

SITE NAME: Address	Walton Hall , Walton Lea Road, Warrington, WA4 6SN				
Unitary Authority:	Warrington (Formerly Runcorn RDC)				
Parish:	Walton				
Location:	Approximately 2 miles south-west of Warrington town centre				
Grid Ref:	SJ600 849				
Owner:	Warrington Borough Council				
Recorder:	EJW	Date of Site Visit	Various, 2015/16	Date of Report:	15/07/16

Summary

Walton Hall is the ancestral home of the Greenall family (later Lord Daresbury).

The grounds around the hall today are a public park and golf course. Basically they remain much as they were in 1941 when the estate was broken up and Warrington purchased the hall and surrounding land.

Principal remaining features

Walton Hall - the principal building¹

Conservatory

Stables

Piggeries

Retaining wall, sandstone **balustrades** and steps between lawns east of Walton Hall²

Sandstone **boundary wall**

Terraces

Pond

Rockery

Walton Hall **Lodge** (now lodge to crematorium)³

Gates, gatepiers and screens at Walton Hall Lodge⁴

History

In **1762 Thomas Greenhalgh (Greenall)** opened a brewery in St Helens. In **1786** a partnership was formed with **William Orrett and Thomas Lyon** and a second brewery was established in Wilderspool, Warrington. The business was highly successful. In **1793** the **Greenalls** built Wilderspool House, adjacent to the brewery, as a family home.

Around **1814⁵ Thomas Greenall's son, Edward**, started buying land from **Sir Thomas Langford Brooke** of Mere in Higher Walton, south-west of Warrington but not too far from Wilderspool. According to Thornber: "Thomas Merbury who was born in 1607, sold all his estates, including Over (Higher) Walton . . . to Sir Peter Brooke of Mere who died in 1685"⁶. The Tithe map (Map 1) shows the land in this area as mainly belonging to **Sir Thomas Langford Brooke of Mere** (a descendant).

The hall was designed by **Edmund Sharpe** and built in **1836**. The clock tower and extra wing were added in **1869** by **Gilbert Greenall** who also ". . . added to the lands of the estate as opportunity offered until now it is a very large one comprising the whole of the townships of

Walton Hall, Warrington

Higher Walton, Acton Grange, Daresbury and Preston-on-the-Hill and most of the townships of Lower Walton, Halton and Newton-by-Daresbury”⁷. At the time of the break-up of the estate in **1941** about 4,726 acres were auctioned off.⁸ However, in the obituary to the first Lord Daresbury, it is stated that the estates extended to about 7,000 acres, principally in Cheshire.⁹

Gilbert Greenall moved into the hall with his first wife in **1836** so there is some doubt as to whether **Edward Greenall** ever lived there as he died in **1835**. Also, a comment made about the extract (above) from the Warrington Observer states that Gilbert Greenall was recorded as the purchaser of the Walton estates, but no reference details were included. Another opinion is that Edward Greenall intended Walton Hall to be his retirement home¹⁰. The Warrington Observer reported in Sir Gilbert Greenall’s obituary in **1894** that Walton Hall was built by his father, Edward, some 60 years previously¹¹.

In **1876 Gilbert Greenall** was elevated to the baronetcy and became Sir Gilbert Greenall, Baronet. This was for services rendered to politics.

Following his death in **1894**, his son, also Gilbert, took over the estate. He became the second baronet but, in **1927**, had a peerage conferred on him by King George V in recognition of the public services he undertook. He took the title of **Baron Daresbury of Walton**. He died in **1938**.

In **1912** work started on a model village for estate workers, designed by **Robert Garnett**, but Sir Gilbert’s plans were stopped by the advent of the First World War¹².

Death duties and the advent of the Second World War brought an end to the estate and it was auctioned off in **1941**. Warrington Council bought the hall and surrounding gardens and parkland. It was opened to the public in **1945**. See extract from the Warrington Guardian from 1945 which describes the gardens when opened to the public (appendices).

A more detailed account of the family, property and employees may be found in “The History of Walton Hall Gardens”¹³.

Gardens and parkland: these were laid out very soon after the hall was built so may have been influenced in design by the landscape era (c 1750s to c 1820s). Such estates had large areas of parkland with a carriageway meandering through this until it reached the hall. Close by the hall would be the formal and kitchen gardens. An engraving by **E Twycross**, dated **1850**, shows paths, lawn, trees, shrubs and flower beds¹⁴. A photo taken around **1900** at the time of Sir Gilbert’s marriage to **Frances Griffiths** shows the pond with walkways around it, flowering shrubs and water lilies¹⁵, confirming that the first Gilbert was responsible for the original landscaping. Another newspaper article quotes the second Gilbert as being responsible for the addition of a sunken fence between the parkland and the hall in order to keep out the cattle. He also designed the conservatories in front of the hall.¹⁶

Lady Frances is credited with introducing many trees and shrubs into the gardens, and she appears to have been a very enthusiastic gardener. Descriptions of the gardens at various times are reproduced in the appendices (page 4 onwards). In its heyday, 26 gardeners were employed¹⁷. Lady Daresbury had plants named after her (see letter from Wm Clibran and Son in appendices). There is still a potentilla with her name - **Potentilla fruticosa (Lady Daresbury Potentilla)**. There is also a primula auricula named “Lady Daresbury” but it has not been possible to confirm that this was named after her, although it seems likely as the breeder was C F Faulkner who lived in Hale, Cheshire¹⁸.

No garden plans have been found but the 1910 OS map (Map 3) shows considerable detail of the gardens at that time. Aerial photographs (photos 1 and 2) taken around **1921** clearly show the gardens and also a kitchen garden. This latter may have been moved in the late **1920s** to the walled kitchen garden which formerly belonged to Walton Lea mansion. The Greenalls bought this in the mid-1920s and eventually had it demolished. The kitchen garden remains.

Description (numbers in brackets refer to site photographs)

The estate sits on the east-west sandstone escarpment which crosses much of north Cheshire. The escarpment slopes down northwards to the Mersey valley. The view from the estate is to the north over Warrington.

The main lodge (11) to the estate is situated on the A56 Warrington to Chester Road. It is now the entrance to the crematorium and is still in use although in need of repair. The drive past the crematorium is straight and, according to the 1910 OS map, always has been straight and tree-lined. Some trees remain. This area was originally parkland but has been re-landscaped in order to create gardens and memorials related to the crematorium.

The driveway meets Walton Lea Road, formerly a service road to the hall, and then crosses the Bridgewater Canal (13). According to the Tithe map (Map 2), when the hall was first built, the drive continued more or less straight up to the hall. However this was altered to create a meandering drive so providing a scenic route through the parkland and up to the hall. Today this area is dedicated to families, having playgrounds, crazy golf, open grassland and a small-animal zoo. Some of the trees have been removed to make way for this development but the basic layout remains. In this section of the parkland a sandstone column may be seen. It was one of the rubbing posts used by the Kerry cattle kept by the Greenalls (15). Another has been destroyed. Behind the zoo is the back lodge, now a private residence (12). Also behind the zoo are the former piggeries, now used as a shooting range.

The view from the hall overlooks the conservatory (14) and associated greenhouses, now derelict. However, a grant has been awarded from the Heritage Lottery Fund and there are plans to renovate/rebuild the conservatory and some of the greenhouses. A sunken fence (ha-ha) ran from the conservatory area up towards the hall where it met the balustrade around the terraced gardens to the east of the hall. This would have been to keep the cattle to the parkland area (9). Remains of a gate may be seen at the point where the drive meets the ha-ha (16).

On the east side of the hall is the terraced garden which used to have beds of flowers. Now it is lawn. The sandstone balustrade to the east of this garden remains (17) and was repaired over the winter of 2015/2016 but the section which ran east-west at the south end of the garden has been removed.

To the south-west of the hall lie the formal gardens. These are retained but not to the original design, as they have been simplified over the years. Some original hard landscaping features may also still be seen such as gate piers, terraces, steps and paths.

In the 1970s it was deemed necessary to demolish parts of the hall, leaving only the east wing and the clock tower. A large part of the south-facing hall was lost and consequently the gardens were extended in this area and a driveway added to allow access from the west side of the estate.

The greenhouses which formerly served the original kitchen garden remained until late in the twentieth century. This area has recently been developed into a car park for functions at the hall. The wall against which the greenhouses leaned is still there but is covered in ivy. Next to this are the remains of the boiler house which heated the greenhouses.

To the west of the formal gardens there are shrubs and former "dell" areas. Pathways meander through these, northwards, past the hall and down to the formal pond (19) alongside which runs the main drive from the hall towards the former stabling and shippon area. These buildings are currently used by Council staff and the public.

The original parkland to the west and south of the hall is now used as a golf course. At the southern boundary of the parkland, adjoining Park Lane, was the site of the kennels for the hounds, along with the house which was presumably for the master of the hounds. The original house remains and is now privately owned.

The estate is mostly enclosed by a sandstone wall which is fairly intact although trees and, occasionally, vehicles have caused sections to collapse.

Appended information/additional notes

THE WALTON GARDENS¹⁹

The Walton Gardens are a wonderful sight at all times of the year, and a visit there is an event long to be remembered. Before the war there were few finer gardens in the country, and some wonderful exhibits found their way to the bigger shows and carried away many important prizes. Chrysanthemums have always been Lady Daresbury's speciality, and a great measure of success has attended the careful growing of the best varieties. During the war the whole of the extensive gardens were given over to the breeding of chickens and rabbits, and since the war they have been brought up to the old pre-war standard.

(Extract of report from) The Guardian, Wednesday, 29 August 1928

WALTON HALL GARDENS SCENES OF FLORAL SPLENDOUR TROPICAL MAGNIFICENCE OF THE GLASSHOUSES SEVEN THOUSAND VISITORS ACCEPT INVITATION

Although rain fell heavily during the greater part of the time the gardens and glasshouses at Walton Hall were open to the public on Sunday, there were more than 7,000 visitors.

Lord and Lady Daresbury could desire no fuller proof of the pleasure with which their thoughtful invitation was received. They were prompted to issue notices that the gardens and glasshouses would be open for public inspection by a feeling that there were many people to whom the opportunity of viewing the magnificent horticultural displays on the occasions of the agricultural shows held in Walton Park was each year an eagerly anticipated delight and that the cancellation of the show this year had been to them a source of keen disappointment.

GREAT THROG BRAVES THE WEATHER

The early afternoon of Sunday was dry, if unpromising for fine weather, and before the hour at which it was announced that the gardens would be opened, many people assembled to await admission. From then onwards there was a constant stream of visitors, whom the heavy showers, which came later in the afternoon and in the evening, did not deter. Motor-coach proprietors reaped a rich harvest conveying the people from Bridge Foot, several hundreds walked from town and the surrounding districts, and very quickly the lanes adjacent to Walton Park were congested with private cars which had brought others to swell the throng.

Regardless of the pouring rain, they strolled around the well-kept flower gardens, borders, and picturesque dells, and walked through the glasshouses in a perfectly orderly manner. The head gardener, Mr C E Goves, reported to a Guardian representative that it was one of the best behaved crowds that had ever visited the gardens. The only damage caused was quite inconsiderable – to two spikes of flowers near the entrance to the glasshouses, where the congestion at one time was extremely great.

FAR-FAMED LOVELINESS

In lesser or greater degrees, the artistic sense is extant in all, and it was love of Nature in one of its most beautiful aspects that drew such large numbers of visitors. The gardens of Walton Hall are far-famed for their loveliness, and to visit them is always a much-prized privilege. There is a distinctive charm about the borders of contrasting yet harmonising colours, the soft-treading and spacious lawns, and the quiet green dells, while the glasshouses, with their scenes of tropical splendour, arouses the utmost admiration. It is well-known that both Lord and Lady Daresbury take a keen personal interest in the gardens, and on Sunday many expressions were heard of grateful thanks for the open invitation that had been extended.

THE TOUR OF THE GARDENS A DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The visitors first crossed the wide lawns, from which they caught glimpses of the interior of the Hall, and entered the Blue and White Garden. Here was an enchanting old-world picture of mingling colours. The dreamy blue of the hydrangeas seemed to reflect the glories of the hidden skies, and dahlias of spotless white stood out in handsome pride.

THE ROSE GARDEN

Proceeding, the visitors passed on to the Rose Garden. Here was a magnificent spectacle. On the right were blooms of full-blooded red, scarlet and many shades of pink, against a background of delicately tinted ramblers while staged on the left were creamy yellows, lemon-toned yellows, and bronzes light and deep. They were grouped like court ladies on carpets of fallen petals, their fragrance filled the air so that even the blind could understand their beauty.

BANKS OF SCARLET AND YELLOW

The path through the Rose Garden led the way to Scarlet and Yellow Borders. Against backgrounds of fresh green foliage were here some huge banks of flowers whose brilliance almost dazzled the eyes, the scene being softened by the dividing strip of close-cut turf. Dahlias with their velvet petals of glowing colours were in spectacular profusion, too beautiful, they appeared, to be real.

THE DELICATE PHLOXES

Next came the Phlox Borders, which simply compelled exclamations of admiration from the visitors. The great trusses of delicate blooms of many hues, tastefully grouped before clusters of dahlias, made pictures of wondrous beauty, snugly surrounded by sheltering shrubs.

A SOFTER NOTE

Softer shades with grey dominant formed the Grey Border which was reached next. Here a large variety of flowering and foliage plants had been grouped and they effectively gave an impression of restful simplicity. There were some before a background of pink and red climbing roses, eight feet high.

THE PAVED GARDEN

A recent addition to the gardens, and one in which much interest was taken, came next. This was the Paved Garden. Here a large piece of ground had been paved with heavy flag stones and planted here and there were 15 beds of stately flowering plants, with blooms of purple, red, pink, white, blue and yellow. The keynote here was orderliness. The plants stood like companies of smart soldiers on a barrack square, steadily waiting for a word of command. In a corner was a water tank, where water lilies were seen in bud.

ROCK AND ALPINE PLANTS

A path of crazy paving led to another new feature of the gardens, the Rockery, which overlooked the Dell. Here were prettily-arranged rock and Alpine plants, tiny shrubs, and a delightful little water trough containing dwarf water lilies.

A REPOSEFUL DELL

A few steps led to one of the most picturesque sections of the gardens – the Dell. The first view was of a gay group of flowering plants and the next, across the Dell to the summer house was a quiet spot, overhung by massive trees, whose great leafy branches embraced it with their cool shelter. All around were novel shrubs and fragile-looking ferns – a stage set for quiet repose. A narrow path led to a small pool in a second and more open dell. There was a bank of shrubs bearing bronze, silver and pink leaves, a group of Acers and Gunnera Manicata – “Like giant rhubarb”, a little boy described them – while bog and water plants grew luxuriantly at the water’s edge. On the left of the path were pink hydrangeas and blue-flowered senecio(?).

Another recent development next passed through was the path to the pond. Here was a sweeping vista, 100 yards long, of grassland, sheltered walks and forest trees, bordered by rhododendrons and other shrubs.

The path led past the pond, fringed by shrubbery and rustic baskets of geraniums and inhabited by water-fowl ever busy in their search for food.

THE GLASSHOUSES

The visit concluded at the glasshouses, which, to most of the people, provided the greatest interest. The first house was the fernery which contained a large assortment of ferns, foliage and flowering plants, including gloxinias and streptocarpus.

On the centre stage of the second house was a remarkable rockery, or miniature garden containing flowering mosses (sedum), heather (ericas), and Alpine plants, while climbing up the sides of the house were yellow and blue statice which blended well with the colour scheme of the centre-piece.

THE CONSERVATORY

The conservatory, in the centre of the glasshouses, had in the centre a tank, in which goldfish darted about, and on stones rising just above the level of the water were tiny rock gardens. Here also was a large collection of liliiums, with a background of tall bamboos.

Another fernery came next. Here was a choice selection of foliage and creepers, with handsome dracentas (?) in the centre.

The furthest house was devoted to tropical plants of exotic beauty. Growing luxuriantly were plants with brightly coloured foliage, cybetium (?) and apifolia (?) 12 feet high, and frail creepers, making a scene of remarkable grandeur.

Extract from the Warrington Guardian – 19 May 1945²⁰

Ornamental grounds: These are laid out on informal lines, and there are fine examples of the old English garden. They contain a very fine collection of choice trees and shrubs, rose gardens and herbaceous borders. Later in the season, there will be some interesting flower displays.

The collection of rhododendrons is considered to be the finest in the north of England, and contains, in addition to many of the less common species, the cream of the large-flowered hybrid which are so popular today. There is also a wealth of more choice trees and shrubs,

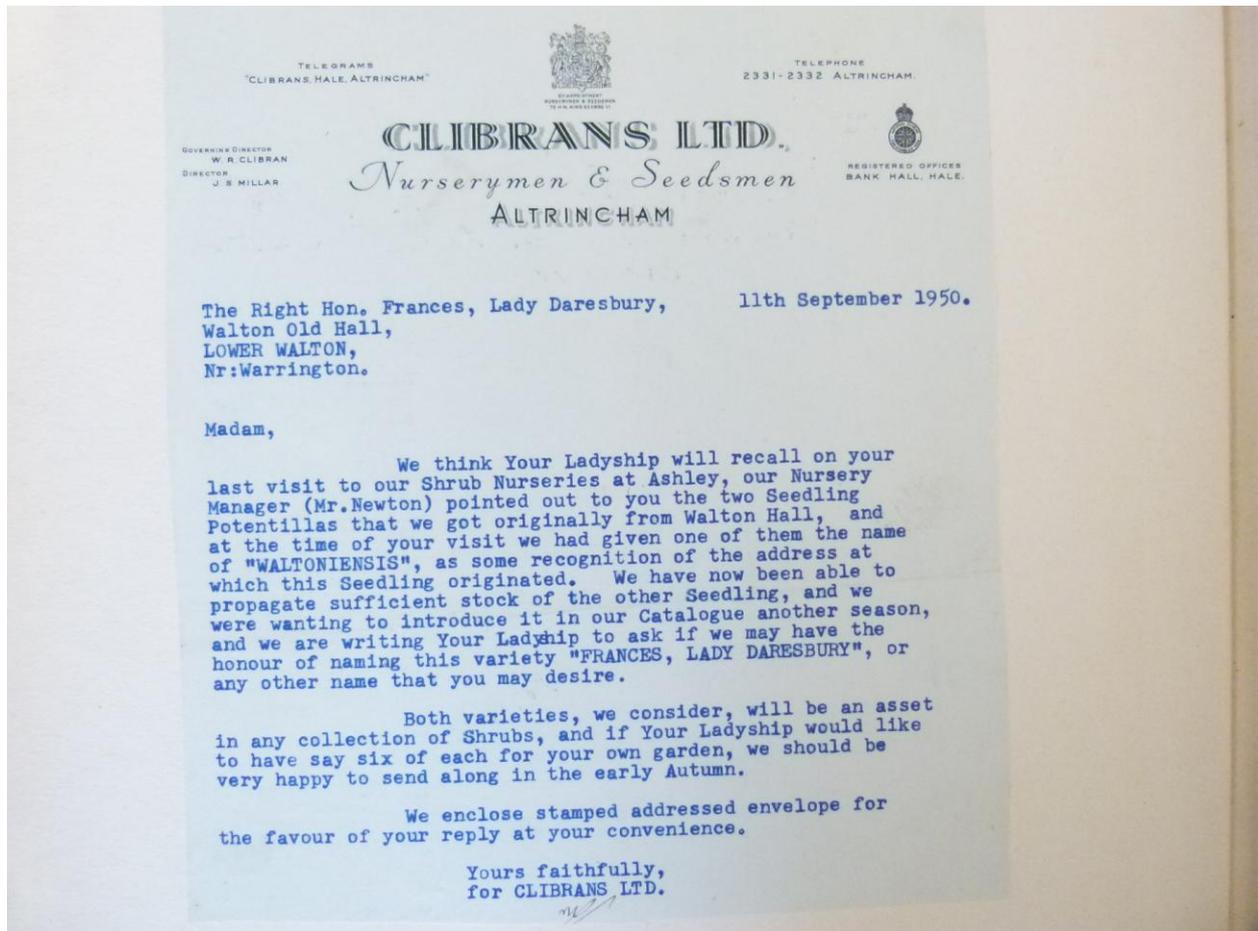
Walton Hall, Warrington

including no fewer than 6 species from Mongolia. Among the general collection is to be found the snowdrop tree (a native of the Iberian Peninsula).

The rose gardens have been replanted during the past season, and contain 2,000 trees. A rose pergola is now in full bloom with climbing roses. Many of the old-fashioned roses have been preserved under the new scheme, and a collection of rose species will be found at the south end of the garden. In the herbaceous borders many of the old English garden favourites have been retained, in addition to the more modern varieties.

Then, there are, of course, the glasshouses and there are interesting specimens.

Letter to Lady Daresbury, 1950
(courtesy of Lord and Lady Daresbury)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Lord and Lady Daresbury for allowing me to visit their home and copy the photographs in the albums compiled by Frances, Lady Daresbury.

I am also grateful to the various people employed by Warrington Borough Council and who work at Walton Hall, and to members of the Friends of Walton Estate, all of whom have been informative and supportive.

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 Historic England. Grade II listed. List entry number: 1139355. Date first listed: 23 December 1983

² Historic England. Grade II listed. List entry number 1136083. Date first listed: 23 December 1983

³ Historic England. Grade II listed. List entry number 1139351. Date first listed: 23 December 1983

⁴ Historic England. Grade II listed. List entry number 1136025. Date first listed: 23 December 1983

⁵ Darling, J, Ed, 1997. *The History of Walton Hall Gardens*. Warrington; Alfresco Books, 42

⁶ Thornber.net

⁷ Extract from the Warrington Observer, 14 July 1894, held in Warrington Library (local history section)

⁸ Auction catalogue (copy held by the Daresbury Estate, Malpas)

⁹ Extracts from various newspapers compiled in a commemorative book entitled "Lord Daresbury" and printed in 1939, the year following his death. It was printed for private circulation, including amongst tenants on the estate

¹⁰ Darling, J, Ed, 1997. *The History of Walton Hall Gardens*. Warrington; Alfresco Books, 45

¹¹ Ibid, 45

¹² Ibid, 48

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid, front page

¹⁵ Ibid, page 46

¹⁶ On-line newspapers: the Grantham Journal, Saturday, November 24, 1900

¹⁷ Information from a file relating to Walton Hall held in the Local History section of Warrington Library

¹⁸ Robinson, M A, 2000. *Auriculas for Everyone*. Guild of Master Craftsman Publications Ltd, 82

¹⁹ Extracts from various newspapers compiled in a commemorative book entitled "Lord Daresbury" and printed in 1939, the year following his death. Page 40

²⁰ Held at Warrington Library, Local History section