

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ALBERT PARK, ABINGDON

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Name: ALBERT PARK, ABINGDON

County: Oxfordshire

District: Vale of White Horse (District Authority)

Parish: Abingdon on Thames

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.672495
Longitude: -1.2897777
National Grid Reference: SU 49210 97319, SU 49594 97217
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001403
Date first listed: 27-Oct-1998

Details

Mid C19 suburban park with formal and informal elements, laid out for the use of the residents of Abingdon as the centrepiece of an associated residential development.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The guild of the Holy Cross was refounded in 1533 as the charity Christ's Hospital of Abingdon. As a result of protracted proceedings in Chancery during the 1840s and 1850s a scheme was devised whereby the Governors would lay out a recreation ground and plots for surrounding houses (to be privately developed) on an open field known as Conduit Field, to the west of the town (VCH 1924). In April 1860 a competition with a 10 gns prize was announced to design the recreation ground, and following five entries the prize was given to Mr Chapman of Dulwich ('commune bonum'). The basic structure of his design was followed, although not all the details were adhered to. During 1861 the infrastructure of the park was laid out, including the roads, drainage and railings, and in 1862 the landscaping was carried out and a park keeper employed. In the 1920s various sports pitches were laid out on the central lawn. The park was renovated in the 1980s, when most of the sports facilities and remaining flower beds were removed, and the site continues (1997) in use as a facility for the people of Abingdon.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Albert Park lies in the western suburbs of Abingdon, 500m from the town centre. The park, situated on land which slopes gently from north to south, lies at the centre of a development of houses on plots laid out in the 1860s which were slowly built upon during the mid to late C19 and early C20. The 5.5ha, D-shaped park is bounded by an estate road, beyond which lie substantial, individually designed houses standing in their own spacious plots, together with, to the east Abingdon Grammar School (moved to this site 1870) standing within extensive playing fields, to the south-east Trinity church (Wesleyan Methodist, Woodman 1875) and to the south St Michael's church (C of E, G G Scott 1867, listed grade II). The park boundary, until the Second World War marked by iron railings and gates which had formed a significant part of the original financial outlay on the site, is now marked largely by clipped hawthorn hedges, the 1860s' railings, lanterns and gates having been removed for munitions during the war. The crescent-shaped central section of

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the south boundary is marked by a low stone wall with taller stone piers at intervals, outside which lie two small panels of lawn. The setting is suburban.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main pedestrian approach from the town centre is via Park Road, which spurs west off Bath Street c 400m east of the centre of the park. At this point the entrance to Park Road is marked by a single-storey stone lodge with large gables with ornamental bargeboards, set in a small garden surrounded by a dwarf stone wall. This lodge, formerly one of a pair, is now separated from Park Road by the Stratton Way relief road, from which there is no vehicular access to Park Road. Park Road runs west flanked by a lime avenue set in lawn, itself flanked by stone walls, passing between open playing fields with views of Abingdon School to the north. At the south-east corner of the park, Park Road intersects with Conduit Road to the south, and to the north Park Crescent, which encloses the park to the west, north and east. Park Road continues west along the south side of the park, flanked by the lime avenue, passing the central main entrance to the park, set back off the road and lying opposite St Michael's church. A small, cuboid, stone conduit house (C16, listed grade II) with a pyramidal roof stands on the boundary with Park Crescent close to the south-east entrance. In addition to the main entrance on Park Road, four further, evenly spaced entrances to the park give access from Park Crescent. The north entrance is aligned with the north spur of Park Crescent (which connects with Faringdon Road to the north), the Albert Memorial, the main park entrance to the south and St Michael's church beyond. Victoria and Conduit Roads to the south, linked by Park Road and Bostock Road and all part of the same development, give vehicular access from Ock Street, now the main road into Abingdon from Oxford.

PARK Albert Park is of a compact, symmetrical design, laid out along a north/south axis, with a central open lawn enclosed by a perimeter shelter belt containing many mature deciduous and coniferous trees, probably part of the original 1860s' planting. A circuitous path system runs through the trees.

From the main, south entrance a broad, straight gravel walk extends to west and east, flanked by informal lawns planted with mature trees, including specimen Wellingtonias which may be the remains of an avenue. The ends of the walk are terminated by specimen Wellingtonias standing in circular panels of lawn and shrubs. The broad gravel walk narrows at both ends to encircle the circular panels, each circle linked to a spur path giving access from the entrances at the southern corners of the park. From the western circle two paths lead north, between them standing the work station/maintenance depot. Beyond this the paths cross and continue north to an open area, now an informal gravel car park situated between mature trees but formerly containing a further circular panel of lawn (OS 1875), at which point the spur path from the north-west entrance joins. The two paths continue from here as one, curving around the northern perimeter with views out to the houses and gardens in Park Crescent and views in over the central lawn to the far, south side of the park and the two churches. At the centre of its north section the path encircles the Albert Memorial (listed grade II), which stands on a circular panel of lawn, and is joined by the path giving access from the Park Crescent spur road to the north. The 15m high stone memorial consists of an ornamented hexagonal column supporting a statue of Prince Albert, the whole standing on a tall plinth with a frieze and carved medallions and four steps up to it. The Memorial, erected in 1865 to a design by John Gibbs of Oxford and paid for by public subscription, is set on a small parcel of land bought from the charity for the purpose. The path continues east, flanked by specimen trees and shrub beds, opening out where the spur path from the north-east entrance joins it, this area formerly containing a circular panel of lawn mirroring that to the west. The path divides into two crossing paths to the south of this area in similar form to that on the west side of the park. The path terminates at the eastern circular panel with its Wellingtonia specimen. The cross path which leads south-east down the east side of the park towards the south-east entrance is aligned on the tall stone spire of Trinity Methodist church standing on Conduit Road.

The central lawn is encircled largely by a belt of shrubs, beyond which lies the shelter belt and path system. Entrance to the lawn is via four evenly spaced spurs to the north, south, west and east, giving access from the encircling path system and related to the park entrances. In the south-east corner lies a bowling green, pavilion (late C20, on the site of an earlier building) and tennis court, and in the west half of the lawn are visible the remains of c 1920s terracing for former sports facilities, including tennis and croquet, now removed. The lawn is dominated by the Albert Memorial overlooking it to the north.

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Chapman's layout consisted of perimeter paths enclosing rondpoints amongst a perimeter belt of specimen trees and shrubs which in turn enclosed a central undulating grass area. This layout still largely exists today (although the central panels of the north-west, north-east and central southern rondpoints have been lost to small, informal open spaces).

REFERENCES

Victoria County History of Berkshire 1V, (1924), pp 437, 448 N Pevsner and J Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Berkshire* (1966), p 60 J Carter and J Smith, *Give & Take, scenes from the history of Christ's Hospital of Abingdon, 1553(1900* (1981), pp 55-68 F Woodward, *Oxfordshire Parks* (1982), p 34

Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1875 OS 1:500: 1st edition published 1874

Description written: May 1998 Register Inspector: SR Edited: January 2000

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.