

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ROPNER PARK

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

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Name:	ROPNER PARK
District:	Stockton-on-Tees (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 54.557290 Longitude: -1.3313044 National Grid Reference: NZ 43344 18211 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001628 Date first listed: 28-Jun-2002 Date of most recent amendment: 22-Aug-2013 Statutory Address 1: Ropner Park, Stockton-on-tees

Historique de la conservation

In 1890 Stockton-on-Tees Town Council appointed a committee to consider the purchase of land for a public park. On 11 June 1890 the committee recommended that 36 acres and 26 perches (c 14.6ha) of land known as Hartburn Fields be bought for the sum of £8250, but concerns were raised by the Council regarding the financial burden to the town (North Eastern Daily Gazette 1893). In the same month the Council received an offer from Major (later Sir) Robert Ropner of Preston Hall, a highly successful local businessman, to pay the cost of the ground. The offer was accepted and, in recognition of the gift, Ropner was made the first Freeman of the Borough and, although not a Councillor, accepted the office of Mayor in November 1892.

In 1890 the Council purchased, for £1026 11s 3d, a further 3 acres, 1 rood and 371/2 perches (c 1.2ha) of adjoining ground to the west which sloped down from the level Hartburn Fields and extended to a stream, Lustrum Beck (Northern Review 1893). This land included a small area of water and the exchange of some parcels of land with an adjoining owner enabled the stream to be realigned and the water extended to form an ornamental lake (Development Plan 1996).

Competitive designs were invited for the park and from the fifteen entries received the first award was given to Messrs Backhouse and Co of York, the second to Mr H Kershaw of Bradford, and the third to Mr G I Rose of Manchester (North Eastern Daily Gazette 1893). The Borough Surveyor, Mr K F Campbell, was then instructed to prepare a final plan for the park on the basis of the three best designs. Laying out of the park commenced on 25 July 1891 with the cutting of the first sod by Mrs Ropner (Northern Review 1893). Contracts were awarded to Messrs Meston of London for excavation, drains, and roads, to W C Atkinson of Stockton for the lodges, railings, and fences, and to Messrs Little and Ballantyne of Carlisle for trees and shrubs, the total cost of laying out the park amounting to c £17,000 (ibid). The park was unofficially opened to the public on 8 June 1893 followed by a grand official opening by the Duke and Duchess of York on 4 October 1893. The park then included three lodges, a cast-iron fountain by Carrons of Glasgow, a stone drinking fountain relocated from Stockton High Street, a bandstand by MacFarlanes of Glasgow, a recreation ground, a bowling green, a tennis lawn, gymnasia for boys and girls at the south-west and north-east corners and, to the west of the bandstand, stone steps leading down to a lake and terrace walks (North Eastern Daily Gazette 1893). The main lodge was occupied by the park's curator, Mr H A Mann, formerly of the Crystal Palace (qv) (Northern Review 1893). A small nursery area to the north-west of the park was extended by c 0.5ha in

1938. An open-air theatre constructed in the south-west of the park in 1951 to celebrate the Festival of Britain was demolished in c 1984. A lodge in the north of the park was sold to private owners in 1981. The stone drinking fountain was, prior to 2002, re-sited in the centre of Stockton.

A two year regeneration of the park was completed between 2004-06 to restore the park back to its former splendour. This included the replacement of original features, including the grand golden entrance gates. Ropner Park remains (2013) in use as a public park and in the ownership of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

Details

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Ropner Park lies 0.8km south-west of Stockton-on-Tees town centre. The c 15.5ha site is roughly square with, to the west, a narrow arm extending north. To the south the main area of the park is bounded by Hartburn Lane while to the east it is separated from a railway line by Marlborough Road. In the north-east corner the park is bounded by Balmoral Terrace. These road boundaries are marked by C20 railings. To the west of Balmoral Road the main area and northern arm of the park adjoin late C19 housing to the north and east respectively with these boundaries generally marked by timber fences and hedges with some remnants of late C19 railings. The northern arm of the park adjoins a nursery and training area to the north-west and a lodge, now in private ownership, to the north-east. The former boundary is marked by late C20 railings and the latter by late C20 security fencing. To the west the park is bounded by the irregular line of Lustrum Beck with this boundary generally marked by C20 railings with short sections of late C19 railings. All boundaries are lined with tree and shrub borders, a feature remarked on at the opening in 1893 (North Eastern Daily Gazette 1893).

The main eastern area of the park occupies level ground. To the west of this area the ground slopes down to the Lustrum Beck on the western boundary with a lower level area extending through the northern arm of the park. The surrounding area is mainly residential with predominantly late C19/early C20 terraced housing to the north and east, late C19 semi-detached villas adjoining the northern arm to the north and east, and mid to late C20 housing to the south and west.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance is situated at the centre of the southern boundary with Hartburn Lane. It is marked by a pair of late C19 ornate stone gate piers and two C20 metal bollards. A 1905 photograph of the entrance (Stockton-on-Tees Reference Library) shows a central carriage entrance, with a further pair of similar stone piers, and two pedestrian entrances, all with gates. Immediately to the east is situated a late C19 two-storey lodge with brick and half-timbered elevations below steeply pitched roofs.

A second entrance, of carriage width, gives access from Balmoral Terrace at its junction with Osborne Road (formerly Camford Road) to the north, 360m north-north-east of the principal entrance. Opposite this entrance, to the south, is situated a small single-storey lodge in similar style to that at the principal entrance. Further entrances are situated at the north-west, north-east, south-east, and south-west corners of the main, higher level of the park. These entrances are generally marked by C20 iron gates flanked by railings, the south-east entrance without a gate.

Some 260m north-west of the principal entrance a footpath leads over Lustrum Beck into the lower, western area of the park from Hartburn Avenue. A carriage entrance situated 480m north-north-west of the principal entrance gives access to this area via an unmade lane between houses on Richmond Road. This entrance is marked by late C19 low cast-iron gate posts, flanked by short lengths of late C19 railings, with one of a pair of gates remaining (2002). At the north-west corner of the park a further informal entrance leads into the park from Nursery Lane via the adjoining nursery and training area.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS From the principal entrance a 9m wide axial walk leads northwards for 150m to the central point of the main level area of the park where it divides to form a circle around a late C19 ornate three-tier circular cast-iron fountain. Either side of the path are flower beds set in grass. To the north the central fountain area is enclosed by an embanked crescent-shaped ornamental planting border topped with a low hedge and shrubs. This border feature was noted in a contemporary account of the opening of the park, together with the fountain which had forty side jets and a central spray (North Eastern Daily Gazette 1893). The fountain has been renovated and reset, but the side jets are no longer in place. From the fountain wide cross-axial walks lead c 140m to east and west, bisecting the main level area of the park within a perimeter

path around the main, higher level area of the park. At the eastern extremity of the cross-axial is an early C21 metal artwork entitled 'Bird Swallows Fish', replacing the old stone drinking fountain. The axial and cross-axial walks are lined with double rows of mature trees. To the south of the cross-axial walks the ground is laid out with intersecting curving paths, some laid to grass, partially enclosed by narrow belts of trees and shrubs set within open grassed ground, the whole design being loosely symmetrical about the main axial walk. North of the main cross-axial walk the shrub- and tree-lined curving paths, intersecting with the perimeter path, enclose two oval areas of ground at the north-west and north-east corners of the main area of the park. The area between the two is an irregular grassed sports ground. The north-west oval contains a sports area. A path leading into this area from the east is lined with low rockwork. The north-east oval contains two square bowling greens, a late C20 bowling pavilion, and the northern park lodge. Both oval areas are shown laid out with tennis grounds on the 1899 OS map with the bowling greens and a small pavilion indicated on the 1915 edition. The Ropner Park Bowling Club occupies the north-east corner.

The western arm of the perimeter path around the main area of the park curves to the right then widens to form a north/south promenade, parallel with the axial walk from the principal entrance. East of the perimeter path an area has been developed into a wild flower meadow. The promenade is sited at the tree-lined head of an embankment, overlooking the lower area of the park to the west, and at its centre intersects with the main cross-axial walk. This junction is marked by a level circular area above a semicircular projection in the embankment to the west and is the site of the former bandstand. A new bandstand was built in 2006. Some 35m to the west a further embankment follows the line of the promenade. A path at the foot of this second embankment forms an outer, western, irregular loop to the perimeter path. To the north and south of the embanked ground, and adjacent to the respective park boundaries, lie two small, sunken oval areas enclosed by trees and shrubs. These areas are indicated on the 1899 OS map and are identified in reports of the park opening as gymnasia, for girls and boys respectively (Northern Review 1893). In the mid to late C20 the northern oval was laid out as a rose garden.

100m north of the bandstand is an adventure playground with C21 play equipment, designed to emphasise the nautical heritage of the Ropner family. Alongside the playground are three tennis courts. A pavilion built in early C21 contains a cafe, toilets and changing rooms. Between the pavilion and the tennis courts is a floral replica of S.S Millpool, originally one of the Ropner fleet of merchant vessels, lost at sea in a storm. A memorial plaque remembers those who lost their lives. Around the park are six pieces from Ropner vessels, which have been restored and painted silver.

From the bandstand a cross-axial path leads west for 100m, with two flights of stone and concrete steps down the embankments, to the lower level of the park where it joins an irregular path following the line of the Lustrum Beck on the western boundary. Low concrete strings to the steps are topped with occasional pieces of rockwork and an early C20 photograph (Stockton-on-Tees Reference Library) shows this as a continuous feature. The path divides 150m north-east of the bandstand, the division to the east continues around the perimeter of the park while the westerly path leads to the lake with a wooded area to the north and a flat, grassy area to the south, used for games and events. This path forms a circuit around the perimeter of a long narrow lake of c 1.4ha which occupies the majority of ground in the northern arm of the park. This level northern area lies below an irregular embankment to the south-east, which follows the outline of the lake. The lake has three small islands to the south planted with trees and shrubs. The edge of the lake is largely lined with narrow beds of tree and shrub planting between short lengths of irregular stonework. The circuit path is enclosed with similar, deeper boundary planting. Late C20/ early C21 stonework embankments define the whole perimeter of both the water and islands.

The layout and character of planting within the park appears to be little altered from that indicated on the 1899 OS map and described in contemporary reports of the opening in 1893, although the mature trees now offer a different view of the lake than those seen in the early photographs.

Summary

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A public park opened in 1893 and laid out to a plan by the Borough Surveyor, Mr K F Campbell, prepared from the basis of three competitive submissions for the design.

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.

Reasons for Designation

Ropner Park, Stockton on Tees, opened in 1893, is designated at Grade II* for the following principal reasons: * Date: the park is a good example of a late Victorian municipal park; * Design: although enhanced, the park's design is essentially unchanged from its original layout of 1893; * Designer: the park was designed by the Borough Surveyor, drawing on designs submitted for a competition; * Structures: the park retains various C19 structures; * Planting: the planting within the park appears much as depicted on late C19 OS maps.

Bibliographie

Books and journals

Cook, R, Stockton-on-Tees in old picture postcards , (1985), fig 79

Other

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Drawings for the south lodge and bandstand, c 1892 (Stockton-on-Tees Museum Service),

Early C20 photographs of Ropner Park (Stockton-on-Tees Reference Library),

North Eastern Daily Gazette, 4 October 1893,

Northern Echo, 9 June 1993,

P Vickers and H A Taylor, Public Parks Stage One Survey, Ropner Park, (EH Review 1995),

Ropner Park Development Plan, (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council 1996),

Stockton Evening Gazette, 11 January 1962,

Supplement to Northern Review, 7 October 1893, p 3,