

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SHARPHAM HOUSE

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
SHARPHAM HOUSE

Name: SHARPHAM HOUSE

County: Devon

District: South Hams (District Authority)

Parish: Ashprington

County: Devon

District: South Hams (District Authority)

Parish: Berry Pomeroy

County: Devon

District: South Hams (District Authority)

Parish: Totnes

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.404770
Longitude: -3.6600465
National Grid Reference: SX 82127 57417
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.localisation: [50.4108837608161,-3.6470105606645], [50.4108902494768,-3.64702246463287],
[50.4108877964311,-3.64702420922953], [50.4108846611669,-3.64702643262164],
[50.4108837608161,-3.6470105606645]

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000701
Date first listed: 12-Aug-1987

Details

Mid C20 formal terraced gardens by Percy Cane and C19 pleasure grounds surrounding a villa by Sir Robert Taylor, set in late C18 parkland attributed to Lancelot Brown.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the late C14 Sharpham belonged to Robert Winard, and subsequently passed by marriage and inheritance to the French, Prideaux and Drewe families. Edward Drewe, Sergeant at Law to Queen Elizabeth sold Sharpham 'which had large demesnes belonging to it' to John Giles of Bowden in Ashprington in the late C16 (Polwhele). In 1748 the estate was sold by Gilbert Yard to Philip Cockey. The sale particulars noted extensive woodlands on the estate, and a 'Mansion House & several Wall'd Gardens' which are also shown on a survey of 1749 (CL 1969; Debois 1993). In 1755 Cockey offered a lease on the estate,

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
SHARPHAM HOUSE

and in 1765 sold it to Captain Philemon Pownoll, a Naval officer who in 1762 captured the Spanish treasure ship *Ermiona*, the richest prize of the Seven Years War (CL 1969). Pownoll built a new villa to designs by Sir Robert Taylor between 1765 and 1769, and recorded this and alterations to the surrounding landscape in a series of paintings by John Lewis (1769) (Debois 1993). Mrs. Pownoll died in 1778, and Captain Pownoll was killed in action in 1780, leaving Sharpham to his young daughter, Jane. In 1783 Jane Pownoll eloped with Edmund Bastard of Kitley, Devon; subsequently dividing their time between Kitley and Sharpham, Edmund and Jane Bastard continued with the construction of the house and improvement of the landscape, which appears to have been completed c 1800 (OS Drawing 1804; Debois 1993). Edmund Bastard died in 1822 leaving Sharpham to his second son, Captain John Bastard, who is reputed to have gambled away his fortune (Debois 1993). The estate was sold in 1841 to Richard Durant, with whose descendants it remained until 1940 when Avenue Cottage was divided from the remainder of the estate, and both were sold. Passing through several hands, Sharpham House was sold c 1960 to Mr and Mrs Maurice Ash, for whom formal gardens were laid out by Percy Cane. Today (1999) Sharpham House is vested in the Sharpham Trust, while Avenue Cottage and other areas of the site remain in separate private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Sharpham House stands on the west bank of the River Dart, c 1km north-east of the village of Ashprington, and c 3km south-east of Totnes. The c 120ha site comprises some 16ha of gardens and pleasure grounds, and c 104ha of parkland and plantations. The site is bounded to the north, north-east and east by the River Dart, and to the south and west by agricultural land. To the south-west adjacent to Avenue Cottage the site is bounded by a minor road which leads from Ashprington to the entrance to Sharpham House. The site occupies a naturally fine position overlooking the River Dart, with the ground generally sloping from the west towards the river on the east. A ridge of high ground on which the House stands extends east towards Sharpham Point c 500m east of the House, causing the river to flow in a wide curve. Avenue Cottage c 520m south-west of the House stands in a deep valley running from high ground to the south-west towards the River Dart. The site enjoys long views north up the River Dart towards Totnes, and east across the Dart valley towards high ground south-west of Paignton. Woodland on the east bank of the River Dart is important for the immediate setting of the site.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is today (1999) approached from a minor road which leads north-east from the centre of the village of Ashprington. Some 550m north-east of the village, the road reaches the entrance gates to Sharpham House, which comprise a pair of rendered brick piers, one of which is now (1999) surmounted by an urn finial, flanked by pedestrian gateways. This arrangement was formed c 1960 when the line of the south drive was diverted from its original course c 30m north (R Soans pers comm, 1999). The tarmac drive extends c 240m north-east through former parkland which falls gently to the north, revealing views up the River Dart towards Totnes. Turning east and descending for c 130m, the drive is flanked to the south by trees, evergreen shrubs and exposed rocks. As the drive turns sharply north-west for c 100m, a vista east down the mid C20 terraces in the gardens is revealed. The drive turns sharply east-north-east for c 190m and passes through evergreen shrubbery, before emerging onto lawns to the north of Sharpham House and sweeping south-east round the House to reach a simple carriage turning area on the east side. A spur leads south from the drive at a point c 50m west of the House to reach the late C18 or early C19 stables and coach house (listed grade II) which are arranged around a courtyard entered by an elliptical arch in the north facade. The present south drive represents a late C18 or early C19 remodelling of an existing approach from Ashprington which is shown on the survey of 1749. It is shown in its present form on the 1st edition 1" OS map (1809). The principal approach to the House from the late C18 was from Totnes to the north. The Totnes drive is entered from a minor road, Totnes Downhill, some 3km north-north-west of the House, where an early C19 Italianate, two-storey lodge stands to the west of an entrance comprising a pair of massive late C18 or early C19 fluted granite piers with rounded caps, flanked by smaller pedestrian entrances with similar granite piers to east and west. The north end of the drive now (1999) serves as access to mid and late C20 houses which adjoin it to the west. For some 950m the drive has the character of a lane running between stone walls and hedges, with views east towards the river. The drive reaches a further gateway on the northern edge of a plantation, with the site of a late C18 or early C19 lodge (demolished c 1950) to the north. Entering the park, the drive continues as a contoured, grassy track, following the east-and north-east-facing slopes above the River Dart. A series of picturesque views of

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
SHARPHAM HOUSE

the river, woodland, surrounding country, and the House are contrived, with the drive passing through plantations and a small cutting c 1.5km north-west of the House. The Totnes drive joins the south drive c 190m west of the House.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Sharpham House (listed grade I) was constructed in 1765-9 for Captain Philomen Pownoll, to designs by Sir Robert Taylor. The present mansion stands on the site of an earlier house, possibly dating from the C16, which was shown on a survey of 1749, and in a painting of 1765 by John Lewis. Elements of this earlier house survive in the service quarters on the west side of the House. The construction of the House continued over an extended period, and it was probably only completed in its present form c 1820 when Taylor's original villa was extended westwards, incorporating more of the earlier house. Taylor's villa is a restrained Palladian stone structure with a rusticated ground floor lit by small square windows, tall first-floor windows with apron balustrades and alternate pediments, and square second-floor windows. The east facade has a full-height canted bay window with a ground-floor porch supported by Doric columns, surmounted by a first-floor balcony. The fine late C18 interior includes a first-floor octagonal saloon over the entrance. Three windows in the canted bay serve to frame vistas north-east, east and south-east over the River Dart and surrounding landscape. Two low wings, one surmounted by a cupola, project to the south-west and north-west of the House enclosing a service court.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Lying to the north, east, south and south-west of the House, the gardens and pleasure grounds are separated from the park by a late C18 or early C19 slate rubble ha-ha (listed grade II), below which runs a farm track. The pleasure grounds extend south-west to include C18, C19 and C20 gardens in the valley around Avenue Cottage c 530m south-west of the House. The gardens east of Avenue Cottage were connected to the gardens around the House by an ornamental carriage drive on the north side of the valley, the Ladies' Walk, which extended along the south side of the valley to enter the park c 290m south-south-west of Sharpham House. To the north and north-east of the House lawns are planted with groups of trees including Turkey and Lucombe oaks, and evergreen shrubbery framing views across the River Dart. To the north-east a large revolving bronze sculpture by Henry Moore stands on the lawn. Lawns below the east front are planted with further specimen trees, and continue in an unbroken sweep to the south side of the House, allowing further extensive views across the parkland and River Dart. The south lawn is enclosed to the south by groups of rhododendrons, while to the south-west stands a mature cork oak. Some 50m west of the House a circular pool with a lead figure fountain survives from a C19 flower garden, in which segmental beds radiated from the pool (R Pitts pers comm, 1999). Loudon noted a flower garden near the House in 1842 (*Gardener's Mag*). To the north, the south-facing rubble-stone wall of the south range of the stables (listed grade II) incorporates a brick-covered horizontal heating flue c 1m above ground level. Some 55m west-south-west of the House two semicircular stone-flagged steps ascend to a series of three terraces laid out c 1960 by Percy Cane as a gift from Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst, Cane's patrons at Dartington Hall, Devon (qv). The lowest terrace comprises a level tennis lawn. To the west, axially placed stone steps flanked by columnar conifers ascend a grass bank to the second terrace which is laid out with herbaceous borders, and which is ornamented with a Byzantine well-head. Further axial steps flanked by similar conifers ascend to the third terrace which comprises a sloping grass walk flanked by herbaceous and shrub borders, which ascends to a simple stone bench seat flanked by further conifers. Beyond the seat the axis of the terraces is continued through an area of informal woodland garden to the south drive. Grass walks lead south-west to an area of informal woodland garden partly developed in a former quarry by the late Mrs Ash from c 1960. A terrace walk south of the west terraces was developed by Percy Cane, and leads into the late C18 Ladies' Walk. Some 160m south-west of the House, three stone and brick walls survive from a conservatory or summerhouse to the north of the Ladies' Walk. The age of this feature is uncertain, but it existed by 1889 (OS 1st edition 25"). The south-facing slope below the Ladies' Walk was planted in the early and mid C19 as a pinetum or American garden, and in 1842 Loudon commented on conifers growing on the Ladies' Walk (*Gardener's Mag*). Extending c 400m along the north side of a valley, the Ladies' Walk was formed before 1769 (Debois 1993) as an ornamental terrace walk or carriage drive linking Sharpham House to pleasure grounds in the valley to the south-west, with trees underplanted with ornamental shrubs on the slope to the north separated from parkland by a ha-ha, with a further ha-ha to the south allowing generally open views across the valley. The south ha-ha is carried west of a pond c 80m north-east of the House, originally allowing cattle grazing the valley to approach the boundary of the pleasure grounds. The ha-ha continues along the south side of the valley, where the carriage drive enters a rhododendron tunnel c 100m long, before passing through a pair of circular stone

gate piers to emerge into the park. Avenue Cottage was built as a cottage orné c 1800, possibly replacing an earlier cottage (ibid). As constructed the thatched structure comprised a pair of cottages facing west, with a circular verandah facing east down the valley. The Cottage stands on a terrace above a grass slope which rises from the former carriage drive where it turns to pass east along the south side of the valley. Avenue Cottage was destroyed by fire in 1953, and rebuilt without the verandah and other C19 features. East of the Cottage pleasure grounds were developed from the late C18, with mid C19 ornamental planting including a group of *Rhododendron arboreum* by the carriage drive north-east of the cottage (ibid). West of the Cottage a ranked avenue of Turkey oak and Cornish elm was planted in 1844 as a walk to Ashprington church. This now serves as the drive to Avenue Cottage, but the original inner planting of Cornish elm has largely been lost through disease. The gardens around Avenue Cottage continued to be developed with ornamental planting throughout the C19, with further development taking place after the sale of the property by the estate in 1940. An elliptical pool with an island c 30m north-east of the Cottage existed by 1889 (OS) and formed part of the C19 pleasure grounds. Today (1999) the Ladies' Walk and carriage drive survive within the garden, together with a network of walks restored partly to the pattern shown on the late C19 OS. There has been extensive clearance of overgrown laurel shrubberies in the late C20, and further ornamental planting reinforcing the pleasure ground character of the valley. A mid C20 reconstituted stone and wrought-iron classical tempietto stands c 50m south-east of the House above the carriage drive, commemorating an earlier phase of restoration.

PARK The parkland at Sharpham has been attributed to Lancelot Brown (1716-83) (Stroud 1975), who worked with Sir Robert Taylor elsewhere, and whose son served as MP for Totnes, and is believed to be contemporary with Captain Pownoll's remodelling of the House c 1765-9. There is no surviving documentary evidence for the attribution, but field evidence is said to support Brown's involvement (N Owen pers comm, 1999). To the north and north-west of the House, the Totnes drive passed through parkland on the east-facing hillside above the River Dart. This area is now (1999) pasture enclosures, with scattered groups of trees, and plantations on high ground c 700m west and c 1.2km north-west of the House. Trees c 270m north-west of the House sheltered a seat affording views north along the River Dart to Totnes (N Owen pers comm, 1999). To the east of the House parkland sloping down to the river has been developed in the late C20 as vineyards, while the steep slope south of the pleasure ground was cultivated as an orchard in the C19, and is today (1999) an area of scrub and woodland. The north-facing hillside known as the Great Run c 200m south of the House was developed as parkland in the late C18 (Debois 1993) with scattered groups of trees contrasting with larger areas of woodland to the west (Cottage Plantation) and south-east (Sharpham Wood). The Great Run remains pasture with scattered trees, and is significant in views from the House; woodland to the south-east has encroached into the parkland since the mid C19. The carriage drive, now (1999) a grass track, crosses the Great Run from the grounds of Avenue Cottage to the west, to enter Sharpham Wood to the south-east, some 260m south of Sharpham House. It continues south-east and east for c 800m through Sharpham Wood before descending the slope and returning north-west along the river bank, passing a stone single-storey fishing pavilion c 540m south-east of the House. Ruins of the fishing pavilion including the west wall and fireplace survive on the river bank (1999). The carriage drive re-emerges into the park c 400m south-east of the House. Some 270m south-east of the House a rendered, single-storey octagonal Bathing House (listed grade II*) stands on the river bank east of the carriage drive. This structure is attributed to Sir Robert Taylor and was constructed c 1769 with a single octagonal room overlooking the river. It was extended to the north and east in the late C19 and served as a boathouse, but was converted to domestic use in the mid C20. Immediately north of the Bathing House and c 240m south-east of the House, the carriage drive crosses an early C19 dam (listed grade II) which retains a lake formed by enclosing a tidal creek on the river. The lake is today (1999) ornamented by a group of late C20 totemic granite sculptures which emerge from the water. The carriage drive continues on the river bank round Sharpham Point, passing a mid or late C18 stone quay (listed grade II) c 400m east-south-east of Sharpham House, and a former quarry and lime kiln. Some 370m east-north-east of the House the drive reaches a picturesquely arranged group of rocks on the river bank. Partly covered by trees, the rocks sheltered a seat which afforded views north-west up the River Dart to Sharpham Barton, a farmhouse c 1.75km west-north-west. The carriage drive returned to the House, joining the main drive c 130m north-west of the House. Today (1999) late C20 farm buildings partly obscure the course of the final section of the carriage drive.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
SHARPHAM HOUSE

KITCHEN GARDEN Enclosed by rubble-stone walls c 3m high with slate coping (listed grade II), the kitchen garden lies c 50m west of Sharpham House, immediately adjoining the west range of the stable court which forms the east wall of the garden. The kitchen garden is almost square on plan, and largely remains in cultivation as a fruit and vegetable garden, with a mid C20 swimming pool constructed axially to a wide ramped opening cut in the centre of the south wall. A mid C20 conservatory is built against the inner face of the north wall, while a stone linhay is built against the outer face. Loudon noted in 1842 that the walls, which are supported by pilaster buttresses, had not then been completed (Gardener's Mag).

REFERENCES

R Polwhele, *The History of Devonshire III*, (1793-1806), pp 482-3 D and S Lysons, *Magna Britannia: Devon II*, (1822), pp 15-16 T Allom, *Devonshire Illustrated* (1829-32) *Gardener's Magazine* 18, (1842), pp 337-9 J B Burke, *Visitation of Seats I*, (1852), p 38 O D Parker, *Sharpham*, (unpublished lecture c 1920) [copy on EH file] *Country Life*, 142 (13 July 1967), pp 78-82; 145 (17 April 1969), pp 952-5; (24 April 1969), pp 1014-17 D Stroud, *Capability Brown* (1975), p 238 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Devon* (1989), pp 722-3 *Avenue Cottage, Sharpham A survey of the landscape, management plan* (Debois Landscape Survey Group 1993) T Gray, *The Garden History of Devon An Illustrated Guide to Sources* (1995), pp 201-2 Maps William Doidge, *Map of Sharpham and Hollabeare, 1749* (90M E1), (Devon Record Office) *Map of Hollabeare and Sharpham Lands, 1826* (90M E2), (Devon Record Office) *Tithe map for Ashprington parish, 1844* (Devon Record Office) OS Surveyor's drawing, 1803-4 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1887, published 1891 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1887, published 1889 2nd edition revised 1904, published 1906
Illustrations *View of Old Sharpham on Map of Sharpham and Hollabeare, 1749* (90M E1), (Devon Record Office) J Lewis, *Old Sharpham from the south, 1765* (private collection) J Lewis, *four views of Sharpham, 1769* (private collection)
Archival items *Durant Estate papers, deeds, surveys and legal papers* (90M), (Devon Record Office) *Photographs of Avenue Cottage and gardens c 1900-20* (private collection) *Postcards of Avenue Cottage, c 1915* (private collection) *Sale particulars, 1940* (547B/3448ii), (Devon Record Office) *Sale particulars, 1952* (867B/S60), (Devon Record Office) *Photographs of Avenue Cottage and gardens c 1950-90* (private collection)
Description written: June 1999 Amended: July 1999 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.