

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

VERNON PARK

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

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Name:	VERNON PARK
District:	Stockport (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.412775 Longitude: -2.1400532 National Grid Reference: SJ 90788 90672 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001308 Date first listed: 10-Feb-1995

Details

A public park opened in 1858.

CHRONOLOGY OF HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1844 the Rt Hon George John Warren, Lord Vernon, gave the council, through the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of Stockport, an area of agricultural land known as Stringer's Fields, then on the outskirts of the town, 'for the purpose of public walks and as a place for outdoor exercise'. The Deed of Gift contained the clause that the council should lay it out as a park and maintain it thereafter. The Deed was consolidated by Act of Parliament in 1847 and included the sale from Lord Vernon to the council of the market rights. This act legitimised the expenditure of monies on the park, and any other park in the borough. Part of the land was retained by Lord Vernon for building purposes. In 1851 however this was purchased for £500 by a local surgeon, S H Cheetham of Millgate Hall, and transferred by him to the Corporation on the same terms as the original Gift. Initially, the Corporation could not agree on spending money on the park and there were objections from local chapels and churches. It was thus not until 1857, when the Manorial Tolls Committee (The Markets Committee) purchased at auction, from their own pocket, 47,000 trees and shrubs, that work on laying out the park started. A further sub-committee was set up to oversee the planting, presenting their report to the council in February 1858. This and the accompanying recommendations being approved, it was agreed that £300 would be allowed to the Park Committee to carry out improvements. The park was opened in September 1858. In 1860 the town's two MPs, James Kershaw and John Benjamin Smith, each subscribed £500 to go towards the building of the Stockport Museum within Vernon Park. The museum was handed over to the Corporation in 1866 and was promptly extended by the addition of a new west wing.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Vernon Park, c 7ha, lies to the north-east of Stockport town centre, occupying an irregular plot on the banks of the River Goyt which forms the eastern boundary of the site. The New Zealand Road defines the western edge of the site, and Newbridge Lane the northern boundary. To the south, the park adjoins Woodbank Memorial Park. The southern end of the site is significantly higher than the area to the north. From the high land there are fine views of the surrounding country to the north and east.

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ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to Vernon Park is the gateway at the corner of Turncroft Lane at the south end of the site. The entrance has suffered some losses: two of the original stone piers have gone, while the gates and the railings of the stone boundary wall were scrapped as part of a salvage drive in 1940.

The main entrance to the site from the Portwood area to the north is the gateway, marked by a pair of stone piers, at the north-west corner of the site at the junction of New Bridge Road and New Zealand Road. Formerly the gateway had an arch over the park gates, erected as part of the park's Jubilee celebrations. It carried the words 'Vernon Park Jubilee, 1858-1908. Williamson and Bell, Mayors', with on the reverse 'Success to Stockport Town and Trade. Health, Peace and Prosperity'.

A third entrance provides access from the west via a gateway in the boundary wall along New Zealand Road. From here a path leads up a long flight of steps, over a bridge spanning the sunken walk along the west side of the museum, to the terraced walk across the bank on the north side of the museum. The bridge is dated 1876 and carries the old Stockport coat of arms.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The museum forms the focus of the higher, southern half of the site and is reached by a drive which leads north from the Turncroft Lane entrance, past a large urn, to the entrance on the south front. A second, matching urn stands to the north-east of the museum.

Almost opposite the entrance to the museum, now set in shrubbery, are the foundations, laid in September 1860, of what was to be a 40m high Observatory Tower. Despite a series of attempts, funds for the tower could not be raised and the 'Amalgamated Friendly Societies of Stockport' eventually had to abandon the idea.

To the west of the museum building are two bowling greens, opened in 1905 and 1908, which occupy the additional piece of land gifted by Cheetham. A pair of shelters stand at the west side of the greens.

To the east of the museum is the site of the oval upper lake, now drained and converted into a sunken garden. Beyond this, forming the east side of the southern part of the park, is a steep bank. This is cut with terraced walks which falls down to the river, dammed here at Stringer's Weir. A flight of steps leads down the bank at the southern end of the site. Some 100m to the north-east of the museum stands the surviving base of the drinking fountain donated by the workforce of Greg Mill.

North from the museum, the ground falls steeply away. At the top of the slope, close to the museum, are the bases surviving from a pair of guns from the Crimea. These had been secured following a proposal by Alderman Hampson who also personally donated a marble statue of Venus. Both statue and cannons have gone, the latter being scrapped in 1940.

Further down the slope, 130m north of the museum, is a levelled platform, the site of the former bandstand erected in 1888 and demolished c 1963. Below this to the west is the site of a shelter erected in 1906.

A long flight of stone steps leads down to the lower part of the park. To the west of the steps, either side of the main terraced cross-walk, the slope is set with rockwork constructed in 1935-6.

The main focus of this northern half of the site is a circular pool surrounded by a network of serpentine paths. The central fountain, only the base of which remains, was donated by the workers of the India Mill. To the south-east is a raised area, the site of the former aviary. Originally a cookhouse, this building stood at the corner of Rostron's Brow in Stockport's Market Place. It was moved to the park in 1885 and converted into an aviary. It burnt down in 1948. The conservatory, erected by the Free Gardeners Society to the north of the pool, has also now gone.

North of the pool is a circular garden, added in the late C19, enclosed with a holly hedge. To the north of the garden, on the northern boundary, stands a shelter constructed in 1906, the row of plane trees along this boundary also having been planted around this date.

The eastern side of the north part of the park was originally occupied by an area of walks north of an oval bowling green. This arrangement was replaced by two recreation grounds, then, in the first decade of the C20, a set of glasshouses was put in (demolished 1950s-60s). By the 1930s the area had been separated off for use as a local authority nursery and remains (1990s) in use as a depot.

Royle's Lane, reputedly a Roman Road, passed through the park area, just to the west of the present museum, its line being partly reflected in the path layout.

REFERENCES

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Special Supplement for Vernon Park Jubilee, Stockport Advertiser, 25 Sept 1908 F Harry, Vernon Park, Woodbank Park and Stockport Museum (1970) R Hampson, Vernon Park- Stockport (booklet 1994) Fact Sheets, (Heritage Protection Society 1994) Postcard collection, notices, posters (Stockport Museum) Newspaper cuttings, photograph collection, site survey, and printed sources (Local Heritage Library)

Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1872-5 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1910 1934 edition OS 5' to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1851

Description written: February 1999 Register Inspector: CB Edited: April 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.