

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PLUMPTON PLACE

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Name:	PLUMPTON PLACE
County:	East Sussex
District:	Lewes (District Authority)
Parish:	Plumpton
National park:	SOUTH DOWNS
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.904935 Longitude: -0.066572376 National Grid Reference: TQ 36040 13498 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000234 Date first listed: 25-Mar-1987

Details

Early C20 formal and extensive water gardens, forming the last collaboration between Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, laid out around a moated manor house, also remodelled by Lutyens, for Edward Hudson, the founder of Country Life magazine.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

A manor house at Plumpton with two mills is mentioned in Domesday Book although the moated site dates back earlier to Saxon times. Construction of the present house was begun in 1568 for the Mascall family. In 1620, the house and land in hand was sold to Sir Thomas Springett. In 1736, it passed to Sir Thomas Pelham, whose descendants later became the earls of Chichester. Edward Hudson purchased Plumpton Place in 1927 from the Earl of Chichester and commissioned Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) to remodel the house and to lay out the gardens. Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) prepared designs for planting the garden. The property then passed through various hands; Lord Manton established a stud there before the house was sold to a local solicitor and then to Jimmy Page, a pop musician. The property changed hands again in 1983, the owners undertaking restoration and further alteration of the house and commissioning Penelope Hobhouse to advise on the gardens. Although the main structural elements of Lutyens' layout remain intact, Jekyll's planting has not survived. The property remains (1998) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Plumpton Place lies immediately to the north of the B2116 Ditchling to Lewes road, which runs east to west along the spring line at the foot of the scarp slope of the South Downs. The village of Plumpton lies c 400m to the east. The ornamental gardens around the manor house, Mill House and the lakes, extend to c 4ha. The site slopes gently down from north to south. To the west and north the site is bounded by close-board fencing and the access road, buildings and playing field of Plumpton College. To the north-east and east, the gardens open onto pasture land and housing in Plumpton village. To the south the gardens are sheltered by a belt of mature C19 holm oak around the moat bank, but beyond a field and the road the South Downs are visible, rising sharply to 200m.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
PLUMPTON PLACE

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The approach to the main entrance is via a narrow lane from the B2116, shared with Plumpton College for the first 60m. This has been the established entrance from at least the late C18. Stone-capped brick gate piers with timber gates (restored to Lutyens' design in 1986) form the entrance to a short, northward-sloping drive to a grassed turning circle (with a surviving pair of early C20 walnut trees), centred on the west-facing front of the gatehouse. The gatehouse is designed as a pair of L-shaped cottages framing a pedimented central doorway. The drive was formerly flanked by Lutyens' double avenue of yew trees which extended around the western half of the turning circle. The yews, those along the drive hiding the manor from immediate view, and the path which entered from the lane on the axis of the gatehouse entrance, were removed in the mid 1980s. A minor drive running due west from Plumpton Lane gives separate vehicle access to the Mill House at the north end of the site.

A public footpath, diverted in 1995 further towards the northern boundary of the site, cuts across from the drive into Plumpton College on the west side, to the Mill House and Plumpton Lane on the north boundary.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Plumpton Place (listed grade II*) sits on an island in the moat towards the southern end of the site. The west wing was added in c 1600. The manor was divided and let as cottages in the mid C19. Lutyens remodelled and restored the house from 1928; he added the music room wing overlooking the moat in 1933-4. Further alterations and modifications were carried out in the mid 1980s. The gatehouse (listed grade II) is built on the axis of the west front of the manor. The cream-painted timber Mill House (listed grade II) lies c 300m to the north-east below the chain of ponds. Together, the three buildings form a dynamic visual relationship from within the gardens. Hudson lived in the Mill House (converted by Lutyens) while work on the house and grounds was in progress. The present owners have installed a new wheel to the mill race.

A large, probably C17, Sussex barn (listed grade II), re-incorporated into the garden in the 1990s, and associated stables, lie to the north-west of the gatehouse.

GARDENS No gardening activity is recorded at Plumpton Place before Lutyens' work in 1928. He collaborated with Gertrude Jekyll on the planting design although she never visited the site, relying rather on photographs and considerable correspondence with Edward Hudson. Various plans and notes survive (NMR).

From the entrance to the gatehouse, a paved axial path (re-laid in the 1990s) runs eastwards to the west front of the manor. The garden enclosed by the gatehouse wings is divided into two plain grassed squares with shrub borders, screened from the moat by a yew hedge which was part of Lutyens' original design. The axial path crosses the moat by a double-arched brick bridge with oak balustrading, replaced to the original 1920s design in 1986. On the island side of the bridge, the bank of the moat is retained to the north by a high brick bastion wall and flanked by a three-flight brick staircase leading down to a lower walk at water level. To the south, the island slopes down to the water in a steep grassed bank.

The present axial path divides the west forecourt of the manor into two large grass squares lined along the path with clipped Portuguese laurel standards (planted in 1987). The forecourt was designed by Lutyens in four quarter squares with a cross-axial path; it was laid to the present design in the 1980s. Shrubs and climbing roses grow against the manor.

The path leads around the manor to a north terrace, laid to grass, which opens out onto a paved area of alternate brick and stone squares edged with species and rugosa roses. The path descends by a flight of brick steps to reach the lower walk below the bastion wall. The present mixed shrub border along the walk is the probable site of Jekyll's herbaceous border, for which plans survive. Of the two large willows trees she planned to punctuate either end of the walk, one survives and the other was replaced in 1997. A new terrace, stone steps and planting have been laid out to the south of the music room.

The moat and the two ponds, the higher Sluice Pond and the Lower Mill Pond, are separated from each other by grassed banks and together form a chain through the gardens from the manor to the Mill House. Extensive views are commanded in both directions. Sir Thomas Springett's purchase in 1620 included c 0.8ha of water, indicating the likely existence of both ponds by that date. By the late C19 they had silted up but were dredged for Lutyens' work and again in 1986. The moat fringes are planted with iris and the two ponds with bulrushes. Lutyens designed the outlets from the moat and ponds to the race as steep cascades faced with shaped bricks which channel the water in an intricate pattern.

A grass path leads down the eastern side of the chain of ponds through light, ornamental woodland of mature and new trees, underplanted with bulbs. A new tree belt has been planted (1986) to extend the enclosure of the garden on the eastern side. The

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
PLUMPTON PLACE

path leads past a beech hedge, raised lavender beds and a tennis court, to the paved terrace on the north front of the Mill House. Jekyll edged the terrace with iris, planted a rose and herbaceous garden on the east bank of the Mill Pond and massed primulas under the trees north and west of the Mill Pond. None of this planting survives.

West of the Mill Pond and enclosed by a tall beech hedge is a rose garden, laid out in 1993(4 to a horseshoe plan with old varieties of shrub and climbing roses. South-west of this is an orchard, with an arbour constructed from oak for climbing plants, built on the axis of the north front of the house. The paddock to the south and west of the Mill Pond is planted with a variety of ornamental trees, replacing many lost in the storm of 1987.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 73 (20 May 1933), pp 522-8; 173 (19 May 1983), p 1324; no 34 (26 August 1993), p 49 Victoria History of the County of Sussex VII, (1940), pp 109-11 I Nairn and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Sussex (1965), p 584 D O' Neill, Lutyens' Country Houses (1980), pp 137, 147 J Brown, Gardens of a Golden Afternoon (1982), pp 148-50 P Beales, Vision of Roses (1996), p 199

Archival items Copies of Jekyll's planting plans and correspondence are held on microfiche at the National Monuments Record (item 222), (originals held at Reef Point, USA). Records of Wells and Co, Builders, of Plumpton Green, containing various plans (some annotated by Lutyens) relating to the layout of the garden and the construction of the buildings, c 1927(35 (AMS 5773), (East Sussex County Record Office)

Description written: July 1998 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: March 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.