

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

BRETBY HALL

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**BRETRY HALL**

Name: BRETRY HALL

County: Derbyshire

District: South Derbyshire (District Authority)

Parish: Bretby

County: Derbyshire

District: South Derbyshire (District Authority)

Parish: Hartshorne

County: Derbyshire

District: South Derbyshire (District Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.797530  
Longitude: -1.5558987  
National Grid Reference: SK 30041 22311  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1001382  
Date first listed: 27-Apr-1998

## Details

Earthworks surviving from extensive gardens of late C17/early C18 date set within surrounding parkland which forms the setting for a country house built, on a new site, in the second decade of the C19, to replace the earlier mansion.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Bretby Castle, the site of which lies near the church in Bretby, was purchased c 1585 by the Stanhopes of Shelford, Nottinghamshire. Philip, first Lord Stanhope and later Earl of Chesterfield, obtained royal consent in 1610 to enclose a park, the year his family came into full possession due to an existing lease. He proceeded to build a new house 850m to the south-east of the old castle.

Philip Stanhope, second Earl of Chesterfield (1633-1713), grandson of the first Earl, spent his childhood abroad in Holland, and studying in France and Italy. He returned to England in 1650 to marry Lady Anne Percy, daughter of the Earl of Northumberland, but on her death in 1654 returned aboard until inheriting Bretby on the death of the first Earl in 1656. The second Earl was responsible for the rebuilding of Bretby sometime after 1660, the year he married, secondly, Lady Elizabeth Butler, eldest daughter of the Duke of Ormonde (d 1665). He married thirdly Lady Elizabeth Dormer, daughter of the Earl of Carnarvon,

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but again the marriage was but a short one, hastened to a close by her death five years later. Chesterfield recounted that 'In 1670, I remained the whole year in the country with my wife and finished the building of my house and the making of my gardens' (Derbyshire Life 1975). Alterations to the house in this year were carried out by Louis Le Vau.

The second Earl is attributed by Wolley in 1712 as the 'chief contriver' of the extensive garden scheme laid out primarily from 1684 to 1702 (Glover 1833). Celia Fiennes visited in 1698 and recorded the gardens in some detail (Morris 1982). In 1702 the Earl was employing the same workmen as at Melbourne (qv) for manufacturing and laying pipework, perhaps repairs, for the waterworks: there was a family link between the two estates, Chesterfield's eldest daughter, Lady Mary, having married Thomas Coke in 1698.

From the middle of the C18, Bretby was little used. The house was demolished in 1780 and the materials all sold, a new house being built, a little to the south, in the second decade of the C19 by the fifth Earl (d 1815). In the mid C19 Bretby passed via an heiress to the Earl of Carnarvon, but was left in the occupation of the widowed Lady Chesterfield. In 1915, the house and park of 1220 acres (c 508ha) was sold to J D Wragg, MP who, in 1924, called in William Barron Ltd to relandscape the gardens. Wragg however sold on a year later to Derbyshire County Council and the house became a hospital, in which use it continued until the late 1990s. It is currently (1998) the subject of proposals for conversion into residential units, with the building of additional new housing blocks round the Castle being considered.

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Bretby Hall and its surrounding park lie c 1.2km to the north of the urban outer suburbs of Swadlincote to the south and Newhall to the south-west. The c 290ha site is defined to the north by Watery Lane, the lane which links the village of Bretby to the west to Repton Lodge near Bretby Mill to the east; to the east by the public road from Repton to the north, to Upper and Lower Midway on the northern edge of Swadlincote, and south of this, Hoofies Wood; merging to the south and west with the farmland and woodland which provides its wider setting. A marked valley cuts from south-west to north-east across the southern park.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main approach to the Hall is that from the south, the drive, marked by a lodge, entering the park from the Ashby-de-la-Zouch to Burton upon Trent road. From here it runs north-eastwards along the north side of the valley, to arrive at the south-west, entrance front of the Hall. To the north, there is an approach from the village of Bretby as the continuation south of the public road through the village. This drive passes the site of William Martin's early C19 Home Farm, cleared in 1967 (Craven 1991) and rebuilt as Bretby Park Farm. Passing between this and the kitchen gardens, it leads on to pick up the axis across the north-east front of the Hall.

A third drive enters the park at Repton Lodge, 1.2km to the north-east of the Hall, crossing the park on a south-westerly route to arrive at its north-west front. No trees from the avenue shown on a view by Kip dated 1707 (Knyff and Kip 1714) appear to survive, the drive now swinging gently to either side of this line as it crosses the park. To the south, a track leads down the valley side to cross the dam between two of the fishponds, continuing south-eastwards across the park to cross a perimeter ride before continuing into Hoofies Wood.

The Kip engraving suggests that the main approach to the late C17 house was along the avenue to the north-east, leading across the north park, the drive swinging round the edge of the gardens to enter the southern end of the enclosed strip of the outer court. This court, now (1998) overlain by tarmac, is described by Fiennes thus: 'one enters an outward court and drives round a little pond, like a ditch all pav'd with stone or great bason of stone, in which were two swans swimming about in that little compass' (Morris 1982). From the north end of this outer court the drive continued down an avenue along the line of the present north drive (the north end of the drive having been moved westwards from the line of the avenue to its present line by c 1880, OS).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Bretby Hall (listed grade II), of Keuper sandstone, stands to the north-west side of its parkland enjoying extensive views to south and east over the valley which lies almost immediately before it. James Wyatt (1747-1813) was commissioned to prepare designs for a new house 1812-13, these being adapted in 1813-15 by Sir Jeffry Wyattville (1766-1840) working for the fifth Earl of Chesterfield, and perhaps also by the Earl's local architect, William Martin. The building is in castellated-Gothic style, a square block with circular corner turrets. The north-east side appears to have

incorporated the range of an earlier outbuilding, perhaps the western one of a pair shown on the Kip engraving, which flanked the drive from the north-east as it swung round to enter the outer entrance court of the earlier house. Immediately north-east of the Hall, a C20 block has been cut into the falling ground.

The north-west side of the present Hall appears to be a reworking of a range of an earlier outbuilding also shown on the Kip engraving, which continued the axis of the south-east wing of the main house, forming the south side of the tree-planted enclosure which lay on the far side of the outer entrance court. The area north of this part of the Hall has been cleared and put down to tarmac and car parking. Across this area, 50m north-west of the Hall, is a late C20 nursing home standing roughly on the site of the range which continued the axis of the north-west wing of the main house to form the north side of the treed enclosure. The fifth Earl's building replaced an earlier house which stood a little to the north, this having been present by the early C17 and demolished in 1780. Of the pre C19 house, nothing appears to survive above ground. Kip shows it as a U-shaped building, wings projecting from the main north-west/south-east orientated central block, the entrance being at the centre of the south-west-facing facade.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** A terrace runs along the south-east side of the Hall presenting a platform from which the views offered by the site can be enjoyed. From here the ground falls as lawn to the ha-ha, beyond which the land drops steeply away.

As shown on the Kip view, and as described in some detail by Fiennes (Morris 1982), the C18 house was surrounded by a complex scheme of formal gardens: 'But that which is most admired and justly so to be (by all persons and excite their curiosity to come and see is the Gardens and Waterworks'. The waterworks (one in the form of a water-clock played Lillibullero, the tune of the 1688 Revolution) for which the gardens were particularly noted have been attributed to Grillet, the Frenchman responsible for those at Chatsworth (qv) (Derbyshire Life 1950). The main parterres, adorned with garden buildings including a marble summerhouse, lay 100m to the north of the present Hall, but of this central area nothing survives above ground, nor is the outline of these parterres readily apparent as archaeology in today's landscape (1998). The house occupied the centre south of the six main compartments which lay to the north of the drive and outer entrance court. To the south-east of the house, below the south-east wing, lay the stable court, set with a lawn with a central cedar, planted in 1677 (Craven 1991). The stump and remains of the trunk of the cedar, felled in 1953 (with a new specimen planted close by), survive within a small plantation on a mound to the north of the present Hall. The north side of the stable-court enclosure was in part formed by the chapel (nothing of which survives above ground), finished in 1696. The other four compartments were laid out as formal gardens, each focused on a fountain or series of fountain basins.

To the west of the present Hall, separated from it by a bank laid out with a small mid C19 rockery, and with a mid C20 hospital block to the east of its northern end, is a substantial walk, 350m long from north-east to south-west end. This walk is, as illustrated on the Kip engraving, flanked to either side by parallel terraces which rise some 4m above the floor of the walk. The terraces are now (1998) overgrown with laurels, and there is some planting of C19 cedars along the top walks; Kip shows the terraces planted with formal rows of conifers. The terraces along the south-east side are formed from a substantial earth bund along the top of which runs a level walk, shown planted with an avenue by Kip. Those to the north-west are cut into the rising ground which then extends as a flat rhomboid-shaped platform, The Levelling (OS). Kip shows this still wooded area densely planted, and cut through by a series of straight parallel walks. The walk was aligned on the axis of the south-west-facing facade of the former house, from which it was separated by the outer court and the treed enclosure beyond.

North-east of the north drive is an area of woodland known as Philosopher's Wood which overlies a valley running north-east. Within this are the remains of a set of pools, part of the scheme of late C17 gardens shown on the Kip view. The earthworks of terraces lead down the south side of the valley to the remains of a circular basin, the axis continuing beyond to the remains of a half-moon-shaped level cut into the far, terraced valley side. This was the site of a C17 garden building marked by Kip at the end of the cross axis which ran from the centre of the north-west wing of the Hall, north-westwards across the centre of the most elaborate of the parterres, and through the terracing. No trace survives either of this building or of the long range, perhaps an aviary or a greenhouse, which ran northwards from it.

To the north of the remains of the circular basin in the valley are the remains of a large pool, once rectangular with apsidal ends to south-west and north-east. The valley sides to either side of this feature show evidence of the former terracing, its central cross axis having been the continuation of the cross axis through the row of the three parterre enclosures which lay below the north-east facade of the house. From the northern end of this pool, a long level walk, bordered by substantial stumps of sweet chestnuts, runs parallel with the east side of the largest, and lowest, of the pools. This was a rhomboid shape, the diverging longer sides c 300m long, perhaps designed to make the large expanse of water look even greater. At the centre of the former pool is a raised mound, the site of an island which once held a massive statue of Perseus (Glover 1883). The walk turns to cross the substantial wooded dam, below which runs Watery Lane. The walk returns along the western bank, here marked by the occasional standing sweet chestnut, survivors from the C17 plantings.

The north drive marks the western limit of these gardens. No clear remains survive of the ponds (drained by c 1880, OS) which must have acted as reservoirs for supplying the fountains and ponds which formerly lay on the west side of the drive, the drive itself acting as the holding dam.

**PARK** The park forms a roughly rectangular band through which runs the deep valley with its undulating banks, the chain of fishponds (present by the beginning of the C18, Kip) which flow through it being a prominent feature of the landscape. Shown as well-treed on Kip and the early editions of the OS, and noted as such by Wolley in 1712 (Glover 1883), the park is now but lightly wooded. Although there is a scattering of mature parkland trees, there are very few survivors from the 'fine rows of trees running up the avenues to the house' (Morris 1982), of elms and chestnuts (Glover 1883) observed by Celia Fiennes. One such avenue marked the north drive, another continued the line of the long formal walk on the south-west axis of the old house, a third extended the walk along the north side of The Levelling, leading to a lodge at the south-west corner of The Gorse. Another avenue picked up a line south from the dam beneath the top pond, south-west of the present Hall. The Topographer, 1790, remarked that 'the Earl of Chesterfield had robbed his beautiful park of most of its venerable ornaments'.

To the south of the north-east drive, north of the lower ponds and 850m north-east of the present Hall, stands a substantial C20 country house. Completed in 1989 to the designs of Digby Harris working for Richard Perkins, a descendent of Sir Herbert Wragg, son of J D Wragg, this was formerly the site of the late C17 Dower House.

In addition to parkland to either side of the avenue from the north-east, Kip illustrates a group of deer in the enclosure between The Levelling and the kitchen garden to the north.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The brick-walled kitchen garden lies on the west side of the north drive, 300m to the north-west of the Hall.

## 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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OS 6" to 1 mile: 1924 edition

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