

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

OVERBURY COURT

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Name: OVERBURY COURT

County: Worcestershire

District: Wychavon (District Authority)

Parish: Kemerton

County: Worcestershire

District: Wychavon (District Authority)

Parish: Overbury

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.042479
Longitude: -2.0613354
National Grid Reference: SO 95890 38233
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000892
Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986

Details

An C18 landscape park and grounds, and formal gardens of the later C19 and C20, associated with a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the C17 and early C18 the manor of Overbury, owned by the Dean and Chapter of Worcester, was held on lease by the Parsons family. The last life was held by William Parsons (d 1714), after which a new lease was granted to John Martin, a banker, who rebuilt the house. The estate remained in the same family in the late C20.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Overbury lies roughly midway between Tewkesbury and Evesham, c 6km north-east of the former and c 10km south-west of the latter, on the south side of Bredon Hill. Overbury Court stands on the west side of the attractive estate village of Overbury, 100m north of the Conderton to Kemerton road which cuts across the southernmost portion of the park. The park itself occupies a linear tract of land c 2.5km from north to south and c 750m wide in its northern part, rising gently from c 50m above OSD at Brake Pool in the southern extremity of the park and then more steeply north of Overbury Court onto Bredon Hill, the northern boundary of the park being at c 243m above OSD. On Bredon Hill the park boundary largely follows field walls, whereas lower down it mainly follows hedges and wire fences.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Overbury Court is approached from the east, through a tall gateway (listed grade II) north of Overbury church. The gateway, of 1887 by Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912), comprises tall, square, limestone ashlar piers with ball finials, linked by an elaborate wrought-iron archway. The wrought-iron gates are of the same date and are similarly ornate. Quadrant walls run off to either side. The gateway leads into an estate yard adjoining the house. A lodge (listed grade

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II) of c 1905 by Ernest Newton (1856-1922) lies east of Overbury Court. Two pedestrian gates lead south from the gardens onto the Conderton to Kemerton road. There are gates into the park at several points around its perimeter.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING After acquiring a lease of the manor John Martin rebuilt the house. That was burnt down in 1735 and a second new house built, Overbury Court. That (listed grade II*), of limestone ashlar with a hipped slate roof, was substantially altered by Richard Norman Shaw in 1897-1900, and again by Ernest Newton in 1909 and 1911 and by Victor Heal in 1959. The main west front is of seven bays and three storeys, with a three-bay centre projection with pediment. The south front, overlooking the main formal garden, has a five-bay elevation with a pedimented doorway with a Gibbs surround.

About 20m north of Overbury Court is an early C18 limestone coach house (listed grade II). This was altered during the Second World War, and in the late C20 served as offices. Some 40m to the south-east is a limestone ashlar game larder (listed grade II), again probably by Shaw.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The pleasure grounds lie west and south of the house, now including, as the south-west portion, the former kitchen garden. A low, stone-walled terrace with gravel path runs along the west front of the house. This looks west across a lawn, at the west end of which are two small pools arranged as a serpentine loop and connected by a small, stepped cascade. A second cascade at the east end of the more northerly introduces water from a broad rill which runs along the north side of the garden, bringing water from an embanked pond on the east side of the estate yard. Mature specimen trees, mainly planes, are planted around the pools. The lawn is bounded to the north and west by iron railings, and to the south by a tall yew hedge and the stone wall of the former kitchen garden.

Off the north-east corner of the lawn is a rock garden largely concealed within 3m tall box bushes. It comprises flagged and revetted paths and steps, monolithic stones, and rock pools. East of the rock garden, and tucked in behind the estate office, is a small courtyard garden.

South of the house the gardens are laid out in a formal manner. The south front of the house gives onto a flagged courtyard bounded to the east and west by 2.5m tall yew hedges. This overlooks the Italian Garden, which measures c 70m east/west by 50m north/south. A terrace runs along the north side of the garden, with a yew bower at the east end. Parallel rows of Irish yews, which continue the line of the house's western terrace, run north/south down the centre of the garden. In the east half of the garden is a swimming pool, and in the west a sunken croquet lawn, both being rectangular in plan with apsidal ends. To the south the garden is bounded by a clipped yew hedge, broken at the end of the grass walk between the yew rows with a clairvoie which gives a view across the sunken Conderton to Kemerton road to the park beyond and especially to Brake Pool 400m to the south. East and west of the Italian Garden are flower borders, both separated from it by clipped yew hedges. To the east, and against the tall, stone, churchyard wall which here bounds the grounds, is a scalloped-edged border with gold and silver planting. A gravel path along the front of this leads to a stone terrace at the south end and to a stone gazebo, probably built in 1923 as a copy of one at Westall Manor, Burford, which overlooks the swimming pool. To the west of the Italian Garden is an herbaceous border known as the Kemerton Walk. This is bounded on its west side by the stone wall of the former kitchen garden, which by the later C20 had been brought in as a further compartment of the pleasure grounds with tennis court (to the south-west) and formal rose garden and cutting border (to the north), the interior otherwise being grassed and planted with fruit trees.

The serpentine ponds and cascades west of the house are presumably C18 and part of one, with a tree-lined walk alongside, is shown on an engraving of c 1781. Formal gardens adjoined the house in the C19. The west terrace was constructed c 1870 and the rock garden some time after that. In 1900 a conservatory (demolished in later C20) off the west side of the house was modified and enlarged by Sir Richard Biddulph Martin. During the 1920s several leading garden designers worked at Overbury: Geoffrey Jellicoe (1900-96) and Guy Dauber remodelled parts of the gardens, and Aubrey Waterfield helped design the Italian Garden. In 1968 Russell Page (1906-85) was brought in to simplify the gardens and reduce their extent, bringing railings nearer the house to the north and west and introducing ground-cover plants.

PARK The landscape park extends south-west and north of the house and pleasure grounds. Its southern half is mainly fields of permanent grassland with specimen trees, and here can be seen considerable areas of ridge and furrow and other earthworks presumably predating imparkment. On Bredon Hill to the north the park is largely given over to arable land. The main views of the park from the house are south to Brake Pool (see above), around which are some ornamental trees; west, across fairly level

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ground; and north, up the steeply rising slope of Bredon Hill. The hillslope is well planted with specimen trees, especially on the crest of the slope where north-west of the house there is a short avenue of horse chestnut trees.

The northern two-thirds of the park, above 125m OSD, continues to rise northward, the main route through it being a shallow, wooded, north/south valley which runs past The Lodge (a stone cottage) on the west side of the track and Park Farm to the east. North of The Lodge is an old cherry orchard. The northernmost 800m of the park, around Park Farm, is arable land with no immediately apparent parkland features, either ornamental or relating to any use as a deer park.

Midway down the east side of the park, at the north end of Overbury village, is a small group of pools (Silk Mill Pool etc) in an area of woodland. Mature ornamental trees, mostly yews, lie around Silk Mill Pool and the track which loops north and then west past it, through Overbury Wood and into the park 400m south of The Lodge.

Maps show the park to have been present by 1772, and indicate that in 1787 and 1805 it contained deer. The pools north of the village relate to textile mills documented hereabouts from the medieval period to the C19 and perhaps also to an iron forge operating in the early C18.

KITCHEN GARDEN The former kitchen garden is surrounded by limestone walls. The north wall, which is topped by a tall yew hedge, kinks around the south end of the more southerly serpentine pool at the end of the west lawn. That line suggests the present kitchen garden walls were built after the ?C18 pools.

REFERENCES T R Nash, Collections for the History of Worcestershire I, (1794), pl opp p 559 The Victoria History of the County of Worcester 3, (1913), pp 468-70 P Reid, Burke's and Savills Guide to Country Houses: Volume II, Herefordshire (1980), p 222 R Sidwell, West Midland Gardens (1981), pp 76-8

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: Worcestershire sheet 48 SE, 1st edition published 1884 Worcestershire sheet 55 NE, 1st edition published 1884 OS 25" to 1 mile: Worcestershire sheet 55.4, 1st edition published 1885

Archival items Photographs at Overbury Court (private collection)

Description written: 1997 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: September 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.