

LLANDRINDOD WELLS PUBLIC PARKS

Ref No	PGW (Po) 20 (POW)
OS Map	147
Grid Ref	SO 057610
Former County	Powys
Unitary Authority	Powys
District	Radnorshire
Community Council	Llandrindod Wells
Designations	Listed building: Pavilion Grade II, Conservation Area, (excluding Rock Park Hotel): Rock Park.
Site Evaluation	Grade II*
Primary reasons for grading	An extensive system of public parks and open spaces surviving in its entirety, including Rock Park, one of the first public parks created in Wales.
Type of Site	Victorian public park/spa with additional public areas throughout the town including arboretum and boating lake.
Main Phases of Construction	c. 1860 onwards.

SITE DESCRIPTION

ROCK PARK

Rock Park is the principal public space of Llandrindod Wells and contains a famous chalybeate spring. The park is situated on the south-west side of the town and covers approximately 12 acres. The ground slopes down from Norton and Park Terraces, on the north-west and north-east respectively, towards the River Ithon, which creates the western boundary of the park, before rising towards a level terrace above the river where a Bowls Club is located. The main entrance to the park is opposite the Gwalia building on the north-eastern end of Norton Terrace.

The Park is characterised by an open central area around three main spa buildings; the Pump Room, Treatment Centre and the Pavilion. It has two styles of planting; a Victorian arboretum to the north and native woodland on the south. A network of paths connect these different areas. A natural water feature, the Arlais Brook, runs through the park on a south-west diagonal. Two bridges, one stone, one partly timber, cross the brook. There are no flower borders within the main park. In the south-west of the park there is a Bowling Club with three greens. Near to this a path runs south-west to a natural rock formation and viewpoint over the river, the Lover's Leap.

Rock Park was developed in association with the development of Llandrindod Wells as an inland spa town. The location - merely scattered farmhouses - had a modest reputation for healing waters from at least 1670, when the area which was to become Rock Park was known as 'Black Smith's Dingle'.

The former Rock Park Hotel is located part way down the valley slope, overlooking Rock Park to the south and east, below the level of Norton Terrace above. It is an extensive, three storeyed, stone and rendered brick house with a gabled roof line. By about 1900 an open two-storeyed verandah had been constructed along its southern side. The principal ground floor rooms have French windows which opened out on to the verandah. A car park lies to the north-west of the buildings and overgrown, what appear to be partially terraced, gardens merge into the Park below the hotel to the south-east.

A farmhouse, Dolysgallog, originally stood on the site of the hotel situated on the edge of Llandrindod Common (see below). Following the establishment of the common wells as curatives in the late 1700s, Dolysgallog became a boarding house in the 1820s to accommodate the growing numbers of visitors. Following the Enclosures Act of 1845 the area of land which was to become Rock Park was set aside for exercise and recreation. In a visit to Llandrindod in 1867 by the Woolhope Club there was only a bare common and three hotels (the Llanerch, Pump House and Rock House). However, there was a plan for the proposed new town and lines were cut in the turf. Part of the common must have been enclosed as Rock Park soon afterwards. Dolysgallog was converted into a hotel to benefit from this development and between 1895 and 1908 the hotel improved in tandem with the rising fortunes of the park. By 1908 the hotel had been bought by the local landowners, the Gibson-Watts of Doldowlod, and was virtually rebuilt as an elegant spa hotel, the shell of which now remains. The hotel ceased to function in about the mid 1960s; since the 1970s it has been in decline and is now derelict.

Norton Terrace runs along the north boundary of Rock Park and was designed both to overlook the park and to be seen from it. By 1871 part (nos 1,3, 4 and 5) of the terrace had been built. It consists of a row of fine town houses and private spas with the Gwalia Hotel, built in the early twentieth century, on the northern corner. The original Gwalia Hotel was the yellow brick building on the opposite corner. The terrace reflects a variety of architectural styles. The Gwalia is an impressive, red brick, moulded brick and stone building with towers on its entrance front above a Victorian iron and glass porch. The Gwalia ceased to function as a hotel in the late 1960s and is now the offices of Radnorshire District Council and other public organisations. One other building of particular note in the terrace is 'Plas Dinam', which has an ornate, classical glass portico on its east entrance front. This and the other houses are now all either rented apartments, residential homes or offices.

Park Terrace, which forms the north-eastern boundary of the park, is more modest in scale and design than Norton Terrace. The houses are substantial, Victorian, three storeyed terraced houses of brick and stone, with ornate bay windows and tiled porches. All have small front gardens behind a low stone wall. These houses are now in variable condition, some are professional offices, others remain private. As the arboretum matured Park Terrace was hidden from view from within the park.

The town really began to develop from about 1868 following the Swydd Enclosure (1845) and the arrival of the Central Wales Railway from Knighton in 1865. Five principal hotels were built to

accommodate the March to November visitors; the Gwalia, the Metropole, Ye Wells, the Pump House and the Rock Park. Cures were originally taken in the hotels, or from small street operations, the actual Rock Park Spa Centre not being built until the early 1900s. The mineral springs at Llandrindod included lithia, saline, radium, sulphur, magnesium and chalybeate. The most famous chalybeate spring was ornamented by a marble fountain and drinking basin in 1879.

In about 1900 in the south-west of the park a small formal green was developed, enclosed on its southern side by an arcade of shops. Originally a 9-hole golf course was laid out here, which continued to function until the Second World War. It ran past Rhydlyndu Farm and over the fields south of the track to Lovers Leap. Bowling greens were established in c. 1912, beginning the town's long association with the sport. A Bowls Club with three greens and a new clubhouse, built in c. 1990, remains on this site. Next to the Bowls Club stand two small cottages, Arcade Cottages. These have always been dwellings and are first mentioned in the 1881 census return.

It is unclear whether there was a particular individual responsible for the layout of Rock Park or whether it gradually evolved. It is known that the path system and the coniferous planting were established during the late 1860s. It is also unclear whether it was intended, in design terms, to leave the natural woodland on the south of the park, focusing attention on the principal residences of the north by way of the arboretum.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1888 provides a clear record of the development of the early park, the form of which remains today. The map records the spa building, except the pavilion, which was added in about 1908, and the arcade. Serpentine paths are marked on both sides of the Arlais Brook and planting along the park's southern boundary, to the south of both Norton and Park Terrace and to the south-east, around a circular path, possibly running through the golf course, above Lover's Leap.

The heyday of the town came in the late nineteenth century. The park and spa were bought by Mr George Baillie, managing director of Llandrindod Springs Ltd., in c. 1910-11 and continued to be well used. In 1926 they were sold to the Urban District Council and the spa continued in use under the control of the National Health Service from the 1950s until it closed in 1972. The post-war growth in affordable foreign holidays and a decline in alternative medicine saw the town's fortunes gradually decline as a main holiday destination. Since the 1980s however, the town has been recovering and there is renewed interest in the Victorian public features. The area of the park was augmented by land purchases by the council; the area around Lover's Leap was bought in 1935.

The northern area of the park is criss-crossed by footpaths of varying character. The majority are now asphalt, some in the woodlands are hard core. The main footpath enters the park opposite the Gwalia building under a iron banner sign, 'Rock Park and Spa'. It descends steeply for about 100m down into the park towards the main spa area. A second main footpath runs across this, from west to east, near to the bottom. This second path runs above the Arlais Brook and links what is now the main vehicle access to the park to the Recreation Grounds/Montpellier Park in the east.

The main vehicular access, which enters the park at the western end of Norton Terrace, has been modernised. This access connects to a car park on the north of the spa buildings by way of a new, arched, stone bridge, capped with the stones from the old bridge, built in c. 1870, which was slightly upstream. The bases of its piers remain.

The river Ithon creates the western boundary of the park and the town. It curves around the town from the north-east and bends away to the south at the Lover's Leap. It is a picturesque river, wide and slow moving with small areas of faster water. Both banks are hung with native trees and from Lover's Leap views of the conifers within the Park add to the feeling of seclusion. Opposite Lover's Leap there is a fertile, flat water meadow.

The Arlais Brook descends through the Recreation Ground (see below) and park on a south-west diagonal before issuing into the Ithon. It flows through a deep, narrow channel that may have been artificially accentuated. Above the chalybeate spring it flows over broad, flat rocks before descending under a footbridge and then the new bridge. Its banks are overhung with trees and shrubs. A main path runs above it towards the Recreation Ground and a narrow, stepped path descends to its north side upstream from the bridge.

The chalybeate spring is located in the north-east of the park about 12m upstream from the bridge. It consists of an ornate, pink marble fountain and drinking basin with a lion head spout, located in the eastern corner of an enclosed, stone flagged platform above the brook. The platform is surrounded by low castellated walls. There is a semi-circular bastion on the western side which overlooks the brook below. The surrounds of the spring were constructed in the 1870s and the marble drinking fountain itself was a gift from the Gibson Watts, the leading local family who by then owned the site. An inscription reads, 'This fountain and the Free Chalybeate Spring was given for the use of the public by the Lord of the Manor, J. W. Gibson Watt Esq. 1879'.

About 6m downstream from the chalybeate spring there is a narrow foot bridge which crosses the brook. Three stone and brick piers carry the wooden deck across the deep channel. Simple wooden railings enclose the deck. This feature appears to have been renovated but the original bridge, which was similar, probably dated to the early twentieth century.

The spa centre comprises three buildings; the Pump Room, on the south, a Treatment Centre on the north-east and a glass pavilion which connects the two. The Pump Room and Treatment Centre were erected in the early 1900s, the pavilion in about 1908. Both the Pump Room and the Treatment Centre are single-storeyed buildings of brick with slate roofs, alternate yellow and black brick creating detail in the walls. The Treatment Centre has an open, iron and glass roofed veranda on its northern side and a roofline evocative of central Europe. A large china bath stands outside the building testifying to its past use. This building is now a museum and, once again, a centre for alternative medicine.

The Pump Room has a three gabled roof and a similar verandah to the Treatment Centre on its west and southern sides. This is a tea room where glasses of mineral water can still be taken in season.

Between these buildings there is an open, covered seating area with an ironwork frame. It has 7 x 5 bays of ironwork, ornamented by both cast and pressed iron panels. Originally the pavilion had a pagoda-style roof which was later replaced by a ridged glass roof, which has recently been repaired. The ironwork was by W A Baker & Co. of Newport and Bayliss, Jones & Bayliss of London.

The Bowls Club is laid out to acknowledge the changes in ground level; the clubhouse, upper greens and lower green are on three different levels, all of which are connected by steps. The clubhouse is a new building, built in about 1990. It is a large two-storeyed building which faces

south-west, overlooking the greens below. It is in a vernacular style, of stone and slate, with a south-western open, ironwork verandah and central clock tower which give it an Edwardian appearance.

Two symmetrical greens are laid out below the club house, surrounded by raised paths with seats. On the south of the southern green a laurel hedge, backed by mature trees which line the path to Lover's Leap, creates a boundary and, on the west, there are clumps of laurel.

On the northern side of the third level there is another green. This is enclosed to the north by a laid hedge. The green is surrounded by a raised path, edged with 6 golden thuja on its western side. A simple, rendered single-storeyed building with a south-facing verandah, is sited on the northern side of the green and opposite on the south there is a larger, similarly style wooden building, which faces north.

The arboretum covers the north-east area of the park. It is mainly coniferous, containing some good examples of wellingtonia, Austrian pine, Japanese red cedar and Douglas fir. There are also some unusual maples. The planting dates from the 1870s on and were mostly the work of Mr Thomas Heighway, tenant of the Rock Park Spa from the Gibson-Watt family. A painting of the park, dating to c. 1890, by P.A. Fyffe Villiers, who lived in Norton Terrace, shows small, immature trees, giving the park the appearance of a Japanese formal garden. No planting plan is known to exist but in 1912 the arboretum attracted the attention of Sir David Morris, Assistant Director of Kew, who compiled 'A list of the more interesting trees growing in the area of Rock Park' which was published in the Radnorshire Transactions of 1948.

On the southern side of the park, particularly towards Lover's Leap, the woodland is dominated by native trees and includes some fine examples of mature oaks. In 1935 the council bought some land in this area under the condition that a large oak near the Bowling greens would not be felled. Some of the trees are believed to be more than 250 years old.

At the northern end of the path to Lover's Leap on the west there is a line of three mature oaks planted on a raised bank. It is unclear whether this bank marked the line of an old field boundary or if it was the line of an older path to Lover's Leap.

TEMPLE GARDENS

The Temple Gardens lie about 200m north-east of Rock Park on a triangular island enclosed by South Crescent and Linden's Walk. The garden covers c. 1 acre and is surrounded by pavements, apart from a short length of low, concrete block wall on the mid-west side and a low dry-stone retaining wall, partly capped with concrete slabs, on the south-west. A red brick path proceeds across the area on a north-east diagonal. A modern octagonal bandstand has been erected in the southern area and a walk with seats runs along north-east boundary.

The gardens are mainly tree planted lawns. On the east the ground falls in three successive terraces, the most eastern of these being a new shrub garden. In the mid section of the west side there is a rectangular rose garden.

Traditionally it was believed that on this area of the original common there was a stone circle, known as the 'Druid's temple'. In 1867 a stone circle was created from stones taken from the turnpike road across the common. It was used by water carriers to hitch their donkeys between visiting the wells and the hotels. This feature is clearly recorded on the Ordnance Survey map of

1888. In 1890 it was accentuated by the town council, which created a tighter, more ornamental circle for the benefit of visitors.

By 1904 the area had already been divided up; what appear to be two small gardens are recorded on the north-west side with a larger area below and a large split level terrace to the east, which included the stone circle. Two mature trees were also recorded on the south-west boundary of the area. In the early 1900s the area was further subdivided into separate gardens for the surrounding hotels and houses which had been established. The eastern area of the gardens contained a tennis court and a croquet lawn, taking advantage of the earlier split-level. The stone circle was dismantled at this time and the stones moved about until they were finally removed from the site and the area unified into a public garden in 1990 by the council. The only 'garden' that survives is a rose garden opposite the Glen Usk Hotel (planted c. 1970s by the Conservative Club). A similar garden on the east survives as parch marks.

The octagonal bandstand which stands in the southern area of the gardens dates from about 1990. It is a period reproduction with a red brick base, iron work railings and an octagonal slate roof. Three wide, concrete steps link it with the seating area below. It is used for concerts during the summer months. No evidence has been found to suggest that this has replaced an earlier bandstand in this position.

The rose garden lies centre west in the garden. It is quite small, rectangular and consists of a circulatory concrete path that runs between raised rose beds on the side and a raised, square bed in the centre, similarly made of concrete. Diagonally opposite one another in the north-east and south-west corners there are two recessed seating areas, each containing a seat. An identical lay out for a similar garden lies to the east of this garden and is revealed in parch marks.

MONTPELLIER PARK

The area of the Recreation Ground was known until at least 1896 as Montpellier Park on account of Montpellier House and Montpellier Park Road to the south. It lies to the east of Rock Park, separated from it by the railway line. On the west and north the ground is enclosed by the railway line and the grounds of Holy Trinity Church, built in 1871. The area covers about 6 acres and is divided into two main areas. The larger northern area is recreation based, with tennis courts, and an indoor bowling green surrounding a large pavilion. The smaller southern area is more ornamental and is a continuation of Rock Park. It lies along the upper reaches of the Arlais brook and is connected to the main park by a underpass underneath the railway.

The main entrance to the upper area of the Recreation Ground is in the north-west corner, opposite Holy Trinity Church. A wide tarmacked access leads down a south-west slope into a large car park, to the east of the pavilion, from where a road continues out of the south-west corner to a second, lower car park. Below the pavilion and the connecting service road, to the south, is a modern indoor bowling green with hard tennis courts on its east and west sides. A double hard tennis court lies to the north-west. Around the Recreation Ground on the north, west and east sides there is a circulatory path lined with pleached limes.

The western path leads downhill into the southern section of the Recreation Ground, which is criss-crossed with paths on the northern side of the Arlais Brook. The main connecting path with Rock

Park to the west is the west/east path above the brook which enters this area underneath the railway.

A stone and concrete bridge, with iron railings, is angled across the upper reaches of the brook. At this point the channel bed reveals a small man-made weir and sections of canalisation. The bridge is angled to accentuate the course of the path up to Montpellier Park Road above. A steep, thirty-four stepped zig-zag path ascends the slope, enclosed on the north by iron railings and on the south by a high bank planted with rhododendrons. The steps are a mixture of stone and concrete. At the top of the steps the path continues south between nineteenth-century iron railings before reaching the road.

It is unclear when this area of ground became public property but, as noted above, it was known as Montpellier Park in 1896 and was certainly within public ownership by 1909. The main use of the northern area appears to have been bowling and the pavilion. Terraces, which may denote greens, are marked within the area as early as 1888. The date of the extension to Rock Park, the southern section of the Recreational Grounds is dates from after 1904 as it is not recorded on the second edition Ordnance Survey map.

The Pavilion is a large four square rendered auditorium with brick detail. An elaborate double doorway stands on the eastern entrance front. On the south there are twin, octagonal glass conservatories which open on to a raised, paved terrace which looks out over the southern part of the recreation ground and park and towards Rock Park in the west. The Pavilion was built in 1912 as an entertainment centre, taking over from previously tented occasions within Rock Park. It later became a cinema. The building was refurbished in 1994 and is now a conference centre.

MEMORIAL GARDENS

The area known as Memorial Gardens, extending to c. 1 acre, has been incorporated into the other public spaces of the town since 1918. It lies opposite the eastern end of Temple Gardens, immediately north of the Metropole Hotel. It consists of tree planted lawn that extends to the east, gradually descending the ground slope, for about 100m.

The garden is enclosed on its northern side by an ornate Victorian town house. About 30m to the east of the house is a second red brick building which faces west. This was built as a museum in 1911 to house the boat taken from the river Ithon in that year and is now the town museum. The Victorian house is now occupied by the town hall, town council and the tourist information centre.

Connecting the house and the museum there is an extraordinary tufa rock face which rises to about 2m high and extends for about 6m. The rockwork includes recessed alcoves which are ornamented with municipal bedding. This is partly covered by a glass roof. An extensive, area of modern brick paving connects all of the buildings and features above. The interior of the tufa feature, underneath the roof, is similarly paved and serves as a seating area.

The garden lies to the south of the house and consists of some mature ornamental trees, pairs of wellingtonia and copper beech set in an area of lawn. A war memorial, from which the area is named, commemorating both wars is sited on the centre front of the western boundary, on the east side of the pavement besides the A 483.

The town house, originally called Brynarlais, the present town hall, was built in 1872 by Dr

William Bowen Davis one of the first general practitioners to take up permanent residence in the town. Dr Bowen Davis laid out a garden and built a conservatory, the back wall of which was covered with the ornate tufa rockwork which still survives. This rockwork contained various dripping pools and the conservatory housed exotic plant, fern and bird life. Dr Bowen Davis was a respected amateur botanist and plantsman and it is believed that the conservatory was built to his own design. The rock is known to have been bought from Derbyshire. Photographs from about 1900 survive recording the appearance of the conservatory. It was an elaborate, heated glass structure with a high lantern roof and at least two bays on its western front. Small stained glass windows ran around the building under the roofline and the interior was filled with exotics, some planted in the rockwork. The conservatory also functioned as an aviary. It was dismantled in the 1960s.

The design details of the original garden, other than the trees and conservatory, are unknown, the area being recorded simply as an open space on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map. Similarly the history of the garden after Davis's death is also unclear but the positioning of the war memorial within the garden suggests that the area was already, at least partially, within public ownership by about 1920.

THE LAKE AND COMMON

The Lake and its associated park lie to the east of the town below a hill on which a golf course, which dates from about 1900, is located. The common lies to the west of the lake park, separated from it by a belt of native woodland, crossed by public footpaths. A straight formal road, Princes Avenue, cuts across the north of the park linking the lake to the town. On the north-west the park is enclosed Western Promenade, a curving road which dates from the early twentieth century. Villas, on the west of this road, face south-east, looking out over the park and lake.

The lake is roughly triangular in appearance and covers about four acres. A large bird island is situated in the upper northern area. The lake is surrounded by a single track public road on the north, east and south sides and a long, straight walk along its west. A park with an extensive children's play area has been created to the west of the walk.

On the north-west of the lake there is a two-storeyed, decked private house, Lake Cottage, which overlooks it. A steep rocky bank and stone retaining wall run for about 20m to the west from beneath this house along the north side of the perimeter road. A seating alcove has been cut into this bank about halfway along its length. On the northern west side of the lake there is a modern two-storeyed, open deck, mock boat house which contains a restaurant and shops. A wooden pontoon floats below this building from where rowing boats can be hired.

The lake was constructed between 1872 and 1873 on the site of a bog on the last part of the old common within the immediate town which had already been in use as a golf course since at least 1900. It was made by the Pump House Hotel which lay to the north. This hotel has since been demolished and new Powys County Council offices erected on its site. Only the actual Pump House survives within its grounds (see below). The lake is relatively shallow and was constructed as a boating lake. A regatta was held each summer, coarse fish were introduced much later. Lake Cottage was the original boat house. The ground originally sloped down from it to the lake, the road, which cuts into the rock, being made later. A second boat house was built on the site of the present one in about 1920 and was replaced by a new building in a similar style in the early 1990s.

The seating alcove is thought to date from at least 1900.

On the west the park is enclosed by a narrow belt of woodland. To the west of this the land slopes down to the west, to Temple Street, as rough, semi-improved grassland, all that remains of the original Llandrindod Common, which dates from at least 1700. A further belt of woodland, planted between the First and Second World Wars, lies on the west, separating the grassland from contemporary century housing. The common was gradually encroached upon by the development of the town. By 1900 a golf course had been laid out on part of it, a further part to the east being developed as the lakeside park. At the south end of the common there is a small timber pavilion, which appears to date from about 1930, open on its north-east side.

To the north of the lake, within the park, and within the former grounds of the Pump House Hotel, to the south of the council buildings, there are the uncovered foundations of an early medieval chapel. A seat has been sited nearby and these remains appear to be presented as a park feature. This chapel, Capel Maelog, was re-erected by the lake from Cefnlllys Lane in 1984.

The only surviving part of the Pump House Hotel is the Pump House, dating to c. 1868, which lies to the south-west of the new County Council buildings. This is an unusual structure comprising twin circular stone and brick towers with slate pyramidal roofs. The upper portion of the walls are slate hung. The Pump House lies to the south of a wide, shallow pool in front of the council buildings and is surrounded by new paths, a car park and municipal shrub planting. Between the Pump House and the lake the only other possible surviving feature of the hotel grounds is a fine nineteenth-century field and kissing iron gate, which marks the old hotel grounds' boundary.

Sources

Primary

Collection of photographs at the Powys archive, Llandrindod town Museum and Radnorshire District Council Planning Dept
Reproduction of pre-Enclosure map (1845), The Radnorshire Society Transactions 1973- copied into Radnorshire District Council file (vol. and p. unknown).
Oil Paintings; A view of Norton Terrace and Rock Park; A view of Lover's Leap, both c. 1895, Peter Abercrombie Fyffe Villiers, Llandrindod Museum.

Secondary

Carter, A., 'A Victorian Conservatory in Llandrindod Wells', The Bulletin, The Welsh Historic Gardens Trust (Spring 1995), p. 6
Conservation Area designation: Rock Park, Radnorshire District Council.
Haslam, R., The Buildings of Powys, (1979), p. 249
Hourse, W.H., 'A visit to Llandrindod Wells by the Woolhope Club', Radnorshire Society Transactions 19 (1949), p. 67.
Jones, I. E., 'The Swydd Neithon Enclosure and the Development of Llandrindod Wells', (1973)
Kelly., The Directory of South Wales, (1924-27).
Morris, D., 'A List of the more interesting trees within Rock Park', Radnorshire Society Transactions. 18 (1948), p. 34.

Whittle, E., The Historic Gardens of Wales, (1992) p. 72