

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

TABLEY HOUSE

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**TABLEY HOUSE**

Name:	TABLEY HOUSE
District:	Cheshire East (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Tabley Inferior
District:	Cheshire East (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Tabley Superior
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.295808 Longitude: -2.4163732 National Grid Reference: SJ7234577731 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000645 Date first listed: 10-Jun-1985

## Details

An C18 landscape park and C19 gardens and grounds associated with an C18 country house.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the Middle Ages Tabley was the home of the de Leycester family, who lived in the Old Hall on an island at the end of Nether Tabley Mere. This was enlarged and embellished in the C16 and C17 centuries, in the mid C17 by Sir Peter Leycester (created Bt 1660, d 1678), author of scholarly histories. Tabley was inherited in 1742 by Sir Peter Byrne through his mother; in 1744 he took the additional name of Leycester. One of the requirements of his inheritance was that he keep the Old Hall in good repair, an obligation maintained by the family until the partial collapse of the Old Hall from subsidence in the 1920s. Notwithstanding the continued maintenance of that house, Sir Peter Byrne Leycester later built an imposing new residence, c 750m to the north-east on higher ground. Hand-in-hand with the building of Tabley House went the laying out of a landscape park, which appears in views of Tabley commissioned from Richard Wilson (1714-82), Antony Devis (c 1729-1816) and others from the 1760s. On Sir Peter's death in 1770 Tabley was inherited by Sir John Fleming Leicester, later first Lord de Tabley, who formed a celebrated collection of contemporary British art. J M W Turner was among the artists who visited Tabley, where in the summer of 1808 he painted two views of the lake and park focussing on the battlemented tower: 'Tabley, Calm Morning', and 'Tabley, Windy Day'. Some of Leicester's collection survives at Tabley, in galleries he contrived on the west side of the House. He died in 1827, and after attaining his majority his son (d 1887) made various alterations at Tabley in the 1840s. The interests of the third Lord (d 1895) were more literary; his friend Tennyson said of him 'He is Faunus, he is a woodland creature' (de Figueiredo and Treuherz 1988, 165).

Tabley remained in private hands until 1975 when, on the death of Lt-Col John Leicester-Warren, it passed to the University of Manchester, which remained the owner in 1997. In the 1980s and 1990s the stables were converted to residential use and much of the House became a retirement home. The ground floor of the House however is managed by a Trust and opens to the public.

### DESCRIPTION

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**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Tabley House stands c 3km west of Knutsford. On three sides the registered area is bounded by major roads: to the west by the A556 from Altrincham to Northwich; to the north by the A5033 (Tabley Lane) which forms an eastwards spur from the latter road; and on the east by the M6 motorway which severs the easternmost 300m of the park. The minor road Sudlow Lane bounds the park to the south-east. To the south the boundary follows the southern fringe of the woodland which lies along the south bank of Tabley Mere, the lowest part of a relatively flat landscape. The area here registered is c 240ha.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main, modern approach to Tabley House is from the north via a winding drive off Tabley Lane. At its end is the Peacock Lodge (listed grade II), variously known earlier as the Knutsford, or White Lodge. This comprises a pair of brick, cube-like lodges of c 1770 either side of stone gate piers with iron gates. John Carr (1723-1807) may have been the designer.

Of a similar date is the White Lodge (listed grade II), which stands on the south-western side of the park. Also probably by John Carr, the two-storey, whitewashed brick building has a central, two-storey, semicircular archway with porthole windows on the first floor to either side. The drive from here shown on C19 maps, looping east and north to the west side of the House via the bridge at the north end of Tabley Mere, was no longer used in the later C20. Some old oaks stood either side of its line. Two late C19 lodges lie further north on the A5033. To the north of the home farm is Red Lodge (listed grade II). Probably built very shortly before 1881 when it is first mapped (OS 1st edition published 1881), the lodge is in the vernacular style with decoration including pargetted panels. Altrincham Lodge (post 1881), also on the A5033, stands close to the north-west corner of the park, while Sudlow Lodge (pre 1881) stands on the eastern extremity of the park, beyond the area here registered which ends at the M6 motorway. Both have applied timber framing to their upper storeys.

The various drives converge before dividing again to approach the courtyard on the north side of the House from both east and west. In the later C19 the final approaches to the House were via drives up double avenues of trees of c 1840, which terminated at iron railed gates mounted on squat brick piers, all probably of c 1770. Those avenues formed the greater part of a transverse axis which cuts through the courtyard on the north side of the House. The vistas down that were emphasised c 1840 when Francis Curzon added a substantial arch to either side of the yard. The Red Drive avenue extending west from the House was largely replanted c 1990 with limes on the outside and chestnuts on the inside. The east avenue partly survives (1997), although many of the extant trees are over-mature. The west avenue appears on an undated plan of the later C18 (Dawson Taylor 1992). Until c 1770 the Knutsford road ran north-east to south-west through the park, past the south side of the House. It was replaced by Tabley Lane.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Tabley House (listed grade I), designed by John Carr (1723-1807) of York and built between 1761-9, is the only example in Cheshire of a C18 Palladian country house, and was published in 1771 in *Vitruvius Britannicus* under the name Oaklands (Figueiredo and Treuherz 1988). It comprises a rectangular block in pink brick with a rusticated basement, piano nobile and attic, and with a projecting portico, pediment and staircase on the nine-bay south front which looks over the park. Low pavilions attached by curved brick corridors stand set back to either side. On the north side of the House is the new seven-bay entrance contrived in 1840-5 by the second Lord Tabley working with Robert Curzon, a young amateur architect and friend of the family. That entrance is approached through a broad enclosed court entered through stucco entrance arches, also added during the 1840-5 alterations.

The court is closed on the north side by a large and austere two-storey, red-brick stables complex (listed grade II), built c 1770 to a design by John Carr. In 1995-6 the stables were substantially remodelled and extended to form twenty-one dwellings. To the north of the stables is a lawn; in the centre of its north side is an octagonal brick pigeon house (listed grade II) with cupola, probably also of c 1770, with decorative blind windows on its ground floor.

In the later 1920s, when the Old Hall was finally abandoned, the C17 and C18 chapel which adjoined it was taken down and rebuilt next to Tabley House's west pavilion. St Peter's chapel (listed grade I) is linked to it by the Old Hall Room (listed grade II), which incorporates some of the more important architectural features rescued from the Old Hall.

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Substantial portions remain upstanding (1997) of the outer walls of Tabley Old Hall (listed grade II\*), enveloped by rough woodland. On the north side of the moat is Moat Farm (elements listed grade II), the Tabley home farm, a brick complex of the mid C17 and later.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** To the south of the House, and extending therefrom for c 50m, is a flat square lawn, separated from the park beyond by a 1m high brick wall of the mid C19 (listed grade II). A sundial (listed grade II) stands in the central-southern portion of the lawn, which projects as a shallow apse into the park. Smaller lawned compartments also lie to east and west of the House; these are still in part separated from the park by iron railings, possibly of the 1760s, of identical character to those attached to the east and west sides of the House and stables complex. On the east lawn are several clipped yews; these are all that survive of the elaborate mid C19 Italianate parterre gardens around the east, west and south sides of the House shown on Victorian photographs.

Extending for c 300m north of the House, and enveloping and screening the stables and kitchen garden, is a roughly circular shrubbery with specimen trees. Paths wind through the shrubbery, and south of the kitchen garden is the remains of a mature avenue, The Lime Walk. North of the pigeon house, to the north of the stables, is Mirror Pool, an irregular pond. On its island is a dogs' graveyard (stones removed during 1990s), while the stream which feeds into the north side of the Pool is crossed by a small balustraded concrete bridge of c 1900. The western part of the shrubbery has been known since the 1920s as The Bird Sanctuary; a second small pond lies on the west side of this. A third pond, The Carp Pool, lies in the north-west corner of the shrubbery. No trace remains (1997) of two structures shown on late C19 OS maps: a summerhouse south of Carp Pool, and an icehouse c 75m north-east of the north-east corner of the walled garden. It is believed (by the long-time agent in 1997) that statuary was placed around the shrubbery; again, none survives in 1997.

**PARK** Tabley House lies north of the centre of what is now a roughly rectangular park, c 1.8km from its northern boundary on Tabley Lane (walled c 1790) to the southern shore of Tabley Mere. The Mere (also known as Tabley Pool), which is the park's main feature, is curving and irregularly shaped, and lies c 800m south of the Hall across level grass parkland with occasional clumps and parkland trees. Royd Wood runs along the south shore of the lake and provides a backdrop to it from the House. On a small island in the western half of the Mere is the round, brick, battlemented, three-storey Folly Tower (listed grade II) of c 1780 which dominates Turner's paintings of 1808. At the north end of the Mere is a bridge which carries the carriage drive from White Lodge to the House. It is called Roaring Bridge because of the noise made by water as it fell over blocks of sandstone placed beneath the bridge c 1790 to form a waterfall. On the south side of the bridge is a square brick boathouse (listed grade II) of the late C18, roofless in 1997. Resembling a blockhouse and with false quatrefoil stone arrow loops, each corner forms a slightly projecting tower-like buttress. Beyond the bridge is the moat around Tabley Old Hall. The east end of the Mere continues northwards through Botany Bay Wood and towards Middle Willowbed Wood as a stream, slightly widened in parts, called the Serpentine Water. East of this, and continuing for a further 900m towards Sudlow Farm, is further parkland, with shelter belts. Shelter belts also run around much of the rest of the park perimeter.

The park's creation belongs to the generation after the construction of the new house, begun in 1761, and was facilitated by the closure of the Knutsford road in 1769. Tabley Mere was created by enlarging and deepening existing pools at various dates between 1789 and 1803. In 1803, when the west, lobed half of the present Mere was dug, John Webb (1754-1828) was responsible for the design. The park was mapped in 1797. Much planting was undertaken in the 1820s (Dawson Taylor 1992).

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The brick-walled kitchen garden lies c 250m north of the House, and was probably built at about the same time. The garden is roughly square, although the north wall at c 100m in length is somewhat longer than that to the south (c 80m). Along the exterior of the wall, angled 'cutwater'-style buttresses alternate with conventional ones. Brick sheds stand along the exterior of the north wall (conversion to stables planned 1997). The main entrance is in the centre of the south wall, and has a stone keystone dated 1656 moved from the Old Hall. Internally the garden is divided into two by an east/west cross wall. In the later 1990s Gardener's Cottage, built in to the north-east angle of the garden, was enlarged and refurbished. The north half of the garden is private to that house, while the south half is laid to communal tennis courts and lawns.

Some 50m south of the kitchen garden is a row of three 1960s brick houses, Garden Cottages.

#### REFERENCES

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P de Figueiredo and J Treuherz, *Cheshire Country Houses* (1988), pp 161-5 P Cannon-Brookes (ed), *Paintings from Tabley* (1989) P Cannon-Brookes, *Tabley House* (1991) A Report on the Pleasure Grounds of Tabley House, near Knutsford, Cheshire, (Dawson Taylor Landscape 1992)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: Cheshire sheet 24, 1st edition published 1881 Cheshire sheet 26, 1st edition published 1881 Cheshire sheet 27, 1st edition published 1881 OS 25" to 1 mile: Cheshire sheet 26.16, 1st edition published 1898

Description written: August 1997 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: April 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.