

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

**BOLSOVER CASTLE**

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

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**BOLSOVER CASTLE**

Name:	BOLSOVER CASTLE
County:	Derbyshire
District:	Bolsover (District Authority)
Parish:	Old Bolsover
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.229567 Longitude: -1.2958069 National Grid Reference: SK 47106 70512 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000674 Date first listed: 04-Aug-1984

## Details

Pleasure grounds with an enclosed garden and a viewing terrace and platform laid out during the period c 1608-40 with additions and repairs of c 1660.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Castle at Bolsover was built by William Peverel in the C12. A stone keep was added in 1173 and domestic buildings in the C13. By the end of the C14 it was ruinous. It was owned by the Crown until 1553 when it was granted to George Talbot, sixth Earl of Shrewsbury and husband of 'Bess of Hardwick'. Bess' son by a previous marriage, Charles Cavendish, bought the Castle and manor from the seventh Earl and he and his heir William, created first Earl of Newcastle in 1628, destroyed most of the medieval work and erected buildings on the site from 1608 onwards. Following despoliation of the site during the Civil War various repairs and additions to the complex were made in the 1660s. In the early C18 the Castle became disused as a main residence and after periods of tenanted occupation in the C19 it was presented as a gift to the nation by the seventh Duke of Portland in 1945. The Castle is currently (1998) in the guardianship of English Heritage and a programme of repairs and restoration is in progress.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Bolsover Castle stands on a steep-sided promontory on the west side of Bolsover overlooking open fields to the north and west. The boundary of the c 4.5ha site is formed by the fenced base of the promontory excluding a building and its grounds on the east side. On the south side the walled and fenced precincts of a school form the boundary, with a wall separating the grounds from a footpath on the south-east side.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The principal entrance is from the west end of Castle Lane at the south-west corner of the site. Stone gate piers and iron gates stand the head of a drive which runs northwards to a set of monumental stone gate piers with a broken pediment and ball finials at the south end of the Terrace. Another entrance, now (1998) used as the main pedestrian entrance, is via a gate from Castle Lane on the south-east side of the site.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** There are three main buildings (all listed grade I) on the site which are linked. Some elements of the design can probably be attributed to Robert Smythson who was succeeded by his son John and grandson Huntingdon Smithson

(who consistently used this spelling for his name); the building history is complex however and it is not possible to be certain of exact dates and attributions, discussion of which can be found in Faulkner (1985) and Girouard (1983).

At the north-west corner of the site is the Little Castle of c 1612. This was built for Sir Charles Cavendish on the site of the keep of the medieval castle. The main entrance is on the west side where steps lead up from a viewing platform to an entrance flanked by towers leading to a paved courtyard and steps up to the entrance. Balconies on two sides of the building give views out to the west and into the more intimate setting of the Fountain Garden to the south. The building is a highly individual synthesis of architectural styles suffused with the romantic medievalism characteristic of the culture of Elizabethan and Jacobean court circles. The fantastic architectural style is consistent with the fact that it was not originally designed as a principal residence but as a place of entertainment within easy reach of the Cavendish seat at Welbeck (qv).

The Terrace Range on the west side of the site was the result of at least three building campaigns, the first of which was contemporary with the building of the Little Castle or immediately post-dates it. The architect was probably John Smythson with additions by Huntingdon Smithson for Sir William Cavendish. The earliest, northern part of the building is linked to the Fountain Garden walls by an arched bridge at first-floor level. The building was stripped to provide lead for works at Welbeck in the 1750s and it is maintained as a controlled ruin (1998). The southern range of buildings is the Riding School of c 1630-40, probably by Huntingdon Smithson.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens consist of four distinct areas articulated around the building complex. To the south is the Outer Court, walled on the east and west sides. The Great Court or Inner Court is an enclosure formed by the Riding School on the south side, the Terrace Range to the west, the Fountain Garden wall to the north, and a wall to the east. The Fountain Garden is enclosed by an irregular oval wall with the Little Castle at the north-west corner. The Terrace runs along the west side of the site to the west of the Terrace Range and Little Castle, and a viewing platform at the north end of the Terrace lies immediately west of the entrance to the Little Castle.

The Terrace is reached from the main drive and it runs parallel with the Terrace Range which contained a long gallery forming an indoor counterpart sharing similar views. A set of double steps, which descend on each side of an alcove flanked by shell-headed niches, gives access from the Terrace Range. The Terrace, with long-distance views to the west, has a low crenellated wall on the west side from which point the land falls steeply. At the north end of the Terrace the viewing platform is in the form of a walled forecourt immediately west of the entrance to the Little Castle which projects west of the line of the Terrace. Steps on the south side lead down westwards from a grassed terrace to a path alongside the west wall from which extensive long-distance views to the west and north are obtained. A drawing of c 1633 (reproduced in EH Landscape Study c 1997) does not show the Terrace wall or the viewing platform, though they are shown on an engraving by Knyff and Kip of c 1700. They were probably constructed between 1634 and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642.

The pedestrian entrance leads to the Outer Court which is grassed, with a path leading as a C20 avenue of young trees to the entrance to the Great Court at the east end of the Riding School. On the west side of the Court there is a bowling green divided from the lawns by a C20 fence, with a C20 pavilion on the west side. A bank along the south side of the green has at its south-west corner an alcove with rusticated stone piers and a mask, probably constructed from fragments brought from elsewhere on the site.

Stone gate piers at the east end of the Riding School lead to the Great Court which is grassed and planted with a few specimen trees. The walled east side of the Court has a border alongside it and c 50m north of the entrance a doorway (blocked, 1998) in the wall leads to a platform flanked by buttresses which gives views to the east, partially obscured by trees. Paths lead west along the inner side of the Riding School to the Terrace Range, and north to the Fountain Garden, branching north-west to run beneath the arched bridge between the Terrace Range and the Fountain Garden wall, to the Terrace and west front of the Little Castle. The Fountain Garden is enclosed by the rebuilt C17 version of the medieval castle's inner bailey wall. There is an arched entrance with rusticated stone piers on the south side giving access from the Great Court which is not shown the drawing of c 1633 when the garden was entered from a simple arched opening to the west of the present entrance. The same drawing shows the encircling wall with crenellations, which had disappeared by the end of the C18, on each side of a walltop walkway which is reached from a door on the first floor of the Little Castle's stair tower. Ground-floor access is from a door leading to steps

on the west side of the garden, and the walk could also be reached from the bridge linking it with the north end of the Terrace Range which was probably constructed in 1633, the date on the entrance to the bridge from the Terrace Range.

Three garden apartments are built into the thickness of the Fountain Garden wall, possibly in the position of early C13 medieval mural towers. The most elaborate is that to the west which has an arched entrance with a lion mask leading to a room with a rib-vaulted roof, an elaborate chimneypiece in the south wall and opposed niches in the east and west walls. Doors lead off to subsidiary rooms on each side, that to the west with a barrel-vaulted roof and that to the east with a barrel vault, a corner chimneypiece and niches, lit by a mullioned window at eaves height. This room post-dates the drawing of c 1633 as it is in the position of the entrance into the garden, which can be seen as infilled masonry on the outer (south) side of the wall. The south garden room is a single chamber with barrel-vaulted roof and simple fireplace. The east room is lit by a mullioned window above the door and also has a barrel vault and simple fireplace. A blocked doorway in the east wall led to steps running down the slope from the Castle.

There are three seating alcoves in the Fountain Garden wall which have arched heads and stone seats supported by consoles, with rectangular niches in the rear walls. One lies between the south and east garden rooms, and the other two are in the east wall north of the east garden room. The enclosed nature of the garden recalls a medieval Hortus Conclusus, in keeping with the medieval elements of the architecture of the Little Castle.

The Garden is grassed and has a system of paths and clipped hedges. At the centre the Venus Fountain is an example of one of a very small number of in situ C17 fountains in England. It has a deep octagonal well with a crenellated parapet and niches in the inner walls and a central pedestal with four cylindrical projections supports a life-size statue of Venus emerging from her bath. A late C18 description (quoted in Worsley 1998) describes busts of Roman emperors within the niches. John Smythson's (undated) preliminary drawings survive and show that the design had evolved considerably by the time it was executed producing a highly individual composition. The historical antecedents and iconography of the Fountain Garden have been the subject of research (summarised in reports in the English Heritage archive) which discusses its use of Jacobean and Caroline chivalric symbolism and emphasises the iconographic unity of the Garden and the architecture and interior decoration of the Little Castle.

The Fountain features in the drawing of c 1633 where it is shown with a circular basin without crenellations but it is not known whether this is an inaccuracy or whether it was altered. It may be that it had not been completed and was still being constructed in preparation for the Royal visit of 1634 when Sir William Cavendish held a banquet at Bolsover for King Charles and his Queen. The banquet was followed by a masque by Ben Jonson entitled *Love's Welcome to Bolsover*, which was performed in the Fountain Garden. The masque's themes of mutual and spiritual love and the divine status of kings have been linked with the iconography of the Garden which has been seen by some writers (eg Strong 1979) as a concrete expression of Caroline court mythology created specifically for the royal visit.

The worn remains of three grotesque satyr-like stone figures within the Fountain Garden (removed for conservation, 1998) may be survivors of more extensive sculptural garden ornaments, possibly designed to represent base lusts as a foil to the symbol of pure love supplied by the Venus statue. Archaeological survey and excavation during the 1990s revealed the detail of the C17 path layout but no traces of beds were found.

## 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.

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