

## **BARRY, ROMILLY PARK**

**Ref number** PGW (Gm) 63 (GLA)

**OS Map** 171

**Grid ref** ST 102 669

**Former county** South Glamorgan

**Unitary authority** The Vale of Glamorgan

**Community council** Barry

**Designations** None

**Site evaluation** Grade II

**Primary reasons for grading** Barry's most important public park of the Edwardian period, which retains most of its original framework and features, including an attractive water and rockwork garden.

**Type of site** Urban public park

**Main phases of construction** 1898-1911

### **Site description**

Romilly Park is a small urban public park, much of whose original structure remains intact, situated near the western end of the town of Barry. The park is surrounded by roads and by the Barry railway along its south side. The ground slopes steeply to the south in the northern part of the park and more gently in the southern part. To the south of the railway is Cold Knap Park. To the north of the main park is a small detached section with a Gorsedd circle of stones.

The main part of the park is roughly triangular in shape, but with a curving boundary. It is bounded by iron railings, with a number of simple pedestrian entrances and two wider ones for vehicles in the south-east and north-west corners. The northern and southern halves of the park are rather different in character.

The north end is steeply sloping and wooded, with mixed mature trees on a grass slope. The trees include some large oaks, plane and horse chestnut, which predate the park and also lime, elm, ash, birch, cedar, Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), wellingtonia, a clump of pines and a monkey puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*) towards the east end. A laurel hedge runs along the boundary. A zig-zag tarmac path, with stone edging, runs down the slope from an entrance at the north end.

Near the east side of the north end is a well preserved water garden landscaped with much natural rockwork. Water enters the park at the north end under a stone and runs down a stony channel, with a rockwork wall on its west side, to a rockery area of large stones. This has a small pool at its base and a dry channel through its east side. At the foot of the pool the water flows under a low rockwork bridge with parapets of

large stones. Below there is more rockwork on the east of the channel, which leads down to a larger pool similar to the one above. Below is a further area of large rocks and a cascade down to a third similar, smaller pool with rocks around it. Below, water flows over a cascade and under a larger bridge, with rockwork parapets, carrying a path over the channel. The path stops a short distance to the east. Below is a last pool, with a rock-revetted east side. The channel below leads to an exit culvert by a flight of steps to a park entrance. To the east of the stream is an area planted mainly with magnolias and acers.

To the south of the water garden, on the east side of the park, is a bowling green. The bowling green lies at the foot of the steep slope. It has a narrow tarmac path around it and benches on the east side, set in recesses in a raised bed planted with a privet hedge and a few shrubs. On the north side the path is revetted with rockwork and above it are two shallow stone-revetted terraces, with a flight of stone steps up them at the west end. On the west side of the green is a post-war brick pavilion and in the middle of the south side is a smaller, original one. This is wooden, with two verandas, one facing the green, the other the main walk and tennis courts on the opposite side. The verandas are supported by six slender cast iron piers. Between the bowling green and the tennis courts is the main walk leading to a double-gate entrance on the east side.

The main axial walk of the park forms a boundary between the wooded slope to the north and the more open, gently sloping area to the south. It is a wide tarmac path running north-westwards from the east entrance past the bowling green and tennis courts and then turning to run south-westwards across the remainder of the park to a vehicular entrance on the west side. The eastern end of the latter part is wider than the remainder, reflecting the original width of the path. The tennis courts (hard) lie south of the bowling green. In the middle of the south side is a two-sided pavilion built of reconstituted stone blocks, with a red tiled roof, red brick corners and steps in front. On either side beds of hydrangeas bound the tennis courts. To the west of the bowling green is a modern, single-storey brick cottage, with a red tiled roof, at present used as a nursery school. It has a stone-revetted flowerbed in front of it, next to the walk. South of this, on the other side of the walk, is a lawn planted with mixed trees, including cut-leaf beech, copper beech, coloured cypresses. Next to the trees are some island beds. To the west, on the north side, is a small shelter with wooden sides, a brick back wall, a red tiled roof and three iron piers along the open front. On the south side, just to the west, is a semi-circular gently sloping lawn, with four triangular beds cut into it. This is the site of the bandstand. Below it a path curves round below the tennis courts. Further west is another pavilion on the north side of the axial walk. This is similar but not identical to that to the east, being tall, with brick back and side walls, and three iron piers along the front. Next to it are public lavatories and to the west is a children's play area. To the west of this the walk is flanked by limes. Near the west entrance there are some large pines.

The remainder of the park consists of a large open lawn planted sparsely around its edges. Along the south boundary is a mixture of mostly young trees. These include pine, oak, sycamore, tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), rowan and walnut. Near the south-east corner is a wide, modern entrance with modern brick public lavatories next to it. A curving drive to its east leads around a wider area of young trees, principally hawthorns and flowering cherries. Along the east side of the southern part of the park is a mixed tree and shrub border. The shrubs are largely salt-tolerant species such as griselinia, olearia and hebe.

To the north of the main park is a detached triangular area of park, surrounded by roads. It slopes to the south, has no boundary, and is laid out to grass, planted with mixed trees and shrubs on the south and west sides. These consist mainly of oak, elm, Portugal laurel, olearia and hebe. In the centre of the area is a Gorsedd circle of large upright stones (one on the north side fallen), with a large, flat, central stone. Scattered throughout the area are concrete platforms for benches, with a few benches remaining on them.

Romilly Park was begun in 1898, created from an area of meadow land owned by the Romilly family. The family had carried out a certain amount of tree planting in the area in the late 1850s and early 1860s and some of the trees in the northern part of the park probably date from this period. The Barry Urban District Council became interested in making a park on the area in 1894, at which time it was already used for agricultural shows. The Romilly family agreed to donate the land on condition that a public road was built around the park and that none of the trees were cut down. In 1897 the well known landscape architect Thomas Mawson agreed to design the park (and also Victoria Park, on the eastern side of Barry) but the council overturned the decision of the parks committee to employ Mawson and the job was given to the council's surveyor, Mr Pardoe, who produced plans in January 1898. The layout that was eventually used, after a competition, was a much reduced version of the prizewinning entry. Paths were being laid out in 1903, but the land was still grazed in 1908. The bowling green had been laid out by 1907 and by 1911 the park was mostly complete. The Barry guide of that year mentioned 'attractive parterres ... tennis courts, croquet lawns and bowling greens'. The layout is shown on the 1915 25 in. Ordnance Survey map.

Original features that have gone are winding paths on the slope at the north end and the bandstand. The bandstand was a central focal point of the park. From old photographs it appears to have been hexagonal, with a two-tiered ogee roof. There was a drinking fountain on the opposite side of the main walk. The water garden is an original feature, illustrated in the 1911 guide. All the shelters except that at the south end of the tennis courts, which dates to the 1920s, are original. There was another similar one on the site of the present-day bungalow. Flowerbeds contained herbaceous plants and some were edged with rockwork. There were also rustic arches and other features.

The only changes to have survived that took place between the First and Second World Wars were the replacement of the eastern shelter on the main walk with a bungalow, tree planting, including the area of magnolias and acers in the north-east, and the erection of the Gorsedd Circle in 1920, when the National Eisteddfod was held in the park. When Cold Knap Park was developed in the 1920s the tunnel under the railway, previously only used for farm traffic, was developed as a public road in order to link the two parks. During the period the roads to the east and west (Romilly Park Road) were gradually built up.

After the Second World War the park underwent a certain amount of simplification. The bandstand was removed and a new bowls pavilion was added. The path layout was reduced and the zig-zag path made. The remaining paths are original. Further tree and shrub planting has also taken place during this period.

## Sources

**Primary**

Plan of Romilly Park attached to the deeds: The Vale of Glamorgan County Council.  
Agreement by Thomas Mawson to lay out the park: Glamorgan Record Office B/B21.

**Secondary**

Carpenter, B., *Guide to Barry district and the Vale of Glamorgan* (1911).  
Moore, D. (ed.), *Barry the centenary book* (1985).