

To be split into two sites:

Sophia Gardens, grade II

Pontcanna & Llandaff Fields, grade II*

draft

**CADW/ICOMOS REGISTER OF LANDSCAPES, PARKS AND GARDENS
OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST IN WALES**

SITE DOSSIER

Site Name	SOPHIA GARDENS, PONTCANNA FIELDS AND LLANDAFF FIELDS
Ref No	PGW (Gm) 21
OS Map	171
Grid Ref	ST 170 775
County Council	South Glamorgan
District	Cardiff City Council
Community Council	Pontcanna
Owner/s	Cardiff City Council
Occupier/s	As above
Designations	None
Site Evaluation	II

RPS, CARDIFF

16 AUG 2007

JOB NUMBER:

PASSED TO: SW

Primary reasons for grading Sophia Gardens was the first public park in Cardiff, and the earliest in Wales, built by the Marchioness of Bute and opened in 1858 to compensate for the closing of the castle grounds. Together with Pontcanna and Llandaff Fields, which followed, it forms a huge public open space in the heart of Cardiff, mirrored on the east bank of the river Taff by Bute Park. Although much of the original framework of Sophia Gardens has been lost, some original features remain, and the long lime avenue through Pontcanna Fields is exceptionally fine.

Type of Site Urban public park

Main Phases of Construction 1858 - 1901

Visited by/date Elisabeth Whittle/July 1995

THE PARK

Central Grid Ref

ST 170 775

Date/style

1858; 1879-1901/urban public park

GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

Sophia Gardens, Pontcanna Fields and Llandaff Fields, together with Bute Park, form one huge continuous public open space in the heart of Cardiff. Bute Park occupies low-lying, level ground on the east bank of the river Taff; Sophia Gardens, Pontcanna Fields and Llandaff Fields lie opposite, on the west bank. Although separately named, the three areas form one large public open space, bounded by the river on the east and north-east, and by housing and roads on the north, south and west.

The park occupies an L-shaped area. Sophia Gardens, 16 acres in extent, lies at the southern end, and is the most intensively used part, both for sport and for other forms of recreation. To its north is Pontcanna Fields, of 28 acres, which consists largely of open mown grass. Llandaff Fields, largely an area of grass, paths, and specimen trees, lies to the west of the north end of Pontcanna Fields.

The origins of the park lie in Sophia Gardens, which was opened to the public by the Marchioness of Bute in 1858 to compensate for the closure of the castle grounds. The widowed Marchioness instigated the making of the park in 1854, on the site of Plasterton Farm. It was designed by the London architect Alexander Roos. The first public notice of the park was in the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian of 7 March 1857: 'the inhabitants of Cardiff will, in the course of the ensuing summer, have presented to them an ornamental walk and pleasure ground of exquisite taste in design, which for its extent and magnificence will be unparalleled by anything of the sort in Wales. Indeed we believe we are correct when we say that in no town in the Principality does such a pleasure ground exist'. The report goes on to give details of the plan: 'The walk itself will ... be of exquisite design. Its length will be about 640 yards, being the full extent from north to south of the grounds. An ornamental lake will be formed at the northern extremity, which will be beautified by small islands of flowers and shrubs, and probably graced also by some fine specimens of water fowl; the walk will extend round the lake, and be carried over it at the north-eastern side by a bridge of highly artistic design. From the south end to the lake a broad avenue of lime trees will be formed, and this avenue will join the narrower walk at the lake, and by a branch across the centre of the grounds. ... the west will be skirted by a long line of beautiful villa residences which are to be erected between the gardens and a new road intended to be formed and called 'the Cathedral-road', leading direct to Llandaff'.

The park was managed by the Bute estate, and on 20 September 1859 the Marchioness visited for the first time and gave instructions for the erection of a fountain. In 1860 band performances started, a bowling green was being built, and the fountain erected. All these features are shown on the 1879 Ordnance Survey map. The park at this time did not extend as far north as subsequently, finishing on a line with the Talbot Street entrance on the west. The curving lake lies at the north end, with an island at its north-east end, and a boat house on the north shore opposite it. The park is informally planted, with a curving wooded or shrubbery area to the south of the lake. The fountain is situated in the centre of the southern half, on a cross walk. Cathedral Road has been built, along with eight 'villa residences' with gardens running down to the park.

In 1860 the intention to extend the park northwards 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-canna Farm on the site of the

present television studios. 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. It was thought that the area should be left 'natural', with playing fields and an open-air swimming pool. After the Corporation acquired the land in 1898 it 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. 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.

The main entrance to Sophia Gardens is at the south end, on Castle Street. The entrance lies towards the west side of the park, and is set at an angle to the road so as to be aligned on the broad walk and avenue that lead northwards from it. It is flanked by tall square stone piers with square tops splayed at their base. The closing gates are of simple wrought iron construction. The entrance is flanked by a pedestrian entrance on the east side and by rubble stone boundary walls with rounded coping. To the east is a modern brick lodge which replaced an earlier one shown on the 1879 map.

The south end of the park is laid out with mown grass and well spaced deciduous trees, with a curving tarmac path through it. From the entrance a broad tarmac walk runs northwards, flanked by horse chestnuts. To the east of this walk there follows, to the north, a large modern car park, in which area the fountain originally stood. To the north is the Cardiff Bowling Club building and green surrounded by a wooden fence and privet hedge. To the north of this is a further area of grass and isolated trees, including ash, sycamore, pine and horse chestnut. It is in this area that the former lake was situated, but this was filled in in ? Further north is the ITN studios building with beyond it the Cardiff Athletic Club Sports Ground and Glamorgan Cricket Club pitch. A walk runs along the embankment flanking the river, with a row of limes to its west.

On the west side of the chestnut walk, at the south end, is a grass area with a row of pines along the west boundary. The park is bounded here by a rubble stone wall with rounded coping. Pedestrian gates flanked by imposing square stone piers, some blocked, lead to the gardens of the villas on Cathedral Road that were part of the original development. Some have steps down into the park, and some raised grass embanked paths to give a smooth descent to park level. The original intended link between the 'villa residences on Cathedral Road and the park has only been retained in a few cases; most of the large gardens behind the villas have been built on.

Half way along the west side is a wide, grand entrance (Talbot Street), the road flanked by limes and other trees, ending at the entrance in tall square piers with ? stone tops at the ends of the flanking rubble stone walls. Inside the park the axis continues with a wide tarmac circle flanked by semi-circles of iron railings on stone plinths, with well spaced limes inside them. The railings end in piers similar to those at the entrance. This feature is shown on the 1879 map as a complete circle, but its east end is now open to allow a road to continue to the Sports Centre. On the north side is 'The Poacher's Lodge', a small, single-storey two-tone stone building with a steeply pitched red tile roof. It is a former lodge, not shown on the 1879 map, now used as a restaurant, with a modern extension on the west side.

Further north are tennis courts and a sports pitch. The west wall is higher and is flanked by limes and copper beeches. The main north-south walk is curving here and is flanked by a beech hedge on the east and a cypress hedge on the west. The park is bounded on the north by

a banded rubble stone wall with a double row of copper beech trees along it. The wall steps up at the east end, and is terminated by a taller, tapering cylindrical pier with a conical top which appears more recent.

Much of the original layout of Sophia Gardens has gone, to be overlain by modern buildings and car parks. The most important original elements that remain are the main axial walk, the western entrance, the boundary walls and private entrances and some fine trees.

Pontcanna Fields survives almost intact, with its main features surviving. It has been encroached on on its western side by modern buildings. This part of 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. South of this 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 ? 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.

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.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Walks

All three areas of park are laid out with walks, most of which are tarmacked.

In Sophia Gardens the main walk is a north-south axial broad walk which is straight in the southern half of the park and curving in the northern. There are a few subsidiary walks, one

winding through the trees at the south end, one along the embankment on the east side, next to the river. A cross axis, now a road, runs east from the west entrance and circular tarmac area inside it.

In Pontcanna Fields the main axis is a broad tarmac walk running straight through the park from the north to the south end. At its northern end it is raised on a low embankment bounded by grass scarps. There is a narrower cross path running east-west next to the boundary wall, and a further unsurfaced path along the southern end of the west side.

Llandaff Fields has a number of straight and winding tarmac walks around the perimeter and across the middle of the park. The one that runs north-west from the north end of Cathedral Road is on the line of a pre-park footpath.

Embankments

Near the north end of Pontcanna Fields, to the east of the avenue, is a raised, flat-topped embankment, running east-west and then curving northwards. Its function may be or have been flood-prevention.

Near the west side of the park, in its southern half, is a low embankment to the west of the caravan park.

A raised embankment with a path on top runs along the river bank in Sophia Gardens.

Pitches and greens

Sophia Gardens: cricket pitch at the north end, sports field at the north end; bowling green to the south (east side); tennis courts to the south (west side)

Llandaff Fields: on the east side a bowling green and tennis courts

Pontcanna Fields: a sports field (using the naturally flat ground)

WATER FEATURES

The river Taff runs along the east side of the parkland. All former water features within the parks have gone.

BUILT FEATURES

Boundary walls

Between Pontcanna Fields and Llandaff Fields is a rubble stone wall.

To the south of Llandaff Fields the west park wall is of rubble stone, making extensive use of river-rolled stones, and c. 2.5 m high. It has a band of slightly larger, more cut stone near the bottom and a coping of rounded ? stone. It has two side pedestrian entrances with square brick piers and iron gates. The southern entrance gates are more elaborate and may be original. A larger side entrance (now a modern access road) retains its south pier, consisting of a square pier c. 3.5 m high, of yellow brick, with a darker stone band at the level of the top of the wall, and topped by a roughly shaped lump of ? stone.

Between Pontcanna Fields and Sophia Gardens is a stone boundary wall c. 2.5 m high, built in bands of river-rolled stone/rubble/river-rolled stone. It is higher at the east end, and terminates at the east end in a cylindrical, slightly tapering pier c. 5 m high, with a conical top. The stonework mimics that of the wall but appears modern. In the middle is a wide entrance flanked by square stone piers c 2.3 m high, with brick tops.

The west boundary wall of Sophia Gardens is similar, c. 2-2.5 m high, rubble built, topped with rounded coping. The wall is punctuated by pedestrian gates to the gardens of villas

adjacent to the park. Some of these are blocked, some have wooden gates. They are flanked by substantial square stone piers, slightly taller than the wall, topped by rounded blocks of ? stone. Some have steps leading down into the park, others have a raised grass embankment giving a smooth descent to park level.

The south boundary wall of Sophia Gardens is rubble built, c 1-1.5 m high, with rounded coping.

Entrance and lodge

A modern brick lodge stands to the east of the entrance, with a low wall and railings in front of it.

The entrance is flanked by tall square stone piers of alternating dressed and rubble stone, c 3.5 m high, with square dressed stone tops with splayed protruding bases. Between is a pair of light wrought iron gates with ornamental tops and bottoms. At right-angles, to the east, is a smaller pedestrian gateway between lower piers (c. 2.5 m) with flattish pyramidal tops.

The main west entrance is wide (of road width), flanked by square piers c 3.5 m high of reddish stone, topped by large blocks of ? stone carved with recessed triangular panels on each side. Inside a large circular area is bounded on the north and south by iron railings on a low stone plinth. The railings terminate with similar piers on the east side, with crudely carved tops. On the north side there is a wide gap in the middle, with similar piers terminating the railings on either side, behind which is the former lodge, now 'The Poacher's Lodge'.

The Poacher's Lodge

This is a single-storey building built of yellowish stone with red stone quoins. It has a steeply pitched red tile roof, and a projecting bay with gabled roof in the middle. The roof has decorative barge boards and the eaves have wooden supports. There is a modern extension on the west side. The lodge is not shown on the 1879 map.

PLANTED COMPONENTS

Pontcanna Fields

Mostly mown grass, some used as sports field. An impressive avenue of limes runs from the river in the north to the south boundary of the park. To its east are some isolated hedge-line oaks at the north end of the park, and an east-west row of sycamores along the south side of an embankment. Further south is a group of oaks and one further isolated oak.

On the west side of the park is a row of sycamores along the south side of the allotments. Further south is a row of evergreen oaks and pines and then just evergreen oaks parallel with the west boundary.

Along the south boundary is a row of evergreen oaks.

Sophia Gardens

There is much modern planting in Sophia Gardens, but there are also some older trees which are probably original. It is this planting that will be concentrated on.

The main walk in the southern part of the park is flanked by horse chestnuts, with pines along the west boundary.

Along the north boundary is a double row of mature copper beeches.

Copper beeches and limes line the north end of the west boundary.

The northern end of the main walk (curving section) is flanked by a beech hedge on the east and a cypress hedge on the west, and by rows of ? trees.

Limes flank the walk along the river embankment and there are large limes around the circle inside the west entrance, against the railings.

mown grass.

BOUNDARIES

North: Western Avenue and the river Taff

East: river Taff

South: Castle Street

West: housing and roads

**ESSENTIAL SETTING, VIEWPOINTS AND CONTINUATIONS OF FEATURES
BEYOND THE PARK, EYECATCHERS ETC.**

Essential setting: Bute Park to the east

Views: east and south-east from Pontcanna Fields to Bute Park

LAND-USE

Public urban park, including many forms of recreation

ELEMENTS OF BOTANICAL OR OTHER NATURE CONSERVATION INTEREST

None known

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: Pontcanna Fields and Llandaff Fields: most. Sophia Gardens: few

Water features: except natural (river Taff) none

Built components: most

Planted components: most, except in Sophia Gardens, where several areas have been developed and their planting removed.

Sources

Primary

Letter from Lady Bute to Bruce, 14 February 1850: Scottish Public Record Office, ref. H.B. MSS, 198.

Pettigrew, A., 'The public parks and recreation grounds of Cardiff' (1926), vol. 1, pp. 38-53, vol. 2, pp. 99-130: Cardiff Central Library.

Secondary

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