

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

REGISTER ENTRY

CATHAYS PARK

Ref number	PGW (Gm) 26 (CDF)
OS Map	171
Grid ref	ST 182 770; ST 184 768; ST 183 767
Former county	South Glamorgan
Unitary authority	The City and County of Cardiff
Community council	Castle

Designations Listed buildings: Welsh National War Memorial in Alexandra Gardens Grade II*; Statue of Lord Aberdare in Alexandra Gardens Grade II; Statue of 3rd Marquess of Bute, Friary Gardens Grade II; Statue of David Lloyd George, Gorsedd Gardens Grade II; Statue of John Cory, Gorsedd Gardens Grade II; Statue of Lord Ninian Edward Crichton Stuart, Gorsedd Gardens Grade II; Statue of Godfrey, 1st Viscount Tredegar, Gorsedd Gardens Grade II
Conservation Area: Cathays Park

Site evaluation **Grade II**

Primary reasons for grading The survival, as integral parts of the original Edwardian layout of Cathays Park, of the three garden areas - Alexandra Gardens, Gorsedd Gardens and Friary Gardens. Each has its own very different character, and each retains its original layout. The setting of these gardens is a magnificent group of public buildings and its attendant tree-lined spacious roads, the layout of which reflects the underlying earlier park. The War Memorial in Alexandra Gardens is of exceptional quality and forms an imposing focal point for the gardens. The 'Dutch Garden' of Friary Gardens survives in excellent condition.

Type of site Urban public park: formal gardens;
informal gardens

Main phases of construction 1903-06; 1924-28

Site description

Cathays Park is Cardiff's civic centre, containing Cardiff City Hall, the former Mid Glamorgan County Hall, the Law Courts, the National Museum, Cardiff University buildings, the Welsh Office, and other civic buildings. It is a large, roughly rectangular area lying to the east of Bute Park and to the north of the main commercial

centre of Cardiff. Its roads are laid out on a generous grid pattern, with the long axis running north-west/south-east. Within the park are three main open spaces: Alexandra Gardens, Gorsedd Gardens, and Friary Gardens. These gardens are all contemporary with the original laying out of the park and it is they that form the content of this designation.

A farm existed at Cathays from at least the seventeenth century, but in about 1812 this was pulled down by the 1st Marquis of Bute and a new mansion was built in its place. However, this was exceedingly short-lived as the Marquis died in 1814 and his successor, the 2nd Marquis, had it demolished in 1824 and concentrated his efforts on the castle. The 1st Marquis had, however, laid out a park to go with his mansion, enclosing with a wall the area between the present North Road on the west and Park Place on the east, and between the present Corbett Road on the north and the Friary estate on the south. During the nineteenth century the park was further improved by the removal of hedges, the constructing of drives along the west and south sides, with entrances in Park Place and North Road, where a lodge was built. In 1878-90 Lord Bute planted a double avenue of elms from the north to the south boundary, and this axis determined that of the future main road of the Park, King Edward VII Avenue. Most of the park was used for grazing, with a nursery on the eastern boundary (on the site of the present University College main building) and with a walled kitchen garden to the south (now built over).

The idea of purchasing Cathays Parks from the Butes for public use was mooted as early as the 1850s, but nothing came of it until the 1890s. Negotiations were opened in 1892, and in 1897 a purchase price for 59 acres of £159,000 was accepted. Lord Bute stipulated that the elm avenue be preserved, that he retain the house site, that the triangular plot that became Friary Gardens should never be built on, and that the northern bank of the dock feeder canal should be planted with trees and enclosed. The Borough Engineer, Mr William Harpur, drew up layout plans for the park in 1899 which included Gorsedd Gardens and Friary Gardens. He produced detailed plans in 1903, and development began. Alexandra Gardens, first called University Gardens, was laid out and planted in 1903 and formally opened and renamed Alexandra Gardens by the Queen on 27 July 1910. Friary Gardens was enclosed in the autumn of 1904 and laid out in the winter of 1905/6. Gorsedd Gardens was enclosed and partly laid out in 1904-5, the public being finally admitted in 1910.

Alexandra Gardens

Alexandra Gardens occupies the rectangular block behind City Hall, between King Edward VII Avenue on the west and Museum Avenue on the east. It is a large, five-acre garden laid out formally, with the Welsh National Memorial of the European War (1914-18) in the centre. It is largely laid out to formal lawns with island beds and specimen trees. The main axes are central north-south and east-west tarmac paths, with perimeter paths, and east-west paths dividing the quarters in half. The paths curve around circular flowerbeds at the crossings with the central north-south path.

The garden is bounded by a beech hedge and a wide shrub border backed by mixed deciduous trees. These include birch, magnolia, flowering cherry and malus. The lawns in the north half of the garden have circular rose beds in their centres and the main north-south path is bordered by cypresses. The circular bed at the northern crossing is surrounded by eight flowering cherry trees. A large statue of Henry Austin Bruce, 1st Lord Aberdare, stands facing east in the lawn in the north-east quadrant of the garden. This is a standing bronze figure on a tall, tapering ashlar plinth inscribed

on the east side. It was sculpted in 1898 by H. Hampton. Opposite, on the west side of the central path, is a small stone paved area surrounded by low evergreen shrubs, at the east end of which is an upright slab of rock with a plaque on the west side recording that it is in memory of Cardiff men killed in the Falklands War, 1982. There are three *Cedrus atlantica glauca* in the lawn to the north and three in the lawn to the south.

The War Memorial is an imposing, circular structure of Portland stone, with a wide brick path around it. Between the path and the Memorial is a flowerbed of bedding plants and Chusan palms (*Trachycarpus fortunei*). Tarmac cross paths leading to the Memorial from the east and west are flanked by rectangular stone plinths that may have been designed to hold statues. The Memorial was instigated in 1919, and a fountain on the Green Circle (now gone) in front of the City Hall was agreed on. In July 1924 the design of Mr (later Sir) J. Ninian Comper was accepted. However, the site was unacceptable, and eventually it was agreed that the Memorial should be erected in its present position in 1925. Contractors began work in 1926 and the Memorial was unveiled on 12 June 1928 by Edward, Prince of Wales. After its erection the Parks Committee decided to ask Mr Comper his views on the setting of the memorial. His answer was that he thought the general setting appropriate, but that he would like some changes of detail. He suggested beds of deep red China roses around the outside of the path circling the memorial and he also disliked the existing acacias lining the paths leading to the memorial and wanted them replaced with trees of a more columnar shape, such as cypresses. These changes were approved and the work carried out the following winter.

The Memorial is a tall, circular colonnade of Corinthian columns, the solid base interrupted by three flights of steps leading down into a sunken court around which are stone benches. The steps are set within three projecting porticos. In the centre of the sunken court is a circular fountain basin, in the middle of which is a faceted plinth topped with shallow basins. Above this is a circular column with three bronze figures holding wreaths standing between slender attached columns. These represent a soldier, sailor and airman. Standing on top, facing west, is a winged bronze figure of Victory holding a sword hilt uppermost. Beneath is inscribed *In Hoc Signo Vinces*. Water plays from the mouths of three leaping bronze dolphins below the figure. The frieze of the colonnade carries inscriptions in English and Welsh.

The southern half of the garden mirrors the north, with a standing stone memorial on the east side to Welsh men who fell in the Spanish Civil War (1936-38). A small triangular stone on the west side, opposite, stands by a deciduous tree. A plaque on the stone records that the tree was planted in memory of Raoul Wallenberg who saved 100,000 lives (24 November 1985).

Gorsedd Gardens

Gorsedd Gardens is a four-sided two-acre area of informal garden to the south of the National Museum. It is so named after the Gorsedd Circle of standing stones that lies near the north side of the garden. This was re-erected here in 1905, having formerly been put up elsewhere in the park for the National Eisteddfod of 1899. The garden is laid out with informal lawns, specimen trees and tree and shrub borders. Winding brick paths run through the gardens and around the Gorsedd circle of red conglomerate stones set in grass, with four ash trees planted inside it.

The north side of the garden is bounded by a low yew hedge and iron railings, backed by a row of flowering cherries. The east side is bounded by an earthen bank

planted with mixed trees and shrubs, with a row of limes along the bank and pines in the north-east and south-east corners. *Viburnum rhytidiphyllum* and holly are prominent among the shrubs. Just inside the bank, in the middle of the garden, is a small wooden kiosk. The south side of the garden is bounded by an escallonia hedge. Along the west side are shrubs beds and beeches, with a core of laurel and aucuba.

A number of statues adorn the garden. On the north side is a standing bronze statue of David Lloyd George on a tall, tapering ashlar plinth. At the south end of the garden, next to the path, is a more elaborate statue to John Cory, coal owner and philanthropist, by Sir W. Goscombe John. It is a life-size standing bronze statue, facing south, on an tapering ashlar plinth decorated with a row of rosettes around the base. The inscription records that it was erected by his friends and fellow citizens in 1906. Next to the path in the north-west corner of the garden is another Goscombe John statue, of Lord Ninian Edward Crichton Stuart (1883-1915), who fell in France at the battle of Loos. It is of a standing bronze figure in uniform, facing west, on a moulded ashlar stone plinth. Immediately to the west of the garden, set in an area of grass between the Boulevard de Nantes and the City Hall, is a large equestrian statue by Goscombe John of the 1st Viscount Tredegar. It was erected in 1909 on the 55th anniversary of the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava. It faces south, and the bronze horse and rider are mounted on a large rectangular ashlar plinth decorated with bronze panels.

Friary Gardens

Friary Gardens occupies a triangular area of about one acre, bounded by the Boulevard de Nantes on the north and North Road on the west. It is divided into two very different areas by the Dock Feeder canal, which runs through the middle. The canal is flanked by deciduous trees, including sycamore and oak, with a row of sweet chestnuts along the north side. The 3rd Marquis of Bute had stipulated that the north bank of the Feeder should be planted with trees and enclosed. The plantation is bounded on the north by iron railings, to the north of which is an area of grass and flowering cherry trees. On the east side of the garden the canal passes under a flat stone bridge with ashlar parapets ending in substantial rectangular piers.

The southern half of the garden is a triangular area, slightly sunken on the east and west sides, laid out as a formal parterre garden of box-edged beds and gravel paths. This was first known as a 'Dutch garden', and has retained its original layout. It is bounded on the east and west by low iron railings on a stone footing, with a yew hedge inside on the west. Below are gentle grass slopes down to the formal garden. The entrance is on the south-east side, with a flight of stone steps flanked by low parapets. In the middle of the path along the north side is a large statue by P. Macgillivray to John, 3rd Marquis of Bute, Baron Cardiff, Earl of Dumfries, Earl of Windsor (1847-1900), erected in 1928. It is a life-size bronze standing statue, facing south, on a tapering and moulded ashlar plinth. The sides are decorated with heraldic bronze panels. The perimeter path is bounded by box edging, and behind it, on the north side, is a narrow strip of grass with bay trees clipped into large balls planted at intervals. At the east end is a large horse chestnut tree.

Sources

Secondary

Pettigrew, A., 'The public parks and recreation grounds of Cardiff' (1926), vol. II, pp. 149 ff. and vol VI, pp. 72-76. Cardiff Central Library.
Chappell, E.L., *Cardiff's Civic Centre* (1946).
Newman, J., *The buildings of Wales. Glamorgan* (1995), pp. 220-37.