

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

STANCOMBE PARK

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STANCOMBE PARK

Name: STANCOMBE PARK

County: Gloucestershire

District: Stroud (District Authority)

Parish: North Nibley

County: Gloucestershire

District: Stroud (District Authority)

Parish: Stinchcombe

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.672733
Longitude: -2.3790016
National Grid Reference: ST 73888 97175, ST7370697478
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: I
List Entry Number: 1000782
Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986

Details

Earlier C19 eclectic valley water garden with wide range of structural elements and older landscape park associated with a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Stancombe, where there was a house of some substance and at least a small park, was part of the estate of William Purnell of Dursley (d 1805). His daughter and would-be heiress Anne, the wife of Robert Bransby Cooper, of Brooke Hall, Norfolk, predeceased him by a year and the estate passed to her son, Purnell Bransby. He, who adopted the surname Purnell by deed poll in 1805, came of age in 1811. In 1813 he married and started to rebuild Stancombe Park, probably soon after that beginning to create the valley water garden. After Purnell Bransby Purnell died in 1866 the estate remained in his family and was subsequently the home of his granddaughter Emily Anne, who in 1882 married the Rev David Edwards (d 1908), who from 1853 had been rector of Nibley. Following her death in 1928 Stancombe Park was sold in 1929 to S Chew Hooper. It remains (1999) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Stancombe Park is midway between Stinchcombe, 1km to the north, and North Nibley, 1.5km to the south, the B4060 between which forms the curving south-west boundary of the site. Park Lane, a turning east off the B4060, bounds the north-west and north-east sides of the park whose south-east boundary follows field edges. The house stands on the upper, west side of a small but sharply defined valley which runs downhill from north to south on the south side of Stinchcombe Hill. From it the views are east and north to the beech and mixed woods on

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the sides of Stinchcombe Hill, and south down the valley which contains the water garden and beyond to North Nibley with its church and hilltop monument of 1866 to Tyndale, the translator of the Bible. The registered area comprises c 27ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The normal approach to Stancombe Park, from an entrance off Park Lane to the north-west of the house, is along a short drive ending at the stables courtyard.

The formal approach is from the south-west, along a curving, 150m long drive. This follows the original course of Park Lane, diverted to its present line around the edge of the park in 1806. The drive winds between steep banks to an elevated sweep before the south-west side of the house. At the end of the drive is a simple, single-storey ashlar lodge of the earlier C19 (Estate map, 1840).

Two early C19 lodges (both present by 1840, Estate map) stand at the south end of the park and water garden on the B4060. Any plan to run drives from these up the valley sides to the house was never carried out. At the south-west corner of the water garden is Lake Lodge (listed grade II). This is a single-storey building of coursed and squared marlstone in a picturesque, Oriental Tudor style with two projecting wings. A watercolour by William Crouch (see below) shows it was originally only half its later size, with a single wing. At the south-east corner of the water garden is the two-storey Parker's Lodge (listed grade II; wrongly shown on OS as Porter's Lodge), in the picturesque Tudor style. Some 10m to its north-east is a decorative single-storey brick building, pre-1840, now a shed but originally servants' accommodation.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Stancombe Park (listed grade II) stands on a knoll at the north-west end of the dry valley - the Stan Combe presumably - which runs down the centre of the park. It was begun for P B Purnell c 1813, occupied in 1814, and finished in 1819. It is of limestone ashlar, with a low hipped roof of Welsh slates. The original entrance front, to the south-west, has five bays and two storeys with a Doric portico. The south-east front is of seven bays with a central semicircular bay. To the north-west is a courtyard with carriage house.

An earlier house stood close to Stancombe Park, although apparently not on precisely the same site.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS From the elevated gravel sweep on the south-west side of the house there are views south and east across the park and outward to North Nibley. A gate gives access to the narrow grass terrace around the south-east and north-east sides of the house, again with views. The terraces are bounded by low and ornate early C19 iron fences; in the centre of the south-east terrace is a small circular fountain pool.

South of the gravel sweep is a short spur off the main valley. Largely formal gardens were designed and laid out by Mrs Gerda Barlow on its far side in the late C20, notably a 50m long yew- and box-hedged corridor (the Pattern Border) of 1988 aligned on the house's south-west portico.

The main, earlier C19 garden at Stancombe lies around a pool in the valley bottom 500m south of the house. The garden is reached from the house by a winding terraced path down the west side of the valley. An iron deer fence is on the outer (valley) side of the path while on its inner side is a shrubbery, on the edge of which in the late C20 established box bushes were being clipped into animal forms to create a Menagerie Walk. From the path there are views across the valley, over the triangular upper pool, and towards the woodland which surrounds the garden. The path drops into the valley bottom c 100m south of the upper pool, immediately below a small middle pool, at the north end of which a small folly-like structure was erected in 1998 reusing elements of either the Chapel or the Museum. West of the middle pool is a niche (listed grade II) which contains a limestone font adapted to form a conduit. From here the path from the house passes beneath an agricultural road via a curving brick tunnel. Almost immediately it goes into another brick tunnel (listed grade II), guarded in a niche by a statue of the dog Cerberus, keeper of the gates of Hades, which bifurcates before emerging in the water garden via a grotto-like facade at the north end of the lower pool. Turning left (south) along the east side of the pool, the choice is either a poolside path running through a continuous iron arbour from the tunnel mouth, or to ascend to a path at a higher level. At the start of the latter is a small court with two small octagonal plant houses of red brick on five sides and diamond-pattern glazing on three, with stone floors and tiled roofs. Raised beds lie on the edges of the court, at the centre of which is a former fountain. From here the upper path runs past a sunken pool, perhaps for swimming, with ramped grass ends, to the end (ie the entrance) of the ashlar Doric Temple (listed grade II*, apparently conceived as a dining room), whose long, columned west side is the principal embellishment of the lower end of the east side of the pool, although a huge copper beech to its north conceals it from the upper end. Steps on the west side of the

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Temple lead down to a spring welling up through a saucer on the pool edge. Northwards along the poolside is the continuous arbour, while southwards is the rear of a simple timber boathouse. Some 20m to the south-east of the Temple is the Studio (listed grade II), an early C19 single-storey building of ashlar limestone with a brick chimney and Welsh slate roof, with one coloured glass window facing west towards the pool. By its entrance is a whale vertebra. Parker's Lodge lies c 10m south-east of the Studio. On the hillside north and north-east of it is woodland, some of it ornamental and including a stand of cedars.

From the Studio the poolside path runs along the dam which retains the south end of the pool, between castellated yew hedges 2m high towards the public road and 1.5m high towards the pool. At the western end the path goes into a curving tunnel which leads, via a keyhole-shaped door, to the small, rectangular, Egyptian Court. The Court (listed grade II) has a simple stone urn at its centre. To the left (west) of the keyhole door is the arched whale jawbone entrance to a former icehouse (also listed grade II) which now (1999) contains a head of Nephertiti. Right of the keyhole door is an Egyptian portal which gives access east to a path which winds round the base of a huge oak tree and descends to a small semicircular quay on the west edge of the pool. The Lake Lodge can be seen 10m to the east of the Egyptian Court. From opposite the keyhole entrance to the Egyptian Court a flagged path runs in a straight line north-east up the west side of the pool; carved into every third flagstone, beginning at the threshold of the Court, are Roman numerals (I, II, III, etc). At intervals down the path are ironwork arbours covered in roses. The path ends at another tunnel (listed grade II) in an alcove within which there is a now-depleted (1990s) ammonite collection. The tunnel is T-plan: one exit leads to the west part of the park, while the other emerges c 25m east of the tunnel at the entrance to the water garden.

The creation of the water garden and the path connecting it to the house are relatively ill-documented. Purnell Bransby Purnell probably began work soon after 1814 when he moved to Stancombe Park, and family tradition has it that much of the labour was provided by soldiers pensioned off at the end of the French wars. Certainly in 1819 he found a Roman villa when trenching for a shrubbery, said to be within 100 yards (c 92m) of the house (Trans Bristol & Gloc Archaeol Soc 1989). The water gardens were well advanced when William Crouch painted a series of watercolours of Stancombe Park; as he died in 1840 aged only twenty-three, this was presumably in the later 1830s. The paintings show the Temple with its steps and fountain; the poolside pergola; the grotto at the head of the pool; and the two lodges at the south end of the water garden. They do not, however, show the Egyptian Court, or the plant houses, whose brickwork similarly suggests a slightly later date, nearer 1850, or the battlemented hedge.

PARK The park has the form of a rounded diamond, aligned north/south, 800m long and 550m wide. The main valley, grassland with very few trees, was a deer park until the mid C20. This valley, with its pools and water garden, runs north/south down the centre of the park, dividing it into two. The southern part of the west side of the park, a field called the Bowery, is permanent pasture with many veteran sweet chestnut trees, probably early C18, and suggestive that Stancombe Park's predecessor had a small park. From its upper, northern part there are views west to the River Severn. The Bowery is also rich in earthworks, including lynchets. Here the park is bounded by a stone wall which extends northwards to the end of the drive to the house. Other lynchets formerly lay on the east side of the valley, but these have been ploughed out and this part of the park is partly under arable cultivation (late C20). Also in the east side of the park is the site of a large Roman villa, excavated in 1846-7. The finds were housed in a small museum (not extant) built c 100m east of the south end of the upper pool. A second lost structure is a chapel built by Purnell Bransby Purnell before 1818 but never endowed and probably never used.

KITCHEN GARDEN Stancombe Park's walled kitchen garden lay on the far (north-west) side of Park Lane. The walls, and two modernised gardener's houses, survive. All are probably early C19.

REFERENCES

B Jones, *Follies & Grottoes* (2nd edn 1974), pp 247-50, 327 J Sales, *West Country Gardens* (1981), pp 107-8 Country Life, 169 (1 January 1981), pp 26-8 Inspector's Report: Stancombe Park, (English Heritage 1989) Trans Bristol & Gloc Archaeol Soc 107, (1989), pp 203-5 N Kingsley, *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire, Volume Two, 1660-1830* (1992), p 299 Stancombe Park, guidebook, (nd) Stancombe Park, guidebook, (nd, 1990s)

Maps Estate map, 1840 (Gloucestershire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1881-2, published 1886

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Illustrations William Crouch, Series of watercolours of Stancombe Park and its gardens, c late 1830s (private collection)

Archival items Extracts from Purnell family papers and letters (private collection) Papers re 1806 diversion of Park Lane (Gloucestershire Record Office) Papers re chapel (RX 287.4 (1-6)), (Gloucester City Library)

Description written: March 1999 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: April 2003

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.