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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

KEELE HALL

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

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Name: **KEELE HALL**

County: **Staffordshire**

District: **Newcastle-under-Lyme (District Authority)**

Parish: **Keele**

County: **Staffordshire**

District: **Newcastle-under-Lyme (District Authority)**

Parish: **Non Civil Parish**

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Longitude: -2.2724266
National Grid Reference: SJ 81814 44760
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
KEELE HALL

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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
KEELE HALL

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label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
 Grade: II
 List Entry Number: 1001165
 Date first listed: 01-Dec-1984

Details

Mid C18 landscape park by William Emes associated with a country house, with improvement of grounds and gardens in early to mid C19 by W S Gilpin and W A Nesfield.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1741 the Keele estate was inherited by Ralph Sneyd from his brother Dryden; by the time of his death in 1793 he had partly rebuilt the Hall, landscaped the park and made a walled garden. He was succeeded by his son Walter (d 1829) under whom, despite absences occasioned by militia duties, improvements continued. As soon as Walter's son Ralph inherited the estate he launched an extensive landscaping campaign, bringing in William Sawrey Gilpin and later (among others) W A Nesfield, and c 1855 rebuilding the house. He was succeeded in 1870 by his brother, the Rev Walter Sneyd (d 1888), and he by his son Col Ralph Sneyd. About 1901 the Colonel leased Keele, which after c 1910 went into decline. The University College of North Staffordshire (founded 1949) took over Keele in 1950, becoming the University of Keele in 1962. A campus was built, mainly west of Keele Hall, in the 1950s and 1960s, which was greatly enlarged following a doubling of student numbers in the 1990s. Nevertheless, many elements of the historic landscape remained intact in 1997.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The village of Keele lies c 4km west of Newcastle-under-Lyme, itself on the western edge of the Stoke-on-Trent conurbation. Keele Hall and its park are to the east of Keele village, the Hall being c 1km from the parish church. To the north-west the park is bounded by the Keele to Newcastle road, and to the south-west by Lymes Road, a metalled track opened in 1840 to replace an older Keele to Butterton right of way. The east

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
KEELE HALL

boundary follows field edges. The highest ground in the park occurs near its north-eastern extremity, a site now occupied by the university's Observatory. From here it falls away to the south-west, with the lowest ground occurring at the southern end of the park, in a small valley which runs south-east from Keele Hall. The registered area comprises c 250ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are two main approaches to Keele Hall. One is from Keele village to the west. The westernmost section of the drive was created c 1847 when the park was extended almost to the centre of the village. Keele Lodge (listed grade II), a cruciform two-storey yellow sandstone building, was built at this time on the site of the newly demolished Old Hall Farm.

The second approach is from the north off Keele Road, which was moved c 150m north to this line c 1833. At the end of the drive is Newcastle Lodge (listed grade II), a two-storey red-brick building with blue diaper work decoration, built in 1833 and designed by Mr Trubshaw of Newcastle-under-Lyme. This drive, and that from Keele, were given more varied and scenic routes c 1833 after the final eradication of public rights of way through the park. An avenue of mature sweet chestnuts north of the walled kitchen gardens probably marks the C18 approach to the Hall.

A third approach was made in 1845, a straight drive northward from Lymes Road to the stables complex. At its end is Lymes Lodge (listed grade II), a two-storey yellow sandstone building of 1845. Sweet chestnuts were planted either side of the drive, and these remained a notable feature of the landscape in the later C20 although by then the drive served only as access to the Lodge.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS Keele Hall (listed grade II*) was completely rebuilt between 1855 and 1860 by Anthony Salvin (1827-81). Of red and yellow sandstone ashlar and in a Jacobean style it has a low ground floor and two main floors, with mullioned and transomed windows. The building is L-plan, and wraps around the south and east sides of an entrance courtyard, with a staircase tower in the angle of the two ranges. Salvin's building replaced one of c 1580, the first on the site, which was extensively altered 1757-63 by William Baker (1705-71).

South-west of the Hall is Clock House (listed grade II), a stables and coach house courtyard of 1833-4 designed by Edward Blore (1787-1879). Also of that date is the drive connecting them, which passes through a rock-cut gorge crossed, 90m north-east of the Clock House, by a stone bridge (listed grade II) also of the 1830s.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The Hall's main formal Parterre Garden occupies the lawn before the south-west front, a lawn quartered and defined by gravel paths with a parterre and a lawn fountain. The last, designed by Charles Raymond Smith, was installed c 1863. The parterre itself was designed c 1845 by William Andrews Nesfield (1793-1881), and recreated in simplified form 1985 having been destroyed during the Second World War. Also part of Nesfield's work at Keele in the early 1840s was the long terrace along the south-east front, with urns and, facing along the terrace at either end, segmental stone seats (terrace features listed grade II). Below the terrace shaved lawns fall to the uppermost of the series of pools which run down the valley leading north-east from the east side of the Hall.

Set into the rising ground at the north-west of the Parterre Garden is an artificial stone crag, probably one of the features created by William Sawrey Gilpin (1762-1843) who was brought in to work at Keele in 1829. About 150m north-west of the Hall, in a block of mature ornamental woodland with sunken walks, is an old quarry, possibly that which supplied stone for the late C16 house. This was adapted as a fernery by Gilpin, who designed an approach via a dog-legged tunnel (listed grade II) and a small, stone, viaduct-like bridge within (listed grade II). The ornamental woodland is bounded to the south by a terraced walk along the north side of the kitchen gardens, giving a view across the gardens and to the landscape to the south. That walk, with mature sweet chestnuts along the edge of the woodland to the north, was contrived from the former Keele drive when that was moved to its present line in the 1830s.

The walk, now past halls of residence, led in the C19 to further pleasure gardens west of the kitchen gardens, now largely occupied by the Sneyd House hall of residence and Larchwood, a group of staff houses. The former stands on the site of an Italianate garden by Nesfield, the only surviving element of which is a stone wall with gateway. The other main surviving element of the pleasure gardens is a tall, east/west holly hedge, probably of 1769, along the north side of Larchwood. At the west end of the hedge in the garden of 21 Larchwood is a south-facing summerhouse lined with Minton tiles, adjoining which to the north is the C19 Holly Lodge and to the west the 'Glazed Gates', tall iron gates on stone piers. Leading south from those

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
KEELE HALL

gates is a tree-lined drive to Paddock Farm, built as a horse stud in the late C19. The house is bungalow-style and late C19; most of the agricultural buildings are large cattle sheds of the late C20.

William Emes (1730-1803), brought in to landscape the park in 1768, created a pleasure garden around the Hall, separated from the park beyond by a ha-ha. Shrubs were planted below the drawing room window.

PARK Keele Hall lies towards the centre of a roughly rectangular park, aligned approximately north-west to south-east and c 2km long and 1.5km wide. Its main natural feature is the wooded valley with ponds running south-east from Keele Hall to Springpool Wood at the park's southern extremity, abutting the M6 motorway. The pool in that wood was originally a hammer pond serving a forge.

The nearest of the valley pools to the Hall was made more sinuous c 1800 to give the impression of a serpentine river, and in 1831 was enlarged to its present extent by adding to it the pool to its south. Also c 1831, and probably by Gilpin (Goodway 1986, 83), are rocky sandstone crags on the east bank of the lake and a viaduct across its north end, adjoining the cascade-like channel which carries water into it. North-west of the head of the pool is the White Well (listed grade II), an Italianate well-house of c 1870. On the east bank of the pool are the foundations of a late Victorian boathouse. Other pools lie further down the valley; the east side of which especially is well planted with ornamental woodland, part of Gilpin's work of c 1830.

North of the Hall, beyond the campus, is slightly higher ground, much of it taken up with sports fields. Occupying the highest ground is the university Observatory. Formerly known as Pavilion Hill, a summerhouse stood here between 1723 and the earlier C19. South of the Hall and campus the park is largely arable farmland; parkland trees were removed using explosives c 1950.

The park was landscaped c 1768-70 by William Emes, who added to or enlarged existing ponds and planted trees to conceal what remained working farms in the park. Much denser planting was done by W S Gilpin who was brought in in 1829, especially around the lakes which until then had an open aspect. The remaining farms in the park were demolished c 1848, after the appointment of a new agent, Andrew Thompson.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen gardens comprise the remains of two compartments, Lower Garden and, abutting it to the west, Upper Garden. Lower Garden, the brick walls of which were built c 1763, lies on the west side of Clock House. Roughly rectangular in plan, it measures 130m east/west and is a maximum of 90m wide at its west end. The north wall, which retains the terrace walk on its north side, was heated. The interior of the former garden is rough grass and has lost most of its old glasshouses, although a derelict range, along with C19 brick sheds, flanks east/west walls along the centre of the garden. The north-facing wall at the west end of the sheds is slag-encrusted, and is pierced by a door surmounted by a stone shield bearing the Sneyd arms. It once formed the back wall of a glasshouse, presumably a fernery. In the east section of the garden are several modern glasshouses.

Upper Garden was added west of Lower Garden in the mid C19. Its area is now largely occupied by halls of residence, although sections of its brick walls have been incorporated in that building scheme.

The Gardener's House (now (1997) the Music Department) lies at the north corner of the Clock House.

REFERENCES Keele Hall Gardens: Proposals for Restoration, (Gillespies 1997) K Goodway, *Landscapes and Gardens at Keele, 1700-1900*, in C Harrison (ed), *Essays on the History of Keele* (1986), pp 67-102

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1889

Archival items Stoke Edith Papers: Nesfield design for parterre (Hereford and Worcester Record Office) [information from Dr Keith Goodway]

Description written: 1997 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: September 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.