

**BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL
HALSTEAD**

HALSTEAD PUBLIC GARDENS

TL810304

Late C19 public park created to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Designed by TW Sanders FRHS FNAGA.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The idea of providing the townspeople of Halstead with a public garden to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria was made possible by an initial subscription of £1000 from George Courtauld, supplemented by over £400 raised by local people. A site of 1.5ha (3.5 acres) in Trinity Street was chosen where there had previously been an orchard, nursery and allotments. There was concern at the time that the maintenance of the gardens would become an intolerable burden on the rate payers and a ballot of the people was taken. The campaigning on both sides was fierce, but the resulting poll was in favour of proceeding with a majority of 115 (474 in favour, 359 against). The land was purchased for £1500 and the Council took possession on 6th February 1899. Halstead Urban District Council borrowed £800 from the Local Government Board that year to finance the other costs of providing the Gardens. The Gardens were designed by TW Sanders FRHS FNAGA, president of the National Amateur Gardener's Association, a landscape designer, horticultural adjudicator, editor of *Amateur Gardening* and author of *Encyclopaedia of Gardening* which was first published in 1895 with the last revision published in 1977. He produced two sets of plans, one of which was selected in May 1899. George Courtauld performed the opening ceremony on Whit Monday, May 1901 attended by several thousand spectators. The original design included a complex network of paths, a recreation area, an ornamental pond, a dancing green and space for a pavilion. Flower beds were not specified, but it was assumed that they could be created from the grassed areas if required. Many trees and shrubs were donated by the local people and some fruit trees were left in place from the allotment site. In March 1900 trees and shrubberies were planted along Kings Road and Trinity Street and in December of that year several trees were planted by local children. A rockery was added to the garden in February 1906. In 1900 wrought iron railings and gates, manufactured by Bayliss, Jones and Bayliss of Wolverhampton, were erected. The spiked top caused problems: a bullock attempted to jump the railings in 1901, was impaled and died as a consequence. After a similar event occurred in 1924 a local doctor expressed concern for the children's safety, and eventually knobs were added to prevent further accidents. Work began in the summer of 1900 on the

construction of the Ornamental Pond, which was supplied with water from Mount Field by kind permission of the Adams Brewery situated in Trinity Street. In 1902 it was decided that the pond should be edged with clinkers and that a fountain be added to the scheme. The fountain has since disappeared, but photographs show that it was also made of clinker. The Dancing Green was part of the original plan and constructed in 1900. It was raised one foot above the green with a clinker bank and was accessed by a flight of steps on either side, each seven feet wide with a rose hoop marking each flight. The area was also used for bowling. The Bandstand was erected in 1901 as a gift from a local man, Charles Portway, who wished to mark his fiftieth year of business in Halstead. It originally had a gilded lyre on top of the tile roof, but by 1908 the gilding was proving too expensive to maintain. In 1976 the clock from the Adams Brewery that was being demolished was erected on the roof, but the 2001 renovations to the Gardens have reinstated a gilded lyre. Also in 1901 twelve seats were donated to the Gardens by local people, each bearing the donor's name. Only three of these seats remain.

In 1899 the Public Gardens Committee Minutes refer to providing a shelter beside New Street for the children for £20 and in 1912 two shelters were built by public subscription as a memorial to the Coronation of King George V. A third of a hectare (three quarters of an acre) was provided in the original plan for a children's play area, but no record of any play equipment exists. This part of the Gardens now includes tennis courts, an adventure play area and a Senior Citizens' Centre. The Drinking Fountain was given by Harry Harvey Portway early in the C20 in memory of his son Harold, who had died of diphtheria. In 1948 a memorial, provided by public subscription, was erected to those who lost their lives in the Second World War. The Gardens are included in a designated Conservation Area established in 1986 and a successful Lottery bid was achieved in 1997. The renovation work began in 2000 and was completed the following summer.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

The Halstead Public Gardens covers an area of 2ha (3.5 acres) on a square site bordered by Trinity Street, New Street and Kings Road. The land falls from south to north, creating a change of level throughout the Gardens. The site is bordered by railings, mainly erected in the 2001 renovation, but short lengths of the original railing with knob tops can be seen in New Street and in Kings Road.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

There are four entrances to the Gardens, one sited at each corner of the square site. Two entrances are in Trinity Street, one in Kings Road and one in New Street. They all have railing gates.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

There are no buildings. The public lavatories shown on the plan attached to the original schedule of 1899 actually have their entrance in Kings Road.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

A square bronze plaque is set into the ground between the 1.5m high railing gates at the entrance on the corner of Trinity and Kings Street, commemorating the opening of the Gardens in 1901 and the restoration in 2001. Smaller bronze squares set at each corner of the main plaque give homage to the four contributors: Heritage Lottery Fund, Braintree District Council, Essex County Council and Halstead Town Council. A perimeter path leads to the right from the entrance gates passing a mixed shrubbery. Along this side of the park there are three benches, and sited three quarters of the way along the path, a green and black painted wooden shelter with a new shingle roof. An information board is displayed at the entrance of the corner of Trinity Street and New Street detailing the history of the park and the restoration carried out in 2001. At this corner is sited the pond. A crazy paving path at this corner runs beside the oval pond containing a new fountain erected on the site of the former one. During the renovation it proved impossible to obtain the clinker on which the original fountain was mounted. The perimeter path climbs above the pond flanked by planted borders, and a third of the way along this side of the Gardens, another wooden shelter is sited with a concrete step access. A short way past the shelter, to the left, steps lead down to a circular area containing a planted bed and beyond this another path leads to a rectangular enclosed bricked area, containing two benches. There are seven benches along this side of the Gardens, three of them original and bearing the name of the donor. At the entrance on to New Street the perimeter path turns left. To the right off this path is the children's adventure play area, containing climbing equipment set in a grassed space containing four trees. At the entrance to the play area is a green cast iron drinking fountain, inscribed: *In memory of Harold*. There are children's swings sited on this side of the Gardens and behind them tennis courts which are in disrepair, as unfortunately the courts were not part of the restoration project. The path leads to the Kings Road entrance and then turns left continuing the perimeter walk, with a third wooden shelter sited along this (Kings Road) side of the Gardens. To the left is the Second World War Memorial: a metre-high stone plinth set in a pebble surround enclosed in a formal circular planting of clipped lavender and a low yew hedge. It is inscribed with the names of the dead and a message. At the centre of the Gardens is the Dancing Green, a raised, roughly circular area of grass set in front of the Bandstand, levelled within the natural slope of the land. The northern side is built up and supported by a raised bank in which pieces of the original clinker can be seen. There are two renovated

flights of steps of grey bricks, re-creating the old steps as faithfully as possible, which lead up onto the Green, one on the Bandstand side, and one diagonally opposite. The steps are framed by climbing roses on wooden pillars as the original hoped arrangement which carried the roses over the steps proved too vulnerable to replicate. Four new lamp-posts have been erected on the Green. The circular Bandstand is built on a raised surround of red brickwork with green wooden railings and pillars supporting a newly tiled roof, surmounted by a gilded lyre. A flight of steps leads up to the Bandstand, where the red, newly painted eaves of the roof can be seen. Up to a dozen paths lead from the perimeter walk towards the centre of the Gardens and the Dancing Green. There are some island beds planted with seasonal displays and shrubs. Mature trees give height and permanence to a public space that has been sensitively restored to its 1901 origins.

REFERENCES

National Heritage Lottery Bid 1997, Braintree District Council

Map

OS New Series 25" to 1 mile scale, third edition, revised 1920/21

Researchers: Gloria and John Hammond