

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

LORD LEYCESTER HOSPITAL

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LORD LEYCESTER HOSPITAL

Name: LORD LEYCESTER HOSPITAL

County: Warwickshire

District: Warwick (District Authority)

Parish: Warwick

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.279772
Longitude: -1.5906835
National Grid Reference: SP 28022 64704
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001597
Date first listed: 28-Feb-2002

Details

Gardens associated with the C14 premises of the Guild of the Holy Trinity and St George, which were converted into an almshouse in the late C16.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The site which is today occupied by the Lord Leycester Hospital was donated by the Earl of Warwick in the C14 to the united Guild of the Holy Trinity and St George. The buildings which were subsequently incorporated into the C16 almshouse, including the Guild Hall, were constructed in the late C15 (VCH 1969; Pevsner 1966). After the Dissolution of the Guild in 1540, the site, which included a garden, was transferred to the Corporation of Warwick which used the buildings as a Burgh Hall and grammar school (VCH 1969). In 1571 the Corporation presented the property to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leycester who wished to found an almshouse for a Master and twelve brethren. The almshouse, known after its Founder as the Lord Leycester Hospital, has continued in existence up to the present day (2002).

The late C16 Hospital was provided with a garden which corresponds to the site of the present garden to the north-west of the Master's House. The use of this area as garden appears merely to have continued an existing use. The garden was divided into two sections, the south-east section being left as orchard and greensward for the recreation of the Brethren, while the north-west section was used as productive gardens. A terrace or promenade was constructed along the old town walls which formed the western boundary of the garden, allowing views across surrounding countryside, while during the late C18 a gazebo and pineapple pit were built at the north-east corner of the site. The late C16 division of the garden appears to have survived, despite the threat of the construction of a bulwark 'all along the garden' in 1644 during the Civil War (Trans Birmingham Archaeol Soc 1936), until 1796 when a central walk was constructed across the south-east section (guidebook). This arrangement is shown on the Board of Health plan for Warwick (1851). The axial walk continued through the north-west section to a circular thatched summerhouse which stood against the north-west boundary wall. This structure was described by Nathaniel Hawthorn, who visited the Hospital on several occasions during the 1850s (Hawthorn 1857). Perimeter walks linked the various divisions of the garden, the walks in the northern section of the site being planted with trees, presumably varieties of fruit (Board of Health plan, 1851). Hawthorn noted in 1857 that the Brethren and the Master were each provided with vegetable plots in the north-

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west section of the site. In 1852 the southern section of the garden was remodelled (Accounts). The central walk was removed and a lawn created, surrounded by a serpentine walk. In 1838 the Earl of Warwick presented the Hospital with an antique stone urn, known as the Nilometer, which was placed on the central axis of the garden at the southern end of the northern section (Master's Journal). In 1860 a Norman arch discovered beneath the floor of the Chapel of St James was re-erected in the garden to the south-east of the Nilometer under the direction of the architect Thomas Garner (1839-1906).

Visitors' books (Hospital Archive) show that during the C19 the Lord Leycester Hospital and its garden was one of the principal sites seen by visitors to Warwick, who included figures such as Oscar Wilde, Edward Elgar, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was accompanied by Elizabeth Siddall. The buildings and gardens were extensively described and illustrated in C19 guidebooks to Warwick (Cooke 1847). By the late C19 the garden appears to have declined, and in 1901 it closed to visitors. The thatched summerhouse was removed in 1927 when a greenhouse was erected across part of its site (Accounts). The basic divisions of the garden however, which had existed since at least the late C16, and probably from the C15, survived.

In 1993 an extensive programme of renovation and replanting was begun under the supervision of the landscape historian Mrs Susan Rhodes and the landscape architect Geoffrey Smith. This scheme aimed to consolidate the known historic plan of the garden and provide an appropriate setting for the historic buildings of the Hospital. Today (2002) the Lord Leycester Hospital remains in charitable ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Lord Leycester Hospital is situated on the north side of the High Street (A429) in the centre of Warwick, immediately north of the Chapel of St James which stands above the medieval West Gate. The c 0.25ha site is bounded to the south-east by High Street, from which it is separated by a terrace retained by a stone wall. To the north-east the site adjoins an area of C20 car park and properties in Brook Street, from which it is divided by brick walls, while to the north-west the medieval stone town wall separates it from Market Street. The south-west boundary is also formed by the medieval town wall (listed grade I); this stone structure serves as a retaining wall for the garden and the Master's Terrace. The site has been artificially levelled and is retained by the stone wall fronting High Street and the medieval town wall. There are views west from the Master's Terrace across Bowling Green Street towards Warwick Race Course and St Mary's Commons. The picturesque timber-framed buildings of the Hospital are a prominent and internationally famous feature of Warwick.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The Lord Leycester Hospital is approached from the High Street to the east, immediately west of its junction with Brook Street. A gently sloping brick and cobbled terrace ascends from the level of Brook Street, passing in front of a group of C15 and C16 timber-framed houses (listed grade II* and grade I) which in the C20 have been incorporated into the Hospital. This terrace is planted with standard lime trees which are shown in early C19 views of the Hospital (WCRO), and is retained above the level of the street by a stone wall. After c 45m the terrace passes beneath a gothic stone arch closed by timber doors, to enter the precincts of the C16 Hospital. Immediately west of the arch a passage leads north-west to give access to the car parking area north-east of the Hospital, from which there is a C20 entrance to the Master's Garden. Some 45m south-west of the arch, an arched opening set in the south-east facade of the Hospital gives access to the central gravelled courtyard. The Master's House occupies the north-west wing of the Hospital, and there is access directly from the House to the garden beyond. From the entrance terrace a flight of mid C19 stone steps ascends south to the Chapel of St James which adjoins the Hospital to the south-west. The C19 visitors' entrance to the garden was through a door situated in the north facade of the chapel leading to the Master's Terrace (Hawthorn 1857).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The Lord Leycester Hospital (listed grade I) comprises a group of picturesque half-timbered buildings arranged around a central courtyard which is entered through a stone arch beneath a bargeboarded gable set in the south-east or street facade. The south-east range contains the C15 two-storey Guild Hall, and is jettied at first-floor level. The north-east side of the courtyard has a two-storey open timber gallery, while the facade of the Master's House in the north-west range has extensive mid C19 plaster decoration including motifs derived from the arms of the Earl of Leycester. The south-west range contains the stone-built hall known as King James' Hall. The ensemble of structures which today comprises the Lord Leycester Hospital were constructed at various period between the late C15 and the early C17, with the Master's House undergoing

extensive renovation and alteration in the mid C19. Early C19 views of the central courtyard indicate that it had as a central feature a circular 'basket-style' flower bed; this feature appears to have been removed in the mid C19 (painting, WCRO).

Immediately north-east of the original Hospital buildings, a group of four C15 and C16 timber-framed houses (listed grade I and II*) fronting onto High Street and Brook Street were incorporated into the Hospital in the mid C20 (VCH 1969). To the south-south-west the Hospital is adjoined by the C13 West Gate (remodelled C14 and C15; listed grade I), above which stands the medieval chapel of St James (listed grade I), which has served as the Hospital chapel since the C16.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The Master's Garden occupies a level site immediately north-west of the Hospital. The garden is divided into two sections by a hornbeam hedge which traverses the site from south-west to north-east at a point c 65m north-west of the Master's House. A stone-flagged terrace extends along the north-west facade of the Master's House, from which a centrally placed shallow flight of stone steps flanked by a pair of low piers ascends a shallow bank to reach the lower level of the garden. The terrace and steps correspond to features shown on the Board of Health plan (1851). The lower level of the garden is laid out with a central lawn surrounded by a curvilinear gravel walk. The western corner of the lawn is planted with a late C20 specimen tree replacing a mature standard pear tree. The gravel walk is bordered on its outer side by mixed borders planted with mature trees, ornamental shrubs, roses, and herbaceous subjects; in the mid C19 these borders were planted with 'Eastern exotics' (Mrs Rhodes pers comm, 2002). A stone-flagged path and a C19 metal rose arch lead through the north-east border to reach a walk which extends along the north-east boundary of the garden, while a gravel walk leads south-west to give access to the Master's Terrace, a gravelled walk which extends along the south-west boundary of the garden. The south-east section of the garden assumed its present form in 1852 when a central walk which had been created in 1796 was removed. In the C16 this area comprised lawns and an orchard for the use of the Brethren (guidebook).

Some 60m north-west of the Master's House, a round-headed Norman arch (listed grade II*) is placed on the central axis of the garden, allowing access to the northern section. The C12 arch was discovered beneath the floor of the Chapel of St James during a restoration in 1860, and was subsequently re-erected in the Master's Garden under the direction of Thomas Garner, architect for the restoration (VCH 1969). To the north-west of the Norman arch, and also placed on the central axis of the garden, is the Nilometer (listed grade I), a carved stone classical urn with a heavily reeded body under a cover and finial. The urn is placed on a square stone pedestal, each face of which is ornamented with a circular inscription panel. The pedestal is flanked by four cannon balls recovered from the field of the Battle of Edgehill (EH Register of Battlefields). The Nilometer was presented to the Hospital by the Earl of Warwick in 1838, and is shown in its present position on the Board of Health plan (1851). The urn derives its name from its original use as a finial on a column used to measure the depth of the River Nile (guidebook). It is possible that the Nilometer was acquired by the second Earl of Warwick from his uncle, Sir William Hamilton, at the same period as the more celebrated 'Warwick Vase' (Mrs Rhodes pers comm, 2002). Guidebooks suggest that before being given to the Hospital, the Nilometer had stood in the Conservatory built in the gardens of Warwick Castle (qv) in 1786-7 (Cooke 1847). Immediately north-west of the transverse hornbeam hedge a gravel walk extends across the width of the garden, linking the north-east boundary walk and the Master's Terrace. This walk is bordered to the north-west by low clipped box hedges. A brick and cobbled walk extends north-west from the Nilometer on the central axis of the garden, dividing the northern section into two. The axial walk is aligned to the north-west on a circular brick and timber summerhouse which is surmounted by a conical thatched roof. The structure shelters a metal bench seat and has a brick-paved and cobbled circular floor, the cobbles being recovered from the floor of the C19 summerhouse. The present summerhouse was constructed in 1993, its design being based on that of a circular summerhouse known to have existed in the Master's Garden from at least the mid C19, the cobbled floor of which was discovered during levelling work in 1993 (Board of Health plan, 1851; guidebook). The present structure stands c 2m south-east of the site of the C19 summerhouse which is partly covered by an early C20 glasshouse. The axial walk is flanked by a pair of herbaceous borders backed by a line of oak posts which support chains for training rambling roses.

The north-east section of the northern area of the garden is laid out with a central lawn surrounded by mixed borders. A specimen tree is planted at each corner of this rectangular area. The south-west section of the northern area of the garden is laid out with box-edged cruciform brick paths which converge at a central rondpoint with a stone sundial set in a circular flower bed. This garden is treated as a potager with the four quarters planted with seasonal vegetables and fruit bushes. The two northern areas of

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the garden were planted in their present form in the late C20 under the direction of Susan Rhodes and Geoffrey Smith, although the general divisions reflect those shown on the Board of Health plan (1851) and those known to have existed in the C16.

To the north-west of the garden divisions a further gravel walk extends across the width of the site linking the two boundary walks. To the south-west the Master's Terrace comprises a gravel walk extending along the medieval town wall. The northern section of this walk passes beneath a series of late C20 metal rose arches modelled on C19 examples found in the garden, and terminates at a late C20 oak summerhouse. The southern section, to the south-west of the south lawn, is partly enclosed by hornbeam and privet hedges and leads to the chapel of St James. The north-east boundary walk is also surfaced with gravel, and to the south-west is edged by low clipped box hedges; to the north-east it adjoins the brick garden wall which is planted with climbing subjects. The walk passes beneath a further series of late C20 metal rose arches, while to the south it is bordered by mature pleached limes. Towards the southern end of the walk, a door set in the boundary wall gives access to the mid C20 car park (outside the area here registered) and Brook Street. The north-east walk is aligned to the south on a late C20 ceramic wall fountain in the form of a lizard designed by Lucy Smith, while to the north it is aligned on the late C18 brick gazebo (listed grade II) which stands at the northern corner of the site. The gazebo comprises a two-storey structure with an upper chamber approached by a late C20 timber staircase and gallery, beneath which is a late C18 or early C19 pineapple pit. Of brick construction, the pit was heated by a furnace situated in the lower storey of the gazebo. The area to the south-east of the gazebo and pineapple pit is paved with brick, while a timber gate to the south-west of the gazebo gives access to the nursery and frame yard. This area also contains an early C20 brick and timber glasshouse by Messenger of Loughborough (restored late C20), together with other associated C20 horticultural structures. The frame yard is screened from the garden areas to the south by a clipped yew hedge, and partly occupies the site of a service area shown on the Board of Health plan (1851).

To the north-east of the Hospital, and to the south-east of the car park, from which it is entered through a short tunnel arbour of green oak, is an approximately rectangular area planted as a box-edged knot garden with brick-paved paths and a sculpture of the heraldic Bear and Ragged Staff (heraldic device of the earls of Warwick) by Rachel Higgins. The pattern of the box knot reflects that of the C16 timber-work on the adjacent Hospital buildings, while the topiary symbolises the twelve Brethren of the Hospital. This knot garden was designed by Susan Rhodes and Geoffrey Smith in 2000, and occupies the site of the rear gardens of the C15 and C16 houses facing High Street and Brook Street which were taken into the Hospital in 1956 (VCH 1969).

REFERENCES

Cooke's Guide to Warwick and Kenilworth Castle (1847 and subsequent edns to 1858) N Hawthorn, Our Old Home (1857) Architectural Review, (February 1913) Trans Birmingham Archaeol Soc 60, (1936), pp 112-44 N Pevsner and A Wedgwood, The Buildings of England: Warwickshire (1966), pp 464-5 Victoria History of the County of Warwickshire VIII, (1969), pp 423-6 Warwickshire Gardens Trust, Newsletter, (Summer 1995), pp 11-14 J Lovie, Warwickshire Register Review, (English Heritage 1997), pp 301-4 The Master's Garden, Lord Leycester Hospital, guidebook, (Lord Leycester Hospital, nd)

Maps Board of Health plan for Warwick, 1851 (Warwickshire County Record Office)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1887 2nd edition published 1905 3rd edition published 1925

Illustrations The Warwickshire County Record Office holds a collection of C18 and C19 engravings, drawings, and paintings of the Lord Leycester Hospital (PV.WAR). C19 and C20 photographs of the Hospital and gardens (private collection)

Archival items Accounts of the Lord Leycester Hospital, C17-C19 (Warwickshire County Record Office) Journals of the Masters of the Lord Leycester Hospital (Hospital Archive) Visitors' Books for the Lord Leycester Hospital, C19 (Hospital Archive)

Personal communication from Mrs Susan Rhodes

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Legal

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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.