

VICTORIA PARK

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| Ref number | PGW (Gm) 23 (CDF) |
| OS Map | 171 |
| Grid ref | ST 155 768 |
| Former county | South Glamorgan |
| Unitary authority | The City and County of Cardiff |
| Community council | Canton |
| Designations | Listed building: Canopy over drinking fountain near north-east end of lake in Victoria Park Grade II |
| Site evaluation | Grade II |
| Primary reasons for grading | A small but intact Victorian public park retaining most of its original layout, a fine drinking fountain, some planting and Cardiff's first municipal bowling green. |
| Type of site | Urban public park |
| Main phases of construction | 1894-97 |

Site description

Victoria Park is a small Victorian urban public park in the Llandaff district of Cardiff. It is four-sided, lying on level ground between the curving Thomson Avenue in the north and Cowbridge Road in the south. The surrounding streets are residential. The 19-acre park arose out of a decision in 1891 by the corporation's Property Committee to hand over to the Parks Committee that part of Ely Common which it was proposed to convert into a park. The borough engineer, Mr Harpur, submitted alternative plans, and in 1894 work began on railings. The people of Canton mounted a campaign to keep a pond within the park area, as it was much used for skating, and work began in 1895 on the layout, including a lake. The park was opened on 16 June 1897 and was called Victoria Park in honour of the queen's Diamond Jubilee. It was described as: 'a beautifully laid out piece of ground with smooth firm greenswards and broad level paths, and delightful beds well-furnished with flowers, shrubs and trees. There is a lake with two beautiful fountains in it; there is a substantial and yet artistic bandstand, and a 2-acre space of playground for the children'. The bandstand was installed in 1897, the second in Cardiff, the first having been at Grange Gardens in 1895.

The intention was to establish a zoological collection in the park, but nothing was done until 1900 when an 'aviary' was instigated. In 1901 a pair of 'Bantam Storks' were installed, followed by two monkeys. Gifts, particularly from returning sea captains, followed, including an ostrich, an antelope, a mongoose, golden pheasants, two South American owls and an Australian owl. A *Gardeners' Chronicle* article of 3

March 1923 mentions the 'large area of water which is the home of many wild-fowl and a seal'. The seal, 'Billy', lived in the park from 1912 until his (her) death in 1939. A Crimean War cannon stood in the south-east corner of the park and during the First World War a tank and two 25-pounder guns were installed. All were melted down during the Second World War.

The park is laid out with winding tarmac paths, mown grass and informally planted trees. It is surrounded by iron railings, with gates at the entrances on the north and south sides. Around the perimeter is a belt of mixed trees. The trees are mainly deciduous, and include sycamore, horse chestnut, cherries, acers, and a large tulip tree. Other trees and shrubs mentioned in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* article of 1923, such as Taxodium, Pawlonia, Atlantic cedar, hollies and bamboos, have gone. Near the north end is a slightly raised grass circle, edged with stone, with a modern bandstand in the centre, on the site of the former bandstand. Paths radiating from the circle are partly lined with horse chestnuts, with Lawson cypresses at the south end of the south-west path. This is the remnant of an avenue which was in existence in 1923.

At the north end of the park is a bowling green screened from the rest of the park by a hedge. This is on the site of the earliest bowling green in Cardiff, laid down in the winter of 1904-05 and opened on 10 June 1905. Then it consisted merely of a level lawn of ordinary meadow turf. Inside the entrance in the north-east corner, between two diverging paths, is a triangular bed for bedding plants with a central tiered iron support for hanging baskets. On the west side is a small children's playground, and in the centre is a kidney-shaped paddling pool surrounded by low railings. This is a modern replacement of the original lake, which from the contemporary descriptions would appear to have been larger. In 1906 some tennis courts were built, but these have gone.

The south end of the park is more formal, with a circular arrangement of island beds and radiating paths. The radiating segmental beds are filled with colourful bedding plants and have strips of grass around them. Around the outside is a circular path, and beyond are three outer beds - a circular one at the north end and two triangular ones at the south end. In the centre is a circular bed of bedding plants surrounded by low railings. In the middle of it stands an octagonal domed drinking fountain of elaborate cast ironwork. It stands on an octagonal plinth of brick and stone and consists of eight slender columns topped by an open scrollwork dome of cast iron with a pinnacle on top. Circular roundels above the arches at the top of the columns have inscriptions of 'The Pavement' and 'Keep dry' alternating with storks. A plaque records that the whole is a memorial to Lewin L. Samuel, who died in 1893. It was presented to the city in 1908.

Note

Since this description was written the park has undergone major restoration work, including the replacement of a *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, which had stood on the site of the original bandstand, by a modern replica of the bandstand.

Sources

Primary

Pettigrew, A., 'The public parks and recreation grounds of Cardiff' (unpublished typescript, 1926), vol. 2, pp. 86-95.

Secondary

Gardeners' Chronicle 3 March 1923, p. 119.