

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WICKSTEED PARK

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Name:	WICKSTEED PARK
District:	North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Barton Seagrave
District:	North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.382727 Longitude: -0.70817327 National Grid Reference: SP 88024 76862 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001524 Date first listed: 26-Apr-2001

Details

An early C20 public amusement or leisure park laid out for Charles Wicksteed and opened in 1921, with formal elements set in an informal amusement park dominated by a large lake. It was the first such park in the United Kingdom, in which Wicksteed installed substantial amounts of play equipment supplied from his own factory.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1876 Charles Wicksteed (1847-1931) founded an engineering company in Kettering, Charles Wicksteed and Company, which prospered such that Wicksteed became a wealthy businessman. In 1913 he bought a parcel of agricultural land south-east of Kettering and formed the Wicksteed Village Trust. His intention was to provide a model village for the working classes at below-average rents, offering generous gardens and a large open public space for recreation. A 1914 plan exists of the proposed Barton Seagrave Garden Suburb Estate, prepared by the local architects Gotch and Saunders, showing a substantial lake flanked by housing and a park and playing fields. Following the First World War public housing became the responsibility of local authorities, so Wicksteed chose instead to concentrate on the creation of the park for public use. The park was to provide a free playground and sports facilities for family enjoyment, funded by other facilities within the park, such as refreshments and outdoor features, for which a small charge was made.

In 1917 the first playground equipment was installed, designed and built by Wicksteed's engineering company. A 12ha lake, fed by the Ise Brook, was constructed by 1921, the year that the park was officially opened. In 1922 work began on a Pavilion and Theatre building towards the centre of the park, these being completed in 1923, followed by the adjacent Rose Garden, laid out in 1924. A water chute, bandstand, and fountain were built in 1926. In 1928 Wicksteed bought Barton Seagrave Hall for £6000. Some housing was built around the western edge of the park by the Trust, including in 1921 prefabricated concrete bungalows in Paradise Lane, the earliest buildings of this construction type. Further prefabricated concrete bungalows were built in 1930, on the eastern boundary close to the lake. A model railway track was built around the edge of the lake in 1931. Following Wicksteed's death that year the park continued in the hands of the Trustees, and further features were added, particularly play

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equipment and facilities for recreational activities. After the Second World War the park was used as an example by Professor Holford during the planning of the New Towns, to show that a town could create parks and playgrounds which, after the initial outlay, could be run at no cost to the rate payers (The Wicksteed Story).

The park continues in public use, owned by Wicksteed Village Trust (2001).

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Wicksteed Park lies at the south-east edge of Kettering, on the west edge of Barton Seagrave village. The c 45ha site is bounded to the north by the A6003 Barton Road, to the west by C20 housing, including the 1920s Paradise Lane, and to the south by land laid out as a miniature golf course and agricultural land. The southern part of the east boundary is marked by the River Ise, beyond which lies open agricultural land. The northern part of the east boundary is marked by a track, beyond which lies Castle Field, containing the earthwork remains of moats, fishponds, and the shrunken medieval village (scheduled ancient monument). The land is elevated in the western section of the site, with a gentle slope running south-east from the Pavilion and Rose Garden down towards the lake in the Ise valley below. The setting is partly urban, with the remains of Barton Seagrave Hall's landscape park and gardens adjacent to the north-east. The landscape of the Hall was laid out in the late C18 and early C19 with advice from Humphry Repton (1752-1818). A Red Book dated April 1794 details his suggestions for the site (British Library). The land which Wicksteed Park occupies was until 1913 part of the Barton Seagrave Hall estate.

Views extend beyond the park north-east towards Barton Seagrave Hall and its park and gardens. Further views extend east and south-east across the site and beyond to distant agricultural land and woodland. All these views are particularly prominent from the Pavilion and Rose Garden.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal approach is from the town to the north-west, via Barton Road. A gateway gives access at the centre of the north boundary, from which a drive extends south to the south-east front of the Pavilion, overlooking the Rose Garden to the south-east. From here the drive continues south-west to a car park at the south-west side of the Pavilion.

A further entrance to the park lies at the junction of the A509 Pytchley Road with Barton Road, 500m north-west of the Pavilion. The entrance, set back off the road, is marked by a two-storey lodge to the south. Stone gate piers with ball finials, supporting wooden gates, flank the entrance, these in turn flanked by further, smaller piers in similar style on which are hung pedestrian gates. The gateway gives access to a c 350m long drive flanked by a broad beech avenue which leads south-east across the park parallel with the north boundary to join the main drive 150m north of the Pavilion. A large octagonal shelter with a pyramidal tiled roof supported by brick piers stands to the south of the avenue, c 150m north-west of the Pavilion. This approach was formerly the main entrance to the park from Kettering.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The Pavilion stands towards the centre of the park, overlooking the Rose Garden and beyond this the shallow slope leading down to the lake to the east. The Pavilion stands on the site of a building erected in the 1920s which was subsequently enlarged. The central block is of two storeys, with, on the north-west side, a clock tower rising above it. The Pavilion provides large reception rooms and a theatre for various types of gatherings. To the north-west of the Pavilion stand various other structures, including service buildings and a compound containing large items of leisure equipment.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Wicksteed Park was laid out as a landscaped public park in which amusements were provided for visitors. It is dominated by two major features: the formal Rose Garden to the south-east of the Pavilion, and the large informal lake adjacent to the east boundary, these being set within informal parkland containing recreation and amusement facilities.

The Rose Garden is divided into two terraces, the upper one lying alongside the south-east front of the Pavilion, from which it is separated by the drive. The upper terrace is laid to lawn enclosed by a perimeter path, with a central stone-edged flower bed (formerly a pond and fountain, 1926). At the centre of the south-east edge a stone-balustraded promontory, formerly the site of a bandstand, overlooks the lower terrace and lake beyond. Paths lead south-east along the outer sides of the upper terrace, giving access to the lower terrace on which is laid out the Rose Garden. The area is laid out with geometric panels of lawn divided by gravel paths, at the centre of which is a circular sunken feature with a central stone monument. The borders within this feature were formerly laid out with rose beds which now (2001) contain seasonal bedding. At the corners of the lower

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terrace lie shrub beds planted with tall evergreens. The lawns are edged with dome-shaped clipped evergreens. At the centre of the south-east edge stands a stone memorial to Charles Wicksteed's dog, Jerry, which disappeared in 1928. The terrace is bounded by clipped yew hedges, beyond which views extend over the park to the countryside beyond.

The path on the north-east side of the Rose Garden continues south-east to the north end of the lake, being carried over the lake by a hump-backed bridge. From here it continues eastwards, giving access to features on the east side of the lake and the line of prefabricated, semi-detached Lakeside Bungalows. To the north and east the Bungalows are enclosed by woodland. An early C20, two-storey brick water chute building stands close by, between the lake and the Bungalows. The northern tip of the lake contains two islands and is used for boating. The remainder of the lake, also used for boating, contains several islands and is largely enclosed by the model railway (1931), and bounded to the east by a narrow strip of trees. The River Ise enters the site from Barton Seagrave park at the north-east corner of the Wicksteed Park, feeding the lake, alongside the east edge of which it runs before leaving at the south-east corner of the park.

The remains of several formal ponds lie on the west bank of the lake, including two circular former lily ponds (OS 1938) and a semicircular paddling pool, now (2001) a sand pit. Close by to the south-west stands a large open shelter, in similar style to that south of the north-west drive. South of the shelter lies the c 0.5ha oval model yacht pond (early C20), now (2001) drained. To the west of this lies the oval former cycle track or velodrome (1930), now enclosing large items of leisure equipment.

The rest of the park is laid to lawn and planted with scattered clumps of trees and singles. Formerly tennis courts were laid out in the north-west corner (OS 1938). A miniature golf course lies to the south-west of the park (outside the area here registered).

REFERENCES

The Wicksteed Story, exhibition text and illustrations, Wicksteed Park, (2000) L Brandon-Jones and N Dayton, 2nd Draft Management Plan for lake restoration project Wicksteed Village Trust Estate (2001) S Brown, Wicksteed Park, Historic Appraisal, (March 2001) [copy on EH file]

Maps Gotch and Saunders, Barton Seagrave Garden Suburb Estate, 1914 (Wicksteed Village Trust)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 3rd edition revised 1938

Archival items H Repton, Red Book for Barton Seagrave, 1794 (British Library exported MSS, RP100)

Description written: April 2001 Register Inspector: SR Edited: August 2001

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.