

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

Grosvenor Park

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

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Name:	Grosvenor Park
District:	Cheshire West and Chester (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.189896 Longitude: -2.8823130 National Grid Reference: SJ4114466231 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001577 Date first listed: 09-Jan-2002 Date of most recent amendment: 22-Aug-2013 Statutory Address 1: Grosvenor Park Road, Chester, CH1 1QJ

## Historique de la conservation

In 1867 the second Marquis of Westminster, an extensive landowner in and around the city of Chester, commissioned the landscape designer Edward Kemp (1817-91) and the Chester architect John Douglas (1830-1911) to lay out a public park on a site, which was purchased at his behest, to the east of St John's church in the centre of Chester. Cole & Roper's plan of Chester (1801) shows this land divided into a series of agricultural enclosures and orchards. The site was crossed from north to south by a lane, approximately following the line of Kemp's formal walk, which led from Union Street to the River Dee. To the north-west a row of houses stood adjacent to the junction of Vicar's Lane and Union Street, while a further building stood on the western boundary of the site opposite St John's church. The development of the park entailed the closure of the lane, and the demolition of most of the structures on the periphery of the site.

The Marquis of Westminster wrote to the City Corporation on 5 October 1867 indicating his intention to place the new park 'in the hands of the Corporation as a gift on my part to the Citizens of Chester hoping it may afford health and recreation to themselves and their Families for many years to come' (Corporation Minutes, 5 October 1867). The gift was accompanied by an endowment to provide an income of £100 per annum towards the upkeep of the park. The Marquis' deed of gift stipulated that the park should be known as Grosvenor Park; there should be free entry to the park every day of the year, but horses and carriages were to be prohibited. Music, including band concerts were allowed, but dancing was strictly forbidden. The Marquis provided a gymnasium at the north-east corner of the park for recreational use. The Corporation accepted the Marquis' gift, presenting their best thanks 'for the princely & munificent boon he has conferred upon the City and its Inhabitants' (Corporation Minutes, 9 October 1867). A special committee was established to make arrangements for the ceremonial opening of the park, which took place on 5 November 1867 with a civic procession and déjeuner (Park Committee Minutes). J Housden, a local poet, published verses (CCRO) commemorating the opening of the park and praising the city's benefactor:

We hail the Marquess with delight, We thank him for his deed; The park is a delightful sight, A princely gift indeed.

An undated and unsigned C19 plan of the park survives (CCRO). This generally accords with the surviving layout of the site, but varies in some details from that shown on the late C19 OS map. In particular, the south-west boundary of the site is shown extending to the River Dee, the formal garden at the north-west corner of the park is shown planted with scattered specimen

trees rather than geometrical flower beds, and small formal pools rather than flower beds are shown at intervals along the formal walks. The informal pool is also absent from the design shown on this plan. These differences perhaps indicate that the plan was a proposal which was subsequently refined. The plan identifies species of trees and shrubs to be planted. A sketch in the Cheshire Observer November 9th 1867 detailing the opening of the park shows the lake. The nurserymen Francis and Arthur Dickson and Sons, based in Chester, were chosen by the Marquess of Westminster as sole suppliers of plants for the park (Chester Chronicle Saturday April 20th 1867). Various minor changes were made to the park in the late C19. In 1869 a large marble statue of the Marquis of Westminster (d 1867) was erected in a prominent position at the junction of the avenue leading from the lodge and the main east/west promenade. Trophy guns from Sebastapol were placed on the octagonal terrace, while two Boer War guns were positioned to the south of the main avenue (Catherall's New Guide 1908). The park was used to re-site various architectural fragments removed from medieval churches in the city in the mid and late C19. In the early C20 three timber shelters were constructed in the park; one of these was converted in the late C20 to serve as a station for a late C20 miniature railway. Further formal elements including a terraced rose garden were introduced into the park in the 1930s. Today (2013) Grosvenor Park remains municipal property.

## Details

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Grosvenor Park is situated c 0.25km south-east of the centre of Chester, to the north of the River Dee and to the south-east of the A5268 Vicar's Lane. The c 6ha site is approximately rectangular on plan, and is enclosed to the north-east, east, and south by mid C19 sandstone walls (all listed Grade II). These walls were constructed in 1865-7 to the design of John Douglas for the Marquis of Westminster as part of the original scheme for the park (Corporation Minutes; Park Minutes; Catherall's New Guide 1908). To the north-west the park adjoins the gardens of C19 properties fronting Union Street, while to the west C19 metal railings separate it from a footpath which ascends from the River Dee to Vicar's Lane, passing to the east of St John's church. With the exception of the properties to the north-west, the park adjoins public roads and footpaths: Union Street to the north, The Headlands to the north-east, Dee Lane to the east, and Grosvenor Park Terrace to the south. The park is generally level, but falls away steeply towards the southern and eastern boundaries, thus allowing extensive views south and south-east across the River Dee. To the west, St John's church, restored in the mid and late C19, and the ruins of its Norman choir, are prominent in views across the park.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Grosvenor Park is entered from Union Street to the north at its junction with Grosvenor Park Road. The latter road is aligned southwards on the entrance (listed Grade II) which comprises stone quadrant walls surmounted by wrought-iron railings, flanking a pair of wrought-iron carriage gates supported by granite piers surmounted by ornate ogee finials. To each side of the carriage gates is a further pedestrian gate of similar design, while to the west another similar pedestrian gate leads to the park lodge. The two pedestrian gates are separated by a further, lower granite pier under a similar ogee finial. The entrance was designed in 1865-7 by John Douglas as part of the initial scheme for the park.

To the south-west of the entrance stands a two-storey stone and half-timbered lodge (listed Grade II). Constructed in picturesque vernacular style with tiled roofs, tall chimneys, gables, and ornamental bargeboards, the east facade of the lodge is decorated with a series of four carved wooden figures supporting painted armorial shields. A single-storey office wing extends to the south and west of the main building. The lodge was designed in 1865-7 by John Douglas as a residence for the park keeper; prior to 2001 it became used as municipal offices.

There are further entrances to the park from Dee Street to the north-east and south-east. Two entrances from Grosvenor Park Terrace to the south are closed, but a further entrance at the south-west corner of the site remains open. A pair of spear-headed carriage gates supported by tall granite piers under ornate ogee finials terminates the principal promenade walk to the west, while similar gates at the north-west corner of the site are supported by granite piers under pyramid caps. The entrances (listed Grade II with the boundary walls) were designed by Douglas in 1865-7. The service yard to the east of the principal entrance has its own access from The Headlands; this comprises a pair of C19 metal carriage gates supported by metal piers (listed Grade II with walls).

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** Grosvenor Park is laid out with two formal avenues or promenades which form an asymmetrical cruciform shape on plan; informal curvilinear walks form a perimeter circuit, while further curvilinear walks and straight paths cross the site from north to south, dividing it up into areas for recreation and horticultural display. The steep south-facing slopes at the south-east corner of the site are laid out as rock gardens, while to the south-west the slope is more wooded. There are further belts of mixed boundary planting extending along the east boundary, and screening the properties to the north-north-west of the park.

From the principal entrance and lodge a broad, level promenade walk extends c 130m south-east. The walk is flanked by an avenue of alternate limes and tall clipped drums of holly. This walk intersects another similar promenade and avenue which extends c 350m from east to west. The point of intersection is marked by a square area partly enclosed by low stone kerbs, in the centre of which a square stone-edged flower bed surrounds a monumental statue of the second Marquis of Westminster (listed Grade II). The white marble statue by Thomas Thornycroft stands on a high pedestal of grey granite with an inscription recording its erection in 1869 to commemorate the late Marquis' philanthropy. To the south of the statue the promenade continues c 10m before terminating in a raised octagonal terrace enclosed by low stone walls and stone bench seats backed by low metal railings. There are views south across the River Dee from the octagonal terrace, while short flights of stone steps descend east and west from the terrace to the southern perimeter walk. The formal east/west promenade avenue is terminated to the east by a stone-kerbed rondpoint, in which is set a stone-kerbed quatrefoil-shaped flower bed for seasonal planting. On the east side of the rondpoint, a stone bench seat is aligned on the promenade. Some 50m west of the statue of the Marquis of Westminster, at a point where the east/west promenade is crossed by a north/south curvilinear walk, is a further, similar rondpoint and stone-kerbed flower bed. To the west the promenade leads to a third rondpoint which surrounds a circular flower bed; beyond this, the walk terminates in an ornamental gateway which gives access to the footpath east of St John's church. The two promenade avenues, the octagonal terrace, and the three rondpoints, which together form the principal formal features of Kemp's scheme for the park, are indicated on the mid C19 plan of the park, although their details differ in certain respects from those shown on the plan. From the western rondpoint curvilinear walks extend north and south. The north walk leads c 60m north along the west side of an informal lawn with an early C20 timber pavilion to the south-west, to reach a circular formal garden which is enclosed to the south-east by clipped conifer hedges and to the north, east, and west by mixed shrubbery and trees. The garden is laid out with a circular lawn set with geometrical flower beds for seasonal planting, which is quartered by crazy-paved stone paths which intersect at a circular flower bed. From this garden a curvilinear walk extends c 240m north-east parallel to the northern boundary of the park to join the north/south promenade adjacent to the lodge. Some 80m south-west of the lodge an early C20 single-storey Arts and Crafts-style pavilion overlooks an area of lawns planted with specimen trees and shrubs. The circular garden corresponds in general outline to a feature shown on the mid C19 plan; by the late C19 it had been developed in its present form with formal flower beds (OS 1899). The walk extending parallel to the northern boundary is also shown on the mid C19 plan.

The walk leading south and south-east from the western rondpoint descends through mixed trees and evergreen shrubbery to reach a grassy glade enclosed to the north by steep rocky banks, and to the south by mixed trees and shrubs. A curvilinear walk extends along the north side of this glade, passing through a round-headed sandstone archway (listed Grade II), relocated in the C19, probably from St Michael's church, Chester; the arch is flanked by a sandstone gothic arch which is probably from another source. To the east of the archway, a sandstone drinking fountain comprising an arched recessed opening formerly containing a water fountain with a shallow basin below for the use of dogs, is set into the sandstone cliff face (listed Grade II). The walk continues, passing through a further medieval archway (listed Grade II) relocated in the C19 from St Mary's Benedictine nunnery, and The Old Shipgate (listed Grade II), a C13 round-arched gateway removed from the city walls in the C19 and re-erected in the park as an ornamental feature. A narrow walk descends south-east from the western rondpoint to reach a late C20 elliptical-shaped sensory garden comprising a raised stone-walled central bed, with a stone sculpture of 'Ymir', the 'Source of the World', carved by Phil Bews at its western end.

To the south and south-east of the octagonal terrace the steep south- and south-east-facing bank which descends to the boundary of the park is laid out as a rock garden with artificially arranged rocks forming watercourses (dry, 2001). The rock garden is

planted with specimen shrubs and trees, while a walk passing through it has a series of rock-walled alcoves cut into the bank to accommodate seats with views south-east across the River Dee. A mid C19 ornamental stone pump house (listed Grade II), known as Billy Hobby's Well, is set in the boundary wall and fence below the rock garden. This elaborate octagonal structure under a steeply pitched pyramidal slate roof was designed by John Douglas in 1865-7 as part of the original scheme for the park. East of the north/south promenade is an area of lawns planted with specimen trees and ornamental shrubs. Some 130m south-east of the lodge is an informal pond partly surrounded by specimen trees and moisture-loving plants. The pond contains a simple jet fountain, while to the north a series of three early C20 stone-walled terraces are planted with roses and seasonal subjects. A flight of stone steps ascends north from the pond to a lawn, from which it is separated by a clipped golden privet hedge. To the north-east of this lawn a single-storey gabled timber pavilion dated 1931 serves as the station for a late C20 miniature railway which passes round the lawns east of the north/south promenade. The pond is not shown on the mid C19 plan of the park, but existed in approximately its present form by the late C19 (OS 1899).

A service yard is situated to the east of the principal entrance. This area corresponds to a rectangular enclosure shown on the mid C19 plan of the park.

## Summary

A mid C19 public park laid out to the design of Edward Kemp with structures designed by the Chester architect John Douglas.

## 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

Grosvenor Park, Chester, opened in 1867, is designated at Grade II\* for the following principal reasons: \* Date: the park is an early example of a municipal park; \* Design: although enhanced, the park's design is essentially unchanged from its original layout of the 1867; \* Designer: the park was designed and laid out by the leading park designer Edward Kemp and the Chester architect John Douglas; \* Historic interest: the park was a gift to the city by the Marquis of Westminster, and is a major example of philanthropic park provision; \* Structures and planting: the park retains many listed structures, as well as good planting.

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