

## CAERNARFON: MORFA COMMON PARK

<b>Ref No</b>	PGW (Gd) 38 (GWY)
<b>OS Map</b>	115
<b>Grid Ref</b>	SH 485 615
<b>Former County</b>	Gwynedd
<b>Unitary Authority</b>	Gwynedd
<b>Community Council</b>	Caernarfon
<b>Designations</b>	None
<b>Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II</b>

**Primary reasons for grading** Purpose-designed nineteenth-century public park which has remained much as laid out; original planting and path layout.

**Type of Site** Small public park designed around artificial lake; tree and shrub plantings on sloping and level grassy areas.

**Main Phases of Construction** Nineteenth century

### SITE DESCRIPTION

The park occupies a small area in the bottom of the Seiont valley at a point where it is steep-sided but wide; the river is close to the south-west boundary and the north-eastern part of the park consists of the steeply sloping valley side. The site lies to the south-east of the centre of Caernarfon, and the park was purpose-designed as a public amenity during the nineteenth century. It appears to post-date the former railway which skirts the site, as there is no trace on any map or on the ground of planting, paths or any other features on the far side of the railway, between it and the river. However, the park was fully laid out by 1889 and deciduous trees shown on the map of that date had gone by 1918, suggesting that they were at least mature enough for use as timber by the early twentieth century. The park is close to the former Caernarvon Union Workhouse, which lies just beyond the south-eastern corner, and its Infirmary, to the north-east, now Eryri Hospital.

The main, lower, part of the park is designed around an artificial lake, created by taking water from the river, using it to fill the shallow, irregularly-shaped lake, and returning it to the river. Around this is good planting, with a high survival rate, of groups of trees, linked by extensive thick shrubbery areas consisting mostly of laurel and rhododendron. Large open areas are broken up by looser groupings of both trees and shrubs. A network of paths offers a circular walk around the lake, with various additional options, including higher-level walks with

views down on to the lake.

The effect has obviously been very carefully thought out, and, as the park has been well maintained, the different glimpses of and across the lake at various points remain probably much as they were intended to appear. These views are created by the careful grouping of trees and shrubs, by the creation of three artificial islands, and by the routing of the paths to best effect, and although the overall appearance of the park is simple and naturalistic (curving lines, thick growth of shrubs, no sharp edges or artificial features) a walk round it is full of visual interest.

The park entrance gates are of white-painted, decorative wrought iron hung on mock-stone posts with decorated caps; the posts themselves are square-sectioned and grooved. There is a pair of wide gates and a pedestrian gate in the same style, hung on the same side of the posts - a hollow metal post separates the double and single gates. The hospital drive has identical gateposts. Iron park fence, painted white, runs along the south side of the hospital drive and the east side of the path down into the garden.

A drinking fountain is a relatively early addition (pre-1918). It is rather unusual, being in the form of a small basin with a canopy over, all surrounded by stones of white quartz, set in a length of dry-stone walling backed by laurels. It appears to be fed by a natural spring which rises on the hillside above, flows down behind it and then away over the grass area in front to the culvert feeding the lake. The basin still contains water, which drips in from the back of the canopy.

A children's playground is a recent feature, and apart from this and the fountain there are few additions other than seats, which have no doubt always been provided. It is possible, however, that there were more in the past; a small building is shown near the drinking fountain on both the old maps (its foundations can still be seen, concreted over), and in the south-eastern area of the park there is a small, roughly circular, apparently levelled area on the slope of the valley-side, near the gate from the field above, which gives a good view back over the park. There is no evidence, however, for any permanent structure at this point.

Near the north-western corner of the park, just below the lodge, a small area is fenced off and divided into two enclosures, each containing a small dilapidated building. The remains of wire-netting runs suggest an aviary or children's pets' corner, and old planting (fruit bushes, rhubarb) suggests this area was at some other time part of the lodge garden. One of the buildings appears to have been used as a greenhouse as well as an aviary. There is a small extension of the lake within one of the enclosures, and this is shown on the 1889 map; the fences are shown on the 1918 map, but without buildings. The original lake extension may have been simply in order to put a bridge over it, as part of the design of the park, but the enclosures were presumably put to some particular use from the time of being fenced off. The buildings appear to be fairly modern. There is a gate into one of the enclosures from the path.

The sloping area on the eastern side of the park, beyond the northernmost slope, which is extremely steep, has several paths, from which views over the lake can be obtained, and this

was evidently an important part of the original design. These paths have not been surfaced with tarmac as the low-level walks have, and this part of the park is now rather neglected compared to the rest, with some of the paths almost lost and the grass allowed to grow long.

There is now very little planting in the park other than the established trees and shrubs, but it is very likely that in the past there would have been areas laid out with beds and borders full of bedding plants. There is no direct evidence for this on maps or visible on the ground, but there are two level grassy areas at the south-east end of the lake, one of them now made into the children's playground, which are likely sites (one still has a small raised bed in one corner); the slope to the north-east may also have had beds, at least lower down, beside the path.

The area of level, relatively high ground north-east of the park and north-west of the hospital, known as Morfa Common, is now used by the local rugby club for their pitches except for the southern part, at the top of the valley slope, which is an expanse of open grassland. This area was evidently part of the park to begin with, but apparently always open ground, and perhaps with a sports-field function from the outset. It is not included in the designated area now that it has become rugby pitches, because the only designed features which are indicated on the old 25-in Ordnance Survey maps are an avenue of trees along the drive to the workhouse and a row of trees all around the northern, north-eastern and south-eastern perimeter of the area, almost all of which have now gone. They are shown on the 1889 map but not on the 1918 map, so had either been felled by then, more likely for timber than because of old age, or were in fact planned but never planted, or failed to survive when first planted. This area, however, because of its relationship with the park and the workhouse, forms the essential setting for the park.

The lodge, although built within the park, probably relates more to the former workhouse and infirmary than the park, but it is situated where it could do duty for both, at the extreme north-west corner of the park between the park and hospital/workhouse gates. It lies within its own small sloping garden. It is a single-storey brick building but with a stone-built lower floor or cellars on the park side, where the ground drops away steeply. There is a shield with three dragons or griffons on the wall, but no date. There are access gates to it from both the hospital drive and the park.