

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PEOPLES PARK, HALIFAX

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Name:	PEOPLES PARK, HALIFAX
District:	Calderdale (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.719920 Longitude: -1.8724901 National Grid Reference: SE 08512 24842 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000553 Date first listed: 01-Dec-1984

Details

A public park designed by Joseph Paxton assisted by Edward Milner which was completed in 1857.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

People's Park was presented to the town of Halifax by the manufacturer Sir Francis Crossley who is said to have conceived of the idea while enjoying the 'grand scenery of the White Mountains' in America (Chadwick 1966). Crossley commissioned Paxton (1803-65) to design the park which was laid out on an area of open fields, as shown on the 1848 OS map. The park provided for quiet enjoyment of the scenery and for walking, and all meetings, games and dancing were forbidden. Crossley made an endowment which initially provided enough money for maintenance but gradually reduced in value, so that Halifax Corporation had to take over responsibility. The park is a public park owned by Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council. It is currently (2000) undergoing restoration.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The park lies c 1.5m south-west of the centre of Halifax in an area which is largely residential. It is bounded by Park Road on the east side, which was laid out in 1856 with six pairs of villas designed by John Hogg (listed grade II). A wall along this side of the park is surmounted by ornamental cast-iron railings (late C20 reproduction of originals by Brooks of Brighouse removed during the Second World War), and this continues along the northern boundary with Hopwood Lane for a distance of c 120m, where there is an entrance, from which point there is a stone retaining wall. Sir Francis Crossley's house, Belle Vue (listed grade II*), is on Hopwood Road opposite the park and is now (2000) in use as offices. A stone wall separates the west side of the site from a college of education and from West House at the south-west corner of the site. The southern boundary is formed by King Cross Street, where there is a wall surmounted by cast-iron railings, and a fence around North Park and the rear elevation of swimming baths, which were built in 1859, form the boundary at the south-east corner. The c 5.5ha site is on land which slopes down to the east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are two entrances with cast-iron gates from King Cross Street, that to the west with stone gate piers (listed grade II). Two entrances with ornamental stone gate piers (both listed grade II) are situated at each end of the park on Park Road. There is an entrance with a cast-iron gate from Hopwood Road which leads through a rustic rockwork cutting. The entrances all lead to curving paths with approaches between banks and mounds planted with trees so that the formal core of the park is not immediately visible from the entrances.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING The Crossley Pavilion (G H Stokes 1856, listed grade II*) is the largest structure within the park and it occupies a central position on the terrace at the west end of the park, overlooking falling land to the east and commanding views eastwards over Halifax to rising moorland beyond. It consists of an arcaded loggia with an apsidal seating area which contains a statue of Sir Francis Crossley by J Durham. On each side are rectangular stone-lined pools backed by screen walls with arched niches, each of which has a sea god head mounted within it above a bowl in the form of a scallop shell. Water issues from the mouths of the heads and collects in the shells, falling from them into the pools.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The park consists of a strongly formal area in the centre and along the west side, with less formal areas around the other sides. Banks and mounds planted with trees and shrubs around the park's perimeter serve to give a sense of enclosure and to screen the area immediately outside the park.

A steep wooded bank runs along the western edge of the park forming a backdrop for a terrace. This bows out at its mid-point in front of the Crossley Pavilion, and stone steps (listed grade II*) lead down to an axial path running eastwards. At each end of the terrace there is a terminus (both listed grade II*) with balustraded walls and stone steps leading down to curving paths. A series of seven (formerly eight) statues is ranged along the terrace, including figures representing Hercules, Venus, Diana, Telemachus and Sophocles by sculptor Francesco Bienaime (all listed grade II*). A number of cast-iron urns (all listed grade II*) in varying states of repair (2000) are positioned along the edge of the terrace.

At the centre of the park there are open lawns crossed by axial paths. A bandstand (listed grade II) stands on the lawns c 50m south-east of the pavilion, and there is a central fountain (listed grade II*) c 80m east of the pavilion which has a stone bowl of c 20m diameter and a central statue. This was relocated from the Winter Garden at Somerleyton Hall in Suffolk (qv) c 1914. Paxton's original fountain was a series of jets in concentric circles. Some 150m east of the pavilion, at the far end of the east/west axial path, there is a stone drinking fountain (listed grade II) with niches and the inscription 'Thank God For Water'.

A wooded bank with areas of rockwork runs along the eastern edge of the park sheltering a serpentine pond which runs north/south and is crossed by two cast-iron bridges (both listed grade II*) carrying the path from the entrances at each end of Park Road. The pond is c180m in length and at its north end a narrow stream issues from a rockwork opening. This then descends as a cascade before winding southwards, gradually becoming wider, until it reaches its widest point where there is an island, c 30m west of the southern Park Road entrance.

The north side of the park has planted banks with areas of rockwork and winding paths which connect with perimeter paths and the central open lawns. A C20 fenced playground lies between the planted banks in this area, c 120m north-east of the pavilion. A shelter was situated on this side of the park c 150m north-east of the pavilion. This was one of two timber structures called Parliament Houses shown in early C20 photographs (see Colvin and Moggeridge 1992) which were exclusively for the use of men and were demolished late C20.

On the south side of the park the entrances from King Cross Street lead to lawns with trees and clumps planted on mounds. The paths lead through an area which becomes increasingly wooded, with branches leading around the perimeter of the site and other routes leading northwards to emerge in the open lawns in the centre of the site. The other timber shelter or Parliament House was situated in this area c 140m south-east of the pavilion. The wooded south-west corner of the park was the site of glasshouses which are shown on the 1907 OS map.

An analysis of the trees (Debois Landscape Survey Group, in Colvin and Moggeridge 1992) has shown that there are examples of horse chestnut, beech and ash trees which probably date from the 1850s. None of the conifers mentioned in a guide to the park published in 1857 (quoted in Colvin and Moggeridge 1992), which included Irish Juniper, Norway Pine, Deodar, Lebanon Cedar, and 'Monkey Teaser' (Araucaria), has survived, but replacement conifers were planted as part of the late C20 restoration scheme. The 1907 OS map shows that there was more tree cover at that time, including an avenue along the central route from the terrace to the fountain.

REFERENCES

G Chadwick, *The Park and the Town* (1966), p 53-5 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Yorkshire The West Riding* (1967), p 235 H Conway, *People's Parks* (1991), p 93-4 Colvin and Moggeridge, *Restoration of The People's Park, Halifax* (1992) [includes reproductions of C19 and early C20 photographs, postcards and press reports]

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Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1848 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1907

Archival items Council minutes of various different Parks Committees are held in Halifax Library [extracts appear in Colvin and Moggeridge 1992]

Description written: January 1998 Amended: March 1999; May 2000 Register Inspector: CEH Edited: November 1999

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.