

<b>SITE NAME:</b>	<b>Whitby Park</b>				
Address	Stanney Lane, Ellesmere Port, CH65 9AQ.				
Unitary Authority:	Cheshire West and Chester				
Parish:	Ellesmere Port				
Location:	Close to centre of Ellesmere Port, approximately 1 mile from Junction 9 of the M53.				
Grid Ref:	SJ 3982 7540				
<b>Recorder:</b>	BM	<b>Date of Site Visits</b>	07/08/2021 10/10/2022	<b>Date of Report:</b>	04/12/2024

## Significance

The significance of Whitby Park lies principally as the last public park designed by Thomas Mawson. Though implementation of the design was interrupted by the Second World War, it has substantially been realised subsequently with the combination of formal and informal elements envisaged by Mawson.

Whitby Park is also the principal park in Ellesmere Port and has, since the Hall was owned by the Grace Family, been a place for celebrations, carnivals and shows.

Former agricultural use of the land is evident in remnant hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees which contribute to the quality of the parkland and its value for wildlife, qualities enhanced by current relaxed maintenance regimes in western and northern areas.

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## Principal remaining features

The Hall – Locally Listed Building DCH9548  
 Former stable block and outbuildings  
 Walled garden, now the Community Garden  
 2 Bowling greens and Bowling shelters  
 Panel garden  
 Fishing pond with rockwork  
 Drive with Lime avenue  
 Mature hedgerow trees

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## History (letters in brackets refer to maps and plans)

**1846** The Tithe Map shows the land later to become Whitby Park as fields. No apportionment is noted for the fields though adjoining plots are held by John Grace. The major landowner in the township of Whitby was the Marquis of Westminster.<sup>1</sup>

**1860** Whitby Hall built for John Grace in the English Gothic style in the manner of AWN Pugin.<sup>2</sup>

**1881** Ordnance Survey shows the layout of Whitby Hall and associated grounds (A)

**1892** "Whitby Hall, a mansion of red brick with stone dressings in the Elizabethan style is the residence of John Grace Esq. JP and stands in a finely wooded demesne" Kelly's Directory

**1894** Local Flower show held in grounds of Whitby Hall.<sup>3</sup>

**1898** Ordnance Survey indicates the extension of the designed landscape beyond the immediate environs of the hall. (B)

**1930** Whitby Fete and Flower Show held in grounds of Whitby Hall by permission of Mr Jon Grace MP.<sup>4</sup>

**1931** Whitby Hall acquired by Ellesmere Port Urban District Council and adapted for use as municipal offices.<sup>5</sup>

It was recommended that a Committee of councillors “be appointed to inspect Parks and Recreation Grounds in Birkenhead and Chester and to report thereon”.<sup>6</sup>

The Surveyor was instructed to prepare alternative schemes for the layout of a park, but consideration of his plan was deferred.<sup>7</sup>

**1932** The Council resolved, with the exception of the nursery garden, to open the park to the public from May 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>8</sup> The Surveyor was instructed “to ascertain the cost of obtaining the services of a landscape gardener, to prepare a scheme for the laying out of Whitby Park, and to report to the next meeting of the Planning Committee”.

The Surveyor reported to the Town Planning Committee recommending that “the services of Messrs T. H. Mawson & Son, Landscape Architects of Lancaster, be engaged to prepare detailed plans, estimates and a report for the laying out of Whitby Park, at a fee of £250.”<sup>9</sup>

Minutes note that the Council did not want provision for games such as cricket, football and hockey.<sup>10</sup>

Mr E. Prentice Mawson attended the Council Meeting in August and submitted his preliminary report in connection with the layout of the park. In September it was recommended that the scheme be approved. (C, D)<sup>11</sup>

**1933** Thomas H. Mawson and Son, Landscape Architects and Town Planning Consultants, produce a **Report on the layout of Whitby Park for the Ellesmere Port and Whitby Urban District Council**.<sup>12</sup> (See Appendix 1 for report transcription)

Representations were to be made to Cheshire County Council for a grant for developing the grounds of Whitby Park.<sup>13</sup> No grant was forthcoming.<sup>14</sup>

It was recommended that the scheme be divided into parts “as a guide to determining the order of proceeding if not all could be proceeded with”.<sup>15</sup>

**1937** The cost of implementing Mawson’s plan was reported as £10,816. It was recommended that public subscriptions be sought, but later the Council decided that there was not enough support to proceed.<sup>16</sup>

**1939** Ellesmere Port Council decide on three month deferral of a scheme to provide a bowling green, two hard tennis courts and a netball court, part of a scheme first proposed in 1933.<sup>17</sup> The National Playing Fields Association having notified the Council that their offer of a 30% grant for layout and equipment must “in view of the international situation, be regarded as having lapsed”.<sup>18</sup>

**1941** The Parks Committee requested consideration of the recall of the park keeper, Mr J Rowley, from fire watching duties, and this was agreed.<sup>19</sup>

**1944** The Women’s Land Army decided “to withdraw Mrs C M Hill for service with the Council as temporary gardener at Whitby Park”,<sup>20</sup> but as a result of representations she was allowed to remain.<sup>21</sup>

Mr Liggett appointed as Head Gardener, with a cycle allowance.<sup>22</sup>

**1945** The Post War Planning Committee agreed that “financial provision be made for construction of 2 Bowling Greens shown on the approved plan for Whitby Park prepared and

submitted by Messrs T H Mawson and Son, and the laying out and development, so far as possible of field... Financial Year 1946/47.<sup>23</sup>

**1951** Tenders invited for sale of ice cream and refreshments in the park.<sup>24</sup>

Ellesmere Port Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society present the comic opera 'Merrie England' in the park.<sup>25</sup>

J. E. Brassey of Chester invite visitors to their stand at the Industrial Trade Exhibition held at Whitby Park June 21 – 23.<sup>26</sup>

**1953** Ellesmere Port Amateur Operatic Society present 'Me and My Girl' on the lawn at Whitby Park, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June<sup>27</sup>

**1957** Ordnance Survey shows a children's playground in the north corner of the park.

**1958** Chester and District Fire Services Competition, a one day event held on June 7<sup>th</sup><sup>28</sup>

**1960** A new store is to be built in the park for the use of the Ellesmere Port Allotment Gardens Association.<sup>29</sup>

Weekend camps to Army Cadets are to be held once a month during the summer in part of Whitby park, opposite the T.A. Centre on Stanney Lane.<sup>30</sup>

**1973** Aerial photograph indicates that the main components of Mawson's design had been carried out (E)

**1974** Whitby Park 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Gymkhana<sup>31</sup>

**1975** May Day Rally<sup>32</sup>

**1978** Chester and Ellesmere Port Athletic Club hold their annual cross country races in Whitby Park.<sup>33</sup>

**1984** Bowls pavilion granted planning permission (for north side of bowling greens, H).<sup>34</sup>

**1988** Planning application for provision of a public car park accessed from the existing main drive to the Hall.<sup>35</sup>

**1989** Conversion and refurbishment of existing outbuildings to form offices granted planning permission.<sup>36</sup>

**1990** Whitby Hall and Whitby Lodge for sale by private treaty.<sup>37</sup> "The parkland setting of the building among mature trees and shrubbery" is mentioned, together with the advantages of the location in proximity to the M53.<sup>38</sup>

**1997** Ellesmere Port and Neston Council receive £15,000, part of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, for a plan to improve Whitby Park. The work is to include improving safety, enhancing the entrance, and encouraging more people to visit the area.<sup>39</sup>

**2001** Change of Use of Part of Hall to Cafe and Public Toilets, Alterations to Car Park and Extension to Allotment Building granted planning permission.<sup>40</sup> Works appear to have included installation of the railings around the bowling greens (I)

**2003** Aerial photograph indicates the loss of some features of Mawson's design such as the rose garden, and the development of other features in line with his intentions. (F)

**2004** Lighting approved for activity court (location of existing MUGA).<sup>41</sup>

**2005** Installation of Wheels Track/Skate Board Park, Flood Lighting and Associated Works granted planning permission. (J)<sup>42</sup>

**2005** Installation of climbing stones approved.<sup>43</sup>

**2008** New Bowling green approved, west of existing tennis courts. (K)<sup>44</sup>

**2015** Parkour area, which at the time was the second largest of its type in the country, opened in December<sup>45</sup>

**2016** Stanney Lane frontage works – removing hedgerow, installing new railings and tree planting; cleaning of pond<sup>46</sup>

**2019** Planning application for “Demolition of the main auditorium and toilet block of the existing building, with replacement auditorium, ancillary cafe and associated servicing and landscaping approved”.<sup>47</sup>

**2021** August – construction of replacement auditorium etc in progress

**2022** August – opening of new Theatre Porto linked to Whitby Hall.

### **Mawson’s Design**

In his introduction to the report Mawson recognises the need for contemporary parks to facilitate extended use and to provide “special facilities for recreation, including organised games”. This meant careful planning to allow more to be achieved within the space and to plan along formal lines. However he stressed that “everything ... has been largely controlled by the twin factors of the position of the mansion and the way in which its surroundings have already been treated, especially in relation to its main drive and secondly, the more important timber existing on the site.” Consequently the park is “a combination between the formal and informal style” where they have “tried to get long vistas and have made the fullest possible use of existing timber to act ... as a frame to these vistas.”

As the house was used as municipal offices Mawson proposed small pavilions serving the bowling greens. The carriage court is modified to accommodate car turning circles, and car parking provided north of the house. “Immediately on the access of the main front door due North East, we have planned a long walk leading up to the bandstand centre, flanked on each side by herbaceous borders, and backed by a yew hedge. This we have called “The Greeting“...

The small rose garden adjoining this terrace, has been kept small in order to allow out of the extension of its central access between the two bowling greens and forward to the rose garden. It will be noticed that these two bowling greens are separated by a central walk flanked on each side by flower beds, which always make an interesting and pleasing feature in conjunction with large areas of lawn.”

Mawson goes on to say that the location of the two bowling greens was situated on what was considered to be drier ground away from the pond but close to the hall. The construction, falls and drainage of the greens is described in considerable detail.

“Continuing the axis running between the two bowling greens, as already stated we come to the area marked Rose Garden. We are of opinion that in the laying out of this garden due consideration should be given to the Council’s future intentions with regard to this site, which we understand they would like eventually to be occupied by an open air swimming pool.” Mawson describes how careful planning could allow the hedge surrounding the rose garden to be retained as enclosure for the open air swimming pool, and mentions other considerations such as the location of locker rooms. He proposed retention of the existing pond as an aquatic centre. “Centring on this pond” there would be “a straight line north-west to the area allocated for tennis and a single bowling green, the path itself centring onto the proposed pavilion and dividing hard and grass courts.”

Mawson goes on to describe how the base and service lines of tennis courts tend to become very worn and how this might be dealt with and discusses play grounds for children, suggesting that they should be screened. "The extreme north corner of the site would we think be one suitable area for this purpose. It would be near the main entrance and therefore quite accessible."

"The site of the old kitchen garden has been somewhat extended and converted into a nursery garden...If your Council do not possess a central propagating area already, we are inclined to think that this would make an excellent centre for this purpose."

Mawson provides guidance on management of the existing trees and shrubberies, and his guidance on new planting:

"The effect or result to be aimed at is that of one comprehensive whole. The perfect artistic disposition and fusion of every and all the masses, the groups and individual trees and shrubs, is that the scheme will appear as one whole."

His report concludes with a list of appropriate tree species.

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## **Description** (numbers in brackets refer to site photographs)

### **Overview**

Whitby Park is generally flat, with only very localised changes in level, retaining evidence of its agricultural origins in remnant sections of hedgerow and hedgerow trees, predominantly oaks. It has areas of open parkland, woodland, recreation facilities and gardens. The Hall, much altered, is situated centrally within the park which is surrounded by housing estates.

### **Boundaries and Entrances**

The main entrance and drive with lime avenue follow the historic approach to the Hall from Stanney Lane, and also provide access to the main car park (1, 2, & 3). Near the Hall there is other mature tree planting beside the drive including a large Turkey Oak, *Quercus cerris*. (4) There are three other entrances on Stanney Lane; a pedestrian entrance to the car park with brick piers, double gates with brick piers, and a gated vehicular entrance alongside a pedestrian access into the parkland.

The Stanney Lane boundary is enclosed by red railings (5); the south eastern boundary is bounded by private gardens but the other boundaries are unenclosed. Houses face the park on the north western/Park Drive and south eastern/Thamesdale boundaries. The Park Drive boundary has a mature tree belt, part of it following an existing ditch (6), while much of the Thamesdale boundary is open in character.

### **The Hall**

The Hall has recently undergone significant refurbishment with a new theatre extension for Action Transport Theatre, Theatre Porto, opening in August 2022. It contains a cafe and toilets. The stables and outbuildings north west of the Hall are used as offices and the yard for car parking (7). The former walled garden adjacent to the stables is a thriving community garden run by volunteers (8 & 9).<sup>48</sup> Fruit, vegetables and flowers are grown with the help of a poly tunnel, and surplus produce is sold at the gate (10). At the rear of the stables is a pit once used for manure from the stables (11). Compost heaps are situated immediately west of the community garden.

### **Paths and areas around the hall**

A path from the car park, which is bounded by the remnants of a former hedge line, (12 & 13) leads to the open air performance area, a modest circular amphitheatre-like space with stepped surround enclosed by grass banks and with accent lighting on tall columns (14). From the performance space a path to the main entrance of the house, follows the line of the axial path

envisaged by Mawson as 'The Greeting'. A line of young established trees on the north side of the path are partially matched by trees on the south side. The trees emphasise the directional nature of the path and partially obscure views of Whitby Hall (15).

North of the path is a pond, identified on the earliest Ordnance Survey as 'fish pond'. It is surrounded by mature trees and marginal vegetation, with areas of naturalistic limestone rockwork suggesting that the area was once more elaborately maintained as a feature of the park (16 & 17). South of the path there is an area of wildflower grassland with mown paths where there appear to be evidence of earlier ridge and furrow (18).

Low walls with areas of shrub planting each side define the Hall forecourt, which is largely paved (19). The shrub planting of *Viburnum davidii* and *Viburnum tinus* is edged with box hedging. From the main entrance to the Hall there is a view down the Greeting and over the parkland (20). The layout and concept are all in accordance with Mawson's proposals. From the forecourt a path leads south to circumscribe the southern edge of spaces associated with the Hall, and beyond are football pitches available for use in season (21).

From this path an axial path leads west between an area of panel beds and continues between two bowling greens with four formal planting beds, all in accordance with Mawson's plan (22 & 23). The four panel beds are edged with box and have centrally planted box specimens, clipped to form large dome shapes. These may be part of the original planting. Other species include a mixture of more recent shrubs and herbaceous plants including *Cornus*, *Viburnum*, *Nandina*, *Lavandula*, *Bergenia* and *Geranium* species.

Each bowling green has a pavilion, sited symmetrically as Mawson proposed. The northern pavilion has a swept ridgeline and reflects the period of Mawson's design though it was only constructed after planning permission was granted in 1984. It replaced an earlier pavilion (24). The southern pavilion appears to be of more recent construction and has a utilitarian pitched roof (25). The path layout around the greens has bays for seats as designed by Mawson. The surrounding planting beds contain small ornamental trees including *Malus* and predominantly evergreen shrubs, most of which have been clipped creating geometric shapes. The planting is backed by mature forest scale trees including Beech, Lime and Poplar.

The path leads between the bowling greens, through a gated pedestrian entrance (usually locked), and into an area of naturalistic planting, the site of Mawson's rose garden. It appears from the 1971/1973 aerial survey that this garden was created with an oval layout as designed, but no evidence of the garden now remains. Nearby is the site of the pond which Mawson proposed should be an aquatic area (27), an area described as a "grassland habitat area".<sup>49</sup> Between the gate and site of the rose garden a path leads north to the tennis courts, located each side of the path broadly as Mawson designed. West of the path is a wooded area which has a "relaxed maintenance regime",<sup>50</sup> and includes a path with a 'dead' hedge, veteran hedgerow trees, shrubby willows and bark paths (28 - 31).

The tennis courts are bounded to the north by a line of mature oak trees from a former hedgerow (32). Between the tree line and Thamesdale is an area of naturalistic woodland where a relaxed maintenance regime is in operation (33). To the east is a Marie Curie Field of Hope and a Covid 19 memorial garden.

### **Other Recreation Facilities**

Two tennis courts remain on the western site proposed by Mawson with a multi use games area on the other side of the central path. A concrete slab indicates that there was a building structure in the location proposed by Mawson for a pavilion at the end of the path. West of the tennis courts is an additional bowling green and to the south climbing stones. (34)

East of the multi use games court is a "Wheels Park facility "for BMX riders, skateboarders and inline skaters" and a Parkhour area. (35, 36)<sup>51</sup>

A play area in the north corner of the park near the Stanney Lane entrance is located where suggested by Mawson. It has a range of contemporary play equipment catering for children up to up to 12 years of age. (37)

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**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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<sup>1</sup> [Cheshire Tithe Maps Online \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](http://cheshireeast.gov.uk) EDT 426/4

<sup>2</sup> [Revealing Cheshire's Past - Single Search Result \(cheshiresharedservices.gov.uk\)](http://cheshiresharedservices.gov.uk) Whitby Hall Locally listed building DCH 9548 LL50

<sup>3</sup> Chester Courant - Wednesday 29 August 1894

<sup>4</sup> Cheshire Observer - Saturday 13 September 1930

<sup>5</sup> Kelly's Directory 1939, Ellesmere Port Township Pack

<sup>6</sup> Cheshire Archives and Local Studies (CALS) LBE 5573/18, Ordinary Meeting of Council 27.4.1931, Para.106, 53

<sup>7</sup> CALS LBE 5573/18 Town Planning Committee, 13.10.1931, Para.812-6, 445

<sup>8</sup> CALS LBE 5573/18 Ordinary Meeting of Council 30.3.1932, Para.1441, 845

<sup>9</sup> CALS LBE 5573/19 Town Planning Committee, 10.5.1932, Para.55, 74

<sup>10</sup> CALS LBE 5573/19 Ordinary Meeting of Council, 12.7.1932, Para 289, 216

<sup>11</sup> CALS LBE 5573/19 Town Planning Committee,13.9.1932, Para 268, 364

<sup>12</sup> CALS 227023

<sup>13</sup> CALS LBE 5573/20 Ordinary Meeting of Council, 26.6.1933, Para 169, 198

<sup>14</sup> CALS LBE 5573/20 Ordinary Meeting of Council,28.8.1933

<sup>15</sup> CALS LBE 5573/20 Parks, Cems and Baths Committee, 3.7.33, Para 192, 226

<sup>16</sup> CALS LBE 5573/23 Parks, Cems and Baths Committee,21. 1.1937, Para 486, 499 and 19.4.1937, Para 649, 679

<sup>17</sup> Cheshire Observer - Saturday 01 July 1939

<sup>18</sup> CALS LBE 55731939/40 Town Planning and General Purposes Committee, 11.9.1939, 169

<sup>19</sup> CALS LBE 55731941/42 Parks Committee 6.5.41 and 12.5.41

<sup>20</sup> CALS LBE 5573 1943/44 Finance Committee 11.1.44, 233

<sup>21</sup> CALS LBE 5573 1943/44 Parks Committee 8.2.44

<sup>22</sup> CALS LBE 5573 1944/45 Ordinary Meeting of Council 27.11.44, Para. 423, 197

<sup>23</sup> CALS LBE 5573 1945/46 Parks Committee 5.6.45, 60

<sup>24</sup> Cheshire Observer - Saturday 12 May 1951

<sup>25</sup> Cheshire Observer - Saturday 09 June 1951

<sup>26</sup> Cheshire Observer - Saturday 16 June 1951

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- <sup>27</sup> Cheshire Observer - Saturday 06 June 1953
- <sup>28</sup> Nantwich Chronicle - Saturday 08 March 1958
- <sup>29</sup> Liverpool Echo - Friday 08 April 1960
- <sup>30</sup> Liverpool Echo - Thursday 21 April 1960
- <sup>31</sup> Cheshire Observer - Friday 03 May 1974
- <sup>32</sup> Liverpool Echo - Thursday 06 March 1975
- <sup>33</sup> Cheshire Observer - Friday 10 March 1978
- <sup>34</sup> [PH\\_3\\_0.8014--3471714.pdf \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](#)
- <sup>35</sup> PH/3/11.352 Provision of Public Car Park | Whitby Park Car Park Stanney Lane Ellesmere Port Cheshire
- <sup>36</sup> [PH/3/12.244 | Conversion and refurbishment of existing outbuildings to form offices | Whitby Hall Stanney Lane Ellesmere Port Cheshire CH65 9AE \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](#)
- <sup>37</sup> Liverpool Echo - Thursday 04 October 1990
- <sup>38</sup> Liverpool Echo - Thursday 31 January 1991
- <sup>39</sup> Liverpool Echo - Tuesday 02 December 1997
- <sup>40</sup> [P\\_2001\\_101\\_WH\\_112--2312326.pdf \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](#)
- <sup>41</sup> [P\\_2004\\_101\\_WH\\_56--3412005.pdf \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](#)
- <sup>42</sup> [P/2005/101/WH/296 | Installation of Wheels Track/Skate Board Park, Flood Lighting and Associated Works | Whitby Hall Stanney Lane Ellesmere Port Cheshire CH65 9AE \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](#)
- <sup>43</sup> [P/2005/101/WH/866 | Installation of 3m High Climbing Apparatus \(Climbing Stones\) and Associated Works | Land Adjacent To Tennis Court Whitby Hall Lodge Stanney Lane Ellesmere Port Cheshire \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](#)
- <sup>44</sup> [P/2008/101/WH/542 | New Bowling Green and Associated Works | Land Adjacent To Tennis Court Whitby Hall Lodge Stanney Lane Ellesmere Port Cheshire \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](#)
- <sup>45</sup> [Video shows £100,000 Ellesmere Port park play area in ruins after arson attack - Cheshire Live \(cheshire-live.co.uk\)](#)
- <sup>46</sup> [Ellesmere Port park views opened up to passers-by - Cheshire Live \(cheshire-live.co.uk\)](#)
- <sup>47</sup> [19/04540/FUL | Demolition of the main auditorium and toilet block of the existing building, with replacement auditorium, ancillary cafe and associated servicing and landscaping | Whitby Hall Stanney Lane Ellesmere Port CH65 6QY \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](#)
- <sup>48</sup> Whitby Park Community Garden, Charity no 1186825
- <sup>49</sup> [Whitby Park | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid