

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

STANFORD HALL

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**STANFORD HALL**

Name: STANFORD HALL

District: West Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Stanford

County: Leicestershire

District: Harborough (District Authority)

Parish: South Kilworth

County: Leicestershire

District: Harborough (District Authority)

Parish: Swinford

County: Leicestershire

District: Harborough (District Authority)

Parish: Westrill and Starmore

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.417570  
Longitude: -1.1443042  
National Grid Reference: SP5829480297  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1000509  
Date first listed: 01-Feb-1987

## Details

Gardens and a park, landscaped in the mid C18 but with traces of the geometric layout of c 1700 surviving, associated with a country house.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1540 the manor of Stanford was purchased by Sir Thomas Cave, who until 1539 had held it of Selby Abbey. His great-great-grandson, Thomas, was created baronet in 1641. Sir Thomas's son Roger (d 1703), who had inherited in 1670 and served as MP for Coventry in 1681 and 1685, built the present Hall on a new site in the last years of the C17. Sir Roger's son, Thomas, died in 1719 (when the great parlour was still being done up), but his widow lived on until 1774, outliving their elder son Sir Verney Cave (dsp 1734). He was succeeded by his brother Thomas, fifth baronet, barrister and antiquary, who in 1737 added

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the stables complex and later landscaped the park and added the kitchen garden. He died in 1778, and his son, also Thomas, sixth baronet, in 1780. He was succeeded by his son Thomas, seventh baronet (d 1792), and he by his sister Sarah Cave, third Baroness Braye (d 1862). Stanford remains (1998) in private hands.

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Stanford Hall and its park lie immediately north of the village of Stanford on Avon, 10km north-east of Rugby. The Hall lies on low, level ground on the west bank of the River Avon, here the county boundary with Northamptonshire. The river forms the principal boundary down the eastern side of the park, feeding from the 1.5km long Stanford Reservoir which abuts the north-east corner of the park. East of the Hall the boundary line diverts east of the river, here dammed to form a lake, to follow a minor road into Stanford. Although now only a small hamlet principally south of the church, earthworks north-east of the church (and immediately east of the registered area) show that the village was once far more extensive. Local roads also define the northern and southern limits of the park; otherwise its perimeter follows field edges and streams. The area here registered is c 200ha.

#### ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main approaches to the Hall are from the south, via a drive created in the 1920s off the Stanford to Swinford road which leads straight towards the south front of the Hall. At the south end of that drive are iron gates (listed grade II) of the C18 or C19. Maps and other evidence show several earlier approaches from the south. One, still partly extant, entered the park off the Swinford road 400m west of the present entrance and ran via an oak avenue along the edge of the park before turning north-east to approach the Hall along another avenue. A second approach, the Waterfall Drive, entered the park north-east of the churchyard, passing via an ashlar stone bridge with segmental arch (listed grade II) across the River Avon at the south end of the lake before swinging north towards the Hall up an avenue. To the south of the Hall is a large, railed, semicircular forecourt with turning sweep, with central, wrought-iron gates (listed grade II) of the late C18 or C19. The main drive however turns around the east side of the forecourt to a gravel yard between the east side of the Hall and the stables; iron gates on the east side of the yard (listed grade II) of the C18 or C19 originally stood north-east of the church, at the end of the Waterfall Drive. The yard serves a doorway on the east side of the Hall inserted c 1737 when the stables were built; balustraded steps up to the door are of 1880. The Hall can also be approached from the north and there are routes from Walcote, 5km to the north-west, and from South Kilworth, 3km to the north-east.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Stanford Hall (listed grade I) was built between 1697 and 1700 by William Smith (d 1724), for Sir Roger Cave. It is a double-pile, H-plan house of stone with a hipped roof. The main front, to the south, is of two storeys with basement and attic and nine bays wide. The wings, each of two bays, are shallow; those to the rear of the Hall are deeper. While the south front is of ashlar the rest of the building is of brick with stone dressings. William Smith's better-known brother, Francis (d 1738), was responsible for the subsequent remodelling of the east front. Other early changes to the Hall included the blocking in 1745 of the central five, second-storey windows on the south front to facilitate improvements to the great hall by William Smith Jnr (d 1747), Francis' eldest son and successor in business.

Some 50m north-east of the Hall, and at a slightly lower level, is a stables court (listed grade II\*) of 1737 designed by Francis Smith. Of brick with stone dressings, it is of two storeys and nine bays, the central three slightly projecting, pedimented, and with a central archway. The stables face south, and form a key element of the architectural composition as the Hall is approached up the main formal drive. The range houses a museum, tea rooms and other visitor facilities. Further service buildings (listed grade II) of the same date, including a smithy and cart house, lie behind (north of) the main courtyard around a second court. The late C17 house replaced a manor house whose site was traditionally believed to lie north-west of the village churchyard, beneath the kitchen garden (see below).

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** North of the Hall is a formal lawn, c 60m north/south by 40m, probably contemporary with it and originally a bowling green. The lawn is surrounded by a gravel path, across the west line of which is a small formal garden of the late C20. To the west of the main lawn is a smaller, less formal, lawn, while north-west and north-east of the lawn, and framing the view from it, are shrubberies with mature trees. To the north of the lawn is a ha-ha, beyond which is the main north avenue which provides the main vista from that side of the Hall and the formal lawn.

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North of the stables, within the second court, is a rose garden with formal beds established in the 1920s. Iron gates, probably C18, stand on the centre of the south, west and east sides.

William Smith's building contract of 1697 included an agreement to pull down a garden house, presumably in the vicinity of the old manor house.

#### PARK

The park divides into two parts. Around the Hall is what may be termed the inner park, which is low, permanent pasture and amply supplied with trees. Extensive areas of ridge and furrow survive, along with other, later, earthworks including a square ditched and banked enclosure north-west of the bridge across the south end of the lake. The northern half of the park is different, rising as it does onto Gravel Hill and Hovel Hill and containing far fewer trees. Although there are some small areas under arable cultivation it is also mainly permanent pasture underlain with ridge and furrow.

The Hall lies between two narrow lake-like pieces of water. To its east is a 500m long lake, formed in the mid C18 by widening the River Avon, the south end of which broadens out and has two heavily wooded islands. The south end of the lake is held back by a cascade-like weir across the River Avon, immediately south of which is the bridge, listed as late C18 but mostly probably part of the works of the fifth baronet who died in 1778, which carried the Waterfall Drive from Stanford village (see above). At the north end of the lake the public road crosses the Avon via a C20 brick bridge, inset in the parapet wall of which is a county boundary stone of 1844. Some 150m west of the Hall is the Serpentine, a curving piece of water retained by a low bank along its west side and with an early C19 monument (listed grade II) to the greyhound Bella on its east bank.

The main avenue in the park, double, wide-set, and largely of oak, runs on a straight line for 1.5km north from the north edge of the garden onto Hovel Hill. West of the Serpentine are the few trees which survive from the radiating avenues which remained one of the most notable features of the park until the mid C20. The remains of at least six, each 400-500m long, radiate out to the west of the Hall, running up to the line of the Park Belt and The Rookery wood which lies behind (north-west) of it. Their lines were softened in the mid C18 as part of Sir Thomas Cave's landscaping of the park. Other avenues carry an arm of the park, now farmland, up to the edge of Swinford village.

North of the bridge across the north end of the lake, a straight, 500m long channel carries a by-pass 50m west of and parallel with the River Avon. This was excavated c 1880 by Adrian Verney-Cave, son of the fifth Baron Bray and later the sixth Baron, to power a turbine. The woodland between it and the Avon was subsequently planted up as Pleasure Ground; this survives, much overgrown. The main block of woodland in the park is The Rookery, 500m north-west of the Hall, the area of which was roughly doubled c 1900.

A straight, 140m long, 8m wide bank situated 100m north-east of the south-west corner of the park is probably an artificial warren mound (pillow mound) for rabbits.

There is an icehouse (listed grade II), possibly of 1812 or 1819 (inscription unclear), in Old Gravel Hill Spinney, c 1km north of the Hall.

The Stanford estate papers are largely uninvestigated, and details of the history of the garden and park remain to be elucidated. The geometric scheme of radiating avenues aligned on the Hall, visible on maps up to the mid C20, was probably set out c 1700 at the time the Hall was built. Nichols (1795, 354) intimates that in the C18 the park extended both sides of the Avon. Of the later changes to the park, the evidence supports Nichols' statement (*ibid*) that alterations by the fifth baronet (d 1778) included plantations, water etc in the park. The alterations included softening the lines of the avenues by selective felling and planting, creating the Serpentine (1734 x 1746) and, by damming the Avon, the lake to the east of the Hall on which he kept 'a sloop or two of his own building' (quoted in Lines 1970, 23). Other than the changes to the approaches from the south there appear to have been virtually no later alterations. There were deer in the park until the Second World War.

In 1899 Lieutenant Percy Pilcher, pioneer aviator, was killed 500m east of the Hall while piloting his glider The Hawk. A monument, visible from the park, was erected on the spot by the Royal Aeronautical Society.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The brick-walled kitchen garden, c 130m north/south by c 80m east/west, lies in the extreme south-east corner of the park. In 1998 the interior was uncultivated, and planning permission had been granted for the erection of houses within the garden. Traditionally the garden occupies the site of the pre 1697 house which William Smith was contracted to

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pull down, although an archaeological evaluation in the later 1990s found no trace of it. The walls look mid to late C18, which accords with Nichols' statement (1795, 354) that additions at Stanford by the fifth baronet (d 1778) included a kitchen garden. REFERENCES J Nichols, *History and Antiquities of Leicester* 2, pt i (1795), pp 350-4, (4 vols, in 8 parts, 1795-1811, reprinted 1971) *Country Life*, 124 (4 December 1958), p 1284; (18 December 1958), pp 1472-5 C Lines, *Stanford Hall: A Family Portrait* (nd, c 1970) H Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840* (1978), pp 747-51, 763 DNB *Missing Persons* (1993), pp 526-7 *Stanford Hall*, guidebook, (nd, c 1998)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: Leicestershire sheet 53 SW, 1st edition published 1890 OS 25" to 1 mile: Leicestershire sheet 53.10, 1st edition published 1886 Leicestershire sheet 53.10, 2nd edition published 1904

Archival items Stanford Hall estate papers (Leicestershire Record Office)

Description written: June 1998 Amended: May 1999 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: July 1999

## 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.