

SITE NAME:	Backford Hall				
Address	Backford, near Chester, CH1 6PX				
Unitary Authority:	Cheshire West and Chester				
Parish:	Backford and Stoke				
Location:	3m north of Chester				
Grid Ref:	SJ 397 718				
Owner:	Cheshire West and Chester Council				
Recorder:	BM	Date of Site Visits	17.08.2011 07.09.2011	Date of Report:	1 st draft. 19.09.2011 Final 06.10.2011

Summary

A 19th century gentleman's residence constructed on the site of two earlier mansions, with 20th century additions to form council offices. Mature pleasure ground planting survives together with sections of walled garden wall, the lodge, carriage house, stables and open views across an enclosed meadow from the main elevation of the hall.

History

There is no mention of Backford, 'ford by a ridge'¹, in Domesday, but it is understood that lands at Backford were given to the Massies, Barons of Dunham Massy, at the Conquest or shortly thereafter². By descent it became part of the estate of Richard de Mascy of Sale and then belonged to Edward de Mascy of Tymperlegh³. In 1571 Henry Birkenhead purchased Backford from Thomas Aldersey. By 1605 Backford had become the residence of the Birkenhead family.⁴

In 1704 Thomas Birkenhead died without issue and the property was divided between his nieces Frances Birkenhead, married to John Glegg of Irby, and Deborah, wife of William Glegg of Grange (re married to Lieut-Col Charles Crosbie.)⁵ The 16th century mansion was taken down by John Glegg and replaced with a new brick mansion.⁶

In 1816 both parts of the estate were vested in Major-Gen Birkenhead, inheriting from his grandmother Frances Birkenhead and succeeding to the second portion on the death of Deborah (without issue) in 1795.⁷ The grounds were laid out by John Webb⁸.

The Tithe Map c.1842 indicates that Birkenhead Glegg owned most of the parish of Backford and Stoke through which passed the Chester to Birkenhead turnpike⁹. 'Backford Hall, offices, buildings, yards, gardens and plantations' are shown immediately east of the road, the plantations encompassing a meadow (116) with an oval pool. Immediately north of the hall and outbuildings is a walled garden (118) and garden (107), while to the east and south east are a house, buildings, yard (112), orchard pasture (110), stackyard (113) and garden (114) occupied by William Mason. The hall and environs, including the church of St Oswald and dwellings and gardens occupied by Thomas Hughes and Samuel Lewes, are bounded by an irregular winding lane passing through the village of Backford. There is a path between the church and hall. Three fields north west of the Hall are enclosed by woodland belts and circumscribed by a path. The northern boundary is defined by a road or lane.¹⁰

In 1843 Baskervyle Glegg died leaving Backford to his brother Edward Holt Glegg and cousin Lee Porcher Townshend in trust.¹¹ Edward Holt Glegg married in 1845¹². A Contract between John and William Walker of Birkenhead (builders) and Edward Holt Glegg of Backford Hall, June 1st 1845, was drawn up for the erection of a mansion at the cost of £10,700.¹³ Edward

Holt Glegg, his daughter, son, nursemaid and other staff are recorded as resident at Backford Hall in the 1851 census and again in 1861 when Edward's wife Margaret and other staff were also present.¹⁴ The new hall in neo Elizabethan style was designed by John Cunningham¹⁵, and is dated 1863¹⁶. The lodge adjacent to the entrance from the Chester to Birkenhead Road is also dated 1863. The coach house, with the same diaper brickwork as the house, is dated 1853. Ormerod says "The grounds of the new Hall were laid out by Gray of London, the landscape gardener, in 1857, when the new Hall was built"¹⁷ It is understood that John Cunningham's original house was destroyed in a fire and then rebuilt which would account for the discrepancy in dates. Beneath the forecourt is a large brick lined tank which collected roof drainage from the front of the hall, creating a reservoir. It was probably constructed following the fire¹⁸.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey c.1875 records the new hall and the changes that had taken place since the Tithe Map c1842. It indicates that the new Hall occupied a similar position and south west/northeast alignment to the old hall but that all the outbuildings were now disposed to the north east, allowing unobstructed views to and from the two principal elevations of the hall. The main approach to the hall from the Chester - Birkenhead Road is now flanked by the lodge and reconfigured to create a curving drive to the forecourt north west of the hall. The meadow with pool has been incorporated into the pleasure grounds. The pool appears to have been extended creating a promontory and has a boathouse. There is a network of paths throughout the pleasure grounds. The path around the fields north of the Hall is retained. The road bounding the hall and grounds has been rationalised into a smooth curve and then straightened to the north, allowing additional ground to be encompassed within the hall grounds. Areas north and east of the hall include two gardens with curved walls, a conservatory, glasshouses and areas of regular tree planting, possibly an orchard. A small building shown on the Tithe Map (108 and 109) as the dwelling house of Thomas Hughes and Samuel Lewes is retained within the property beside the newly straightened road.

In 1877 Edward Holt Glegg died leaving Backford Hall and all his estates to his eldest son Birkenhead Glegg and his nephew Edward Townshend, or survivor of him, in a will dated 10th May 1869.¹⁹ The 1881 census records that Birkenhead Glegg, his mother, brother and a number of servants were in residence²⁰. Some of the servants may be those in a photograph at the south east door of the hall, c.1888²¹. Birkenhead Glegg died 18th November 1914, and his brother Edward Maxwell Glegg died at Backford 6th February 1927. As neither of them had produced heirs²² the property was inherited by Lettice Valentine Lee Townshend, daughter of Edward Townshend Logan who had been killed in action in France 19th February 1915. (Edward's eldest son, Edward Lee Venable had pre deceased him, dying at Gorstage Hall 13th February 1915, age 14)²³.

Lettice Townshend was legally granted the property on 10th January 1928. Her inheritance comprised -

'Backford Hall estate 923.439 acres, of which land in hand comprised:

Hall, grounds and 3 cottages 27.736 acres

Plantations 35.461 acres

(The rest of the land was all tenanted.)

Irby Hall estate 276.168 acres', all tenanted'²⁴.

Lettice Townshend never lived at Backford but placed the estate in the hands of Gandy and Sons, surveyors of Northwich. Prospective tenants included a boys school, Mr and Mrs Jacobs (Jacobs biscuits), and a Salvatorian Order who occupied the hall for 3 months. After a period as a country club the hall was finally sold to a shipping company in 1941. Lettice Townshend married John Robert Collie in London on 22nd November 1934²⁵ Gandy's letter books provide a record of the property during Miss Townshend's ownership²⁶.

5th June 1927 Road to be widened and estate to be paid £55 for land, £2 for trees²⁷

12th Sept 1927 - enquiry for land at Backford Hall to be used as a golf course²⁸

10th Oct 1927 - reference to summer house purchased in Backford House sale that is no longer wanted by purchaser and is still on site²⁹

17th Oct 1927 - Mr T Humphreys of Backford Hall Lodge and his family to take over kitchen gardens as market gardens³⁰
 1st Nov 1927 - 6 elm trees down in hall grounds due to gale³¹
 21st Dec 1927 - 'Everywhere is beginning to look very much tidier and less overgrown'³²
 30th June 1928 - to Mr Humphreys -'I have given permission for Mr Douglas Jones to come over probably Monday pm to try his luck fishing in the pool'³³
 3rd Dec 1928 - to G E Ashford, the Castle, Chester - will remove dangerous trees overhanging road³⁴
 14th Jan 1929- Mr and Mrs Jacobs would like to take a lease on the Hall.³⁵
 11th March 1929 - re proposed greenhouses, central heating and independent hot water supply by Foster and Pearson. Greenhouse plans meet with Mrs Jacob's approval³⁶
 15th March 1929 - to Messrs Dickson and Son, Chester re list of shrubs which Capt Jacob has asked the owner to plant³⁷
 5th April 1929 - negotiations with Jacobs fall through³⁸
 10th August 1934 - letter to Rev Father Enderlie, Wylde Green House Birmingham (Salvatorian Order) who is interested in a lease of 7 years
 22nd August 1934 - letter confirming verbal agreement to lease
 8th October 1934 - negotiations with priests have fallen through and they vacate the Hall³⁹
 7th Feb 1935 - Mr F W Woodhall had applied for tenancy of Hall as a country club
 20th March 1935 - lease refers to pool as a fish pond
 24th April 1935 - Mrs Collie objects to the pool being used for bathing
 24th June 1935 - lease signed⁴⁰

On 25th July 1941 a Conveyance to 'Alan Heathcote Williams of Craigbet Liverpool Road in the City of Chester Engineer (thereafter called the purchaser) of the third part of Dock Services Limited of 18 Chapel Chambers North, 28 Chapel Street Liverpool - the Company', records the sale of the property to a shipping company. The schedule includes 'lodge outbuildings conservatory glass houses gardens grounds and appurtenances'.⁴¹

In December 1945 Backford Hall was advertised for sale by private treaty ,with extensive gardens and grounds extending to 25 acres'.⁴² On 9th January 1946 a Cheshire County Council note entitled ,Staff Sub- Committee - Office Accommodation' records:

'Backford Hall. I have been told privately that this property has not yet been sold and that the owners are likely to accept £12,500 instead of the original figure of about £15,000. The hall includes an area of 25 acres. There is a lodge from which an income could be derived. The accommodation at the Hall is the same as that at Watergate House, so that we should only have to move the two huts from the grounds of Watergate House'⁴³.

The Hall and surrounding land were acquired for £10,000. ⁴⁴By 29th March 1946 the Conveyance had been signed and ex army huts were transported from Linenhall stables to provide the additional accommodation required by the County Surveyor's Department.⁴⁵

C. 1971 the Chester - Birkenhead Road was widened to create a central reservation. This resulted in the closing of the entrance by the lodge⁴⁶ and creation of the principal access from Gordon Lane. In 1972 a new purpose designed building was completed for the department of Trading Standards⁴⁷ replacing some lean to garages by the wall of the kitchen garden⁴⁸. Also in 1972 a pair of semi detached houses were erected in the area of the former walled gardens to provide accommodation for caretakers⁴⁹. During the 1970's over 100 trees on the roadside frontage of the hall and grounds to the north succumbed to Dutch elm disease and had to be felled. A storm in 1976 resulted in the loss of a Redwood near the car park.

C. 1980 construction of the M56 over the A41 involved emptying a couple of ponds. The fish, including pike, tench, rudd, perch and roach, were removed and taken to the pond at Backford Hall. C 1985 the pond was covered in blanket weed and duck weed. The groundsman used a chemical to treat the weed which resulted in the death of all the fish and there have been no fish since. C 1991 the pond was de silted, pumped out to wagon situated beside the A41. The pond depth varied between 0-4ft suggesting that it did not originate as a marl pit, marl pits tending to

be of greater depth. C 1992 the path around the pond was improved as part of a staff project. Work included cutting back vegetation, creating steps (using railway sleepers,) installing edgings and laying gravel surfacing. Prior to this it was not possible to walk around the lake due to vegetation on the west side. (The path was subsequently refurbished by the groundsman who installed new board edgings). A timber balustrade was erected around a stone paved viewing point on the southern edge of the lake. It replaced an earlier stone balustrade. It is understood that that roof drainage from the rear of the hall drains to the pond and that an old shed near the lake, erected in 1946, accommodated a pump in case of fire⁵⁰.

Since 1990, various mature trees have been lost due to age, storm or disease. These include a large oak near the car park c.1996, a large beech tree at the front of the hall in a storm, 1998, and a mature oak west of the hall due to honey fungus 2003/4.⁵¹ Some replacement planting has been undertaken. A tree survey report was produced in 2001/2⁵².

There was a nine hole putting green in the grass area (roundabout) at the front of the hall. C. 2000 this was removed and the 9 holes added to the existing 9 holes at the back of hall. The putting green was used by staff.

Backford Primary School used a small field north of the hall as a playing field until the school closed in 1996. Since then the field has been let to a local farmer, together with the adjacent field.

In 2001 a small area of woodland south of the lake was sold to the church for a car park. Until about 2005 the lodge was occupied by staff on short term lets. The grounds were maintained by site based groundsmen until 2009 when Backford Hall was transferred from Cheshire County Council to Cheshire West and Chester Council, since which time the site has been maintained by contractor.⁵³

Description

Numbers in brackets refer contemporary photographs included in illustrations document

Boundaries and entrances

The western boundary adjacent to the A41 is defined by a coursed sandstone wall with rustic sandstone coping (8) backed by a tree belt and extending both sides of the former main entrance flanked by the lodge of 1863, listed Grade II⁵⁴ (9). This entrance is now barred by a locked timber gate with a pedestrian gate to the side. The wall has been partially rebuilt beside the pleasure grounds, probably in association with road improvements. There is more sandstone walling to the southern boundary and a section of close boarded timber fence which extends to the current site entrance on Gordon Lane. Beyond the entrance the boundary is formed by the rear wall of a historic building constructed of sandstone and brick (that shown as the dwelling of Thomas Hughes and Samuel Lewes on the Tithe map(4), and continued by a high freestanding sandstone boundary wall up to another entrance, now closed. This entrance appears to have been an earlier service entrance to the property and was still in use in the 1970's by Sid Hawes and others.

North of the service entrance a small field formed by the earlier straightening of the road, is bounded by trees and an informal hedge on Gordon Lane. The northern boundary is defined by a tree belt and a deep ditch at the eastern end. The ditch becomes shallower as it turns in a southerly direction across the enclosed meadow. The tree belts and meadow are overlooked by the hall (2). The meadow is enclosed on the northern and southern boundaries by iron hurdles in varying states of repair, and within the trees is evidence of the informal path shown on the historic maps. The western tree belt bounding the meadow includes some large tree stumps and much elm regeneration.

Pleasure grounds

The main approach to the hall from the lodge, now closed, curves up a slight incline between

banks planted to the north with Irish yew. The route appears to have been reconfigured in association with the 19th C rebuilding of the hall (11). This approach leads to an impressive view of the main facade of Backford Hall, Grade II⁵⁵(1) and the main entrance. Twentieth century council buildings have been constructed within the pleasure grounds which formerly extended all around the hall except on the north eastern side where there were service areas. The path network shown on the 1910 Ordnance Survey appears to have been lost, but many mature trees remain including some large open grown oaks, sweet chestnut and cedar (12), thought to be 18th century or earlier, and araucaria (13), wellingtonia and yew, considered to be part of the 19th century planting. Plantings of laurel, cherry laurel and rhododendron combined with natural regeneration have created a dense understorey so that the area has the character of ornamental woodland rather than of a pleasure ground.

A flagged path leads through a treed area to an arched gateway into the churchyard (7). The keystone on the arch is dated 1774. Another flagged path leads to the staff car park which has been developed on open ground outside the pleasure grounds. A mound with mature trees separates the car park from a lawn within the pleasure grounds. The lawn, at the rear of the hall, is consistent with that shown on a photograph of the hall c.1900 and was used as a putting green until 2008. It contains a mature weeping ash for which a replacement weeping ash has been planted alongside. To the north east is an area of raised ground with scattered trees including an old pear tree, one of four pear trees remembered by Sid Hawes, remnants of an orchard indicated by regular tree planting on the 1875 Ordnance Survey. No conservatories or glasshouses survive.

The pond

The pond is screened by pleasure ground planting (13) and circumscribed by a gravel path. The path has railway sleeper steps in two locations, a stone flagged viewing area with modern timber balustrade, and passes by the old pump house (14) and a couple of seats. The location of the former boathouse is indicated by brick edging. It is understood from Sid Hawes that the bricks form a curved base. The pond has an overflow to an outlet passing beneath the A41.

Working areas

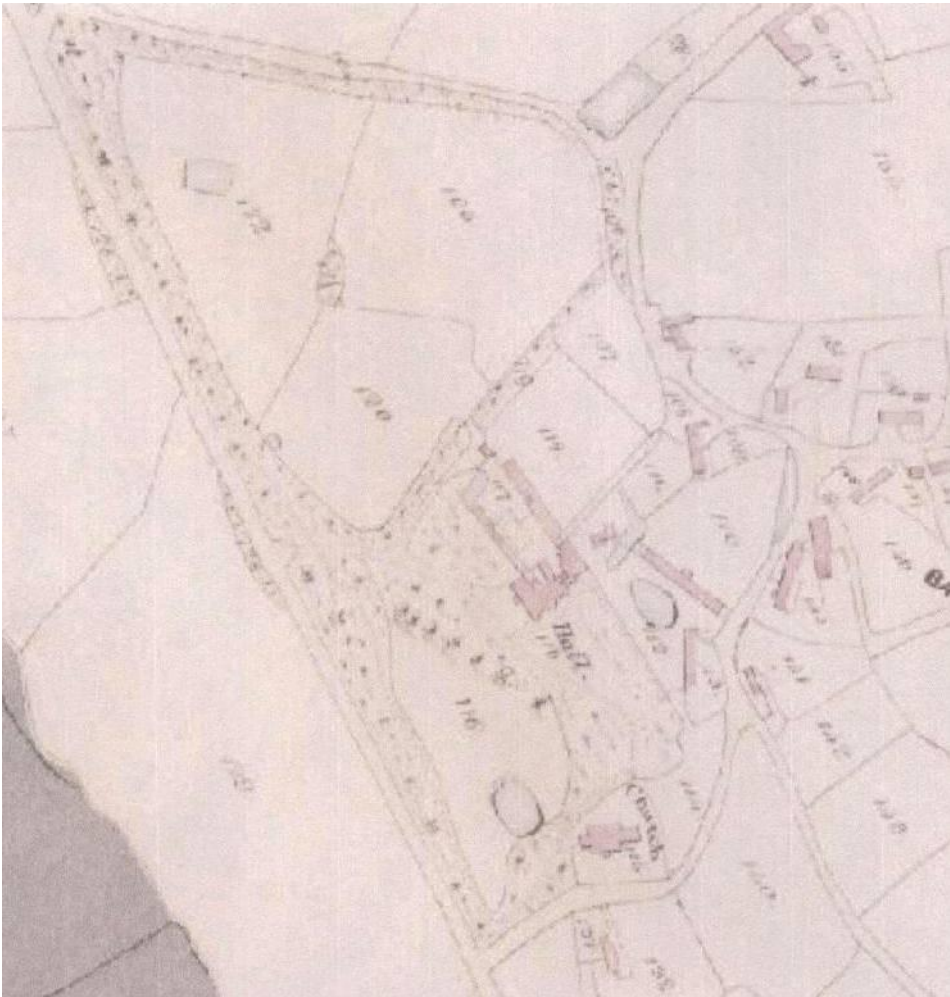
East of the hall the 19th century stables and carriage shed remain around a cobbled courtyard (3), but the structure of other working areas associated with the hall been altered since the war. The walled kitchen garden has been perforated in two places by the late 20th century access drive (5), and although considerable lengths of the wall survive in good condition, these are partially obscured by the late 20th century building of offices and caretakers houses and by planting. An original entrance in one of the walls (6) is consistent with the central access indicated on the First Edition Ordnance Survey.

Appended information/ additional notes

The site is currently open by appointment with Cheshire West and Chester Council. It is being vacated by the Council in September 2011 and is to be sold.

No check has been carried out to ascertain whether any of the trees are covered by Tree Preservation Orders

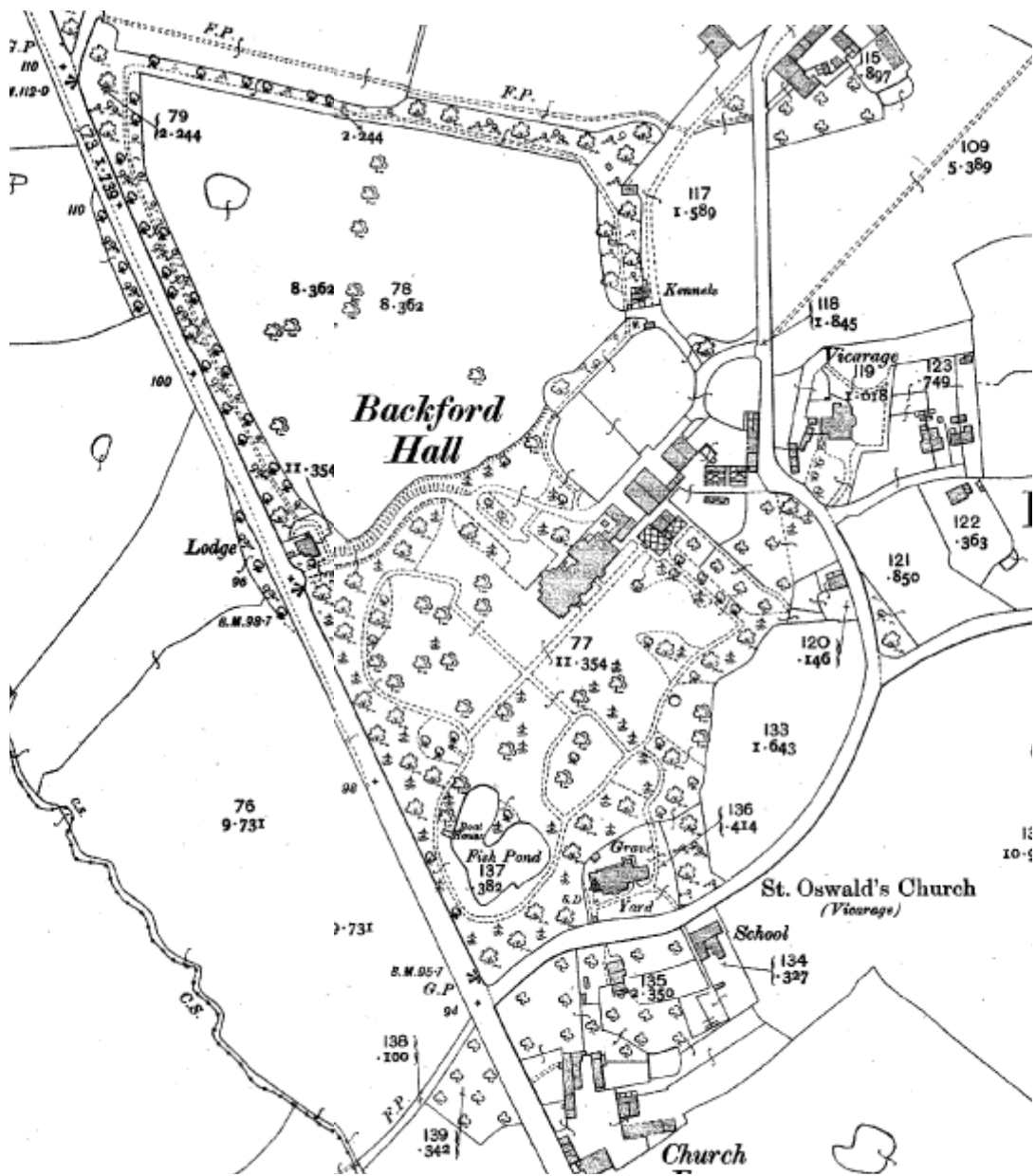
Illustrations



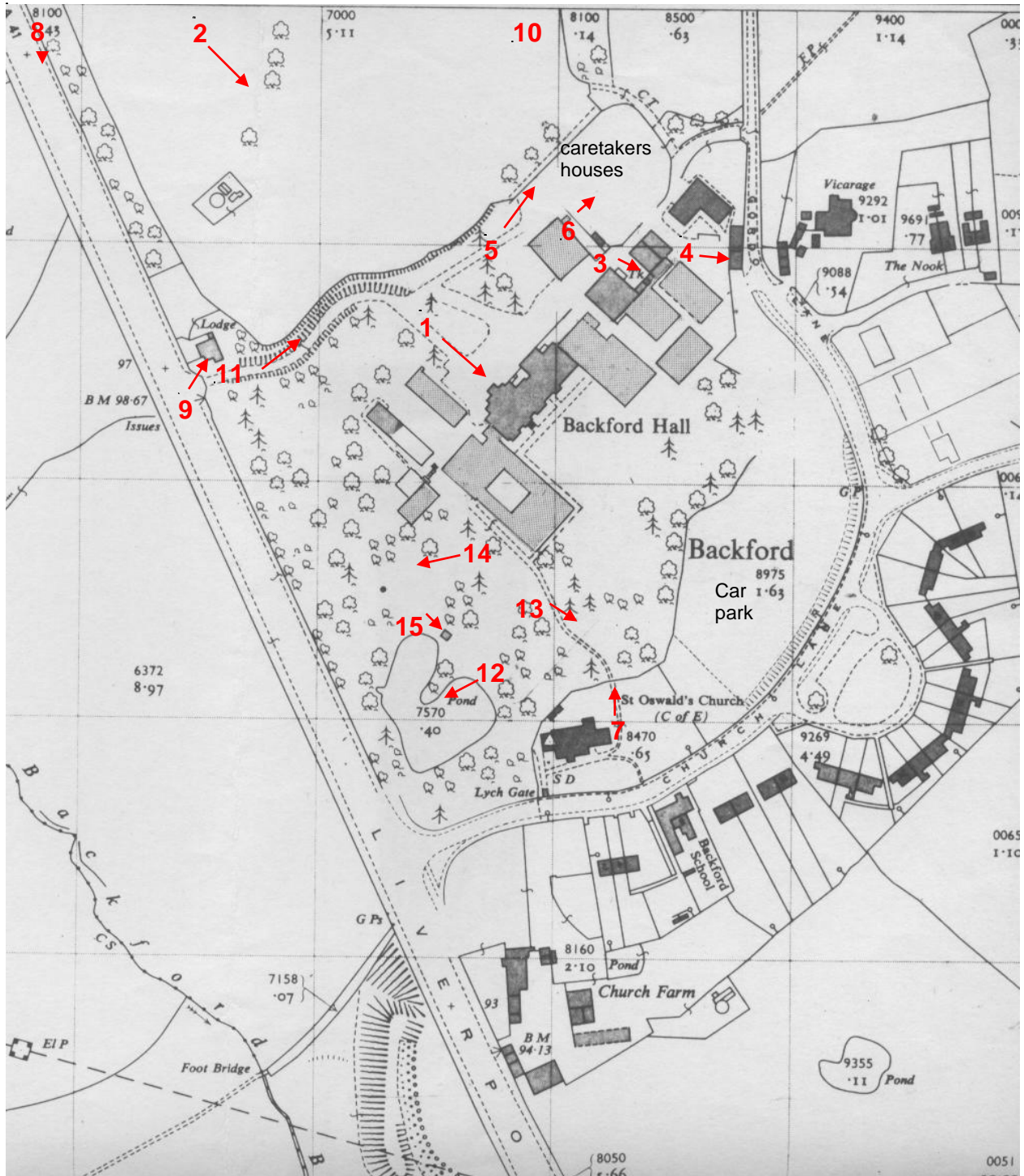
Tithe Map c.1842 showing the 18th c Backford Hall with grounds by Webb.



First Edition Ordnance Survey 1875 showing Backford Hall by John Cunningham (1863) and grounds by Gray of London.
CAL5



1910 Ordnance Survey



Ordnance Survey pre construction of the caretakers houses (1972) showing the addition of buildings to accomodate Cheshire County Council staff.
 Box of information collected by Des Carroll

Numbers indicate location of contemporary photographs included in report.



c.1900 Backford Hall from the south, the rear elevation (Box of information collected by Des Carroll)



c. 1972 when an extension containing caretakers accommodation was demolished to make space for Cheshire County Council accommodation. (Box of information collected by Des Carroll)



1888 staff outside the Hall
(Box of information collected by Des Carroll)



Wartime huts moved to Backford
(Box of information collected by Des Carroll)



Main entrance 1970's (?) showing the square window inserted in the left-hand gable.
 (Box of information collected by Des Carroll)



2011 Window in gable restored.
 A brick lined tank lies beneath a hatched area immediately in front of the hall.

1



Hall from across fields to north

2



Coach house dated 1853 with cobbled courtyard

3



Undated photograph of 18th c (?) building shown on Tithe Map c1842. Note cast iron window frame. (Box of information collected by Des Carroll)



4

18th c (?) building shown on tithe map, cast iron window replaced, adjacent to current site entrance



5

Walled garden wall



6

Doorway in walled garden wall consistent with entrance shown on 1st Edition Ordnance Survey



7

Gateway between church and hall dated 1774



8

Boundary wall beside A41, former turnpike



9

Lodge dated 1863 beside drive, now closed



Park rail hurdles

10



Drive with banks each side and Irish views

11



Cedar tree beside path to church

12



Araucaria, Wellingtonia, Sweet Chestnut and Oak in the pleasure grounds

13



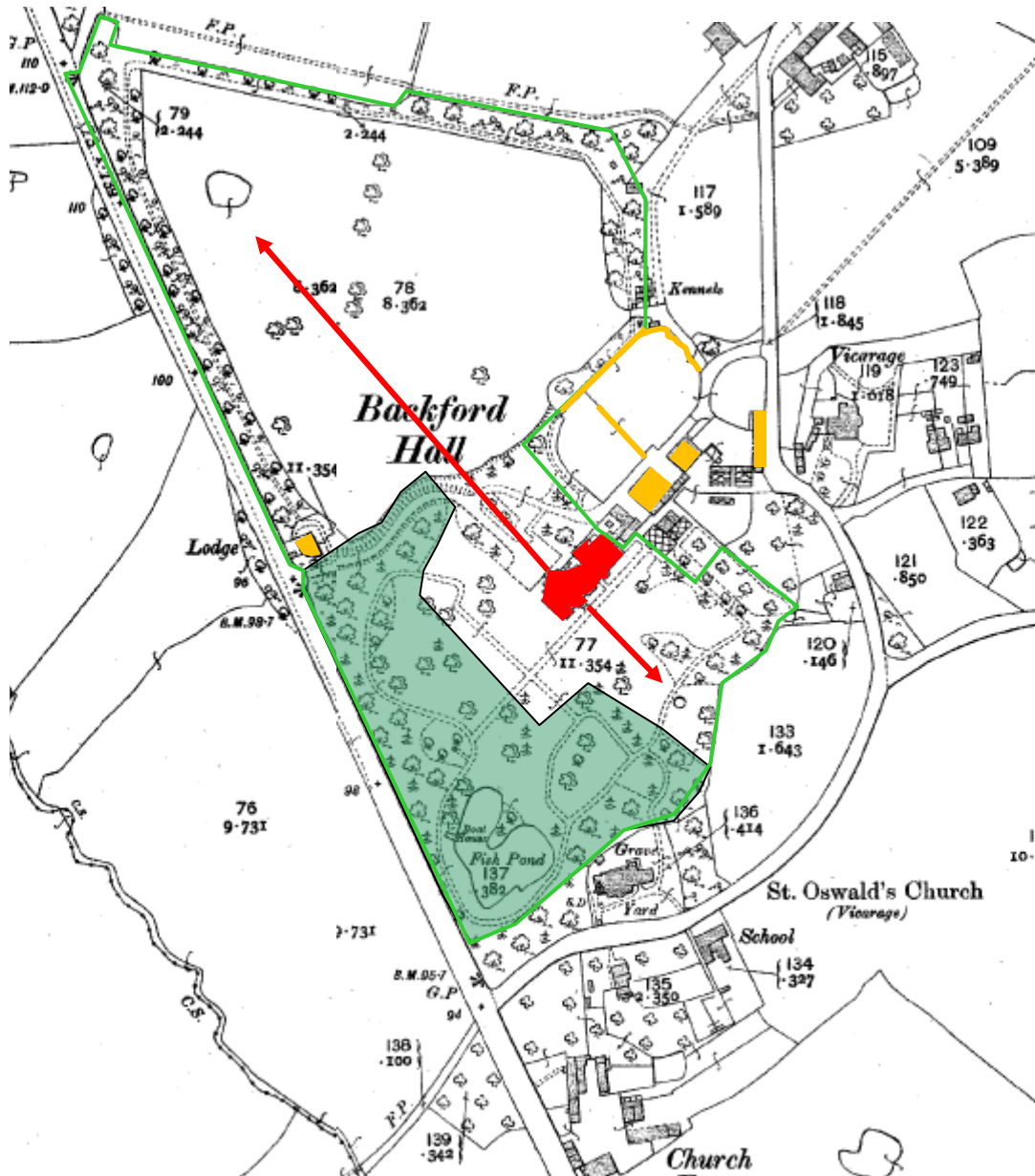
The pond looking towards the A41

14



Pump house of 1946

15



**Principal elements of surviving landscape
Key**

- Remaining historic designed landscape
- Principal building
- Principal designed views
- Historic buildings and structures
- Historic tree groups

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¹ Ekwall, E. 1991. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Place-names*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 21

² Ormerod G. 1882. *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*. V.2, 362

³ Ormerod G. 1882. *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*. V.2, 364

⁴ Ormerod G. 1882. *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*. V.2, 366

⁵ Ormerod G. 1882. *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*. V.2, 366

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- ⁶ Handwritten note in *Box of information collected by Des Carroll*, former employee at Backford Hall. Box now in possession of John Hess (2011).
- ⁷ Ormerod G. 1882. *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*. V.2, 366
- ⁸ Ormerod G. 1882. *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*. V.2, 366
- ⁹ The plan of improvements to the Chester to Birkenhead Turnpike 1832, CALS QDP 109, records nothing of the grounds of Backford around this time.
- ¹⁰ <http://maps.cheshire.gov.uk/tithemaps>
- ¹¹ *Box of information collected by Des Carroll*
- ¹² www.ancestry.co.uk
- ¹³ The contract is understood to be in the E. Gandy and Sons collection, CALS DGN, but has not been seen. This information is taken from a document in CALS Local Studies collection, a print out from a now defunct Backford Hall website derived from a 2006 publication 'CCC at Backford Hall'(not seen).
- ¹⁴ www.ancestry.co.uk
- ¹⁵ John Cunningham's obituary in the Builder 18th October 1872 does not mention Backford Hall but does say that he was the engineer for several water works.
- ¹⁶ Figueiredo, P, and Treuherz, J.1988. *Cheshire Country Houses*. Chichester: Phillimore,214
- ¹⁷ Ormerod G. 1882. *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*. V.2, Appendix 898.
- ¹⁸ Sid Hawes, caretaker at Backford since 1976.
- ¹⁹ *Box of information collected by Des Carroll*, Order of High Court dated 10th March 1941 with documents attached
- ²⁰ www.ancestry.co.uk
- ²¹ *Box of information collected by Des Carroll*, photograph
- ²² *Box of information collected by Des Carroll*, Order of High Court dated 10th March 1941 with documents attached
- ²³ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 1, p189
- ²⁴ *Box of information collected by Des Carroll*, Order of High Court dated 10th March 1941 with documents attached
- ²⁵ *Box of information collected by Des Carroll*, Order of High Court dated 10th March 1941 with documents attached
- ²⁶ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books
- ²⁷ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 1, p59
- ²⁸ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 1, p109
- ²⁹ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 1, p141
- ³⁰ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 1, p153
- ³¹ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 1, p161
- ³² CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 1, p200
- ³³ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 1, p343
- ³⁴ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 1, p461
- ³⁵ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 1, p484
- ³⁶ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 2, p44
- ³⁷ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 2, p47
- ³⁸ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 2, p61
- ³⁹ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 3, p364, 367, 448
- ⁴⁰ CALS DGN - E. Gandy and Sons, letter books, book 3, p525, 564, 594, 630
- ⁴¹ *Box of information collected by Des Carroll*, copy of conveyance
- ⁴² Chester Chronicle
- ⁴³ *Box of information collected by Des Carroll*
- ⁴⁴ Backford Hall history on front desk of hall, researched and compiled by Alistair Haydock
- ⁴⁵ *Box of information collected by Des Carroll*, 24th April letter from County Surveyor to Chief Inspector Lloyd, Chester City police, confirming a telephone conversation
- ⁴⁶ Sid Hawes
- ⁴⁷ Backford Hall history on front desk of hall, researched and compiled by Alistair Haydock
- ⁴⁸ CALS Local Studies collection, a print out from a now defunct Backford Hall website derived from a 2006 publication 'CCC at Backford Hall'(not seen).
- ⁴⁹ Sid Hawes
- ⁵⁰ Sid Hawes
- ⁵¹ Sid Hawes
- ⁵² By J P Hess and R Burlingham
- ⁵³ Sid Hawes
- ⁵⁴ Listed 20.12.1983, CHER
- ⁵⁵ Listed 20.12.1983, CHER