

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CONGLETON PARK

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Name:	CONGLETON PARK
District:	Cheshire East (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Congleton
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.167651 Longitude: -2.2082704 National Grid Reference: SJ 86174 63413 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001530 Date first listed: 31-May-2001

Details

A public park formed with the support of James Bateman, designed by Edward Kemp and the town surveyor, William Blackshaw, and opened in 1871.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Town Wood is mentioned in the Domesday Book as belonging to the people of Congleton. In October 1860 the Congleton and Macclesfield Mercury reported that James Bateman of Biddulph Grange (qv) had, with other members of the Park Committee, visited Town Wood in Congleton to assess the spot for the purpose of a public park (Williamson 2000). In Bateman's opinion the Wood, in conjunction with an adjoining field owned by Mr Darcy and some land owned by Sir Charles Shakerley, would provide a park and walks together with a public playground. Bateman donated £50 towards the project and offered to send one of his gardeners to test the ground (ibid). It is of note that, c 1862, Bateman prepared a design, by invitation, for the Oxford University Parks, although this was not executed (Craig 1998).

In 1865 Congleton Town Council purchased c 4.8ha of land lying between the Town Wood and the River Dane for the provision of a public park (Stephens 1970). Undergrowth in Town Wood was cleared in 1867 and a series of informal paths constructed. An appeal for subscriptions was opened in 1868 and in c 1870 c 1.2 ha was offered by Sir Charles Shakerley subject to a nominal rent (Williamson 2000; The Builder 1870). The design of the park was by Edward Kemp and the town surveyor, William Blackshaw (Head 1887). The Builder reported in 1870 that Mr Kemp, the manager of Birkenhead Park (qv), proposed to lay out Town Wood in walks and the land between the Wood and the River Dane into recreation and ornamental ground. Edward Kemp (1817-91), who was trained by Sir Joseph Paxton, was responsible for the laying out of Birkenhead Park to Paxton's design and was appointed superintendent there in 1845. In 1847 he also commenced a private practice. Kemp was responsible for laying out Hesketh Park (qv) in Southport in c 1864 and, in Liverpool, for designs for Newsham Park (qv) in c 1864 and Stanley Park (qv) in c 1866, as well as Grosvenor Park in Chester in c 1867.

Congleton Park was opened to the public on 29 May 1871 by the mayor, Dr Robert Beales JP. Before the opening a new approach, Park Road, and a cast-iron bridge over the River Dane had been constructed to provide access from the centre of the town to the park. In 1871 the park included a bowling green and facilities for boating on the river, cricket, and croquet (Williamson 2000).

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Late C19 additions to the park included a landing stage with stone shelter (Head 1887), a pavilion to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, and a bowling pavilion (OS 1897). By 1909 (OS) a second footbridge and access, adjacent to St Stephen's church, had been added. In 1953 an ornamental garden was created to the east of the Jubilee Pavilion, to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. In 1956 Hankinson's Field, adjoining the River Dane to the south of the park, was purchased by Congleton Council to serve as a sports field in conjunction with the park (outside the area here registered). Congleton Park remains in use as a public park and is in the ownership of Congleton Borough Council. The Council have (2001) proposals for the restoration of the park.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Congleton Park lies about 0.5km to the north-east of Congleton town centre and occupies c 10.5ha. To the south and east the park is bounded by the River Dane enclosing a level triangular area of c 6ha with gentle slopes down to the river bank. The south river boundary has a stone retaining wall with c 1.2m high C20 railings. The east river boundary has similar railings at the head of an earth embankment.

In the north and north-west of the park c 4.5ha comprises the steep bank of Town Wood rising to c 29m above the triangular area and with an average width of c 55m. At the base of the Town Wood slope, on its south-east edge, a gently curving level path is set on a shallow embankment running from south-west to north-east. This path forms the third side of the level triangle bounded on the other two sides by the river. To the west of the park, on the north bank of the river, is the remains of Old Mill, built in 1753. To the south-west, south of the river, is a mixed area of early C20 housing and commercial development, some of the latter in converted silk mills. Immediately south of the park, across the river on Hankinson's Field there are playing fields and the late C20 Congleton Leisure Centre. On rising ground to the south-east, across the river from the park and bounded by Willow Street, are St Stephen's church, the vicarage (listed grade II) and a number of early C20 houses. A mixed industrial area lies to the north-east. The high ground to the north-west of Town Wood has mid to late C20 semi-detached housing with varied hedging and fences to private gardens forming the north-west boundary of the park.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance gives access into the south-west of the park, over the cast-iron bridge from Park Road. A pair of iron gates stands at the south end of the bridge flanked by balustrades with late C19 vertical iron railings set between square-section iron piers with ball finials. From the north side of the bridge a short drive leads north into the park. The 1873 OS map shows the bridge access as the single entrance into the park. In the late C20 the direct route from the centre of Congleton to the park has been disrupted by the construction of a bypass, Mountbatten Way. A second entrance, from Mill Green, standing 105m north-west of the main entrance, has early C20 rusticated brick gate piers with evidence of gates now (2001) removed. From this entrance a drive runs east-north-east into the park, with stonework to the embankment to Town Wood to the north, to join the drive from the main entrance 100m to the east. This entrance drive is indicated on the OS map of 1897.

A footbridge entrance to the south-east of the park is approached via a footpath from Willow Street which runs adjacent to the c 3m high retaining wall to the south-west of St Stephen's churchyard. Between the wall and path is a planting bed bounded by irregular upright stones. This route is first indicated in 1909 (OS). The footbridge was replaced in 1976 and is today (2001) under repair. From the north-east there is a late C20 informal riverside path leading into the park from Riverdane Road. At the north-west corner and in the centre of the north-west boundary footpaths lead from the adjoining C20 housing development to the boundary path within Town Wood.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Congleton Park is divided into two distinct areas, the south-east-facing Town Wood to the north-west and the open triangular area to the south-east, bounded by the river on two sides. The lower area is provided with a circuit path and from the north-west section five sets of stone steps give access to a series of irregular footpaths in Town Wood, which frames the lower area. From the higher woodland paths there are views out to distant countryside and from the lower area views out across the river to the town with St Stephen's church dominant to the south-east.

Immediately to the north-east of the cast-iron entrance bridge stands the Jubilee Pavilion of 1887, a tall, single-storey building with a roof of blue slate and black- and white-painted timber panelling above a red-brick plinth. The Pavilion is set above the entrance path with a broad flight of stone steps leading up to the entrance, which overlooks the lower park to the east. The

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Pavilion is currently (2001) vacant and awaiting final refurbishment following a fire in 1997. To the west of the Jubilee Pavilion is situated a late C20 park keeper's bungalow and a groundsman's compound.

To the east-north-east of the Pavilion is the formal Coronation Garden laid out in 1953. The central feature of this garden is a wide path on an axis with the drive from the west entrance from Mill Green. Within the paved path there are a series of central planting beds set in grass. The path terminates 90m east-north-east of the Jubilee Pavilion at the base of the Congleton market cross, which is set on circular stone steps within a paved circular area with rose beds and defined by a low perimeter hedge. To the south and north-west of the market cross there are two square paved areas bounded by low walls and with square central beds. Paths linking these areas with the market cross and the circuit paths to the south and north-west form axes which define the Coronation Garden. The market cross, the base of which may date from 1500 (Restoration Plan 1998), was restored and erected in 1902 in Lawton Street Gardens to mark the coronation of King Edward VII; it was moved, complete, to its present position in 1953. The upper section of the cross is now (2001) missing. A circular stone fountain situated 44m north-east of the Jubilee Pavilion forms a further feature of the Coronation Garden. The fountain was presented by local businessman James Broad in 1886. Lawned areas within the Coronation Garden are laid out with formal planting beds including a circular bed raised at an angle with stonework to present a display facing the Jubilee Pavilion. There are also a number of evergreens including a single specimen *Araucaria*.

From the Jubilee Pavilion the level circuit path leads north-east bounded on its north-west side, at the base of Town Wood, by a c 0.6m high retaining structure formed by irregular upright stones. Running for c 160m from the Jubilee Pavilion there is a second, similar retaining structure set c 1.2m to the north-west of the first to form a raised planting area. The lower retaining structure is broken at five points where stepped paths lead up into Town Wood to the north-west, the junctions marked by dressed stone piers with pyramidal caps, some now (2001) only partially extant. The steps, formed by dressed stone risers, are set into the steep slope with irregular embanking rockwork to either side. At five points the lower retaining structure is set back to form alcoves; these were designed for seats and drinking fountains. The rockwork to the alcoves includes pieces of naturally patterned quartzite stone for decorative effect. Adjoining the path, 140m north-east of the Jubilee Pavilion, is the octagonal stone base with iron balustrade of the former bandstand. Erected in 1914, the bandstand is shown on an early C20 postcard (Congleton Library) to have had a shallow bell-shaped canopy supported on bracketed cast-iron columns; the canopy was removed in 1956.

At the north-east entrance to the park the circuit path returns south-south-east to follow the line of the river. This turning point is marked by a c 20m stone-edged path running from north-west to south-east, linking the two arms of the main circuit path, and with steps at its centre leading down to the grassed area to the south-west. A postcard of c 1905 (McLean 1988) and the 1897 OS map show a small pavilion to the north-east of the steps, now (2001) removed, overlooking the sports ground.

In the south-east corner of the park is an oval bowling green with a mid C20 bowling pavilion to the east-south-east which replaced an earlier pavilion on the same site (OS 1897). A smaller bowling green (OS 1909) formerly lay to the west of the existing green; it was removed in the late C20 and its site is indicated by a depression in the grassed area. The east and south sections of the circuit path have C20 railings to the river side and a line of mature trees to the other. Some 60m east of the Jubilee Pavilion, adjacent to the circuit path, there is a landing stage and small C20 timber ticket office. A late C20 children's playground is located on the site of former tennis courts 100m east of the Jubilee Pavilion. During the C20 a number of historic artefacts have been relocated in the park from Congleton town centre. These include an 1887 Jubilee cast-iron drinking fountain resited on the edge of the playing field in 1969, 170m north-east of the Jubilee Pavilion.

The steep wooded slope of Town Wood is laid out with a series of informal paths as indicated on the OS map of 1873. Two of the paths run along the contours of the slope, one adjacent to the north and north-west boundary and one mid-way up the Wood. From these elevated paths there are views out, through trees, to the east to The Cloud, a prominent craggy outcrop and local landmark, and, to the south, over the town where the towers of the parish church and town hall are visible on the skyline. Heavy rains in 2000 have resulted in subsidence in parts of Town Wood, particularly below the highest point, 220m north-north-east of the main entrance. A castellated stone lookout with a Russian cannon which was located at the highest point (OS

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1873; early C20 photographs) has been lost (2001). The cannon was removed in 1940. Tree planting to Town Wood is largely deciduous with some shrub underplanting on the lower part of the slope.

REFERENCES

The Builder 28, (1870), p 455 R Head, Congleton Past and Present (1887, reprinted 1987), pp 141, 143 G Chadwick, The Park and the Town (1966), pp 100-6 W B Stephens (ed), History of Congleton (1970), p 104 Alcock, A look around Congleton and its history (1977), pp 14-15 J Congleton History Soc 2, (1977-8), p 27 M and C McLean, Congleton and District: A Portrait in Old Picture Postcards (1988), pp 44-50 S Craig, The University Parks Oxford: A Historical Guide (1998) Congleton Town Park Restoration Plan, (Heritage Lottery Fund Urban Park Programme report 1998), pp 11-14 and illustrations M Williamson, Research Paper on Edward Kemp 1817?91 (Congleton Borough Council 2000), p 3

Maps Tithe map for Congleton parish, 1818 (Congleton Local Studies Library)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1873 3rd edition published 1911 1938 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1873 2nd edition published 1897 3rd edition published 1909

Archival items Historic photographs and local press cuttings held at Congleton Local Studies Library.

Description written: March 2001 Amended: May 2001 Register Inspector: HMT Edited: July 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.