

Cronkhill is the first and most well known of John Nash's Italianate villa designs. The house was built for Francis Walford (1779-1856), agent and friend to the 2nd Lord Berwick (1770-1832) of Attingham Park, two miles away. The plans for the house were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1802.

History

Francis Walford arrived on the Attingham estate sometime around 1804. He seems to have first lived in the timber-framed farmhouse which forms the basis for the existing servants' wing, before moving into the completed Cronkhill House that Nash was building sometime by 1806. He was married twice. His first wife died young in 1814, and he subsequently married again, to Anne Scott. It was Walford who helped in the sales of items belonging to Lord Berwick in order to fund the construction of a library in which to house his collections. In later years the friendship between Walford and Lord Berwick seems to have turned sour, and a letter of 1828 complained of Walford's neglect of duty. It seems that Walford eventually left Cronkhill, returning to Shrewsbury where he died in 1856. He was buried in the churchyard at nearby Atcham, his tomb commanding a view of Cronkhill in the distance.

After the tenancy of Walford, Cronkhill was mostly used by the Lords Berwick themselves, being a more modest home for them than Attingham, which was either shut up or tenanted until the 8th Lord & Lady Berwick returned there in the 1920's. Cronkhill's most notable resident the 5th Lord Berwick (1800-1861) oversaw the building of the model farm for his prize winning herd of Hereford cattle known as the Cronkhill herd, and who made the name famous in the rifling world by patenting his innovative design as the 'Cronkhill rifle'.

A Tour of the House

The first room you see on entering the house is the Entrance Hall, dominated by an elegant cantilevered staircase which is constructed out of stone as far as the first floor. The flight leading on up to the second floor is made of wood and is narrower, to give the impression of grander scale.

From here, visitors proceed into the Dining Room, which sits under the round tower visible from the outside of the house. The room itself is not circular, Nash instead favoured an irregular eight-sided room. Amongst the original decorative features of the room are floral details on the door frames, and a rolled acanthus leaf frieze around the ceiling, both of which are continued in the next room.

The Drawing Room is dominated on one side by three sash windows, which originally opened high enough to walk through. The upper part of the window slots into a gap in the frame above, which can still be seen today. The small door in the central window is a later addition, as is the south facing window ahead of you as you enter the room. The winged griffins either side of the marble fireplace are the remains of the bell-pull system that once operated in the house.

The final room on the tour is the Library. A smaller room than those you have already seen, the Library sits in the base of the shorter square tower, and so has a lower ceiling than the rooms that come before it. The room has been recorded at some times as a study, and the bookcases in this room are original to the house. The Dining Room, Drawing Room and Library all share magnificent views to the east, looking out towards the Wrekin, and in the far distance the Roman remains at Wroxeter can sometimes be seen.

The Exterior

From the outside Cronkhlll is dominated by two towers, one circular and one square. Originally the house was reached via a drive to the North, making the round tower the main focal point of the approach. The two towers are linked on the east side by an arcade, and the whole house is attached to a 17th century timber framed building, which formed the servants' wing.

Newly repaired and made safe in 2005 visitors can now view the Cronkhlll stables and tack room to the rear of the main house.

The Gardens

The Gardens on view to visitors comprise several parts. Starting on the front lawn by the flower beds directly in front of the house, take the steps down to the left into the Orchard. From here, go left again up the separate set of steps into the Walled Garden (in fact only partially walled). After looking around this area, take the path back towards the house (to the right as you came up the steps), through the gate, taking in the timber frame of the original farm house which is still visible at the end of the servants wing of the house.