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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CHASTLETON HOUSE

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

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CHASTLETON HOUSE

Name: CHASTLETON HOUSE

County: Gloucestershire

District: Cotswold (District Authority)

Parish: Adlestrop

County: Oxfordshire

District: West Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Chastleton

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.958771
 Longitude: -1.6397293
 National Grid Reference: SP 24853 28982
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.localisation: [51.959543053913,-1.63984006512309], [51.9594962562581,-1.63979576203984],
 [51.9594142017628,-1.6397178329281], [51.9593402520864,-1.6396442050597],
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label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
 Grade: II*
 List Entry Number: 1001090
 Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

A C17 formal gentry garden surrounding an early C17 country house, with landscape park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Catesby family owned Chastleton House during the C16, it being in the possession of Robert Catesby by the end of the century. Catesby was murdered in 1605, following his conspiracy in the Gunpowder Plot, and around this time the property was bought by Walter Jones and the house demolished. In its place Jones built the present house, probably between 1607 and 1612, and is likely to have constructed the rectangular, walled garden compartments at this time or a little later. These compartments

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conform closely with Gervase Markham's prescription for garden layout in his *The English Husbandman* of 1613 (Inskip and Jenkins 1994). It is possible that the circular hedged feature in the Best Garden was laid out at this time, although subsequently it must have been replanted several times. The family was actively Royalist during the Civil War (at which time the Joneses were severely penalised financially, from which the family never fully recovered), celebrating the Restoration by planting two oak trees, and remaining Jacobite during much of the C18. Descendants of the Jones family continued in ownership until 1991 when the property was vested in the National Trust; it is now (1997) open to the public after six years of repair and restoration.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Chastleton House lies within the village of Chastleton, adjacent to the north Oxfordshire border with Gloucestershire, 7km north-west of Chipping Norton. The c 15ha site is bounded largely by agricultural land, with the village of Chastleton and its associated fishponds to the north, Peasewell Wood to the south, and the village church at the centre of the site, 40m south-east of the House, enclosed by its own stone walls. The church tower was rebuilt in the late C17 in a style which echoes the two staircase towers of the House. The estate lies on the side of a gently undulating, north-facing hillside, with panoramic rural views to the north and east across the distant valley.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approaches utilise the village street, either from the village to the north, skirting the west and south boundaries of the gardens, or from the east, converging on the early C17 stone gateway (listed grade II*) standing at the south boundary of the forecourt, opposite the south park. The gateway, with iron gates beneath a round-headed archway surmounted by small finials at the corners and centre, is aligned on the centre of the south front of the House. It is flanked by stone walls which return north at both ends to enclose a forecourt 25m wide and 50m long, bounded to the north by the House itself. A short, straight drive from the gateway, flanked by lawns, runs towards the House, opening out into a circular carriage sweep with a flight of stone steps leading up to the south face of the House. The door to the porch is offset to the west at the top of the steps, at right angles within the adjacent projecting bay and invisible from the approach, thus achieving the traditional entrance to a great hall at the screens end within the rigid symmetry of the facade. A doorway in the west forecourt wall gives access to the stable court, which is also entered at the south end from the village street through double gates in a stone wall. It is thought (Marshall 1997) that in the C17 the forecourt contained a raised terrace in the northern third, with a central flight of steps leading up from the lower, southern level, and paths leading from here towards the church and stable yard, and possibly side paths running north/south along the full length of the forecourt.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Chastleton House (1607-12, possibly Robert Smythson, listed grade I) lies at the centre of formal garden compartments. It is a square, stone House of three storeys and an attic, with projecting bays, two prominent stair towers and a small central courtyard, the whole of which has altered little since the C17. Its three main fronts, none of which contain obvious doorways, directly overlook the entrance forecourt and the south park to the south; the Best Garden and the north park to the east, with rolling countryside beyond this; and to the north lawns, with the village and further long views north beyond. The east front contains the most prestigious apartments, overlooking the Best Garden whose layout is seen to best advantage from above. The upper rooms of the stair towers, on the east and west fronts, may have been used as rooftop banqueting houses, particularly that on the east front with its panoramic views over the Best Garden and the countryside beyond.

The two-storey service ranges lie south of the House, with a stone stable range and brewhouse (early C17, listed grade II*) forming the west and north sides respectively of the stable yard, the remainder being formed by stone walls and a coach house to the east against the west wall of the forecourt.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens are divided by stone walls (early C17, listed grade II) into several square or rectangular compartments. The Best Garden, on the east front, is reached from the House by a door facing south-east, at the top of a flight of semicircular steps set in the angle between the central projecting stair tower and the main elevation. The steps give access onto a grass terrace which runs along this front, flanking the projecting stair tower. The remainder of the almost square Best Garden lies at a lower level; laid largely to lawn, it is surrounded on the other three sides by stone walls, with an iron clairvoie (probably early C18) flanked by two C18 stone gate piers with ball finials at the centre of the east wall. This device allows views over the north park, the Boscobel Oak and the distant countryside. The Best Garden is dominated by

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a circular clipped yew hedge, with four axial openings aligned with the surrounding walls, enclosing a further circle of twenty-four box topiary specimens, most with little recognisable shape.

The Best Garden was located at the 'upper', east end of the House, entered from the Great Parlour and overlooked by the Great Chamber. Access was only possible from the House, or at one time, from a doorway in the shared churchyard wall, forming a hortus conclusus, or enclosed garden. The central circular feature is possibly a survival of the C17, albeit replanted, probably in 1713 by Anne Jones, again in 1833 by Dorothy Whitmore-Jones, when the hedge was planted with laurel, and again c 1900 with yew. Late C19 and C20 photographs (National Trust) show the ornate shapes the specimens were then clipped to, including a cake-stand, cat, teapot, ship in full sail, peacock and crown, together with a riot of rose arbours, espalier fruit trees and herbaceous borders, all now (1997) gone.

A gateway (late C19) at the north-west corner of the Best Garden leads into the North Lawn area, immediately reaching a small, level lawn lying adjacent to the north front of the House. The lawn's north boundary is marked by a stone retaining wall (early C20), with, at both ends, a flight of stone steps with square piers and ball finials leading down to a further level lawn. West of these two lawns is a further lawn, adjacent to the stone west boundary wall. The north boundary is separated from these descending terraces by a c 1900 wilderness garden with mature evergreen shrubs, and a recently restored path winding through it. Much of this area seems to have been levelled and terraced in the 1860s when Walter Whitmore-Jones formulated the rules of English croquet here in 1865, parts having previously been used as kitchen gardens.

PARK The small park is divided into two sections: to the north-east and south of the House and gardens. Both sections are laid to pasture, and contain scattered, mature trees, including, in the north-east park, the Boscobel Oak, said to have been grown by John and Dorothy Whitmore-Jones in 1852 from an acorn from the Royal Oak of Boscobel. In the south park an avenue of mature limes connects the north and south boundaries, giving access from Chastleton to the nearby village of Adlestrop to the south. A square, stone dovecote (dated 1762, listed grade II*) stands 130m south-east of the House, with a roof consisting of four gables and a wooden cupola supported on four open arches at ground level. The park was gradually added to the Chastleton House estate during the C18 and C19, that parkland which lies to the south, including the dovecote, having formerly been part of the setting for a substantial house demolished in the 1840s.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden lies to the north of the House, in the angle formed between the North Lawn and the Best Garden. Surrounded by stone walls built by John Henry Whitmore-Jones in 1849, and entered from the south wall, it is largely laid to lawn, with a gateway in the east wall giving access to a further, disused (1997) walled garden situated within the north park 100m north of the House.

A further enclosed space lies below the west front of the House. This is subdivided by a tall, clipped yew hedge running parallel with the east wall, returning west from the centre of the House and again to the south-east, continuing above and along the boundary. This area acted as a base court at the 'lower', west end of the House and served to link the domestic offices of the House with the brew house and stable range, until in the early C20 it was planted with yew hedges and laid out as a rose garden.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 45 (25 January 1919), pp 90-6 N Pevsner and J Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), pp 531-3 R Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England* (1979), pp 12, 122, fig 74 Chastleton House Conservation Plan 7, (Inskip and Jenkins, 2nd draft 1994) Evidence from the Archaeological Excavations at Chastleton House, (Gary Marshall 1997) Chastleton House, guidebook, (National Trust 1997)

Maps A Bryant, *Map of the County of Oxford ...*, surveyed 1823

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881-2 2nd edition published 1901 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: December 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: January 2000

Legal

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