

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HIGHBURY HALL

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	HIGHBURY HALL
District:	Birmingham (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.439872 Longitude: -1.9021886 National Grid Reference: SP0674682438 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001203 Date first listed: 01-Jul-1986

Details

Gardens and landscaped grounds of 1879 by Edward Milner associated with a contemporary, city-edge villa built for Joseph Chamberlain. Greater part of grounds a public park since early C20.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Joseph Chamberlain came to Birmingham in 1854 to join his father's screw manufacturing business. By 1874 he had amassed sufficient fortune to retire and embark on a political career. In 1878, three years after the death of his second wife and two years after he was elected Member of Parliament for Birmingham, he purchased land at Moor Green, c 7km south of the centre of Birmingham. This was an area where from the later C18 a number of residential estates had been established by the town's rich and successful who wished to enjoy a lifestyle that was 'rus in urbe'. Here he had a large house constructed surrounded by landscaped gardens, named Highbury after the London suburb where he spent his childhood. In 1888 Chamberlain married again, to the American Mary Endicott, and thenceforward until 1906, when he had a stroke and withdrew from active political life, Highbury was the setting for large social and political gatherings. About 30ha, south of the lake, were added to Highbury by lease or purchase c 1900.

Chamberlain died in 1914, and from 1915 the house was used as a hospital and home for disabled servicemen. In 1919 Sir Austen Chamberlain gave the house to the Highbury Trustees, who presented it to the Corporation of Birmingham (later the City Council) in 1932 along with adjacent land purchased by public subscription. Thereafter, until 1984, the Hall was used as a home for Aged Women, and also housed a small Chamberlain museum. In 1984 a renovation programme began, and in the 1990s Highbury was used for a wide range of civic and social activities. The greater part of Highbury's grounds was made a public park soon after 1932, which also incorporated the Henburys' villa estate which lay along the southern edge of Highbury and Uffculme. The park remained much used in 1997.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Highbury lies in the suburb of Moor Green, c 7km south of the centre of Birmingham. To the north and north-east the site is bounded by Yew Tree Road and Queensbridge Road, on the far side of which are sports fields and other open ground associated with a school and offices. To the south-east the park adjoins the Birmingham to Cheltenham railway line. Beyond is suburban housing, as there is on the west side of the park, along Shutlock Lane. The registered area comprises c 33ha.

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ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Highbury's grounds are entered by either of two gates on its north side, a third entrance further to the east giving access to Chamberlain House. The gate to Highbury's former dairy farm lies c 150m east of the Chamberlain House entrance, on Queensbridge Road.

The original approach to the Hall was from gates with elaborate stone tops to the piers 250m to the west of the present entrance, on the junction of Shutlock Lane and Yew Tree Road, the last newly made in the 1870s. A two-storey brick lodge of c 1880 stands on the south side of the entrance. From here a drive (still partly extant) ran to the west side of the Hall, screened from Yew Tree Road to the north by the existing bank planted with shrubs.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Highbury Hall (listed grade II*) was designed in 1878 by the Birmingham architect John Henry Chamberlain (who was unrelated to his client, although this was but one of several commissions for that family) and built by John Barnsley & Sons, also of Birmingham. It is a large building, more institutional in scale than domestic, and in a hard red brick with decorative terracotta and some applied timber framing as decorative detailing. Its style has been described as 'a robust Venetian Gothic' (Ballard 1986, 62). The main facade is the south, garden front, essentially a long, two-storeyed wing with bay windows and at its east end a three-storeyed wing with three-storeyed stone canted bay window.

In the 1940s the glasshouses to the east of the Hall were demolished and replaced by a two-storey, dark brick building, Chamberlain House. In 1994 this was occupied by the City's Social Services Department.

In the 1960s a two-storey warden's house was built on the Yew Tree Lane frontage, 50m north-west of Highbury Hall.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Highbury Hall stands on high ground, looking south across its gardens and the trees of the park beyond. Running along the south side of the Hall, and extending east along the front of Chamberlain House, is a terrace walk. Steps off this at either side of Highbury Hall lead down to a semicircular lawn, c 30m deep. A path runs around the edge, with clipped box and holly. Beyond the bottom of the lawn, to the south and east, paths wind through a shrubbery of now dense and mature specimen trees and shrubs, most of which were probably planted in the later C19. A recently erected fence (1997) separates the relatively well-kept grounds to the south of Highbury Hall from those south and south-east of Chamberlain House which are neglected and badly overgrown. Some 80m south of the front of Highbury Hall, looking south from the edge of the shrubbery across the park beyond, is a small, multi-angular brick bastion of c 1880. In the early C20 the area immediately to the south-east, now occupied by bee hives, was the Tea Garden constructed in 1904. North-east side of this, on the north side of the dairy farm, is the site of the Elizabethan Garden, also of c 1904.

North of the Hall, to its west, and along the north front of Chamberlain House, is car parking. An area of hardstanding west of Chamberlain House, on the site of the kitchen garden, was also so used in the later 1990s.

The original garden design was by Edward Milner (1819-84), who in 1879 submitted a plan for landscaping what was then c 10ha of meadow ground, extending south to what he developed as the Fish Pond and west to Shutlock Lane. This was one of several commissions in the area for the Chamberlains undertaken by Milner, and later his son Henry (1845-1906) who continued his father's practice. Chamberlain himself took an active interest in the gardens, which in the later C19 were maintained by eighteen gardeners. By 1903 the grounds had been extended to just over 100 acres (c 41ha) by the purchase of additional land and by the leasing of a substantial acreage from Richard Cadbury, the cocoa and chocolate magnate, who in 1891 had built a new mansion, Uffculme, east of Highbury.

One of the main features of Highbury Hall in its heyday in the late C19 was a series of glasshouses, fourteen in 1896 and twenty-five in 1903, on the east side of the Hall, where Chamberlain's celebrated orchid collection was housed. These were demolished in the early C20, and Chamberlain House built on their site.

PARK Since the 1930s the iron railings which run around the south side of the shrubbery, c 100m south of Highbury Hall, have divided it and Chamberlain House from the public Highbury Park beyond. Before that however the park formed part of the private Highbury estate, Milner's concept being that from the Hall one would pass through the gardens to the pleasure grounds beyond, with the outer fringe of the estate being the meadows where its Jersey cows grazed. Most of the features which are to be seen today relate to that phase of landscape development. There have however been several phases of tree planting in the C20 and sections of the northern half of the park are quite densely planted.

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The main broad, surfaced path runs east from the lodge on Shutlock Lane, past the bottom of the Hall's grounds, before turning south. Here, as in several other places, the path is lined with trees, in this case horse chestnuts. At the south end of the chestnut walk the path branches north-east, up the north side of a tongue of hummocky parkland which runs up to an opening opposite the end of Alcester Road. This follows the line of Henburys' main, east drive. The other branch of the path leads south and south-west from the end of the chestnut walk, past (on the east) several level areas marking former bowling greens and tennis courts, before running downhill to an entrance on the south-west corner of the park opposite the end of Pineapple Road. This part of the park, Henbury Playing Field, is very open, and virtually the only trees other than those on the perimeter are mature oaks and other hedgerow trees which mark former field boundaries.

Other evidence of the pre-Chamberlain agricultural landscape is ridge and furrow c 100m south-east of the Yew Tree Road lodge. Leading down to this point from the main path east from the lodge is a 100m long avenue of mature lime trees. A path south down that avenue swings west, around the north side of a small pond, to a zone down the east side of Shutlock Lane which is fairly closely mown and which is planted with specimen trees and shrubs. Immediately south of the pond, within a 2m high beech hedge, is a 90m long garden. The north half, the Italian Garden, contains a north/south tiled path and pergola, with herbaceous beds to either side. Steps at the south end lead down into the Rock Garden, laid out to Joseph Chamberlain's own design by Messrs Pulham and Sons. The rockwork comprises just a few beds adorned with groups of Pulhamite blocks little more than 0.5m in diameter. These two gardens, along with a Dutch Garden on the west side of the Italian Garden, were laid out c 1900-1 when the area was referred to as 'the new garden'.

From the south-west side of the Rock Garden the circuit path runs past some formal beds adjoining an entrance off Shutlock Lane before swinging south-east to run along the side of the Fish Pond, a narrow 130m long pool formed by Milner from a stream.

Down the south-east edge of the park, alongside the railway line, are the Uffculme Leisure Gardens, allotments with chalets.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen gardens lay 100m east of the Hall, east of the orchid houses, and screened from Yew Tree Lane by a 3m tall brick wall. These seem to have been established at the same time that the Hall was built in the later 1870s, and their development continued in the 1890s when further ranges of glasshouses were erected. In 1997 the kitchen garden area was overgrown and derelict. What survived was the wall along the north, one semi-ruinous north/south glasshouse range, and a north/south apple and pear arbour on an iron frame down the west side of the former garden.

South-east of the site of the kitchen gardens are the surviving buildings of the dairy farm established at Highbury at the time the Hall was built, notably a bailiff's lodge of c 1904 on Queensbridge Road. An ornamental dairy with thatched roof was built in 1890 to hide the rickyard from the Hall. Jersey cows were the main stock kept, as well as pigs and poultry, and sheep were added c 1890.

REFERENCES

Gardener's Chronicle, (25 October 1884), pp 519-20; (8 December 1894), pp 699-700; (15 September 1900), pp 192-5, 200; (26 November 1904), pp 360-2; (3 December 1904), pp 390-2; (14 January 1905), pp 24-5 Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener, (12 March 1896), pp 227-35 The Victoria History of the County of Warwickshire 7, (1964), p 49 Garden History 14, (1986), pp 61-76

Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884 2nd edition published 1904 3rd edition published 1916 1937 edition

Description written: 1997 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.