

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

GREAT BARR HALL

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	GREAT BARR HALL
District:	Sandwell (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
District:	Walsall (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.557156 Longitude: -1.9306320 National Grid Reference: SP 04800 95482, SP 05375 94417 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001202 Date first listed: 01-Jul-1986

Details

An C18 landscape park associated with a country house; associated with Humphry Repton and John Nash and George Gilbert Scott, and possibly with William Shenstone.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT In the mid C17 Richard Scott (d 1675), tenant of Old Hall (or High House), the manor house of Great Barr, built Nether-house Farm c 1km to the south-west near the bottom of a wooded valley. In the time of John Scott (d 1755) Nether House was apparently rebuilt or greatly extended and the ornamentation of the landscape begun. An early C19 tradition states that William Shenstone (1714-1763), later a kinsman of the family, helped lay out these improvements. The house was then tenanted until 1777 when his grandson Joseph Scott came to live there following his marriage. Over the next six years he ran through most of his fortune, much of it on rebuilding the house, thereafter known as Great Barr Hall. Some was also spent on its grounds. By c 1785 the Scotts' financial plight had driven them abroad, and Great Barr was leased to the Galton family, Birmingham Quakers. Samuel Galton junior was a member of the Lunar Society, the unofficial scientific body whose members did much to advance the Industrial Revolution, and this met occasionally at Great Barr between 1785 and 1796. The Galtons' lease was terminated in 1797 and Scott immediately called in Humphry Repton (1752-1818) and John Nash (1752-1835) to work on the park. He had presumably become acquainted with them through his kinsman Edward Foley, of the well-known Herefordshire family. Joseph died in 1828 and was succeeded by his son Sir Edward Scott (d 1851), who in the 1840s commissioned considerable improvements at Great Barr. His second wife Lydia Robinson, whom he married in 1848, was an associate of the Brontes; Branwell was supposedly infatuated with her. Sir Francis Scott (d 1863), Sir Edward's son and heir, undertook many changes to the house and park, which have been attributed to the architect George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878), whom he had met in Venice. In 1911, following the death of his widow in 1909, the house and park were sold to West Bromwich Poor Law Union. Three years later work began on Great Barr Park Colony for Mental Defectives, later renamed St Margaret's Hospital. The first phase, an elevated horse-shoe of buildings, was designed by the Birmingham architect Gerald McMichael. In the 1990s most of the extensive older hospital buildings were abandoned, although some clinic services

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continued to be provided from buildings of c 1990. Recently (2008) the hospital buildings were demolished and replaced with a new housing estate (not part of the area registered).

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Great Barr lies c 5km south-east of Walsall, the former Great Barr park forming a green valley corridor between the housing estates of Great Barr to the west and of Pheasey and Queslett to the east. The north boundary of the site is formed by Chapel Lane, and that to the south by the A4041. The west boundary now follows the line of the M6 motorway, which truncates the south-west tip of the park. The east boundary follows the line of the lakes. It bounds a housing estate built in the early C21 on the horse-shoe shaped site of the hospital buildings that occupied this former part of the park (not included in the registered area). The registered site comprises c 105ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Since the C17 there have been numerous approaches contrived to the Hall, some direct and others designed to show off the park. The Hall is approached from the north-west down Sutton's Approach, lined with later C20 horse chestnuts. This drive was laid out in the 1840s, at the same time Sutton's Bridge being built at the north end of the Upper Lake. The drive enters the grounds off Chapel Lane, the public road past Great Barr church; Chapel Lodge (c 1856) which stood on the west side of the drive has been demolished. Opposite the lodge site, on the north side of Chapel Lane, is Avenue Lodge, a red-brick lodge with blue diaper work of c 1856, probably by Gilbert Scott. Iron gate piers of the same date stand at the end of the Walsall Approach drive of 1797, now a footpath, which runs for 1km west through Merrion's Wood. At the end of that path is the mid C19 Walsall (or Merrion's) Lodge of 1854 (listed Grade II); it too has iron gate piers to one side. Sutton's Approach leads to the north side of the Hall and to its west front. From here a rough drive continues south, down the east side of the lakes. The present lodge on the centre of the south side of the park dates from the mid C20. A more important approach from the south was the drive through the woodland above the west side of the lakes, from the mid C19 Handsworth Lodge (listed grade II) at the south-west corner of the registered area. Laid out c 1799 the drive survives as a track.

From the stables on the east side of the Hall the Farm Approach of 1856 leads east past the site of Park Farm (built in 1856 on the east side of the walled garden); it originally ran to Beacon Lodge 500m beyond, now subsumed in the dense suburban housing of the 1960s and 1970s which abuts the east side of the registered area.

In the early C18 there was an ornamented walk to High House, past the west wall of the kitchen garden. This was done away with in the 1790s when Repton and Nash reworked the approaches to the Hall. As well as those noted above a further drive was constructed at that time from the south-east corner of the park, where the Queslett Lodge was built c 1800.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Great Barr Hall (listed Grade II*) stands central alongside the east boundary of the registered park, and has since the closure and demolition of St Margaret's Hospital been vacant and in poor condition. Built in 1777 for Joseph Scott, it is a rendered, gothic style building. It is set on relatively low ground, facing west towards its lake, and with a wooded bank rising immediately behind it. The main part of the Hall has a nine-bay front, with ogee-headed windows, buttresses done as octagonal turrets, and battlements. At the south end of the Hall is a red-brick with blue diaper work building of 1863 attributed to George Gilbert Scott, constructed as a chapel but never consecrated and used subsequently as a billiard room.

The Hall occupies the site of the mid C17 and later Nether-house Farm.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS West of the Hall is an overgrown lawn, laid out as the Great Meadow in the 1740s and reworked more formally with two low terraces and a central axial path in the 1840s. This lawn extended c 80m west to the Upper Lake, now silted up and overgrown.

On the bank above the Hall and c 150m to the south is a roughly circular grassed area, the site of the late C18 Flower Garden. On its north side is a two-storey brick range, the surviving element of the gothic greenhouse built c 1825 by Robert Lugar and illustrated in his *Villa Architecture* (pl 5) of 1828.

Creation of pleasure gardens around the Hall began in the early C18 under John Scott who created features including the Great Meadow, a shrubbery, and a summerhouse on the site of the Flower Garden.

PARK Merrion's Wood, the western arm of the park, is between 50m and 200m wide and 1km long. It comprises mature deciduous woodland through which runs a broad footpath along the line of the former drive, the whole managed as a public amenity by the local authority via a trust. Merrion's Wood was added to the estate by purchase in 1796.

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Occupying the high ground down the high, eastern border of the park is mature deciduous woodland: High Wood to the north, and Fox's Plantation to the south. Tradition states that the politician and statesman Charles James Fox (d 1806) had a hand in the laying out of the latter, and there is some evidence that Fox may have visited Great Barr in 1784 or 1785, about the time the Plantation was put in.

The main feature of the park is the two lakes which lie along the valley bottom. The more southerly, Big Pool, was formed c 1744. It is c 400m long and 100m wide. A dam at its north end retains the Upper Lake, which is narrower. Constructed c 1799 and once somewhat longer than Big Pool, its north end, west of the Hall, is now silted up and overgrown. Opposite the axial path west from the Hall is an embayment wherein stood a boathouse built in 1863 to a design by Gilbert Scott (now gone). The lakes are screened on the west by Holly Wood and beyond it the park (partly ploughed) with Gilbert's Wood at its centre, rises in the direction of the M6 motorway. From this part of the site there are views of Great Barr Hall (now partly obscured), situated on the other side above the lakes. Formerly there were also views from the Hall and the lakes of this part of the park. The western part of the site had been imparked by 1830 (see estate map of that date), probably by Joseph Scott who owned Great Barr Hall from 1777 until 1828.

As with the garden, the wider landscape around what was still then called Nether-house Farm began to be ornamented in the mid C18 by John Scott (mostly c 1744) and by the 1750s there was a cascade on the stream 200m north-west of the house and close to that cascade a botanic garden, while Big Pool had been created 500m to the south of the house. An early C19 tradition states that William Shenstone (1714-1763), later a kinsman of the family, helped lay out these improvements.

The work undertaken to the designs of Humphry Repton and John Nash in c1797, included laying out new approaches from the north (Walsall), south (Handsworth), and south-east (Queslett), constructing the Upper Pool, and making or enlarging the park's woodland, which was cut through with walks: High Wood, Fox's Plantation, and that down the west side of the lakes. The next and last main phase of work took place in the later 1850s when many buildings and features in the park were rebuilt to designs by Gilbert Scott.

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled garden, standing above and 150m north-east of the Hall, was built in the 1740s. The brick-walled compartment, partly collapsed and overgrown in 2008, is c 100m east/west by 60m north/south, and slopes markedly down from north to south. A rabbit warren was built in the garden c 1777.

REFERENCES Great Barr Park: A Survey of the Landscape, (De Bois Landscape Survey Group 1985) Reilly, R, Josiah Wedgwood (1992), 194, 198

Maps Estate map of Great Barr, 1830, by G Weddal Tithe Map for Adridge, 1839/40 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886 2nd edition published 1918 1937 edition

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION Great Barr Hall, Walsall, West Midlands, an C18 landscape park, is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * Group value: the C18 landscape park is contemporary with and provides the setting for Great Barr Hall (listed Grade II*). * Design interest: C18 and C19 design work by Humphry Repton, John Nash and Gilbert Scott, and possibly William Shenstone. * Intactness: the overall layout, boundaries and features of the park remain mostly intact and it retains strong visual links with Great Barr Hall.

Description written: 1997 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: October 1999 Amended: February 2009 Amended: June 2010

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.