

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CHICHELEY HALL

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Name:	CHICHELEY HALL
District:	Milton Keynes (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Chicheley
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.104418 Longitude: -0.67851520 National Grid Reference: SP 90607 45944 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000596 Date first listed: 30-Aug-1987

Details

C18 formal gardens, designed by George London c 1700, surrounding a slightly later country house, set within a small park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Sir John Chester inherited Chicheley in 1698 and built the present house c 1719-24, replacing a Tudor mansion built by Anthony Cave. Sir John started work on the garden layout in 1700, employing George London (d 1714), although his exact input is unknown. Sir John began with the three-sided canal, and seems to have completed much of the layout by 1701. Having finished work on the house in 1724 he invited Charles Bridgeman (d 1738) to advise, who visited in January 1726, but it seems that Bridgeman's proposals were not carried out, Sir John having died only a month later. An undated plan exists for the naturalisation of the east garden, possibly in Bridgeman's hand, but this work was never implemented (BRO). The estate remained in the hands of the Chester family, although it was let out in the late C19 and C20, until 1952 when it was bought by Lord Beatty. Little structural alteration has taken place to either house or gardens to the present day. The estate remains (1997) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Chicheley Hall is located 4km north-east of Newport Pagnell, in the north-eastern corner of Buckinghamshire, on a low ridge adjacent to the A422 Newport to Bedford road. The 20ha site is bounded to the west by the small village of Chicheley and the A422 which passes through it, to the north and east by gently undulating agricultural land, and to the south by Chicheley Road leading to North Crawley. Much of the site is level, except for the east side of the garden which slopes down towards a brook in the valley to the east, and the south park which slopes down to Chicheley Road. The setting is largely agricultural. Chicheley parish church and its tower are highly visible from various parts of the site.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach is from the south, entering off North Crawley lane, climbing the gentle slope up towards the south front of the Hall on a drive which is raised in places, flanked by a straight, 175m long, double lime avenue. The avenue finishes at the entrance to the level south garden, 75m south of the main entrance to the Hall, the drive continuing between the two flanking grass panels of the enclosed south, entrance garden, to a gravel sweep by the Hall. The centre of the south front is visible from the bottom of the drive, the view of the Hall gradually widening out during progress along the drive, with views across the park and dovecote to the west, and out over the agricultural land of the park

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to the east. At the top of the avenue the full width of the Hall is revealed, framed very simply by the lawn in front of it and garden walls to west and east.

A service approach, from the west, along the lane off the A422 from the village, reaches first the entrance to the service areas on its north side, then meets at its east end the main drive. A straight enclosed drive runs north from the lane, bounded by low brick walls separating it from the coach-house yard to the west, and the stable block to the east. This drive runs parallel to the west side of the Hall and service wings along their whole length, eventually opening into the north park adjacent to the kitchen garden and The Grove. Below the west front of the Hall it widens out into a cobbled courtyard surrounded by buildings and low brick walls and dominated by the church tower to the south-west. From the west side of the courtyard a flagged path between two brick-walled garden compartments provides access to the church via a door in the churchyard wall.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Chicheley Hall (c 1719-24, listed grade I), a red-brick house with stone dressings, lies at the centre of the site, surrounded by the gardens. It was built by Sir John Chester shortly before he died, replacing a Tudor house, parts of the fabric of which were reused inside the new house. It is of U shape, with a supporting pair of brick office pavilions with central pediments to the north and south, offset to the west from the north/south axis of the Hall. That to the north is a domestic service wing (listed grade II*), formerly housing the laundry and kitchen, linked to the Hall by a quadrant wall; that to the south forms the stable block (listed grade II*). These pavilions are important in the symmetrical composition of the east front, such that, from the far side of the east garden, Hall and pavilions appear as one continuous building.

The views from the Hall are to the agricultural land to the north, along the line of an avenue, now replanted, in the north park, south down the drive and avenue, and east across the garden to the shallow valley and hillside beyond, and North Crawley church tower flanked by trees in the distance.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Three main, formal garden compartments flank the Hall to the north, south and east. The area to the west and north-west of the Hall is filled with walled compartments consistent with the service function of this side of the house.

The south garden is a large rectangular entrance court through which the drive runs to the main entrance front of the Hall. It is bounded to the north by the Hall, to the east by a brick retaining wall with stone coping (C18, listed grade II) backed by a clipped yew hedge planted on the higher ground of the terrace in the east garden, to the south by the first trees of the avenue, and to the west by a brick wall with a central opening flanked by stone gate piers (C18, listed grade II), which separates it from the stable block, although this building is still a dominant feature in the south garden. Pre-war photographs (CL 1936, 482-8) show an iron fence across the south end of the garden and no hedge along the east boundary, allowing a clearer view of the stable block from the east garden. The area is laid out with two simple grass panels flanking the drive, with borders along the outer edges, and the rectangular gravel sweep in front of the Hall.

The east garden is the largest compartment. A terrace runs along the length of the east front of the Hall, extending parallel to the east sides of the north and south gardens. This terrace, with its gravel path, provides views of the east garden below as well as views of the north and south gardens at each end. Beyond is a level, almost square, 1ha lawn enclosed on its north, east and south sides by the arms of a U-shaped canal. The north and south arms of the canal are shorter (c 100m) than the central, linking, east arm (c 130m). The view east from the terrace is now (1997) partially obscured by trees on the east boundary, but from upper windows on the east front a wide view across the valley beyond opens up, particularly towards North Crawley church tower, flanked by trees, on the distant ridge to the south-east. A grassed terrace walk allows access around the outer perimeter of the canal. To the north is an area of trees known as The Wilderness with the ruins of a small, red-brick, C18 pavilion (listed grade II) at the west end, and many large yews surrounding it. Views north from this area look over the north park to agricultural land beyond, and also to an eyecatcher at Grange Farm. Below, and parallel with the east arm of the canal, is a descending line of four rectangular ponds. The ponds are themselves separated by grassed banks, the largest of which lies between the central (larger) two ponds. This area is planted with trees and shrubs, with a farm hedge and ditch dividing it from the agricultural land to the east. South of the south arm of the canal an open grass slope runs down gently to a red-brick ha-ha separating this area from the south park, and presenting a view of the rising land south of the North Crawley lane.

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The north garden mirrors the south garden; an enclosed rectangle running north from the Hall with a central gravel path, dominated on its west side by the service wing, with views east to the east garden. The area is largely lawn, with flanking borders, and recently planted formal features at the north end including a lime allée and laburnum walk. A red-brick wall forms the north boundary, with a hedge along the east edge. A curved, white-painted alcove is set into the centre of the east wall of the service wing, with a view east across the lawn in the east garden.

PARK There are two small areas of park. That to the south slopes down from the southern edge of the formal gardens to the North Crawley lane, and is pasture with sparse trees, divided by the avenue. In the west half, close to the south end of the stable block, an octagonal brick dovecote with ogee domed roof and wooden cupola (C18, listed grade II*) lies alongside the remains of a lime avenue running at right angles to the main approach. The open north park, bounded on the west by the A422, includes an enclosed area of trees and scrub known as The Grove. An avenue stretching north has recently been planted, replacing an earlier one seen on late C19 OS maps.

KITCHEN GARDEN A series of irregular, brick-walled compartments lies west of the west drive, these having originally been functional gardens but now being mostly laid to lawn or overgrown, with the kitchen garden confined to two compartments to the north.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 17 (29 April 1905), pp 594-602; 79 (9 May 1936), pp 482-8; (16 May 1936), p 508; (23 May 1936), pp 534-5; 157 (13 February 1975), pp 378-81; (20 February 1975), pp 434-7 P Willis, Charles Bridgeman and the English Landscape Garden (1977), pp 50-1 N Pevsner and E Williamson, The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire (1994), pp 245-8
Maps Chicheley Tithe map, 1851, [good garden detail] (Buckinghamshire Record Office) Chester of Chicheley Papers (Buckinghamshire Record Office): Plan of the layout of a park, c 1725, (D/C/2/19A). [Plan is said to be by Bridgeman. Covers area to east where moat is; mostly tree/shrub plantings and path layout. Central area blank. Informal curvaceous paths and tree clumps and singles around edge of area. Shows two garden buildings close to house, start of avenue north of house, no avenue on south front of house.]

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1881(2 2nd edition published 1898

Archival items Chester of Chicheley Papers (Buckinghamshire Record Office) include: Garden labour accounts, 1738-40, 1749-69, 1783-8, 19 vols (D/C/2/51)

Description written: 1997 Register Inspector: SR Edited: June 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.