

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

DORFOLD HALL

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

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**DORFOLD HALL**

Name: DORFOLD HALL

District: Cheshire East (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Acton

District: Cheshire East (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Nantwich

label.localisation: Latitude: 53.066293  
Longitude: -2.5491671  
National Grid Reference: SJ6329852258  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1000641  
Date first listed: 10-Jun-1985

## Details

A C19 landscape park and formal gardens by William Andrews Nesfield, associated with a C17 and later country house.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Dorfold estate was bought in 1603 by Sir Roger Wilbraham, a distinguished lawyer. Being childless he passed the property to his younger brother Ralph, Feodary of Cheshire and Flintshire, who in 1616 constructed the greater part of the present house. The Wilbrahams retained Dorfold until 1754, when it was sold to James Tomkinson (d 1794), a wealthy lawyer from Bostock, who proceeded to remodel the interior and before 1789 add a five-bay service wing (demolished, except for one bay, in 1951), possibly using the architect William Baker (1705-71). Under Tomkinson's son Henry (d 1822) the present garden layout was established. In 1824 the forecourt of the house was made more attractive and antique for Henry's son, the Rev James Tomkinson (d 1841), while twenty-five years later William Andrews Nesfield (1793-1881) was brought in to advise on further improvements to the surrounds and setting of the house, although disapproval from within the family, not least from Tomkinson's widow who lived on until 1861, delayed implementation of his scheme until 1862. In 1861 Dorfold was inherited by the Tomkinsons' daughter Anne, the wife of Wilbraham Spencer Tollemache. It was he who brought in Nesfield, and certain aspects of the scheme, notably the new drive, were opposed by his wife who shared her mother's opinion of it. Dorfold remains (1997) in private hands.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The parkland which surrounds Dorfold Hall begins almost immediately west of Nantwich. To the north of the park is the village of Acton, and the road therefrom to Nantwich forms the northern boundary of the park. The eastern boundary of the park follows the Shropshire Union Canal, and that to the south Marsh Lane, which runs west from Nantwich. To the west the registered area is largely defined by field boundaries. The area here registered is c 125ha.

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**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Dorfold Hall is approached down a straight, 220m long drive, with a double avenue of limes (early 1860s) well set back to either side on slight ramps. At the north end of the drive, standing on the Nantwich road, is a tall and elaborate gate screen, the piers surmounted by cast-iron heraldic lions, and an equally elaborate single-storey brick lodge, all of 1862 (and all listed grade II). In the 1970s ha-has were dug outside the lime avenues to divide the drive zone from the parkland, and to improve the views thereto from the drive and forecourt.

The approach drive leads straight and symmetrically to the north forecourt, c 30m in diameter. Closing the north side of the forecourt is a stone balustraded wall with central iron gates, all of c 1862. So too is the surfacing of the turning circle, a swirling pattern of white pebbles set against a main body of dark grey or black pebbles which can probably be attributed to Nesfield. In the middle of the round lawn within the turning circle is a low stone plinth carrying an above-life-size cast-iron statue (listed grade II) of a mastiff suckling her young. The statue was acquired from the 1855 Paris Exhibition. On both east and west sides of the forecourt is a tall, clipped, yew bush.

This new approach formed part of Nesfield's work at Dorfold. Until then the main, tree-lined drive had approached the north forecourt from a gate c 200m to the east of the later one.

A service track runs north/south down the west side of the park from a gate at the south end of Acton village. A spur east from this leads to Dorfold's stables and kitchen gardens.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Dorfold Hall (listed grade I), built in 1616, is of red brick with blue brick diapering and stone detailing. It is of two storeys and an attic above a basement, of double-pile plan, and extends to five bays, with an added C18 bay at the east end. To each corner of the north forecourt are brick pavilions with curved gables of the same date, which are linked to either end of the Hall by screen walls of 1824 in a similar style.

North-west of the Hall is a brick clock tower and carriage house (listed grade II), part of the works of c 1862.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The main garden, largely laid to lawn with beds, lies south of the Hall. The Upper, or South Lawn occupies the site of a parterre designed by Nesfield c 1862 and removed during the Second World War. The lawn is bounded to the south by a low, sandstone ashlar wall (listed grade II) of 1827, which stands on top of a ha-ha wall of 1796. Openings in the wall with ball finials to either side were created at a later date to give access to a slightly lower lawn to the south. That is separated from the parkland beyond, which is overlooked from the garden, by a ha-ha dug c 1960.

To the west the South Lawn is bounded by a 3m high brick wall: the east end wall of the nearer of the kitchen gardens, and a northward extension thereof. The kitchen garden is entered from the South Lawn via an imposing gate with tall brick and stone piers surmounted with eagles (listed grade II), possibly of 1824, which support a wrought-iron gate of the 1860s with the Tollemache fret device in the overthrow. About 20m north of this an elaborate early C17 stone gateway (listed grade II\*) with an iron gate, probably of the 1860s, gives access from the South Lawn to a former walk along the outside of the north wall of the kitchen garden. The gateway was moved here in 1872 from the Roger Wilbraham Almshouses in Nantwich. On the south side of the kitchen garden a mid C19 iron gateway lies on the line of a former herbaceous border walk along the outside of the garden wall. The South Lawn extends round the west side of the Hall.

To the east the South Lawn is bounded by a 2.5m high brick wall of the 1950s. This wall is met by a northward extension of the low sandstone wall of 1827 which bounds the south side of the lawn. From an opening in that wall near the south-east corner of the lawn, steps lead down to a lawn with specimen tree which extends for c 100m east to the Woodland Garden. That was created in the 1980s, with plantings of spring-flowering shrubs and plants, from a Rockery Garden made c 1908 (date carved on steps off lawn) in a shallow, bowl-like depression. Many of the rockery features, including the rocks themselves, and a concrete-lined rill with basins, still survive.

Some 80m west of the Hall is a sweet chestnut of exceptional size, celebrated as the 'last survivor of Delamere forest' (Cheshire Life 1954). It is more probably a remnant of a C17 formal layout around the Hall. An estate map of 1789 (private collection) shows pleasure grounds south of the Hall, and a 'Lawn' west of the stables and north of the kitchen garden.

**PARK** Dorfold Hall lies in the northern part of a roughly square park, a little over a kilometre across. It falls gently from north to south and is largely given over to pasture, although the fields down the western side of the park were under arable cultivation in 1997. Bull's Wood, in the southern half of the park, is the only substantial block of mature woodland within the park although

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since the 1970s considerable investment has been made in plantation belts and block plantings designed to enhance the setting of the Hall and to increase its privacy. Especially to the north of the Hall are mature specimen trees including some coniferous examples, probably planted by Nesfield c 1862.

Extending west for c 200m from the south end of the main drive is a pool (Upper Pool, 1789). Its easternmost 30m, which had been infilled by Nesfield in the 1860s, was re-excavated in the 1970s. Nesfield did away with any remaining trace of a second large pool (Lower Pool, 1789) which lay east of this; it was the east end of this pool which was later turned into the Rockery Garden.

Some 200m north-east of the Hall is an icehouse (listed grade II) of 1796.

The map of 1789 shows that already by that date the boundary between the land around the Hall and the road to the north was paled, and the land itself had a park-like character. The park took on its essential modern appearance in the early 1860s when Nesfield straightened the line of the drive to the Hall and undertook planting, both of the lime avenues and of specimen trees within what became an enhanced parkland setting.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** West of the Hall are extensive brick-walled compartments, including two walled gardens. The earlier garden, perhaps later C17, lies immediately west of the South Lawn. It measures c 80m east/west by c 40m north/south. The interior is grass apart from a section of the west end which is a hard tennis court. Against the north wall, sections at least of which were heated, is an early C19 orangery or greenhouse.

A second walled garden, built in 1796 and 80m east/west by 70m north/south, abuts the earlier garden to the south-west. Along its north wall are ranges of mid C19 sheds. The interior is planted with Christmas trees. This garden replaced a narrower walled garden shown on the 1789 map.

Just north of the junction of the two gardens is a two-bay, two-storey, brick gardener's cottage of c 1800.

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, 24 (31 October 1908), pp 594-606 Cheshire Life, (February 1954; February 1984) P de Figueiredo and J Treuherz, Cheshire Country Houses (1988), pp 77-80 J Furse, Dorfold Hall, Nantwich, Cheshire. A Report on the History of the Gardens (1999)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: Cheshire sheet 55, 1st edition published 1882 Cheshire sheet 56, 1st edition published 1882 OS 25" to 1 mile: Cheshire sheet 55.16, 1st edition published 1875

Archival items Plan of Dorfold demesne, 1789, (Dorfold Hall private collection)

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.