

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PITCHFORD HALL

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Name:	PITCHFORD HALL
District:	Shropshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Pitchford
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.635570 Longitude: -2.7007854 National Grid Reference: SJ 52671 04433 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001133 Date first listed: 01-Dec-1986

Details

Gardens, pleasure grounds and a park associated with a timber-framed manor house, close to which stands a tree house, probably C17.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Pitchford was acquired by the Ottley family in 1473 and passed from father to son until 1807. Lord between 1695 and his death in 1752 was Adam Ottley, Bishop of St David's, who seems to have made several adornments to the gardens and Pitchford's deer park. He was succeeded by Thomas, and he by another Adam. On his death in 1807 the manor passed to his cousin Charles Jenkinson, later Earl of Liverpool, under whom the present park was created. He was succeeded by his daughter, Lady Louisa Cotes, who held Pitchford 1851-87, and she by her son Col Charles James Cotes, 1887-1913. His heir was his sister Victoria, wife of Lt-Gen Sir Robert Grant. The Hall then descended in the family until the early 1990s when it and most of the park were sold. They remain (1998) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Pitchford Hall lies c 8km south-east of Shrewsbury. The Hall, and the adjacent parish church, lie almost 1km north-west of the modern village of Pitchford. The Hall stands on the north side of the Row Brook valley, at the point where the Brook is joined by a smaller stream from the west which has been dammed to form the two large pools west of the Hall. The minor local road running north from Pitchford village towards Shrewsbury bounds the park to the east and north; it was moved to this line in 1833 by the lord of the manor, previously having followed the line of the south drive. South-east of Oak Cottage the footpath followed by the park boundary is believed to follow the line of a Roman road. Otherwise the park boundary follows field edges. The area here registered is c 40ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The Hall is approached from the north via a straight, 300m long drive lined with a double avenue of mature lime trees. This slopes gently down from the North Lodge (listed grade II), a single-storey red sandstone building, probably of the 1830s, designed in the Tudor-gothic style by the Shrewsbury architect Edward Haycock (d 1870). The South Lodge (listed grade II), at the north end of Pitchford village, is in the same style. The drive from here north-west across the park is no longer extant, although its line is marked by several massive oak trees, survivors of a flanking avenue. The line of that avenue was re-established in the late C20 with new oaks. Until c 1886 the drive led to a bridge across the Row Brook 50m south-east of the Hall, and thence to a forecourt to the south of the Hall. This arrangement is shown on a view of

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Pitchford taken in 1714 (VCH 1968). About 1886 that bridge was demolished and rebuilt (listed grade II) 100m east of the Hall, with the drive from the South Lodge now being carried across this and via a line along the north side of the Brook to the new forecourt on the north side of the Hall.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Pitchford Hall (listed grade I) is generally considered Shropshire's finest timber-framed house. John Sandford, a local carpenter, was employed in building a 'mansion place' for Adam Ottley in 1549. This forms the west wing of the present house, the main front of which is now the south-facing garden front. The east wing and the symmetrically-planned hall range with central cross-passage - which produced an E-plan house - are probably late C16. A service wing had been added to the west of the house by 1682. The roof is stone tiled, and rising above it are elaborate brick chimneys, probably C16. There was a clever restoration by George Devey 1884-6, and not all work of that period has yet been disentangled.

Immediately south-east of the Hall is a U-plan stables court (listed grade II), of brick and largely C18. About 75m to the east is a substantial brick farmhouse of the early C19, presumably for a bailiff.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the north of the Hall, cut back into the hillside south of the churchyard, is a gravelled forecourt with domed, clipped yews around its edge. The east side of the forecourt is retained by a 7m tall, buttressed stone wall (listed grade II), rising above the Row Brook as it turns east. From this terrace there is a view down the Brook and across the parkland to its south. West of the forecourt is a small lawn with beds and a central tazza or basin. The lawn, forecourt and terrace were all formed c 1886.

The court to the south of the Hall is a formal lawn, crossed by an axial north/south path from a door in the centre of the Hall. The lawn extends c 25m beyond the Hall where, like the forecourt to the north, it is cut back into the hillside on its west and south sides. This half of the lawn is defined by stone walls (listed grade II). A summerhouse (listed grade II) with a roof of large stone slates stands in the angle of the west and south walls, while a stone alcove seat is built into the south end of the west range of the Hall. The walls and summerhouse are of the early C20, being built around the garden created c 1886 when Devey pulled down the old forecourt wall to open up the south side of the Hall. Stone steps (listed grade II), again probably early C20, lead down from the south-east corner of the lawn to the bank of the Row Brook. The Hall stands only 15m from the Brook, the ground between them being occupied by a terraced lawn, perhaps created in the later C18 when a bow window was inserted in the drawing room on this side of the Hall. At the bottom of the terraces is a stone wall. The Brook (called the Canal in 1774, NLW) which is c 3m below the top of the wall, is carried over a cascade-like weir (which was crossed by the former bridge carrying the south drive) 50m south-west of the Hall; another lies 50m south-east of the Hall.

West of the Hall are two large, irregular, fishponds: Church Pool and, to its west, Heath Pool. These are surrounded by Heathpool Plantation, through which there is a circuit walk. The late C19 OS map marks an icehouse between the two ponds. Ornamental woodland, including large, mature specimen trees, also extends along the bank west of the south lawn, north and east of the kitchen garden and either side of the south drive east of the church. Within the last, 20m north-east of the late C19, twin-arched bridge which carries the line of the south drive over the Row Brook, is a Bituminous Well, 0.5m deep and stone lined, wherein pitch still bubbles up occasionally. Pitchford takes its name from this phenomenon, and no doubt the well was a curiosity to be visited.

On a slight knoll 10m west of the north-west corner of the kitchen garden is an ancient and massively squat lime tree which supports Pitchford's well-known tree house (listed grade I). First documented in 1714, it is probably of C17 date. Much of the present structure, including its gothic plastered interior, is of the later C18. From it there are views to the Hall, which stands below it and 100m to the north-east, and over the countryside to the west and south occupied, at the time the tree house was built, by Pitchford's deer park.

Beneath the west end of the south range of the stables is an underground chamber, 5m square, 6m high and barrel vaulted. High on the north wall is some shell work, and almost certainly this is an C18 grotto-like pool or nymphaeum, perhaps used for plunging. The original doorway into the chamber, in its south wall, is blocked. This was reached via a ramp or steps down a tunnel from an outer entrance 20m south of the stables. This was approached via a gully, overhung with yews, which led from the door in the south-west corner of the wall around the south lawn. Map evidence suggests the blocking of the entrance to the chamber may have taken place between 1882 and 1902; only the top of the outer door is now visible. The chamber is now

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accessible via a 50m long, 1m high tunnel which carries water from the pond north of the stables. The water is carried away from the chamber via a tunnel which drops steeply away from it, to emerge by the weir 80m to the east.

PARK The Hall and its pleasure grounds lie on the south-west side of a small (c 40ha), roughly oval park, created soon after 1833 when the Shrewsbury road was diverted away from the Hall. South-east of the Hall the park is permanent pasture with some mature parkland oaks. Otherwise the park is either farmed as arable or divided into fenced paddocks for horse grazing. Some 350m south-east of the Hall, in Bath Wood (a post-1902 plantation) on the east bank of the Row Brook, are one, or two, spring-fed plunges or cold baths. In the north-west part of the wood is a ruinous stone-lined structure, c 4m square, marked as 'Well' on the late C19 OS map when it stood amid a few specimen trees. Sixty metres to the south is an oval pool, 10m long, 1.5m deep, brick lined and with steps down into the water on the middle of the west side. In the late C19 this stood within a small wooded enclosure. The date of the two structures is uncertain; it is possible the former is C18, the latter an outdoor pool perhaps constructed as part of the improvements of the 1880s. At the top of the wooded slope above the pool is a circular, stepped, ashlar plinth. It now supports a 1m high rude boulder; originally (? c 1800) it may have been surmounted with an urn. It is intervisible with the Hall and orangery (see below).

A deer park in the western part of the parish, created before 1596, was extended in 1729 to include Park Farm, and again in 1742-3. Adam Ottley wrote to his daughter in March 1743 '[Sir Edward Smythe, of Acton Burnell] rode with me some hours in the park yester-morning, likes that and the addition of the new part, the deer have been in it about a fortnight. I'm busy in finishing the new pale, clearing the hedge rows, opening the vistas and beautifying it against the time that you and your brothers may now and then take a walk with me there'. (Ottley Corresp 3666). This park was probably disparked shortly before 1766. The Kennels, 100m west of the registered area, includes a structure incorporating brick piers which looks as if it may have been built in the C18 as a deer shelter (cf that at Henley, Shrops, qv).

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden lies 100m south of the Hall on ground which slopes down to the east, with the Row Brook 25m east of the bottom of the garden. Overall the garden area is roughly 80m square, and comprises a main brick-walled compartment which occupies the west half of the garden and a lower garden with glasshouses to the east. The walled garden, probably mid C18 (see below), has rounded corners to the north-west and south-west, and a main double gateway in the centre of the west wall. From this a path runs through the garden to a corresponding gateway in the east wall, the piers of which are surmounted with carved stone lions. Built against the north wall is a largely wooden orangery (listed grade II), 16m wide, designed in the early C19, possibly by Edward Haycock. From this there is a good view over the walled garden and the valley of the Row Brook to Pitchford village on the skyline. After the Second World War the orangery was converted for use as a house, and a roof of stone slates replaced the earlier glass one. A stone terrace runs along the south front of the house. In the east half of the garden, about half of which is still cultivated for vegetables, fruit and flowers, are three parallel glasshouses of the later C19. There are C19 sheds up the outside of the north wall.

It is possible the walled garden dates from c 1730, as in 1732 Stephen Switzer (d 1745) was supplying Pitchford with 'wall trees' from his London nursery. Adam Ottley, who had visited him, wrote to his wife 'Switzer I hope has distinguished the trees by proper labels and then Richard [the Pitchford gardener] will know that the choicest trees must have the best walls and most of the sun.' (Ottley Corresp 2652).

REFERENCES

Country Life, 9 (2 February 1901), pp 144-51; 41 (7 April 1917), pp 352-8; (14 April 1917), pp 376-81; no 26 (25 June 1992), pp 84-6 The Victoria History of the County of Shropshire viii, (1968), pp 119-20, 123-4 and pl opp p 132 P A Stamper, Historic Parks and Gardens of Shropshire (1996), pp 13, 17, 18, 40, 56-7, 62, 98 J Ionides, Thomas Farnolls Pritchard of Shrewsbury (1999), p 51

Maps Pitchford, 1682 (photographic copy in Shropshire Records and Research Centre) Pitchford field name map, 1848 (Shropshire Records and Research Centre)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1881-2, published 1890 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1882, published 1882 2nd edition surveyed 1901, published 1902

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Archival items The Pitchford Hall and Ottley Correspondence Collections are held in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Description written: August 1998 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: February 2000

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.