

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

GAWSWORTH [OLD] HALL

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Name:	GAWSWORTH [OLD] HALL
District:	Cheshire East (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Gawsworth
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.223462 Longitude: -2.1696439 National Grid Reference: SJ 88771 69615, SJ 88827 69561, SJ 89206 69608 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000539 Date first listed: 10-Jun-1985

Details

Earthworks and other remains of an extensive formal garden of c 1600 associated with a manor house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the later Middle Ages the manor of Gawsworth was owned by the Fittons, a minor county family which in the later C16 became involved in court service. In 1569 Sir Edward Fitton II (1527-79) became the first Lord President of the Council of Connaught and Thomond, and later Treasurer of War in Ireland. His son Edward III (1550-1606) was a friend of Sir Christopher Hatton and Sir Walter Raleigh, and in the 1590s owed £400 to Sir Thomas Tresham, builder of the great garden at Lyveden New Bield (Northants) (qv). On the death of Edward III Gawsworth passed to his son Edward IV, who was succeeded by his son Edward V. Following the death of the last in 1643 a dispute arose over the succession, which was only decided in favour of his nephew Charles Gerard, later Earl of Macclesfield, in 1663. The title to the property however continued to be contested, and in 1712 that dispute led to a duel between Gerard's descendant Lord Mohun and the Duke of Hamilton in which both were killed. In 1725 the estate passed to Lord Harrington, whose main house was Elvaston, in Derbyshire (qv). The Harringtons remained owners until 1955, although the Old Hall was generally tenanted. It remains (1997) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The hamlet of Gawsworth, comprising little more than the Old Hall, New Hall, church and Rectory, lies to the west of the main A536 from Congleton to Macclesfield, c 4km south-west of the latter. To the north the registered area is bounded by the minor road past Gawsworth church, and to the east by a track serving Parkhouse Farm. Otherwise the site is bounded by open countryside, and in general the setting is very rural. The registered area is c 9ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The Old Hall is approached from the north, from Church Lane, via a causeway which crosses the dam separating the second and third of the fishponds which form the northern element of the designed landscape around the Hall. To the south of the causeway are tall C18 gate piers (listed grade II), imported to the site in the mid C20, with C20 iron gates.

West of St James' church (outside the registered area) Church Lane is lined with mature lime trees as far as the Harrington Arms inn, a distance of 300m. This avenue, planted in 1827, runs along the southern edge of the fifth of Gawsworth's fishponds.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING Gawsworth Old Hall (listed grade I) is a timber-framed building of shallow U-plan. Originally the building was ranged around a courtyard, but in 1701 large parts of the building were pulled down including the southernmost bay or bays of the great hall and, it is assumed, the west range of the Hall. What survives are the north and east ranges which are at least in part medieval, and a south range with a three-decker bay window with exuberant decoration of c 1580 looking into the courtyard.

Some 60m north-east of the Old Hall, and linked to the wall along the north side of the gardens complex, is The Gatehouse (listed grade II). Listed as of mid to late C17 date with additions, the two-storey brick building has a regular plan of four small rooms. East of this, and built against the inner face of the north garden wall, are brick stables converted to residential use.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The principal pleasure garden associated with the Old Hall, mainly developed from the 1960s, lies to its west side, and comprises a series of small formal beds and a fountain set in a lawn. To the west, and up a scarp, are the lime trees of the Wilderness Garden (see below). To the north of the Old Hall lawns run down to the third fishpond in the chain, and there is also a small lawn to the south of it.

The Old Hall's early modern gardens lie within well-defined boundaries, to the north provided in part by a chain of fishponds and otherwise by tall brick walls. The fishponds, five in all, lie in a straight chain 550m long dropping from east to west. There are large dams between the pools, each of them carrying a road or path. The westernmost pool is dry, as it has been since at least c 1770. There is a terraced walk down its north side and further earthworks, perhaps associated with water management, lie in the low ground to its west. Looking down the chain from a mound 40m east of Wall Pond, the easternmost pool, is the Pigeon House or Watch Tower (listed grade II), an early C18 pigeon house now converted to residential use. It is a square, three-storey brick building with a pyramidal roof. It presumably replaced an earlier building or viewing platform.

Brick walls of c 1600 (listed grade II), 2-3m tall and with outward sloping stone coping, enclose a roughly square area c 250m across with the Old Hall centrally placed in the northern half. The west wall is exactly 300 yards long, hinting at the planned nature of the whole garden. The central portion of the south wall bows out in a half moon 100m wide and 30m deep; a doorway, possibly C18 and now blocked, gave access from the garden to the surrounding park. A stream course runs from north to south down the centre of the garden, from below the presumed south end of the great hall, where the building platform is retained by a brick wall with shallow apses of c 1600, to the site of a small round pond c 60m north of the door in the centre of the south wall. The west half of the garden (which the OS calls, without apparent authority, 'Tilting Ground?') is considerably more complicated than that to the east. Down the full length of the west wall of the garden, and c 5m within the garden, is a substantial raised walk. From this views could be enjoyed down into and across the garden, as well as over the garden wall to the surrounding park. Further afield can be seen the distant hills which provide such pleasing views from the garden: to the west Beeston, Peckforton and the hills of north Wales, to the south the mounded hill called The Cloud, and to the east Shutlands Low and the more distant Pennines. Immediately east of the south end of the raised walk is a prospect mound; its matching pair in the south-east corner of the garden was removed during the Second World War. To the east of the raised walk a 60m wide series of terraced compartments runs down the length of the garden, with a terraced scarp up to c 7m deep running down most of its east side. One of these compartments, to the west of the Old Hall, contains what in the late C20 came to be called the Wilderness Garden. This was a small plantation, c 60m square, chiefly of very mature lime trees, some of which - for instance at the north-east and north-west corners - indicate an initial formal arrangement. North of this two terraces drop to the third fishpond in the north chain, while to its south is a level compartment c 70m from north to south. A 15m wide platform, slightly raised, at the south end of the latter runs along and looks down into a sunken rectangular compartment c 40m from north to south. Terraced walks lie along its north and west sides, excavation showing those along the north side (but not those to the west) to have been retained by brick walls (Turner 1990). The previously mentioned prospect mound lies above the south-west corner of this compartment, which along its east side is open to the central portion of the garden, bisected by the stream course.

The south edge of the sunken rectangular compartment is picked up by the line of the south end of the 130m long sunken compartment which is the main feature of the east half of the garden.

No documentary evidence or even traditions survive relating to the gardens. It has been argued by Turner (1990) that the archaeological and stylistic evidence indicates a construction date of c 1600, about the time the Old Hall was enlarged. This

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was the period when the Fittons were at their most successful and socially aspirant, and Mary, daughter of Sir Edward Fitton III, was appointed Maid of Honour to Queen Elizabeth in 1596. She, the supposed 'Dark Lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets, was dismissed from court in 1602 after becoming pregnant by the Earl of Pembroke. Her father's acquaintanceship with Hatton, Raleigh and Tresham would certainly have given him the opportunity to be exposed to contemporary fashions and thinking about great gardens. David Jacques however (pers comm) thinks the garden is more likely to have been constructed in the later C17 by the first Earl of Macclesfield (d 1694), who had come into the property in 1663. This he feels is more probable both in terms of the known family history and on stylistic grounds. Another possibility is that the garden was constructed c 1600, and the wall added half a century or more later.

PARK In the later C16 a 600 acre (250ha) park surrounded Gawsworth. To the west it extended up to the Macclesfield to Congleton road, to the north to Woodhouse Lane, to the east to a line close to that followed by the modern railway line, and to the south partly followed Cow Brook. That southern boundary, still followed by field edges, lies c 750m south of Parkhouse, which stands roughly in the centre of the former park. In the later C16 there was a warren in the northernmost part of the park, while 400m north-west of the Old Hall is a hill called The Mount, from which extensive views can be gained both across the park and out into the surrounding countryside. A few ancient lime trees survive on the footpath leading east from the north-east corner of the garden enclosure, remnants of an avenue. In 1725, after Lord Harrington inherited Gawsworth, the park was inclosed and parcelled out among tenant farmers.

The former park is not included in the registered area.

REFERENCES

P de Figueiredo and J Treuherz, *Cheshire Country Houses* (1988), pp 99-102 R C Turner, *Gawsworth Hall Gardens: A History and Guide to the Great Elizabethan Garden at Gawsworth, Cheshire* (1990) *Gawsworth Hall*, guidebook, (English Life Publications 1992)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: Cheshire sheet 43, 1st edition published 1882 OS 25" to 1 mile: Cheshire sheet 43.3, 1st edition published c 1882

Description written: September 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.