

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

TIRLEY GARTH

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TIRLEY GARTH

Name: TIRLEY GARTH

District: Cheshire West and Chester (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Utkinton and Cotebrook

District: Cheshire West and Chester (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Willington

label.localisation: Latitude: 53.192575
Longitude: -2.6808910
National Grid Reference: SJ 54605 66382
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1001593
Date first listed: 15-Feb-2002

Details

An early C20 garden laid out by the architect C E Mallows, with advice from Thomas Mawson, to accompany a contemporary country house which he also designed.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Bryan Leesmith, a director of the chemical firm Brunner Mond (later ICI), employed the architect C E Mallows to build him a country house in country east of Chester. Designs for the house, originally known as Tirley Court, were produced in 1906, the year that work commenced, and amendments were made over the next few years. In 1912 the site was sold to Brunner Mond who leased it in August of that year to R H Prestwich, a Manchester businessman. Prestwich continued with the construction of the house and garden to Mallows' designs, which had been exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1908 and published in *The Studio* in 1909.

Thomas Mawson (1861-1933), then sharing office premises with Mallows in Conduit Street, London, was called on by Mallows to provide advice on the garden design. Mawson produced planting plans and a scheme for re-routing the drive away from the garden (plans, private collection). Entries appear in Mallows' diary (private collection) during May to August 1912, regarding discussions of the garden design with Mawson and Mr and Mrs Prestwich. The full extent of Mawson's input remains unclear, although it appears that Mallows was the author of the strongly architectural terraces and other garden features around the house (*The Studio* 1909).

Prestwich died in 1940. His daughter Irene established a charitable trust which purchased the property from ICI in 1949. The site remains in single ownership, and has been used as a conference, training, and retreat centre for Moral Re-Armament (now Initiatives of Change) (2002).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Tirley Garth lies c 14km east of Chester and 0.5km north of the village of Utkinton in a rural area. The c 16ha site is bounded to the north by agricultural land and Tirley Lane, to

the west largely by agricultural land and a footpath, beyond which lies a brook (outside the area here registered), to the east by agricultural land and a further brook, and to the south by a lane linking the villages of Willington and Utkinton. The site straddles a valley through which a small stream flows from north to south towards the Cheshire Plain. The ground slopes steeply down from the northern tip of the site, by Tirley Lane, to the lowest point at the southern boundary, at the main entrance to the site. The setting is rural, with long views extending south across the Plain from many parts of the house and gardens, towards Beeston and Peckforton Castles.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach enters the site 250m south of the house, off the lane linking Utkinton and Willington. To the east of the entrance stands The Lodge (Mallows c 1910, listed grade II), a two-storey rendered building with stone dressings which was extended in the late C20; it stands set back from the drive and road in its own garden. The main entrance is marked by a stone gateway, with adjacent to the west, a massive stone stile with steps leading to the top on both sides (Mallows c 1910, the whole listed grade II). A further gateway, simpler in structure, enters 30m west of this gateway. From these two gateways the two arms of the south drive lead north, meeting after 30m to continue up the hillside through informal lawns planted with scattered mature trees, edged at the southern end on the west side by shrubbery and woodland. Glimpses of the south front of the house open up as the drive progresses, and the house rises above the lawns. Some 30m west of the house the drive arrives at a turning circle, on the east side of which is the entrance to the square forecourt (listed grade II* with the house) on the west front of the house. The forecourt is enclosed on the outer three sides by rendered walls, with further gateways giving onto the motor-house court to the north and the sunken garden to the south. The forecourt is laid with square stone setts, with a central circular panel of lawn. A short, broad flight of steps leads up to the arched front door, beyond which a passage through the west wing gives access to the square Garth. The Garth is surrounded by a covered passage, arcaded in the form of a cloister on all sides, overlooking a sunken paved court at the centre of which is a sunken circular pool. The west, south, and east sides are enclosed and overlooked by wings of the house but the fourth, north side leads out to a lawn, now partly covered by a timber shed. At the ends of the north side are two large stone basins set into the north wall. The roof of the arcade is accessible from the upper floor, and doorways in each wing at ground level give access to the interior.

The north drive enters 450m north of the house, off Tirley Lane, via a gateway with a stile in similar style to that at the south entrance. To the west of the north entrance stands a single-storey stone pump house (disused), modelled in the style of a lodge. From here the drive descends the slope between banks of rhododendrons flanked by mature evergreens, in particular pines. Occasional glimpses of long views to the south-west across the Cheshire Plain appear through the plantings. Some 150m south of the north entrance a spur leads east to The Farm, a group of small barns and wooden huts standing in a yard 300m north-east of the house at the north-east corner of the site. Long views extend from this spur south across the falling garden, over the Plain. West of the point where the spur leads off to The Farm stands The Cottage (early C20, ?Mallows), a two-storey estate house facing south and set in its own enclosed garden.

From here the north drive curves south-west between banks of shrubs to arrive at the turning circle 30m west of the west front which gives access to the forecourt. A spur east off the north drive, 35m north of the turning circle, gives access to a service building standing north of the house. This spur is flanked by clipped hedges and supported on the south side by a stone retaining wall. A further spur extends east off the drive c 15m north of the turning circle, giving access directly into the motor-house court (listed grade II* with the house). The motor house stands at the east end of this court and forms the north-west corner of the main house. This courtyard is bounded to the north by the stone retaining wall which supports the spur to the north, to the south by the north wall of the forecourt, and to the west by a further stone wall separating it from the drive.

The drives are both flanked by two-course banks of local stone along their length. The drives were laid out at the time that the house was constructed, although the north end of the south drive was shortly afterwards moved to the west by Thomas Mawson (OS 1910; Mawson plan, private collection) to its present position.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Tirley Garth (C E Mallows 1906-12, listed grade II*) stands towards the centre of the site. Of two and three storeys, it is built in Neo-Vernacular style of rendered brick with stone dressings. The house stands on formal terraces, the almost symmetrical south front being the main garden front. A three-storey tower stands at the south-west corner, overlooking

the sunken garden to the west, adjacent to the main entrance on the asymmetrical west front. Tirley Garth has been described as Mallows' magnum opus (CL 1982).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens and pleasure grounds are divided into two main sections: a series of formal terraces adjacent to the south front of the house, and informal largely wooded pleasure grounds enclosing the house and terraces.

The garden door is set at the west end of the south front of the house. It leads out onto the south terrace which is laid out with a rectilinear pattern of panels of lawns surrounded by rose beds, these in turn surrounded by crazy-paved stone paths. The terrace is bounded to west, south, and east by stone retaining walls and a distinctive rustic balustrade in similar style to that which occurs elsewhere in the garden. Several projections extend from the south wall onto the south lawn, and a central broad flight of shallow steps in the south side gives access to herbaceous borders along the bottom of the retaining wall on the south side. These borders may have been laid out initially by Mawson. Panoramic views extend south and south-west from the south terrace and south front of the house, across the Cheshire Plain towards Beeston and Peckforton Castles and the distant Welsh Mountains. The north-west corner of the south terrace leads to the rectangular sunken garden south of the forecourt. This is laid largely with stone paving, with shallow flights of steps at the centre of each side leading down to a sunken central area laid out with panels of lawn separated by a cruciform pattern of stone paths. From the centre of the south side of the sunken garden steps lead down to the hydrangea walk, bounded to the east by the retaining wall of the south terrace and to the west by a further stone wall. This leads at the south end to the south lawn.

The north-east corner of the south terrace leads to a steep flight of steps which leads east from the south-east corner of the house, down to the rest of the formal garden (east terrace walls and steps c 1912, possibly by T Mawson, listed grade II). The steps lead down to the alpine garden, the stone path being flanked by raised stone beds and leading to the Octagon. This is an octagonal stone area with a central bed. North of the alpine garden lies a square croquet lawn, and to the south is a further, slightly larger, rectangular tennis lawn. West of these two lawns, and crossing the flight of steps leading east down from the south terrace, is the west terrace, bounded at the north end by the east front of the house, and at the south end by the east retaining wall of the south terrace. It forms the western axial walk on the east side of the house, and extends for c 150m from below the south-east corner of the south terrace to the north-east corner of the house. A parallel, eastern axial walk runs along the east side of these two lawns, 30m east of the western walk, crossing the Octagon. South of the Octagon, reached via a steep flight of stone steps, this lower part of the walk is called the Azalea Walk. It is bounded by the east retaining wall of the tennis lawn, and to the east overlooks the stream valley and is terminated at the south end by a circular pool set into the south-east corner of the retaining wall. A double flight of steps surrounding this pool gives access from the southern formal lawn down to the south end of the Azalea Walk.

North of the Octagon, the eastern axial walk is flanked by the retaining wall of the croquet lawn above to the west, and to the east by the Rose Garden. The Rose Garden slopes down to the east and is laid out in a semicircular pattern of beds divided by narrow lawns and flights of stone steps radiating out from the centre of the west side. It overlooks the stream valley to the east. The eastern axial walk continues north, entering the Silver Garden. This octagonal area to the north-west of the Rose Garden mirrors the Octagon at the south-west corner. The Silver Garden is enclosed by stone walls and is laid largely to stone flags, with a central circular sunken pond. Stone steps lead down from the east side to the north end of the perimeter path which encircles the Rose Garden. An archway at the south-west side gives access to the croquet lawn, allowing a narrow view of the Silver Garden from the western axial walk below the east front.

From the Silver Garden the eastern axial walk continues north to the Spring Walk. This stone path is flanked by narrow borders, which are in turn flanked by raised stone walls. That to the east overlooks a shrubbery, with glimpses of the stream valley below. That to the west is the retaining wall for a lawn which slopes down from the west. A shallow flight of stone steps bisects this lawn, leading down from what was formerly an orchard. This area, to the west of the lawn and north of the house, is now (2002) a car park. The steps lead east down the slope, overlooking the paddock beyond the stream valley to the east. They cross Spring Walk, continuing east below the Walk as a double flight which encloses an alcove for a seat which also overlooks the stream below.

The north end of Spring Walk continues the eastern axial walk north through the centre of the Round Acre, the former kitchen garden, terminating at The Bothy, standing c 125m north-east of the house. This wooden structure has a central arch leading to the greenhouse behind to the north and dominates the vista northwards along the c 200m long eastern axial walk.

The informal pleasure grounds surround the house and formal gardens and comprise lawns overlying the undulating ground. Those sloping down to the western boundary from the drives contain scattered clumps and belts of trees, including many pines, and banks of mature shrubs, including rhododendrons. The lawns leading east from the drive descend to the stream valley. The valley is planted up with shrubberies including many rhododendron varieties introduced in the early C20 and is overlooked by the formal gardens, and the east and south fronts. The stream rises at the north end of the site before broadening into two ponds: the Upper Pond lying 200m north-east of the house, and the Lower Pond lying 150m south-east of the house. West of the Lower Pond is a rock garden, known as The Dell, with informal flights of stone steps linking the formal, south tennis lawn, via the double flight of steps, with the Pond below. East of the stream valley the ground rises to a series of paddocks planted with clumps of trees, including many pines.

Several perspective views and a plan of the core of the garden were published by Mallows in two articles for *The Studio* (1909). The features in the views were not on the whole executed in the manner of those he published. Most of the compartments shown in the plan were laid out however, albeit in modified form and greatly expanded to the east. The alterations may have been due to Mawson's influence, although it is not known exactly what was the extent of his input. Mawson certainly produced several plans (private collection), including planting plans. A revised and undated plan signed by Mallows (private collection) shows a design much more closely allied to what exists today (2002). In Mallows' revised plan the stream was to widen in many places into small pools overlooked by the east garden terraces. These pools, if ever implemented, have largely silted up. Three gaps in the encircling hedge on the east side of the Rose Garden were to overlook three of these pools; only one of these gaps now exists (2002). Since the Second World War some elements of the garden have been simplified.

KITCHEN GARDEN The circular kitchen garden, known as the Round Acre, lies 75m north-east of the house, east of the north drive and at the north end of the east axial walk. It is bounded by clipped hedges and largely laid to lawn, with the east axial walk bisecting it from south to north. At the north end the vista is terminated by the large wooden Bothy, and beyond this a rendered glasshouse and frames, set in a small yard. The kitchen garden was an integral part of Mallows' design for the site (plan, *The Studio* 1909; revised plan, nd, private collection). In Mallows' 1909 plan he envisaged a semicircular kitchen garden immediately north of the house. This was revised however to become the present circular feature, which was laid out with two major paths following the cardinal points of the compass, and two further paths intersecting these. Since the Second World War this layout has been greatly simplified to leave the present path bisecting lawns. Openings in the encircling hedge at the end of the three easternmost paths were intended to overlook three of the pools in the stream valley to the east (including the Upper Pond); only one gap is now extant. A further opening to the west (extant) gave access from the north drive, while that to the south-west (gone) gave direct access to the orchard immediately north of the house (now a car park). The semicircular north side of the former orchard is still reflected in a line of mature deciduous magnolias backed by evergreen shrubs.

REFERENCES

The Studio 44, (June-September 1908), p 187; 45, (October 1908-January 1909), pp 31-42 T H Mawson, *The Life and Work of an English Landscape Architect* (1927), p 209 *Country Life*, 171 (18 March 1982), pp 702-5 H Jordan, *Thomas Hayton Mawson 1861-1933 The English Garden Designs of an Edwardian Landscape Architect*, (PhD thesis, London Univ 1988), p 565 P de Figueiredo and J Treuherz, *Cheshire Country Houses* (1988), pp 181-5 Tirley Garth, guidebook, (1990) *English Heritage Register Review: Cheshire* (1995)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1911 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1910

Archival items C E Mallows, drawings of Tirley Garth (72.036.6(42)92M), (RIBA Library) T H Mawson, site plans, c 1914 (private collection)

Description written: January 2002 Amended: March 2002 Register Inspector: SR Edited: April 2002

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.