

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

AMESBURY ABBEY

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Name:	AMESBURY ABBEY
District:	Wiltshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Amesbury
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.176046 Longitude: -1.7931286 National Grid Reference: SU1455841888 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000469 Date first listed: 01-Sep-1987

Details

C18 and C19 garden and park, including early C18 work by Charles Bridgeman, around an early C19 house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

During the medieval period the Benedictine abbey of Amesbury formed part of the land of a priory manor that stood here. At the Dissolution, the latter held its own site, mills, meadows, pasture, agricultural land, parkland, and various properties in the town of Amesbury (VCH 1995). In 1541, the Crown granted the estate of the priory manor to Edward, Earl of Hertford, later Duke of Somerset. Between 1595 and 1601 the priory manor was replaced with a new house, built for Edward's son, the second Earl of Hertford. In 1600 a gatehouse known as Diana's House was built, and an ornamental tower, followed in 1607 by another gatehouse, Kent House. The precincts of the former priory, which were enclosed by the River Avon and a wall, were laid out as a park, and in 1635 the grounds included a bowling green (ibid). By the early 1660s, a new house designed by John Webb (1611-72) had been built for the third Lord Hertford or his successor, William, Duke of Somerset (ibid). The house became known in the mid C18 as Amesbury Abbey.

In 1720 Amesbury was bought by Henry Boyle, Lord Carleton (d 1725). He passed it on to his nephew Charles Douglas, Duke of Queensberry, and the latter extended the house to designs attributed to Henry Flitcroft (ibid). In 1726 Flitcroft produced a survey of Amesbury, which shows the Abbey with enclosed formal gardens surrounded by a park with a large double avenue and geometrically patterned block plantations. Between 1720 and 1725, new entrance gates were erected near Kent House, and a formal ride, later called Lord's Walk, was planted to provide a new approach to the Abbey (ibid). In 1733 the enclosed formal gardens were removed and a ha-ha was made around the house. After 1735, the Duke of Queensberry acquired more land west of the River Avon and the park was further extended. In 1730, Henrietta Howard, mistress of George II, recommended Charles Bridgeman (d 1738) to the Duchess of Queensberry to work on the Amesbury landscape. In 1738, following a visit to Amesbury, Charles Bridgeman produced a plan which shows an extensive formal landscape with lawns, avenues, rides, a canal, and a formal kite-shaped garden. It also shows part of the Vespasian Camp (the Iron Age hillfort near the Abbey) as a prominent feature in the landscape design, laid out with formal rides, avenues, and plantations. It is unclear to what extent Bridgeman's plan was implemented, or to what extent it adopted any previously laid out landscape features (see Flitcroft survey, 1726). By the late C18 (Andrews and Drury, 1773) however at least part of Bridgeman's proposals seem to have been implemented, as the park and the Vespasian Camp had been laid out with formal rides and avenues, as indicated on his plan.

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After 1760 the park was enlarged to the north and west (Andrews and Drury, 1773), where the so-called Nile Clumps were planted. Some land was disparked c 1778 when the house and dukedom passed to Charles' cousin once removed, William Douglas. In 1825 the Douglas family sold Amesbury to Sir Edmund Antrobus. By the early C19 a new entrance to the park had been created to its south. In 1834 Sir Edmund started to rebuild Arnesbury Abbey to designs by Thomas Hopper, reusing the existing foundations. This new house was extended in 1860, and in 1904 the architect Detmar Blow undertook further improvements. In 1915 the Antrobus family sold the Amesbury estate, including Stonehenge, in several lots (Sale particulars, 1915). By that date Lord's Walk had been opened to the public, and it is now owned and managed by Amesbury Town Council. The house was converted into flats and became a nursing home c 1960. In 1969 the A303 was constructed as a northern bypass to Amesbury town, cutting off the northern tip of the park.

The site remains (2002) in divided ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Amesbury Abbey, a site of c 56ha, is situated to the west of the town of Amesbury. The A303 and the River Avon form the north boundary of the site, the river entering the park at Grey Bridge immediately south of the Countess Roundabout. To the south-west the site is defined by Stonehenge Road, to the south-east by Church Street and the houses and other buildings along the north side of High Street, Fairfax Close, and London Road, and to the far north-east by Ratfyn Road. The setting of the site includes the town of Amesbury extending to its south-east and the River Avon and its banks to the north-east. To the north and west of the site lie the Nile Clumps, tree clumps planted here by the late C18 (Andrews and Drury, 1773), some of which have recently (2002) been replanted (Mott MacDonald 2002). The course of The Avenue, the archaeological remains of a prehistoric road that leads to Stonehenge, runs through the area of the Nile Clumps. Stonehenge is situated c 1.5km west from Amesbury Abbey and was owned by the Antrobus family until 1915. The area north and west of the site (not included in the area registered here) has been farmed since the early C19 and is divorced from the park by the A303, introduced in the late 1960s.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Since the early C19 the main entrance to Arnesbury Abbey has lain to the south-east, off Church Street. Here mid or late C18 gates and gate piers with attached flanking walls (listed grade II*), moved here from elsewhere in the grounds in the early C19, give access to a curved drive that leads in a northerly direction to the south front of Amesbury Abbey house. Immediately to the south-west of the entrance stands a C19 lodge. Some 50m to the north of the entrance stands St Mary's church with its surrounding graveyard (outside the area here registered).

The park can be approached from the north-east via Lord's Walk, a curved ride originating from the early C18 (VCH 1995), which runs for c 500m in south-westerly direction to a pair of mid C17 gate piers and gates (listed grade II*) on the west side of Countess Road. The gate is flanked to the south by Kent House (listed grade II*). Built in 1607 as a lodge to Amesbury Abbey, it was remodelled c 1733 to become the lodge for the late C17 house by John Webb. West of the gate piers, Lord's Walk continues as a footpath that leads into the park, running parallel to the south-eastern park boundary to the main entrance off Church Street (OS 1877). On Bridgeman's plan of 1738, and Andrews and Drury's map of 1773, a formal avenue or ride is shown in this area. Lord's Walk has been planted with hazel on either side since the late C20.

Some 100m north of Kent House, on the west side of Countess Road, stands Diana's House (listed grade II*), built c 1600 as the gatehouse to Amesbury Abbey.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Amesbury Abbey (listed grade I) stands just east of the centre of the park. It was built for Sir Edmund Antrobus to designs by the architect Thomas Hopper between 1834 and 1840 and 1857-9. The three-storey high cubic house is built in Classical style, evoking the house of 1660 designed by John Webb that it replaced. The entrance front to the south has nine bays and a large central portico of six composite columns. The east and west elevations have five bays and are identical except for the late C20 conservatory attached to the west side. An irregular service block is attached to the rear on the north side.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The pleasure grounds of c 8ha extend mainly to the north of the house but also include small areas to the south, east, and west. To the south, east, and west they are separated from the park by a ditch or ha-ha lined with parkland fencing. The pleasure grounds are laid to lawn and adorned with mature clumps of specimen trees dating from the C18 and C19.

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In the pleasure grounds, some 30m to 50m north and north-east of the house, stand two groups of single-storey sheltered accommodation with associated garages, introduced in the late C20 as part of the nursing home. Further to the north-east, c 200m north-east of the house at Bowles' Hatches, is an C18 three-arched bridge (listed grade II) that spans the River Avon. During the early C18 the piece of land to the north-east of the bridge, north of the River Avon, formed part of the grounds of Amesbury Abbey (Bridgeman plan, 1738) but it has recently (2002) been built over (outside the area here registered).

From the north-west corner of the house a walk runs in a north-westerly direction to the Baluster Bridge (listed grade II*) that crosses the River Avon. This bridge, rebuilt by Sir William Chambers in 1775, is ornamented at its north end by two gate piers. Some 10m to the north-east of the Baluster Bridge, on the north bank of the River Avon, is the site of a former boathouse (OS 1877). The walk, in parts much overgrown, continues in a north-westerly direction to the A303. A small path runs west c 40m north-west of the bridge to the Chinese House or Chinese Temple (listed grade II*), situated along the River Avon c 270m to the west-north-west of the house. It was completed by 1748 (VCH 1995) and rebuilt or altered by Sir William Chambers in 1772. It is surrounded by a Chinese-style water garden laid out in 1986-7 when the Chinese House was restored. Some 90m further north of Baluster Bridge the walk leads to a second footpath, now (2002) only partly visible, which runs in a south-westerly direction to the Vespasian Camp, an Iron Age hillfort (scheduled ancient monument), which forms the western part of the site, linking up with a circular walk that leads around the Camp. From this perimeter walk, to the north, south-west, and east of the Camp respectively, three walks lead to the summit of the Camp where lies the site of a Bronze Age barrow (scheduled ancient monument). The latter was possibly excavated in 1770 or 1771. Another earthwork (scheduled ancient monument), a second barrow or possibly an ornamental landscape feature, is situated c 100m to the south-east. Set into the hillside of the east side of the Camp is Gay's Cave (listed grade II*), an early to mid C18 grotto surrounded by a diamond-shaped clearing with a perimeter path and bisecting walk, now (2002) only partly visible (Bridgeman plan, 1738). The Cave is named after the poet John Gay, a close friend of the Duchess of Queensberry, who wrote at Amesbury Abbey. The Vespasian Camp is covered in dense, mature woodland containing beech, box, and yew. It was landscaped in the early C18 to designs by Charles Bridgeman, which, as partly indicated on his plan of 1738, included formal rides, plantations, and ornamental features. Archaeological excavations took place at the Vespasian Camp in 1964 and 1987.

PARK The park lies to the south, east, and west of Amesbury Abbey house, with the River Avon running through the western part of it. To the east the park is screened from Countess Road by an C18 park wall (listed grade II) which runs between Diana's House and Kent House. It is c 3m high and built of flint and stone with stone copings. The River Avon bounds the park to the west. The park has an informal layout and is planted with both single mature specimen trees and a scattering of mature tree clumps. During the early to mid C18, works were carried out in the park to proposals by Charles Bridgeman (plan, 1738), including formal rides and avenues. As indicated on Andrews and Drury's map of 1773, some of the landscape features indicated on Bridgeman's plan may never have been implemented or had disappeared by that time. By 1877 (OS), the park had an informal layout.

KITCHEN GARDEN There is now (2002) no longer a kitchen garden at Amesbury Abbey. On Bridgeman's plan of 1738 an unusual kite-shaped walled garden is shown to the west of the house. As recorded by James Crow in his Field Book belonging to a survey of 1771, there was a 'Kitchen Garden by the Cascade' but this is not shown on Andrews and Drury's map of 1773, or subsequent maps.

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Description written: August 2002 Amended: August 2002 Register Inspector: FDM Edited: November 2004

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.