

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

MAER HALL

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Name:	MAER HALL
County:	Staffordshire
District:	Newcastle-under-Lyme (District Authority)
Parish:	Maer
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.943956 Longitude: -2.3184002 National Grid Reference: SJ 78701 38555 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001246 Date first listed: 23-Oct-1991

Details

Park laid out, primarily in the first decade of the C19, by John Webb. The park, incorporating pleasure grounds dating from the early C18, forms the setting for a country house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Maer estate was sold in 1693 by Ralph Macclesfield to Capt John Chetwynd. From the Chetwynd family Maer passed to the Talbots; they retained it until 1802 when it was purchased by Josiah Wedgwood, second son of Josiah Wedgwood, master potter. In 1805 he brought in John Webb (1754-1828) whose plans led to the landscaping of the Hall's grounds. The younger Wedgwood was uncle to Charles Darwin who visited many times in the early 1830s and who married Wedgwood's daughter (that is, Darwin's cousin), Emma, in 1839. On Wedgwood's death in 1843, the estate was sold to William Davenport, the Burslem pottery manufacturer. Frederick James Harrison, a Liverpool ship owner, purchased Maer early in the C20 after Davenport's bankruptcy and, in 1910, employed Thomas H Mawson (1861-1933) for help with the gardens. Mawson recommended a scheme of formal terrace gardens with distant planting to frame the views, but the work was not carried out. After Harrison's death the Hall was occupied, until the second's death in 1963, by his two daughters. Ownership later passed to the Tellwright family and it was during their time, in the 1960s, that a substantial proportion of the house was demolished. The estate remains (1999) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Maer Hall stands at the eastern end of a flat-bottomed valley draining to the west through Maer Moss which adjoins the park to the west. The stream out of Maer Pool, the main feature of the park, is the headwater of the River Tern. The area here registered is c 70ha.

ENTRANCE AND APPROACHES The main approach to the site is that to the north, laid out in the late C19, but in accordance with advice provided by John Webb in the early C19. It starts at the single-storey stone lodge (listed grade II) on the A51 which forms the northern boundary of the site, from here passing south through wing walls to Knight's Wood, then across the park, to arrive at the north-west front of the Hall (listed grade II). South-east of the Hall stands the Clocktower gatehouse (listed grade II*) providing the entrance from the village of Maer.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING Maer Hall (listed grade II) is a coursed ashlar building of the late C17. It was greatly enlarged in the mid C19 by William Davenport using the architects William Culshaw and Francis Doyle, but in the 1960s the Hall was reduced to its C17 extent. The stable block (listed grade II) and outbuildings (listed grade II) stand to the south-west on what was formerly the southern end of the early C18 gardens.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The earliest known mention of gardens at Maer Hall is that in Robert Plot's *Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686) which mentions topiary. The original front door of the Jacobean house now looks over lawns, dotted with specimen trees, which lie to the south-west. On an axis to the Hall is a recently (late C20) erected stone plant container which stands on a sundial base. The south-western edge of the lawns is marked by a length of balustrading (listed grade II) 70m west from the Hall which reflects the extent of the early C18 gardens. This feature was probably added for Davenport in the mid C19 and appears to be modelled on that at Haddon Hall (Derbys, qv).

To the north of the Hall is an area of lawn, which, in the early C18, was the site of a wilderness. Laid out in a star-pattern, the design extended from the present drive east to land which is now on the other side of the public road. It was cleared during the course of the early C19 alterations.

A straight, stone-edged path runs north-west from the Hall to a flight of steps which lead, via a bridge over the public road, to an area of pleasure grounds. The road is sunk in a deep cutting with stone revetments (listed grade II) to either side. The path meets with a gravel terrace, at the southern end of which is a gate into the churchyard of St Peter's. This terrace marks the former western edge of a second early C18 wilderness. Cut into the hillside above the terrace are walks laid out in diagonal pattern, the presence of mature yews suggesting that these might once have been yew-hedged. The paths lead to an upper terrace at the centre of which is a semicircular bastion ringed by a planting of mature yews. To the north-east of the walks is a piece of woodland named The Thickets. Webb suggested modifications to this upper wilderness but his proposals were not implemented.

PARK Maer Hall stands at the east end of a park which extends c 1km west of it and is c 500m wide. Maer Pool, its main feature, was originally a natural mere. Webb suggested that its level be raised, and a dam and sluice were constructed which increased the area of water from 6 to 9ha, much of the additional area being in front of the Hall. He advised a small adjustment of the line of Moss Lane, the public road diverted from the western corner of Hogshead Wood south so that it entered the village through the southern end along its present route. Due to silting, the area of the Pool has been reduced to 6ha with the result that the C19 boathouse 100m west of the Hall is now divorced from the water.

South-west of the Hall, four sets of steps lead down from the balustrade to join with walks round the Pool. From the steps at the southern end, a straight path extends to the south, to the area north of the kitchen garden where there is a small rockery (Jacques reported that in 1979 an old gardener called this the 'elephant's grave') beyond which is an avenue of Irish yews. The path continues to Hogshead Wood, at the northern corner of which is the remains of an icehouse. It then passes through Pool End Wood on the north shore of the Pool to Bath Wood (which name suggests the location of a plunge pool) on the Pool's north-east shore, and so back to the balustrade and Hall lawn. Many of the park woodlands were planted according to Webb's recommendations.

Beyond the Pool, to the north and north-west, is an area of parkland within which Nursery Wood is situated. South of the Wood lies an area which formerly formed part of an extensive bog, Maer Moss. The land rises south of this to a strip of woodland, The Ridding, planted on the southern boundary of the site. A spring with accompanying pumphouse and pool form a feature near the base of the slope, and the line of the old public highway to the village, the continuation of Moss Lane, survives as a grassy track across the park, running through Hogshead Wood and along the southern edge of the mere.

In the park east of the drive is a cricket pitch and pavilion, added in the late C19.

Opposite the north lodge, on the far side of the A51, is Berth Hill, on the summit of which are the earthworks of a hillfort (scheduled ancient monument). After Webb put forward proposals for the planting of the southern slopes of the Hill, then part of the Maer estate, the Hill was brought into the ornamental landscape, with paths, platforms for seats, a small grotto facing towards the park carrying the date 1824, and some early C19 plantings. On the eastern side of the Hill is a spring from which water was piped by Wedgwood to Maer Hall and the village, using a terraced aqueduct.

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Maer's park and gardens are largely the result of improvements carried out after Josiah Wedgwood called in John Webb in 1805 to advise. Webb produced a plan of Maer showing an ambitious scheme of road diversions, drawn up and given consent in 1807. Prior to Wedgwood's alterations, the road from the village continued north-west below the western edge of the Hall's gardens, along the shore of the mere, joining the London to Chester road at what is now the north-west corner of the park. In accordance with Webb's recommendations, the road to the west of the Hall was moved eastwards to the steeply rising ground behind, the change allowing the laying out of the north drive through newly created parkland, and increasing the extent of the park to the north and west of the mere. A map of the parish of 1809 shows the changes to the roads as already in place.

KITCHEN GARDEN A detached house and a bungalow have been erected (late C20) in this area. Before 1805 the kitchen garden lay on the south-west facing slope adjacent to The Thickets. Moving Moss Lane southwards enabled the slopes above the Pool to be incorporated into the park, which in turn enabled a new kitchen garden, with an extensive range of glass, to be built near the stables, 200m south-west of the Hall.

REFERENCES R Plot, Natural History of Staffordshire (1686), p 381 T H Mawson, The Life and Work of an English Landscape Architect (1927) D Jacques, York Form 2, 1991 (EH file)

Maps William Godson, Map for the Hon John Chetwynd, c 1717-35 (cite by Jacques) A Plan of the Demesne Lands at Maer, the Seat of Josiah Wedgwood Esq., with some alterations by John Webb, 1805 (3470/1/3), (Staffordshire Record Office) Highway diversion map, 1807 (Staffordshire Record Office) J Fenna, Commons and Waste Lands within the Manor Mare, 1807 (cited by Jacques) T Fenna, Plan of the Parish of Maer, 1809 (private collection) OSD for 1833 map, 1817 (British Library) Maer Hall estate, sale particulars, 1846 (cited by Jacques) RCHME, Measured survey of Berth Hill, 1990

OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1901 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

2nd edition published 1901

Archival items Webb letters (private collection)

Description written: March 1999 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.