

WHITEHURST

Ref No PGW (C) 11

OS Map 117

Grid Ref SJ 288 400

County Denbighshire

District Denbighshire

Community Council Chirk

Designations Listed building Whitehurst House Grade II; Garden Walls
Grade II

Site Evaluation Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading

Survival of seventeenth-century walled garden of Chirk Castle, including tiered curving fruit walls, gates, banqueting house and mount.

Type of site

Walled garden

Main phases of construction

Seventeenth century

SITE DESCRIPTION

Whitehurst House is a seventeenth-century two-storey brick and stone house under a slate roof. It is thought that when the house was first built it was of one storey only, the second storey and bay window on the south front being added in the eighteenth century. There is a two-storey bay window on the south end of the house with pitched and slated roof. Next to the house is a nineteenth-century house of brick with a double pitched slate roof.

The gardens are situated about two kilometres north of Chirk Castle, and lie adjacent to the A5. Because the gardens are in divided ownership there are two entrances. Access to Whitehurst House is directly off the A5 via a pair of plain black iron gates with tall panelled sandstone gate piers, probably late seventeenth-century in date. The piers were surmounted by elaborate stone urns topped by pyramids of fruit. These fell to the ground some time ago, and their fragments are now in store. The other entrance is to the south, also off the A5.

The gardens lie on sloping ground facing south. A roughly rectangular area is enclosed by stone walls on the south, west and most of the east sides, and by brick ones on the north and rest of the east sides, the north wall having an outer skin of stone. In the north wall is an oak studded door (a recent replacement for a similar door which was burnt) over which is a keystone carved with the initials 'R M' (Richard Myddleton) and the date '1765'.

The north half of the interior is laid out in a series of terraces divided by four curving brick walls which were originally used for fruit growing. The walls survive, except part of the second wall going up the slope, only the west end of which is extant. Subsequent to their building a gateway and steps were inserted in the wall between the first and second terraces. The wall over the gateway was rebuilt and a keystone carved with the initials 'T M' (Thomas Myddleton) and the date '1651' was added. It would appear that this is not in situ and has been moved from elsewhere in the garden. A banqueting house is built into the lowest wall on the west end. This is a late seventeenth-century or early eighteenth-century square brick building with a pyramidal slate roof. The entrance is directly on to the first floor. Against the top wall is the frame of a lean-to glasshouse in poor condition. The 1905 Ordnance Survey map shows a number of glasshouses at the west end of the terraces, but this one was not then in existence. Next to it are nineteenth-century lean-to brick buildings, probably built as potting sheds and for general storage.

The centre of the garden is a level area, part of which is overgrown and part of which is taken up by a playground. A slight depression may indicate the presence at one time of a pond, but there is no direct evidence for this. Near the boundary on the south side of the garden is a conical, flat-topped mount, the banks of which are planted with hazel coppice. It is surmounted by a yew tree.

Twelve semi-detached cottages are situated on the east boundary of the walled garden. They were built in the early twentieth century as miners' cottages.

The garden was built by the 2nd Sir Thomas Myddleton in the middle of the seventeenth century, confirmed by the 'T M 1651' keystone. It was both productive and ornamental. A note in the Chirk Castle Accounts (I, Note 117, p.36) describes it as a place where Sir Thomas Myddleton could entertain his friends, as it was convenient to those travelling north and south through the village, and thus they were saved nearly two miles journey to the castle. The accounts record purchases of plants for the garden, and the building of banqueting houses. The garden was described by Thomas Dineley in *The Beaufort Progress* (1684) as being an 'Admirable Walled GARDEN of Trees Plants Flowers and Herbs of the greatest rarity as well forreigne as of Great Britain, Orrenge and Lemon Trees the Sensitive Plant & c', where Sir Richard Myddleton entertained the 1st Duke of Beaufort to a collation of 'choice fruits and wines' in a banqueting house. The main evidence for its early appearance lies in the 1735 drawing by Thomas Badeslade of 'The West Prospect of Chirk Castle'. This shows the layout of the garden in some detail, including the curving terraces and the mount. The southern and eastern parts of the garden are shown as plantations, with rows of conifers along the west and north boundaries and across the centre. The mount is shown with radiating rides cut through plantations on its slopes, and a spiral ride up to the top, which is planted with a single conifer. The drawing shows a building, no longer extant, in the same wall as the present banqueting house but further to the east. Another building is shown above it on the second terrace. These are probably the banqueting houses mentioned in the accounts.

Immediately to the east of the walled garden and directly outside the boundary wall is the Black Park, the largest of the three parks belonging to the Chirk Castle estate. It was estimated that the park was 'in Circuyt ywo myles, in length half a myle and in breadth a quart of a myle'.

Sources

Primary

Thomas Badeslade drawing of the 'West Prospect of Chirk Castle', 1735; National Library of Wales.

Secondary

Dineley, T., The Beaufort Progress (1684).

Myddleton, W.M. (ed.), Chirk Castle Accounts 1605-66 (1908).