

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

LUSCOMBE CASTLE

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Name:	LUSCOMBE CASTLE
County:	Devon
District:	Teignbridge (District Authority)
Parish:	Dawlish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.579946 Longitude: -3.4978755 National Grid Reference: SX 94044 76650 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000486 Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

Details

An early C19 park and garden for which Humphry Repton prepared proposals in a Red Book of 1799, surrounding a house of 1800-4 designed by John Nash

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Luscombe valley and the surrounding downs remained farmland until the late C18, with pasture and arable land in the valley and on the flat hilltops, woodland and rough pasture on the slopes, and moorland at the head of the valley (Debois 1991). With the exception of the moorland to the west, this land was enclosed before 1788 when Charles Hoare, grandson of Henry Hoare of Stourhead, Wiltshire (qv), and a partner in Hoare's Bank, acquired an interest in the property. Charles Hoare rented a house in the emerging resort of Dawlish in the 1790s for the sake of his wife's health. Luscombe Farm was not finally purchased until 1797, but it is likely that from 1788 Hoare was responsible for plantations which were later noted by Repton (ibid). The property acquired in 1797 included a relatively substantial house and outbuildings on a site c 100m south-east of the present house, and probably further buildings on the site of Home Farm. The existing house no longer stood when Humphry Repton (1752-1818) advised on the site for a new house in 1799. The new house, designed by John Nash (1752-1835), was begun in 1800. Concentrated planting in the park and pleasure grounds continued up to 1805, when the Veitch nursery submitted its final account for trees supplied. The land on which Summercombe Wood was planted was not acquired until 1801, and the final stage in the early C19 development of the site was the formation from c 1812 of the American Garden. Although the essential structure of the landscape was complete by the time of Repton's death in 1818, Charles Hoare continued to make improvements up to his own death in 1851. A comprehensive programme of replanting took place c 1835, and changes were made to the American Garden. Peter Richard Hoare succeeded his uncle in 1851, and made further changes to the property including the introduction of exotic trees, and the formation of the Pinetum. This process continued under Peter Merrick Hoare who succeeded his father in 1877. Formal gardens were created in the pleasure grounds by Peter A M Hoare c 1900. Following storm damage in 1990 an historical survey and management plan was prepared for the landscape. Luscombe Castle remains (1998) private property.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Luscombe Castle is situated c 0.5km west of the coastal town of Dawlish, and some 15km south of Exeter. The c 140ha site comprises c 10ha of formal and informal pleasure grounds around the house, and some 130ha of parkland and ornamental woodland. It lies principally in the Luscombe valley which runs west from the coast at Dawlish, and in Summercombe, a similar east/west valley to the north of a minor road which runs west from Dawlish to a ridge of high ground at Little Haldon c 2km beyond the site. The south-east and east boundaries are formed by this minor road, Luscombe Hill. Luscombe Hill continues through the site, dividing the grounds around the house from Summercombe Valley to the north. Luscombe Wood descends from the ridge of high ground south of Luscombe valley to Smallacombe, where the woodland adjoins the agricultural landscape; to the west ornamental woodland merges with heathland on higher ground. Boundaries are generally formed by hedges and banks. The early and mid C19 gardens of Stonelands, a substantial early C19 house c 700m east of Luscombe Castle formed part of the estate in the early C19, and were planned by Humphry Repton to be seen from the park. Now partly developed, Stonelands lies outside the site as here registered, but is still significant in longer views from The Park and Luscombe Wood.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is entered from Luscombe Hill at a point c 600m north-west of Dawlish parish church. Stone-coped concave rubble-stone walls adjoin the principal entrance, which is formed by a white-painted timber gate hung from a monolithic stone gate pier. Front Lodge, an early C19, single-storey, Tudor-gothic stone lodge stands within the site to the north-west of the entrance. The tarmac drive leads west for some 400m to reach the carriage court and porte-cochère on the north side of the house. The drive ascends gently with parkland enclosed by metal estate fencing and mature trees to the south, and mixed ornamental planting on higher ground to the north. The carriage court is enclosed to the north and south by early C20 yew hedges, while the drive continues north and north-west to a service court, and a further drive which ascends c 240m to Back Lodge, a mid C19 Tudor-gothic stone lodge on Luscombe Hill. The banks north and north-west of this drive are planted with mature cedars which may have formed part of Repton's early C19 scheme (Debois 1991). The mid C19 Church Drive approaches the park from Dawlish to the south-east, and is carried over the Smallacombe road on a castellated gothic arch. The Haldon and Beech Grove Lodges were built in the mid C19 at points where carriage drives cross Luscombe Hill within the site.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Luscombe Castle (listed grade I) stands on a level platform on the south-east-facing slope towards the east end of the Luscombe Valley, with extensive views east towards Dawlish and the sea. The house was built from 1800 on a fresh site for Charles Hoare, to the designs of John Nash. In his Red Book (1799), Humphry Repton described the intended effect of Nash's design, which through its irregular plan and outline would ensure an 'infinitely more picturesque effect than any other stile of building'. The house is constructed in stone, and is principally of two storeys with a prominent three-storey octagonal tower which connects the north wing and the south-west wing, and a square north tower surmounting a porte-cochère. Castellated parapets, turrets, pinnacles and clustered chimney stacks, and details such as window surrounds in Tudor-gothic style contribute to the 'consequence' and picturesque effect of the building (Repton 1799). At the south-east corner an open gothic loggia was glazed to form a conservatory in the mid C19 when an earlier conservatory in the American Garden was removed, while to the south-west the single-storey Chapel of St Alban was added by George Gilbert Scott in 1862. Built in sandstone with a pitched slate roof, the Chapel has an apsidal north-east facade, and buttressed elevations with lancet windows. The Chapel replaced shrubberies which were intended by Repton to screen the stables west of the house.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Lying north-east, east and south of the house, the formal and informal gardens and pleasure grounds include the American Garden which survives from the early C19, and formal gardens adjacent to the house which were created in the mid and late C19, and the early C20. The gardens have undergone the greatest changes since Repton planned the landscape in 1799. The American Garden lies c 200m north-east of the house, and was developed as the principal early C19 pleasure ground associated with the house between 1812 and 1814 (Debois 1991). The garden is enclosed to the north and north-east by a wall separating the pleasure grounds from Luscombe Hill, while to the south a C19 stone ha-ha separates the garden from grass slopes to the north of the drive. Mature oaks survive from late C18 planting pre-dating Repton's involvement, while island beds planted with ornamental shrubs and rhododendrons were created c 1890, replacing a similar early C19 layout. The pool c 240m north-east of the house was formed c 1900. The early C19 circular stone and thatch summerhouse which now

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stands near the west end of the American Garden appears to have been constructed immediately adjacent to The Park c 1799, and was moved to its present location c 1830 as part of a remodelling of this area (ibid). Other early C19 features including the conservatory which adjoined the wall forming the north-east boundary of the garden were removed in the mid C19. The American Garden has been the subject of a programme of restoration in the late C20 and today (1998) retains a simplified network of C19 gravelled walks, shrubby planting and mature trees.

The formal gardens east, south and west of the Castle were formed from the late C19 and replaced a smaller area of pleasure grounds laid out by Repton in the early C19. East of the house, a level lawn extends c 50m to a stone ha-ha constructed c 1890 which allows views east across The Park to Dawlish church and the sea, while a gravel walk immediately below the east facade continues south across the lawns to reach the lowest of a series of three late C19 grass terraces on the north-facing slope c 50m south of the house. A subsidiary gravel walk leads west past the mid C19 conservatory (originally an open loggia), to a gravelled area north-east of the Chapel, which is ornamented by five variously sized, circular box-edged flower beds. Continuing south-west c 20m, this walk becomes the principal axis of the late C19 and early C20 formal gardens west of the house. Bordered by groups of rhododendrons, the walk extends south-west c 50m to a series of three circular gravel areas placed on an axis with the walk, the north-east and south-west gravel circles surrounding circular rose beds edged with a narrow turf border, the central circle containing a stone-kerbed circular pool. Some 100m from the house the walk ascends a shallow flight of stone steps to reach a circular yew-hedged enclosure c 35m in diameter which contains circular and segmental box-edged flower beds set in gravel. This garden, planned in the early C20 as a formal rose garden is now (1998) planted with low ornamental shrubs and herbaceous plants. Clipped Irish yews flank a gap in the yew hedge which leads south-west to give a view west-south-west up Back Lawn. North of the formal garden lies an extensive early C20 rock and water garden exuberantly planted with ornamental trees and shrubs, with a stone-faced early C20 grotto or seat at the north-west corner some 130m west of the house. A gravel walk returns c 100m north-east and east to the house, passing the early C19 Milk Room immediately west of the house. In the early C20 this walk was surmounted by a pergola, few traces of which survive today (Mr Hoare pers comm, 1998).

PARK The parkland comprises The Park east of the house, Back Lawn running towards the head of the Luscombe Valley west of the house, the meadow south-west of Home Farm, and the mid C19 Church Park which adjoins the south-east drive. The Park occupies a valley which falls east from the house towards Dawlish, and which is enclosed by woodland on the higher ground to north and south-west. Remaining as pasture, the gently sloping ground to the south and south-east is planted with clumps of mature broadleaved trees, preserving the easterly views conceived by Repton in 1799. Church Park c 800m south-east of the house comprises pasture planted with mid C19 exotic trees, with open views across the Aller valley. Church Park also contains an ornamental pond 930m east-south-east of the house, and a mid C19 cascade fed by the River Aller c 880m south-east of the house. Some 400m north-east of the house, the meadow west of the Home Farm is visible from The Park across Haldon Lane, the course of which is sunk. Opposite Front Lodge, the drive leading north-east to Home Farm accords with Repton's proposals (1799), which envisaged the meadow as 'Lawn', underlining its ornamental character. Back Lawn extends some 400m up the valley west of the formal gardens, and is adjoined by woodland to the north, west and south. The early C19 soft edge to the plantations has been partly lost due to the C20 change of management from grazing to mowing. Other changes include the opening of glades through the woodland at the west end, and to the south of the valley.

KITCHEN GARDEN The early C19 walled kitchen garden was constructed to the north of Home Farm rather than in the position to the west of the house advocated by Repton (1799). The kitchen garden is now (1998) disused.

OTHER LAND Two areas of ornamental woodland, Luscombe Wood and Summercombe Wood, are included within the site boundary. Luscombe Wood occupies the north- and south-facing slopes of the west/east ridge which lies to the south of the house, the spine of which forms The Terrace, a wide ride formed c 1831 from a former public road. To the east the late C19 Pinetum overlooks The Park c 400m south-south-east of the house, and clumps and groups of trees in The Park merge gradually with the woodland to the west. The northern boundary of Luscombe Wood adjoins Back Lawn, while to the north-west it is bounded by Haldon Lane, which separates it from Summercombe Wood. A network of paths, carriage drives and rides was developed in Luscombe Wood from the early C19, with those to the north of The Terrace being established by 1817. These

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appear to relate to Repton's Red Book proposals (1799), while the predominantly deciduous trees underplanted with evergreens such as laurel has been identified as being in Repton's preferred style (Debois, 1991).

Summercombe Wood occupies a valley and spur of high ground north of Luscombe Hill. The woodland has been extensively replanted since the Second World War, but the early C19 ornamental drive which follows a stream up the valley, passing a pool c 670m north-west of the house and a gothic-arched stone bridge c 1km north-west of the house, survives. The bridge connects the drive to further areas of early C19 woodland including The Brakes and Pit Wood to the north, while the drive itself returns south and south-east through Summercombe Wood to a gate near Woodbrook, 240m north-west of the house. Mid C19 planting north of the stream has obscured some of the fine easterly views which were favourably reported in 1818 (Neale). Haldon Lodge, a mid C19 lodge house (listed grade II) stands on high ground at the west end of Summercombe Wood c 1.5km west of the house.

REFERENCES

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Maps Map of Southwood Estate, 1799 (private collection) Map of Aller Barton, 1800 (private collection) Estate Plan, 1817 (private collection) C and J Greenwood, *Map of Devon*, surveyed 1825-6, published 1827 Tithe map for Dawlish parish, 1840 (Devon Record Office)

OS Surveyor's drawings, 1801-4 OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition surveyed 1904, published 1906 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1887, published 1890 2nd edition revised 1904, published 1905

Illustrations Pair of paintings of Luscombe Farm, c 1770 (private collection) Humphry Repton (?), Mrs C Hoare with J N Nash very humble respects Nov 27 1801, drawing of thatched lodge, probably Bottom Lodge, with two figures (private collection) H A Fortesque, *Luscombe*, August 1819, (private collection) T Allom, *Luscombe, seat of Charles Hoare Esq*, 1832 (West Country Studies Library) J Gendall, *Luscombe*, 1840 (West Country Studies Library)

Archival items Humphry Repton, *Red Book for Luscombe Castle* (1799), (private collection) Family papers, accounts and correspondence held at Hoare's Bank Hoare collection (4765), (Devon Record Office)

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