

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

FRIARWOOD VALLEY GARDENS

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Name:	FRIARWOOD VALLEY GARDENS
District:	Wakefield (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.688902 Longitude: -1.3121091 National Grid Reference: SE 45525 21603 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001514 Date first listed: 02-Apr-2001

Details

A mid C20 public park designed principally by R W Grubb, Borough of Pontefract Parks and Cemeteries Superintendent and planted to take advantage of the site's beneficial horticultural conditions.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Friarwood Valley Gardens is situated on, or adjacent to, the site of the town's monastery gardens. Pontefract's Dominican friary, founded by Edmund de Lacy in 1256, survived until the Dissolution in 1539, after which the site was used as a cemetery until orchards were planted in the C18. C19 antiquarians deduced that the friary was situated at the western end of the present Friarwood Valley Gardens but more recent interpretations place the friary closer to the General Infirmary, which lies adjacent to the east. Archaeological surveys (WYAS 1996) undertaken in the gardens between 1989 and 1991 indicate the presence of structural remains and further archaeological work is anticipated.

At the end of the C19 the land was laid out as private gardens and orchards and access was gained to the houses to the north of Southgate via a subway. In the 1930s road-development schemes for Southgate were undertaken and in 1939 a reference to access to the site is made in Minutes of the Parks and Allotments Committee of 24 April. It was:

Resolved that the Borough Engineer be authorised to communicate with the County Council with a view to consent being obtained for the provision of gateways to the boundary wall now being erected in connection with the Southgate widening, so as to provide access in connection with the proposal for the development of the land in Friarwood Valley.

Little activity on the site is recorded throughout the war years. In September 1947 a draft layout of Friarwood Valley for pleasure-ground purposes was prepared by the Borough Engineer. Development work was undertaken by the Parks and Cemeteries Superintendent, Mr R W Grubb. In 1949, and subject to minor modifications regarding access, the scheme for developing 'Friarwood Valley as an open space' was approved by the Parks and Allotments Committee (Minutes, 19 October 1949).

In his report, Mr Grubb points out that every advantage has been taken of the situation of the land, and the type and depth of soil will allow the cultivation of almost every sort of plant, tree and shrub. The layout provides for many different kinds of garden, with terraces, rockeries, a winding stream interspersed with lily pools, and lawns running down to the water's edge. (Pontefract and Castleford Express, 4 November 1949).

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Work started on site in 1950 and a tree planting by the Mayor, on 16 March 1950, commemorated the occasion. The tree, a flowering cherry (*Cerasus hisakura*), still stands (2000) at the entrance to the formal gardens in the park's north-west corner. An inscribed stone tablet containing a note of the planting ceremony is set into the Southgate retaining wall at the Mill Hill entrance. In the same month Mr McCloy presented a set of stone steps and gate pillars from Byram Park. These were integrated into a low stone retaining wall to the south of the formal gardens and flower beds. Early stages of development were concentrated in the western portions of the site and the Planning Authority only gave approval to development in the eastern portion subject to the retention of the productive fruit trees which remained on the site. This decision reflected the development proposals:

As Mr Grubb observes, the valley in its present state, has a natural wooded nature, and fruit trees make a fine display at blossom-time. Every effort will be made to preserve this beauty, and to add to it by flowering cherries, almonds, pyrus, and so on. (Pontefract and Castleford Express, 4 November 1949).

In spite of this, part of the orchard was removed in 1952 to accommodate the construction of the Friarwood Lane entrance in 1953. The fruit trees that remained continued to flourish and measures were taken to distribute the fruit. By 1955, concern over the continuing fruit production was noted in the Parks and Allotments Committee and it was agreed that 'the present policy of gradually replacing the remaining fruit trees be continued' (Committee Minutes, 26 October 1955). Development work continued throughout the years 1950-4. An open-air theatre in the woodland gardens, a bowling green and pavilion, a rose garden and an aviary were among the features added to the gardens in this period (Parks and Allotments Committee Minutes). Other developments were more remedial in nature. One of the most distinctive features of the 1949 design proposals was the 'winding stream' (photograph, PLSL) which was to be made from the existing culvert. The culvert was fed from run-off water collected in two holding tanks built into the bank on the western boundary of the gardens. By 1955, concern was being voiced about the quality of the water in the stream and the Borough Engineer was required to investigate ways of preventing or minimising pollution in the stream, and consequently the culvert was reinstated. In the period since 1955 the gardens have continued to undergo minor alterations and revisions: the outdoor theatre stage has been removed and the planting today (2000) is no longer as rich as originally suggested. Nevertheless, the fundamental layout and design as described in the 1949 proposal remains intact and visible. The park remains (2000) in public ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Friarwood Valley Gardens is situated c 300m south-south-east of the town hall, in the town centre. It is bordered on the north-north-east by the A645 Southgate. The road is constructed c 4m above the park and the boundary is characterised by a stone retaining wall c 250m long, which was created in the 1930s at the time of the widening of Southgate. In parts, views from Southgate over the park are facilitated by railings which are inset at intervals into the parapet wall. The park is bounded to the west by the A639 Mill Hill Road and to the east by a public right of way that runs from north to south between the park and Pontefract General Infirmary. The footpath is separated from the park by a wire fence and at its southern end it joins Friarwood Lane which forms the park's south-east perimeter. Immediately to the west of the footpath's junction with the road is the park's principal pedestrian and vehicular entrance. Private gardens, most notably those belonging to Friar Wood House (shown on the 1891 OS map), mark the south-west margins.

The park lies in a valley which is steeply graded from the northern boundary at the foot of Southgate's retaining wall to the lowest level (the culvert) which runs from west to east c 60m south of the wall. From this point the land rises to the south, culminating in Friar Wood Hill.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance is via Friarwood Lane and the gates, brick wall, and piers date from 1953. The gates are modest in scale and design. Access to the park from the north and town centre is provided by a pair of steep parallel steps that are situated c 95m east of the junction between Southgate and Mill Hill Road. The steps' stone walls match the retaining wall in material and detailing although they are not keyed into the latter. The step treads and risers are formed from in-situ concrete with a distinctive exposed black aggregate. The iron gate and railings appear to be original. The approach from the west is via a pedestrian entrance and flight of steps, which enter the park adjacent to the commemorative plaque and tree in the formal gardens.

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GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS In spite of the two straight lengths of the principal east/west path, the gardens display an informal quality which to some extent is determined by the site's valley formation. In the park's early years an open stream ran along the valley bed immediately to the south of the path that leads from the Friarwood Lane entrance in the east, to the bank and Mill Hill Road retaining wall in the west of the site. The stream is now (2000) culverted. The path is flanked with ornamental trees that date from the time of the park's setting out. South of the path the land rises to Friar Wood Hill and the area is characterised by woodland and specimen trees including a number of fastigate species.

More formal garden and park features occur to the north of the path including a rose garden in the north-east corner and a terraced lawn (called the formal gardens in the original plan) in the north-west of the site. Access to this is gained from the central west/east walk via stone steps that were brought from Byram Park. The most dominant visual feature of the site is the Southgate stone-faced retaining wall. It is south facing and provides a sheltered location for a good range of trees, shrubs, and flowering plants. The site is well stocked (2000) with shrubs and trees, a number of which are contemporary with the laying out of the park while some predate the park.

The gardens were not designed to provide play and sports facilities but leisure amenities include a bowling green and pavilion, situated immediately to the north of the Friarwood Lane entrance, a paddling pool, disused (2000), to the north-west of the bowling green, and a brick aviary to the west of the rose garden.

REFERENCES

'Terraced Gardens in Town', Pontefract and Castleford Express, 4 November 1949 N Pevsner and E Radcliffe, *The Buildings of England: Yorkshire West Riding* (2nd edn 1967), p 153 The Dominican Friary, Pontefract, Assessment and Project Design, (West Yorkshire Archaeology Service 1996) Pontefract's Historical Town Trail, leaflet, (Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, nd)

Maps P Jollage, Plan of Pontefract in Yorkshire, 1742 (Pontefract Museum)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1889-90, published 1893

Archival items Pontefract Parks and Allotments Committee Minutes, 1939-55 (Pontefract Local Studies Library) Mid C20 postcard views of Friarwood Valley Gardens (Pontefract Local Studies Library) Mid and late C20 photographs of Friarwood Valley Gardens (Pontefract Local Studies Library)

Description written: December 2000 Register Inspector: PV 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.