

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Steeple Manor

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	Steeple Manor
District:	Dorset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Steeple with Tyneham
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.629171 Longitude: -2.1258213 National Grid Reference: SY9119781060 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1400620 Date first listed: 19-Apr-2011 Location Description: The garden surrounds Steeple Manor. Statutory Address 1: Steeple Manor, Steeple, Wareham, BH20 5PA

Historique de la conservation

HISTORY The formal gardens at Steeple Manor were laid out in 1924 by the landscape architect Brenda Colvin (1897 – 1981) for Major Frederick Holland Swann who had bought Steeple Manor in the early 1920s. At that time the house, of c1600 origin, and enlarged in the late-C17 and C18, was in a derelict state, and the Swanns commissioned the architect Percy Richard Morley Horder (1870 – 1944) to restore and extend it. A collection of photographs (in private ownership), of c1920, show the house prior to Morley Horder's alterations and later photographs of 1926 show the renovated and extended house and the newly laid out gardens by Brenda Colvin. As shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map published in 1889, the main road through Steeple ran immediately along the south-west front of the house to St Michael's Church. Colvin's design included the re-alignment of this road, creating a larger garden and enabling room for a turning circle in front of the house. To the north-west and south-west of the house, she created a series of formal, terraced 'garden rooms', including walls, steps, a rectangular pond and a summer house, and further away from the house, an informal woodland garden, incorporating a small stream running through it, and two small lakes to the east of the house. In the 1950s Brenda Colvin exhibited a number of photographs of the gardens at Steeple Manor at the Chelsea Flower Show, and in 1952 they illustrated her article in the 'Studio Gardens and Gardening' annual.

During the late 1960s the gardens at Steeple Manor fell into slight neglect but, as shown by an aerial photograph taken around that time (in private collection), the main layout and much of the structural planting of Colvin's design survived. In the mid-1970s Steeple Manor changed ownership for the third time. Since then the gardens have been maintained and managed by the current owner with the assistance of two gardeners.

Morley Horder is an Edwardian architect, well known for his domestic designs in the Arts and Crafts style, mostly built in the Cotswolds and Dorset. The remodelling of Steeple Manor (listed at grade II*) is one of his later works. The relation between house and garden was very important to him, and one of his domestic designs, Little Court in Charminster, Dorset, featured in Gertrude Jekyll's 'Gardens of Small Country Houses' (1914).

Brenda Colvin trained at Swanley Horticultural College, the first horticultural college to take women. After having left Swanley in 1921, Colvin worked briefly for the garden designer Madeline Agar (c1874-1967) before setting up her own practice later

that year in London. From 1922 until the Second World War she mainly created or improved private gardens, but also designed a number of public gardens. In 1929 Colvin attended a meeting at the Chelsea Flower Show, together with a group of other landscape architects and architects, including Geoffrey Jellicoe, Oliver Hill and Barry Parker. This meeting resulted in the foundation of the British Association of Garden Architects, shortly after renamed Institute of Landscape Architects (RLA), of which in 1951 Colvin became President. In 1931, under the encouragement of the British planner and first president of the Town Planning Institute, Thomas Adams (1871-1940), Colvin went to America where she studied American landscape design and planning at Harvard. On her return to England, despite her interest in landscape planning, most of her work was still limited to garden design, but after the Second World War, from the 1950s onwards, Colvin had the opportunity to take the lead on large landscape projects in England, including schools, universities (University of East Anglia), reservoirs, a military camp, quarries and power stations. Between 1947 and 1979 she published a number of books and many articles, mainly in professional magazines and journals. In 1969 she invited the landscape architect Hal Moggridge to become a partner in her landscape practice, which continues today under the name Colvin and Moggridge.

Details

DESCRIPTION Formal gardens laid out in 1924 to a design by the landscape architect Brenda Colvin.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The site is located in Steeple, a small hamlet dating back to the post-medieval period, in a relatively remote rural area at the foot of Creech Hill, a steep ridge rising steeply to its north. The gardens cover an area of c2.37 ha, and slope in a south-westerly direction. They are screened from the road to its west and south-west by a tall beech hedge with additional screening from taller trees behind it, including macrocarpa and eucalyptus, and to its north by a belt of densely planted trees. To the south and south-east the site is bounded by fields. There are a number of significant views from the gardens to St Michael's Church to the south of Steeple Manor, and to Creech Hill to the north and Smedmore Hill to the south-east, which function as a dramatic backdrop to the design.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site has two entrances, both situated along the road bounding the site to the west. The northern one is marked by two, c1.5m high round gate piers, topped with ball finials, attached to curved walls terminating in square gate piers topped with a flat coping stone. This entrance gives access to a drive, which is flanked to its south by a garage and outbuilding (added in the later C20), enclosed by mature trees and shrubs. The drive curves south-eastwards leading to a small wall enclosed courtyard north of the house, with further outbuildings. From this courtyard a doorway flanked by a tall curved stone wall, creating the 'surprise effect' of a switch-back tunnel, gives access to the gardens north of the house. The southern entrance leads off the main road to a round gravelled parking area situated to the south-west side of the house, with grassed curved corners. It is enclosed by a c 2.5 m high beech hedge to screen the cars from view from the house. Along its north side a pair of gate piers with ball finials (included in the listing of the Grade II* house) give access to a small flagstone paved courtyard in front of the main entrance to the house.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Steeple Manor (listed at Grade II*), stands just off centre in the south-western part of the site. It is a house of c1600 origin, enlarged in the late C17 and C18, with a matching north-east wing added in c1920 by Percy Richard Morley Horder, which was linked to an earlier farm building and on the west side to the early C18 part of the house. The two storey house with attic is built in stone rubble, with stone slate roofs with coped gables, and stone stacks with moulded caps. The main south-east garden elevation has full height projecting gables, those to the right added by Morley Horder. Both wings have similar style windows, adorned with hood-moulds, which offer views of the formal gardens to the south-east.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS A small doorway from the forecourt south-west of the house, gives access to stone steps leading down to a straight, stone paved path, overlooking a small orchard to its south with some early C20 fruit trees remaining, and enclosed by a wall along its north east. The path leads to the wooded south corner of the site, which includes oak and lime trees, occupied by the Well or Spring Garden, which includes a semi-circular stone well head, a small stream, and a network of small, meandering paths. In the wall along the main path a door gives access to the formal gardens laid out on the south-east and north-east axis of the house.

Immediately south-east of the house is a flag stone paved terrace enclosed by a dwarf stone wall in the centre of which is an opening leading into a rectangular walled garden divided by stone paved paths into four quarters with a central urn (added in the later C20) on low stone pedestal. In its east corner against the wall, stands a mature magnolia. Each of the four sections has four mature, clipped yew trees, two of which are now missing. The slightly lower wall enclosing this garden to the south-east, has a central decorative cast iron gate hung between a pair of square gate piers, which gives access to a central flight of outward curving stone steps, leading down to the 'Double Hedge Garden'. This consists of a semi-circular lawn enclosed by a tall curved yew hedge, with immediately behind it a slightly taller beech hedge. Formerly the lawn was planted with tall conical shaped yews, interspersed with square rose beds, of which today the outline can be seen in the grass. A narrow central opening in both hedges gives access to a large informal garden occupying the eastern part of the site, which has two ponds, the smaller one added more recently in the late C20.

To the east of the house, accessed from the walled garden described above, is a square shaped 'garden room' with stone paths laid in a symmetrical pattern, curved outwards in the corners and enclosing planted beds. From this garden is a significant view of the rectangular shaped formal sunken garden laid out below it, to its north-east, and accessed via central stone steps which lead to a raised path along its south-west side. From here steps at either end of the walk give access to a large rectangular shaped lily pond with a stone edge, surrounded by stone paving. The pond is fed via a very narrow, straight stone rill which supplies water from a small circular pond to its north-west. The latter is enclosed by semi-circular stone steps leading up the slope to a small area planted mainly with bamboo. The south-west side of this garden, to either side of the steps, was planted with tall cypresses, as shown on photos of c1930 (held in a private collection), and these were replanted in the late 1990s. On the other side, to the north-east, steps lead to a pleached lime walk, formerly lined on the outside with a hedge. From here path meanders into a woodland garden with a small stream occupying the north-east corner of the site. The stream has a small dam at its south-east end, and is crossed by a number of rustic bridges (late C20). In this part of the garden, in the far north-east corner of the site, is a sunken tennis court with pavilion, introduced in the late C20.

Paths from the woodland garden lead to the garden north of the house which consists of a large rectangular lawn, formerly in use as a tennis lawn. A retaining wall along its north side supports a raised grassed walk lined by a planted border, accessed via central steps in the wall. A c2.5m high stone rubble wall runs along the full length of the walk and at its centre, opposite the steps leading to the lawn, is a square-shaped stone rubble summer house with a pitched tiled roof, and with small timber casements to the side elevations. Its timber door with large decorative strap hinges is imported from elsewhere, as is the lintel above the door. The current owner suggests these may be from Corfe Castle. The south corner of the lawn is emphasised by an L-shaped yew hedge. Along the full length of the west end of the lawn is a bed with mature shrubs, with behind it another raised walk lined with five tall conical-shaped cypresses, grown by the current owner from seedlings of the Vatican garden. Behind it, the walk is screened by a timber pergola, introduced by the current owner (2011), who also re-instated the border to its west. The garden north-west of the house is accessed via steps flanked by gate piers leading from the small courtyard at the main entrance to the house. It consists of a rectangular shaped lawn, curved at its far north-west end where it is screened by mature yew trees, with a denser belt of shrubs and trees beyond it and to its south. On the lawn are six ball-shaped yews planted in two rows, framing the north-west elevation of the house. Formerly stepping stones in the grass formed a curved path leading from the south end of the lawn to the drive bounding the north side of this garden, from where it gave access to a small entrance on the other side of the drive, marked by gate piers, leading to the former tennis lawn north of the house, described above.

Parts of Brenda Colvin's planting scheme have survived, some of which can be seen on a series of historic photographs of the garden taken in the late 1920s and 1930s. These include for example, macrocarpa, prunus, lilacs (of which the labels were found by the current owner, and which were introduced from France), and a grouping of wygelia.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden, laid out by the current owner in the late-C20, is situated in the far north-east corner of the site. It covers a rectangular plot enclosed by mature trees and shrubs. In the northern part are a number of green houses. Apart from growing vegetables, it is mainly used as a nursery to grow plants for the gardens.

Summary

Formal gardens laid out in 1924 at Steeple Manor, designed by the landscape architect Brenda Colvin.

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.

Reasons for Designation

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION The garden at Steeple Manor is included on the Register of Parks and Gardens at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * Intactness: its layout has survived mostly intact, and later minor additions have not affected its interest. * Historic interest: it is an influential and innovative example of an early-C20 garden heralding significant changes in C20 landscape design in England. * Historic association: it is an important and early example of the work of Brenda Colvin, a nationally important landscape architect. * Group value: it is the essential setting to the listed Grade II* Steeple Manor with which it forms an important ensemble.

Bibliographie

Books and journals

Gibson, T, Brenda Colvin. *A Career in Landscape*, (2011)

Briggs, M S, 'Oxford Dictionary of National Biography' in Horder, Percy Richard Morley, (2006 (online edn))

Moggridge, H, 'Oxford Dictionary of National Biography' in Brenda Colvin, (2006 (online edn))

Other

Copies of photographs of the gardens at Steeple Manor of c1920, 1926 and of later C20 date (private collection),