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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

STANWAY HOUSE

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Name: STANWAY HOUSE

County: Gloucestershire

District: Tewkesbury (District Authority)

Parish: Stanton

County: Gloucestershire

District: Tewkesbury (District Authority)

Parish: Stanway

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.988158
Longitude: -1.9112405
National Grid Reference: SP 06192 32193
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: I
List Entry Number: 1000480
Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986

Details

Early to mid C18 gardens including terracing, a canal and cascade, and a landscape park, associated with a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Stanway estate was leased from Tewkesbury Abbey by Richard Tracy in 1533, and following the Dissolution his family purchased the freehold in the 1580s. The Tracys held the manor until the C18. Major changes took place in the time of the above-mentioned Richard, under whom a now-vanished north wing may have been constructed; Paul, who inherited in 1569 (cr bt 1611, d 1620), who rebuilt the great hall; and his son and heir Sir Richard (d 1637), in whose time the gatehouse and south front were probably constructed, or at least begun. Under his sons Sir Humphrey (d 1658), Sir Richard (d 1666), and Sir John Tracy (d 1677), successive owners, the house more or less reached its present, C20 size. Stanway passed on the death of the last-mentioned to his kinsman Ferdinando Tracy (d 1682), whose heir was his son John (d 1735), probably in whose time a water garden was laid out on the hill behind the house, to which a cascade was added c 1750 in the time of Robert Tracy, John's son, who held Stanway from 1735 to 1767. In the early C18 there were internal alterations to the house, and between c 1710 and 1748 the northern service range was rebuilt. Thereafter, until the later C20, the Tracys and their mid C19 successors, the earls of Wemyss and March rarely occupied Stanway, preferring their Scottish estates. Between 1883 and 1937 Stanway was made over to Hugo, later eleventh Earl of Wemyss, who lived there with his wife Mary Wyndham. During their time Stanway became the central meeting place of their wide circle of literary and artistic friends known as The Souls. The estate remains (1999) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Stanway House stands on the north side of the hamlet of Stanway, east of St Peter's church. The settlement clusters around a crossroads on the B4077 (and its continuation the A438) from Tewkesbury, c 15km to the west, to Stow-on-the-Wold, c 15km to the east. It is here crossed by an unclassified road which runs between Wood Stanway and Didbrook, c 1.5km to the south, and Stanton, 2km to the north. In places the park boundary follows streams, and to the south extends to the B4077. To the east the park extends up onto the slopes of Lidcombe Hill, the wooded top of which, beyond the park, is the highest point in the parish. The area here registered is c 140ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal, formal approach to the House is from the south, passing beneath the gatehouse into the west forecourt. The main everyday approach is from a gateway off the Stanton road west of the stables from which there is access to the courtyard against the north-east side of the House.

Although no longer extant, there are archaeological traces of a carriage road which entered the south-east part of the park, enjoying dramatic views eastwards before descending to the lower part of the park via a route north of the kitchen garden.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Stanway House (listed grade I) comprises an L-plan ashlar building, thought to have been begun in the early C17 by Sir Paul Tracy and added to by Sir John Tracy later in the same century. The principal rooms lie in a south-facing range resplendent with an unbroken series of triple mullioned and transomed windows and with strapwork along the parapet. This range, conceived as a royal apartment, was probably begun in the later 1620s, has rainwater goods dated 1670, and was presumably the range noted as unfinished in 1685 (Kinglsey 1989). Its central doorway was inserted in 1724. This range abuts the rear of the west, hall range of c 1580-90, at the extreme south end of which is a great bay window. A north range was demolished in 1948; what remains is a kitchen court of 1859-60 designed by William Burn (d 1870). Running along the west front of the hall is the entrance court, bounded by a 2.7m high stone wall (listed grade I). At its south end, close to the hall's bay window, is an architecturally elaborate, three-storey gatehouse (listed grade I), perhaps of c 1620, while at the north end is a gateway of similar date (listed grade I) with scrolled pediment. Midway along the west side is a pedestrian gateway to the churchyard.

An ashlar stable block (listed grade II) of 1859-60, designed by William Burn, lies c 50m north of the House.

Some 100m west of the House, outside the north-west corner of the churchyard, is the former Tithe Barn (listed grade I) of c 1370, now the village hall. It is of rubble masonry with a stone slate roof, seven bays long (base cruck trusses), and with a central porch on the north side. This once opened onto a farm and stables courtyard, now a grass paddock, with central pond (restored 2000). North of it is a shrubbery established in the late C19 or early C20.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The south range overlooks a lawn, with raised walks along its east and west sides, which extends for c 40m from the House. The raised walk along the west side of the garden runs alongside the ashlar wall (listed grade II), perhaps part of Sir Richard Tracy's work of 1620-37, which bounds this part of the grounds, running south from the gatehouse. The ground level within the garden is c 2m above what it is externally, where the wall rises to 4m alongside the approach to the gatehouse. The wall is pierced with three pairs of oval, spectacle-like windows which allowed visitors to be observed from the raised walk. Alternating with the windows are ogee-headed piscina-like openings, five in all, perhaps for sconces. A gravel walk runs along the north side of the lawn, while to its south is a yew grove. Kip's view of Stanway (Atkyns 1712) shows a formal garden south of the House occupying the area defined by the raised walks (shown) and a linking walk to the south, all confined by walls. The central area was then occupied by four rectangular plats with low topiary around their edges arranged either side of a broad axial path running south from the central door of the south range. This path leads to a gateway in the centre of the garden's south wall, giving access to a triangular outer court, the area now occupied by the yew grove. The outer court was bisected by a continuation of the main axial path, either side of which lay another plat surrounded by topiary. Against the south wall of the outer court was a cottage; when this was demolished c 1880 it was known as Stoke's Cottage. The south gardens with their plats were presumably laid out at about the time the south range was nearing completion, in the 1670s or 1680s. It is not known when the formal plats were removed, although they had gone by 1748 when Stanway was painted by W Taylor.

To the east of the House is the rear courtyard, with beyond a walk linking the kitchen garden and the south garden. East of the walk is a lawn, c 40m wide from west to east. On its north side, against the south wall of the kitchen garden, is a small

geometrical garden created c 1955 by Lady Violet Benson, mother of the twelfth Earl of Wemyss, with box hedges, topiary, and formal bedding. From the east side of the lawn the ground rises steeply in a series of ramped grass terraces, at the centre of which is a bulbous, bulwark-like projection. As the uppermost terrace is breasted the visitor arrives at, and sees for the first time, the Long Canal, re-excavated in 1998. This, c 152m long and c 15m wide, runs north/south along the terrace. Originally a statue of Neptune is said (CL 1964) to have stood at its centre; a jette d'eau now rises here. In 1998 excavations revealed the substantial footings of a summerhouse at the south end of the Canal. An avenue carries the line of the Long Canal north across the park (see below), and there is a shorter avenue of limes replacing an elm avenue killed in the 1970s, leading south.

Above (east of) the uppermost terrace and the Canal the ground continues to rise steeply uphill to the Pyramid (listed grade II*), an ashlar garden building surmounted with a pyramidal roof, erected in 1750 by Robert Tracy as a memorial to his father, John (d 1735). Originally it had glazed doors and an ornate plaster ceiling (demolished 1945), but is now an open pavilion. From it there are views across the House and its gardens and the landscape to the west: the hills of Dumbleton, Dixton, and Oxenton, the Vale of Gloucester, the Malverns, and the Black Mountains of Wales. From beneath the Pyramid floor two culverts supply water to the Cascade which descends, aligned on the central door of the south range, to the centre of the east side of the Canal. The cascade, re-excavated in the years after 1985, is 170m long and 4m wide. It is edged with stone kerbs and paved with limestone cobbles, while midway down it are twenty-one steps. The culvert is fed from a circular pool, c 25m in diameter, immediately east of the Pyramid, itself fed along a kerbed channel from a spring (now lost) 400m to the east and by a contour channel which brought water from another spring 450m distant and probably from the Paper Mill stream outside the present south-east boundary of the park. The same water source powers a jette d'eau, installed in the centre of the Canal during its restoration in 1998. Behind (east of) the Pyramid and the circular pool is a rectangular plantation dominated by mid to late C18 cedars of Lebanon; further woodland covers the hillside north and south of the Cascade which from the House appears to run down an open glade with the Pyramid at the apex and the cedars rising behind. The woodland south of the Cascade, the Arboretum, running downslope to the north end of the grove of yews south of the gardens, contains many specimen trees, perhaps including some of those planted between 1783 and 1817 by Henrietta Tracy-Keck (see below), others of the mid C19, and a further group planted to the south of the Long Canal during the 1950s and 1960s.

The precise chronology of the creation of the gardens east of the House is unknown. Kip's view (1712) shows trees, perhaps an orchard, running east from the House. By 1748, when William Taylor painted Stanway, the trees had been cleared and there was a bowling green against the House, beyond which rose the terraces with the Long Canal (on which boating is shown) and Cascade. These water features are generally dated to the time of John Tracy, lord 1724-35, and may have been inspired by a visit in 1724 to Great Tew, Oxfordshire, at the time the waterworks there were nearing completion (Ann Tracy, diary). The terraces could well be a generation or two older. The Long Canal, and presumably the Cascade, was filled in c 1850, although its terrace retained the name The Canal. In 1859 this was used as an archery ground.

PARK Stanway House lies on the centre of the south side of a park which is roughly square and c 1km across. Running from south to north through its western part is the unclassified road from Stanway to Stanton. West of the road to Stanton, c 250m north-west of the House, is a cricket ground, created in 1879-80. On its east side is a pavilion provided in 1925 by the playwright Sir James Barrie (d 1937), who took Stanway as a summer tenant between 1923 and 1933. West of the cricket ground, beyond the Sling stream, is Thompson's Hill (until 1900 known as Honesty Close Plantation), on which there is a late C18 plantation. East of the road from Stanway to Stanton is lush parkland with scattered trees and some mid to late C18 clumps, all underlain with ridge and furrow and crossed by the 1.25km long chestnut avenue. It, like its southern counterpart, was probably established c 1750. Some 400m east of the road the ground rises steeply up the west slope of Lidcombe Hill, part of the Cotswold Edge. Here, too, in places where the ground levels out a little, there is ridge and furrow. The parkland trees are mainly oak and some veteran sweet chestnut, although there are also some mid C19 coniferous specimen trees. The highest part of the park is along its western boundary, the stone for whose wall was presumably got from one of the many small quarries which survive as earthworks in this part of the park. Quarrying is recorded on Stanway Hill in the C18 (Management Plan, 1999). Also stone-walled is Holder's Rough, a small wood of mature beech trees planted in the mid C19 on the east edge of the registered area.

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A park had been made by 1683, and although c 1700 it was said to have been ploughed up (Management Plan 1999), Stanway Park, surrounding the House, remained part of the demesne. In 1767 John Tracy Atkyns, who had just inherited Stanway from his brother, wrote admiringly of the 'Rude Dress' of the overgrown hawthorns in the park and gardens (quoted in Management Plan, 1999). Henrietta Tracy-Keck, who owned and lived at Stanway from 1783 until her death in 1817 is said (guidebook) to have laid out the park and planted many of its trees. Bryant's and the Greenwoods' county maps from soon after her death show the park, but indicate it was then confined to the south-east portion of the present park, extending only east of the gardens, and with a north boundary which extended from c 200m north-west of the House to the vicinity of Ash Coppice.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden, now planted as an orchard, abuts the east side of the kitchen court at the north end of the House, running east of, and behind, the stables. It is c 80m square, with walls which are internally of brick and externally of stone. The south and east walls are C18, its north one of the mid C19 when the garden was enlarged a little. Two small lean-to glasshouses stand against the north wall. In the south wall is a gateway (listed grade II) of c 1860, probably by William Burn, framed by plain Roman Doric pilasters. There are further productive garden areas along the north side of the main walled garden and between the House and the stables.

In Kip's view (Atkyns 1712) the kitchen garden occupies the same area.

REFERENCES

R Atkyns, *The Ancient and Present State of Gloucestershire* (1712), pl facing p 684 *Country Life*, 40 (25 November 1916), pp 630-7; 136 (3 December 1964), pp 1490-4; (10 December 1964), pp 1646-9; (17 December 1964), pp 1708-11 *Victoria History of the County of Gloucestershire VI*, (1965), pp 224-7 D Verey, *The Buildings of England: Gloucestershire The Cotswolds* (2nd edn 1979), pp 415-17 Stanway House, guidebook, (1984) N Kingsley, *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire, Volume One, 1500-1660* (1989), pp 173-6 J Harris, *The Artist and the Country House from the 15th century to the present day*, (exhibition catalogue 1995), p 76 *Architectural History* 41, (1998), pp 245-60 *Garden History Soc Newsletter* 55, (Spring 1999), p 4 *Landscape Management Plan*, (in draft 1999)

Maps A Bryant, *Map of the County of Gloucestershire, 1824* C & J Greenwood, *Map of the County of Gloucestershire, 1828* Estate map, 1865 (private collection)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1883, published 1891 3rd edition surveyed 1921

Illustrations William Taylor, *View of Stanway from the east, 1745* (private collection)

Archival items *Diary of Ann Tracy, 1723-5* (private collection)

Description written: March 1999 Amended: May 2001 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.