

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ASHTON MEMORIAL GARDENS AND WILLIAMSON PARK

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

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
ASHTON MEMORIAL GARDENS AND WILLIAMSON PARK

Name:	ASHTON MEMORIAL GARDENS AND WILLIAMSON PARK
County:	Lancashire
District:	Lancaster (District Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 54.044345 Longitude: -2.7825558 National Grid Reference: SD 48855 61214 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000942 Date first listed: 01-Apr-1986

Details

SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

A public park which was laid out during the 1870s by J Maclean for James Williamson Snr and further developed over subsequent years by James Williamson Jnr, Lord Ashton. The park was given to the people of Lancaster in 1881.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The site originated as an area of open moorland with disused quarries. A painting by W J Linton of 1854 (private collection) shows people seated amongst the dramatic quarry scenery, looking out over Lancaster. This suggests that the area was in recreational use before the park was created and that it was valued for the fine long-distance views over Lancaster and to the Lune Estuary beyond. A gravel drive was laid out across the quarried moors as part of a work creation programme for unemployed cotton spinners during the Cotton Famine of 1862-5 (Ashworth 1989).

James Williamson Snr undertook the development of the area as a public park and the landscape was laid out in a campaign which began during the 1870s to the designs of Mr J Maclean of Castle Donington. A map of 1877 shows that by then the basic pattern of paths and drives had been laid out but little else. The park had not been completed at the time of Williamson's death in 1879 and his son James Williamson, an industrialist and philanthropist, who was created Baron Ashton of Ashton in 1895, continued the work and handed the park to Lancaster Corporation in 1881 with an endowment of £10,000. A major phase of work funded by Lord Ashton commenced in 1904 when the Ashton Memorial was commissioned and various other structures erected.

DESCRIPTION LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Williamson Park is situated on steeply sloping land overlooking the city of Lancaster and the Lune valley beyond to the west. The c 32ha park abuts the wooded grounds of Lancaster Moor Park Hospital on the east side. To the west there are playing fields and residential areas are situated on the north and south sides of the site. The boundary is formed by fencing on the west side and by a stone wall on the other sides; this was formerly surmounted by cast-iron railings on the north side along Quernmore Road and the south side along Wyresdale Road. These have been removed apart from a short section along the southern boundary either side of the entrance to the car park. The eastern boundary with Moor Park Hospital is formed by a simple stone wall which has never had railings.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

There are two entrances with gateways (both listed grade II) and stone lodges (both listed grade II). On the north side, on Quernmore Road, the gateway consists of central stone piers with cast-iron gates flanked by stone arched pedestrian entrances also with cast-iron gates. In a frieze above each of the arched entrances there are the words 'Williamson' and 'Park 1880'. The pedestrian entrances are joined on each side with walls which splay and connect with the boundary wall. A drive leads from the gateway and on its east side there is a stone lodge, called Highfield Lodge. The other main entrance is on Wyresdale Road, on the south side of the site. The lodge here is known as Wyresdale Lodge or Golgotha Lodge. A drive leads south from Highfield Lodge to the Ashton Memorial and joins with drives leading from Golgotha Lodge. These are largely as shown on Harrison & Hall's 1877 map of Lancaster.

A secondary entrance on Quernmore Road, at the extreme north-west corner of the site, consists of stone gate piers and cast-iron gates. There is a similar entrance at the extreme south-west corner of the park, on Wyresdale Road. Another entrance on Wyresdale Road, c 80m east of Golgotha Lodge, formerly served nurseries and is now used for access to the car park.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The principal building of the park is the Ashton Memorial (listed grade I), which was commissioned by Lord Ashton in 1904 and erected 1907-9 to the designs of Sir John Belcher at a cost of more than ?80,000. The monument is c 50m high; panoramic views are obtained from the top and it forms a prominent landmark for many miles around. It is of Portland stone in Baroque style and was described by Sir Niklaus Pevsner as 'the grandest monument in England' (Pevsner 1969). The Memorial was constructed on a plateau, called the Sixpence, and the land falls away on all sides but the east. Some 40m east of the building there is a palm house (listed grade II), now used as a butterfly house, which was designed by Belcher and Joass in c 1909. Between the Memorial and palm house there is a formal garden with lawns flanking a late C20 stone mosaic. A late C20 cafe and shop is situated immediately north-west of this area on the edge of the park.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The park consists of a central area which is mainly open grassland, where the principal buildings are situated, with landscaped former quarries, which are wooded, to the north and south.

The land slopes away steeply from the Memorial giving long-distance views to the north-west, west and south-west. A ramped grass platform, which was formerly the site of a bandstand shown on the 1960 OS map, is situated c 100m north of the Memorial. Sinuous paths lead north from this area through wooded slopes and into hollows with rockwork and precipitous sides which were formed from the disused quarries. Some of the paths are shown on the 1877 map. In one of the hollows, c 150m north of the Memorial, seats have been laid out with a stage in the late C20 to form an amphitheatre. The paths continue through the northern part of the park and they are contrived to give views through the trees across steep drops in some places, and to lead suddenly into canyon-like hollows in others. The paths connect with routes from the two entrances on Quernmore Road.

On the south side of the site the main drive leads past a crescent-shaped lake situated c 150m south of the Memorial. This has steep rocky cliffs along the north, east and south sides and is crossed at its mid-point by a stone balustraded footbridge (listed grade II) which was designed by Belcher and Joass c 1909 to replace a timber bridge. Some 100m south of the Memorial, on an eminence overlooking the lake, there is a tower (listed grade II) which is the remains of a pavilion of c 1909 designed by Belcher and Joass. The paths in the southern part of the park, as in the northern part, lead from the main drive and thread through woodland with dramatic hollows, eminences and stonework formed from the quarries. Some of the routes are shown on the 1877 map. The footings of the Greg Observatory, which was built in 1892, are situated in the woodland c 150m south-west of the Memorial.

There are a number of rustic stone shelters, some with timber framing, disposed around the park which date from the campaign of improvements begun in 1904.

The extreme southern edge of the park, c 80m east of Golgotha Lodge, is the former site of glasshouses which are shown on the 1960 OS map. These have been replaced by a car park.

REFERENCES N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Lancashire* (1969), pp 163-4 *Country Life*, 168 (18 December 1986), pp 1970-1 S Ashworth, *The Lino King: the Life and Times of Lord Ashton* (1989)

Maps Harrison & Hall, *Map of Lancaster*, 1877

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
ASHTON MEMORIAL GARDENS AND WILLIAMSON PARK

OS 6" to 1 mile: Lancashire sheet XXX SE, 1st edition surveyed 1844 Lancashire sheet XXX SE, published 1919 OS 25" to 1 mile: Lancashire sheet XXX SE, surveyed 1891, revised 1931 OS 1:2500: published 1960

Description written: July 1997 Register Inspector: CEH Edited: March 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.