







As with the Conservation Area as a whole, the park itself can be broken down for analytical purposes into a number of distinctive character zones. In reality these zones blend seamlessly into one another, but the broad subdivisions provide a convenient basis for description and analysis of the park as it is today and the ways in which it has changed over time.

It is considered that the main character zones comprise the following:

-  The main entrance gates and the formal gardens and paths.
-  The central platform area with steps, pavilion and bandstand.
-  The ornamental lake area.
-  The northern zone including the recreation grounds and the depot.

Ref Diagram 1

ZONE ONE

The main entrance and formal gardens

The principal entrance to the Park is via an impressive ornamental gateway served by a driveway entrance and located, as noted, at its south-east corner at the junction of Mesnes Park Terrace and Bridgeman Terrace. The wide sweeping kerbed carriage crossing has no surface differentiation to denote a pedestrian crossing and in effect is a continuation of the junction carriageway.

The ornamental cast iron park driveway gates are supported by Pennine sandstone ashlar piers and flanked by narrower pedestrian gates with lower outer piers. The gates and piers are Grade II listed.



The gates are said to be the product of the renowned McFarlane Foundry of Glasgow and contain medallions showing the town's coat of arms. They have had a chequered history, having been removed for the wartime scrap drive during 1941-5. In 1950, they were rescued from the scrap yard restored and re-hung by Bridge and Sons (Wigan) Limited in 1950 only to be damaged in a road accident in 1957.

The fragments were collected and once again repaired and reinstalled by Bridge and Company.



One gate pier has since lost its ball finial. The town shield is a distinctive feature but the drab green paint does not perhaps show the elaborate ironwork to its best advantage. A short length of old railings survives adjacent the gate piers, but the park's boundaries are now mainly low privet hedges.



The wide sweeping entrance driveway, and absence of differentiated pedestrian crossing provision does not offer a pedestrian friendly welcome to the park. The tarmac surface at the entrance is worn and reveals sections of the old stone thresholds.

Flanking the gateway is the 1878 Swiss Chalet style lodge. The entrance lodge was designed by W H Fletcher of Welbeck Street, London; extended in 1928 by the addition of a two storey wing. The extension sits somewhat awkwardly with the original. This is an early 20th Century view before the extension was built.



The lodge is described in the List Entry as one and a half and two storey, with irregular plan. The lower left portion next to the gateway has a projecting gabled porch with recessed doorway above, which is a plasterwork panel inscribed with date 1878. The base is snecked sandstone with half timbering above. Elaborate tall Jacobean style chimneys in brick and stone, rise from a sweeping slated roof.

The 1928 extension called Mesnes House is in similar materials but of two storeys gabled and set back from the lodge.



To its rear is a group of trees and open grassed area abutting onto the rear of the former Grammar school and once used as tennis courts. Though the lodge is Grade II listed it has been disused since the mid 1980s and is identified as a building at risk. It is boarded up with roofs part felted and battened. The dilapidated appearance of these key buildings located at the main entrance conveys an initial impression of neglect, which is at odds with the generally neat and well kept appearance of the park as a whole. Attempts have been made in the past to find a suitable new use for the lodge but without success. The complicated internal layout and varied floor levels are said to be an obstacle. The building is also subject to a covenant which restricts its use to a use for municipal purposes, otherwise its ownership will revert to the Rector.



The renovation and re use of these buildings for a suitable purpose must nevertheless be an absolute priority in any scheme to revitalise the park. It is clearly desirable that the lodge and its extension are used for a purpose which relates directly to the use and enjoyment of the park itself, reinstating the original relationship between lodge and park, though not necessarily as a residence.

From the entrance gates, the carriage drive slopes slightly downwards, flanked by trees and shrubs which initially screen the view towards the pavilion. About 60metres from the entrance, the carriage drive alignment veers slightly northwards and the park opens out onto the formal gardens with a vista towards the elevated pavilion, some 220m beyond.



The formal gardens, described in early accounts as being in the 'Italianate style', consist of a mainly flat area comprising spacious lawns flanking the 7m wide carriage drive which forms the central axis aligned upon the pavilion. The lawns contain a pattern of small floral beds, beyond which are curvilinear evergreen hedges trimmed to about a maximum 1.5m in height. The outer edges of the park are bordered by mature trees and shrubbery.

The lawns contain a number of individual trees some evidently being fairly recent plantings. Secondary paths lead off the main drive at right angles, then turn parallel with the main axis before looping back to the centre below the pavilion steps, providing alternative routes for strolling.

The view northwards to the pavilion along the carriage drive is perhaps the most significant planned vista within the park, with the corresponding prospect from the pavilion southwards over the lawns and flower beds towards the town centre.

(Ref diagram 2)



Early plans and photographs indicate that the vista towards the pavilion would have been obtained directly from the entrance gates across open lawns. This vista is now partly obscured by trees and shrubbery though even in this 1920's view, the dense growth of trees and shrubs around the perimeter is apparent.

It clearly shows the elaborate floral and rhododendron planting scheme Today's floral beds are smaller and simpler. (The last carpet bedding was 1976).

The photo shows the main central axis with temperance fountain, 1880, lower; the pavilion and site of large fountain centre; to centre right the bandstand; duck pond and woodland to right. The still undeveloped plot in Bridgeman Terrace, left, is evident. Paths lead to the other park entrances from Bridgeman Terrace, Parson's Walk, Park Road and from the north via Walkden Avenue.





The paths would have been originally gravel or shale. Approval for re-surfacing in tarmacadam, was granted in 1917 but the work was not carried out until on or after 1921. In the above 1920's view the paved areas appear to be still in their original state.

The main drive and some of the other paths, are neatly edged in stone setts but in places, surfaces are crazed. Other sections are patchy e.g where repairs have been made; some localised ponding is evident after heavy rain.



Mid way along the formal axis is the Powell Monument, a bronze life sized statue of one of the town's long serving MPs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Sir Francis Sharp Powell.



The figure is set upon a granite plinth and raised platform, with corner posts which once held chains. The monument proclaims the year of its

unveiling, 1910, which was according to the local press account carried out with due Edwardian pomp and circumstance. The whole is listed Grade II, designed by E G Gillick.

Oddly, given the overall symmetry of the layout of this area of the park, it was not thought necessary to provide an equivalent feature opposite to balance the formal composition and though of unquestionable artistic and historic merit, the monument appears rather isolated.

There is not even a bench to encourage visitors to sit and contemplate the scene, sadly perhaps to discourage vandalism.

No doubt when there are bedding plants in bloom this area of the park is most attractive, but it appears somewhat empty when the beds are bare, a situation exacerbated by the wide expanse of tarmac surfaced driveway.

Tree and Shrubs within the park

During the summer months, at least, the dense perimeter tree and shrub planting effectively encloses the central zone of the park to such an extent, that only traffic noise serves as a reminder that the park is situated within an urban area.

The present day aerial photograph provides a good impression of the extent of tree cover within the park showing the main tree groups to be concentrated round the perimeter, with planting in depth around the ornamental lake and to north-east of the pavilion.

A tree survey of the park in 2002 revealed some 1,060 trees of which 180 have been identified as being in poor condition warranting removal, with a further 147 noted as in need of arboricultural work for various reasons. Some 710 trees, 66% of



the total, are mature or reaching maturity. It is believed that the park was originally planted with a mix of deciduous trees and conifers but that the conifers were killed by air pollution so that none of the originals have survived.

Over the last two decades, trees in the park have received only a limited amount of management which has concentrated mainly on safety issues. As a result, a dense enveloping canopy has developed, to the detriment of the tree and shrub under-storey. Holly bushes, probably originally intended to be shrubs, have developed into a subdominant tree layer. The crowding of trees and shrubs is probably due to the originally dense planting to give an initial green effect together with later colonisation by seeding species of trees.

The present density of greenery and the condition of some trees and shrubbery has given rise to the need for an arboricultural management programme. This would involve selective thinning which could beneficially open up views and improve perceptions of security.

A comprehensive account of the tree and shrub planting in the park and proposed arboricultural management measures has been provided by the Woodlands Officer for the Leisure and Culture Trust and is set out in Appendix 5.

ZONE TWO

The central area containing the pavilion, steps and bandstand

The pavilion is placed axially upon a two stage mounded platform, which is semi-circular on its western side, rising some 6.5m above the lower ground level but blending into the natural ground level on its northern and eastern sides. The platform is approached on its southern and western sides by two stage flights of stone steps.

At the foot of the south steps a large ornamental cast iron fountain once occupied the point where the loop paths converged onto the main axis. The fountain was supplied by the Coalbrookdale Company.



The fountain stalk was 14 feet high, placed in a basin of 25 ft diameter.

The fountain was removed c1914. The site is now a flower bed bordered by grass.

The higher ground on the northern and eastern sides of the Pavilion is accessible by sloping paths. On the eastern side of the pavilion there is extensive tree and shrub planting including a zone of conifers and a secondary path leading to the Bridgeman Terrace entrance.



Undoubtedly the Park's most important built feature, the pavilion was clearly intended to be the elegant focal point of the axial plan, taking advantage of the original contours of the land. Of course other views towards this landmark structure can be obtained from various positions within the park and these incidental views and vistas add to the element of surprise and interest within the park. The approach to the pavilion via the two flights of 16 stone steps is particularly impressive.

The steps are listed Grade II, c1880 "sandstone ashlar, wide steps in two flights, interrupted by intermediate terraces. Low side walls have moulded copings; they form a group with the pavilion and are listed for their group value". The 22 ft (6.7m) wide steps were erected by Messrs Dalton and Co London. terracotta ornamental urns were originally placed at the landing pedestals, possibly replaced later by cast iron versions supplied by the Coalbrookdale Ironworks, Ironbridge, but none now remain.

The steps now are now heavily worn and in places laminated. Joints have opened up. Handrails seem to have been absent from the beginning, perhaps more an issue of concern today than in 1878!

The pavilion is octagonal in plan, approx. 14m across, 2 storeys with tall central glazed lantern. Polygonal single storey wings project on northern, eastern



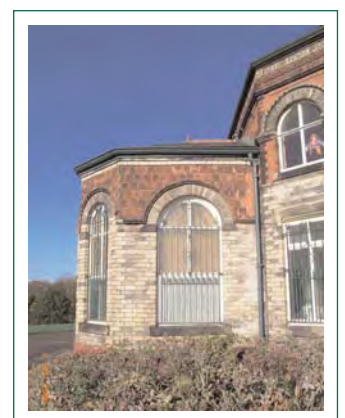
and western axes. Its south eastern elevation features a lofty 5 sided open porch supported on twisted cast iron columns with foliated open work brackets forming decorative spandrels. The porch and terrace offer a fine elevated prospect

over the formal gardens towards the town centre. Access to the porch is by 3 stone steps from the pathway.

At the opening of the pavilion in 1880, toasts were raised to John McClean, the designer of the park and to the architect, W H Fletcher. This suggests that the concept for the pavilion was John McClean's but that the architect for the lodge probably also undertook the detailed design of the pavilion.

Externally the lower elevations are in buff brick, unusual in the area, surmounted by red brick at first floor level.

Round headed windows feature in the wings and at first floor level with yellow brick voussoirs and drip moulds, sandstone cills and springers. The grills are a recent addition, in keeping. Terracotta tiles with floral motif clad



the spandrels. Rising above the first floor flat roof is the lofty fully glazed lantern also octagonal in plan supported on 8 cast iron columns.

From a distance the pagoda style roof seems to float above the lantern.



Six tall round headed windows occupy each side above which are small ports glazed, alternately in red and blue glass, and above these are row of star shaped ventilation openings. The structure is basically an external brick perimeter wall roofed towards the central lantern, which is supported by 8 cast iron columns rising in stacks of 3. The roof is a two stage in-swept pagoda style clad in slate.

Internally, the ground floor is an open space containing the 8 columns clad in timber. The first floor is decked over but was originally an open gallery permitting light to enter the interior space from the lantern and facilitating ventilation.

Externally the pavilion is sited within a circular kerbed dais, paved up to the building on its northern side where service access is provided. The paved surround is functional rather than pleasing. The south facing semi-circle has a narrow grass borders containing low shrubbery either side of the porch.

The pavilion is in use as a cafeteria with a particular speciality in ice creams and appears to be a very popular venue.

As well as providing a focal point and landmark within the park, the pavilion's lantern and distinctive roof profile can also be seen from Market Place in the town centre at least when trees are bare, reinforcing the visual linkage between the park and the town centre.

In 2004 a comprehensive analysis of the condition of the building was carried out by Heritage Engineering of Glasgow. Their report identified the ironwork as almost certainly the product of the McFarlane Foundry. The report concluded that whilst the building was in basically sound condition and some useful remedial work had been carried out over the years it was not up to conservation standard and in time elements of the structure

would deteriorate. Externally, there was some damage to brickwork, erosion of stonework and missing terracotta tiles. The yellow bricks in particular appear to show effects of past atmospheric pollution and a general cleaning to conservation standards, might be worthwhile.

The rather drab painting scheme and pollution stained brickwork do not present the pavilion's attractive architecture at its best.

The 2004 report recommended a programme of specialist renovation work to achieve the long-term conservation of this unusual and important structure. The report is held by the Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust.

This early 20th Century view shows the memorial statue in Carrera marble erected by public subscription to the memory of the Regular, Volunteer and Imperial Yeomanry forces of Wigan and



District, who fell in the South African War 1899-1902. The memorial was unveiled in 1903. After 65 years the statue was removed because of its deteriorating condition, the railings having been removed probably during WW2.

The photo also shows that the first floor of the pavilion had a decorative railing balustrade and that the roof of the porch appeared to be in corrugated iron. Note also the fascia below the pagoda roof.

Of the statue, only its Aberdeen granite plinth remains, forlorn, an example of one of the park's lost treasures.



In 1920, two German field guns captured by Lancashire troops were placed next to the statue and a WWI tank positioned on top of the hill facing the pavilion. These were all removed in 1935, ... "as they served no useful purpose".

The pavilion is unquestionably the most significant building in the park by reason of its unique architectural character, its use of materials exemplifying 19th Century skills and technology, particularly the use of cast iron and its design purpose as a focal point within the park.

Renovation of the pavilion to conservation standards will secure its long term survival which is of fundamental importance to the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area as whole.

The Bandstand



The bandstand is located at a lower level 70m to the north-west of the pavilion. Listed Grade II it is an open sided structure, octagonal in plan, with tall inswept roof. Set on a slightly raised plinth, the bandstand is enclosed by a low hedge following the octagonal plan, surrounded by a circular paved area of about 55m overall diameter.

The list entry describes it thus: c1880, altered, sandstone plinth. Cast iron columns at the angles with fluted bases, twisted shafts and crocket capitals:

these are now linked by wooden tie beams; large pierced decorative brackets springing from the capitals both laterally and forwards carry the oversailing eaves of a strongly swept roof, which has a simple corona round a dome with renewed finial. Forms group with the pavilion.

The bandstand design was in fact approved in 1890 and it was erected in 1892. In 1922, folding glazed screens were fitted and admission fees charged for bandstand seating. The following year, the grass surround was replaced with concrete covered with asphalt and a retaining wall built. These improvements allowed for dancing, but only two hours per evening during summer!

In 1926, new shutters were added, the floor concreted and the paved surround extended. In 1983, submissions by the Wigan Civic Trust to the Civic Trust Pride of Place competition resulted in an award of £500 for repairs to ironwork and restoration of the roof to its original profile. Refurbishment work was carried out in 1985 by the Leisure Department.

In 2004 the condition of the bandstand was also evaluated by Heritage Engineering of Glasgow. The consultants believe that it was a product of George Smith and Son's Sun Foundry, Glasgow, who produced numbers of such structures involving the liberal use of cast iron.

They consider the band stand design used at Mesnes Park to be one of the finest models produced by the Sun Foundry.

Their report identified a number of defects and made recommendations for heritage based conservation works. These include the restoration of lost features, including a decorative cast iron balustrade. They conclude that the bandstand is a rare and fine example of its kind but importantly it forms a key



element in the park amenity group of structures. It can be restored to a high standard and its life extended by its previous span. The structure restored will enhance the aesthetic appeal of the park and encourage its use as a venue for musical events.

The bandstand has over the years clearly been an important focus for public entertainment within the park. For many years on Wednesdays and Sundays in summer, concerts were given by military and other bands*.

*from pamphlet c1950 provided by GMAU.

Protection of such an open sided structure from vandalism as with other vulnerable elements of the Park environment, will however be an issue that must be addressed in a conservation management strategy. As with the pavilion, the renovation of the bandstand to conservation standards will be necessary to ensure the long term survival of this important feature of the park and the conservation area.

ZONE THREE

The lake area



This pleasing ornamental water feature consists of an irregularly shaped lake about 150m in length, which extends along the western edge of the Park, abutting onto Parson's Walk and Park Road. At its northern end there is a substantial rockery - originally with a waterfall, designed and installed at a cost of £500, by Messrs Pulham and Sons ... "to convey an air of artificial rudeness which will resemble a natural structure".

Source: Wigan Examiner August 9th 1878

Pulham were amongst the foremost exponents of Victorian rock garden design pioneering the use of realistic and long lasting Portland cement based artificial stone though in their later works they used natural rocks. The material used at Mesnes has all the appearance of natural stone but may indeed contain some artificial material. The waterfall is long defunct but the 'rock' formations, channels and basins remain. The Wigan Archaeological Society is currently involved in investigations of the water supply and pumping arrangements which once fed the waterfall.

Early illustrations show a set of cast iron railings to the duck feeding area, thought to be of a McFarlane Foundry pattern. The present railings are a later replacement. Three islets are provided planted originally with shrubs and rhododendrons.