

CADW/ICOMOS REGISTER OF LANDSCAPES, PARKS AND GARDENS
OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST IN WALES

REGISTER ENTRY

JERSEY PARK, BRITON FERRY

Ref number	PGW(Gm)62(NEP)
OS Map	170
Grid ref	SS 745 948
Former county	West Glamorgan
Unitary authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Community council	Briton Ferry
Designations railway incline (GM489(NEP))	Scheduled Ancient Monument: Ynysmaerdy
Site Evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	Exceptionally well preserved urban public park. Its original layout of formal and informal areas remains complete and includes sports facilities. Planting in the park is diverse and interesting, with an emphasis on evergreen trees and shrubs.
Type of site	Urban public park
Main phases of construction	1925

Site description

Jersey Park is a well preserved, urban, public park situated on the western edge of the town of Briton Ferry, at the southern end of the Vale of Neath. The park lies mostly in a small valley extending eastwards, with steeply sloping wooded ground to the south and a cemetery and housing to the north. Its shape follows that of the valley floor, being narrow and elongated. The western end of a disused railway incline runs east-west down the spine of the park, its upper, eastern end in a cutting, its lower, western end on an embankment. This was one of the last generation of rope-hauled railway inclines, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel in the 1850s and opened in 1863.

The park was made on land given by the Earl of Jersey in a deed dated 31 December 1908. In this deed the Earl indicated that he was presenting the land to the Neath Urban District Council for the purpose of a public park, provided that the Council agree to maintain it as such. It was opened by Mrs Clarke, wife of the borough engineer H. Alexander Clarke, who designed the park, on 5th September 1925. The park and its layout is shown on the 4th edition 25 in. Ordnance Survey map

(1936). It was extended in 1939, when the Earl of Jersey donated further land. From the 1936 map it is clear that the original layout of the park has survived in its entirety to the present day. The only element which has gone is three glasshouses in the utilitarian area, which are shown on the 1936 map but which have now gone and been replaced by a small utilitarian workman's storeroom.

The entrance to the park is on the main road through Briton Ferry (A474), with a narrow, delicate wrought-iron archway on openwork iron piers at the entrance. At the apex of the underside of the arch is the name 'Jersey Park' in wrought-iron. The arch is flanked by short stretches of curved railings and lower piers similar to those at the foot of the arch. A tarmac path, flanked by white-flowered hebe hedges in stone-edged beds, leads between houses to the south-west corner of the park. All paths in the park are of tarmac and many of the flowerbeds and paths are stone-edged. At the east end of this path are further, inner, iron gates. Just inside them is a stone pier in which is set a bronze plaque recording the donation and opening of the park.

The main formal area of the park consists of a trapezoidal, level lawn surrounded by mixed tree and shrub borders. The lawn is divided into four compartments of unequal size by cross paths and each compartment has some formal island beds cut in it. The paths meet in the centre of the lawn at a circular path around a lawn with five formal island beds cut in it. Benches are set around the circle. There is also a perimeter path and a smaller circle at the north-east end of the lawn, where it narrows to a point. This consists of a circular bed, planted mainly with hebes and phormiums, around a tarmac circle. Along the south-east side of the lawn is a wavy-edged border, bounded by rockwork. Its planting is dominated by alternating gold Irish yews and tall cypresses.

To the south-east of the border a path runs parallel with it, flanked on the south-east by a water channel with sloping, stone-revetted sides. To the south-east of this the level rises again and above the walling of the channel is a narrow border planted with alternating bergenias and *Lonicera nitida* bushes clipped into low bulbous shapes. Next to this is a narrow strip of grass flanking a broad walk, which runs the length of the south-east side of the lawn. This is backed on the south-east by a bank of mixed, mostly evergreen, shrubs and conifers and then by deciduous woodland.

At the north-east end of the lawn a flight of concrete steps, flanked by low walls with flat concrete slab coping, leads to the upper path and broad walk. Above, reached by tapering random stone steps, flanked by low stone walls with copings of large flagstones, is a pavilion. This stands on a rectangular platform cut into the slope, paved with similar random stone to the steps, one part laid out in a radial arrangement. There are low stone parapet walls along the front and front halves of the sides of the platform. The pavilion is a rectangular, open-sided building with a pitched slate roof supported on wooden piers. Although a building of this shape in this location is shown on the 1936 Ordnance Survey map the present one was built on the site of the original wooden pavilion in 1996.

Beyond the circle at the north-east end of the main lawn is a short stretch of water channel, where the stream which runs through the park issues from a culvert under the railway embankment. It then runs under the circle to emerge in the straight channel next to the broad walk. To the south of the stream is a small rectangular area of lawn and formal beds. The lawn is surrounded by a path and has seats along its south-east side. To the north-west is a small, informal, concrete-lined pool, with some rockwork around it. To the north-east of the stream and lawn is a small, triangular

utilitarian area surrounded by a Leyland cypress hedge. There were formerly glasshouses in this area but now there is only a small brick workman's storeroom.

The north side of the main lawn lies along the railway incline embankment. The steep bank is planted with mixed, mainly evergreen, trees and shrubs. A flight of concrete steps, flanked by low concrete walls, leads up the bank to the western end of the former railway line, where the trains were disconnected. This level area is now grassed over and used for sports. Beyond, to the north is, from east to west, a children's playground, a sports field and a bowling green. The bowling green has a modern brick pavilion on its south side. The original pavilion, now gone, was on the west side.

A path leads up on to the railway incline embankment from the path to the east of the circle and pool. This runs eastwards along the former railway line, initially flanked on the north by the stream, which tumbles down the slope here in a rocky channel. The line runs straight down the slope in a cutting, the lower parts of which are cut into the rock. On the south side is a smaller watercourse. The banks have mixed deciduous trees, in particular oak, ash and sycamore, growing on them, giving the path a wooded character. Clumps of bamboos have been planted next to the path at intervals. Further east the cutting is crossed by a substantial, single-arched stone bridge with high parapet walls. Underneath the arch of the bridge are fixings for signalling wire. A wide, stone-edged path, now somewhat disused, runs in a loop from the east end of the park over the bridge and back again. To its north is a stone wall separating the park from the cemetery. At the top (east end) of the park is a grove of trees dominated by cypresses. The park is bounded by iron railings and there is a pedestrian entrance. The railway incline extends eastwards beyond the park, running up and over the hillside. It is known locally as Rhodfa Clarke, or Lady Walk and is used as a public footpath.

To the south of the railway incline cutting is an informal area of the park. This consists mainly of a grass bank, sloping up to the south, planted with young oaks. A privet hedge divides off the west end of the grass slope. Below, along the top of the cutting is a straight, stone-edged path, flanked on its upper side by a bank of evergreen trees and shrubs. This path continues westwards along the contour, cut into the slope, with a bank of rhododendrons along its upper side. A lower path branches off and leads to the pavilion and main lawn.

The last area of the ornamental part of the park is the deciduous woodland to the south of the main lawn. The woodland is extensive, covering 500 acres, and only the lower part has been incorporated into the park. This lies on steeply sloping ground and a network of paths, edged in stone, has been cut into the slope. The paths are laid out with three parallel to the slope and joining paths between them. The woodland here is clear of undergrowth, allowing grass to grow beneath the trees. Above the pavilion a curving flight of random stone steps, edged with upright stones, leads down from the uppermost path to the lowermost, just to the west of the pavilion terrace. The lower path is edged on its north side with clipped *Lonicera nitida*.

Sources

Primary

Information from Mr S. O'Donovan

Secondary

Morgan, C., *A pictorial record of Briton Ferry* (1979), p. 34.
4th edition Ordnance Survey map (1936).