The Gardens’ Restoration programme

All the paths have been re-laid using resin-bonded gravel and including metal edges to the paths. New bins, dog-waste bins and seats have been installed.

A series of trail leaflets has been produced and are available for schools and other visitors to the Gardens.

A number of new events have been staged including a Summer Cream Tea for elderly residents, tree trail, music events, arts event and Christmas carol singing.

Educational aspects are being developed with local schools, including history, sports events and nature trails.

Local history study has been undertaken through a Local History Group and a history archive is being created. Elderly residents are being encouraged to share their memories of the Gardens.

If you would like to find out more about the Friends of South Park Gardens, please visit the website www.southparkgardens.org or write to Friends of South Park Gardens c/o YMCA, The Broadway, Wimbledon SW19 1RY.

To order more copies of this leaflet or others in the series, go to the website and download the order form. Schools may also order work sheets and book guided tours and/or sorts days.

Details of our next guided tours of the Gardens will also be posted on the website and on noticeboards.

Alternatively contact the Community Park Warden Jill Hall - on 07742 633760.

REF: 052682

please tick

I’d like to help with events

I’d like to know more about the history of South Park Gardens

I’d like to become a Friend of South Park Gardens

Name

Tel number

Address

Post Code

Email address

Mobile

www.merton.gov.uk

MERTON COUNCIL

Local History
Trail leaflet
South Park Gardens
A Victorian Delight

South Park Gardens is a beautifully restored Victorian decorative model residential park, designed in 1899, constructed in 1900 and opened in September 1901.

It was restored in 2008/9 with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is registered Grade II on the English Heritage Register of Parks & Gardens and is situated within the South Park Conservation Area in Wimbledon.

South Park Gardens are managed and maintained by the London Borough of Merton in partnership with the Friends of South Park Gardens. The gardens provide a much needed and well used green space in the heart of the South Park community.

Development of the Gardens

The Council purchased the land from Mr J T Smith as part of a parcel of just over 6 acres with 2.4 hectares set aside for the ‘South Park Pleasure Grounds’. The rest of the land was used for residential housing, including Trinity, Dudley and Kings Roads. The cost of constructing the Gardens was £630, with an additional £180 for the public toilets and £195 for planting trees and shrubs.

The Gardens were designed in a Beaux Art style with serpentine pathways, circular features, a mixture of shrubs, trees, grass and flowerbeds.

Historical Features

In 1904 the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association presented a drinking fountain and horse trough to the Council. Deliverymen who sold milk, coal, and other domestic comestibles from their horse-driven carts and drays regularly used this to water their horses.

The stone drinking fountain in the centre of the Gardens was installed in 1904. It was presented by Ellen Reardon to commemorate her father, mother and sister.

In 1907 the 2nd Voluntary Battalion E of the Surrey Regiment gave a series of band concerts in the Gardens. These were very popular and in 1912 it was suggested that a permanent bandstand be erected. In 1913 Messrs Bolton & Paul Ltd of Norwich constructed a rustic octagonal bandstand at a cost of £168 10s. The bandstand was demolished in 1964.

The original cast iron railings were dismantled and removed as part of the war effort in the early 1940s. The Gardens were left without a boundary fence until the 1950s when concrete pillars and chain link fencing was erected. In 1994 three ornamental gates were added, but these did not reflect the historical importance of the park. The chain link fencing was regularly broken down and this led to the security of the Gardens being extremely poor. In 2006, the Council replaced the chain link fencing with new railings designed to match the originals.

Friends of South Park Gardens

In the 1990s the Gardens continued to decline, with broken down boundary fencing, regular occurrences of vandalism and instances of rowdy behaviour and litter-dropping. In 2002 one set of ornamental gates at the Trinity Road entrance was stolen. This led to a public meeting and the setting up of the Friends of South Park Gardens. The Friends resolved to halt the decline of the Gardens and restore and improve them for the good of the community.

The Friends embarked on a programme of lobbying the Council to make changes to the maintenance of the Gardens and to explore different funding options.

The Council and the Friends collaborated on undertaking a feasibility study to restore and improve the Gardens and applied for a grant to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). After a number of years’ hard work a grant of just over £1m was achieved.

As well as lobbying and working on the grant application, the Friends developed a programme of community events, building on the regular annual picnic, which had been taking place since the Silver Jubilee in 1977. The Friends now organise a series of family events including: Easter Egg Hunt, Picnic, Teddy Bears’ Picnic, Fireworks and Bonfire Party. So far they have raised over £50,000 to be used for improvements to the Gardens.

The Friends has a healthy local membership and deliver a regular newsletter and run User Surveys as well as helping out at events. The Executive Committee of the Friends meets regularly and feeds back information to the membership.