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REGISTER ENTRY

ABERDARE PARK

Ref number	PGW(Gm)2 (RCT)
OS Map	170
Grid ref	SN 994 032
Former county	Mid Glamorgan
Unitary authority	Rhondda, Cynon, Taff
Community council	Aberdare
Designations	Listed buildings: Gated entries Grade II; Lord Merthyr statue Grade II; Fountain Grade II; Industry fountain Grade II; Bandstand Grade II
Site Evaluation	Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading Well preserved Victorian public park partly laid out by the eminent park and garden designer William Barron. As well as retaining most of its Victorian built features, such as bandstand and fountain, it has an attractive lake and many of the original trees are now fine mature specimens.

Type of site Mid nineteenth-century municipal public park

Main phases of construction 1869-70s

Site description

Aberdare Park is a Victorian public park in Trecynon, towards the north end of Aberdare. It lies on a south- and east-facing slope on the west flank of the Cynon valley, bounded on the east by the A4059 road, on the north and south by minor roads, and on the west by the track of a disused railway line.

The park was laid out on part of Hirwaun Common at the instigation of R.H. Rhys, chairman of the Local Board of Health, who in 1865 informed the local Board of Health that the 'pleasure ground' of nearly fifty acres would soon be made over to the Overseers of the Parish. Rhys intended it to be 'a pleasant place for the dust-begrimed inhabitants'. It was opened on 27 July 1869, and in 1877 the Local Board of Health borrowed £5000 to wall, drain and plant the parkland. The landscaper was William Barron (1805-91), a nurseryman who laid out many public parks in England from the 1860s onwards. By the 1870s he was a well known and influential landscaper. Before the major landscaping of the park by Barron in the 1870s it was laid out with two entrances and lodges at the north-east and south-east corners, a

circuit walk and two informal fish ponds, the larger near the south end of the park, the smaller at the north end. This layout is shown on the 1st edition 25" Ordnance Survey map (1867-75) and remains unchanged today, except that the northern pond has been filled in. The early planting of the park was restricted to a belt of mixed coniferous and deciduous woodland along the Hirwaun Road (A4059) on the east side. In 1887 rowing boats were introduced on the lake.

On to the early layout further ornamental features and planting were grafted by Barron in the late 1870s. These are restricted to the outer fringes of the park, the centre being left open as an undulating area of grass. The main entrance is in the south-east corner where simple iron gates are flanked by tall square stone piers and pedestrian gates. These in turn are flanked by iron railings on low stone walls. These continue along the A4059 as far as the north end of the formal garden. The remainder of the park boundary, except on the west side, is a substantial stone wall. On the west side of the entrance is a former lodge, now used as an office. It is a small two-storey stone building with transomed windows and a gabled porch on the north side. Opposite this, on the north side of the walk, is a small formal garden surrounded by low iron railings, with a stone-flagged path leading to a large statue of Lord Merthyr on a tall inscribed plinth set in a T-shaped pool. The pool is edged with a low stone wall and has a single jet fountain in the middle.

A wide gently curving tarmacked walk runs north-west from the entrance up a gentle slope flanked by grass slopes planted with large mature specimen trees. These include pine, cypress, monkey puzzle, wellingtonia, beech, oak, and sycamore. The monkey puzzles, on the west side of the walk, are particularly large and handsome specimens. On the east side is a small dry water channel with stone slab bridges across it and several shallow cascades. It ends with a large upright stone slab. Above it is a bank of rhododendrons. At the top of the slope the walk branches left and right on to the circuit walk, which is also tarmacked. At the junction is a small statue (originally fountain) named the Spirit of Industry. It was presented in 1905 by Isaac George.

The circuit walk leads to a large pond to the west. This is roughly oval, with a sinuous, stone-lined edge. Towards the west end is a small circular island which is planted with a few rhododendrons and a small tree. To the south of the pond is a single-storey brick pavilion with a pitched roof and verandahs on both the north and south sides. This is now used as a cafe. To its south is an elaborate cast iron fountain, the Coronation Fountain. This was presented to the inhabitants of Aberdare by Lord Merthyr to commemorate the coronation of George V and Mary in 1911. The fountain, which is painted, consists of a circular pool, with a sloping edge decorated with rosettes and stars, in the middle of which is a circular plinth decorated with four dolphins and cherubs. On top is a large splayed bowl above which are pelicans holding up a small bowl. The whole is topped by a draped female figure.

To the west of the circuit walk and pond is a level lawn with four island beds in the middle of which is an octagonal bandstand with an ogee-shaped roof, iron railings around it, and concrete steps up to it.

The south-west corner of the park is taken up with sporting facilities - tennis courts and a bowling green. To their north is an area of informal oak woodland. On the eastern edge of this area is a shallow ravine through which winds a small stream. This was landscaped as part of the William Barron scheme, and has recently been restored after some years of neglect. The water enters at the north end, emerging from a wall of rough boulders. It then winds down the valley through a series of small stone-edged pools and over stone cascades. Winding paths follow the stream on both

sides, with two bridges over it. The valley is planted with small trees and shrubs, including rhododendrons and azaleas, and has a canopy of large mature beech trees over it.

The west boundary, along the disused railway line, is a modern aluminium fence. A path follows the boundary, flanked by island beds and a belt of mixed trees and shrubs. The north end of the park is laid out with paths, flowerbeds, and mainly young trees. The former pond, in the centre, is a level area of rose beds, cherry and cypress trees. Above it, to the west, is its former inlet, a brick- and stone-lined channel leading from the boundary to a sunken tank and then underground. This lies in an area of grass and large beech trees. Along the north boundary are pines and copper beeches. The entrance in the north-east corner is similar to the main entrance, with railings on either side. A modern house stands on the site of the original lodge. Inside the entrance is a small brick public convenience.

The east boundary of the park is planted with a belt of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees, many of which are part of the original planting. They include horse chestnuts, sweet chestnuts, cypresses and wellingtonias.

Sources

Primary

Old photographs: Aberdare Library.

Secondary

Aberdare Leader 22 April 1905, p.3.

Perry, R.I., 'Sidelights on Aberdare', *Glamorgan Historian* 10 (1974), pp. 75-76.

Jordan, H., 'Public parks, 1885-1914', *Garden History* 22.1 (1994), pp. 85-113.