

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SIMMONS PARK

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

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Name:	SIMMONS PARK
County:	Devon
District:	West Devon (District Authority)
Parish:	Okehampton
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.734089 Longitude: -3.9998304 National Grid Reference: SX 58970 94627 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001625 Date first listed: 28-Jun-2002

Details

An early C20 public park laid out in Picturesque style by Francis Worden, the Borough Architect and Engineer.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the late C19 the arrival of the railway and the development of extensive quarries outside Okehampton led to the expansion of the town, with new residential development taking place between the ancient centre of the town and the railway station c 1km to the south-south-east. In the early C20 a locally born business man, Sydney Simmons (1840-1924), who had made his fortune in London, donated land comprising a meadow enclosure and copse to the west of the East Okement River, together with an endowment, for the formation of a public park for his native town. Simmons also established Friary Park, at Friern Barnet in Greater London (HLF Bid).

The new park was laid out to the designs of Francis Worden, Borough Architect and Engineer, who worked in close consultation with the donor. As part of his benefaction, Simmons required that almshouses should be built within the park. Three structures comprising five almshouses were incorporated into Worden's plan. The park was opened on 8 July 1907 by Sir William Treloar, Lord Mayor of London and associate of Sydney Simmons (inscription in park). The park comprised a picturesque riverside walk, woodland paths, cascade, a group of picturesque structures including a Swiss chalet and two lodges, and areas of formal gardens incorporating a series of relocated architectural fragments (HLF Bid). These are shown on the OS map of 1932 and survive essentially unchanged today (2002).

In 1909 Solons Copse, a meadow and woodland to the south-east of the original park, was presented to the town by the Okehampton United Non-Ecclesiastical Charity to form an extension to the park (ibid). This was laid out with lawns and further woodland walks. A bandstand was constructed in 1911 to commemorate the coronation of King George V (inscription); this structure was partially demolished in the mid C20. Land to the east of the East Okement River was laid out as a recreation ground with sports pitches and a pavilion in the 1930s. Okehampton Grammar School was constructed to the north-east of the park in the same period. A swimming pool and other facilities were developed at the recreation ground in the late C20. The areas to the east of the East Okement River are not included in the site here registered.

Simmons Park remains (2002) municipal property.

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DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Simmons Park is situated c 250m south of the centre of Okehampton, to the west of the East Okement River which flows from south-east to north forming the eastern boundary of the site. The c 4ha site is bounded to the north by Mill Road, from which it is separated by low granite walls. Forming part of the early C20 layout of the park, these walls formerly supported iron railings which were removed during the Second World War. The south-east boundary is formed by a traditional Devon hedge and bank which separates the park from an area of public open space extending east along the valley of the East Okement River. To the west the site adjoins the boundaries of early C20 villas on the east side of Station Road. The park is separated from these properties by a fence and walls following the crest of the steep east- and north-east-facing escarpment above the river. The park occupies this escarpment and a narrow strip of level ground extending along the west bank of the river. There are extensive views south-east along the river valley towards Dartmoor and Okehampton Park, and further views east across the recreation ground, sports pitches, and school grounds on the east side of the river.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Simmons Park is entered from Mill Road to the north at a point c 15m west of its junction with Kempley Road. The principal or north-west entrance comprises a pair of rusticated granite piers supporting a pair of ornamental wrought-iron carriage gates. The carriage entrance is surmounted by a wrought-iron overthrow which incorporates a lantern and the name 'Simmons Park'. A single pedestrian gate supported by a further rusticated granite pier adjoins the carriage entrance to the west. Within the park, c 20m south-west of the entrance and set above a rocky bank, stands a two-storey Arts and Crafts-style half-timbered lodge. The lodge formed part of Sydney Simmons' provision of almshouses within the park.

A further entrance leads into the park from Mill Road c 30m east of the principal entrance and c 15m west of the bridge carrying Mill Road over the East Okement River. This entrance comprises a pair of late C20 white-painted timber gates supported by a pair of rusticated granite piers, and is approached from the road by a short cobbled path. Within the park and c 10m south-east of this entrance stands a single-storey picturesque lodge with half-timbered gables, bay windows, and a timbered porch on the west facade. The east facade which faces the East Okement River and has an exposed basement incorporates a ground-floor verandah. This lodge also forms one of the group of almshouses established by Simmons in the park. A Second World War pill box is concealed to the north-east of the lodge adjacent to the Mill Road bridge.

A further informal entrance to the park leads from late C20 car-parking areas immediately east of the East Okement River. A mid C20 metal and concrete bridge crosses the river allowing access to the principal walk running along its west bank. Two further early C20 footbridges lead from the recreation ground to the lawns at the south-eastern extremity of the site, while an informal gate leads from this area to the extensive area of public open space to the east of the park.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS From the principal or north-west entrance, a broad tarmac walk extends south-east for c 100m through an area of formal gardens. To the west the walk is adjoined by rocky banks planted with ornamental shrubs, while to the south-east there is a more extensive area of geometric shrub and flower beds edged with rustic stonework. A further area of stone-edged geometric flower beds divided by gravel walks and enclosed by shrubbery lies between the principal walk and the north-east lodge. To the south-west the walk is adjoined by an area of east-facing sloping lawn which is planted with scattered specimen trees, and which ascends to a belt of shrubbery and mature trees on the western boundary of the park. Towards the centre of the lawn stands an early C20 single-storey stone shelter under a hipped slate roof. This shelter was formerly thatched. To the south of this lawn a granite monolith set on an inscribed pedestal records the donation of the park by Sydney Simmons and its opening in July 1907, while to the south-east of the principal park walk a C15 granite pinnacle from St James' church, Okehampton is set at the corner of a triangular area of lawn which extends south-east to the river. To the west of the monolith a stepped path ascends through evergreen shrubbery to reach the woodland walks on the east- and north-east-facing slopes above the river. These slopes are predominantly planted with mature beech and mixed evergreen shrubbery, interspersed with specimen conifers. The woodland walks are informal in character and are linked by a series of zig-zag paths. The principal park walk continues south extending along the west bank of the East Okement River, from which it is separated by a narrow strip of lawn. The edge of the walk is marked by a series of granite boulders. Some 240m south-south-east of the principal entrance, the walk reaches the mid C20 metal footbridge which leads east across the river to the C20 car-parking areas.

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To the west of the walk, opposite the footbridge, is an area of east-facing sloping lawn enclosed by mature trees and shrubs to the north-west, west, and south-west. Above this lawn, to the west, stands the base of an early C20 shelter, the superstructure of which does not survive. Below, to the north-east, is a further commemorative granite monolith and to the south-east a granite cattle drinking trough commemorating the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902, which was removed to the park in the mid C20 from its original position in the Market Place. Continuing parallel to the west bank of the river, the walk affords picturesque views up the river towards a weir. Passing through an area of denser woodland, the walk emerges after c 240m below a series of pools and a cascade. A chain of four informal stone-edged pools extends north from the foot of the cascade with a rustic bridge constructed from cement render in imitation of wood crossing from east to west at the central point. The pools are surrounded by ornamental planting. The cascade comprises a series of rocky pools and falls edged with rustic stones forming planting pockets. Crazy-paved stone paths and steps ascend each side of the cascade allowing access to the upper woodland walks.

Some 30m south-east of the cascade stands the early C20 Swiss chalet (listed grade II). Known as 'Treloar' after the Lord Mayor of London and friend of Sydney Simmons who opened the park in 1907, this building comprises two storeys over a basement with deep overhanging eaves, ornamental bargeboards, and other 'Swiss' ornamental motifs. This picturesque building contains a further two almshouses founded by Simmons in 1907. To the north-west of the Swiss chalet is a late C20 service yard and a range of early C20 single-storey stone sheds. Some 20m north-north-east of the Swiss chalet, beyond a tarmac carriage turn to the north of the chalet, a double-sided timber shelter stands on the river bank affording views north-west down the river, and south-east towards Dartmoor. This structure was built in 1983, replicating the design of an early C20 shelter which stood on this site until destroyed in a storm in 1981 (inscription).

To the east of the chalet and shelter, an area of lawn extends along the river bank, with walks leading along its northern and southern edges. Some 80m south-east of the chalet the octagonal granite drum base survives from the bandstand erected in 1911 to commemorate the coronation of King George V (inscription). The bandstand base is surrounded by rustic rockwork and ornamental planting. Footbridges c 80m north-north-east and c 100m north-east of the bandstand lead across the East Okement River to the recreation ground on its east side. The bridges are formed with a metal framework covered with cement render formed to resemble rustic woodwork. They were constructed c 1950 by a local mason, Mr Partridge, to replace early C20 rustic timber bridges (J Winchester pers comm, 2001). The lawn east of the chalet corresponds to the extension made to the park in 1909.

REFERENCES

N Pevsner and B Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Devon* (2nd edn 1989), p 609 S Pugsley (ed), *Devon Gardens An Historical Survey* (1994), p 170 Simmons Park, Okehampton, Devon: Heritage Lottery Bid (1998) Devon Register Review, (English Heritage 1999)

Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1884, published 1886 2nd edition published 1904 1932 edition

Archival items Minutes of Okehampton Corporation Parks Committee (Okehampton Town Council) Photographs of Simmons Park, 1914 (Chapman plates 12997-8, 12595), (Devon Record Office)

Description written: February 2002 Register Inspector: JML Edited: November 2002

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.