

Report On The History Of Crawley Parks
Prepared By The Sussex Gardens Trust For Crawley Borough Council © March 2013
Memorial Gardens

MEMORIAL GARDENS

Crawley
West Sussex.

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST

The Memorial Gardens were originally land purchased in 1920 to take the form of a recreation ground. The intention was that this should be a place for children to enjoy as well as a memorial to those who had lost their lives in the First World War.

During the 1920s a bandstand, a set of swings and a fountain were bought for the recreation ground, but apart from some copper beech trees the ground was kept open so that children could make use of the open space. Gradually changes were introduced to the use of the land. In 1920 West Sussex and Chichester Joint Education Committee were given permission to teach organised games and in the same year the West Crawley Prize Band was allowed to play on alternate Sundays.

Flower beds and pathways were added at later dates, appearing on Ordnance Survey maps towards the end of the 1960s. Originally named the Recreation Ground it was decided in 1958 that a more appropriate name would be the Memorial Gardens and it is likely that after this date the planting increased. The original bandstand, swings and fountain no longer exist. Two cast iron gates and a cast iron pillar were erected in June 1921 and four bronze plaques were engraved with the names of those who had lost their lives in the war. According to local historian Nadine Hygate there were originally six plaques, two of which were stolen in the 1980s and the originals are now kept by Crawley Museum.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

At the end of the First World War the local community raised money to purchase land in Crawley for a memorial recreation ground which would be both attractive and useful. The names local men who lost their lives during the war were inscribed on cast iron pillars. A bandstand was built, and trees from a local nursery, Cheal and Sons, planted. In 1945 the names of those who died in World War II were added to the memorial tablets. In the 1950s Crawley became one of the government's New Towns and development grew: increased housing and new roads surrounded the recreation ground, although it survived a proposal to appropriate the land under the New Town scheme. By the early 1960s the recreation ground had been re-named the Memorial Gardens, with new pathways and flower borders.

More recently a sensory garden and a number of mosaics have been added to the site. The flower beds have been replaced by planting which is drought tolerant and low maintenance.

The need to memorialize the First World War was immediate, with stone crosses and plinths, soldier-statues and granite monuments appearing in every town and

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village.¹ Memorials could be dramatic and imposing, inspired by allegory and national pride, acknowledged privately and publicly, the ceremonial unveiling a part of the ritual of remembrance. But, for many communities, finding a way to remember the dead became a debate about an alternative to built monuments, an attempt to make sense of recent events through schemes that would serve the community, by usefulness, and practicality, rather than symbolic ideas invested in stone crosses and statues. The variety of these alternative monuments is surprising: village halls, endowed beds in hospitals, electric lighting installed in churches, avenues of trees, bus shelters.

Each small town in Britain set up a War Memorials Committee, to decide on what would be appropriate, and the records from these meetings reveals what was undesirable, as well as deemed fitting, in the years just after the war. At a public meeting in The Railway Hotel, Crawley, in February 1919, for instance, the suggestions rejected as not entirely suitable for the 'debt of gratitude owed',² included a club where ex-servicemen could meet, a grand public hall, and a granite column with space on the top for a statue of a local celebrity. A bandstand was considered worthy, provided it was not ornate, such as found on piers, but was more in the likeness of a garden temple. But the popular choice was for a recreation ground, which could incorporate the bandstand, and together with ornamental trees, and electric light, would be both attractive and useful (Figure 1).³

After some disagreement by the Memorial Committee an area on the Three Bridges Road, known as Crawley Meadow, was purchased, at a cost of £820. The four acre site was part of a larger piece of land, purchased only a few years earlier by Frederick Parsons, from the sale of Crabbet Park (Figure 2).⁴ This estate, of over sixteen hundred acres, owned by the Blunt family in Crawley since the 1700s, had passed Baroness Wentworth, who sold off the farmland in various lots in 1916 (Figure 3).⁵ At the time of the sale the land that was to become the recreation ground had changed little from the 1800s, surrounded by farmland and allotment gardens (Figure 4).⁶

The bandstand was built, and the West Crawley Prize Band were allowed alternate Sundays to perform.⁷ Twenty 'standard' trees were ordered from the local nursery, Joseph Cheal & Sons, costing 12/6 per tree, and planted on the western side of the ground.⁸ Six oak seats were provided, but the local children had to wait until 1923

¹ See 'War Memorials, Diversity of Aim and Design', '...practically every city, county, town, village, hamlet, possesses at least one memorial..', *The Times*, 23 September 1926, p.13.

² War Memorial Committee Minutes of Ifield and Crawley Joint Committee, February 1919-July 1922, (13 February 1919), West Sussex Records Office (WSRO), Par.60 Crawley 54/3.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Recreation Ground at Worth: Indenture dated 16 March 1920, Crawley Library (CL).

⁵ Sale Particulars of Crabbet Park Estate, 1916, CL.

⁶ Ordnance Survey map West Sussex, 1910, CL.

⁷ Correspondence with Crawley Recreation Ground Committee, April to December, 1921, WSRO, Par. 60 Crawley 54/3.

⁸ Recreation Ground Committee Record Book, January 1922-May 1934, WSRO, Par 60 Crawley 54/4, p. 11.

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before a pair of swings were erected; clearly marked 'Boys' and 'Girls'. In 1926 a drinking fountain was erected, and when some of the original trees died, they were replaced by copper beech trees.⁹ The Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1937 shows the recreation ground, with houses starting to appear on what was once the open meadow land (Figure 5).

SITE DESCRIPTION

THE PARK

The creation of this site as a memorial evolved slowly. During the inter-war years the community responded to the need for remembrance by raising funds, publishing letters in the newspapers, distributing leaflets, and asking for volunteers to organise subscriptions from local residents. Although it would take ten years to provide children with play equipment, and visitors with public lavatories, it was clear that these were grounds dedicated to the memory of the First World War. The imposing wrought iron gates and the cast iron pillars, with inscription and names of the fallen, were made by a Wolverhampton company, Bayliss, Jones & Bayliss, on behalf of the local firm, Bartley & Ward (Figure 6). Amongst the list of names, was William Drughorn, a Private with the Royal Fusiliers, killed in the first month of the battle on the Somme, July 1916; his father, John Drughorn, paid for the gates and the inscribed memorial tablets (Figures 7 and 8).

Recording of names was the only way that the dead would be remembered. There were no commemorative plants, symbolising regeneration, nor allegorical statues, only a short inscription on the memorial tablets, and although the unveiling ceremony brought the community together to share individual memories, the recreation ground was seen as a service to the community that remained, rather than evoking memories of the past.

The residents of Crawley were not alone in their utilitarian choice. The National Inventory lists 114 recreation grounds that were chosen as memorials for the First World War. There was a growing need to provide for children, who needed 'play plots' and recreation grounds, as existing playing fields were often no more than open spaces, without play equipment, and the debate about memorials in the 1920s was welcomed by developers and planners as an opportunity to increase the amount of green space in their towns.¹⁰

The past must still have been a vivid memory when in 1945 the names of those who died in World War II were added to the memorial tablets in Crawley (Figure 9).

Whilst the recreation ground remained unchanged, apart from the addition of children's play equipment, the surrounding landscape began to develop: increased

⁹ Ibid, pp. 17, 26.

¹⁰ Henry Alexander, 'Town Planning in relation to Parks and Open Spaces', *The Journal of Park Administration, Horticulture and Recreation (PAHR)*, Vol.3, No.4, (September 1938), pp. 133-141, (p.137).

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housing to the north, new roads to the south and west, and in 1954, designation as one of the government's proposed New Towns, planned to ease the overcrowding of the metropolis. The recreation ground survived a proposal to appropriate the land under the New Town scheme, although two small sections in the north-west corner and along the eastern boundary were taken for the new road around Crawley.¹¹

The memorial significance of the land prevailed, resisting requests for ice-cream kiosks, for example, but other changes reflected different attitudes to commemorating the past. Buried amongst the council minutes of January 1959, is a proposal that such areas as recreation grounds should have 'more suitable names' and the ground became the Memorial Gardens.¹² Flower beds and a variety of shrubs and pathways appeared (Figures 10 and 11). By the late 1960s the garden appears as a surviving fragment of green space between new roads, car parks and housing (Figure 12).

Different memories are now celebrated. A mosaic seat, designed by a local artist, represents the theme of transport and marks the town's associations with Gatwick Airport, the George Coaching Inn and the London to Brighton Veteran Car run, whilst the 'Doves of Peace' mosaic is a modern interpretation of the original meaning of the memorial gardens.

New ideas have changed the planting and design. Roses in the circular bed in the centre of the gardens have been replaced with plants that will be drought resistant, as well as low maintenance. Paths and a sensory area have been added to the gardens (Figure 13).

A recent OS map shows the garden surrounded by all the urban clutter of the late twentieth century: networks of roads and roundabouts, town squares, car parks and shopping centres (Figure 14). A myriad of pathways criss-cross the garden, a reflection of the continual movement of those who pass from the town, enter the separate memory space and then leave. The memories in this garden are not expressed through special plants, or sculpture, but built up in layers, a scrapbook of open farmland, enclosed parkland, and a small patch of green enduring as a focus for remembrance.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, SETTINGS

The Memorial Gardens lie within an urban landscape of commercial buildings and roadways within the centre of Crawley town. The Gardens are bounded by Queensway on the north side and on the east side by College Road (A2004). Haslett Avenue and a multi storey car park form the southern boundary. The County Mall shopping centre lies on the north west boundary.

¹¹ 'Must Have New Memorial', *Crawley & District Observer*, (22 July 1949), p.1.

¹² Crawley Parks & Open Spaces Committee Minutes, 1 January 1959, p.159, CL. The alteration may have suggested a more formal attitude to remembrance, but for the older generation of Crawley the ground continues to be known as 'the rec'.

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ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance is on the north west boundary. A network of paved paths crosses the Gardens, radiating from a central circle to each boundary. Grassed areas and flower beds separate the pathways. Mature trees within the Gardens and lining the outer boundaries help to hide views of the town buildings and car parks, thus creating a private enclosure.

References

Sale Particulars of Crabbet Park Estate, 1916, Crawley Library Archive.

'Ifield and Crawley War Memorial', *Sussex and Surrey Courier*, 20 January 1921, p.8.

Recreation Ground Committee Record Book, January 1922-May 1934, WSRO, Par 60 Crawley 54/4, p. 11.

Histories/Literary Description

War Memorial Committee Minutes of Ifield and Crawley Joint Committee, February 1919-July 1922, (13 February 1919), West Sussex Records Office (WSRO), Par.60 Crawley 54/3.

Views/Illustrations

Memorial Gardens, c1970. *Crawley Borough Council Official Guide*, c1970, (Home Publishing, Crawley), p.78.

Memorial Gardens, *Crawley Borough Council Official Guide*, 1987, (Home Publishing, Crawley), p.51.

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Illustrations

By Order of the Honorable Mrs. BLUNT LYTTON.

ON THE NORTHERN BORDER OF SUSSEX.
70 minutes from London in a favourite Residential District. In the Parishes of
WORTH, IFIELD & CHARLEWOOD.

Particulars and Conditions of Sale
OF
OUTLYING PORTIONS
OF THE
Crabbet Park Estate
COMPRISING
HAZELWICK, WOOLBOROUGH, PRIORS, SCALLOWS, BLACKWATER,
LITTLE BLACKWATER, FROGSHOLE, WAKEHAM'S GREEN, LAYHOUSE, GOPTHORNE,
TINSLOWS FARMS,
With Farmhouses, Homesteads and Cottages.
A Charming Residential Property, "HAYHEATH,"
A small SPORTING ESTATE known as HEATHY GROUND,
VILLA RESIDENCE,
The Old Curiosity Shop, Crawley,
30 COTTAGES, SMITHY, BUILDER'S PREMISES,
Various Pieces of BUILDING AND ACCOMMODATION LAND,
SMALL HOLDINGS,
400 ACRES of heavily TIMBERED WOODLAND,
THE WHOLE COVERING AN AREA OF ABOUT
1635 ACRES.
To be sold by Auction by

MESSRS. COBB

At the **GEORGE HOTEL, CRAWLEY,**
On **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20th, 1916,** at 3 p.m. precisely,
In 52 convenient Lots.

Particulars and Conditions of Sale, with Plans and Views, can be obtained at the place of Sale; of the Solicitors, Messrs. BUCKASS, TAYLOR & TAYLOR, 1, New Square, Lincoln's Inn, W.C.; and of Messrs. H. & R. L. COBB, Auctioneers and Surveyors, 61 & 62, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, W.C., and Higham, near Rochester.

The Printing Company, Limited, 77, High Street, Rochester.

Figure 1.

Sale details of Crabbet Park Estate, 1916; courtesy: Crawley Library

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LOT 4.
(Coloured Yellow on Plan).

**TWO PIECES OF EXCELLENT & WELL
TIMBERED PASTURE LAND**

Available for Building or Accommodation Purposes

With long frontage to the Three Bridges Road, situate close to Lot 3 and covering together

12a. 3r. 15p.

Let to Mr. WICKHAM with Lots 3, pt. 9, 13, 14 and 4 acres not included in the Sale, as mentioned in the Particulars of Lot 3.

The apportioned rent of this Lot for Sale purposes being

£24 PER ANNUM.

Power is reserved in the Lease to resume Possession after three months' notice if required for building purposes.

Figure 3.
Sales details of land part of which would become
the memorial recreation ground, 1916; courtesy: Crawley Library

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QUOTATION.

IN REPLY ADDRESS
FENCING DEPARTMENT.

TELEGRAMS "BAYLISS, WOLVERHAMPTON"
Replies by Telegram must be prepaid
TELEPHONE, No 1041.

VICTORIA WORKS,
WOLVERHAMPTON,
14th June, 1921.

BAYLISS, JONES & BAYLISS,
LIMITED.
LONDON OFFICES & SHOW ROOMS,
139 & 141, CANNON ST. E.C.
WNR/KG.

Messrs. Bartley & Ward, Ltd.,
Builders & Contractors,
High Street,
CRAWLEY.

FOR REPLY FINELY REFER TO
DEPARTMENT

Sirs
We thank you for your esteemed enquiry of
the 11th inst. and have pleasure in submitting the following
quotation which includes free delivery to **Crawley Station**.
Terms **Nett ~~cash~~ ~~for~~ Cash on 10th of Month following**
date of Invoice.
We await your commands which shall have our best attention.

Yours faithfully,
FOR BAYLISS, JONES & BAYLISS, LIMITED. *R.S.*

2 Wrought Iron Foot-path Gates as our No. H1636, 4'0" high
x 3'0" wide, $\frac{3}{8}$ " dia. bars, made self-closing one way, with
bows to match, and one Cast Iron Pillar No. 9L with base
to fix in ground to each, painted,

@ £10. 0. 0. each.

References required with first transaction.

Figure 6.
The estimate sent to Bartley & Ward, for the memorial gates and the pillars, 1921.
Crawley Recreation Ground Committee Record Book (correspondence), January
1922-May 1934; courtesy: WSRO, Ref.54/4.