



Restoration work on the lake to repair leakage, improve water supply and restore banks was undertaken between 1998 and 2000, assisted by the 'Friends of Mesnes Park'. The pond is home to a seemingly thriving waterfowl population. Pathways around the pond provide pleasant walks amid mature trees and shrubbery. The western side is open to Parson's Walk and Park Road, permitting a degree of inter-visibility between park and highway.

The contrast between the informal woodland walks around the pond and the formally laid out and more open central zone is one of the park's attractive features.



Between the lake area and the former Grammar school is a roughly rectangular area, enclosed by high hedges laid out as a rose garden with a sun dial at its centre. Its site was originally part of the general parkland but by 1929 it had become tennis courts.

The Rose Garden was opened in 1949 and dedicated to the memory of Alderman James Pagett, Chairman of the Markets and Parks Committee for 37 years. Some restoration work has recently been carried out but the sun dial gnomon is missing. A 1950s style gate with modern brick piers provides pedestrian access to and from Parson's Walk just to the north of the rose garden. At the Park Road entrance, pair of more ornate gates, probably of wrought iron remain. As with the Park's other gates, their drab

green paintwork with rust showing through does not present them to their best advantage. An open sided 'Tudor style' shelter originally with toilets at the rear dating from 1936 is located on the loop path about 30m east of the duck pond providing an outlook over the formal gardens. It is built in brick with half timbered twin gables with fascia boards and plain tiled roof. The shelter has been prone to vandalism and had become dilapidated, the toilets now having been demolished. Some refurbishment of the shelter has been carried out recently, involving re-tiling the roof and installing new iron grill gates but damaged roof tiles were still evident at March 2006. Although not one of the park's original structures, the shelter has been an established feature of the park for 70 years and is certainly worthy of retention as long as it can be protected from malicious damage.





ZONE FOUR

The northern park and recreation grounds

The main spine footpath curves northwards from the pavilion, bisecting the northern area of the park and leading to its north entrance. The subtle curvature of the path provides progressive views southwards towards the pavilion. On its south side are the recreation grounds and children's play area. To its north is an open field used as sports pitches extending up to the college. A drinking fountain was installed on this path in 1880 provided by the Abstinence Society, removed during 1920s. A link path now leads up to the college entrance, via a short flight of steps.

A belt of woodland planting extends north-eastwards from the pavilion and along the boundary with the former mill. The Bridgeman Terrace gate is a wrought iron type but evidently modern, set in c1950's brick piers flanked by short lengths of modern railings, again in need of attention by the painters!

The 'recreation grounds' consist of a group of 3 bowling greens with pavilion, a putting green and a pair of tennis courts arranged in a row alongside the railway embankment. Their development has taken place in several stages. The 1894 OS shows the northern area of the park as open land bisected by the meandering Barley Brook, which disappeared in a culvert beneath the railway embankment about 120m north of Park Road. Nearby was the site of the Gidlow Lane Colliery No 3 shown on the 1848 OS. A footpath looped around the northern area providing an outer circuit. It is thought that this open area was intended to cater for archery, cricket, lawn tennis and bowling. The development of a second lake in the area was mentioned in the description of the park at its formal opening. In 1903 the first bowling green was created on a site adjoining the railway and Park Road.



By 1908, 3 'recreation grounds' had been added. In 1921 a second bowling green was opened and tennis courts provided. In 1922 the remainder of the Barley Brook was culverted and the ground levelled with assistance from the Government Unemployment Grants Committee. In 1923 plans for more tennis courts and a further bowling green were proposed, which involved relocating some swings. The 1929 OS shows the arrangement much as it is today with three bowling greens, a putting green and two tennis courts, occupying the full western edge of the park with the park depot and glasshouses at the northern corner. The northernmost of the greens is now a pitch and put course. A hard surfaced area bounded by hoop railings has been laid out between the northern-most tennis court and the depot, allocated for skate boarding, in-line skating and BMX biking. Between 1960 - 62, the open area in front of the Rylands Mill was levelled to accommodate the summer shows, displacing the children's playground. Works carried out in recent times, have included the provision of a fragrance garden, 1982, improvements to the relocated children's play area and the construction of a play shack in the 1980's.

The presence of the railway becomes more apparent in the northern area though its embankment is well wooded. Trains now probably create less disturbance than in the past, however.

In the eloquent language of the day, the Wigan



examiner describing the future experience of park visitors, suggested ...

"the weary may recline beneath the foliage of overhanging trees and listen to the musical murmurings of the gentle zephyr and yet find it impossible to forget the grim realities by which they are surrounded, for although the vision may be restricted, their musings will be disturbed by the sharp shrill whistle of the engine as it hurries past, the rattle of the trains on the lines and the harsh - hum of the machinery in motion in the adjacent mill".

The author was pleased to comment that:

"the Park Committee had obtained permission from the railway company to plant shrubs etc. along that portion of the embankment which bounds the park"; also to note that Turner's colliery which occupied the site and contrasted "rather curiously with the sylvan aspect of the park", would be removed when its lease expired in two years time. Wigan Examiner August 9th 1878 extract from article on the park opening ceremony. (Wigan History Shop).

In its heyday some 200,000 bedding plants were raised annually in the depot greenhouses*.

*Undated pamphlet from GMAU, probably c1950.


Although clearly necessary for the upkeep of the park, the depot has become shabby and run down. Despite it being excluded from the Conservation Area, it is unfortunately located in a prominent elevated position in front of which is an untidy bank of rough ground.


Some tidying up and screening, perhaps including the demolition and replacement of the unsightly depot buildings would be beneficial.

The park's north entrance, created in 1910 at a cost of £10!, is little more than an alleyway with a raised bank on the north side and the depot on the other. A short length of original railing oddly survives in this location. From the entrance, a footpath continues, in a north-westerly direction, initially along the park depot wall then turns northwards to follow the foot of the railway embankment leading to Walkden Avenue, a suburban road about 250m away. New buildings for the Pagefield College annex, (under construction December 2005) occupy an elevated site to the north and east of the footpath. A triangular area of patched tarmac formerly a play area, flanks the main park path near to the northern entrance, contributing to the somewhat unkempt appearance of the park's northern extremity.

The narrow path with its blind corner and poor quality northern entrance represent an unsatisfactory and somewhat intimidating approach to the park.

Summary - The Park character area

 As the focus of the Conservation Area the park is its dominant feature, and its raison d'être. The park's mature landscaping lends a spacious and sylvan setting to its immediate surroundings. Mesnes Park is itself a heritage asset included on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. It also provides the setting for a number of built features of acknowledged heritage value each complementing the other to form a complete composition.

 The park has adapted to meet contemporary recreational needs by providing facilities for a diverse range of activities and events. It still



provides floral bedding displays in spring and summer; it has modern facilities for children's play, it caters for crown green bowling, tennis, basketball, crazy golf and informal recreation. Additionally, the Rangers offer a programme of 'hands-on' events in the park throughout the year whilst the main event of the year is probably the 'Wigan One World Festival', (WOW!) a major event in the park aimed to celebrate the town's cultural diversity.

✎ Mesnes Park thus remains a valued urban park capable of accommodating contemporary leisure requirements, readily accessible on foot from nearby residential districts and within a 10 minute walk of the main town centre facilities.

✎ Historically it is important because of it was the town's first urban park commissioned during the high Victorian era of Wigan's industrial growth and expansion. It was the outcome of both civic endeavours and private philanthropy to preserve the historic former manorial demesnes land for the benefit of the community. Without the intervention of the town's benefactors, further encroachment by industry and commercial development would have been inevitable.

✎ In its planning, Mesnes Park is an example of the fashionable park design philosophy of the era. As described in this review, (and with reference to diagram1), its design skilfully accommodates a variety of landscapes in a relatively small space giving the impression of a much larger area. Especially noteworthy are the planned vistas and prospects towards and from the main entrance and the pavilion and the contrasting informality of the lakeside woodland area.

✎ The laying out of the park also represents an early colliery land reclamation project. It made

imaginative use of the natural ground contours and existing features, for example the marl pits which were adapted to the ornamental lake.

✎ It is a tribute to those involved in the management and stewardship of Mesnes Park over the years that so much of its original Victorian character has survived intact including its important heritage structures.



The view from the terrace c1907, showing the fountain and urns

Negative Factors/ Opportunities

Inevitably, the park has undergone many changes over the years not all of which have been beneficial. Natural wear and tear and exposure to weather and air pollution, the introduction of new facilities, changes in horticultural and landscape management practice and natural maturity of the landscape itself have all influenced its character and appearance.

Whilst horticultural stewardship of the park is evidently of a good standard, the budgets available for maintenance and upkeep in the recent past have not been sufficient to fund a comprehensive arboricultural management programme or restoration of the heritage structures to conservation standards. Nor has the reinstatement of lost or damaged ornamental features been possible.



In consequence, Mesnes Park today has lost some of the richness of detail embodied in the original concept and its surviving built features are in need of major overhaul. Many of the pathway surfaces including the broad 'carriage drive' are now badly deteriorated and in need of major renewal. As noted much of the remaining ironwork is shabby and in need of overhaul and repainting.

Perhaps the most significant changes have been the loss of the perimeter railings, the Coalbrookdale fountain and urns, the Boer War statue, the Pulham waterfall and the dilapidation of the lodge.

In more recent times those involved in managing and maintaining the park have had to contend with the effects of vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

The pedestrian provision at the main entrance gates is unsatisfactory for the reasons mentioned.

However as already noted, the original layout remains virtually unaltered, the important built structures survive and the park remains a valued asset in the community.

The HLF bid scheme provides a valuable opportunity to restore the park to at least some degree of its former glory and to restore the heritage assets to conservation standards and ensure their long term survival. It also offers the opportunity to adapt the park to modern needs for accessibility and to improve its safety and security in a manner which is compatible with its heritage status.

A fine prospect towards the town centre from the upper level of the park. The former grammar school tower, the Methodist Mission cupola (1907-8), and Parish Church tower as prominent landmarks. Site of Coalbrookdale fountain right foreground.

An assessment of the issues to be addressed in a management strategy for the park is set out under the Conservation Area Management section below.





Character area 2: The Mesnes Field



The Mesnes Field is an almost rectangular area of approximately 1.83 hectares, bounded by Mesnes Street, New Market Street, Parson's Walk and Mesnes Park Terrace. Mesnes Park Terrace and New Market Street are parallel and 120m apart. It was part of the original manorial demesnes land. The Mesnes Field was used as a playing field by the former High School but since the closure of the school it has been very much under used. Ownership of the Field remains with the Borough Council.

The field lies at a slightly lower level than the surrounding roads and is bounded by low hedges permitting views across it. Pedestrian access is by iron gates which open onto two short flights of steps at mid points on New Market Street and Mesnes Park Terrace but there are no connecting pathways. In November 2005, part of the area was laid out as a temporary car park. The picture shows the Mesnes Field viewed from south west. From the eastern side the view is dominated by the Wigan and Leigh College block rising 5 storeys from its slightly elevated site.

The Mesnes Field accommodates buildings at its south-western, north-western and north-eastern corners. The south western corner is dominated by the Council's Civic offices building.



Originally built as a food and grain warehouse this structure is three storeys in hard red brick, frontage 45m to new Market Street of 11 bays divided by brick pilasters and 25m in 4 bays to Parson's Walk. Ground floor elliptical arched windows have drip moulds and fluted keystones; pairs of rectangular windows with continuous stone heads and cills at first floor; pairs of round headed windows at second floor; fluted terracotta keystones continue as corbel brackets to dentilled cornice; parapet wall proclaims AD 1900 O & C Rushton Limited AD1905. The stock brick north elevation of the civic office is by contrast austere and unornamented.

Abutting on to its eastern flank are a pair of three storey shops of similar period. They feature large projecting 1st and 2nd floor bays, above a traditional shop fascia, attic gables with round arched windows stone cornices and ball finials.

The north west corner of the field is occupied by a large detached villa. Its name 'Drumcroon' inscribed in its stone plinth, it is an Arts and Crafts style building of the turn of the 20th Century. The earliest available record of this property is the 1909/10 street directory, which records it as the residence of John McAllister Boyd, surgeon and physician. The previous (1903) directory records the same person resident at 61 Mesnes Street and does not refer to any property in the position of Drumcroon. The 1925/26 directory finally mentions Drumcroon, still



occupied by J McAllister Boyd, BA MB, Bch, BAO, physician and surgeon. The building was clearly intended to be a dwelling for a gentleman of substance, its name and that of its original occupier evidently sharing a Scottish connection.



Known today as Drumcroon Gallery, an Arts education centre operated by the Borough Education Department, it is two storey in hard red brick with hipped and gabled plain tiled roof; prominent barge boards and brackets, stone cills and lintels, terracotta detail including a balustrade above the west bay window; a projecting 5 sided turret effectively turns the corner into the shorter Mesnes Park Terrace elevation.

A small hipped roof brick pavilion (boarded up) which also accommodates a sub station is sited next to Drumcroon on the Mesnes Park Terrace frontage.

Located on the north-east corner of the field is a terrace of 5 houses. No 1 Mesnes Park Terrace is a large two storey house in red brick with slated roof, splayed bays with hipped roofs; a pleasing round arched doorway. Nos 2 and 3 are plainer, in business use; Nos 4 and 5 are taller 3 storeys with 2 storey splayed bays and decorative tiling and capitals, prominent keystone and drip moulds to the doorways. No 4 is the Driving Test Centre; No 5 appears to remain residential. Nos, 4 and 5 appear on the 1894 OS.

No 5 marks the end of the terrace leaving an open gap of over 100m to Drumcroon.

The layout of the 5 properties and the street name suggest that perhaps it was intended to continue building along the frontage. Reference was made to subsidence problems in 1910 when a steamroller was engulfed in Mesnes Park Terrace. Perhaps this discouraged further development!

Public realm aspects: Mesnes Field Character Area

The Galleries shopping precinct opened 1989, occupies the entire length of New Market Street opposite the Mesnes Field. This modern development displays an interpretation of 'Victorian vernacular' design in red and blue brick, well modelled and detailed. Though its north elevation is not designed as shopping frontage, it accommodates accesses to a Morrisons superstore, the indoor Market Hall, Market Square and the Galleries. A service road used as a taxi rank and for disabled parking extends along the north frontage of the shopping centre. Pedestrian guard rails on the service road and the north side of New Market Street ensure that pedestrians are directed to crossing facilities located at the junctions of New Market Street with Parson's Walk and Mesnes Street, about 130m apart. The Mesnes Field is bounded at least on three sides by busy roads.

New Market Street is itself a busy cross town centre route. Mesnes Street and its continuation Bridgeman Terrace are classified B5376 which, continuing as Kenyon Road, leads to the A49 Preston road. Parson's Walk and its continuation Park Road, B5375, lead to Shevington and Appley Bridge. Both these classified roads are developments of paths or lanes, which are shown on the 1848 OS. Bridgeman Terrace is believed to follow the alignment of the Wigan Preston Roman Road, see Appendix 3.



From New Market Street a fine terrace of listed early to mid 19th Century Georgian style town houses at Dicconson Street are visible beyond a landscaped area. On the opposite corner, Mesnes House is a modern office building of distinctive and not displeasing design.

Summary of the Mesnes Field Character area

As noted, the Mesnes Field is historically important in that it was once part of the Manorial demesne, being divided off from the remainder of the Mesnes which ultimately became the park, as a consequence of the 1871 Wigan Rectory Glebe Act. Today it provides an area of green space penetrating up to the town centre. It permits open views towards the park and to the former grammar school.

The buildings located at the three corners of the playing field make positive contributions to the conservation area by reason of their scale, age, quality of detail and their generally consistent use of the typical local materials of the late 19th Century/early 20th Century notably red brick and sandstone.

The Rushton Building is especially prominent and by its scale and bulk helps to balance the modern and somewhat bland college buildings located opposite.

Drumcroon is, despite some replacement windows, a distinctive villa like building, well suited for its prominent corner position, its varied roof profile especially noticeable from Market Street.

Negative factors/ opportunities

The Mesnes Field itself is currently under used as a recreational space. The partial use for car parking is temporary, pending completion of the new Grand Arcade shopping development (taking place 2006) on the east side of Standishgate.

The Mesnes Field at present might be described as a wasting asset in that it is not a regularly used playing field nor is it an active urban open space. It contains little of landscape value nor does it function effectively as a physical link between the town centre and the park. Its very openness moreover exposes the generally nondescript backs of the corner buildings which were clearly not intended to be viewed as principal elevations.

Mesnes Park Terrace is a one-way street serving the driving test centre, the service area of the Thomas Linacre centre and the temporary Mesnes Field car park. The junctions at east and west ends have wide bellmouths because of the carriage drive access to the park gates and a redundant vehicle access to the Thomas Linacre Centre. The road tends to isolate the park from the town centre because of its inadequate pedestrian crossing provision.

If the Mesnes Field is no longer required as a playing field, it has the potential for remodelling as an urban open space which could be laid out so as to strengthen pedestrian links between the park and the town centre, possibly in conjunction with some form of traffic calming on Mesnes Park Terrace.



Character area 3: Parson's Walk and Park Road



The former grammar school, is located at the junction of Mesnes Park Terrace and Parson's Walk, abutting onto the south west corner of the Park. Pevsner described it as - "Grammar School, Parson's Walk Large neo Georgian, 1937 by A E Munby". It is a replacement of an earlier gothic style edifice dating from c1878. The present building is Grade II Listed; an extensive description is given in the list entry which describes it as "Thirties modernist style". Latterly a High School it is now converted to use as the Thomas Linacre Out Patients Department of the Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust.

It is a substantial two storey building, U shaped in plan, central main block of 60m with flanking wings 70m long enclosing a car park with gated main entrance facing onto Parson's Walk. The clock tower located on se corner is a local landmark. Hipped roofs are in a type of pan tile. Round headed windows at first floor level are used in the central parts of the wings with red tile voussoirs. The south wing containing the former assembly hall over a crypt, features very tall rectangular windows with horizontal glazing bars and margin panes as have the others.

Old stone shields with JB probably rescued from the 19th Century building are positioned over main entrances, commemorating Dr John Bridgeman, Rector and Lord of the Manor of Wigan 1615-1642 and whose family supplied or presented Rectors during the 18th and 19th Centuries.

Although a large building, its bulk when seen from the park is softened by nearby trees and shrubbery. The former school represents a period of building rare in the locality. Its 'modern movement' style, is in marked contrast to the predominantly Victorian architecture of the conservation area. It is also important for its historical association with the town and with the park.

The Parson's Walk edge to the park is bounded by a continuous low hedge. Trees and greenery dominate the scene especially viewed northwards as the road curves round to the north west.



A group of 36 houses on the west side of Parson's Walk form a more or less continuous frontage of some 310m between the Technical College campus and the railway bridge.

They vary in age and style and are a mixture of detached, semi detached and terraces. The development of this long frontage did not proceed chronologically outwards from the town centre. The 1894 OS shows Park Crescent complete, Nos