

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ROCKBEARE MANOR

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

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Name:	ROCKBEARE MANOR
County:	Devon
District:	East Devon (District Authority)
Parish:	Rockbeare
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.737810 Longitude: -3.3765077 National Grid Reference: SY 02963 94037 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000193 Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

Details

Late C18 and early C19 parkland and pleasure grounds laid out around a mid C18 house which was enlarged c 1820 and restored c 1916 by P Morley Horder. Formal terraces and gardens around the house form part of Horder's work, but elsewhere the early C19 scheme recorded in a pair of watercolour views survives.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Rockbeare, meaning 'Rook Wood', was given by the Bishop of Bath and Wells to Matilda, Countess of Gloucester in the reign of Edward III. From the Countess the manor passed to the abbey of Canonleigh, while at the Reformation it was acquired by the Sainthill family. By the middle of the C18 Rockbeare was owned by the Duntze family, prosperous merchants in Exeter, who appear to have been responsible for the construction of the core of the present house, and the stables to the east. Sir John Duntze served as MP for Tiverton from 1768 to 1795, and was made a baronet in 1774. He made additions to the house including the dining room which was constructed in 1769, and by 1793 Polwhele described the house as 'a mansion house pleasantly situated with excellent wall gardens'. A pair of early C19 watercolours show the house prior to alterations made in 1820, but the landscape in which it stands is recognisably the park which survives with the lake west of the house, planting along the drive to the north-west, and tree planting to the south-east. The layout shown on the 1" OS map (1809) also reflects the surviving elements of the landscape, with the exception of a second lake shown to the north-west of the present lake; this lake does not survive today. This evidence suggests that the landscape was developed either by Sir John Duntze in the last years of the C18, or by Thomas Porter who purchased the property in 1815. Porter made significant alterations to the house in 1820 including the addition of the upper storey, and it is likely that the walled garden to the south-east of the house was built at the same time. The Tithe map (1844) shows the main features of Porter's early C19 landscape, including the east drive, the west drive with associated areas of planting, the pleasure grounds around the house, shrubbery and kitchen garden south-east of the house, the orchard with ornamental boundary planting north-east of the house, and parkland with the lake west of the house. To the south and south-west woodland was established which served to frame vistas from the dining room and other rooms on the south front of the house.

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Thomas Porter sold the house, known as Rockbeare Manor since his acquisition of manorial rights in 1815, to William Nation in 1859. Inherited in 1915 by Colonel Spencer Follett, the house was renovated by the architect Percy Morley Horder, who also introduced formal terraces, flower borders and lawns to the south and south-east of the house. In 1988 plans for the realignment of the A30 trunk road included proposals for the construction of the new dual carriageway across the park. As a result of a public enquiry held in 1992, the new road is now (1998) being constructed on an alternative route immediately to the south-east of the site. The estate remains private property and an extensive programme of restoration and consolidation of the historic landscape, including replanting of trees lost through storm damage in 1990, has recently (1998) been undertaken.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Rockbeare Manor is situated c 1km south-east of the village of Rockbeare and 1km north-west of the hamlet of Marsh Green some 10km east of Exeter. The c 60ha site comprises c 10ha of pleasure grounds around the house, and c 50ha of parkland and woodland. Bounded to the north by traditional banks and hedges on the outer side of evergreen shrubbery planting, to the east the site is enclosed by hedges and to the south of the east drive by a brick wall c 3.5m high. To the south the site is adjoined by the route of the A30 now under construction, and by enclosed woodland. To the west a soft boundary to the park allows views over the meadows which adjoin Silver Lane to the west, and more distant views of the Haldon Hills. The site slopes gently from east and west to a stream which runs from the east boundary just below the kitchen gardens to the north-west boundary below Lions Farm. As a result of the generally flat surrounding topography, the site enjoys wide views to the west to specific features including the Haldon Belvedere, Broadclyst parish church, Rockbeare parish church, and Cawsand Beacon, on Dartmoor, while to the south blocks of late C18 or early C19 woodland frame vistas to Westcott Great Covert on the skyline c 1km south-south-west of the house and beyond the site boundary. The late C20 A30 road is being constructed between the park and Westcott Great Covert.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal approach leads from the minor lane which forms the northern boundary of the site at a point some 450m north-west of the house. The entrance is flanked by ornate mid C18, white-painted stucco, pedimented gate piers (listed grade II*) which are ornamented by round-headed niches and Doric columns with bands of vermiculated rustication. The wrought-iron double gates have uprights with spiked finials, and probably date from c 1820. The C20 wing walls with down-swept parapets adjoining the gate piers replace single-storey octagonal lodges which are shown in early C20 photographs (CL 1930). The gravelled drive proceeds east-south-east for c 200m through a narrow belt of planting which follows the northern boundary of the site. Evergreen shrubbery to the north screens the boundary, while to the south groups of deciduous trees frame significant views across the park. Turning south-south-west the drive continues for a further 200m before reaching a gravelled carriage court on the west side of the house which is separated from a lawn to the west by an early C19 low, stone-coped retaining wall. This second section of drive has evergreen planting to the east which screens the former orchard (Tithe map, 1844), now a paddock, north-east of the house, while deciduous trees to the west frame vistas across the park and countryside beyond. The early C19 gabled east facade of Lions Farm c 650m north-west across the park is an important designed feature in these views. Along the entire length of the drive the adjoining planting is used with considerable care to create a series of apparently natural and effortless views across the park.

A service drive passing beneath an archway which links the house and a low pavilion to the north leads from the carriage court to the mid C18 red-brick stables and coach house (listed grade II*) on the east side of the house. A similar archway and pavilion to the south of the house mark the entrance to the early C20 formal terraced garden. A secondary drive leads c 40m from the minor lane forming the eastern boundary of the site to the early C19 courtyard of model farm buildings (listed grade II) c 20m east of the house. This drive is entered through an early C19 gateway (listed grade II) which comprises two low, square brick piers surmounted by recumbent stone lions which are linked by curved, spear-headed wrought-iron railings to a taller pair of square brick piers. The gravelled drive passes to the south of the paddock which is screened to the north, east and west by evergreen shrubbery.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Rockbeare Manor (listed grade I) is an important example of a country house which preserves its Regency character essentially intact. Begun in the mid C18, the house was altered c 1770, and remodelled and raised by one storey for Thomas Porter in about 1820. Further sympathetic alterations were made in the early C20 by Percy Morley Horder.

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Constructed of brick finished with pale painted stucco, the house is U-shaped on plan with north and south wings extending from the west wing. The west or entrance facade is symmetrical with full-height bow windows flanking a wide ground-floor porch supported by pairs of fluted Doric columns, the roof of which forms a wrought-iron railed balcony opening from the drawing room. This room and its balcony afford wide views across the park and agricultural landscape beyond, the additional height helping to accentuate contrasts within the relatively level landscape and enhancing the effect of the lake. The west facade assumed its present form c 1820, but the single-storey pavilions lit by Venetian windows which are linked to it by monumental arches to the north and south survive from the C18 house. The south pavilion is an orangery, while that to the north is a games room. The south or garden facade is asymmetrical, with the late C18 dining room forming a two-storey bow-fronted block at its east end. The north wing is of similar appearance and contains service quarters. It is linked at the east end to the south wing by a single-storey corridor which encloses a small central courtyard and fountain. The house retains significant late C18 and Regency interiors, the dining room in particular being comparable to Wyatt's Music Room at Powderham Castle (qv).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens and pleasure grounds lie to the south and south-east of the house. Here a series of formal terraces retained by low drystone walls of blue lias were created by Morley Horder c 1915. A gravel walk and lawn below the house is connected to a lower tennis lawn by wide stone-flagged steps. Further steps south of the orangery pavilion are flanked by Coade stone vases, and both sets of steps are connected by a wide flagged walk at the lower level. Borders below the retaining walls are separated from the lawn by a flagged walk which extends along the east side of the lower lawn, where more stone steps ascend to an area of lawn to the south-east of the house. Formerly a rose garden, this south-east lawn is ornamented by an early C20 stone tazza or bird bath on a slender pedestal. Although planting has been simplified in the late C20, the formal terraces remain substantially as shown in early C20 photographs (CL 1930). A gravel walk extends south from the south-east terrace through an area of late C18 or early C19 evergreen shrubbery and deciduous trees known as The Shrubbery to the kitchen garden c 240m south-east of the house. Ornamented in the C19 by aviaries which no longer survive (G Noel pers comm, 1998), extensive late C20 replanting has been undertaken in The Shrubbery to replace trees lost in 1990. Below the terraces a further area of lawn is separated from the park by a wire fence, while the axis from the garden door is extended through a late C20 yew walk to a wire gate leading to a mown path extending across the park to a late C20 seat below a mature oak. Immediately south-west of the formal terraces is an early C20 rock and water garden created in an artificial depression. To the west of the house lawns adjoining the carriage court are separated from the park by a ha-ha. These lawns flow naturally into the shrubbery and tree planting along the drive, which thus form an extension to the pleasure grounds.

PARK Created c 1820 from some thirty previous enclosures (G Noel pers comm, 1998), the park lies to the west and south of the house. Boundary planting encloses the park to the north and south, while to the south-west it merges with more substantial blocks of woodland including Home Covert. Traces of earlier field boundaries survive within Home Covert indicating that it was planted as part of the late C18 or early C19 landscape improvements. Boundary planting is carefully contrived to control significant outward views from the house to features beyond the site, including broad views across agricultural land to the west. The park itself remains pasture with scattered mature deciduous trees, some of which survive from earlier field boundaries. Some 200m west of the house a late C18 or early C19 serpentine lake c 270m in length and c 30m wide runs north-west to south-east, forming a prominent feature in the landscape, particularly when viewed from the first-floor drawing room and balcony of the house. From this vantage point in particular the lake appears to connect with a smaller pond c 480m north-west of the house to form a continuous lake or river. The lake was not formed by damming the stream in the lowest area of the park, but rather by constructing an embankment which forms its western bank in a manner which recalls canal construction. The early C19 gabled east facade of Lions Farm forms an ornamental feature at the north-west corner of the park, while a C19 timber and thatched barn and mature oaks c 400m north-west of the house provide a further picturesque incident.

KITCHEN GARDEN The rectangular walled kitchen garden lies c 200m south-south-east of the house at the south-east corner of the site, and is concealed by mixed late C18 or early C19 shrubbery and trees. Enclosed by tile-coped brick walls c 3m high (listed grade II), the garden is divided by a cross wall into two sections. In the early C20 the gardens included formal herbaceous borders, espaliered fruit trees, and, in the northern section, a central, circular, brick-lined fountain pool. The garden walls appear to have been constructed at several periods, but the garden had assumed its present form by the early C19. Planting schemes

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and the internal layout shown in photographs published in 1930 were the early C20 work of Mr Granger (CL 1930). The walled gardens are approached from the north by a walk through the C19 shrubbery and entered through an early C20 gateway with an C18 wrought-iron gate and overthrow supported by brick and stone-banded gate piers with ball finials. An axial walk extends through the north garden to an arch in the cross wall which leads into the kitchen garden beyond. The walled gardens are today (1998) largely uncultivated and laid to grass; some fruit trees survive, while the early C20 lead fountain comprising a figure of a boy holding a fish from the pool in the north garden has been removed to the house.

REFERENCES

R Polwhele, *The History of Devonshire II*, (1793-1806), p 198 R Ackermann, *Repository 2*, (1809-28), pl 2 D and S Lysons, *Magna Britannia: Devon II*, (1822), p 428 W W Gendall, *Views of Country Seats ... II*, (1830), p 126 *Country Life*, 67 (19 April 1930), pp 570-6; (3 May 1930), pp 642-8 A M Rockley, *Historic Gardens of England* (1938), pp 184-5 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Devon* (1989), pp 702-3 *Rockbeare Manor, Devon: The Heritage threatened by A30 Trunk Road Realignment* (G Noel 1988) *Rockbeare Manor, guide notes*, (G and C Noel 1989) T Gray, *The Garden History of Devon An Illustrated Guide to Sources* (1995), p 192

Maps D Climie, Tithe map for Rockbeare parish, 1844 (Devon Record Office)

OS Old Series 1" to 1 mile, published 1809 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1887-8, published 1888 2nd edition revised 1903, published 1906 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition revised 1903, published 1905

Illustrations Watercolour view of Rockbeare House from the south-west, early C19 (private collection) Watercolour view of Rockbeare House from the south, early C19 (private collection)

Archival items Sale particulars, 1918 (547B/1718), (Devon Record Office) Photograph of west gates and former lodges, (private collection)

Description written: November 1998 Amended: March 1999; May 2000; September 2001; October 2001 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.