

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

VICTORIA PARK, TUNSTALL

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Name:	VICTORIA PARK, TUNSTALL
District:	City of Stoke-on-Trent (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.061196 Longitude: -2.2023544 National Grid Reference: SJ 86536 51569 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001590 Date first listed: 12-Feb-2002

Details

A late C19 and early C20 public park laid out to the design of the Borough Surveyor, A R Wood.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

During the course of the C19 the six towns which today comprise the City of Stoke-on-Trent expanded rapidly as a result of successful industries including the potteries and coal mining. As a result of this industrial activity, the area suffered from acute atmospheric pollution which led to poor health and high mortality, and there was a need for open spaces for recreation.

As the six towns grew, rivalry for civic primacy developed, with each community vying to provide the best municipal facilities such as town halls, libraries, and public parks. Queen's Park, Longton (qv) was opened in 1888, while in 1893 the landscape architect Thomas Mawson (1861-1933) was commissioned to lay out Burslem Park (qv); work on Hanley Park (qv), also designed by Thomas Mawson, commenced in 1892.

Tunstall Urban District Council had undertaken improvements including the construction of baths and a recreation ground in 1887-90 to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The Council went on to purchase 33 acres (c 14ha) of industrially blighted land adjacent to Station Road for the construction of a public park and a new road; the first sod was turned by the Chief Bailiff on 22 June 1897. The scheme for converting the former mine-workings into a public park was devised by the Surveyor to Tunstall Urban District Council, Absalom Reade Wood (1851-1922), an architect with an extensive local practice. Work on the park progressed over several years, partly due to shortage of money and the inability of the Public Works Loan Commissioners to provide funds which in 1906 led to the Council obtaining a commercial loan (Conservation Area Plan). The boating lake was constructed in 1903-4, while bowling greens, tennis courts, and a pavilion were completed in 1904. A clock tower donated to the town by employees of William Adams & Co in memory of the pottery owner William Adams (1833-1905) was constructed in 1907, while the opening of ornamental wrought-iron gates in memory of Thomas Peake on 18 June 1908 constituted the official opening of the new park (ibid).

Features continued to be added to the park in the early years of the C20. In 1909 H H Williamson, the Clerk to the Council and the Surveyor, A R Wood, donated a bandstand to the park, while in 1910 it was decided to erect a pavilion, later known as the Floral Hall; this was completed in 1911. A fountain in memory of George Cumberland, JP was donated in 1910, and a further bandstand or music pavilion was provided by Mr Williamson and Mr Wood in 1911.

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By 1914 the park had essentially assumed its final form. Few significant changes were made to A R Wood's scheme during the mid and late C20, except for the construction of a sunken garden south of the boating lake c 1945 and a rockery and cascade to the north of the boating lake c 1960. The Floral Hall was closed in 1991 and the 1920s conservatory attached to it demolished in 1997. Today (2001) Victoria Park, Tunstall remains municipal property.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Victoria Park is situated c 250m east of the centre of the town of Tunstall. The c 8.5ha site is approximately rectangular on plan, and is bounded to the south by Queen's Avenue, to the west by Victoria Park Road, and to the north by Little Chell Lane. To the east the site adjoins Whitfield Greenway, a grassy path constructed on the course of a C19 mineral railway. To the south-east a service drive leading to a car park south-east of the Floral Hall and a service depot separates the park from a late C20 Methodist church which was constructed on part of the late C19 recreation ground. The south boundary is marked by a stone wall and a privet hedge. To the south-west the principal entrance to the park is flanked by low stone walls surmounted by early C20 wrought-iron railings, while the western boundary fronting Victoria Park Road is secured by late C19 or early C20 metal 'unclimbable' fencing; these railings continue along the northern boundary separating the park from Little Chell Lane. The eastern boundary is marked by late C19 or early C20 spiked metal railings. An area of high ground is situated towards the south-west corner of the site, from which the ground falls towards the boating lake to the north and the bowling greens to the east. The ground rises again beyond the lake to reach a further summit at the north-east corner of the site. There are extensive views from these areas of high ground across the park and surrounding residential areas. To the south of the park, the early C20 Roman Catholic church of the Sacred Heart (listed grade II) with its domes and tall tower is prominent in views.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Victoria Park is entered at its south-west corner adjacent to the junction of Queen's Avenue and Victoria Park Road. A pair of elaborate wrought-iron carriage gates with an ornamental overthrow is supported by a pair of square-section stone piers ornamented with fielded panels and wreaths, and surmounted by urn finials. The carriage gates are flanked by a pair of similar wrought-iron pedestrian gates which are supported by a further pair of identical stone piers. The gates are inscribed 'Floreast Tunstall In Memory of Thomas Peake By His Children AD 1904', and were made by the Tunstall blacksmith William Durose (maker's mark). The ceremonial opening of the gates in June 1908 was taken to mark the official opening of the park. The entrance is flanked to north and south by low stone walls which terminate in square-section stone piers with flat caps; the walls are surmounted by early C20 wrought-iron railings. Within the park and to the south-east of the entrance stands a two-storey brick, render and half-timbered lodge; the lodge was constructed in 1903-4 as part of A R Wood's scheme for the park (Conservation Area Plan).

A further entrance to the park is situated at its north-west corner adjacent to the junction of Victoria Park Road and Little Chell Lane. The north-west entrance comprises a pair of late C19 ornamental wrought-iron gates supported by a pair of square-section stone piers with monumental pyramidal caps. A pair of wrought-iron carriage gates supported by a pair of square-section brick piers with flat stone caps gives access to the park from Victoria Park Road to the west, at a point c 270m north-north-east of its junction with Queen's Avenue. A simple metal-railed pedestrian gate leads from Whitfield Greenway to the east, while vehicular access from Queen's Avenue at the south-east corner of the site leads to a car park south-east of the Floral Hall.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Within the principal or south-west entrance, a broad tarmac walk divides with branches leading east and north to form a circuit walk providing access to all areas of the park. The east walk is flanked by lawns planted with specimen trees and ornamented with geometrical flower beds, while to the north-east a rockery bank planted with heathers and conifers ascends to the clock tower. Square on plan and constructed in stone, the tower has a pyramidal tile roof surmounted by an elaborate wrought-iron weathervane. Clock dials are placed on each face of the tower at a high level, while below are placed bronze portrait medallions of William Adams (1745-1805) and William Adams (1833-1905), in whose memory the clock tower was donated by employees of the pottery firm of William Adams & Co in 1907. The clock tower is approached by a flight of stone steps flanked by stepped privet hedges to the west, and stands at the south-west end of an artificial terrace known as The Battlements. The terrace comprises an approximately triangular-shaped lawn retained by high stone walls partly surmounted by a simple stone balustrade to the east and north, and by lower walls to the west which have now (2001) lost

their balustrades. The lawn is planted with C20 specimen trees and surrounds a series of circular rose beds. The Battlements was the site of the original bandstand donated to the park in 1909; the relatively exposed position meant that it did not find favour and it was finally removed together with two shelters c 1950 (OS 1950). The extensive views north and east from The Battlements are today (2001) partly obscured by tree growth, but views south-east towards the Roman Catholic church remain. Stone steps descend south-east from The Battlements to reach a further terrace, at the centre of which is a rectangular kerbed enclosure with rounded ends to the north-east and south-west. The area within the late C19 or early C20 hoop-topped metal railings is planted with heathers and Irish yews, but was formerly a paddling pool. The pool was developed from a reservoir which existed on the site in the late C19 as part of the industrial workings before the formation of the park (OS 1899). Stone steps descend from the north-east end of the paddling pool terrace to regain the eastern circuit walk adjacent to a semicircular bastion enclosed to the east by stone piers surmounted by ball finials which are linked by concrete balustrades. A flight of stone steps descends from the bastion to two east-facing terraces at the south-east corner of the site. The upper terrace is laid out to the north with a lawn and geometrical flower beds which surround a fountain basin (dry, 2001) with a central tazza supported by entwined fish. The fountain was donated to the park in 1911 in memory of George Cumberlidge, JP (inscription). To the south the upper terrace is laid out as a hard-surfaced tennis court. Stone steps aligned with the bastion descend to the lower terrace which comprises two bowling greens divided by a central tarmac walk which is terminated to the east by a single-storey roughcast pavilion with a verandah front to the west overlooking the bowling greens; the bowling greens were opened for use in 1904, while the pavilion was built in 1906 (Conservation Area Plan). A further pavilion set into the east-facing rubble-stone retaining wall west of the southern bowling green was severely damaged by fire in 1998.

To the north of the bowling greens, the early C20 Floral Hall stands on a terrace partly planted with late C20 ornamental shrubbery and heathers. The Floral Hall comprises a single-storey brick and roughcast half-timbered structure under a tile roof. The Arts and Crafts-style building has a large stone-framed Venetian window set in its north-east facade, while to the north-west there is a level terrace which was the site of an early C20 conservatory. The Floral Hall, known until c 1950 as the Park Pavilion, was built in 1910-11 by P Pemberton at a cost of £1238 (*ibid*); today (2001) the building is disused. The circuit walk passes to the north-west of the Floral Hall, separating it from a small formal lawn surrounded by flower beds, and a mid C20 toilet block. Above these a terrace supporting hard-surfaced tennis courts extends north-west below The Battlements. To the north-east of the Floral Hall is a further bowling green enclosed from the perimeter walk by privet hedges; the bowling green was formed from a tennis lawn in the 1920s (OS 1924, 1938). An area to the north of the bowling green is surrounded by mixed ornamental shrubbery and laid out with lawns and a pair of metal-framed tunnel arbours, one of which is planted with laburnum. Developed c 1970, this garden replaced a playground which had been constructed in the mid C20 (OS 1950).

The circuit walk extends c 130m north-east from the Floral Hall, passing through a C20 avenue of Turkey oaks. To the north-west an approximately elliptical-shaped area comprises sports pitches. The walk sweeps north-west and gently drops down into a wooded dell which corresponds to the course of the Scotia Brook. Some 240m north-east of the Floral Hall, an early C20 single-storey shelter and lavatory stands to the east of the walk, overlooking an area which in the mid C20 was developed as a parterre and sunken garden. The outline of the sunken garden survives, with flagged walks and rustic stone retaining wall, but no trace of the parterre survives above ground. To the north-west and below the shelter is an approximately elliptical-shaped fishpond surrounded to the north and south by banks of shrubbery. To the west of the fishpond is a broad tarmac area surrounding an octagonal single-storey shelter surmounted by a pyramidal tile roof; this shelter may correspond to the bandstand built on The Battlements in 1909 which was removed c 1950 (J Taylor pers comm, 2001). West of the shelter is a symmetrical area of lawn and geometrical flower beds backed by ornamental shrubbery, while a stone-flagged walk enclosing a panel of lawn is aligned with the shelter and an early C20 bandstand or music pavilion. This brick and timber structure comprises a raised platform with a metal-railed balustrade surmounted by a pedimented shelter supported by timber columns. The music pavilion was donated to the park in 1911, while the surrounding lawns, shrubberies, and flower beds were developed during the 1920s (OS 1924, 1937). Immediately north of the fishpond is a larger boating lake of informal outline with an island situated towards its northern end. The lake is surrounded on the south, east, and north sides by a water-level gravel walk which was constructed c 1950 (OS), while to the west it is bordered by the circuit walk. At the north-west corner of the lake is a boathouse. Of roughcast and half-

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timbered construction under a tile roof, the boathouse was constructed in 1904 following the excavation of the boating lake in 1903-4. A semicircular stone and concrete landing stage in the form of steps descending into the water is situated c 30m south-east of the boathouse. The circuit walk extends above the east side of the boating lake before sweeping north-west through a mid C20 avenue of flowering cherries. To the north-east of the avenue is a level semicircular lawn with a central triangular-shaped rose bed. Beyond and to the north-east of the lawn the ground rises towards the site boundary, while a rocky stream and cascade descends from the north-east corner of the park; the cascade and stream were constructed c 1950 (OS). The circuit walk continues round the boating lake, returning along the west shore to reach the bandstand and shelter. Sweeping west it passes a late C20 children's playground before continuing through an informal avenue of mature specimen trees along the north and west sides of the sports pitches. The walk turns south-south-west for c 30m running between the western boundary of the park and The Battlements, before returning to the principal entrance at the south-west corner of the park. There are southerly views from this final section of the circuit walk towards the clock tower and the Roman Catholic church beyond the park.

REFERENCES

Staffordshire Advertiser, 20 June 1908, p 8 Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire (1912), p 444 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Staffordshire* (1974), p 265 H Taylor and P Vickers, *A Review of Public Parks in England*, (English Heritage theme study 1995) M Edwards, *Potters in Parks* (1999), pp 56-67 Draft Conservation Area Plan for Victoria Park, Tunstall, (City of Stoke-on-Trent Design and Conservation Section June 2001)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1925 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1924 1938 edition

Archival items Tunstall Urban District Council Minutes and Annual Reports, late C19 and early C20 (City of Stoke-on-Trent archives)

Description written: August 2001 Amended: September 2001 Register Inspector: JML Edited: April 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.