life, no 6 (11 February 1999), pp 46-9

Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition revised 1904, published 1906 1937 edition

Illustrations C Farey, Terraces at Glengorse, 1932 (private collection) C Farey, Perspective view of the house, terraces and Orangery, c 1932 (private collection) Aerial photographs of Glengorse from south-west and south, c 1934 (private collection)

Description written: September 1998 Amended: May 1999; May 2000 Register Inspector: JML Edited: July 2000

Legal

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