

PENARTH, ALEXANDRA PARK

Ref number	PGW (Gm) 37 (GLA)
OS Map	171
Grid ref	ST 187 715
Former county	South Glamorgan
Unitary authority	The Vale of Glamorgan Council
Community council	Penarth
Designations Area: Penarth	Listed building: Cenotaph Grade II. Conservation
Site evaluation	Grade II*
Primary reasons for grading	Well preserved Edwardian urban public park in an attractive location overlooking the Bristol Channel, retaining its layout and many of its original features.
Type of site	Urban public park
Main phases of construction	1901-02

Site description

Alexandra Park is a public urban park in the heart of Penarth. It occupies a roughly rectangular area sloping to the east and south, bounded by Beach Road on the north, the former public baths and a block of flats on the site of the Esplanade Hotel on the east and housing on the south. The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1878 shows the area as fields between two wooded dingles. Development followed the opening of the railway station in 1878 and in 1883 a footpath down the southern dingle from the station to the beach was laid out by the Windsor estate. Further paths followed and footbridges were built across the dingles. In 1895 the Penarth Urban District Council began laying out public open spaces provided by the Windsor estate, including Alexandra Park. The park was laid out quickly in 1901-02 and much of its layout, planting, terracing and many of its original features survive. Some original built features have gone and been replaced by others, and some ornaments, particularly a First World War tank and some cannons have also disappeared. The original octagonal bandstand was removed in the 1950s and a square wooden shelter survived until 1994, when it was replaced with the present structure. Many of the seats, the park gates and boundary fencing are original. Although there was an intention to make the planting of botanical interest this was not carried out and planting was sparse at first. Many of the conifers, such as the pines (*Pinus nigra*), Lawson cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*) and Monterey cypress were planted just before or after the First World War.

In the 1920s the Cenotaph, Garden of Remembrance and topiary were added. During the Second World War some new paths were added, including the path and steps up the northern dingle opposite the lodge and steps from the south-east entrance to the bandstand area. Further changes took place in the 1950s, when the bandstand was replaced by the aviary, which was built around a shelter taken from Belle Vue Park, Penarth.

There are several points of access to the park, the main ones being at the north-west, north-east and south-east corners. The park can also be reached from the public footpath down The Dingle, a valley that runs along the south side of the park. The park is bounded by simple iron railings, with a hawthorn hedge along the east side. The entrances have pairs of cast iron gates flanked by square iron gate piers with tapering ornamental finials. The north-east entrance has a two-storey red brick lodge, now separated from the park, with a red tiled roof and mock half-timbered upper floor. In its garden is a large monkey puzzle tree.

The park is laid out in several distinct areas through which runs a network of paths. These are generally of tarmac, although some stone paved paths dating to the 1940s do remain in the valley at the north end of the park. Two valleys, running down from west to east, occupy the north and south sides of the park. Both are woodland areas, but of rather different character. The southern valley, The Dingle, is more natural, with a deciduous tree canopy, mainly of oak, and with a natural flora beneath, particularly of wild garlic. This is a relic of the pre-park landscape. The stream running down the dingle is crossed by a concrete bridge taking the public footpath across to the south side to run along the south boundary of the park. A pedestrian gate similar to the south-east entrance gate leads from the park to the public footpath.

The valley along the north side is planted mainly with deciduous trees but also contains some very tall pines (*Pinus nigra*). Two paths wind down the valley, the upper one flanked by a row of cypresses near the west end. One crosses the (dry) stream and runs down the north side of the valley. Near the east end is a raised earthen causeway taking a path across the valley to two glasshouses. These are relatively modern but both are disused. The 1915 Ordnance Survey map shows one glasshouse here, whose footings remain. Below the causeway a stone paved path dating to the 1940s runs along the bottom of the valley. It is bounded by a dry-stone revetment wall and then edged with large stones near its west end.

From the north-west entrance a wide path leads southwards, flanked by sloping lawns, with island flowerbeds of bedding plants and a few ash and sycamore trees to the west. The ground drops eastwards, and on the slope below the path is a row of cypresses, with three large topiary yew bushes near the entrance. Next to the entrance are three large pines and a small rockery bed edged with looped iron fencing. A hedge and shrub border run along the west boundary. Towards the south end steps lead up to a square raised bed to the west of the path. This is the Tank Bed, so called after a First World War tank which stood here for a long time. It is thought to have been removed during the Second World War.

Immediately west of the entrance is a small, separate garden, bounded by iron railings, laurel and berberis hedging. This is a Garden of Remembrance to the dead of the Second World War, laid out in the 1920s. A small plaque on the north side commemorates the dead. The garden is laid out with two rectangular lawns flanked by paths, with flowerbeds along the north side. The south-west side is bordered by cypresses.

The central part of the park is the most elaborately laid out. At the upper end is a prominent war memorial cenotaph designed by Goscombe John and erected in 1924. It is a stepped obelisk of white granite standing on a low grass mound, with steps up on the east side. Above is an inscription in remembrance of the dead of both the First and Second World Wars with a bronze figure of winged Victory above. The memorial stands in a lawn with rose beds cut in it. A tarmac path leads eastwards down towards the pool, flanked by lawn and on the north a hawthorn hedge. To the south is a small circular garden surfaced with tarmac, surrounded by a low yew hedge topped with yew topiary shaped in tiers with rounded tops. The hedges and topiary also flank the paths leading to the garden. They date to the 1920s and are shown on photographs dating to the 1920s and 1930s. In the centre of this garden, on a square of concrete, is a modern octagonal 'bandstand' built to a traditional design in modern materials, with iron latticework piers and a curving metal roof. It is simple but elegant and has benching around one side, making it more of a seat than a bandstand. It stands on the site of a wooden shelter and was erected in 1994.

A curving path flanked by yew hedging and topiary leads from the east side of the bandstand garden to a wide tarmac terrace that runs south-west/north-east below it. This has iron-framed, wooden-slatted benches along the front and similar continuous benching along the back, behind which is an escallonia and cotoneaster hedge and slope up to the bounding hedge of the bandstand garden. In the centre is the circular concrete base where until recently a sundial stood. Towards the east end concrete steps lead down to a circular tarmac terrace, the upper side revetted with a wall of large dry-stone blocks, the lower half edged with stones. Benches similar to those on the terrace are ranged around the edge. In the centre is an aviary. This is a small single-storey building of wood, with a corrugated iron roof and open-air cages on the north and south. It stands in a circular bed edged with 'rope' tile edging and a low looped iron fence and planted with a few shrubs, cypresses and cordylines. The aviary was built in 1972, partly out of material from a shelter in Belle Vue Park, Penarth. It stands on the site of the original bandstand, which was demolished some time ago. There was then a period until 1972 when the site was a flowerbed. A flight of steps on the south side lead down to an east-west path.

To the west of the aviary is a sloping lawn with four island beds arranged in a fleur-de-lis or Prince of Wales's feathers pattern. This was instigated in the 1920s. On the west the lawn is bounded by clipped griselinia bushes.

At the eastern end of the terrace steps lead down into the valley to the north and a short path leads south-eastwards to another circular tarmac terrace, this one largely occupied by a circular pool edged with stones forming a raised rim, with an inner, lower ring of stones. It was made, in its present form, in about 1920. In the centre is a naturalistic rockwork dripping fountain overgrown with moss and cotoneaster. The pool is surrounded by low, looped, iron fencing. On the east side steps, flanked by cypress bushes, lead to a small children's play area. On the north side is a bench sheltered by laurel hedging, to the north of which, in a laurel alcove, is a low ornamental iron column on a circular concrete base, with a circular concrete top. Its purpose is obscure but may have been a sundial base, part of a fountain, or a table.

To the south paths lead down a grass slope with a few island beds and deciduous trees, including birches. There are three bay trees towards the west end, in the corners of a flowerbed by the pedestrian entrance to The Dingle. At the east end of the slope is a stand of pines (*Pinus nigra*) at the foot of which is a small single-storey stone building, which used to serve as the filter building for the former baths

below the park, opposite the south-east entrance. The 1915 Ordnance Survey map shows two further buildings above this one, but they have now gone.

Sources

Primary

'Plan of Lord Plymouth's estates in Penarth, Llandough, Cogan and Lavernock, 1768'.

Glamorgan Record Office: D/D Pl 6.

Map of Windsor land in Penarth, 1820-40. Glamorgan Record Office: D/D Pl 7/3536.

Secondary

W. Mate & Sons, *Mate's Illustrated Penarth* (1903).

J.F. Pickford & Sons, *Pickford's Penarth Guide* (1909).

Postcards from the 1920s and 1930s.

Thorne, R., *Penarth, a history* (1975).

Moore, P., 'Penarth', in *South Glamorgan: a county history* (1975), pp. 116-38.

Hilling, J.B., 'The buildings of Llandaff, Penarth and outer Cardiff: an historical survey', *Glamorgan Historian* 17, pp 102-47.

Newman, J., *The Buildings of Wales. Glamorgan* (1995), p. 494.

Thomas, B. A., *Penarth the garden by the sea* (1997).