

**MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL
MALDON**

PROMENADE PARK

TL 860 062

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1887 Maldon borough council set up a Jubilee committee to commemorate the event. Mr. Foxlee, the engineer of the railway to Maldon, offered to “engineer any improvements by the riverside for nothing if they decided to build a recreation ground or a promenade”. A sub-committee was established to look into this proposition but made no progress due to difficulties in purchasing the land. Three years later an ‘improvement committee’ for the town was formed and discussed the possibility of providing a park with a good beach. Disagreements over the costs delayed any decision, but in 1894 the mayor, Alderman E.A. Fitch, decided that the project should go ahead, mortgages were obtained, and construction commenced.

The work proceeded quickly (at a cost of between £4000 and £5000) and the 14 acre park was opened by the mayor on 26 June 1895. Some 9000 people attended the opening, dressed in their ‘glad rags’ and contemporary photographs show the imposing entrance gates, with fairground swings and tents in the park itself. The Promenade Walk ran eastwards on a thin spit of land between the estuary and the grazing marsh. Half way along was a bandstand, with a bathing shed placed nearly at the end. These were moved in 1905 when the marine lake was formed.

The people had a park but, as yet, no beach (apart from a muddy creek used for bathing) as the riverside was still in use for barge building. In 1905 the borough council purchased Benjamin Handley’s Bath House and all the land which lay between the creek on the edge of the Recreation Ground and the estuary of the Blackwater. A dam was made by extending the Bath Wall south-eastwards to join the Marine Promenade, and this formed a large lake, about 700 feet long and 200 feet wide. This ‘marine lake’ formed part of the new park and was formally opened with great ceremony by Lady Rayleigh on 21 June 1905. Separate bathing sheds were provided for men and women, and the bandstand was moved from the promenade to overlook the new lake.

Over the next hundred years there were many developments within the park. Tea rooms, and a seaside store (selling ice-creams, buckets and spades, and holiday toys) were added. The bathing place was well used, and a swimming club was formed. A photograph taken in 1910 shows a wooden diving board, and separate changing facilities for men and women.

In 1925 the marine parade was extended and widened, and the following year the recreation ground was enlarged, and a second entrance was provided from Park Drive. A pond here was removed in 1960 to accommodate new sports pitches, and pedal boats were provided for the marine lake. In 1964 an adjoining landfill site (the former grazing marsh behind the Promenade Walk) became available and was added to the park, forming the present car parking area. As part of Maldon’s 800th centenary celebrations in 1971, the park was honoured by a visit from HM Queen Elizabeth.

Over the next twenty years there were further changes to accommodate the latest trends. An undercover roller skating rink was built, and then demolished to make way for a clipped evergreen maze. A large wooden skateboard ramp, a miniature golf course, tennis courts and a go-kart track all had brief appearances. Fifty trees were lost in the October 1987 storm.

A putting green was installed in 1995 to celebrate the Promenade Park's centenary. Major improvements to the marine lake (costing £74,000) commenced in 1998 and received a Green Flag award in 2003. Following a fatality the lake was fenced off, initially as a temporary measure. However it was subsequently decided that a permanent fence should be erected, and the marine lake became a nature reserve. In the autumn of 2006, a new boating lake, splash park, playground and amphitheatre were opened.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM & SETTING

The park adjoins the town of Maldon to the south-east, lying between Park Road on the west and the estuary of the River Blackwater to the east. Its original area in 1895 was 14.5 acres (5.9 hectares), but subsequent additions have increased the area of the park to 23.5 hectares. The west side of the park is level but falls quite sharply to the marine lake and river embankment to the east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

In 1895 the park, then known as the Recreation Ground, was approached through an impressive entrance from Park Drive, with wrought iron gates on brick piers. There is a central double carriage gate, with pedestrian gates on each side. The lodge by the gates (now Maldon District Museum) was built in 1915, funded by a bequest from T.D.J. Cramphorn of Chelmsford. These structures, and the broad carriage drive curving to the south, still exist. Contemporary photographs show young trees planted along the drive; it is probable that some of the existing limes, as well as a specimen of *Cupressus amazonica*, are survivors of this planting. The carriage drive bifurcates at the top of the slope, one half going down steeply to the marine lake, the other (lined with lime trees) taking a more circuitous route down to the other end of the lake, passing above the modern brick amphitheatre (the site of a former bandstand). A second entrance further south off Park Drive is lined with a low hawthorn hedge and is planted with *Acer* sp. on the north side, and a double row of horse chestnut on the south. This drive was presumably created when the park was extended to provide sports fields. At the top of the slope this drive turns 90° south and is planted on each side with a single avenue of horse chestnut. Further south there is modern vehicular access leading to car parking near the adventure playground.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

There are a number of small buildings (huts, shelters, kiosks and pavilions) of no particular distinction. Probably the oldest is now used as an equipment store, and is timber framed with board walls and eaves boards with a distinctive wavy and pierced pattern. This pattern has been copied on the new shelters on the marine walk.

PARK AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

This is a complex area which has been subject to many changes. It is described in compartments:

a) The original recreation ground. North of the original triple gated entrance is the former park keeper's lodge (now the museum) with a modern wisteria pergola adjacent. Between the carriage drive and St Mary's Lane is an area containing a semi-circular hedge embracing three round borders, and (separately) a Thuja hedge maze. A privet hedge and a line of limes separates this from St. Mary's

Lane. Further down the carriage drive, following its bifurcation to the north, is a grotto behind two large golden yews. This is constructed of concrete slabs, tiles and re-used bricks, possibly dating from the 1930s. At the bottom of the slope is the marine lake (now a nature reserve) with its encircling fence, and new curved linear seating between the lake and the marine parade. The latter has two modern open fronted shelters.

On the opposite side of the lake, cut into the side of the slope, is a modern brick amphitheatre on the site of the lost bandstand. The higher ground between the carriage drive and Park Drive is grass, with a car and coach park adjacent to the road, screened by a beech hedge. There are two semi-formal borders on the main carriage drive, flanked by semi-circular laurel hedges with a central golden Irish yew. At the south-east corner, in the angle between the carriage drive and the second access drive, is a petanque ground enclosed by a hornbeam hedge. Immediately to the east, at the centre of the junction of three avenues, is a large circular flower bed. Further east, between the marine lake and the adventure playground, are a number of kiosks and stores, backed by a clump of oriental plane, weeping ash, Scots pine and lime trees.

b) Sports field and tennis courts. Apart from the avenues already described, a former pavilion and a modern one, there are no specific features.

c) Continuation down the marine walk to the statue of Byrhtnoth. This strip appears to be reclaimed land and contains the adventure playground (with pirate ship and a splash pool), and a feature planted as a memorial to the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, consisting seats and brick paving enclosed by a semi-circular hedge of field maple and tamarisk, flanked by two holm oaks. Further on there is a model boat lake and, right at the end of the spit, the statue in bronze of Byrhtnoth by John Doubleday, erected in 2006.

d) Area to south-west of continuation of marine walk. From east to west this is i) an area of grass without features ii) the Delph ditch, a drainage channel managed as a nature reserve (mixed shrubs include Ionicera, privet, elaeagnus, snowberry and lilac; mixed trees include ash, aspen, beech, oak, robinia, sycamore, weeping willow and white poplar) and iii) further car parking with a horseshoe shaped avenue planted with 86 trees in 1987 in memory of local people who died in World War II.

REFERENCES

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Maps

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Archive Items

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1923/4 Plans for widening Marine Parade ERO D/B 3/14/22

1925 Park keeper's bungalow D/B 3/14/108

1927/8 Men's lavatories D/B 3/14/24

1936 Extensions to bathing station ERO D/B 3/14/117

1936 Plan of bathing accommodation ERO D/B 3/14/118

1936 Bandstand ERO D/B 3/14/116

WEBSITE maldon.gov.uk

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