

9. Marbury Country Park

Marbury has seen many dramatic changes, particularly within living memory.

After Leslie Fink and Company demolished Marbury Hall in January 1969, they tried several times to get planning permission to build an exclusive housing estate on the site of the former Hall. The applications were refused and eventually in 1983, Cheshire County Council obtained the land where the Hall once stood by compulsory purchase.

After the hutments had been demolished, ICI still owned the parkland and, in 1975, leased it to the Council. Major restoration work commenced and Marbury Country Park was created. The Park was maintained by the Countryside Management Service of Cheshire County Council.



After demolition of the hutments



Creating Marbury Country Park

The area around the lime avenues was ploughed, levelled and seeded to create the grassland which now greets visitors to the park.

In 2001, ICI sold the freehold of the parkland to Broughton Estates, a Yorkshire-based company and it is now owned by Marbury Country Park Ltd., a Ludlow-based company.

Cheshire West and Chester Council was formed in April 2009 and took over the responsibility of managing the park, including the ex-ICI land, which it now manages under lease from Marbury Country Park Ltd.

Since its creation, Marbury has become one of the most visited countryside sites in Cheshire.

The landscaping and development of the derelict land between Marbury Country Park and Northwich town centre has created the area now known as Northwich Woodlands.

In 2002, Ranger Pete Schofield wrote:

'The park has a wonderful mix of semi-ancient woodland, open grassland and fields, with Budworth Mere and woodland streams on its boundaries. In spring the woodlands are carpeted with bluebells and wood anemones while many migrant birds such as chiffchaff and willow warbler can be heard singing. Throughout the year, there is always something new to see or hear. This is what makes Marbury such a special place. Many people comment that they feel they are in the heart of the country as soon as they leave the car park even though Northwich and two chemical works are only a couple of miles away.'

The Rangers manage the Park for informal recreation and also to maintain and enhance its wildlife and conservation value. There is a juggling act between providing a park for the many thousands of visitors to Marbury each year whilst helping and improving nature conservation on site. Some of the management is done with the future in mind. For example reducing the number of sycamore trees, a non-native species, in the woodlands and replanting with native oak and ash, will benefit visitors in about 30 years or so.

Marbury has seen many changes in recent memory and the change continues. Over the last ten years much of the derelict land between Marbury and Northwich has been landscaped and opened to the public. This area is now known as Northwich Woodlands. Marbury Country Park is a key part of this area, acting as a gateway into the Northwich Woodlands. From Marbury visitors can now walk to the Anderton boatlift on well surfaced paths or even through to Northwich in a traffic free environment. Further developments around Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes will open up more land of wonderful potential for wildlife and walkers. The original Marbury estate was some 900 acres in size; the new Northwich Woodlands will be nearly as large. It is fitting that Marbury is at the heart of these developments.'

Friends of Anderton and Marbury (FoAM)

The Friends of Anderton and Marbury (FoAM) is a voluntary group of local people interested in the Northwich Woodlands, who assist the Rangers from the Greenspace team of Cheshire West and Chester in its management. The group also run events designed to help visitors and the local community learn more about the wealth of wildlife that can be found in the area.

FoAM has developed a number of environmental and educational projects. One of the projects undertaken at Marbury Country Park was the creation of wildflower meadows.



FoAM has also built a pond dipping platform at Marbury to enable children to enjoy this activity in safe surroundings. The platform is sited at the ice pond, which was once used by the Smith Barrys to collect ice and store it in the adjacent ice house. The domed roof has been removed from the ice house, but the remains of the circular structure can still be seen between the ice pond and the Mere.



Pond Dipping Platform



The most ambitious project for FoAM to date has been the construction of Marbury Lodge. The Rangers and volunteers had long recognised the need for a shelter to enable school parties and other visitors to make better use of the Park in bad weather. We were able to realise this thanks to a generous donation from one of our members and Marbury Lodge now provides a meeting place near the Rangers' cabin. The Lodge is a traditional green oak frame with cedar shingle roof, designed to fit in with its surroundings.



Marbury Lodge

These projects have only been possible because FoAM works in partnership with the Rangers. By working in this way, we have been able to provide facilities which make Marbury Country Park a more enjoyable place for the many visitors who come here.

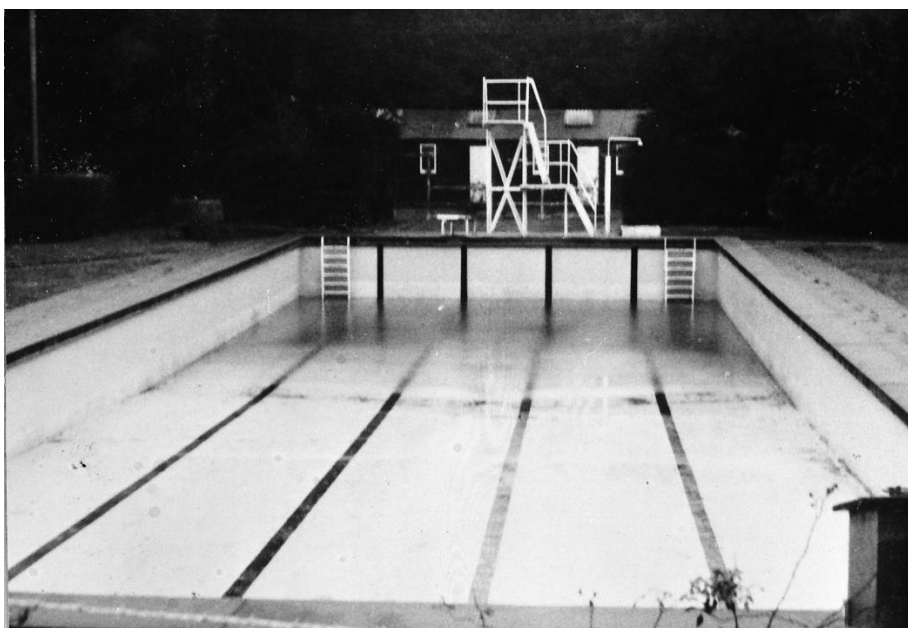
Swimming Pool

Early in 1932, George Smith bought Marbury Hall and estate. George built the swimming pool as part of the work to turn the Hall and estate into a Country Club. The pool was used during the war years and was also well used and maintained after ICI purchased the Hall in 1948.



Swimming pool in 1959, during ICI's ownership

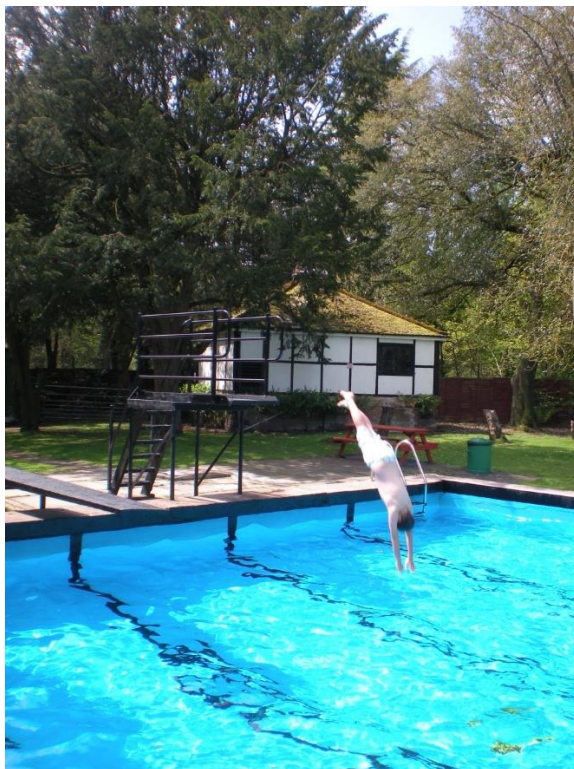
In 1961, ICI sold the Hall and land immediately surrounding it. The Hall itself fell into disrepair and the swimming pool was later also abandoned.



Fortunately, the Marbury pool is still open today. The site of the pool is owned by Marbury Country Park Ltd and managed by Cheshire West and Chester Council under a long-term lease. Marbury Park Swimming Club, a group of volunteers, run the pool under a lease from the Council and open it between May and September each year. The club sells memberships for each season, but visitors are welcome to buy day passes on the gate, if numbers and safety requirements allow.



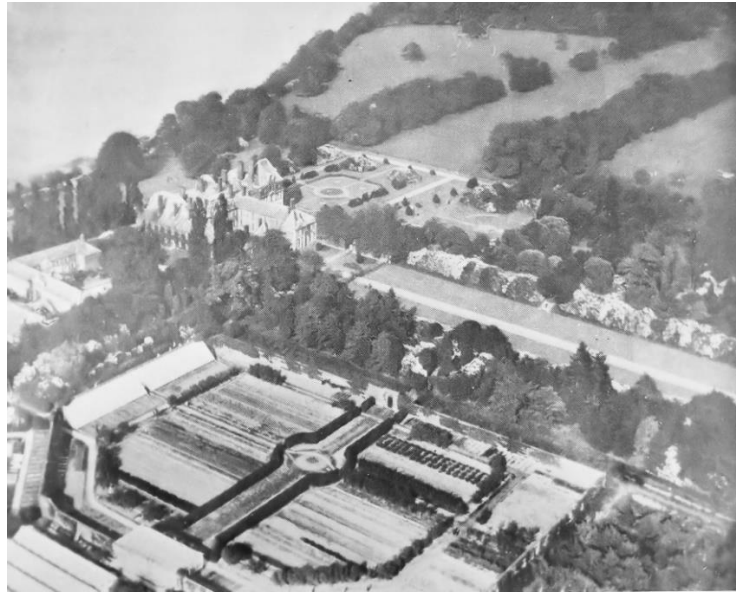
The pool is well used by both serious swimmers and families who visit just for fun. Several organisations hire the pool each year for parties, events and triathlon swimming sessions.



For information about membership and pool hire for events, contact the membership secretary:
jeanette.unsworth@nationalgrid.com.

Marbury Hall Nurseries

Although it is not part of Marbury Country Park, Marbury Hall Nurseries deserves a mention as the garden centre is situated in the old walled garden, which was once part of the Marbury estate. The walled garden can be seen in the foreground of this aerial photograph, which probably dates from the late 1920's.



Marbury Estate (with the walled garden in the foreground)

The walled garden survived when the Hall was demolished in January 1969. It is now owned by Cheshire West and Chester Council and leased to the Tomlinson family, who run the nursery business. The tall brick walls enclosing the nurseries give the place a special feel and also give visitors a reminder and sense of the grand scale of the house that once stood next door. The old walled garden is another part of the ever changing story of Marbury.

Find out more on www.marburynursery.co.uk

Lime Avenues

Visitors can still enjoy the Arboretum and Lime Avenues in Marbury Country Park, and they can find steps and stonework from the formal gardens, but little trace remains of Marbury Hall itself.



Lime Avenue, 2009

Site of Marbury Hall

The site of the Hall is now an open area and this picture shows families enjoying the space during a recent Family Fun Day.



Family Fun Day, 2012, on the Site where Marbury Hall once stood

Although the Hall has gone, there is still much to do during a visit to Marbury Country Park. We hope the amenities at the Park will continue to be managed and developed to enable visitors to enjoy Marbury for many years to come.