

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SUTTON PARK

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Name:	SUTTON PARK
District:	Birmingham (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Sutton Coldfield
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.571597 Longitude: -1.8543862 National Grid Reference: SP 09966 97096 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001307 Date first listed: 18-Jul-1995

Details

An extensive public park originating as a C12 deer park and with remains of largely C18 industrial activity.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The area of land which became the current Sutton Park formed part of a royal chase created out of the Forest of Cannock. In 1126, as a result of property exchange with Henry I, Sutton Chase passed from the Crown (Henry I) to the earls of Warwick, and it is likely that it was they who first enclosed a park. Traces of the original boundary ditch and bank remain on the east, north and west boundaries of the present Park. Earthwork subdivisions and woodland boundary banks and ditches dating from this period through to the late C15 also survive within the Park.

In the early C15, the manor and park were leased by the earls of Warwick to Sir Ralph Bracebridge. In 1471, after the death of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, the manor reverted to the Crown. The park apparently remained little altered until 1528, when Bishop Vesey, Bishop of Exeter and a native of Sutton Coldfield, encouraged Henry VIII to grant a Charter under which Sutton became a Royal Town and the Park was given to the people of Sutton in perpetuity, for use as common grazing and woodland. The Seven Hayes, seven areas of existing woodland (Streetly Wood, Pool Hollies, Darnel Hurst, Upper Nut Hurst, Lower Nut Hurst, Holly Hurst and Lady Wood), perhaps medieval in origin, were enclosed with banks, ditches and quickset hedges, to exclude the livestock now being grazed in the Park. The sale of timber was intended to support local charities, poor relief and other good works.

In the C18, while grazing rights continued, the Park became the centre of a local semi-industrial economy providing revenue for the Corporation and people of Sutton. Three pools were constructed (Blackroot, Powell's and Longmoor) to power new mills, requiring an alteration in the boundary of the Park, especially to the south. Local landowners attempted to have all commons, including the Park, enclosed in 1778, but the Enclosure Act, finally passed in 1825, excluded this area. The desire of the Hartopp estate to consolidate its land holdings resulted, in 1827, in the exchange of 63 acres (c 16ha) of land adjacent to Four Oaks Hall, for 97 acres (c 40ha) of farmland in the south and near the Town Gate, and this also meant boundary alterations to the east and south.

The Birmingham to Wolverhampton railway was constructed through the Park in 1879, increasing the importance of the land as a rural retreat for the people of Birmingham and surrounding industrial areas. The Park thus developed as a place of recreation with the construction of sporting facilities and a variety of smaller shelters, gates, and park attendants' accommodation, mostly

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constructed in rustic style with heather-thatched roofs. Towards the end of the C19, the Park was used for a variety of military purposes, including an annual militia camp. In 1974, the management of the Park was transferred from the Borough of Sutton Coldfield to the City of Birmingham.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Sutton Park, now c 900ha, is located on the north-east edge of the Birmingham plateau, to the north-west of Sutton Coldfield. Much of Sutton Park retains a rough, heathland character, and parts are relatively exposed and bleak. Its roughly oval perimeter is almost wholly followed by roads. The Park is bisected into two unequal halves by the Birmingham to Wolverhampton railway, constructed north-west to south-east through the park in 1879.

ENTRANCE AND APPROACHES The main entrance into Sutton Park is the Town Gate which leads into the most-used area of the park - a zone of open grassland with scattered trees to the west of the town. This gate superseded the Wyndley Gate as the main entrance to the Park after 1827 when, as part of the Hartopp exchange, the piece of former farmland, Meadow Plant, was added to the eastern side of the park.

PARK Within the Park, to the west of the Town Gate, is Park House (listed grade II), probably originally let on a long lease and now leased out (in 1999 as a restaurant) by the City Council. The present house, formerly an C18 mill house on the site of an earlier watermill, was extended c 1870 when the accompanying grounds were planted up. Two millponds survive in the grounds; there was a blade mill here in the early C18 and later a gun polishing mill and tilt-hammer.

North of Park House, and immediately south of the railway, is Holly Knoll, an area of C19 woodland within which banks and ditches marking the subdivisions of the medieval deer park are visible. Land to the north-west of the Knoll was laid out as a racecourse from 1847 until c 1865 when it was replaced by the new course (see below). The first golf course was laid out on the area south-west of the Knoll c 1880, and a maypole was erected here c 1890.

To the south of Meadow Plant, and outside the Park boundary, is the site of the Crystal Palace, a structure based on the Crystal Palace at Sydenham (qv), which stood from 1868 to 1962, and its associated Royal Promenade Pleasure Gardens. This establishment was a major attraction and helped secure the adjacent Park as a place of public resort. West of the Palace site, but within the Park, is the Pageant site, the area used in 1928 for the holding of a pageant on the history of Sutton to mark the 400th anniversary of the Royal Charter. This has left traces of the banking used for the seats.

To the south, at the south-east corner of the park, lies Wyndley Pool. This was in existence by the C16 and by 1754 was accompanied by two mills on the dam, near Wyndley Gate. The Pool was owned by the Somerville family until 1937 when it became part of the Park, and was much used for boating. Prior to the land exchange of the 1820s, Wyndley Gate served as the main way in to the Park, traces of a hollow-way showing the line of the track which went through Holly Hurst across to the north-west side of the Park. Rearrangement of coppice stands within Holly Hurst in the early C19 removed traces of the route through the wood.

The medieval bank and ditch of the early imparking is visible along the present (late C20) northern boundary. The north part of the Park contains a medieval pool, Bracebridge Pool, probably originally constructed as a fishpond. The smaller pool, Little Bracebridge, above it (to the north-west) was possibly originally part of the main pool or was perhaps also a medieval fishpond. Bracebridge Pool was probably the creation of Sir Ralph Bracebridge following his take-up of the lease of the Park in 1420. It had been drained by 1550, and was reinstated by Richard Barlowe following a grant of 1577 for the creation of the lake and a blade or fulling mill. The Pool was owned by the Hartopp family until c 1880 when acquired by the Corporation. Bracebridge Cottage, which stands at the south-east end of the dam on the site of the mill, was constructed as a cafe in the later C19 and now (late C20) functions as a restaurant. The present shelter on the dam replaces a C19 one.

To the north of the Pool is a set of burnt mounds, probably of the Middle Bronze Age. To the east, it is abutted by woodland, Pool Hollies, probably of medieval origin, enclosed in the mid C16, through which runs a late medieval bank and ditch. At the south-west corner of the wood is Druid's Well, a spring enclosed in a stone arch, the surround dating from 1815. The woodland to the south of the dam is probably of C19 origin. On the eastern boundary of the northern park stands Four Oaks Hall, set within parkland. North of the Hall is Gum Slade, a wooded area probably dating from the C18. South of the Hall is Lady Wood

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which has lain outside the Park boundary since the Hartopp exchange of land in 1827. Probably of medieval origin, the wood was enclosed in the mid C16. In 1858, the east boundary of the Park was straightened and the present brick wall erected. West of Lady Wood are earthworks known as the Ancient Encampment, of unknown, but possibly prehistoric, date.

The central section of the Park offers a landscape of grass and heathland and mixed woodlands. Just south of the railway, in the centre of the Park, stands Darnel Hurst, one of the Seven Hayes enclosed in the mid C16. To the south is Upper Nut Hurst and, south again, Lower Nut Hurst, also among the Seven Hayes. Lower Nut Hurst contains banks and ditches which formed subdivisions of the medieval deer park. To the west of Upper Nut Hurst is the site of Lodge Oak Nursery, in operation around the turn of the C19/C20 century growing trees for replacement of those felled for timber in the Park. Wartime agriculture in this part of the Park has resulted in grassland vegetation rather than heath.

East of Upper Nut Hurst lies Blackroot Pool, also known as Perkin's Pool, created in 1757 by Edward Homer and Joseph Duncomb. The pit near the south-east corner of the water was formed through extraction of material for use in the creation of the dam. The Pool was used extensively for bathing and boating in the late C19, and a boathouse of this era stands in the south-eastern corner and a shelter of similar date on the dam at the southern end of the water. The outflow channel of the lake was straightened in the C19, then landscaped in the 1920s with bridges and a pool for paddling.

At the southern end of Lower Nut Hurst lies Keeper's Pool, probably dug in the C15 by John Holte, but possibly of earlier origin. It is fed by Keeper's Well, an ancient well, enclosed in 1815, which may mark the site of a late medieval Keeper's Lodge. The Pool was leased in 1754 and returned to the Park in 1879. An enclosed open-air bathing pool was created on the northern shore in 1889 which was extended and rebuilt in c 1950 and further rebuilt in 1970; by the pool is a cast-iron C19 sewer vent pipe and a large quarry pit resulting from extraction of material to construct the dam. Bank and ditch boundaries of all three medieval subdivisions of the deer park are visible west of Keeper's Pool.

South of Keeper's Pool is Holly Hurst, one of the set of woods enclosed by Bishop Vesey in the mid C16. The regular system of coppice falls established in 1786 resulted in the loss of the hollow-way which crossed it. In the late C19 there was a cottage and cafe on the south-east edge of the wood, and camping was permitted within it. Wyndley Glade, the straight clearing from west to east through the southern half of the wood was cut in 1786, apparently to align on the tower of Sutton parish church. New Plantation, the woodland along the west side of Holly Hurst, was planted c 1900.

The southern boundary of the medieval park is thought to have run to the south of the line of the present Monmouth Drive. The southern end of the present Park, south-west of Holly Hurst, an area of open grassland with scattered trees, has been well-used for recreation since the late C19. At the very southern tip is Powell's Pool. This was embanked by the Gibbons family in the C18 to power a spade and sheet metal mill which stood at the north-east end of the dam. The Pool was used extensively for boating in the late C19, and was the home of a small steam vessel. On the demolition of the mill in 1937, the Pool was incorporated into the Park and the outflow area landscaped with rockwork. Also in the 1930s, a dance hall was built replacing the earlier boathouses on the northern side of the water. This was redeveloped as a cafe c 1980. Around 1900, ground to the west of Powell's Pool, and now considered to be outside the Park, was laid out as a municipal golf course, this being extended in 1939. North of the Pool, lines of trees and banks reflect the boundaries of agricultural land taken into the Park as part of the Hartopp exchange in 1827. The western side of the Park is mainly open heath and grassland with some woodland. Again, it is an area well-used for recreation since the C19. At the southern end is Longmoor Pool, dammed in 1733 by John Riland, a button and flour mill being constructed on the dam in 1754. To the east of the water, the 4 acres (c 1.5ha) of enclosures associated with the former mill house survive. By 1880, the Pool was owned by the Corporation.

North-east of Longmoor Pool is the Queen's Coppice, a piece of woodland planted in 1953 as a Coronation memorial. Here also is a probable barrow, excavated partially but inconclusively in 1859. To the north of Longmoor Pool stands Rowton's Well, enclosed in 1815, with, to the north-west, Rowton's Cottage, probably of late C19 date. Peat was formerly cut from the land to the south of the Well and the old peat pit is still visible. Timbers, possibly part of a prehistoric trackway, were found during peat cutting in the C18. North-west of Rowton's Well are the Old Targets, remains of the late C19 rifle range associated with militia activities in this part of the Park. Traces of bell-tent emplacements survive. The area was also used during the Second World

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War as a Prisoner of War camp. North-east of the Well is the Jamboree Stone, commemorating the World Scout Jamboree held in this part of the Park in 1957.

Further to the north-west is the site of a racecourse which replaced the original one on the east side of the Park in 1868, continuing in use for ten years only. Towards the north-west corner of the Park, but to the south of the western end of the railway, stands Streetly Wood, one of the Seven Hayes enclosed in the mid C16. The wood was considerably altered following a serious fire in 1868, and the construction of part of the Sutton Coldfield Golf Club Links in 1891.

To the east of the western boundary of the site, and running through the Park, roughly parallel to the present road, is the line of the Roman road, Icknield Street (scheduled ancient monument). It consists of a bank of gravel flanked by side ditches and quarry hollows. The western boundary bank and ditch of the medieval park is well preserved. Alongside the southern half of the western boundary is the Warden's Belt, and a plantation, West Wood Coppice, of C17 date.

REFERENCES

A Bracken, *History of the Forest and Chase of Sutton* (1864) A Peers, *History and Guide to Sutton Park* (1869) E Edwards, *History and Guide of Sutton Coldfield* (1880) J C W Field and P W James (eds), *Sutton Park: A History and Guide* (1965) *Trans Birmingham Warwickshire Archaeol Soc* 89, (1980), pp 166-71; 97, (1991-2), pp 92-5 Sutton Park, guidebook, (Birmingham Leisure Services Committee 1980) D V Jones, *Sutton Park, Its History and Wildlife* (1982) M A Hodder, *The development of some aspects of settlement and land use in Sutton Chase*, (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham 1988) *A Management Plan for Sutton Park*, (Birmingham City Council 1989, amended 1991)

Maps [all held in the Local Studies Collection, Sutton Coldfield Library] Plan of Hartopp Exchange, 1827 Copy of Order of Exchange, including plan, 1858 Exchange plan showing Four Oaks Hall and Lady Wood, 1858 Map of Sutton Park and Town, 1893 Map of Sutton Park and Town, 1900

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1885

Description written: January 1999 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: October 1999

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.