

Development of the Historic Landscape of Sidbury Manor

John Clark, Barbie Moul and Dianne Long

Historic interest

Sidbury lies about three miles from Sidmouth. The manor of Sidbury was originally owned by the Dean and Chapter of Exeter. At the end of the eighteenth century land was gradually sold off piecemeal, and Thomas Grigg Esquire was owner of the land which was subsequently bought by Daniel Cave half a century later.¹ The area was known as Woodhouse and is recorded on a late eighteenth century survey map held at the Exeter Cathedral Archives (ECA).² It is shown blanked out without detail, surrounded by tenanted fields still owned by the Dean and Chapter (Figure 1).



Figure 1. 'Part of the Estate known as Woodhouse lands owned by Thomas Grigg Esquire'. 1770–1799 (ECA M5) reproduced by courtesy of the Dean & Chapter of Exeter Cathedral

Between 1805–1806 Woodhouse was leased by John Pearse Manley and William Guppy.³ A year later it was purchased by Robert Hunt, who had been buying land in the area since the turn of the century. It is recorded that he changed the name from Woodhouse to Sidbury House, suggesting the house was built before his purchase in 1806.⁴ A watercolour of the house still exists and although dated 1856, shows a building with characteristics from a much earlier period (Figure 2).⁵

Hunt eventually owned the whole of Sidbury manor as shown in a map and confirmed again in a large spidery plan of his total acquisitions.⁶ The latter, which although clearly by a different hand, has the same numbering and field details as the Dean and Chapter's plan, suggesting the new manorial lord copied or perhaps purchased the survey for his own use. The Woodhouse area has two distinct groups of buildings, the large rectangle with a fence to the rear being Sidbury House, corresponding well in shape and aspect to the 1856 watercolour. The map shows a new approach to the Georgian manor; a long path or driveway coming up from the village, passing over a bridge and continuing through open parkland. It turns off from the original road to East Hill Strips, crosses previously tenanted fields, and with views over the picturesque landscape sweeps round to the front of the house across the original Woodhouse estate, ending with an elliptical turning space (Figure 3).⁷



Figure 2. Sidbury House 1856 from Barbara Sofiley, Tapping at the Garden Gate, p. 14



Figure 3. Map of Woodhouse estate showing new approach to Sidbury House, 1806, (DHC Z17/3/14)

Within 18 years of Hunt's purchase of the manor he was in financial difficulty and in 1824 the estate was put up for sale, the catalogue describing his land as 'comprising nearly the whole of the village of Sidbury'.⁸ The 3000 acre site included the Court Leet, Court Baron and, 'an eligible residence, Sidbury House; a square stone building with portico front, seated in a paddock surrounded by an amphitheatre of beautiful hills, sloping to the south and commanding grand and picturesque views.' The pleasure garden was 'tastefully disposed in lawns, with excellent dry gravelled walks, shrubberies, ornamented with thriving shrubs and forest trees'.⁹ In addition, there was 'a flower garden and an excellent kitchen garden, walled round and planted with the choicest fruit trees, with four capital orchards and nursery'. Sidbury House and gardens extended to over 20 acres. Court Hall Mansion on the main road in the village had its own garden and pleasure grounds as did its attached building described as the West End of the Manor. Farms made up 2000 acres of the demesne including Wood House farm (also referred to as Home Farm) and Filcombe, along with a garden and orchard called Mouse Plat. Written on the front is "Mr Kelawick bought this" although it is not dated.

Within ten years the estate was up for sale once again, this time by auction at the New London Inn, Exeter, not the previous Garraway's in London. The 3000 acres with house and farms were just as before, although Sidbury House was now described as an oblong stone building, but its

‘portico front, lawns and amphitheatre of beautiful hills still remained’.¹⁰ It was purchased by Mr John Cunningham, as confirmed in writing on page 4 of the Sales Catalogue, and also by the tithe apportionment carried out a few years later.

The 1840s tithe map depicts Sidbury House as described in the 1824 Sales Catalogue; a ‘compact eligible residence’ with enclosed yard, stable and stack yards, and a coach house for two carriages. Nearby buildings are recorded as a house and offices, and the large walled garden is shown west of Sidbury House. The long drive from the village is still present, now with the advantage of passing by a ‘deere’ park as it crosses the bridge, on through parkland and the newly created lakes to arrive finally at the front of the house, the dotted lines indicative of an unfenced roadway.

In the 1850s Daniel Cave (1789–1872) began buying land in the Sidmouth area and in 1853 bought Sidbury Manor from Cunningham to use as a sporting estate, his main residence being in Cleve Hill, Downend, Bristol (also known as Cleeve Hill). The Cave family originated from Worcestershire, moving to Bristol in the 1750s. Daniel’s father, Stephen Cave Esq. (1763–1838), a partner in the Bristol banking firm of Ames, Cave & Co., had married Anne Daniel of Stoodleigh Court, Devon, and in 1804 had purchased Cleve Hill, which had gardens designed in part by Thomas Wright of Durham.

In 1854 Daniel Cave’s wife, Frances (née Locock) passed away and the 1861 census shows him living at Witteby Cottage, Peak Hill in Sidmouth with his two adult daughters and seven servants. His son Sir Stephen Cave MP (1820–1880), a member of Disraeli’s cabinet, inherited the estate in 1872 and commissioned David Brandon to design a new house cut into the hill opposite, close to Blindwell’s spring. The house was completed by 1879 with southerly views over the village below. Sidbury House was demolished, possibly before the new house was finished, and by 1883 the landscape had changed dramatically with only the walled garden remaining from Hunt’s original Woodhouse estate (Figure 4).

Sir Stephen died abroad before the house was finished and the estate was inherited by his brother, Charles Daniel Cave,



Carriage drive and balustraded bridge

who continued with the building projects and development of the landscape park. Charles was created 1st Baronet in 1896. The gardens were laid out by Charles during the 1880s and 1890s: trees, fountains and sundial date from that time. In 1899 Charles commissioned his son, Walter, to design a new Rose Garden below the new walled kitchen garden, a short distance from the house.

German POWs were employed on the estate during WW1 and a school was moved to the manor during WWII. The school remained there for twenty years and, apart from the kitchen garden, the estate fell into disrepair. Restoration work began on the 20-acre garden in the 1950s, following the marriage of Charles Edward Coleridge Cave (1927–97). His son, Sir John, in residence with Lady Cave from 1998 until his death in 2018, made many improvements to the Sidbury estate. The lake was restored, the forecourt was remodelled, the yew arches were cut back, and sycamore and ash were cleared. There were also substantial improvements made to the Rose Garden, now transformed into a very attractive garden sympathetic with its original design. The area below was enhanced by replacing the hard surface of the tennis court with grass.

Connections with famous people

Sir Stephen Cave was a significant member of Disraeli’s cabinet, including twice being Paymaster-General and Special Envoy to Egypt. The eminent architect and garden designer, Walter Frederick Cave, designed the Rose Garden at Sidbury Manor.

Walter Frederick Cave (1863–1939), the son of Sir Charles Daniel Cave, was articled to Sir Arthur Blomfield. He was President of the Architectural Association (1907–1909), Fellow, and Vice President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (1917–1921), a member of the Art Workers Guild and The Quarto Imperial Club. Cave designed other gardens, including Tyntesfield in North Somerset (now National Trust), and two gardens in Devon, namely Sidbury Manor and Sherwood. He worked in the Arts and Crafts style successfully incorporating features of the Classical Revival, as exemplified at the Orangery (1897) at Tyntesfield, a rare example of a late Victorian orangery in the Classical style.

Tyntesfield was his first garden commission, designed in 1896 for Antony Gibbs (a family friend) where interestingly Blomfield had designed the private chapel between 1872 and 1877. He re-designed an area behind the walled kitchen garden creating an enclosed Lady Garden, and



Figure 4. 1883 First edition OS map shows the remains of the Sidbury House estate and the new Sidbury Manor

a Jubilee Garden with Orangery and a cutting garden to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Within the gardens there was a loggia, bothy, garden offices and a range of glasshouses, to which he added Arts and Crafts features such as water hoppers and door furniture. Three years later Cave used a similar design concept at Sidbury Manor.

Architectural Interest

Listed Buildings

The house, including the conservatory and screen wall to the west, forecourt railings, gates and piers, was added to the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest on 12 November 1973 at Grade II by English Heritage.

The Victorian manor house with its forecourt railings, gates and piers, lower balustrade terrace and the stable block were designed by David Brandon and built in 1879 of red brick with Ham Hill stone dressings.

The Stables to the north east of the house were also designed by David Brandon and built in 1879 of red brick with Ham Hill stone dressings, they have a shaped gable and cupola over the central archway, dated 1879.

The five-level complex of the Rose Garden and walled kitchen garden complete with balustraded staircases and terraces, bothies and substantial retaining walls are an architectural and engineering masterpiece and must be considered as an entity in terms of architectural and garden design. They include four large water cisterns/reservoirs built behind the retaining walls. The materials used in the construction of the Rose Garden were red brick and Ham Hill stone and Portland stone, which relate to the materials used for the construction of the house and stable block, and the materials previously used to build the earlier kitchen gardens. The kitchen garden complex is regarded as unique by Susan Campbell, author of several books on walled gardens and founder of the Walled Kitchen Garden Network.

There are three lodges at the entrances to the Estate; the one to the south, near the village is half timbered and is dated 1884. The stone gate piers have ball finials. The second to the east is off The Ridgeway and the third to the north is the Gamekeepers Lodge or Mouseplatt.

Gamekeepers Lodge (Mouseplatt) is constructed of Ham Hill stone and red brick; a perspective drawing of this house was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1890. Mouseplatt, designed by Walter Cave, was built by his father for one of his Estate workers. There were dog kennels and a pheasant rearing house attached.¹¹

Artistic Interest

The long drive to the house winds picturesquely from the village of Sidbury through the park and over the bridge with a cascade upstream. The entrance to the house is from the east, through a gravelled forecourt enclosed by good low iron railings with scrollwork panels together with finials and gates in the eighteenth-century style. The house and garden have immense charm, situated on the side of a steep valley with a stream running through the grounds below. The Victorian conservatory on the south side of the house, with its cast iron pillars, is a gem. There is a fountain in a pool on the lower terrace and the balustrade marks the ha-ha boundary



Sidbury Lodge marks the entrance to the estate

A short formal avenue of lime trees leading to the long winding carriage drive

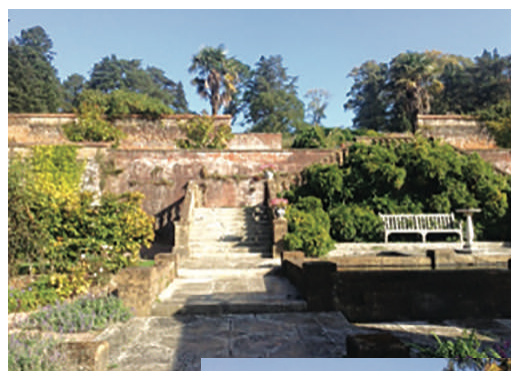


with the parkland. The pleasure grounds are to the north of the stable block and continue round the north and west of the walled gardens, affording views across and down the valley. A series of walled gardens, including an offices and bothies tier, are terraced into the hillside above the house.

There are fine groups of mature specimen trees in the pleasure grounds, many flowering shrubs and a Redwood copse. *Eucalyptus gunnii*, *Pinus montezuma*, redwood, *Magnolia campbelli*, *Liquidambar*, *Abies*, *Cedrus atlantica*, *Metasequoia*, *Michelia*, many planted at the beginning of the last century, tower above what is at present essentially a spring garden, planted with rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolias, camellias, daffodils, bluebells and cyclamen. There were rides in the South Lincombe Plantations on the hill to the west.

The Rose Garden and Walled Kitchen Garden

Walter Frederick Cave was commissioned by his father to design a formal garden at Sidbury Manor, three years after his successful design for the Lady Garden and the Jubilee Garden at Tyntesfield. It is known as the Rose Garden, and



Level 2 to 3: Steps from Rose Garden to level 3. Remains of two parallel rows of glasshouses can still be seen



Level 3: The remains of glasshouse looking west



Level 3: looking towards the remains of the second group of glasshouses, bothies are beyond

as at Tyntesfield, was intended as the final delight at the end of a stroll through the pleasure grounds. The signed and dated (1899) drawings are held by the Cave family in Sidbury Manor. There is also a drawing dated 1903 for the fountain and pool on the lowest terrace below the house.

The Rose Garden is to the north west of the house, built on terraces on the slope of Evergreen Hill, below the already existing terraced kitchen gardens. The latter are walled and contained substantial glasshouses and a range of workshops, offices and bothies. The iron brackets which held the timber boards to protect the peach trees remain in situ. Only the footings of the glasshouses remain, but the outline of the walls can still be seen on the brick walls. The walls, offices and bothies are in good condition but some of the stone steps are in poor condition.

The lowest terrace designed by Cave had a tennis court or bowling green, on the next Terrace is the Rose Garden terrace with a fine balustraded staircase leading to the next level where there were two parallel ranges of glasshouses. The terraces fit into a sequence ascending the slope to the walled kitchen garden. Traces of the massive greenhouses remain, vestiges of former times of plenty when the



Sidbury Manor walled garden complex Tennis Court and Rose Garden

Level 2: Rose Garden with view towards Sidmouth and steps to next level



substantial walled gardens supplied the household of Sidbury Manor and Cave's other house in Bristol. Behind the substantial retaining walls of the upper two terraces of the walled garden are four cisterns, built to feed the fountains and supply water for the garden.

The whole five-level complex of bowling green/tennis court, Rose Garden, glasshouses, bothies and two kitchen gardens are a 'set piece' and must be considered as an entity in terms of architectural and garden design.



Sidbury Manor and forecourt

The late Victorian walled gardens at Sidbury Manor are magnificent. They are an excellent example of how walled kitchen gardens should be maintained in accordance with the long-standing advice of The Garden History Society (now The Gardens Trust), which is that the preferred option for walled kitchen gardens that are no longer viable for their original purpose should be grassed over with the walls and paths maintained in good condition.

Sidbury Manor is of the highest significance. It includes a fine complex of Victorian buildings comprising house, forecourt, balustraded lower terrace, and stables, all by David Brandon, together with three lodges. The Rose Garden, was designed by Walter Frederick Cave FRIBA at a time when his work was most influential. It includes a unique walled garden of five tiers terraced into the hillside with underground cisterns built behind the retaining walls. Although the house was rebuilt in 1879 on a different, more commanding site to take advantage of the fine views across and down the valley, there are vestiges of the earlier designed landscape: a short formal avenue of Lime trees, a long winding drive through picturesque parkland in the English Landscape style, lakes (originally fish ponds) and cascades, and a balustraded bridge, rides through plantations to the west; also, some remnants of the earlier manor's walled garden. The Victorian pleasure grounds and an arboretum remain. The natural topography, ornamental and productive landscape which provides the historic and natural setting to Sidbury Manor survives.

Sidbury Manor remains in good condition and is maintained to the highest standard.

References

1. The title Esquire infers Thomas Grigg was lord of the manor at that time, though he may have owned only a portion of the manorial estate. Ref P367-368 refers to Thomas Grigg from Sidbury Manor, 1788.
2. Exeter Cathedral Archives (ECA) D&C3574 PP106-108. Alexander Law was paid £108 19s 3d for surveying and mapping Sidbury Manor.
3. Devon Heritage Centre (DHC) 516M/T/15-16, Lease for a year and release (copies), Sidbury, 13 December 1805–14 December 1805.
4. Barbara Softley, *Tapping at the Garden Gate*, (Wellington: Westcountry Books, 2010), p. 14.
5. Ibid.
6. DHC 906M/T73-76 and DHC Z17/3/14.
7. DHC 906M/T73-76.
8. ECA 6051/44, [Sales catalogue, 1824].
9. ECA 6051/44.
10. DHC 906M/T74.
11. Judith Patrick, *Walter Cave: Arts and Crafts to Edwardian Splendour*, (Phillimore & Co Ltd, 2012), p. 104.

Bibliography

DHC 906M/T73, Sale Particulars of Manor of Buckley in Sidbury, 1829.

DHC 906M/T74, Sale Particulars of Manor of Sidbury, 1834.

DHC 906M/T75, Sale Particulars of estates at Sidbury, 1837.

DHC 906M/T76, Maps of Sidbury, 19th century, Pages 8-16 from a book: printed maps of Sidbury with manuscript notes, the maps having been cut out and pasted on to the pages, the pagination of manuscript.

DHC Z17/3/14, Map of Sidbury Manor, early 19th century.

Bridget Cherry & Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Devon*, 2nd edn., (Penguin Books, 1989), p. 258.

Todd Gray, *The Garden History of Devon*, (Devon, University of Exeter Press, 1995), p. 71.

Steven Pugsley, ed., *Devon Gardens: An Historical Survey*, (Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994), p. 181.

Judith Patrick, 'Walter Cave, FRIBA and his Two Devon Gardens', Devon Gardens Trust *Journal*, Issue 2, 2009.

Judith Patrick, *Walter Cave Arts and Crafts to Edwardian Splendour*, (Phillimore & Co Ltd, 2012).

Robert Waterhouse, Sidbury Manor Archaeological Notes, Devon Rural Archive, 2008.

Barbara Softley, *Tapping at the Garden Gate*, (Wellington: Westcountry Books, 2010).

Photos by John Clark unless otherwise stated.