

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CATHEDRAL CLOSE AND LINEAR PARK, LICHFIELD

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CATHEDRAL CLOSE AND LINEAR PARK, LICHFIELD

Name:	CATHEDRAL CLOSE AND LINEAR PARK, LICHFIELD
County:	Staffordshire
District:	Lichfield (District Authority)
Parish:	Lichfield
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.683912 Longitude: -1.8319874 National Grid Reference: SK 11455 09593 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001399 Date first listed: 03-Sep-1998

Details

An interlinked series of public walks and parks of later C17 to C20 date running through the centre of Lichfield including a tree-lined walk in the Cathedral Close.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

From at least the C7 Lichfield has been an administrative and ecclesiastical centre, and in the C8 became the seat of an archbishopric. A new cathedral was completed under Bishop Clinton (1129-48), who also fortified the Close and laid out a new grid-plan town south of the Minster Pool. In the Middle Ages Lichfield was an important regional centre, and its position on the London to Chester road brought many important visitors to the city.

Lichfield was besieged three times in the Civil War, and the cathedral and town were badly damaged. During the extensive rebuilding campaign of the later C17 many fine buildings in brick and stone were erected in place of timber-framed predecessors. Gentry were increasingly attracted to what Defoe in the 1720s called this 'fine, neat, well-built' city (Defoe 1928 edn, 80), as well as a body of important 'literati' encouraged by an influential and educated group of cathedral clergy. The second group included Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-84), conversationalist, writer, critic and lexicographer; David Garrick (1717-79), actor; Thomas Seward (1708-90), scholar, and his daughter Anna (1747-1809), poet; and Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), scientist, physician and grandfather of Charles. As Lichfield became fashionable and prosperous so public walks, gardens and other facilities were provided. These were added to in the C19 and C20, and the chain of parks, pools and open spaces remains one of the city's most attractive features.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The area here registered, c 40ha, extends south-west to north-east through the historic core of the city of Lichfield, either side of the Cathedral Close which is itself included. Other than to the west, where Beacon Park is bounded by the A51 Stafford Road, it is largely bounded by the built-up area, although to the north-east, towards the rising ground of Stowe, the aspect is more open.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The registered area is readily accessible at numerous points, and is bisected by numerous thoroughfares. The main approach to the Close is from the south, via Dam Street.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CATHEDRAL CLOSE AND LINEAR PARK, LICHFIELD

PARK The Cathedral stands within a small, rectangular Close. Badly damaged in the Civil War, by the early C18 the reconstructed Close was becoming the focal point for polite society in the town. A walk lined with lime trees, by the C18 known as the Dean's Walk, runs around its north and east sides. The Dean's Walk was laid out at an unknown date in the later C17, possibly c 1687 when the new Bishop's Palace was built. In 1776, at the instigation of Anna Seward, to whom the idea was suggested by Humphry Repton (1752-1818), some of the trees on the east side of the walk were removed to open up the view to the Cathedral from Stowe. On the other hand she resisted the proposal of the Dean and Chapter to remove every other tree 'because so much foliage made the houses dark and gloomy and shaded gardens over-much' (quoted in *Countryside News*, April 1997, 6), saying that it would be like a mouth with alternate teeth removed. Occupying the north-east corner of the Close is the Cathedral School, formerly the Bishop's Palace (listed grade II*), in the later C18 the home of Anna Seward. Some elements survive of the garden there which she modified, probably with the guidance of Humphry Repton with whom she corresponded. East of the house are the foundations of her summerhouse, with adjacent yews, while to the north-east corner is another summerhouse, contrived from one of the Close wall's bastions. Seward's garden extended along the 'valley' of the moat outside the Close wall. It is believed locally that Selwyn House at the south end of that garden was constructed or enlarged in the later C18 or early C19 to block the view from Stowe Pool to the Cathedral. Two conduit heads (both listed grade II) stand close to the west end of the Close: a small octagonal ashlar one of 1786, and an octagonal, slate-roofed structure of 1803 used since the 1980s as a refreshment kiosk. Other features include a large sundial (listed grade II) and Victorian street furniture. Dam Street leads south off the south-east corner of the Close, the location of its South Gate, across the pedestrianised dam at the north-east end of Minster Pool. From here it is possible to turn either east, towards Stowe Pool, or west to Minster Pool, Museum Gardens and Beacon Park.

From that dam there is a view west along Minster Pool, c 220m long and up to 50m wide, over a low stone parapet. New Walk (now Minster Pool Walk), laid out in 1772, runs along the south side of Minster Pool, connecting Dam Street with Bird Street. That crosses the end of Minster Pool via Causeway Bridge (listed grade II), rebuilt to accommodate coaching traffic in 1816-17. One of the key figures behind the laying out of the walk was Anna Seward, who in 1773, having seen London's Serpentine, promoted the idea, which was adopted, of reforming the north bank of the Pool on a curved line. There was an island at its west end in 1776, but this is no longer extant. In the 1850s the Pool was re-excavated by the South Staffordshire Water Co.

A Memorial Garden dedicated to Lichfield citizens who died in the Second World War and later 'struggles for freedom' was laid out along the south side of New Walk in 1955. Some 100m long and 20m wide it is a lawn with shrubs and trees, notably two mature yews either side of the central path leading to a memorial plaque on the rear wall.

On the north-west corner of Minster Pool, on the east side of Bird Street and adjoining Causeway Bridge, is the War Memorial Garden (structures and walls listed grade II*) laid out in 1920. About 50m square, it is bounded to the north and east by tall, C18 brick walls, and to the west and south by C18 balustrades, said to be from Moxhull Hall, Wishaw (Warws). The stone lions which stand atop the gate piers of the main gates, on the west side, may also have come from Moxhull. Against the east wall is a memorial to the dead of the First World War by the Lichfield firm of Robert Bridgeman & Sons, in the form of a stone screen of classical form incorporating in a niche the figure of St George. Bridgeman also supplied the sundial in the centre of the garden, which is a formal lawn with, in the centre of each quarter, a circular bed surrounded by a low box hedge.

On the west side of Causeway Bridge is Museum Gardens, a c 100m square park with straight, tree-lined paths down its north and south sides and formal flower beds and, in its western half, a bowling green. Along the east front of the park, along Causeway Bridge, is pierced-stone balustrading (listed grade II) of the 1850s with urns on the parapet. At the centre of the park, within a formal flower bed, is an ornate ashlar and iron fountain (listed grade II) of 1871. The figures of lions around the base were added later, probably in the late 1880s. In the eastern part of the park is a statue of Edward VII (listed grade II) presented in 1908, in the western part a statue (listed grade II) of 1914 of John Smith, Captain of the Titanic, by Lady Kathleen Scott. The cost of the latter was met by national subscription, and the statue sited in Lichfield because it was the centre of the diocese where Smith was born and conveniently placed for visitors travelling between London and Liverpool. Set in the flower bed along the eastern edge of the garden are fragments of the city arms installed on the front of the Guildhall in 1744. A Crimean War cannon and First World War gun were removed from the Gardens for scrap in 1940. Museum Gardens was laid out in 1859

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CATHEDRAL CLOSE AND LINEAR PARK, LICHFIELD

immediately south-west of the new Free Library and Museum (listed grade II), a striking buff brick building, set on the south wall of which, overlooking the Gardens, is a stone statue of a Boer War marine. The park occupies the site of the medieval Upper Pool, which by the C18 had become the Swan Moggs osier beds. Tree-lined walks were laid out here in the later C18 before the ground was finally reclaimed in the 1850s by dumping dredgings from Minster Pool.

To the south of Museum Gardens stands the Swan Hotel (listed grade II), one of Lichfield's two main inns in the C18 and early C19. On its north side, alongside Bird Street, it has a terrace with rectangular garden, laid to lawn, beyond. The terrace and garden, overall 40m long and 15m wide, are partly surrounded by stone balustrading, possibly C18, which photographic evidence suggests was probably installed in the early C20. Nevertheless, the general layout perpetuates that of the formal garden shown on Snape's Plan of 1781, which was divided into eight compartments.

Museum Gardens is continued westward, beyond a rockery with pool, as Beacon Park, an extensive area of parkland and playing fields. In the eastern part of the park are bowling greens, a children's playground, modern shelters, and parkland and specimen trees, while football pitches and a golf course occupy the more outlying and open western and northern parts. This was formerly the grounds of Beacon Place, a late C18 house off Beacon Street built by George Haud. In 1827 the house passed to the Hinckley family who added two wings and greatly extended the grounds, which by 1848 covered thirty-seven acres (c 15ha). By the 1880s the Seckham family had further extended the park to nearly 100 acres (c 41ha). A 2ha public recreation ground west of the Museum had already been opened in 1891 and was extended north by 5ha in 1944. After Beacon Place's demolition in 1964, its park was added to this recreation ground to create Beacon Park. The main historic feature surviving within the park is an avenue of mature lime trees which formerly lined a drive.

Reeve Lane leads east from Dam Street. It runs along the south side of playing fields before continuing as a tree-lined path, part of a walk laid out by Anna Seward, along the north side of Stowe Pool to St Chad's Church and Stowe, which lies on rising ground beyond the north-east end of the Pool. That itself is a slightly dog-legged sheet of water c 500m long from south-west to north-east and 100m wide. Johnson's Willow, whose later C18 predecessor was apparently much visited by the eponymous Doctor, stands on the edge of the path about a third of the way along the Pool. The path continues around the north-east end of the Pool, from where there is a fine view back to the Cathedral, before returning along its south side. An early C20 boathouse stands at the south corner of the Pool. There was already a path along the north side of the Pool, leading to St Chad's Church, in the early C17. This became a more formal walk c 1790. The Pool itself, which had dried out in the C18, was leased in 1855 by the South Staffordshire Water Co which re-excavated it. A botanic garden north of the pool in the grounds of Parchment House (not here registered) became an attraction in the 1780s.

Stowe Pool, Sandford (later Upper) Pool and Middle (later Minster) Pool were formerly valuable fisheries, and records from the C13 to the present record their management and value. It is possible that they may also have had an ornamental role. Wet ground around their edges, notably 'the moggs' (a place name implying wetness) at Upper and Moggs pools, is recorded from the C15, and was on occasion enlarged as land was reclaimed from the pools.

REFERENCES D Defoe, *A Tour Through England and Wales* 2, (1928 edn), pp 80-2 *The Victoria History of the County of Staffordshire* 14 (Lichfield), (1990), esp pp 163-4 R Harper, *Historic Background to Lichfield's Linear Parks* (unpublished document for Lichfield District Council, nd, c 1996) *Lichfield City Conservation Area Document: A Guide to Features of Historic Interest in Lichfield Conservation Area* (Lichfield District Council 1997)

Maps John Speed, *Map of Lichfield*, 1610 John Snape, *Plan of Lichfield*, 1781 Joseph Naden, *Survey of Lichfield*, 1825 OS 1:500 map of Lichfield, 1884

Archival items Anna Seward correspondence (Lichfield Reference Library)

Description written: July 1998 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: September 1999

Legal

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CATHEDRAL CLOSE AND LINEAR PARK, LICHFIELD

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.