

SITE NAME: Address	High Legh village, site of former West and East Halls, High Legh, Cheshire				
Unitary Authority:	East Cheshire (Macclesfield Borough Council)				
Parish:	Rostherne				
Location:	Approx 4 ml north-west of Knutsford				
Grid Ref:	SJ 688 835				
Owner:	Now housing development and golf course				
Recorder:	JW	Date of Site Visit	26 01 2012; 08 08 2012	Date of Report:	11 08 2012

Summary

Formerly the site of 2 halls, East and West, together with gardens and parkland. The gardens and parkland for East Hall, known as High Legh Hall, were designed by Humphry Repton in 1791, with buildings designed by Humphry Repton, John Nash and George Legh. Not all the landscape and building proposals were carried out.

Of note is the remaining parkland, now a golf course, where tree belts along the A50 and Wrenshot Lane boundaries remain. Some woods existed before Repton designed the parkland but he added to them in his plan.¹

Principal Remaining Features

Gate Lodges– one for each hall

Garden steps -between the garden of High Legh Hall and the park

Heated walls to kitchen garden of West Hall

Sections of **kitchen garden** wall to High Legh Hall

Landscape park -remains of

Tree belts -around remaining parkland, modified or added to by Humphrey Repton-

History

1086: Domesday Book: parish of High Legh recorded as having 2 Saxons – Ulviet and Dob(b). The Norman baron, Baron de Venables, was given the parish by King William².

1154-1189: During the reign of King Henry II, the High Legh manor was rented in 2 parts (moieties) – Legh of East Hall (later known as High Legh Hall) and Leigh of West Hall³. (Surnames were often taken from a locality. Leigh/Legh/Lea/Ley meant “a town in England, a pasture or meadow“.)

Circa early 14 century: Thomas Legh fought legal battle to succeed to East Hall estate⁴.

1581: Either Thomas Legh or his son rebuilt the hall (Elizabethan style)⁵.

Late 17 century: Egerton of Tatton Park married into Leighs of West Hall and became known as Egerton-Leigh.

1781-1784: East Hall burnt down and was replaced in 1782 by a Georgian brick mansion,

High Legh

designed by John Hope and built for Henry Legh⁶. His son, George, later had the hall stuccoed⁷.

Late 1700s: George Legh of East Hall married Anna-Maria Cornwall and the family became known as Cornwall-Legh⁸.

1791: Humphry Repton produced a Red Book for High Legh (East Hall) at the request of George Legh. Part of the new design involved the demolition of the village and the realignment of the former turnpike road (now A50). A new village was planned by George Legh, John Nash and Humphry Repton but was never constructed⁹.

1790s: An entry in Caldwell's ledger for this period reads:

*Legh, Henry Cornwall Esq Geo John Esq*¹⁰

Caldwell's Nursery was, seemingly, supplying some of the garden needs for both Henry Legh and his son, George Cornwall-Legh.

C 1814: the half-timbered West Hall was enlarged or rebuilt in brick¹¹.

1823: George John (Cornwall) Legh is recorded as being a member of The Horticultural Society of London which had been founded in 1804 and became the Royal Horticultural Society in 1861. This would suggest that he had a special interest in horticulture.¹²

1862: A Mr C G Smith writes in the introduction to his latest book – "Rural Rambles in Cheshire".¹³

High Legh Hall: . . . The grounds surrounding the hall are laid out and planted with rare taste and skill by the famous Ripton (sic), and the plantations are luxuriant in growth and foliage. . .

. . . West Hall, that is to say what remains of it, is now used as a farm house, into which, by additions and repairs, it was some 50 years ago converted.

Early 20th century: Egerton-Leighs sell off all land and property to Cornwall-Leghs c 1900 and, in 1932, Maurice, Lord Egerton, sold the remaining land. (The West Hall family lived elsewhere and let out West Hall prior to its sale¹⁴.)

1939-1945: The Ministry of Defence purchased the halls as an army training camp. According to a local resident, the West Hall was the officers' mess and the East Hall was the sergeants' mess. Mr Charles Cornwall Legh (later Lord Grey of Codnor) moved across the A50 into High Legh House¹⁵. After the Second World War, the halls and land were sold back to the Cornwall Leghs.

c 1963: The halls and parkland were sold to developers. The halls were demolished. The area was redeveloped for housing and a golf course over subsequent years.

Description

It is possible to identify several elements of the original estates around the halls, mainly relating to West Hall. The site of (East) High Legh Hall has been almost completely destroyed to make way for housing.

Along the A50 and B5159 West Lane, the road north from the A50 past the old school house, is a stone boundary wall. This was not included in any of Humphry Repton's plans so was probably constructed at a later date. Repton did not want the parkland to appear as small as it

actually was and designed the road to appear as if it were going through the park rather than alongside it. The wall is generally in good condition but has been re-pointed in places using cement rather than lime mortar leading to erosion of the sandstone. The former lodge to High Legh Hall, listed Grade II, remains on the A50 almost opposite the road to the garden centre. It is now a private house. The redevelopment of the site appears to have retained the footprint of some of the pathways, either by incorporating them in the new design or simply by leaving them as they were (see maps and photographs).

The lodge to West Hall has been altered considerably. It stands at the junction of West Lane and Pheasant Walk. The first section of Pheasant Walk appears to follow the alignment of the original drive to West Hall and many old trees have been retained. Further along Pheasant Walk behind the houses, the remains of the a kitchen garden wall for High Legh Hall are visible.

From West Lane 'The Avenue' leads to St John's Church, listed Grade II (still in use), and also to West Hall farmhouse, listed Grade II, and to farm outbuildings now converted to residential use which originally comprised West Hall's home farm. St John's was the church for West Hall. Behind St John's and the cottages are the remaining walls of the kitchen garden for West Hall, complete with chimneys which indicate that the walls were heated. Other buildings from the estate include West Hall's wash-house, now used for meetings, etc, and a former gardener's cottage. (In the grounds of this cottage are snowdrops, the originals of which were removed from West Hall's grounds prior to demolition of the hall¹⁶.)

Pheasant Walk traverses what was originally part of the pleasure grounds for West Hall and High Legh Hall, and passes St Mary's Church, originally the chapel for High Legh Hall¹⁷. Near the church are trees which formed part of High Legh Hall's grounds.

Along the northern section of Pheasant Walk there is access on the right to a play area. On the west of the play area are the remains of steps which are shown on the c1910 OS map, steps that appear to have linked High Legh Hall's gardens to the park.

At the north end of Pheasant Walk, before it joins Wrenshott Lane, there are some former estate cottages (High Legh estate). The general condition of these buildings did not appear to be as good as that of buildings formerly associated with West Hall.

The former parkland

Part of the parkland has modern housing built on it and the remainder is a golf course. To create the golf course the park has been completely re-landscaped. Many new trees have been added and only a few mature trees have been left around the club house.

There are hedges along the boundaries, some of which are well established and are marked on Repton's plan as already existing (along the A50 and along the northern section of Wrenshot Lane). They appear to be quite old as 7 species of shrub were counted along a 100 yard stretch. These boundaries include mature trees, particularly oak trees along Wrenshot Lane; also ash and Scots Pine. Again, these may have present before Repton designed the parkland but his plan included extensions to the plantations as shown on his plan (see illustrations). In recent years many self-sown trees such as silver birch have become established.

On the northern section of Wrenshot Lane there is a fishing pond named Bath Water Pool which may originally have been a bathing pool. It is on all the maps from the Tithe maps onward.

On Repton's plan of 1791 he has marked the hedge to the eastern side of the parkland for removal as it was his intention that there should be a clear view from the house across to the "Cloud", a gritstone outcrop of the Pennines.

He was also concerned about the proximity of the turnpike road to the house so arranged to have it moved south slightly. In addition, he wished to give the appearance that this road

passed *through* the estate rather than along one side of it. To achieve this he planned “to avail ourselves of all the land possible on the opposite side the road. By judicious management of the plantations it will not, I hope, be difficult to cheat a stranger into this description of the place, viz ‘the turnpike road passes thro’ the park and for some distance makes part of the approach to the house’”. With this in mind he included a plantation across the road at A on his plan. Whether this field was planted is not known but there is no wood there today.

Appended information/additional notes

There follows a pictorial history of High Legh Hall and, to a lesser extent, West Hall. As very little remains, it is hoped this section will serve to give an impression of what the area must have been like prior to redevelopment.

Please note that this report contains the research and recording information available to Cheshire Gardens Trust at the time. It does not purport to be the finite sum of knowledge about the site as new information is always being discovered and sites change.

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¹ Repton, Humphry. 1791. *The Red Book for High Legh*. In private ownership

² Popley, Judy A. <http://www.aboutbritain.com/towns/high-legh.asp>

³ de Figueiredo, Peter and Treuherz, Julian. 1988. *Cheshire Country Houses*. Chichester: Phillimore, pages 241-242

⁴ Thornber, Craig. Cheshire Antiquities. <http://www.thornber.net/>

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ de Figueiredo, Peter and Treuherz, Julian. 1988. *Cheshire Country Houses*. Chichester: Phillimore, pages 241-242

⁸ Crompton, R G. rgcrompton.info/origins/1066info6.html

⁹ Temple, Nigel. 1979. *John Nash and the village picturesque*. Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 115-121

¹⁰ Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Caldwell Nurseries Business ledger DDX 363/6: 1789 – 1795

¹¹ de Figueiredo, Peter and Treuherz, Julian. 1988. *Cheshire Country Houses*. Chichester: Phillimore, pages 241-242

¹² http://books.google.com/books?id=tOYTAAAQAAJ&pg=PA64&dq=nurseryman+Manchester&lr=&as_brr=1#PPA7,M1

¹³ Smith, C G. 1862. *Rural Rambles in Cheshire*. John Heywood, Deansgate, Manchester, pages 39-40

¹⁴ Crompton, R G. rgcrompton.info/origins/1066info6.html

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ Information from the occupants

¹⁷ Open to the public only on certain days of the year according to the parish council’s website