

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WALSALL ARBORETUM

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Name:	WALSALL ARBORETUM
District:	Walsall (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.588637 Longitude: -1.9704653 National Grid Reference: SP 02098 98982 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001534 Date first listed: 04-Jun-2001

Details

A late C19 public park laid out and planted by Richard Lowe of Wolverhampton.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Arboretum occupies the site of Reynolds Hall, the home of the Persehouse family from the C16. In the C18 the estate had been inherited by the Littleton family, who developed extensive lime quarries and associated kilns and workings; this 'group of open quarries called Walsall lime-pits' was noted by the Rev Richard Warner in 1801 (Warner). By the early 1840s at least one of the quarries had been flooded and was used by local people for bathing and skating. In 1844 the mayor of Walsall, John Harvey, was drowned while bathing in the lake which, by the following year, was known as Hatherton Lake after its owner, Edward Walhouse Littleton, who had been created first Lord Hatherton in 1835 (Fink 1954). In the early and mid C19 the flooded quarries were surrounded by detached town gardens, while in the 1850s new premises for Queen Mary's Grammar School and a group of villas were built on Lichfield Street to the north-west of the old quarries. A further group of semi-detached villas, Victoria Terrace, were built on high ground overlooking the lakes; these villas were originally known as Hatherton Lake Villas. In 1870 the Walsall Arboretum and Lake Company was formed in order to provide the town with a public park, and in 1873 a ninety-nine-year lease was taken from Lord Hatherton and Sir George Mellish QC, for 7 acres (c 3ha) to be laid out as a public pleasure ground. As a condition of the lease, the laying out of the park was to cost not less than £1500, while the buildings were to cost at least £2000; Lord Hatherton agreed to contribute £500 towards the cost of constructing a boundary wall. Plans for the buildings to include two lodges, a boathouse, and bandstand were obtained from Robert Griffiths, County Surveyor for Staffordshire, while the scheme for laying out the site was drawn up by Richard Lowe (c 1827-1908), a nurseryman with premises in North Road and Penn Road, Wolverhampton. Although known as the Arboretum, the new park did not contain a scientific collection of trees; its name followed a fashion set by Nottingham Arboretum (qv) (1850-2) and the contemporary Lincoln Arboretum (qv) laid out by Edward Milner in 1872. When Walsall's Arboretum was opened in 1874, an admission charge was made, the lodge in Lichfield Street serving as a private entrance for subscribers. By 1878 the Arboretum Company was experiencing financial difficulties and an unsuccessful approach was made to the town council by the Company with a view to the sale of the lease. In 1879 the United People's Parks Committee and Lammas Lands Rights Defence Association urged the council to acquire the Arboretum and open it free of charge. The sale of Lammas Land to the Midland Railway Company in 1880 enabled the council to begin negotiations, and the following year it secured a three-year lease of the site,

before finally purchasing it from Lord Hatherton in 1884 for £4000. A series of improvements were made in the late C19, and the bicycle track was refurbished.

A further 9 acres (c 3.5ha) was purchased to the south-east of the original Arboretum in 1891, and was laid out by the Borough Surveyor. Games facilities including a gymnasium and two 'giant strides' were provided in the extension, and further improvements in the early C20 included a pavilion and refreshment room designed by H E Lavender in 1902 and an open-air swimming pool built in 1912; the latter closed in 1956. Tennis courts and bowling greens were also constructed in the early C20, while the old town stocks were removed to the park in 1904. In 1924 a new bandstand was constructed on the site of the C19 structure, and at the same time rock gardens were constructed to provide work for unemployed men. The pavilion and refreshment room was refurbished in 1937 and reopened as the Joseph Leckie Sons of Rest Pavilion for the use of retired men. In the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s additional land was purchased to the east of the C19 Arboretum, creating a green link between the town and Barr Beacon. These areas, which were laid out with sports pitches and areas of informal planting, lie outside the site here registered. Today (2001), the Arboretum remains in municipal ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Arboretum is situated c 0.5km north-east of the centre of Walsall. The c 11ha site is irregularly shaped on plan, and is bounded to the north-west by the A461, Lichfield Street, and to the south-west by the A4148, Broadway North. To the north the boundary is formed by a rocky cliff which separates the park from the gardens of the mid C19 villas known as Victoria Terrace (all listed grade II), while to the north-east the site is adjoined by Buchanan Road, the early and mid C19 buildings and gardens associated with Moss Close Farm, and the gardens of early C20 villas on the south side of Buchanan Road. The south-east boundary is formed by a public footpath which links Broadway North and Buchanan Road; this path formed the boundary of the 1891 extension to the original Arboretum and to the south-east is adjoined by the early and mid C20 Arboretum extension. The southern boundary is formed by premises fronting Broadway North, while c 200m south-east of the junction of Broadway North and Lichfield Street, Arboretum Road leads north-east into the site. The east side of Arboretum Road is lined with large, late C19 villas overlooking the park to the west; the road formed the eastern boundary of the original Arboretum. The boundaries adjoining public roads are all closed by late C19 brick walls c 1.5m high; those fronting Lichfield Street, Broadway North, and Arboretum Road were designed in 1873 by Robert Griffiths, County Surveyor.

The site is undulating as a result of historic lime working, the original or western area being dominated by two flooded quarries, with a steep rock face rising to the north below Victoria Terrace. The eastern section of the site comprises a valley through which a stream flows from south-east to north-west. The ground to the north-east of the stream has been terraced to allow the construction of tennis courts and bowling greens, while to the south-west the ground rises gently towards the site boundary. From the western section of the Arboretum there are views south-west towards prominent buildings in the town centre, including the Council House and the parish church, and west to buildings on Lichfield Street including the former Queen Mary's Grammar School. To the north, the gardens of the villas in Victoria Terrace occupy a prominent position above the north lake. To the north-east, villas and associated gardens in Buchanan Road close views from the park.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance to the Arboretum is situated at the west corner of the site, adjacent to the junction of Lichfield Street and Broadway North, and comprises a pair of lodges linked by a screen wall containing a pair of arched entrances, surmounted by a tall clock tower. The lodges are built in a Tudor-Gothic style with stepped gables and other picturesque details, and are constructed in red brick with stone dressings. The principal entrance was designed in 1873 by the County Surveyor, Robert Griffiths, as part of the original layout of the site. A further lodge and entrance designed by Griffiths are situated on Lichfield Street at a point c 200m north-east of its junction with Broadway North. The lodge is built in similar Tudor-Gothic style with stepped gables and diaper-work, while the entrance comprises a pair of wrought-iron gates with spear-headed rails, supported by a pair of brick piers. When opened as a commercial pleasure ground in 1874, this formed a private entrance for subscribers.

An entrance comprising a pair of wrought-iron gates supported by brick piers surmounted by stone ball finials and flanked by quadrant railings leads to the site from the north-east end of Arboretum Road. This entrance was constructed c 1891 to give

access from Arboretum Road to the eastern extension of the site; it replaced an earlier gateway leading north-west into the site from Arboretum Road (OS 1887, 1902). There is a further entrance to the site from the public footpath forming its south-east boundary. This comprises a pair of rustic Cotswold stone piers which support a pair of mid C20 wrought-iron gates; the entrance formed part of a scheme of improvements made to the park in the mid 1930s. A pedestrian gate provides access to the site from Buchanan Road at a point immediately west of Moss Close Farm.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The principal entrance leads directly to a tarmac walk which forms a perimeter walk around the western or original Arboretum. The Arboretum is dominated by Hatherton Lake, which is separated from the lodge by an area of lawns with formal bedding displays, a mid C20 fountain, and a late C20 wrought-iron bandstand. From the lodge the perimeter walk leads east along the southern end of the lake, to reach a group of three hard tennis courts at the south-east corner of the site; these courts replaced a group of late C19 tennis lawns (OS 1887), which themselves occupied the site of a quoits ground and gymnasium (Foster 1973). The walk continues for c 100m north-east along the east side of the lake and immediately west of a canalised stream which is ornamented with rockwork; it passes a glacial boulder which was moved to the park in 1925 (inscription). To the east, a series of informal walks pass through mature trees and evergreen shrubbery planted on a west-facing slope rising to Arboretum Road. Some 160m east of the entrance, the circuit walk reaches the bandstand, which is constructed on the east bank of the lake facing a series of four west-facing seating terraces. The bandstand is of alcove form with a half-dome roof with a cupola and flagstaff finial; to north and south the bandstand is flanked by seating alcoves. The present bandstand was constructed in 1924, replacing a structure of conventional octagonal form on the same site which had been part of the 1873 park scheme. The terraces south-east of the bandstand comprise four levels linked by steps flanked by topiary specimen yews and aligned with the bandstand. The terraces, which are retained by drystone walls and surfaced in gravel, support a range of ornamental shrubs. The terraces are contemporary with the bandstand and replaced a late C19 circular feature approached by steps which had a flagstaff as its focal point (OS 1887, 1914); to the north of the flagstaff a level terrace was used for dancing (Foster 1973).

Some 130m north-east of the bandstand the walk reaches a small, early C20 timber refreshment pavilion which stands adjacent to the town stocks. Removed to the park in 1904, the stocks stand under a small hipped-roofed timber shelter. The walk continues round the northern end of the lake, passing along a causeway separating Hatherton Lake from a smaller lake to the north. The causeway forms a formal walk bounded by a low beech hedge and an avenue of Lombardy poplars. Continuing west, the walk leads to a junction with a further curvilinear walk bordered by ornamental rockwork which ascends to the Lichfield Street lodge. To the north-east of this walk are two terraced bowling greens which ascend to the gardens of villas in Victoria Terrace. The bowling greens are screened from the north lake by mixed ornamental planting; they were originally formed as croquet grounds (ibid). The lakeside walk continues west and south-west passing a series of rocky outcrops, and, c 240m north-north-east of the principal entrance, the late C19 boathouse. The boathouse is of open-fronted timber construction under a hipped tiled roof; it formed part of the 1873 scheme for the original park and is prominent in views across the lake. A mid C20 brick and concrete shelter is built into the east-facing slope below Lichfield Street some 10m south-west of the boathouse; this affords views east across the lake.

To the north-east of Hatherton Lake is an approximately elliptical area of lawn which is enclosed by a walk; this originated in the late C19 as a cycle track which enclosed a lawn used for archery and cricket (ibid). North-east of the lawn a formal terraced garden behind a clipped beech hedge occupies the site of late C19 display glasshouses. The garden comprises three shallow terraces linked by steps and retained by brick walls, which are laid to grass with geometric beds for seasonal planting. The garden is enclosed to the north-east by a brick and timber pergola and the former rear wall of the glasshouses. The garden contains a monumental stone sculpture, *Round and Round the Garden* by Liz Lemon (1988). To the north-west of the formal garden is a service yard with associated late C19 brick bothies and sheds. South-east of the formal garden an early C20 rockery comprising lawns and ornamental planting, a pool, cascade, and an open-fronted octagonal summerhouse, is enclosed to the north by mixed ornamental trees and shrubs. Stone steps ascend through this planting to reach a pedestrian gate leading to Buchanan Road. The rock garden was constructed in 1924 using the labour of local unemployed men.

The late C19 eastern extension of the Arboretum comprises a shallow valley through which a stream flows from south-east to north-west. The stream is retained by a series of rocky cascades and its rocky margins are planted with moisture-loving plants and specimen trees. Walks run parallel with the stream to north-east and south-west; these are linked at various points by rustic stone footbridges. The walk to the north-east links a group of tennis courts and bowling greens. The two western tennis courts are separated by a narrow formal garden with geometric flower beds set in brick and stone paving. To the north, this garden is terminated by an open-fronted timber shelter. To the south-east of the bowling greens is a formal rose garden enclosed by beech hedges which comprises a grass walk flanked by beds divided by clipped beech buttresses. To the north the walk broadens into a circular enclosure with a central specimen tree. A raised terrace walk to the north of the tennis courts and bowling greens and parallel to the north-east boundary of the site allows views across the valley.

To the south-west of the stream a broad, tree-lined tarmac walk leads c 350m south-east from the lawn north-east of Hatherton Lake to the gate leading to the footpath forming the south-east boundary of the site. Some 30m south-east of the Arboretum Road entrance, the Leckie Sons of Rest Pavilion stands on the north-facing slope above the walk. The pavilion comprises two storeys and a basement, with basement and ground-floor verandahs and a half-timbered gable on the north facade. Constructed in brick and wrought-iron under a hipped tiled roof, the pavilion was built as a refreshment room in 1902 to the design of H E Lavender; it was refurbished as a Sons of Rest pavilion in 1937 and retains the original single saloon on the ground floor. Below the pavilion the sloping lawn is laid out with geometric flower beds for seasonal planting. To the south-east the north-facing slope is laid out with a terraced rose garden. Steps enclosed by yew hedges and surmounted by late C20 wrought-iron arches ascend through the centre of the rose garden to an early C20 gardener's house c 30m south of the pavilion. The north-east-facing slope beyond the rose garden is laid out with lawns planted with specimen trees and a boundary screen of shrubbery. The path pattern with curvilinear walks passing through this area corresponds closely to that shown on the 1902 and 1914 OS maps. Some 160m south-east of the pavilion and rose garden a slightly sunken, approximately rectangular flagged area occupies the site of the early C20 swimming pool which was closed in 1956. To the south-west of this area is a small, early C20 brick and timber ornamental pavilion, while to north-west a pair of late C20 linked brick octagonal pavilions stand on the site of the mid C20 aviary. Beyond the site of the swimming pool, and immediately north of the gateway leading to the footpath forming the boundary of the site, is a stone refreshment pavilion known as the Richard B Sutton Shelter (inscription). Constructed in Cotswold stone under a hipped tiled roof with a loggia supported by circular-section rustic stone columns, the shelter was built in 1934 (inscription).

REFERENCES

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Archival items W T Foster, *A History of Walsall Arboretum*, typescript study, 1973 (Walsall Local History Centre)

Description written: March 2001 Register Inspector: JML Edited: October 2002

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.