

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BELFORD HALL

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Name:	BELFORD HALL
District:	Northumberland (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Belford
label.localisation:	Latitude: 55.600175 Longitude: -1.8226736 National Grid Reference: NU 11272 34076 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001574 Date first listed: 07-Jan-2002

Details

A mid C18 park and pleasure ground surrounding a country house by James Paine, with later landscaping in the early C19, possibly to designs by John Dobson.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1726 Abraham Dixon, a Newcastle master mariner, acquired lands at Belford for £12,000 (Country Life 1988). His son, also Abraham, succeeded in 1743 and set about improving the village and building a new mansion for himself to replace the old manor house which stood on the west side of the village. James Paine (1717-89) was employed to design the mansion, which was sited on a south-facing hillside to the east of the village. The building was completed by 1756. A plan dated 1754 shows the outline of the house, flanked by C-shaped wings, with a formal landscape composed of walks flanked by avenues radiating out to the north. A large lawn was laid out below the entrance portico on the south front of the mansion, and pleasure grounds were laid out to the east, including an octagonal gothic tower prominently sited on a crag to provide extensive views across the countryside and to the sea. The tower may also have been designed by Paine. The architect John Adam visited in March 1759 and in his account of the site referred to the tower and its extensive views (Country Life 1961). Another visitor, John Wallis, in 1769 noted:

a beautiful shrubbery by a piece of water under a semicircular rocky mount, on the top of which is a neat little tower, with port holes, and at an agreeable distance to the south-east, near a Chinese cottage, is an opening between two hills which lets in a prospect of the sea.

On the death of Abraham Dixon II in 1782 Belford was inherited by his great nephew, George Onslow, later Lord Onslow. In 1810 the estate was sold to a Newcastle merchant, William Clark, who called in the architect John Dobson (1787-1865) to reorder the house. As part of this work the entrance was moved to the north front, and at the same time works were carried out in the park, extending it and reworking the drive system.

In 1921 the estate was sold out of the Clark family into divided ownership. During the Second World War the Hall was requisitioned and huts built around it. Following the war it was left unoccupied and fell into a derelict state, until in the mid 1980s it was converted by the Northern Heritage Trust into apartments. The estate remains (2001) in divided ownership.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Belford Hall lies between Berwick-upon-Tweed, 19km to the north and Alnwick, 22km to the south, on the east side of the village of Belford. The c 60ha site is bounded by a lane to the north linking the north end of the village with the A1 Great North Road, by the village to the west, to the south by agricultural land, and to the east by the A1. The north boundary is marked by a 1.6m high stone wall which turns south along the east boundary to run for c 175m alongside Turret Wood. The wall also turns south at the west end of the north boundary, to run alongside North Bank. A further stretch runs alongside the south end of the High Street to the north and south of the main entrance to the park. The south boundary is marked by the Belford Burn, beyond which lies agricultural land. The ground slopes down from north to south, the highest point being the north-west corner of the site, with the southern half of the park occupying largely level ground. The setting is largely agricultural, with the village adjacent to the west, and views west from the park and principal walled garden over the village houses to the parish church. Cragmill Quarry lies adjacent beyond the north boundary. Long views extend south from the mansion, pleasure grounds, and park across open agricultural land to a distant ridge, as well as to the south-east to the North Sea. Further long views extend east and north-east from the pleasure grounds towards the coast, particularly towards Holy Island.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach enters the site off the south end of Belford High Street, 600m south of the Hall. The carriage entrance, designed by John Dobson c 1818, is set back off the road, flanked by stone piers, these in turn flanked by a further pair of piers which formerly supported gates to pedestrian entrances. The gateways are in turn flanked by convex stone walls leading back out to the road (the whole entrance listed grade II). North of the gateway, on the west side of the drive, stands a single-storey stone lodge (listed grade II) with a small portico overlooking the drive, built in 1818 Greek Revival style and also by John Dobson. From here the south drive curves gently northwards through the park, breasting a gentle slope and overlooked by the Hall. Some 300m south of the Hall, adjacent to the west side of the drive, stand several mid C20 semi-detached houses (outside the area here registered). Close by these to the north lies the larger of the two walled gardens. The drive turns north-east 75m west of the Hall to arrive at a portico on the north front. A spur leads off the drive 75m south-west of the Hall, crossing formal lawns to arrive at the portico on the south front, which is reached via a flight of stone steps. From here the spur continues north-east across the lawns, curving around the east side of the Hall before returning along the north front. A back drive, marked by a single-storey lodge, enters the park 150m north of the Hall, off the north boundary lane. From here the drive curves south-east past the west side of Home Farm to join the spur off the south drive 40m north-east of the Hall. A further lodge, North Lodge (now, 2002, called Neralcm), stands at the north-west corner of the site, 225m north-west of the Hall. The single-storey lodge is a mid C20 replacement of a C19 building. It was formerly linked to the Hall via a curving drive which led across the northern parkland, but this drive has since disappeared.

When the Hall was built in the mid 1750s the principal entrance was on the south side, approached via a double flight of steps. The approach to the south front was via a drive which led east off the west boundary at the south end of North Bank. The entrance to this former drive is marked by a single-storey stone lodge which stands behind, and is masked by, the stone boundary wall, but the course of the drive appears to have been lost. The 1754 plan shows the course of the drive marked in pencil. When John Dobson remodelled the house he moved the entrance to the north front, constructing a new entrance hall and portico, and probably constructing the present (2001) single flight of steps to replace Paine's double flight on the south front. The c 1818 plan shows the course of the west drive shaded, with the proposal for the south drive pencilled in. The 1860 OS map shows these two drives, together with the north-west drive and North Lodge. The south drive is shown with a double carriageway separated by a strip of land planted with parkland trees, the western section of which is no longer visible. From the OS map it appears that a further drive at that time entered at the north-east corner of the site, giving access to the Home Farm complex on the north boundary.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Belford Hall (listed grade I) stands towards the north boundary of the site. It is built in Palladian style, of ashlar with a slate roof, and is set into the hillside which slopes up to the north. The central block, built by James Paine 1754?6, was designed to have two lower flanking wings which were not added until John Dobson's remodelling in 1818, when the main entrance was moved to the north side. The Hall was extensively restored in the 1980s following a long period of

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neglect. From the cellars a tunnel extends out below the forecourt on the north front to a large subterranean stone-built vaulted coal cellar (listed grade II as an icehouse).

The former stable block stands removed from the Hall, 125m to the north, now (2001) set within the buildings of Home Farm. GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens and pleasure grounds are divided into two main sections: formal lawns adjacent to the Hall, and the informal pleasure grounds within Turret Wood to the north-east of the Hall.

The Hall is flanked to west, south, and east by lawns which are bounded by metal estate fencing and planted with scattered mature trees. Two formal panels of lawn flanking the central block of the Hall are bounded on the north side by the wings of the Hall, these in turn being flanked by stone retaining quadrant walls supporting the rising ground above. To the south of the Hall a further lawn leads down a slope to the park.

The Hall and lawns are separated from the Turret Wood pleasure grounds to the east by a small field known as The Paddock, at the south-east corner of which stands a metal kissing gate which formerly gave access to the Wood. The Wood surrounds a field to the north on three sides, the north-east and south-west arms being narrower than the central south-east section. A stone ha-ha marks the boundary between the Wood and the south-east side of the field, running approximately parallel to, and along the length of, the serpentine pond within the Wood. The Wood occupies undulating ground, with steep-sided slopes overlooking a valley which runs from south to north through the centre. Many mature trees clothe the Wood, including large yews scattered throughout, although there has recently (2001) been a programme of clearance. The informal path system shown on C19 and early C20 maps is largely no longer visible. To the east of the serpentine pond is a steep-sided crag on which stands a gothic tower (c 1750s, listed grade II), c 400m north-east of the Hall.

The crag is approached from the south by a smoothly sloping ramp which leads north, overlooking the serpentine pond to the west as it rises to the tower which stands on a plateau. The octagonal tower (now, 2001, roofless) was probably designed by Paine (Belford Hall report, 2001) and built during the construction of the Hall, or shortly after. Of two storeys in height (the floor of the upper storey has gone), it is built of brick faced with stone, with internally a fireplace and three rounded-headed niches; the entrance is on the south off the ramp. Three ogee-headed windows provide views to the west, over the pond, north towards Holy Island (although this is largely obscured by mature tree growth, 2001), and east across agricultural land towards the coast. The remains of a flight of steps lead down the north side of the crag, the sides of which are planted with ferns remaining from a C19 outdoor fernery. The course of the steps links up with a path which returns between the west side of the crag and the east side of the pond, rejoining the south end of the ramp.

From the ha-ha to the north-west of the pond views extend north towards the coast and Holy Island. The south-east boundary of the Wood overlooks the parkland and beyond this are views across agricultural land to a ridge to the south and towards the coast to the south-east and east. Formerly a path led from the kissing gate set in the south-west boundary of the Wood to the south end of the ramp leading up to the crag (OS 1925).

Wallis' description of 1769 refers to a Chinese cottage within the pleasure grounds; this feature has disappeared and its site is not known for certain, but it probably stood either on the south-east or north-west boundary of Turret Wood.

A further area of former pleasure grounds, now (2001) an open paddock, lies to the north, north-east, and north-west of the Hall. It is bounded on the north and west by belts of trees adjacent to the boundary wall and incorporates The Paddock to the north-east. By the 1750s, as shown on the 1754 plan, this pleasure ground was laid out with a series of walks flanked by avenues but by 1818 these had been replaced by an informal pleasure ground laid out with scattered trees. The Paddock formed the eastern section of this early C19 pleasure-ground design, and was laid out in similar fashion, leading into Turret Wood. By 1860 (OS) the whole paddock area was heavily planted with scattered trees, and the area north of the Hall was identified as the Deer Park. Several paths and drives curved through it, leading between the Hall, North Lodge, and the stables now (2001) within Home Farm. A grassy knoll in the pasture, 50m north of the Hall, may be an icehouse.

PARK The main area of parkland lies to the south and south-east of the Hall. It is laid partly to pasture, with the areas along the south and east boundaries laid out with a golf course. An oval pond, partly surrounded by a belt of mature trees and overlooked by the south front of the Hall and from the south drive, is situated 400m south-east of the Hall. The park is planted with scattered

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mature trees as singles and clumps, with a small spinney lying to the east of South Lodge. A belt of trees (now gone) formerly separated the two sections of the south drive carriageway (OS 1860).

By 1818 the area south of the Hall was an open area known as The Lawn, with to the east Turret Close and further enclosed fields to the south and west. The 1818 plan shows the site of the present oval pond pencilled in, as though a proposal for its creation. By 1860 (OS) scattered single trees and clumps were planted within the park and the oval pond was sheltered to the south-east by a spinney.

KITCHEN GARDEN Within the site are two walled kitchen gardens. The larger of the two stands 100m south-west of the Hall and is at present (2001) disused. It is built of brick and is trapezoidal in shape, its longest side being to the north where formerly a range of glasshouses stood against the heated wall. The garden is entered via a break at the north end of the east wall. Formerly a wall running from west to east divided the kitchen garden into two fairly equal-sized halves.

The second, smaller walled garden stands 150m north-east of the Hall, within Turret Wood, and is also at present (2001) disused. It is built of brick and stone with the south wall lowered to c 1m high. It was formerly approached via a serpentine path (no longer visible, 2001) leading from the kissing gate at the south-west corner of Turret Wood to the south-east corner of the walled garden (OS 1860).

REFERENCES

J Wallis, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Northumberland II*, (1769), p 416 *Gardener's Magazine*, 16 (1840), p 583 *Country Life*, 130 (13 July 1961), pp 64-5; no 4 (28 January 1988), pp 76-9 P Leach, James Paine (1988), pp 63-4, 140, 174 *Belford Hall, Northumberland*, unpublished report on the history of the site, (Belford Hall Management Company 2001) [copy on EH file]

Maps D Hastings, *A plan of a part of the town of Belford with some of the adjacent Inclosures Belonging to A Dixon*, 1754 (private collection) J Dobson, *Belford Estate Survey*, c 1818 (copy in Belford Hall report, 2001)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1860 3rd edition surveyed 1922, published 1925 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1860 2nd edition published 1897 3rd edition published 1925

Description written: December 2001 Amended: February 2002 Register Inspector: SR

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.