

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

REGISTER ENTRY

VICTORIA PARK, SWANSEA

Ref number	PGW (Gm) 61 (SWA)
OS Map	159
Grid ref	SS 642 922
Former county	West Glamorgan
Unitary authority	City and County of Swansea
Community council	Uplands
Designations of William Thomas Grade II	Listed buildings: Patti Pavilion Grade II; Statue
Site evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	A small Victorian urban public park in the centre of Swansea that incorporates a large conservatory, the Patti Pavilion, brought from Craig-y-nos Castle in 1920.
Type of site	Urban public park
Main phases of construction	1887

Site description

Victoria Park is a small, rectangular, Victorian public park, opened on Jubilee Day, 1887. It lies on level ground on the sea front, to the west of the city centre, bounded by St Helens Avenue on the north and the Mumbles Road on the south. The park originally extended north-eastwards to St Helen's Crescent, over the site of the present Guildhall, built in 1932-36.

In 1872 the privately owned site of the park was used as an open space, with a cricket club and football pitch on it. It was secured for the city largely through the efforts of Alderman William Thomas, whose statue adorns the park. He was also instrumental in obtaining Cwmdonkin and Brynmill parks before he left the Council in 1894. The original layout, shown on the 1917 (2nd edition) Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1914, was simple. There was a grand entrance at the north-east end, with the statue of William Thomas in a circle inside the entrance and a bowling green behind it. There were perimeter paths and a cross axis, now Francis Street, which now forms the north-east boundary of the park. In the eastern half there was a bandstand near the south end but little else. The western half was also simply laid out with a

perimeter path but there was also a small, formal, triangular garden on the south side. This is no longer part of the park, a former path, which ran along the north-west side of the triangular garden, having been turned into Guildhall Road South. The triangular garden is now a road and a traffic island. The park, reduced to its western half in the early 1930s, was developed further in the 1920s and 1930s. Postcards from this period show flowerbeds of colourful bedding plants, some surrounded by low railings, rustic archways over paths and small, octagonal, rustic kiosks, now gone.

The park is bounded by iron railings and laid out formally, divided into sections by straight, tarmacked paths. The main axis is a wide central walk running north-east/south-west, with the Patti Pavilion at its west end. The walk is flanked by grass strips laid out with island beds, fastigiate conifers, two prunuses and rocks. These are backed by privet hedges.

At the east end there are two entrances with a semi-circular bed between them planted with bedding and *Trachycarpus fortunei*. At the south end of the bed is a modern single-storey maintenance building. Along the south side are two bowling greens, made in 1909, with tarmac paths around them and bounded by the privet hedge flanking the central walk on the north side. On the south side of the eastern one is a brick single-storey pavilion with a verandah in front. To their west are two hard tennis courts bounded by a privet hedge, to the west of which is a north-south path leading to an entrance at the south end. This is flanked by wide grass strips, that on the east having a large wavy-edged bed of colourful bedding plants set in it, that on the west with smaller beds. To the west is a sunken lawn with geometrical beds for bedding plants cut into it and a central bed planted with a *Trachycarpus fortunei*. The lawn is bounded on the south and west by privet hedges. A tarmac path along the south side of the park is flanked by shrubs on the south and a bed, edged with stone, with prunus trees, cordylines and bedding next to the tennis courts. Half way along is a lawn next to the park boundary with a central fountain in a rectangular pool. The fountain has a circular concrete base on top of which is artificial rockwork with painted cherub figures standing, kneeling and sitting on its sides and with circular bowls on top. A plaque records that the fountain was erected on 6th September 1987 to celebrate the centenary of the park and of the Boys Brigade in Wales.

To the north of the central walk there is a lawn and children's playground in the eastern half, with a small rectangular area of lawn, rose beds, ornamental trees and shrubs enclosed by a privet hedge at the east end. The north-western quarter is taken up with hard tennis courts and a basketball court bounded on the north and west by privet hedges. A belt of mixed trees and shrubs, bounded by iron railings and a tarmac walk, runs along the north side of the park. Trees include evergreen oaks, with two large poplars in the north-east corner; shrubs include pittosporums, cotoneasters and crataegus. In the north-west corner, partly concealed from the park by a cypress hedge, are a number of single-storey brick and rendered maintenance buildings, one set against a high brick wall which runs behind them on the north side. The central one has been burnt out. To the south of the buildings is a rectangular lawn with geometrical island beds.

The west end of the park is dominated by the Patti Pavilion. Two entrances, flanked by square stone piers, lead into the park on the west side, with paths leading to the pavilion. This is a tall, white-painted former conservatory or winter garden, the tall, central section of which has a corrugated-iron roof shaped like the upturned hull of a boat. This is flanked by single-storey pent-roof sections with glazed walls on stone bases. The structure of the building is of cast iron. Single-storey flat-roofed

wings extend to the east and west and the main entrance is in that in the centre of the east end. A photograph of the 1930s shows that the roof of the entrance wing was supported at the front on square piers with openings between them. These have now been filled in. The building is now used for communal events. The pavilion originally stood on the terrace at Craig-y-nos Castle, Ystradgynlais, but was bequeathed by the singer Dame Adelina Patti, owner of the castle, to the people of Swansea. It was re-erected in Victoria Park in 1920.

In front of the pavilion, at its east end, is a tarmac apron with a central statue of William Thomas. This is a bronze statue of a standing figure on a tall, tapering granite plinth. The inscription on the east side records that Thomas was the mayor in 1877-78 and that he was a 'Pioneer - champion of open spaces'. Carved on the bottom of the plinth is the name of the sculptor, Ivor J. Thomas, Swansea. The statue was originally erected at the main entrance to the park, at its north-east end, in 1906. It was removed to its present position in 1930 prior to the building of the Guildhall on the eastern half of the park.

Sources

Primary

Old postcards of the park (1920s and 1930s).

Secondary

Rogers, W.C., *A pictorial history of Swansea* (1981).

Newman, J., *The buildings of Wales. Glamorgan* (1995), p. 596.