

## Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England

West Yorkshire	Peel Park
Bradford	GD3330
Bradford	II

The first publicly owned park in Bradford, open in early 1850s.

### Historic Development

Bradford received its Charter of Incorporation and became a Municipal Borough in June 1847, at that time having no publicly owned parks or recreation grounds. Following a public meeting on 13 August 1850 in St. George's Hall, Bradford, Monies were raised by subscription, augmented by a grant of £1500 from Her Majesty's Government, to purchase an estate to the north-east of the town centre for public use. Donations of £1000 each were also made by Sir Robert Milligan and Sir Titus Salt, the first and second Mayors of Bradford. The c 26ha of land purchased overlapped the boundary, at the time, between the towns of Bradford and Bolton and included Bolton House (listed grade II) and its grounds (Bentley 1926), which were already planted (Conway 1993).

A plan of 1853 (Dixon) shows the purchased land, named Peel Park Estate in memory of Sir Robert Peel, with Bolton House and villa plots to the north, and the proposed design for a park covering c 22ha. Laying out the park was also funded by public subscription. The first gala in the park was held over three days in June 1853. A plan of the park dated 1854 (Conway 1993) shows perimeter building plots set around a cricket ground in the south of the park and a sports and bowling green to the north-east, but from the evidence of the 1893 OS map these proposals were not realised. Peel Park, the first publicly owned park in Bradford, was conveyed to Bradford Corporation in November 1863 (Bentley 1926). Facilities for sports were added within the park in the early C20. Peel Park is in the ownership of the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council and remains (2001) open to the public.

### Description

#### Location, Area, Boundaries, Landform, Setting

Peel Park lies c 1.2km to the north-east of the centre of Bradford. To the north of the c22.6 ha park is bounded partly by Valley View Grove, the remaining grounds of Bolton House, two late C19 houses, The Mount and Park House, and other late C20 residential development. The boundary to Valley View Grove is open while the north boundary to residential properties is marked by shrub planting and hedging. Stone gatepiers mark an entrance to Bolton House and a former entrance to The Mount from the park.

The west boundary of the park overlooks a lower-lying sports field, with commercial property to the north of this on Bolton Road. The park has been slightly reduced to the north-west by the exclusion of the site of former glasshouses, now commercial property, where the boundary is marked by a dense evergreen hedge. The sports field has been formed in the late C20 on the site of old quarries, a C19 local authority

refuse destructor, and C20 allotment gardens. Between the designed park and playing fields, at a lower level to the west, the boundary is formed partly by bowling green pavilions but is otherwise open along the line of a steep grassed bank.

To the south-south-west the park is bounded by Cliffe Road, formed in the C20, replacing Cliffe Lane. The latter adjoined the current Cliffe Road, running north-north-west, and has been incorporated into the park and adjacent playing fields in the C20. Wright House, a former farmhouse (1853 plan) on Cliffe Road, remains (2001). A single-storey, late C20 residential care home at the south-east corner of the park (outside the area here registered) stands within the C19 park boundary. The grounds of the residential home are marked by a low stone wall and hedging, with access into the park. Stone walls, generally c 1.2m high, mark the south and east boundaries, these having formerly supported railings.

The southern half of the park is on level ground while the northern section occupies a valley running west-north-west to east-south-east. The valley is overlooked to the north by Bolton House and later properties. To the south of the valley a terrace runs at the head off the valley side along the north boundary of the southern half of the park. In the irregular north-east area of the park the valley side extends steeply up towards Valley View Grove.

The surrounding area is largely residential with Undercliffe Cemetery (qv) lying to the south-east of the park.

#### Entrances and Approaches

The main entrance is from Bolton Road, the former Bradford and Eccleshill Turnpike Road, at the north-west corner. The entrance has rusticated stone gate piers marking two pedestrian entrances flanking a carriage entrance. There are gates to the carriage entrance and a gate to one pedestrian entrance. Immediately to the north-east of the entrance is a two-storey lodge (listed grade II with gate piers and gates), built in 1862 in an Italianate style in sandstone 'brick'.

A second entrance from Cliffe Road (formerly Cliffe Lane) at the south-east corner is similar with a smaller lodge and less ornate gates to the carriage entrance only (listed grade II). Two entrances from the area to the south-east are formed by simple breaks in the stone boundary walling.

#### Gardens and Pleasure Grounds

Peel Park is divided into northern and southern halves by a broad terrace extending east/west along the top of the northern valley's southern side. The path is carried by a bridge at its eastern end over the carriage drive below. The level southern part of the park is laid out with large irregularly shaped lawns between tree-lined paths. Parts of the lawns are used for sports and include a football area (2001). There is no indication on the plan of 1853, or the 1893 OS map, that any areas were particularly designed or designated for sporting activities. In the conveyance of 1863 (Bentley 1926) it is noted that no games were to be allowed in the park on a Sunday. The western part of the valley is laid out with serpentine paths around a lake with more open areas to the north-east.

A carriage drive links the two principal entrances, following a winding route north from the Cliffe Road entrance at the south corner, parallel to the east boundary, passing below the east end of the terrace before curving around the eastern end of the valley to return west along the northern valley side to the entrance on Bolton Road. From the Cliffe Road entrance a second carriage route is shown on the 1893 OS map running to the north-west to link to the west end of the terrace, together with a narrower, straight pedestrian path leading to the terrace at the same point. Some 40m north of the Cliffe Road entrance the division of the carriage drives is marked by a prominent stone drinking fountain (listed grade II) with red granite corner shafts, erected in 1861 in memory of Alderman Thomas Beaumont.

The existing layout of tree-lined paths in the southern half of the park remains almost exactly as shown on the 1893 OS map except where modified with the construction of two early C20 square bowling greens (OC 1908, 1922) and mid C20 tennis courts. In 1997 100 trees were planted in the park, recorded on a stone plaque mounted on a boulder, to mark the centenary of Bradford's status as a city. This included avenue planting along the straight pedestrian path, in keeping with planting indicated on the 1893 OS map. There is a small late C20 children's playground on the extension of the park southwards to Cliffe Road. Tennis courts and bowling greens to the north-west are screened by tree and shrub planting with shallow stone steps and neat hedging to the bowling greens. From the southern area of the park views extend westwards over the adjoining playing fields, to the city rising on a ridge.

At the west end of the terrace stone steps lead up to a viewing platform with low stone walls, copings, the whole largely rebuilt in the 1990s due to its poor structural condition. The platform area has been somewhat reduced and the steps narrowed. The view from the platform is extensive, overlooking the Manningham Valley and the heights of Heaton, with the tall chimney of Lister's Mill of 1870 a dominant feature. To the east the view is focused along the tree-lined terrace to distant hills beyond. The terrace is not included on the 1853 plan but is shown on the 1893 OS map, complete with viewing platform.

Leading north from the west end of the terrace, a series of short flights of stone steps leads down from a semicircular platform in a winding route towards the lake in the valley below. OS plans up to and including 1922 show a number of semicircular areas set to the north of the terrace with paths leading down into the valley, now gone but with their location marked in places by remaining sections of rockworks. It is presumed that these areas were similar small viewing platforms as, along the length of the terrace, there are varying views down into and across the valley between groups of trees.

To the south side of the terrace, between 165m and 280m east of the viewing platform, there are three statues (each grade II). The central figure, which is of Robert Peel, formerly stood in what was known as Peel Square on Leeds Road and was the first public statue in Bradford. It was re-erected in Peel Square following the demolition of Kassapian's Warehouse (after 1926). It is a cast-lead figure inscribed 'W Behnes Sculp' and was cast by Robinson Scott Company of Pimlico. It stands on a cylindrical stone plinth on the former site of an ornamental bandstand erected in 1902 (Bentley 1926). This replaced an earlier bandstand situated on the north side of the terrace on a large semicircular projection on the valley side, now gone. To either

side of the Peel statue are smaller figures of 'Autumn' and 'Spring', given to the park in 1869 and 1877 respectively by the Bradford Band of Hope Union (ibid).

From the north side of the terrace, 320m east from the viewing platform, stone steps c 4m wide and four flights with low stone walls to either side, provide a route down the valley side. The shallow arched bridge carrying the east end of the terrace over the carriage drive is in cast iron by Railway Foundry, Bradford and is dated 1857. The parapets have cast-iron railings and handrails between square cast-iron posts and robust circular stone piers with shallow stone caps.

At the east end of the terrace a series of paths intertwine with the carriage drive. One footpath leads up to the north-east corner of the park which is largely open with tree planting to the boundaries, and another leads east-south-east to the base of the wide stone steps. The carriage drive curves north from below the bridge following the contour of the eastern end of the valley before returning west on an embankment along the north boundary. A focal point in the east of the park is a drinking fountain erected at the side of the drive, 130m north-north-east of the cast-iron bridge. The ornate stone fountain (listed grade II) was erected in the town in 1861 by the Bradford Band of Hope Union and later moved to Peel Park as a result of street improvements. The view west from the fountain is focused by tree planting on lower-lying ground in the west of the park, and at the top of the valley sides to north and south, framing the view over the city with Lister's Mill again prominent.

Some 35m south-east of the Bolton Road entrance is a late C19 serpentine lake with two islands (OS 1893). A fountain in, and a bridge over the lake shown on the 1893 OS map no longer exist (2001). The east end of the lake is set into slightly rising ground with stone surrounds and rockwork forming a shallow cascade. To the east-south-east and c 70m from the lake is a late C20 children's play area on the site of a second lake remodelled from a fishpond (OS 1851, 1893) and now filled in (2001).

To the south of the lake and 160m south-east of the Bolton Road entrance, an ornate stone doorway (listed grade II) is set into a low stone retaining wall. The doorway dates from c 1705 – 7 and was re-erected in the park, before 1926, from Bradford Hall which stood facing Kirkgate (Bentley 1926). The 1908 OS map shows a fossil tree, now gone (2001), to the north-east of the lake. Similar features exist at Lister (qv), Bowling (qv), and Horton (qv) Parks in Bradford. To the north of the lake, 80m south-east of the Bradford Road entrance, there is a formal circular arrangement of planting beds set in lawn which is first shown on the 1922 OS map. The site of a former late C19 conservatory lies 55m south-east of the Bradford Road entrance. The gently undulating slopes around the lake are planted with groups of shrubs, evergreens, and deciduous trees.

## References

- J Bentley, *Illustrated Handbook of the Bradford City Parks, Recreation Grounds, and Open Spaces* (1926), pp 13-24  
H Conway, *People's Parks: The Design and Development of Victorian Parks* (1993), pp 57, 93, 95, 102, 229  
*Undercliffe Remembered*, (Eccleshill Local History Group 2000)

Maps

T Dixon, *Peel Park Estate Bradford Plan of Bolton House and Villa Sites etc Shewing Proposed Design for Park*, April 1853 (ID82/5/1), (Bradford District Archives)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1<sup>st</sup> edition published 1853  
1938 edition  
OS 25" to 1 mile: 1<sup>st</sup> edition published 1893  
2<sup>nd</sup> edition published 1908  
1922 edition

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