

The Barn Area & Kitchen Garden

The barn area at the rear of Gorton House has been used for many different purposes of the years and continues to be used now by The Friends of Debdale in a variety of social projects.

The Eco Centre

Based in two porta cabins the Eco Centre is developing a whole range of services focused on horticulture, food growing and recycling. There is a biodynamic garden which comprises of 9 large beds that are used for growing a wide variety of vegetables and flowers, also there is a border bed containing fruit trees and herbs. The various tasks of preparation, sowing, planting and harvesting are undertaken using a lunar gardening guide allowing the lunar cycles to play their part in plant growth. The garden is also managed organically and has a small pond and logpile to support wildlife.



The Lunar Garden at the rear of Gorton House & remaining cottage

Green Fingers

This is another horticultural project located in the kitchen gardens which provides a gardening experience for adults with special needs. Again it grows a wide range of vegetables, flowers and fruit.

Hammer & Nails Woodworking Project

The workshops for this project are located in the old barn complex of buildings and also caters for adults with special needs and learning disabilities. It produces a wide range of wood crafted products, such as can be used in the park and gardens, and also restores furniture

Cycling Centre

Two cycling projects run by the Friends use the barn as a base for cycling projects for the community: Cycling for Health and Wheels for All attract a wide number of people on a weekly basis for a cycling experience

The Story of Gorton House In Debdale Park



Gorton House is a Grade II listed building located in the centre of Debdale Park. It is a Regency manor built in the 1790's by the wealthy textile merchant Robert Grimshaw, a member of a well know local dynasty of land owners and industrialists.

Its listing with English Heritage (No 507191) identifies many distinctive features of interest both exterior and interior:

- It is a good example of late eighteenth century polite country house built for a successful industrialist, which reflects the advent of industrialization in Manchester and the desire of the wealthiest citizens to move away from inner-city living;**
- It possess a finely detailed exterior with ionic door case and polygonal bays;**
- It retains high quality late eighteenth century interior features such as a top-lit open stair well, moulded door architraves, six panel doors and some fireplaces of note**

The house was built in its own grounds with two entrance lodges on Hyde Road in what was then a rural landscape. The house is contemporary with the building of the nearby Stockport branch canal which was opened in 1797 and ran near to the house, though now filled in. It was a sign of the spreading industrialisation around Manchester.

In 1918 the land surrounding the house was incorporated into Debdale Park and in 1938 Gorton House became the residence of the Park keeper. Later it was used for administrative offices until the deterioration of the fabric of the building led to its closure. There have been a number of unsuccessful attempts to restore the house which is now in danger of collapse.

People who lived in Gorton House

Since it was built Gorton House has had many different occupants and uses.

Robert Grimshaw, who built the house, already owned a mill in Manchester but planned to build a much bigger one in Gorton. He was a great innovator and obtained a licence to use Edward Cartwright's new automated spinning machine. However, his mill was burnt down only weeks after being opened which bankrupted him and sent to prison. Whilst there he committed suicide and his property sold.

Thomas Howard bought the house in 1816. He was a partner with his brothers in the hat-making business and part of the premises was used for this purpose with some workers cottages built at the rear of the house, one of which still survives adjoining the main house. Part of the property was also sublet to a firm of Calico bleachers.

Nathaniel Denton was another hat maker who bought the house in 1836. He had a business nearby in Denton and traded widely across the north of England and Ireland. Sadly his wife died shortly after he moved in though he continued to live there with his daughter and three servants until in 1841 he moved his business to Oldham and let the house to a Mr Bowker.

Mrs Thatcher ran a boarding school for girls and in 1844 moved into Gorton House which was said to have spacious pleasure grounds and ample convenience for recreation – just right for young ladies who were charged up to 42 guineas (nearly £2,000 today) per annum. The school moved out in 1848 but soon another one moved in.

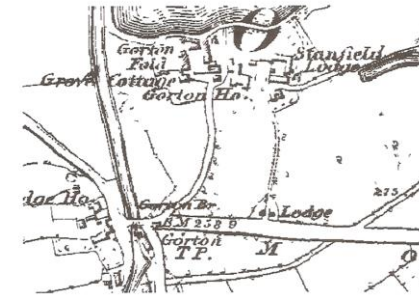
John Williamson advertised his school as offering a whole range of subjects such as chemistry, geology, mechanics, astronomy as well as cricket and archery, dancing and drilling. Though advertised as providing 'the moral influences of the home' the premises were raided by the police in 1853 who found an illegal distillery for making whisky in one of the cottages in Gorton House Yard. The occupant of the cottage, Thomas Duffy, was fined £30 (£1,755 today). In 1861 the school moved to Culcheth Hall across Chat Moss.

William Pinder, a steel merchant, then took over the house. His company, originally from Sheffield, moved to Manchester in the 1840's producing high quality 'doctor' blades for use in the textile and wallpaper industries. A selection of his products won a number of medals for their products at the Great Exhibition of 1851. Edward Pinder, the son, lived in the house and used the cottages previously occupied by hatters for making springs, grinders, files and other steel products in what was advertised as a Hot & Cold Rolling Mills producing 'Best refined blue steel'. The company moved to Sharston in 1880 by which time the property had been purchased by Manchester City Council who then rented it out for 80 guineas a year (£4,000 or £350 per month).

Thomas Parker, the next occupant, was a Carriage and Waggon Superintendent at the Gorton Locomotive Works. He had come to Manchester to work for a railway company and remained in the house until his death in 1903. The Parker family were the last private residents

Manchester City Council increasingly took over the use of the house and surrounding land for its own purposes in the twentieth century with the grounds becoming known as Debdale Recreation Ground and the house and buildings used for the Park Keeper and administration.

The Grounds of Gorton House



A map of Gorton House c.1860 showing the grounds and lodges with the reservoir at the rear and canal on the left hand side

The grounds of Gorton House have an interesting history in their own right.

In 1821 the Manchester and Salford Water Company were authorised by an Act of Parliament to purchase the land just to the rear of the house and construct two large reservoirs. These were the first municipal reservoirs to be built in the country to supply fresh water to the rapidly expanding cotton town. Today the reservoirs provide a scenic setting of the house and park. Though no longer used for drinking water the reservoirs provide the opportunity for sailing and fishing.

In 1851 Manchester City Council purchased the land surrounding the reservoirs from the Waterworks Company. Gradually this land became available for public use as a recreation ground. At first it was not a park as the council were reluctant to spend money on facilities but during the First World War this began to change. In 1914 a Bowling Club was created and in 1915 an area fenced off as pitches for cricket, football and hockey.

Later, Debdale acquired an outdoor swimming pool, a bandstand for open air concerts and an Aviary. The pool is now a children's playground and the Aviary has been refurbished to provide community rooms for a variety of projects run by the Friends of Debdale Park

For more information: www.friendsofdebdalepark.co.uk

(Thanks go to local historian, Janet Wallwork, for providing much of the above information)