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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CHOLMONDELEY CASTLE

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Name:	CHOLMONDELEY CASTLE
District:	Cheshire East (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Cholmondeley
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.057817 Longitude: -2.6811212 National Grid Reference: SJ 54447 51391 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000638 Date first listed: 10-Jun-1985

Details

An C18 landscape park and mainly C20 gardens associated with an early C19 country house. The park contains the remains of formal gardens of c 1700 by George London associated with an earlier house.

CHRONOLOGY OF HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Cholmondeley has descended in the male line of the eponymous family since the C12. Robert Cholmondeley was created Viscount in 1661, and his son Hugh (d 1725) an earl in 1706, the aspirations and successes of the latter being marked by major improvements to his gardens (from 1688) and house (from 1702). On the death of the first earl Cholmondeley passed to a nephew, George (d 1733), whose successor the third Earl (d 1770) was a spendthrift who by the 1740s had run through much of the family money. Fortuitously, its fortunes were reversed when in 1797 the fourth Earl and first Marquess of Cholmondeley (d 1828) inherited the estate of his kinsman Horace Walpole. The construction of Cholmondeley Castle began soon afterwards. At much the same time a programme of estate improvements seems to have commenced; most of the lodges as well as Park House (listed grade II) and Castle Farm (outside registered area; house listed grade II) are of this date.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Cholmondeley Castle and its park lie 10km north of Whitchurch, on the west side of the A49, to which the easternmost arm of the park extends. To the south the park is bounded by the minor road west off the A49 to the hamlets on the Peckforton Hills, which lie 5km north-west of Cholmondeley. Otherwise the park boundary largely follows field edges. Locally the topography is generally flat, and the park contains two large natural meres, although its western part rises onto a pair of low hills, known variously as Tower or Castle Hill and Fir Hill. The registered area contains c 240ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

There are three drives to Cholmondeley off the roads along its south and east sides. Nearest to the Castle, 500m to the south-west at the bottom of Castle Hill, is Malpas Lodge, a castellated stone turret of c 1800. Some 200m south-west of the Castle the drive passes through white-painted iron gates and a screen (listed grade II*) by Robert Bakewell of c 1722, moved here c 1801 from their original position on the north side of the Old Hall. On the far east side of the park is Beeston Lodge and gateway (listed grade II), an elaborate two-storey sandstone building of 1854 by S S Teulon (d 1873) with a broached and crenellated stone tower. From the lodge the drive runs west via a lime, poplar and hornbeam avenue and across the Old Hall's canal. A stone

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bridge (listed grade II) of c 1800 carries it across the serpentine stream leading south from Chapel Mere; it then passes through the early C19 castellated sandstone Somerset Lodge (listed grade II), which stands at the entrance to the pleasure grounds 250m north of the Castle. Nantwich Lodge (listed grade II), a small, thatched, whitewashed brick cottage with gothic windows of c 1800, stands at the south-east corner of the park. This marks the end of the C18 drive to the Old Hall, the line of which ran east of the modern drive, via tall stone gate piers which now stand isolated in the park c 400m south of the south end of the canal. The drive from Nantwich Lodge runs through a wood and then, 400m north-west of the lodge, past Deer Park Lodge (listed grade II), a two-storey brick building of the early C19 with Tudor-detailed windows and shallow hipped roof. The drive, here lined with chestnuts, then swings more to the west, passing over a Second World War girder bridge at the north end of Deer Park Mere before swinging slightly south to join the drive from Malpas Lodge c 350m south-west of the Castle.

The fourth lodge on the edge of the park, Park House Lodge, an early C19 building of whitened brick, stands between Scotch Farm and Park House some 400m north of the Castle. The drive from it runs south to join that from Beeston Lodge c 50m east of Somerset Lodge.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Cholmondeley Castle (listed grade II*) is a crenellated sandstone gothic building. It stands on a low hill above its level park, with panoramic views to the east. Designed by the fourth Earl working with the local architect William Turner of Whitchurch, it was built between 1801 and 1804. In 1817-19 the symmetrical and relatively modest building began to be extended and had turrets added to designs by the newly raised Marquess, a further tower being added to the south-east corner in 1828 by Sir Robert Smirke (d 1867).

Some 350m north of the Castle is Scotch Farm (listed grade II), a red-brick stables complex of 1887.

The Old Hall, rebuilt in 1571, lay 1km to the east. In 1702 the London surveyor Robert Jones was apparently engaged to refront the timber-framed house, but in 1707 passed over the commission to William Smith (d 1724) of Warwick. He in turn was replaced in 1712 by Sir John Vanbrugh (d 1726), although how much of his scheme to complete the modernisation of the house was actually carried out is uncertain. After a half century of neglect the Old Hall was largely demolished in 1801. What survives, remodelled as a modest estate house, is listed grade II.

On a slight hill c 150m west of the Old Hall is the chapel of St Nicholas (listed grade I), a brick building of the C18 and early C19 with an elaborate and outstanding oak interior of 1651-5. The north and south gates (both listed grade II) to the chapel ground were contrived in 1829 from sections of Bakewell's screen of c 1722.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The Castle's pleasure grounds and gardens lie on the hillslopes to its south and east, within a ha-ha which loops around the bottom of Fir Hill. A low, stone-walled terrace surrounds the Castle; this may have been designed by John Webb (1754-1828), who is known to have laid out the grounds at Cholmondeley. Three interlinked gardens were created along the south front of the terrace in the later C20. Around the south-east corner of the castle is the Silver Garden, which incorporates in its stair railings ironwork by Bakewell of 1714 made for the Old Hall. In the centre of the south side of the Castle is the Lily Pond Garden, with to its west and within a yew hedge a compartment containing a small swimming pool. On its north side is a brick gothic pool house of 1972 by Roderick Gradridge. It too incorporates early C18 ironwork by Bakewell.

Below the terrace around the Castle are lawns with gravelled paths running between extensive collections of specimen trees and shrubs, some of the C18 and C19 but the majority of the later C20, James Russell giving much guidance in the years after 1960. To the east of the Castle, where the main views across the park are enjoyed, the plantings are relatively thin, but they increase to the south and especially to the west, up onto Castle Hill where are found some of the largest and oldest trees including chestnuts and cedars. Some at least of these may have been planted in the 1770s when the park was landscaped. Additional plantings were made with Countryside Commission assistance in the 1980s. Largely concealed by the plantings, c 100m east of the Malpas Lodge, is a C20 walled garden, in the latter part of the century used as the kitchen garden but earlier a rose garden.

Within the pleasure grounds the main feature is the Temple Garden 300m south of the Castle. This garden was so-called by the 1870s, but was restored and much enhanced after 1955, the rockwork being by Brian McKenna. It is built around an irregular pool c 100m long in a dell or hollow, replanted since c 1960 with a wide variety of specimen plants. The garden is entered at its west end through a simple early C19 sandstone gateway with seats (listed grade II), the iron gate of which is probably that

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made in 1695 by Jean Tijou for the new grotto. A second, simpler gateway lies c 30m to the north-east, and a gateway screen incorporating C18 columns c 50m to the east of the last. At the west end of the garden, on a hillock, is a late C19 rotunda (listed grade II) with open-work wrought-iron dome, brought to Cholmondeley c 1960. A second temple, of c 1830 (listed grade II), stands on the more westerly of the two small islands within the lake. Some 100m west of the Temple Garden is a second pool, surrounded by a wild garden.

A path leads north-west from the Temple Garden to the Rose Garden, laid out in the early 1950s on the site of a C19 aviary. At the centre of its cruciform plan flagged paths is a sundial.

Extensive formal gardens in the French style were laid out around the Old Hall in the years after 1688 when the French gardener Lecocke (d 1691) was sent to work at Cholmondeley. On his death George London (d 1714) was brought in, an agreement of 1694 including details of the canal that was then under construction. In 1695 leadwork was supplied by John Van Nost (d 1729), and Jean Tijou was paid for iron gates (Cholmondeley Papers). Work by both survives, resited in the Castle grounds. The main gatescreen to the north of the Old Hall was supplied by Robert Bakewell c 1722. In 1724 Macky described the gardens as 'not inferior to any in England' (CL 1973, 155), and they were illustrated in the following year in *Vitruvius Britannicus*. Few traces of those gardens remain other than a north/south canal 100m north of the Old Hall. The canal, 350m long and 25m wide, widens at its north end into a circular pool 90m across. About 100m east of the south end of the canal is a square pool, c 75m in diameter. Surrounding earthworks are slight and denuded.

PARK From the Castle there are panoramic views east across the rest of the park and the Cheshire Plain beyond. Most of the park is grassland with mature parkland trees; the southern part of the park is mostly permanent pasture, with areas of rotation grass in the northern half. A ha-ha runs north-west from Deer Park Lodge for c 500m. The main features of the park are two meres: Chapel Mere, and to its south the much longer Deer Park Mere, known in the later C19 as Moss Mere. There are plantation belts and planting around much of the southern and eastern borders of the park. Recreational facilities include a cricket ground with pavilion to the west of the north end of Deer Park Mere, and a children's playground and picnic area to the east of the mere. In 1777 William Emes (1730-1803) was called in to landscape the park, and it was presumably then that much of London's eighty-year-old formal gardens were done away with. The details of his plan are unknown, although his estimate of over ?500 indicates large-scale plantings (Cholmondeley Papers). It seems likely that many of the older specimen trees, including cedars at the foot of Castle and Fir Hill, were planted at that time, and so too plantation belts around the edge of the park.

KITCHEN GARDEN The walled kitchen garden lies c 300m east of the Old Hall, and some at least of the walling seems to be of the C18. On the west side of the garden is a mid C19 brick gardener's cottage with fretted bargeboards, and on the north side a brick bothy, also C19. The interior of the garden was grass in 1997.

REFERENCES

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Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: Cheshire sheet 54, 1st edition published c 1874 Cheshire sheet 60, 1st edition published c 1874 Cheshire sheet 61, 1st edition published c 1874 OS 25" to 1 mile: Cheshire sheet 54.16, 1st edition published 1874 Cheshire sheet 60.4, 1st edition published 1874

Archival items Cholmondeley Papers (Cheshire Record Office, Chester): contract with Geo London 1694, DCH/A/242; correspondence from John Van Nost 1701, DCH/L/47; estimate by William Emes 1777, DCH/A/397; map book including map of formal gardens 1735.

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Legal

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