

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

CLIFTON PARK, ROTHERHAM

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Name:	CLIFTON PARK, ROTHERHAM
District:	Rotherham (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.431114 Longitude: -1.3445879 National Grid Reference: SK 43644 92903 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001503 Date first listed: 30-Mar-2001

## Details

A municipal park at the centre of Rotherham, opened in 1891 by the Prince of Wales. The park overlies the landscape of Clifton House which was laid out in the late C18.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Joshua Walker, of the Walker Iron & Steel Works of Masborough (founded 1749) bought part of the field known as Gallow Tree Close, together with Groat Acre Close and Ash Tree Flat Close, from the Earl of Effingham c 1780. Here, between 1783 and 1784, Walker, with the local architect John Carr (1723-1807), built Clifton House which included stables, outbuildings, dovecotes, fishponds, an icehouse, and wells. The estate occupied c 35ha with an entrance halfway up Clifton Lane and drives linking to the Tinsley and Doncaster Turnpike Road. Half of the land was let to tenants for grazing land. After Joshua Walker's death in 1815, Clifton estate passed to his son, Henry Frederick Walker, who occupied Clifton House from 1850 until his death in 1860. William Owen, an iron and steel manufacturer, bought the estate in 1864. He died in 1881 and the estate was put up for sale in June 1883, with the trustees offering almost half of the land for building plots. The House and much of the park remained unsold until 1891 when Rotherham Council, perceiving the need for a public park to serve the growing population in this part of the town, bought 54 acres (22.5ha) for £25,000. £5000 was spent on improvements and the park was opened by the Prince and Princess of Wales on the 25 June 1891. The site remains (2001) in public use and is owned by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Clifton Park lies on the east side of Rotherham, c 400m from the town centre. The park occupies a roughly rectangular area of 22.5ha, oriented on a north-east/south-west axis. It is entirely surrounded by residential housing, commercial properties, and to the east, the grounds of Clifton Comprehensive School. It is bounded largely by public roads: Doncaster Road to the north-west; Middle Lane to the north-east; Clifton Grove, Middleton Road, Lister Street and Parkfield Road to the south-east; and Clifton Lane to the south-west. Clifton Lane is very open as a result of road widening and fine views are afforded to the north, across Rotherham and beyond. A north-west-facing slope runs through the middle of the park separating a broad plateau to the south-east, which offers fine views to the north and north-west, from the low-lying, more enclosed area to the north-west.

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**ENTRANCES & APPROACHES** The main pedestrian and vehicular entrance stands at the western corner of the park, 270m north-west of the House, at the junction of Clifton Lane and Doncaster Road. This entrance reflects the site of a former entrance to the Clifton Estate (OS 1890) which was improved in 1900 with the construction of four large stone pillars and connecting walls. These still remain in situ (2001) although the wrought-iron gates were removed during the Second World War. Road widening in 1982 claimed 300m<sup>2</sup> of the park at the entrance with the loss of a substantial area of planting beds and the removal of boundary walls along Clifton Lane.

One of the main pedestrian entrances to the north, off Doncaster Road, stands 310m north of the House and was part of the former C18 Clifton Estate (guidebook). Birdcage Lodge, built c 1830 (RMBC 1997) was situated adjacent to this entrance on the east side; it was demolished in 1946. This entrance leads into an area known as The Dell. To the north-east of this entrance, a late C20 entrance off Doncaster Road formed by a gap in the boundary wall leads to car parking and the main body of the park. The last surviving former estate entrance is situated at the junction of Middleton Road and Clifton Grove, 350m north-east of the House. The tall stone piers surmounted by urns (late C18, listed grade II) remain (2001) but the gates have been removed. There are a number of minor pedestrian entrances into the park off the south-east boundary. The former entrance to Clifton House, 30m south-south-west of the House, has been closed and a new entrance created 25m south-west of the building leading to the House and a car park. Several further pedestrian and maintenance entrances give access off Middle Lane to the north-east.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Clifton House (listed grade II\*) is situated in a prominent position in the south-west corner of the park. The House was built around 1783 by Joshua Walker of the Walker Iron & Steel Company, and designed by local architect John Carr. Built of ashlar sandstone in two storeys with a symmetrical facade, it was the focal point of the estate before the park was established. Most of the outbuildings have been removed except for a stable block with attached wing walls (listed grade II). These walls link to further outbuildings immediately to the east of the House. Two years after the opening of Clifton Park in 1891, the House was opened to the public as a museum and remains (2001) in this use. The museum car park occupies the area adjacent to the west and south-west of Clifton House.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The low-lying north-west part of the park has a strong planting structure and degree of enclosure, formed by distinctive mature tree avenues and a number of mature specimen trees, largely inherited from the C18 Clifton Estate. The more elevated south-east part is open in character, with C19 tree avenues lining main routes. The loss of 300 mature elm trees to Dutch elm disease (late C20) has had a major impact on the structural planting of the park. On the slope separating the two parts of the park, new tree planting (late C20) has been carried out to create woodland walks.

There is a direct axial connection between the main park entrance at the junction of Clifton Lane and Doncaster Road and the war memorial, unveiled in 1922 (listed grade II), which stands 60m east of the entrance and 210m north-west of the House. Immediately to the east lie the memorial gardens, opened in 1948, the main feature of which is a large formal fountain surrounded by formal gardens and terraced seating areas. Substantial stone retaining walls frame these gardens. A further memorial garden 175m south-east of the main entrance and 100m north-north-east of the House consists of a large rock garden framed by trees and mature, largely evergreen, structural shrub planting. Crazy paving footpaths give access around the garden, connecting a series of seating niches. There are mature specimens of Japanese maples and junipers. This garden was opened in 1951, incorporating some 700(800 tons of Hooton Levitt stone to create a large cascade, rock pools, rills, and larger pools, as shown on contemporary photographs (guidebook). The garden is currently without water (2001). South-west of the rock garden, 60m north-west of the House, is the largest tree in the park, a beech tree planted during the 1830s to commemorate Queen Victoria's Coronation.

From the war memorial an avenue of mature London planes leads north-east to the bandstand which is set in an open space 200m north of the House, in a natural arena with rising ground to the south and a frame of trees to the north. The bandstand was constructed in 1928 and was refurbished for the visit of Queen Elizabeth during the park's centenary in 1991. This replaced the late C19 cast-iron bandstand shown on the OS map of 1903, which was removed in 1919.

Some 100m north-east of the bandstand, and north of the main walk, lies a children's paddling pool, a playground, summer fairground, and roller skating rink (late C20). This is the former site of a fishpond, a part of the C18 Clifton Estate which was

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modified to become one of the main features of the late C19 park, the ornamental lake, which had three large fountains. In 1939 the lake was filled in and play facilities established.

From these features the main walk leads north-east into the eastern half of the park which is much more open, with broad areas of grass interspersed with avenues and clumps of trees. A large showground lies close to the northern tip of the park and is used for events such as the Rotherham Show. The ground rises towards the south, from where there are good views north and north-west across the park to Rotherham.

Towards the southern corner of the park, south-east of Clifton House, lie the main sports facilities laid out as terraced areas separated by hedges, footpaths, and fences. These include tennis courts opened near Clifton House in 1923, and putting and bowling greens, opened in 1924 (RMBC 1997). A car park in the southern corner of the park is screened by existing mature trees and areas of shrub planting. Immediately north-east of Clifton House lies a rose garden and lawn surrounded by clipped hedges. In the south-east corner of the rose garden are pieces of stone work and columns from the granary of the C2 Roman fort at Templeborough (listed grade II), moved here in 1920.

North-east of the rear garden of Clifton House is a modern (1990s) maze framed by boundary walls and structural planting. Fine views extend north and north-east from the maze. This was formerly the site of a sunken garden created in the late 1940s, at the same time as, and closely linked to, the rock garden and memorial gardens. At that time it was a formal rose garden with a central drinking fountain (ibid).

#### REFERENCES

Clifton Park & House, guidebook, (Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, nd) Clifton Park Revitalisation, (unpublished report to the Heritage Lottery Fund, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council 1997) Clifton Park, Rotherham, (Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council unpublished report, nd) Urban Parks, (Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council unpublished report, nd)

Maps OS 25" to mile: 1st edition surveyed 1888-90, published 1893 1934 edition

Description written: March 2001 Amended: April 2001 Register Inspector: JS Edited: May 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.