

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Alexandra Park

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

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Name:	Alexandra Park
County:	East Sussex
District:	Hastings (District Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.865261 Longitude: 0.57019814 National Grid Reference: TQ 80961 10453 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001384 Date first listed: 11-May-1998 Date of most recent amendment: 27-Aug-2013 Statutory Address 1: Lower Park Road, Hastings, TN34 2LD

Historique de la conservation

The valley occupied by Alexandra Park was farmland and woodland in the C18. In 1849, the Eversfield Waterworks Company leased land from the Eversfield estate in the upper reaches of the valley to build a series of reservoirs to supply the growing population of Hastings and St Leonards. Much of the southern end of the park was owned at that time by Countess Waldegrave (Banks 1849) and it was from her that a Mr Shirley leased land in the 1850s to establish a nursery garden with a series of ponds. In 1859 the Hastings Corporation took over the remaining seventeen years of Mr Shirley's lease, the Countess Waldegrave cancelling this in 1860 and granting a new one for ninety-nine years to the Corporation which also, in the following years, bought the leases of the Shornden, Harmers and Buckshole reservoirs. In 1863, the Corporation passed a resolution that 'the public be permitted access ... for recreation' to the grounds westwards of the lower reservoir (Shirley's Pond) at the extreme southern end of the present park, which were duly laid out at a cost of £50 and opened as St Andrew's Gardens in 1864. From 1872 the Corporation continued to purchase woodland and agricultural land north and west along the two arms of the valley and up the sides so that by 1876 the park extended north and south of St Andrew's Gardens to St Helen's Road and Lower Park Road, westwards up the valley to include Shornden Wood and the surrounds to Harmer's and Shornden reservoirs and northwards to Buckshole Reservoir. A year later, the Corporation commissioned Robert Marnock (1800-89) to advise on the improvement of the park, authorising him to purchase plants the following year. No plans or drawings indicating the extent of his work have survived. The park was opened to the public by the Prince and Princess of Wales (Princess Alexandra) on 26 June 1882. Since then, the Corporation and then the Borough Council have extended the park to its present boundaries, acquiring the land between Buckshole Reservoir and Old Roar Ghyll to the north in stages in 1930, 1939, 1956 and 1996. Following an extensive restoration programme, the park was officially 'reopened' in 2004.

Details

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Alexandra Park lies in the centre of Hastings, between the A21 and the A2101 London to Hastings roads and just over 0.5km inland from the main A259 east/west coast road and the sea. The 48.6ha registered area, which is linear in form, stretches 2.7km from its most northerly to south-easterly point, occupying two narrow valleys which curve downhill from the north and west to converge in a single, broader-floored and fairly level stream valley running south-eastwards. The lower valley park, which is enclosed on about two-thirds of its perimeter by iron railings surviving from its complete enclosure as part of Marnock's scheme in the late 1870s (Colson Stone 1997), is bounded to the south by Lower Park Road, built in 1877 and to the north by St Helen's Road (this section built by 1873), with housing on the rising valley sides beyond. At its south-east end, the boundary abuts Bethune Way and, on the far side, the embankment of the railway which was opened in the early 1850s. Most of the east side of the north-running valley is bounded by the continuation of St Helen's Road but park boundaries in the upper valleys mostly abut timber garden fences of adjoining properties (with occasional lengths of C19 iron fencing surviving) or, occasionally, areas of allotments. The park is crossed by two east/west roads, Dordrecht Road at 0.75km from the southern entrance and St Helen's Road c 1.3km further north.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the park is at the extreme south-east corner, at the junction of Bethune Way and St Helen's Road, through a gateway framed by a pair of rendered pillars erected in the 1990s to replace those built (and subsequently removed at an unknown date) in 1877 when the boundary of the park was altered to permit the construction of Bethune Way (ibid). A number of other pedestrian gates occur in the remaining fenced boundaries which otherwise provide open access from adjacent public roads. At the extreme west end of the western (Shornden Wood) valley, Bohemia Lodge, built c 1880, stands at the entrance to the park on the corner of Upper Park Road and Clarence Road.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS From the main, southern entrance, a short, broad drive flanked by bedding set in a ribbon of lawn leads north-westwards to and around the perimeter of an oval expanse of open lawn overlooked on its south side by the brick-built, slate-roofed Queen's Lodge of c 1877. To the west of the lawn stands a war memorial of a winged figure on a column, designed by Margaret Winser, a pupil of Rodin and erected in 1922. Running parallel to the western boundary is a raised, grassed, terrace walk, formerly lined with clipped hedges and with a maze at its north-west end (gone by 1909) and constructed on land added to the park between 1864 and 1872. North-westwards along the valley floor beyond the lawn, a system of paths, largely surviving from the layout for St Andrew's Gardens in 1864, encircles and connects a string of four concrete-edged ponds of varying size set within lawns and informal tree belts. The southernmost, rectangular pond, which is used as a boating lake, has a largely open perimeter; the remaining three ponds, two of which have central islands and a duck population, are irregular in shape and partially enclosed by trees. Between the third and fourth ponds is a bowling green, laid out between 1899 and 1909, with a pavilion built mid C20 to replace an earlier, timber structure. The pond system was constructed in the mid to late C19, the northern and southernmost two built by 1858 (John Laing's survey), possibly as irrigation for Shirley's nursery gardens. Modified into three ponds, they were incorporated into the layout for St Andrew's Gardens in 1864, the northern one forming the boundary of the Gardens, and had achieved their present form by 1899. The stream, known as Priory Stream, which is canalised within dressed stone walls and largely enclosed within a belt of ornamental trees and shrubbery, runs south-eastwards parallel to the ponds along the north-east boundary.

Beyond the ponds, the north-westward-curving valley floor is occupied by two broad, linear lawns, the north side of the easternmost Long Lawn bordered by the remnants of a rockery and heather garden and the ornamental shrubs of the Wall Garden. The western lawn is laid out to grass tennis courts with, on its north side, an ivy-clad, colonnaded tennis pavilion built by 1929 on the site of a former glasshouse (and now used as a changing room) and a bordering Mediterranean Garden of aromatic evergreens. The stream, crossed by a number of footbridges, changes course from the south to the north side of the valley floor between the lawns, its crossing point dotted lightly with trees beneath which stands a square, tile-roofed bandstand, built between 1909 and 1929 on the site of an earlier one. The southern side of the lawns is enclosed by an extensive belt of trees of mixed age and species which is likely to be part of Marnock's layout of 1878 (Colson Stone 1997).

West of Dordrecht Way, in the area extending north-west to Buckshole Reservoir which was added to the park by 1876, the south-east end is laid out to further grass and hard tennis courts and, on their north-west side, to lawns with formal, geometric

island beds, one area enclosed by clipped hedges and planted as a rose garden and a second, western area planted with herbaceous and bedding plants. Burnside Lodge, built c 1880, sits at the north-east end of the lawns.

North-west beyond the lawns, at the fork with the Shornden Wood valley, the northern half of the valley floor is occupied by an extensive maintenance yard, the eastern part in use as a works depot and the western part developed as a Pet's Corner. Established, with some of its present buildings, by 1899, the yard had been extended to its present boundaries (and the stream culverted beneath) by 1938 with a range of glasshouses of which only one, in poor condition, now (1997) survives. Immediately west of the yard is the brick-built Pumping Station, rebuilt in c 1970 on the site of the former Victorian building of 1877 with, at its rear, the semi-detached Park Cottages, built between 1874 and 1899. North-westwards, the stream meanders through the centre of the valley, the grassed slopes of which are planted as an arboretum with belts, clumps and individual exotic trees of mixed ages and species including, on the eastern side a Pinetum with the last remnants of a belt of Austrian pine (probably part of Marnock's scheme) and collections of cypresses, oak and birch. Some 30m and 40m to, respectively, the west and north-east of the stream is a chalybeate spring with a stone-lined basin and Dr McCabe's Well, both incorporated into the park in 1876/7 (ibid).

Northwards, the steep, tree-planted dam of Buckshole Reservoir, built in the early 1850s, encloses the valley. The Reservoir, used for fishing, is enclosed by a fringe of trees and northwards, on the south-west side of the valley beyond several small, silted catchment ponds, Coronation Wood contains the remnants of some 2000 trees planted as an avenue in 1937 by local schoolchildren to commemorate the coronation of King George VI. North of the wood, a stone-faced viaduct carries St Helen's Road over the narrow, precipitous upper valley of the park known as Old Roar Ghyll at the north end of which is the site of Old Roar waterfall, a feature depicted in C18 and C19 engravings (Centenary Guide 1982) but virtually dry since 1852-3. The ghyll stream, crossed by three or four late C20 timber bridges which replace the former rustic ones, runs over several small waterfalls amid dense undergrowth and beneath a canopy of mixed deciduous trees and occasional pines.

West of the maintenance yard, the Shornden Wood valley extends westwards largely, on the north side of Upper Park Road (built 1877), as an area of oak and sweet chestnut mixed with other native and exotic species and with an under-storey of *Rhododendron ponticum*. A system of informal, sinuous paths and an east/west straight ride (known as Shornden Avenue and shown, with the path system, on the 2nd edition OS map 1899) which, with exotic planting within the semi-natural woodland probably formed part of Marnock's scheme, follow the valley westwards either side of Harmer's and Shornden Reservoirs (constructed in 1852-3) to the more open, grassed areas towards the entrance at Bohemia Lodge. On the rising slopes south of Harmer's Pond are the remnants of a beech collection (damaged in the war) and, at the east end of Shornden Avenue, a Holly Walk of Victorian cultivars. South of Upper Park Road lie Newgate and Thorpe's Wood which were added to the park in 1931, Newgate Wood being semi-natural woodland while Thorpe's Wood was planted with ornamentals in 1935 of which a few trees survived in 1993.

Summary

A late C19 municipal park laid out by the landscape designer Robert Marnock, to include the site of a former mid C19 public garden and with additional mid and late C20 areas of semi-natural woodland.

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.

Reasons for Designation

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Alexandra Park, Hastings, opened in 1864, is designated at Grade II* for the following principal reasons: * Date: the park is a relatively early example of a municipal park * Historic interest: the park was enlarged and redesigned after 1877 by Robert Marnock, one of the leading park designers of the time and a leading exponent of the gardenesque style * Design: Marnock's landscape design is essentially unchanged * Planting: the park is richly planted, retaining much of Marnock's scheme of the later 1870s * Structures: a number of later C19 park structures and memorials survive.

Bibliographie

Other

Alexandra Park, Centenary Guide, (Hastings Borough Council 1982)

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Alexandra Park, Hastings, Heritage Lottery Fund Restoration Proposals, (Colson Stone Partnership 1997),
County Borough of Hastings, Souvenir Programme, Jubilee of Alexandra Park 1882-1932,

Dr O Johnson, Specimen Trees in Alexandra Park (1993) [copy on EH file],

Title: Map of Hastings Source Date: 1859 Author: Publisher: Surveyor:

Title: Plan of Priory Farm Source Date: c 1750 Author: Publisher: Surveyor:

Title: Survey of Hastings Source Date: 1858 Author: Publisher: Surveyor:

Title: Survey of the parish of St Andrew's Source Date: 1849 Author: Publisher: Surveyor: