

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS

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**BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS**

Name:	BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS
District:	Birmingham (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.466520 Longitude: -1.9299939 National Grid Reference: SP 04853 85400 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001200 Date first listed: 01-Jul-1986

## Details

Botanic gardens of 1830s designed by J C Loudon which retain many original and C19 features including the overall layout and range of glasshouses.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

A committee of local business and professional men under the presidency of the Earl of Dartmouth formed the Birmingham Botanical and Horticultural Society in 1829 with the intention of establishing a botanical garden. Local residents were invited to become shareholders, and over 600 £5 shares were purchased. An experienced local gardener, Mr Lunn, selected 'Holly Bank', an 18 acre (c 7.5ha) farm on Lord Calthorpe's Edgbaston estate as a suitable site, and David Cameron (c 1787-1848), a contributor to *The Gardeners' Magazine*, was appointed as curator. John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843), the magazine's proprietor and well-known garden designer, who had supplied Cameron with a reference, was then approached by the committee to furnish a plan for the garden. Their brief was to combine a scientific with an ornamental garden and arboretum, which was also to have some of the characteristics of a nursery and market garden from which superfluous plants, fruits and culinary vegetables might be sold to lessen the garden's running expenses. In the event the committee rejected as too expensive Loudon's ideas for the garden's main conservatory, turning instead to a design submitted by a local manufacturer. The garden opened in 1832, although substantial development and planting continued throughout the decade. By 1844 it was clear that expenditure had and was exceeding expectations, and the southern third of the garden, comprising part of the botanic garden and the whole of the reserve ground, orchard and vegetable garden was given up. Since then there have been no substantial changes to the original layout. The land given up in 1844 was laid out as the Westbourne Road Leisure Gardens (qv).

The garden did much to disseminate Loudon's ideas of gardenesque layouts and plantings in the Birmingham area, while the annual exhibitions for exotics, fruits and flowers held between 1833 and 1927 considerably fostered local horticultural expertise. In 1910, in an effort to increase membership of the Society, a zoological collection was started, with bears, monkeys, seals and alligators. Collections of birds remained a feature of the garden in the later 1990s although the keeping of mammals had been abandoned earlier in the century.

A £1.8 million refurbishment programme of the 1980s which continued in the 1990s saw the restoration of the glasshouses and other structures and the construction of several new buildings and individual gardens.

### DESCRIPTION

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**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The 4ha Botanic Gardens lie on the south side of Westbourne Road in Edgbaston, c 3km south-west of the centre of Birmingham. On the east side the Gardens are adjoined by Edgbaston High School for Girls, on the west side by private housing and the courts of the Edgbaston Archery and Lawn Tennis Society, while the southern tip abuts allotments and Westbourne Road Leisure Gardens (qv). Despite lying within a built-up area the Gardens have a notably open aspect to the south, with views down the Chad Valley.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The Gardens are entered off Westbourne Road. There is a car park on the north-east edge of the site. The entrance lodge (listed grade II) of 1840 with a canted two-storey end towards Westbourne Road was greatly extended and modernised in the later 1980s with a new glass entrance hall, gallery space and shop. From this there is access to the structure housing the National Bonsai Collection (see below).

**OTHER LAND** Leading off the Westbourne Road entrance is the C19 L-shaped range of glasshouses which replaced that begun in 1832 to a design by J Jones & Co of Mount Street, Birmingham. The first glasshouse is the Tropical House of 1852 (rebuilt 1990-1), in the centre of which is a raised circular pool. This House leads into the most prominent of the structures, the Palm House of 1871 (listed grade II) which stands at the south-east angle of the range. This is an 8m high square glasshouse with pyramidal roof, which originally rose in two stages but since rebuilding after a collapse in the late 1960s only one, supported externally by panelled Corinthian pilasters. Internally the main architectural feature is an elaborate fountain and basin. From the Palm House there is access to the south range of 1884 (listed grade II), comprising the Orangery and, on the west side of its central entrance, the Cactus and Succulent House. Behind (north of ) the south range of glasshouses are the Terrace Suite and Bar, which take the place of an Exhibition Hall opened in 1884. Also behind the south range is a boiler house, over which rises an elaborate blue-brick chimney with decorative cap. Built on to the south-east corner of the Palm House is the Pavilion Restaurant of c 1990 with, to its north, a structure housing the National Bonsai Collection, opened in 1993.

Running along the south side of the south range of glasshouses is a terrace (in the 1990s known as the Loudon Terrace) with a broad path and edging of lawn and formal beds. From this there are sweeping views over the tongue-shaped Main Lawn below the terrace and over the wooded Chad Valley beyond. A path, screened from the car park by a beech hedge, runs around the edge of the Lawn. This gives access to the Lawn Aviary of 1996 on the south-east side of the Lawn, four tall, domed, iron flight cages grouped around a central concourse. On the north side of the Aviary is the sunken formal Rose Garden of 1995. Midway down the west side of the Lawn is an octagonal iron bandstand (listed grade II) of 1873, designed by F B Osborn. The third structure around the Lawn stands at the north-west corner, an octagonal, pierced-work, cast-iron gazebo of c 1850 of somewhat oriental inspiration moved to the Botanical Gardens in the mid 1990s from 32 Church Road, Edgbaston.

West of the bandstand is a Coade stone fountain with basin, designed and presented in 1850 by Charles Edge, a prominent Birmingham architect. This forms the hub of a network of sinuous, looping paths which radiates north and south down the west side of the Main Lawn. To the north the paths give access to the Pinetum, whose many mature specimens form a windbreak to the west of the Main Lawn. West of and below the Pinetum are the Winter Garden, and the West Lawn and Herbaceous Border. To the south of the fountain is the Rock (or Alpine) Garden and Pool of 1895, with to the south the Rhododendron Walk and the Ernest 'China' Wilson Border. Beyond, forming the southernmost elements of the gardens within the network of paths, are the Azalea Walk, and the Fern Walk and Woodland Glade laid out 1862(8 during the Pteridomania craze and restored during the 1990s. On the west side of the path looping around the Rhododendron Walk is a Conservation Garden created in 1991. South of this, and occupying the southern corner of the Gardens, is its Nursery. Some of the brick sheds are C19.

At the north-west corner of the Gardens, and separated from the glasshouses by a rectangular Alpine Yard (replacing an earlier Rose Garden) is the Curator's Lodge, built in the 1960s. In 1999 this was extended to become a Study Centre. South of this, against the east boundary of the Gardens, is a series of three (Roman, Medieval, Tudor) Period Gardens created in 1994. Adjoining the Roman Garden to the south is a Waterfowl Pool, south of which is a children's playground. From this there is access west to a museum housed in the ornate red-brick Teulon Cottage (listed grade II), a lodge-like structure of 1847 designed by S S Teulon. Incorporated into the Gardens in 1930, the Cottage may have been constructed to accommodate an employee of the Edgbaston Archery & Lawn Tennis Society, allegedly the world's first lawn tennis club, which in the 1840s took over part

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of the Gardens given up by the Society and whose courts still adjoin the Botanic Gardens to the east. In the garden of Teulon Cottage is a brick seat or shelter moved to the Botanic Gardens from the walled garden at Bournville.

Near the west boundary is a rock garden constructed in 1895 in memory of Sir Hugh Nettlefold, an important benefactor. Water is supplied from a natural spring, the overflow being piped to create an area for moisture-loving perennials.

#### REFERENCES

The Gardeners' Magazine 8, (1832), pp 407-28 The Gardeners' Magazine 15, (1839), p 456 The Gardeners' Chronicle, (28 September 1872), pp 1291-2; (9 December 1893), pp 723-4 Garden History 8, (1980), pp 66-74 M Hadfield et al, British Gardeners: A Biographical Dictionary (1981), p 58 R Sidwell, West Midland Gardens (1981), pp 201-3 P Ballard, An Oasis of Delight: The History of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens (1981) The Birmingham Botanical Gardens & Glasshouses Souvenir Guide, guidebook, (nd, c 1995)

Maps Beilby, Knott and Beilby, Map of Birmingham, 1828 (Birmingham Reference Library)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1890 2nd edition published 1904 1945 edition

Description written: October 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: October 1999

## 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.