

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|
| SITE NAME: | Queen's Park, Crewe | | | | |
| Address | Victoria Avenue, Crewe CW2 7SE | | | | |
| Unitary Authority: | Cheshire East Council (former Crewe and Nantwich B.C.) | | | | |
| Parish: | Crewe | | | | |
| Location: | c. 2 kms W of the town centre | | | | |
| Grid Ref: | SJ 687 556 | | | | |
| Owner: | Cheshire East Council | | | | |
| Recorder | IBW | Date of Site Visit | 26/03/2017 | Date of Report | 24/04/2017 |

Designations by Historic England: Queen's Park Crewe Grade II* (UID 100 1412)

- West Lodge & East Lodge, both Grade II (UID 1136230 & 11386810)
- Clock Tower: Grade II (UID 1136226); • South African War Memorial: Grade II (UID 1138682)

Note: *The main focus of this report is the park's origin and creation in the late C19.*

Summary

Municipal park of 45 acres opened in **1888**, and gifted to Crewe by the town's main employer, the London and North Western Railway Company. The park was designed **F.W. Webb**, the Company's Chief Engineer, with important contributions by **Edward Kemp**, one of the era's leading landscape designers.

The park's **design is little changed** from its original layout.

2006-11: A major **restoration** of the original landscape, its features and buildings was funded by Cheshire County Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Principal features remaining:

Layout of c.1883 – 1904:

- Circular road outside park boundary
- Boundary plantations
- 2 main drives forming the central axis.
- Lake with 3 islands
- Circuit walk and secondary footpaths
- rich variety of trees and shrubs

Buildings and Structures of 1888 – 1904:

- Boundary railings
 - Gate pier and gates (N entrance)
 - Lodges
 - Clock Tower
 - Bandstand
 - South African War Memorial
-

History (Numbers in brackets refer to historic images appended)

The Railway Town 1837 - 88

Until the railways came, Crewe was a small hamlet serving Crewe Hall and estate.

In 1833 the Great Junction Railway Company (GJR) obtained the right to construct a line from Birmingham to Warrington. The line was opened in **1837** and included a station near the Crewe estate in the rural township of Monks Coppenhall. The Crewe to Chester line followed a year later, and soon more railway lines converged at Crewe junction.

In 1843 GJR transferred its engineering works from Liverpool. From now on, engineering and construction of locomotives took place at Crewe Works¹. GJR merged with 2 other companies in 1846 to form the London and North Western Railway Company (**LNWR**)².

Over the next 40 years, Crewe Works grew into a massive industrial complex for the production of engines, passenger-and goods carriages, rails and signals. Associated infrastructure included a large steel works, gas and brick works.

As the workforce grew so did the population, rising from 148 in 1831 to 30.000 in 1886³. The small 'railway colony' grew into a town, incorporated as Crewe Municipal Borough in 1877 (1). The LNWR Company had established churches, schools, a hospital, dispensary and a system of health insurance for employees. What was missing was a public park.

Designing and funding a public park 1875 - 85

The park's design is attributed to F.W. Webb and Edward Kemp⁴.

The main driving-force behind the park's creation was the LNWR Company's Chief Engineer and Superintendent of Works **Francis William Webb** (1836-1906).

From the time of his appointment in 1871, Webb took an interest in the town's civic affairs.

He was an alderman of the town council and president of several societies, including Crewe Horticultural Society. Gardening was his 'fond interest'⁵, and so was "his desire that the town should have a Public Park"⁶.

Webb probably identified the site in the mid-1870s⁷. It is likely that he also studied garden design, including E. Kemp's bestseller *How to Layout a Garden* - and then contacted/visited the author at Birkenhead Park, where Kemp held the prestigious position of Park Superintendent. In the 1870s **Edward Kemp** (1817-91) was regarded as "one of the ablest landscape gardeners in the kingdom"⁸. His influential book on garden design had reached 3 editions, and Kemp had practised what he advocated: apart from many gardens for private clients, his completed public commissions in the North West comprised four cemeteries and five public parks.

Preparatory drawings and plans by either Webb or Kemp have not survived. Thus, the different partners' input, and the stages of the design-development can no longer be determined with any accuracy. However, as many of Kemp's design principles are evident during the early development of Queen's Park, it seems certain that Kemp influenced the design and planting.

Webb turned to the LNWR Company to secure the funds for the park's creation. "He managed to persuade the Chairman and Board of the LNWR to dedicate the necessary land together with £10.000 for the construction of the new park"⁹. The enlisting of Kemp's name and expertise will have added prestige to the project.

The aim was, to complete construction and to donate the new park to Crewe Corporation on the occasion of the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 1887. "The Company, under the personal supervision of Mr. Webb, commenced to lay out the park"¹⁰. In 1883 "a lake was created by damming the west side of the River Waldron {or Valley Brook}, flooding 5 acres of land"¹¹.

1886 (9. Nov): The townspeople must have realised that a large-scale construction project was under way, but the Town Council was informed only in November of that year.¹²

After his election as Mayor of Crewe, Webb told the aldermen that LNWR had decided "to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee by the presentation to the Corporation of land in the Valley for a public Park, which the Company would lay out, fence and erect the necessary Lodges at their entire cost". The park would be "in a circular shape, with a 36 ft road surrounding the same" and the Company would construct a new road to access the park. He also hoped to find enough subscribers to finance the building of a pavilion for refreshments.

To express their gratitude, the Council decided to convey the Freedom of the Borough on the LNWR Company's Chairman, Sir Richard Moon, and to prepare a special album for the occasion. Webb produced a watercolour drawing for the album¹³ (2). The Council sought permission from the Crown to name the new park 'Queen's Park', which was granted.

1887 (4 July): Dedication of Queen's Park (3)

In June and July of 1887 Crewe celebrated not only the 50th year of the Queen's reign, but also

- the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Grand Junction railway through Crewe,
- the completion of the 3000th engine made in Crewe works, and
- the dedication of the new Queen's Park.

The Dedication was a grand occasion¹⁴. 400 guests were invited, representing the political, religious and landowning leadership of Cheshire. They took part in a church service, the conferring of the Freedom of the Borough on Sir R. Moon, and a lunch. At 2:30 the Grand Procession walked through decorated streets and an arch of ladders by the fire brigade to the gates of the park. It began to rain. Speeches were delivered from the bandstand: Sir Richard Moon (LNWR's Chairman) dedicated the park and the Mayor (F.W. Webb) expressed the town's gratitude. Both hoped that the park would "contribute to the pleasure and happiness of the community"¹⁵.

After the procession had departed, the public were free to look round the park, which was "far from being finished"¹⁶. Fireworks concluded Dedication Day.

Crewe Corporation was now owner of the park, and a **Park Committee** was established. At this committee's meeting in May 1888¹⁷, the Mayor (F.W. Webb, re-elected for a 2nd year), proposed that certain members of the construction team be kept on to manage the park: Thomas Wynn as head gardener, and George Latimer as superintendent (Latimer was to hold this position until his retirement in 1906). Webb also suggested that a retainer fee be paid to Mr. Kelly, "the landscape gardener who had been employed by the Railway Company to lay out the park, so as to secure his advice as to transplanting trees"¹⁸.

The proposals were accepted, and work at the park continued apace: the lodges were completed (architect John Brooke), the bandstand, pavilion and footbridges were built, and trees and shrubs were planted out (**5, 8**).

On **9 July 1888** Queen's Park was officially **opened to the public (4)** by HRH the Duke of Cambridge. The clock tower with a drinking fountain was unveiled; it had been donated by LNWR employees.

The erection of iron railings around the park boundaries (1893) completed the work undertaken by the Railway Company.

Queen's Park became a great success with the public.

Later additions

During the 20th century, the park was enhanced by the addition of further planting, special garden features, memorials and amenities.

Restoration 2000 – 2011

The park's restoration was funded by Cheshire County Council with a major contribution from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The main phase of the park's restoration, refurbishment and modernisation was completed in 2011 at a cost of £ 6.5 million.

In September 2011 Queen's Park re-opened to the public with a day of celebrations.

Since 2014 Queen's Park has been managed and maintained by Ansa Environmental Services, Cheshire East Council's operating company for grounds maintenance and streetscape services. In 2016 Queen's Park gained the Green Flag Award.

Today there are other green spaces around the park, 'King George V playing fields' (1937) to the W, and to SW a golf course. Adjoining the park to the NE are Tipkinder Park and a BMX track, constructed on former slag heaps.

Description (Letters in brackets refer to maps and numbers to images appended)

Choice of site (A-C)

Webb chose a site at the western fringe of the emerging town, an area of fields sloping into the valley of the Valley Brook. Much of the land was already owned by the LNWR Company¹⁹. The site had potential but offered few natural boundaries, a fact that may have led Webb or Kemp to impose the park's distinctive **circular** shape.

The Webb/Kemp design of 1887 (D, 2):

Although amendments were made during construction, and more features and amenities were added in later years, the **park's design has changed little** from the layout shown in Webb's 1887 drawing.

The circle's main E-W axis bisects the park.

The **northern half** is divided into 2 quadrants by the central N-S avenue which starts at the park's N entrance with its ornamental gates and two lodges. Lined with parallel rows of trees, the avenue leads straight to the park's centre marked by a bandstand and pavilion.

The 2 quadrants on either side of the N-S avenue are indicated as open parkland with a few trees, remains of former field boundaries (5 oak trees remain today). In the NW quadrant, the small valley and stream run almost parallel to the N-S avenue, its vegetation left intact.

Curving plantations along the park boundary show Kemp's influence; referring to large parks he writes: "There should be breadth of glades, with planting chiefly at the margins, disposed in masses or groups, with openings between, and fronted by occasional single specimens."²⁰

The **E-W axis/Broadwalk** (500 m long) lies at 90° to the N-S avenue. Near its E and W end the walk splits to lead either N or S. Here shrubberies provide areas of interest.

The **southern half** is dominated by the lake with its wooded islands and overlooked by the pavilion. Winding paths run along the lake's N embankment. At the lake's E island, two bridges give access the lake's S shore and the raised mound due S of the pavilion (here marked with a flagstaff). The mound provides views across the lake and, as there are no S boundary plantations, into the surrounding countryside.

A winding circuit walk unifies the 2 halves of the park; it runs along the inner edges of boundary plantations and the lake, with a loop around the pavilion. The circuit walk, "to encourage peaceful perambulation"²¹ is another of Kemp's design principles for large parks.

Planting: Apart from trees of former field boundaries, Webb's drawing does not indicate any clumps or shrubberies in the areas of open grassland. It is likely that detailed planting plans existed, possibly by Kemp; they have not survived. However, photographs dated 1888 show that much planting-out had been achieved for the Park's Opening. (**5, 8, 13**).

Later Additions (E, F)

Planting continued under superintendent Latimer's successors:

L. Morgan (1906-35), a forestry expert, introduced many clumps and single specimen trees as well as a great variety of shrubs. Glasshouses and a walled nursery supplied elaborate carpet-bedding displays throughout the park (and vegetables to local people during WWII).

Garden features: In 1937 H.W. Probert created the 'Coronation Walk' in the valley of the small stream: a landscaped walk with a waterfall, rockeries and an aviary (**13**). The Burma Star Island and Scented- and Wildlife Gardens were established in the 1960s by C. Farmer.

Memorials were integrated into the park's design. The bandstand (**8**) was moved to the W end of the Broadwalk (1904) to give the South African Memorial (also called Boer War Memorial) pride of place at the centre of the park (**9**). Later decades added memorials to the Allied Forces who fought in Burma during WWII, memorials to Princess Diana and the Fallen of the Gulf War.

Amenities for leisure activities were introduced over the years. While swimming in the lake was closed in 1936, boating and angling continue until today. Crown Green Bowling and putting were introduced in the 1920s and a children's play in the 1950s. After a fire, the pavilion was

rebuilt in 1977 and named Jubilee Pavilion. Due to increased housing around the park, new entrances were opened on the W, E and S park boundaries.

By the late 1990s, however, restoration and modernisation of the park had become a necessity.

Restoration Work c. 2000 – 2011 (G, 1-15)

After years of research and surveys, proposals were developed for a major restoration of the original landscape, its features and buildings. Applications for grants by the Heritage Lottery Fund were successful. Work began in 2006.

Landscape: The main problems were “the over grown or over stocked planting areas and abundance of trees.Trees planted without due regard of the designed landscape, or permitted to flourish after self-seeding, created barriers in the landscape that blocked the sight-lines towards the park’s special features.”²²

A phased programme of work removed trees and shrubs to restore key vistas.

The N-S avenue was replanted with lime trees, its shrubs and flower beds restored.

2016: “Today the park faithfully retains the integrity of its Victorian designers as an open pastoral landscape encompassed by trees and shrubs. Iconic features are carefully situated so that they draw the eye.”

Features: The lake was dredged, its retaining walls rebuilt and bank-sides reconstructed; bridges were replaced with modern constructions; footpaths and drainage were repaired; railing and gates were replaced; the children’s play-area was enlarged and refurbished with new equipment.

The Victorian **buildings** were restored: the 2 lodges to serve as offices, community rooms and staff accommodation. The clock tower, the South African War Memorial, the bandstand, and 2 shelters were restored.

The Jubilee Pavilion and Sports/Bowls Pavilion were replaced with modern structures.

The park’s re-opening was celebrated in September 2011.

Some restoration and repair work continues; for example, 5 kms of footpaths were renewed and their edging replaced in 2016. Building of a new depot for maintenance equipment and landscaping of the Coronation Valley remain to be done.

Queen’s Park has been and continues to be “truly significant for the population of Crewe as a place for remembrance, a place of carnival, a place for exercise, a place for relaxation and a place of peace”²³.

Acknowledgment

We are grateful to Elaine Webster, Parks and Grounds Manager at Ansa, for her support and information about the park’s restoration, to LNWR Society Archives for information and images, and to Jan M. Wright for permission to use photographs published in www.queensparkcrewe.com.

Please note that this report contains the research and recording information available to Cheshire Gardens Trust at the time. It does not purport to be the finite sum of knowledge about the site as new information is always being discovered and sites change.

Copyright notice ©

All rights reserved. This work is part of ongoing research by Cheshire Gardens Trust. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior permission from Cheshire Gardens Trust

-
- ¹ The 2000th engine was completed in 1876. In 1886 the locomotive department employed 16,000 people.
- ² The other companies: London & Birmingham Railway, Manchester & Birmingham Railway
- ³ • Source of figure of 148 for Monks Coppenhall: Cheshire County Council. 2002. *Cheshire History, Towns Survey – Crewe*. (www.cheshirearchaeology.org.uk);
• 1886 figure for Crewe: Crewe Guardian. 1887. *The Jubilee of Crewe*. Archives of the London and North Western Railway Society, Reference CREWE 022
- ⁴ Descriptions of Queen's Park do not give contemporary evidence for Kemp's involvement, not even recent publications, for example: • Davey, Elizabeth. 2010-11. "A Complete and Constant Superintendence" in *Cheshire History* No. 50, p. 92. • Historic England. 2013. Listing of Queen's Park, Crewe, LEN 1001412.
- ⁵ www.lnwrs.org.uk Catalogue: Personalities.
- ⁶ Cheshire Archives and local Studies (CALs), Ref: LBCr 2486/10: Crewe Corporation, Minutes of the Parks and Pleasure Grounds Committee, p. 32
- ⁷ Cheshire East Council. 2016. Management Plan, section *Queen's Park – Her Historical Development*.
- ⁸ *The Staffordshire Sentinel* of 16/10/1869
- ⁹ E. Davey (see 4), p. 92-93
- ¹⁰ CALs LBCr 2486/10 (see 6), p.33
- ¹¹ Dodd. E and Farmer C. 1987. *The Dedicating of Queen's Park*:
"The lake was formed by 'grading-in' from existing banks and levelling off to a depth of 5'. By puddling the clay bottom it was made watertight and a dam at the west side was erected."
A wormscrew was introduced in 1913 to fill the lake; it is still in use.
- ¹² • CALs Ref: LBCr 2486/1/8 Minutes of Crewe Council and Committee Meetings August 1883 – November 1899, Minutes of Meeting of 24/11/1886, p. 234-5.
• National Archives Ref: RAIL 410/29, LNWR Board of Directors, Board Minutes of 19/11/1886, Volume 10, Minute No. 6659:
"The election of Mr Webb as Mayor of Crewe was reported and it was Resolved, along with other Landowners, in recognition of Her Majesty's Jubilee Year, to present the Crewe Corporation about 36 acres of Company's land, to be laid out and by the Company as a Public Park. Messrs. Webb and Hull (*LNWR's divisional manager*) were authorised to lay out the Park and continue the existing road (*now Victoria Avenue*) to the limits of the Company's property subject to arranging with the owners of the adjoining property to carry it forward, and arranging for the Town Council's acceptance of the gift of land and undertaking to keep up the Park."
- ¹³ Archives of London and North Western Railway Society, Ref. CREWE 032.
Webb's design was published by several local newspapers for 'Dedication Day' July 1887.
- ¹⁴ *The Jubilee of Crewe*. 1887 (see 3), p. 87 onwards for details of the day's proceedings and speeches.
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*
- ¹⁷ CALs 2486/10 (see 6), p. 19
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*
- ¹⁹ The land used to be part of Coppenhall Heys farm until acquired by the railway company – probably in 1836-7, when initial plans located the Crewe-Chester railway line in the valley of the Valley Brook.
- ²⁰ Kemp, Edward. 1864 (3rd ed.), *How to Lay Out a Garden*. Chapter IV, p. 228
- ²¹ *ibid.*
- ²² This quotation and those following are taken from:
Cheshire East Council. 2016. Management Plan Queen's Park, Crewe, Extract MMP *The Heritage in Context*.
- ²³ *ibid.*