Christopher Hussey in Country Life (1927): “the most perfect small 15th century country house that survives in the kingdom”
COTHAY MANOR

NEAR WELLINGTON ≈ SOMERSET

Taunton 11 miles (London Paddington 1hr 45 minutes) ≈ Tiverton 15 miles (London Paddington 2 hours) ≈ Exeter 30 miles ≈ Wellington 6 miles ≈
Bristol Airport 48 miles ≈ Exeter Airport 24 miles.
(All distances and times approximate)

An Historic Grade 1 listed Manor House.

Cothy Manor

Screens Passage ≈ Vaulted Great Hall ≈ Parlour/ Sitting Room ≈ Library/ Book Room ≈ Dining Room ≈ Cloakroom ≈ Kitchen ≈ Laundry ≈ Boot Room ≈ Office ≈ Georgian Hall
Solar/ Great Chamber ≈ Master Bedroom and Bathroom ≈ Guest Chamber and Bathroom ≈ Oratory ≈ Gold Room ≈ Three further bedrooms and one bathroom ≈ Separate cloakroom.

Laundry Flat ≈ One bedroom ≈ One bathroom ≈ Separate loo ≈ Kitchen sitting room. (directly accessed from the manor.)

Cottage ≈ Three bedrooms ≈ One bathroom ≈ Entrance Hall ≈ Kitchen/ Dining Room ≈ Sitting Room. (own entrance and directly accessed from the manor.)

Garage Flat ≈ Two bedrooms ≈ One bathroom ≈ Kitchen ≈ Sitting Room. (separate access and not accessed from the manor.)

North Wing ≈ Entrance Hall ≈ Utility Room ≈ Kitchen/ Dining Room ≈ Sitting Room ≈ Garden Room ≈ 4 bedrooms ≈ 2 bathrooms ≈ Direct access to main courtyard/ Manor

Gate House ≈ Vaulted Room on the ground floor ≈ Tower Room.

Three Garages ≈ Bio-boiler room ≈ Green Houses ≈ Stables ≈ Barn complex ≈ Pump House ≈ Swimming Pool with pool pump house (currently not in use)

In all about 40 acres

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These particulars are intended only as a guide and must not be relied upon as statements of fact.
Your attention is drawn to the important notice on the penultimate page of the brochure.
Historical Note:
The manor is Grade I listed on the National Heritage List for England, and its gate piers and wall to the north entrance of the house are listed Grade II.
In the early 14th century the lord of the manor was the de Cothay family, whose heir was the Bluett family, later from the early 15th century lords of the manor of Holcombe Rogus in Devon, also of nearby Greenham Barton. Built around 1480, its listing cites it as an unusually well-conserved, neat collection of buildings before 1500 in England. Simon Jenkins awarded the house four out of five stars in his 2003 book England’s Thousand Best Houses. The rent for the land surrounding the manor in the medieval era was a pair of silver spurs and a rose. To celebrate the end of the Cousins’ Wars, in the Tudor rose iconography of the time, a red rose (for Lancashire), and a white rose (for Yorkshire), were planted on the terrace by Richard Bluett, who was the lord of the manor at the time. The gardens were laid out in the 1920s by Colonel Reginald Cooper D.S.O, who was Sissinghurst Castle Garden owner Sir Harold Nicolson’s oldest friend, having been at school together at Wellington College, Berkshire, in the Diplomatic Corps, and were friends of Hidcote Manor Garden’s Major Lawrence Johnston and Edwin Lutyens.

The gardeners exchanged ideas, and in Nicholson’s diaries there is an entry: “Reggie came to stay and advised me on the length of the bowling green”. Cooper’s larger projects included moving the River Tone to save his favourite pine trees from erosion. Sissinghurst was laid out in 1932, Cothay in 1925, with one garden writer describing Cothay as the “Sissinghurst of the West Country”.
The house then belonged to Sir Francis Cook, 4th Baronet, and during World War II housed much of his famous art collection, dispersed after the war.
With the whole property and gardens in need of renovation, the gardens were gutted and rebuilt along the original Cooper structure by Alastair and Mary Anne Robb, adding new garden areas, including a bog garden in the Oxbow, an Arboretum, a wild flower meadow, a lake and a Mount from the spoil, where Alastair Robb is buried.
The Great Hall follows the general development of the 15th century manor. The corbels of the massive trusses are wingless angels carrying shields. On the twelve angels’ shields should properly be painted the coat of arms of the various owners of the manor. The roof reflects the spirit of the age in that the Bluettis were intent on creating an impression. The reverse windbraces are an example of this, since conventional windbraces would have been cheaper.

Until 1605 when the Everys added the dining room, the Great Hall would have been the centre of activity. On the raised dais, at the north end of the hall, would have been the high table. The squire, his lady and guests, would have sat there, with the rest of the household seated at a long table down the centre of the hall. On the parapet of the gallery can be seen the remnants of pegs, which were used to rack halberds. The transom windows, set high in the walls for security, have the original pintles on which hung newly created contemporary shutters made from old wood.

The oak wainscot panelling was added in the early 17th century, and is unusual because, similar to the Long Gallery at Haddon Hall in Derbyshire, it has been grained to look like walnut and the mouldings of the panels were gilded, traces of which remain. Walls of medieval houses were brightly decorated and at Cothay the allegorical scene of the funeral of Reynard the Fox being hanged by two geese on a gibbet is still faintly visible. The smell of beeswax and wood smoke, mingling with the life of this ancient house, create an atmosphere of past times, adding to the feeling that little has changed since the time of Richard Bluett, the builder of Cothay.

The Screens Passage was a cross passage which led outside to a courtyard. The 15th century stone arch, on which the outside door hung, can still be seen, as can the housing for the original drawbar. The floor of the passage is known as Ashlar, made from river shale from the Tone, wood ash and lime. The five hundred year old front door has its original wooden lock-case, wrought-iron handle-plate, and ten-and-a-half inch key. Cut into the door is a small round spy-hole. The straight staircase has replaced the much earlier spiral staircase, treads of which can be seen as you go up the stairs.
The Dining Room, added by William Everly in 1609, panelled in oak, the top of which is ‘linen-fold’ with a fine carved chimneypiece on which the arms of the Every’s are impaled with that of Haydon, the shield being left partially blank for future generations. The four carved figures are of Plato’s Cardinal Virtues, viz, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance and Prudence; the original paintwork is still clearly visible. The stone fireplace has a very rare carving of a six pointed star, which in 17th century England was said to stop witches from coming down the chimney! The decoration of the ceiling is of local plasterwork, carved in-situ with a design of vine leaves and grapes. In each corner are sculptured heads, possibly portraying the craftsmen involved in the construction of the dining room wing.

The Winter Parlour/ Sitting room, entered from the Great Hall through a double ogee door, would in 1485, as other rooms, have been brightly painted. The remnant of the wall painting above the wainscot panelling, to the left of the window, is possibly a scene from the parable of the Prodigal Son. The wooden transom window was added later in about 1558. The panelling, put in by the Every’s in 1609 is the same as that in the Great Hall with its faux walnut graining. The sprung ceiling is of moulded and pegged oak beams. A hidden spiral staircase, behind the panelling, leads to the Great Chamber above.

The Book Room, painted red and overlaid with a darker colour, matches the colour of the stained-glass window, which bears the coat of arms of Sir Francis Cook, bt, with the motto ‘esse cum videere’ (To be, rather than to seem). This small chamber, with its unsophisticated ceiling, may have been part of an earlier dwelling, incorporated into the main house by Richard Bluett in 1485 and used perhaps as a summer parlour as it has no fireplace.
The Great Chamber or Withdrawing Chamber was a private bed-sitting room of the Squire and his family. The roof is of splendid oak beams; the high oculus window is said to be 14th century, probably from an earlier building, the hall house of Adam de Cothay. Overlooking the Great Hall is a squint for the Squire to communicate with the hall. The transom windows are pre-1480.

Contrary to common opinion, mediaeval houses were brightly painted and between Henry VIII and Cromwell, eighty percent of English art was destroyed. The king of France in early Medieval times had his favourite hunting forest painted on the walls of a chamber, and the stylised flowers, painted by Arabella Arkwright are in homage to the period.
The Guest Chamber has a 15th century freeze of ribbon pattern, interspersed with writing, which is still faintly visible. Wall paintings, uncovered in the 1920’s, show an annunciation, the Christ Child descending on a ray of light from the Godhead, toward the Virgin Mary. This iconographical representation of the Incarnation suggested the body of Jesus was not formed in the Virgin’s womb. This heresy persisted until banned by Pope Benedict XIV in the 18th century. To the right of the window, another wall painting shows a woman in a close-fitting coif, and halo, standing in the centre looking left and downwards with an elderly bearded man kneeling behind her. This probably represents our Lady and Saint Joseph. To the left of the fireplace, a male secular figure in costume of the period, c. 1580, is possibly a portrait of Richard Bluett, the builder of Cothay. The sprung ceiling, with its moulded beams, is otherwise undecorated. In the corner of the chamber a hagioscope looks through to the altar in the adjoining oratory, which is connected by a small door.

The Oratory standing over the porch, facing East towards Jerusalem, this tiny chapel measures nine foot by eight foot. The Hagioscope, to the left hand side of the door leading through to the Guest Bedroom.

The Gold Room, so-called on account of particles of mediaeval gold paint which were found on the walls, leads off the stairs and acts as an ante-room to the Master Bedroom and the Screens Gallery. Originally a sleeping chamber, the room has the only fresco in the house, depicting the Madonna and Child in front of a landscape with buildings contained in a roundel - the colours still bright and fresh though painted 500 years ago.
Master bedroom and bathroom
The Gate House

The Inner Court
The Kitchen, with three doors leading to the dining room, the kitchen courtyard, and the back hall/laundry.

The Kitchen Courtyard leads into the garden, the kitchen and the laundry area.
The gardens, laid out off a 200 yard yew walk in the 1920’s by Lieutenant-Colonel Reginald Cooper D.S.O, were gutted in the early 1990’s within the original framework. The restoration and additions to the garden have been an ongoing project.

Cothay is a romantic garden epitomised by the terrace with it’s Red rose for York and a White rose for Lancaster; legend has it they were [originally] planted to celebrate the end of the Wars of the Roses in the 15th century, when Richard Bluet built Cothay, and [roses] have always flowered since. Leading off the long Yew Walk are many small garden rooms, further enclosed by yew hedges. As with the rooms of the house they have their own individual character. Cothay is predominantly a summer garden, at its best from May, after the blossoms, when thousands of white lily-flowered tulips herald the season, like an army of white angels marching through the garden. For it is in the summer months the glory of this ancient place is at its best.

The lake was created by Alastair and Mary Anne Robb as a back drop to the gardens and to create a small arboretum with specimen trees. The spoil from the lake was used to create a mount in the style of the 17th century, and which later entombed its creator, Alastair Robb. The arboretum has many specimen trees including the Brewer’s weeping spruce Picea breweriana, the blue cedar Cedrus atlantica glauca, the incense cedar Calocedrus decurrens, several different Ironwood trees Parrotia persica, the dawn redwood Metasequoia glyptostroboides, a cut leaf alder Alnus glutinuous imperialis, the swamp cyprus Taxodium distichum, the Hemlock tree Tsuga heterophylla, golden Ash, Laburnum, the Caucasian wingnut tree Pterocarya fraxinifolia, and many different magnolia.
Jeremy Musson, of Country Life, quotes in the English Manor House “An exceptionally perfect survival of the 15th century manor house”.

Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd and Christopher Simon Sykes write in English Manor Houses “No one did more to open peoples eyes in the 20th century to the beauty of English country house architecture than Christopher Hussey of Country Life. So when one comes across a description by him [Hussey] in 1927 of Cothay as “the most perfect small 15th century country house that survives in the kingdom” attention returned to Somerset to discover how this paragon is shaping up the 21st-century.

Christopher Hussey shrewdly noted, when writing about Lieutenant-Colonel Reginald Cooper’s supremely sympathetic repairs in the 1920s, “nor are there any new old fireplaces or new old panelling’.

Christopher Hussey “Cothay looks as though it had been moulded by thick fingers out of the soil”. Hussey goes on to say “to him [Cooper] a real debt is owed by all lovers of English architecture and craftsmanship for his preservation and skilful treatment’.

Discussing the wall paintings that Lieutenant-Colonel Cooper discovered, that were hitherto covered in successive coats of plaster, and sufficient traces of the original interior decoration in several of the rooms, Professor E. W. Tristram, author of the classic three-volume work English Mediaeval Wall Painting, wrote that he knew “of no other domestic work with which one could make any real comparison, and in this way the Cothay paintings appear to me unique”. 
The Georgian Hall - Connecting the old house with Sir Francis Cook's 1938 North Wing. It was so called because of the fine staircase of 1732 taken from a nearby house before it was demolished. The walls are of local cob and the floor of limestone flags. As you climb the staircase you can see the original outside wall of the old manor house, and the weathered bargeboard and gutter brackets are still visible.
GENERAL REMARKS AND STIPULATIONS

Method of sale
The freehold of Cothay Manor is available for sale by private treaty with vacant possession available on completion.

Services
Mains electricity, spring fed private water supply. Hot water and heating supplied by a bio-mass boiler and backup oil-fired boiler. Septic tank and soak-away sewage system. BT broadband. Intruder alarm system.

Local authority
Taunton Deane Borough Council, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE.
Tel: +44 1823 356 356.

Fixtures and Fittings
All those items regarded as tenants fixtures and fittings, together with the fitted carpets, curtains and light fittings, are specifically excluded from the sale. However, certain items may be available by separate negotiation.

Planning, Rights of Way, Licences and Easements
Cothay Manor, The North Wing, The Studio Flat, The Laundry Flat, The Cottage, The Garage Flat, The Gatehouse are individually Grade 1 & II listed. There are no public rights of way across the property. There is a water extraction licence in place with the Water Authority.

Council Tax
Manor Band H, North Wing Band D, others band A

Directions (TA21 0JR)
From the North, take exit 26 on the M5, direction to Wellington. At the first roundabout take the first left onto the A38. Continue for 3.6miles, where at the Beambridge Hotel you turn right direction Greenham. From here you cross over a cross roads, and past Myrtle Lane (a right handed T junction). Turn right at the next crossroads down Bughole Lane, and first left into Piley Lane. At the bottom of Piley Lane, bear right and the entrance to Cothay is on the left hand side, through a pair of gate pillars.

Viewings:
strictly by prior appointment with the selling agents Knight Frank LLP.

Important Notice:
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WINTER PARLOUR/ Cothay Cottage: 6 months assured shorthold tenancy agreement from 28th February 2015

The North Wing: 6 months assured shorthold tenancy from 22nd March 2019

The Annex Studio: (1st floor) 6 months assured shorthold tenancy agreement from 18th March 2017

The Flat: (1st floor) 6 months assured shorthold tenancy agreement from 10th May 2019

Coach House: 6 months assured shorthold tenancy agreement from 1st August 2015