

PONTCANNA FIELDS AND LLANDAFF FIELDS

Ref number	PGW (Gm) 59 (CDF)
OS Map	171
Grid ref	ST 165 776
Former county	South Glamorgan
Unitary authority	The City and County of Cardiff
Community council	Riverside, Llandaff
Designations (part)	Conservation Area: Llandaff (part), Cathedral Road
Site evaluation	Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading A well preserved central urban park which, with Bute Park and Sophia Gardens, gives Cardiff an unusually large area of open space in the heart of the city. The magnificent axial lime avenue forms a very striking feature of the parkland.

Type of site Urban public park

Main phases of construction 1879; 1899-1901

Site description

Pontcanna Fields and Llandaff Fields, which adjoin each other, together form a huge tract of open space in the heart of Cardiff. They are situated on the west bank of the river Taff, to the east of Llandaff. The ground is mostly level, being part of the floodplain of the Taff, but rises gently on the western edge of Llandaff Fields. To the south of Pontcanna Fields lies Sophia Gardens and to the east, on the other side of the river, Bute Park.

Pontcanna Fields is the larger area and it survives almost intact, retaining most of its main features. A small area on the western side has been encroached on by modern buildings. The park is a large, level open space, most of which is uninterrupted mown grass. The chief ornamental feature is a great north-south lime avenue and broad walk which runs the entire length of this part of the park. In fact the avenue starts a short distance to the north of the park proper, on the river. The straight walk is tarmacked, on a raised embankment. At the north end there are allotments on either side, those on the west bounded on their south side by a row of sycamores and on their west by a stone wall. To the east are a few isolated small houses and the City of Cardiff Riding School. Along the river is a further lime avenue, aligned east-west. This now stops at Western Avenue at its west end, but previously continued to the Mill Stream, later the boundary of the cathedral cemetery. This avenue is aligned on the cathedral.

To the south are a few fields with isolated hedge-line oaks on their boundaries. A raised, flat-topped embankment with a stony surface under the turf runs from the broad walk eastwards, and then curves round to the north. This is flanked by a row of sycamores at its western end, which continues as a hedge to the east. The embankment may have been part of a flood-prevention scheme, possibly with a track on top.

To the south is a large expanse of grass, with a group of oaks and an isolated oak near the east side. Part of the area is used as a rugby pitch. To the west of the avenue are modern buildings and a car park. Further south the walk is no longer on an embankment, but higher ground to the west is bounded by a scarp. Along the west side is a narrow unsurfaced walk flanked by a row of evergreen oaks, with a stone wall along the west boundary. An entrance has only one remaining pier, on the south side, which is built of yellow brick topped by a large lump of Radyr stone. To the south modern housing flanks the park, with evergreen oaks and pines along the park wall. There are a number of pedestrian gates in the wall, with brick piers and iron gates. The south end of the west side of the park is occupied by a caravan park, bounded on the west by an embankment. At the south end of Pontcanna Fields is a narrow cross walk flanked on the north by a row of evergreen oaks and on the south by the wall marking the boundary of Sophia Gardens.

The area of park called Llandaff Fields lies to the west of the north end of Pontcanna Fields. It survives intact, although it has lost some of its original features. This part of the park is an area of open mown grass crossed by a network of tarmac walks and bounded on all but the east side by roads. It is separated from Pontcanna Fields on the east side by a stone wall flanked by sycamores. The area is planted with deciduous trees, mainly sycamores and limes, flanking the walks. Along the east side, next to the wall, are various recreational facilities, including a children's playground, a bowling green, and tennis courts. At the north end is an open-air swimming pool (closed). The features such as fountain, pool, rockery and fern dell mentioned in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* article of 3 March 1923 have all gone.

In 1860 the intention to extend the parkland northwards from Sophia Gardens was indicated, 'for the purpose of athletic exercises'. This extension, on to Pontcanna Fields, took place in 1879. The Ordnance Survey map of that date shows the area still as farmland, with Pont-cana Farm on the site of the present television studios. The 1901 Ordnance Survey map (surveyed 1898-99) shows Pontcanna Fields laid out as a public open space, with the great axial double avenue following field boundaries. At its north end, to the north of Mill Stream, was an *étoile* of avenues, the main one ending at the river, a short cross avenue at right-angles to it, from the river to Llandaff Mill, and a longer east-west avenue, aligned on the cathedral, running from the river to the east to the Mill Stream. This magnificent climax to the layout was subsequently wrecked, first by the building of Western Avenue across it, along the line of a small lane which ran north-eastwards from the mill, and secondly by the building of an educational establishment on the north side of Western Avenue. This obliterated all the arms of the *étoile* to the south of the main axis.

Llandaff Fields, an area of 70 acres, was added in 1898, after a vociferous campaign by the *South Wales Daily News* to save it from development. At the time that the 1901 map was surveyed (1898) it was still Court Farm. It was thought that the whole area should be left 'natural', with playing fields and an open-air swimming pool. After the Corporation acquired Llandaff Fields in 1898 the area was placed under the supervision of Mr W. W. Pettigrew, Superintendent of Parks. In 1899-1900 three cricket pitches and a hockey pitch were prepared, and in 1901 two tennis courts were

added, although these were merely grass areas set aside for the game. Plans were submitted by the borough engineer in 1900 and 1904 for a swimming pool but at this stage nothing happened. The 1920 Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1915, shows Llandaff Fields the footpath layout, with two tree-lined stretches, one at the south end and one on the western part of the main east-west walk. There was a drinking fountain near the central crossing. A *Gardeners' Chronicle* article of 3 March 1923 describes Llandaff Fields as: 'a playing area of some 70 acres. During the war, 40 acres were devoted to allotments. In the entrance is a fountain and water pool surrounded with flower beds'. The article also mentions a fine clump of bamboos, elms, a large rockery and a fern dell in the woodland.

Sources

Primary

Pettigrew, A., 'The public parks and recreation grounds of Cardiff' (1926), vol. 2, pp. 99-130: Cardiff Central Library.

Secondary

Gardeners' Chronicle, 3 March 1923, p. 119.