

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

DARTMOUTH PARK

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

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Name:	DARTMOUTH PARK
District:	Sandwell (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.520029 Longitude: -1.9817409 National Grid Reference: SP 01336 91350 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001102 Date first listed: 03-Aug-2001

Details

A public park designed in 1876 by John Maclean to take advantage of the views along the Sandwell Valley.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In June 1876, Alderman Reuben Farley approached the fifth Earl of Dartmouth and proposed the idea of leasing land from the Dartmouth estate to establish a park for the people of West Bromwich. After further correspondence and meetings, the Earl offered two sites, the first c 20.2ha at Cooper's Hill, West Bromwich, and the second c 17.8ha near Handsworth, both to be leased at the nominal rent of £1 per year for ninety-nine years. West Bromwich Improvements Commissioners chose the Cooper's Hill site, as its proximity to the town centre was felt to be preferable.

The boundaries were laid out for the 22.7ha park and in October 1876 the lodge design of a local architect, Mr E J Etwell, was accepted. Budgets were set of £300 for building the lodge and £2500 for laying out the park and an advertisement was placed in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* inviting landscape designers to send in designs (Commissioners Minute Book 1877). In January 1877 sites were fixed within the park for a cricket ground, ornamental water, and the line of a drive or carriageway. Seven plans were submitted and at the Earl's suggestion, a landscape gardener known to him, Exsuperius Weston Turnor, inspected the entries and judged Mr John Maclean from Donnington Park, Leicestershire the winner. Sandwell Park Colliery Company agreed to relinquish any surface rights to the park, allowing work to commence. In November 1877, the Earl donated trees and shrubs for planting and a fountain from Patshull, near Wolverhampton. The park was opened to the public by the Earl of Dartmouth on 3 June 1878; the day was observed as a general holiday and the thoroughfares and the park were crowded with 40,000 to 50,000 people (*The Free Press*, 8 June 1878).

The park was extended by 3.4ha on the eastern boundary in 1887, providing a boating pool. The Commissioners also intended providing an open-air swimming bath but due to difficulties with the nature of the soil these plans were abandoned and a bowling green laid out instead. Further land was leased in 1909 to allow a formal entrance from Dagger Lane and tennis courts were added near the Beeches Road entrance. Over the next few years the park underwent numerous improvements under the supervision of the Superintendent of Parks, Mr H Browne, including the planting of an avenue of trees from the boating pool to the Beeches Road entrance, moving the bandstand, and widening the main walk.

The freehold of the park was awarded to the people in 1919 and the deeds were handed over by the Prince of Wales in 1923 during a visit to the town. Later that year the Earl unveiled the town's war memorial (listed grade II), erected by public subscription.

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In 1928 a paddling pool was added to the list of amenities and five years later, in 1933, a new bandstand was opened. The park remains (2001) in municipal ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BONDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The park is situated c 1km east of West Bromwich town centre. In its original format, the park's boundary to the north-west and south-west faced West Bromwich's residential and manufacturing areas whilst views to the north-east, east, and south-east overlooked the agricultural and park land of the Sandwell Valley and the Sandwell Park Estate. At the turn of the C20 the park was c 26.3ha in area. In the mid C20 the Expressway, a dual carriageway connecting north West Bromwich with the M5 junction to the east, was constructed which resulted in the loss of c 2.4ha at the park's south-east corner, leaving the present size of the park at c 23.9ha. The Expressway severed the park's direct relationship with the town's east margins. Pedestrian access is still provided via the entrance at the junction of Beeches Street and Herbert Street and a concrete footbridge over the Expressway, but the Herbert Street entrance lodge, wall, gate piers, and gates are physically cut off from the park they were designed to serve. The boundary with the Expressway is contemporary with its construction and comprises a concrete fence of utilitarian design and construction. The remainder of the park's boundaries retain their original iron railings set on a brick plinth and supported with brick piers at regular intervals.

The land is gently undulating and falls gradually from the highest and flattest area of the site in the north-west to the lowest in the south-east. The topography of the site influenced the allocation of features in the original laying out, the north-west being allocated as a cricket terrace and the boating lake constructed in the south-east. Good views over the Sandwell Valley are afforded from the upper reaches of the park and the location of the tea pavilion, damaged by fire and demolished in 1983, is ideal for viewing Sandwell Park Farm and the surrounding estate.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance serves the north-west of the park and is located opposite the junction of New Street, Lloyd Street, and Reform Street. The two pedestrian and one vehicular entrance is marked by four brick and stone gate piers which have undergone restoration, although the lamp fittings which were incorporated on the original design are absent. The entrance is flanked by a low brick wall with a stone coping on which cast-iron railings were set. These were removed in the 1940s as part of the war effort and a hedge is planted immediately behind the wall. The iron gates have been restored/renewed and are in situ.

A second entrance, from Herbert Street, gives access to the south-west of the park although the construction of the Expressway has eliminated vehicular access and restricted pedestrian access to a footbridge over the dual carriage way. A small parcel of land c 40m by 30m houses the lodge, gate piers, gates, and boundary wall to the west of the Expressway; these are completely isolated from the park. The piers are in brick and stone with decorative iron lamp brackets on the stone caps of the two central piers. The pedestrian and the vehicular entrances have restored/renewed decorative iron gates.

A modest pedestrian entrance is located at the north of the park providing access from Dagger Lane and access to King George's playing fields on the park's east boundary was introduced in the 1930s.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS The two principal buildings are the New Street Lodge and the Herbert Street Lodge. The New Street Lodge is situated c 15m to the north-east of the entrance gates. The brick and tile lodge was built at the time the park was laid out and is shown on the OS 1st edition map of 1890. The New Street Lodge was built after the park was opened and is not shown on the 1890 map; it first appears on the 1902 revision published in 1904. It has a brick ground floor and a half-timbered first floor with a slate roof.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The west of the park is laid out around a straight carriage drive or promenade which runs east from the New Street Entrance for c 200m. The town's war memorial (listed grade II) is situated c 100m east of the entrance gates. The carriage drive divides c 200m east of the entrance to create circulation routes to the north and south which follow the brow of the hill providing views to both east and west.

A grassed semicircular terrace framed by limes, c 150m to the south-east of the war memorial, marks the site of the original refreshment room. The site provides views of the park and in particular to the east and south-east over the Sandwell Valley. The 1890 OS map indicates that a bandstand was sited 70m to the west of the refreshment room terrace although there is nothing

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left on the site to mark its exact position. A bandstand built in 1933 was located 100m south of the refreshment room site; this was demolished in the late C20 and only the hard standing and a retaining wall remain.

A small ornamental lake, c 100m by 70m, is situated c 350m south-east of the war memorial. Situated in the low-lying area of the park and at the foot of the gentle slope it has an irregular oval shape which is emphasised by three small islands. In the far east corner is a larger lake, c 200m by 150m, which is referred to as Pleasure Pool (Fish Pond) on the OS map of 1904. Large grassed banks form the lake's east and south margins. In contrast with the smaller lake the straight retaining banks present the body of water as a man-made construction with little attempt made to create the artifice of a natural lake.

REFERENCES

'The Opening of Dartmouth Park, West Bromwich', *The Free Press*, 8 June 1878 'Dartmouth Park - The Story of a Gift', *The Free Press*, 15 June 1923

Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1886, published 1890 2nd edition revised 1902, published 1904 3rd edition revised 1913, published 1916 1947 edition

Illustrations A selection of photographs and postcards are held at Sandwell Community History and Archive Services.

Archival items West Bromwich Improvement Act, Commissioners Minute Book, 1877 (Sandwell Community History and Archive Services)

Description written: June 2001 Register Inspector: PV Edited: December 2003

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.