

FRODSHAM

Festival of Walks 2021

REDISCOVER WHERE YOU LIVE

Remembering Joe Beswick (1931–2020)

WALK 2: CASTLE PARK REDISCOVERED

A circular walk of about 1 mile on firm park paths with some cobbles and steps, beginning at Car Park (6) on the 'Welcome' map.

START: Walk along the main drive to the arrival space at the front of **Castle Park House (5)**, note the **Wollemi Pine** on your left, a tree discovered growing in Australia in 1994! The House is said to be the site of an ancient castle, but, more likely it was a manor house. In Victorian times (1837–1901) the site was developed as a mansion with designed pleasure grounds, kitchen garden, coach house, stables and 'home farm'. In the 1930s this private estate was gifted to the local authority, then Runcorn Rural District Council, as a park for local people and its buildings were adapted for new uses. In the 21st century both the House and the Park have been restored with the aid of Heritage Lottery Fund grants. Currently the ground floor of the House is occupied by Ancora School and other rooms are let as business premises.

DIRECTIONS

A brief history of House ownership is described on the blue plaque to the right of the entrance. Bear left and walk towards the clock-tower ahead. Note the pleasant view across the pleasure grounds on your right. Take a closer look at some of the nearby exotic trees, i.e. non-natives, planted by Stubs and/or Kemp, e.g. the **Maidenhair** and **Deodar Cedar** (closest), the **Walnut** to your right and the fenced **Copper Beech**. The nearby fast-growing **Red Oak** was planted as a commemorative tree in 1983!

Further information: the **Maidenhair** or **Ginkgo** tree is a long-lived deciduous conifer. European plant collectors first encountered it in the temple gardens of China. It is valued as a disease and pollution resistant tree, and is planted as a street tree in Chelsea, London. The **Deodar** or **Himalayan Cedar** is widely grown as an ornamental tree in parks. **Walnut** trees have long been grown for their nuts and timber, and more recently as ornamental trees. The **Copper Beech** is a large deciduous tree with a smooth bark, grown for its display of deep purple leaves in parks and gardens. The **Wollemi pine** is an evergreen conifer more closely related to the **Monkey Puzzle** than modern pines. Modern propagation methods have made Wollemi Pines available across the world. The desire to plant exotic trees in Castle Park continues: what other labelled exotics can you spot on your walk?

A short distance further, note the detached repurposed **Footman's Cottage** on your left. The **Formal Garden (4)** still has a central fountain (awaiting repair) which was originally spring-fed, and the garden still supports Kemp's actual **Yew** trees and planting scheme. Visit the **Conservatory (3)**, which has been part of the garden since the 1870s: inside, view the time-line panels and historic images of Castle Park.



Back on the walk route, descend the steps to the Arts Centre car park, originally the Gardeners' Yard, with the Smoke-house (for meat!), now a hairdresser, in the far left corner. View the estate clock-tower and the evidence for coach house and stable entrances in what is now **Castle Park Arts Centre (1)** – the blue plaque describes its history.



FDN1443 Estate farmyard and barns 1899



FDN1526 Clock-tower and stable entrances, coach house left of image 1899

Exit the Arts Centre courtyard via the ornamental wrought-iron gates made by local blacksmith, Chris Doughty. They depict Harriet and Emily Wright in their carriage with coachman Walter Bean. Together with the newly-built **Craft Workshops** they were officially opened by the Duke of Westminster in 1993. Turn right and walk to just beyond the Fountain Lane gate piers – here you will see the **Park Court** blue plaque. Return to the cobbled access on your left to compare the present Park Court with the historic image. This building was the Fire Station (1937–77) before its present transformation!

Continue over the cobbles and on to the service road passing the **Play Area (2)** on your right; this was originally a terraced Kitchen Garden and then tennis courts. The **Bowling Green (9)** on your left, was formerly an orchard.

Pass **Luca's Cafe** in the **Park Pavilion (8)** and turn immediately left down the steep footpath, fork right at the cycle racks and left to view the **American Garden** information sign. The pure water of this spring-fed pool was the estate's watercress bed.



FDN1498 Mushroom seat with canopy 1899

Climb 2 of the 3 sets of steps ahead of you then turn sharp left to reach the 'mushroom seat': a shady viewpoint.

The American Garden was a Stubs/Kemp creation of trees under-planted with shade-loving rhododendrons and ferns around springs and streams. It still has its network of paths.

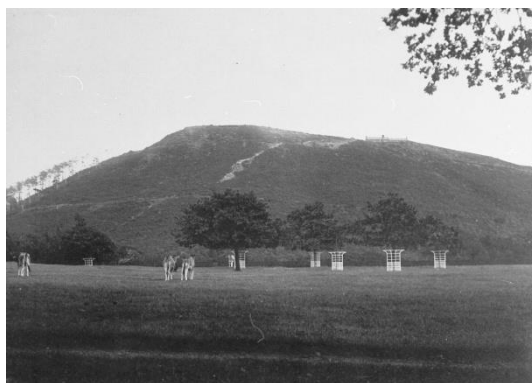
Continue on the path beyond the 'mushroom seat' and at the next 3 path junctions turn left, then right, then left again passing the tall '**Elephant Beech**' on your left.

Turn right on to the path that parallels the stream on the east side of the Park and continue up to the **Synagogue Well** information sign (14).

Synagogue Well is an ancient spring that was stone-lined to form a cold bath some 3 m deep. It was reputed to discharge 1700 gallons of water a minute in 1791 and overflowed into the stream which is now culverted under Main Street and Marsh Lane to discharge on The Marshes. In the 19th century water from the Well was gravity-fed to stand pipes in the pleasure grounds and the House. In 1935, after a number of sad suicides the bath was filled with stones; recent attempts to create a fernery have clearly failed.



FDN1682 Synagogue Well 1899



FDN1544 Cattle grazing, protected oak trees (now mature) and a treeless Overton Hill 1899

Return to the fingerpost and turn left on to the path that follows the stream course at the back of Howey Lane properties. Turn right on to the Howey Lane access path with **Tennis Courts** and **Multi Use Games Area (11)** on your right and the Castle Park Trim Trail on your left. At the 'Welcome' sign turn left passing the **Zip-wire** and the **Running Track (13)** to view an area that was originally an estate field.

To complete the walk, turn right at the fingerpost and walk down to the car park. This was a spring-fed millpond until the railway was constructed (1849–50) and then an ornamental lake in the pleasure grounds of the estate. By the 1950s there was little visible water.

Note: During the last century groundwater management for human use has lowered the water table across the district and the water features of Castle Park have all been affected.



FDN1685 Ornamental Lake 1899

Images FDN1526, FDN1443, FDN1498, FDN1682, FDN1544 and FDN1685 courtesy of Cheshire Archives and Local Studies. These images, and many more, can be found at www.cheshireimagebank.org.uk



Welcome to Castle Park

These historic gardens designed by Edward Kemp have been restored and improved with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Parks for People programme.

The gardens offer features of interest to history and horticulture lovers. Tennis courts, games area, bowling green and running track for sports fans. Play areas within the 9 hectares of parkland offer endless opportunities to play and have fun.



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|--|---------------------------------|
| 1 Castle Park Arts Centre | 9 Bowling green |
| 2 Play area | 10 Sports pavilion |
| 3 Conservatory | 11 Tennis courts and games area |
| 4 Formal gardens and fountains | 12 Older Children's play |
| 5 Castle Park House | 13 Running track |
| 6 Car Park | 14 Synagogue Well |
| 7 American Garden | Paths |
| 8 Park pavilion including toilets and café | Steps |



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