

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CANNON HILL PARK

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	CANNON HILL PARK
District:	Birmingham (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.451568 Longitude: -1.9030162 National Grid Reference: SP 06688 83739 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001489 Date first listed: 05-Feb-2001 Date of most recent amendment: 21-Aug-2013 Statutory Address 1: Russell Road, Moseley, Birmingham, B13 8RD

Historique de la conservation

The site on which Cannon Hill Park was developed in the late C19 had previously been low-lying meadows associated with a C19 villa, Cannon Hill House, which had been constructed on a knoll of high ground overlooking the valley of the River Rea c 1830-40. The Cannon Hill property formed part of the extensive Birmingham estates of Miss Louisa Ann Ryland (1814-89) of Barford Hill House, Warwickshire, the descendent of a prominent C18 Birmingham family. In April 1873 Miss Ryland presented some 57 acres (c 24ha) at Cannon Hill to the Corporation; she also paid for the draining of the site, and its laying out and planting as a public park. The park was designed and laid out by John Gibson (1815-75), who had trained under Joseph Paxton (1803-65) at Chatsworth, Derbyshire (qv), and who in 1849 had been appointed superintendent of Victoria Park, London (qv). In 1858 Gibson had designed Battersea Park, London (qv) of which he was subsequently appointed superintendent, and in 1871 he became superintendent of Hyde Park (qv), St James' Park (qv), and Kensington Gardens (qv). Cannon Hill Park was opened to the public on 1 September 1873 without public ceremony. Each visitor was handed a card with a message from Miss Ryland in which she expressed the hope that 'the Park may prove a source of healthful recreation to the people of Birmingham, and that they will aid in the protection and preservation of what is now their property' (Cox 1892). Miss Ryland also declined the Corporation's offer to name the park after its donor. As laid out the park included a carriage drive, two lakes, a bathing pool, refreshment pavilion, lodge, and glasshouses erected at the Corporation's expense. In 1877 an anonymous visitor commented that the park was 'very pretty; laid out like Battersea Park' (BRLA).

A further 7 acres (c 3ha), the gift of Sir John Holder, Bart, were added to the park in 1897, while in 1898 some 5 acres (c 2ha) were acquired as part of a scheme for straightening the River Rea; in 1907 the Corporation purchased Cannon Hill House from the Trustees of the late Miss Ryland together with a small area of ground to form a nursery. A students' botanical garden was laid out in the park in 1887 with the guidance of the Birmingham botanist Joseph Oliver (1833-1907); plants and seeds were supplied by Kew (Dent 1916). In the early C20 an arboretum was established adjacent to the students' garden and several Arenig or 'Ice Age' boulders excavated from the lake were displayed with an inscription (ibid). As the result of a campaign by the Birmingham Daily Mail, the park was chosen in 1906 as the site for the City's memorial to the dead of the Boer War by the Birmingham sculptor Albert Toft (ibid). The 'Golden Lion Inn', a C16 timbered house from Deritend, Birmingham, was

re-erected in the park by the Birmingham Archaeological Society to serve as a refreshment room and cricket pavilion in 1911 (ibid). In 1916 R K Dent commented that the park was 'one of the fairest domains under the care of the Corporation', while 'the carpet bedding has always been a feature of interest, which has increased in later years through the attraction of the tours de force such as the Tudor crown and other devices in carpet bedding which have attracted visitors from far and near' (ibid).

In March 1914, suffragettes targeted buildings in the park. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was founded by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903 and used direct action to campaign for votes for women. Some suffragettes practised acts of criminal damage such as arson on empty buildings. The damage at Cannon Hill Park was typical of suffragette arson attacks nationally. Oil was sprinkled on the woodwork of the park's refreshment pavilion and the Golden Lion Inn and ignited with a lamp after the park was closed for the night. WSPU literature was left at the scene along with the message 'stop torturing women', a reference to the forcible feeding of suffragette prisoners. The fires were discovered and put out before too much damage occurred, and no individual perpetrators were identified.

In the period following the First World War the park was used as the venue for an annual vehicle and cycle rally, and for dancing, with some 2400 people participating in a dance in 1920 (Birmingham Gazette); a Sons of Rest pavilion was constructed in 1937. After the Second World War Cannon Hill Park was adopted as the City's premier public park, and in 1964 it was adopted as the site for the Midlands Arts Centre (Pevsner and Wedgewood 1966), which was constructed on the site of the late C19 bathing pool. At the same period a new boathouse was built, together with other facilities. Today (2013), Cannon Hill Park remains municipal property.

Details

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Cannon Hill Park is situated c 3km south of the centre of Birmingham and c 1.5km south-east of Edgbaston, to the south-west of the B4217 Edgbaston Road. The c 24ha site is bounded to the north-north-east by the B4217 Edgbaston Road, and to the north-east by Russell Road. To the east the park adjoins the gardens of early C20 domestic properties fronting Russell Road, while to the south it is bounded by a recreation ground and an area of public open space (formerly allotment gardens) which were respectively added to the park in the 1930s and the late C20. To the west the park adjoins the Tally-Ho Grounds, an early C20 tennis club to the east of the A441 Pershore Road. The park boundaries are closed by early and late C20 metal railings. The park rises gently from the River Rea near its western boundary towards Cannon Hill House, which stands on a knoll of high ground at the south-east corner of the site. There are views north, north-west, and west from the higher ground within the park towards tall buildings in the centre of the city, and towards villas and houses in Edgbaston which lie on high ground to the west of the Pershore Road.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Cannon Hill Park is approached from Edgbaston Road to the north-north-east. The principal entrance is situated c 65m north-west of the junction of Edgbaston Road and Russell Road, and comprises a pair of simple metal carriage gates supported by a pair of stone piers with flat caps flanked to the east by a similar single pedestrian gate and a length of matching railings, supported by further, similar stone piers. Within the park and to the south-west of the entrance stands a late C19, two-storey gabled brick lodge (altered mid C20); this formed part of the original layout of the park in 1873. Some 200m north-west of the junction of Edgbaston Road and Russell Road, a mid C20 vehicular entrance leads from Edgbaston Road to an area of car parking which extends c 700m south-west parallel to the River Rea. The car park was developed from the late C19 Queen's Ride, a wide, tree-lined riding track laid out in 1897, which had never enjoyed public favour (Dent 1916; Vince 1923). The Queen's Ride formed part of a scheme for straightening the River Rea, which flows in a deep, canalised channel between the ride and the park. Some 130m and 250m south-west of the vehicular entrance, single-arched stone bridges lead from the Queen's Ride to the park. In 1920 an avenue of trees was planted along Queen's Ride, with a tablet at the foot of each tree naming a local Boy Scout who had fallen in the First World War. This Scouts Memorial, for some 250 young men of Birmingham, had been proposed by the Chief Scout Major Lord Hampton DSO and was inaugurated by him on 27 June 1920. The tablets were vandalised and by 1924 all had disappeared. To the south-west the Queen's Ride is terminated by the Boy Scouts War Memorial obelisk of 1924 (Grade II).

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There is further vehicular access to the park from Russell Road to the east, c 250m south-south-west of the junction of Russell Road and Edgbaston Road. This entrance is closed by late C20 wrought-iron gates and leads to a tarmac drive which is adjoined to the north by a late C20 car park parallel to the boundary of the park. The drive leads c 40m west before turning sharply south for c 60m to reach Cannon Hill House.

Two pedestrian gates connect with the mid C20 recreation ground (outside the site here registered) which adjoins the park to the south-west.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Cannon Hill House (listed Grade II) is a two-storey stuccoed villa under a hipped slate roof. The House is lit by tall sash windows, those on the ground floor set in blind arched openings divided by rusticated stucco; dormers light the attics. The villa was constructed c 1830 and has recently (late C20) been extended to the south-east. Cannon Hill House remained in private ownership until 1907 when it was bought by the Corporation from the Trustees of the late Miss Ryland; today (2013) it is let for commercial use.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Cannon Hill Park is approximately elliptical on plan, with a wide tarmacked, tree-lined carriage drive forming a circuit through the site from the north-east, Edgbaston Road entrance. The curvilinear carriage drive divides the site into areas for different uses: to the north-west the northern boating lake and flower gardens; to the south-east shrubbery, arboretum, and the students' garden; and to the south-west lawns, games pitches, and the southern boating lake. The carriage drive is carried across the southern end of the south lake on an ornamental brick and stone bridge with a single gothic arch (listed Grade II); constructed in 1875 (date stone), the bridge may be a re-working of an early C19 bridge associated with Cannon Hill House.

Immediately south-east of the Edgbaston Road entrance is a range of brick, timber, and glass conservatories and display houses of late C19 or early C20 origin (superstructure repaired or rebuilt mid C20). Approached by a flight of brick steps, the conservatories are 'T' shaped on plan with an east/west range comprising a cool display house and a temperate display house with a central circular pool containing a cast-iron, two-tier tazza fountain. Tiled walks surround central beds, while potted plants are displayed on staging supported by cast-iron pillars. To the south, a square, pyramid-roofed house contains tropical subjects planted in beds arranged around an informal pool. Outside the conservatories there are formal beds for seasonal planting set in lawns. To the south of the conservatories an area of informal shrubbery and herbaceous borders extends parallel to the eastern boundary of the park, and is separated from the carriage drive by a wide lawn.

Some 240m south of the Edgbaston Road entrance, the carriage drive passes to the west of a single-storey rendered refreshment pavilion and information centre. Constructed c 1930 (OS 1938), the pavilion replaced the refreshment pavilion constructed in 1873 which stood on a site immediately opposite the present structure (Cox 1892). The site of the late C19 pavilion is laid out with formal flower beds for seasonal planting; these date from c 1930 (OS 1938). Some 40m south-west of the refreshment pavilion a secondary walk rises south to reach Cannon Hill House and the gates leading to Russell Road to the east. Cannon Hill House is set in grounds predominantly laid to lawn with scattered mature specimen trees and mixed ornamental shrubbery. The secondary walk passes to the west of the grounds of Cannon Hill House, through an area of mature specimen trees, conifers, and evergreen shrubbery on a north-east-facing slope above the bandstand, the Golden Lion, and the lawns. Immediately south of the grounds of Cannon Hill House, a service yard is accessed from the secondary walk, while c 120m south-west of the service yard the walk passes to the south of the students' garden. Today (2013) the students' garden comprises an area of mixed ornamental trees and shrubs arranged around three grassy glades. The glades to the south and south-east were formerly, in the late C19 and early C20, pools, while the northern glade retains ornamentally arranged groups of 'Ice Age' boulders from the late C19 layout. The students' garden was planted in 1887, when one pool served to accommodate a collection of aquatic plants and the other was the setting for a fernery (Dent 1916). The surrounding area was planted as an arboretum in the late C19 and early C20 to complement the students' garden (ibid). A curving walk leads c 50m north from the students' garden to rejoin the carriage drive c 600m south-west of the Edgbaston Road entrance, while another walk continues round the south side of the garden to reach the carriage drive adjacent to the bridge across the south end of the south lake.

From the refreshment pavilion the carriage drive extends south-west along the south-east side of a large lawn which slopes gently down to the southern lake. After c 200m the drive passes to the north-west of the late C19 bandstand (listed Grade II).

The bandstand is octagonal on plan with a blue-brick and stone drum which supports slender cast-iron columns surmounted by an ogee-curved pavilion roof which is in turn surmounted by a cupola with a gilded lyre finial. The bandstand stands at the centre of a circular C20 block-paved area around which are arranged bench seats. This area is surrounded by lawns bounded to the south-east by specimen trees and mixed shrubbery. Some 80m south-west of the bandstand and to the north-west of the carriage drive stands the Golden Lion (listed Grade II), a triple-gabled C16 timbered house from Deritend, Birmingham, which was re-erected in the park in 1911 (Pevsner and Wedgewood 1966). The building is adjoined to the north and south by small mid C20 formal gardens comprising lawns, herbaceous borders, and specimen shrubs enclosed by low holly hedges. To the west a loggia supported on early C20 brick piers opens onto a cobbled terrace with a centrally placed flagstaff, from which stone steps descend to the lawn south-east of the south lake. The Golden Lion was adapted at the time of its re-erection to serve as a cricket pavilion (Dent 1916). Some 50m south-east of the Golden Lion, and to the south-east of the carriage drive, the single-storey, half-timbered Sons of Rest pavilion stands above a north-west-facing bank planted with rhododendrons. The pavilion was constructed in a picturesque vernacular style in 1937 (inscription) for the use of local retired men. A full-height square bay on the north-west facade overlooks the lawns and lake while a similar window at the south-west angle of the building looks down a glade north of the students' garden.

Beyond the Golden Lion the carriage drive sweeps south-west and north-west for c 260m to reach the late C19 bridge which carries it across the south-west end of the southern lake. The south lake extends c 320m from north-east to south-west and is irregular in outline with an island north-east of the bridge which crosses the south-west end of the lake. A mid C20 single jet fountain rises from the centre of the lake. The lake formed part of Gibson's plan of 1873, and was used for boating in the late C19 and early C20. A walk runs parallel to the south-east side of the lake, passing the site of an early C20 aviary and a further 'Ice Age' boulder. To the west of the lake the carriage drive forms a broad promenade which extends c 290m north-east to reach the mid C20 buildings of the Midland Arts Centre (MAC), which was constructed to plans by Jackson and Edmonds (Pevsner and Wedgewood 1966) on the site of the late C19 bathing pool. The buildings of the MAC are grouped around a central elliptical court, the outer edge of which is articulated by specimen trees; the shape of this court recalls the elliptical plan of the bathing pool. The pool, fed by a spring, was 'enclosed with high wooden fences and shrubs' and provided with a 'dressing-shed' in Old English style (Cox 1892). No trace of the pool survives above ground. Immediately to the south-west of the MAC a mid C20 open-air theatre is enclosed by stone walls c 2m high; alcoves set into the outer face of the wall are decorated with mosaics. From the MAC the carriage drive sweeps north-east and north across the park to rejoin the circuit route c 320m south of the Edgbaston Road entrance and c 50m north of the refreshment pavilion. As it crosses the park from west to east, the tree-lined carriage drive forms a boundary between the lawns and games pitches to the south-west, and an area of pleasure grounds to the north. Immediately adjoining the drive to the south-west are a bowling green, tennis courts, and a pitch-and-put course; an early C20 octagonal timber pay-booth survives adjacent to the bowling green. A further bowling green and tennis court are set in ornamental shrubbery to the north-west of the drive.

To the north-east of the MAC a further irregularly shaped lake extends c 160m from north-east to south-west with islands near each end. This lake remains (2013) in use for boating with a mid C20 single-storey brick and concrete boathouse on the north-west bank replacing the timbered boathouse of c 1873 which stood at the south-west end of the lake. The lake is sheltered to the north-west by specimen trees and evergreen shrubbery, while a walk follows the north-west bank of the lake, crossing a narrow neck of water towards its northern end on a footbridge. To the north of the footbridge a concrete model of the Elan Valley Reservoirs (which supply Birmingham with water from North Wales) is arranged on a south-facing bank retained by a low stone wall. The model, which is fed by running water and surrounded by ornamental planting, was constructed in 1961 and repaired in 1998 (inscription). To the north-east of the northern boating lake an informal fishpond is surrounded by luxuriant water-side planting, while to the south-east of the pond there is an area of rock garden with crazy-paved paths, a small pool, and specimen conifers; this dates from the 1930s (OS 1938).

To the east of the northern boating lake is an area of formal and informal flower gardens and pleasure grounds, the focal point of which is the Boer War memorial which stands at the intersection of a cruciform arrangement of walks c 40m east of the lake. The monument comprises a granite pedestal, its ogee faces inset with bronze inscription and relief panels, surmounted by

a bronze female figure of Peace which stands on a gun carriage flanked by two British gunners. The memorial was sculpted by the Birmingham sculptor Albert Toft in 1906 (signature and date on figures). The intersection of the walks is marked by four specimen golden conifers, while formal rose beds are set in grass panels each side of the monument. A walk extends c 35m east from the memorial to a rondpoint marked by a mature horse chestnut; from this point a further walk leads c 20m east-south-east to rejoin the carriage drive c 100m east of the lake and c 100m south of the Edgbaston Road entrance. To the north of the war memorial is an area of informal pleasure grounds with lawns, specimen trees, and groups of ornamental shrubs. To the south-east there are further areas of shrubbery and a flower garden with beds for seasonal planting. This garden is ornamented with stone urns in the form of monumental Corinthian column capitals.

This list entry was amended in 2018 as part of the centenary commemorations of the 1918 Representation of the People Act. This list entry was subject to a Minor Enhancement on 04/06/2018

Summary

A late C19 public park laid out to designs by John Gibson.

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.

Reasons for Designation

Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, opened in 1873, is designated at Grade II* for the following principal reasons: * Designer: the park was designed by John Gibson, one of the leading park designers of the time who had designed and overseen several of London's major parks; * Design: Gibson's landscape design is essentially unchanged, although it has been enhanced; * Historic interest: a major civic amenity philanthropically provided for a major industrial city; * Structures: a number of later C19 and later park structures and memorials survive, some listed; * Planting: the park is well planted, retaining much of Gibson's scheme with later additions.

Bibliographie

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Other

Archival items

Anonymous account of a visit to Birmingham by a lady, 1877 (MS 1462/2), (Birmingham Reference Library Archive)

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E J Bancroft, *The Early Parks of Birmingham*, 1989,
Photograph, The Rock Garden, Cannon Hill Park, early C20 (in Dent 1916),
Postcard views of Cannon Hill Park including the lakes, bridge, boathouse, and war memorial, early C20 (private collection),
Postcard, carpet bedding in the form of a crown, 1906 (in Elliott 1986),
Title: Cannon Hill Park Source Date: 1892 Author: Publisher: Surveyor: