CHT Highbury Landscape History 1878-Present and Restoration Proposals

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Introduction

The gardens of Highbury are of considerable historic importance and a great asset to Birmingham. They were laid out from 1879 to 1914 and were the creation of Joseph Chamberlain, the head of Birmingham’s most distinguished political family, who employed the well-known landscape architect, Edward Milner, and subsequently his son Henry. In their day the gardens of Highbury were the most renowned in Birmingham, and possibly the West Midlands. They were widely written about in the national press and provided the setting for Chamberlain’s entertaining of leading politicians and his Birmingham associates. The fame of Highbury was due to the fact that within the thirty acres there were many different features and these contributed to the feel of being in the country on a large estate rather than in the suburbs of a major industrial city. They display the quintessence of high Victorian taste in gardening, and, moreover the taste of one man having been created on an undeveloped agricultural site and having remained largely intact and substantially unaltered since Joseph Chamberlain’s death in 1914. The fact that much of the grounds became a public park in 1921 and the rest remained with Chamberlain’s former home which became an institution, has resulted in their preservation from development. The significance of the Highbury landscape is recognised by its listing at Grade II on the EH Register of Gardens and Parks of Special Historical Significance.

Their significance is further enhanced by the fact that the original mansion of Highbury designed by John Henry Chamberlain, a leading Birmingham architect, also survives. This is registered Grade I*. The survival of a quality mansion and its intact grounds is extremely rare in the environs of an important industrial city.

This report is in two parts. Part 1 covers the history of the landscaping of Highbury from 1879 to the present and Part 2 covers restoration proposals. Highbury is a multi-layered landscape and this report touches on developments that preceded the laying out of Highbury, and also includes the development of Highbury Park from 1921. The park’s northern section comprises a portion of the original grounds of Highbury.
PART 1 HISTORY OF THE LANDSCAPING OF HIGBURY 1878 TO PRESENT

1 EARLY HISTORY OF THE AREA SUBSEQUENTLY HIGBURY AND HIGBURY PARK

Figure 1 Sites and Monuments Records
There is some evidence of the prehistoric use of the land of the historically recent Highbury and Highbury Park around the area of the stream which was later became a lake, in the form of burnt mounds (SMR 02882 and 20014).
These date from the late Neolithic to the late Bronze Age (2,500 BC to 701 BC).

Although some historians have claimed that there is little evidence in Moseley of any Roman settlement\(^1\) two Roman coins (SMR 03279 and 03280) have been found in the Western Henburys meadows. A monumental Roman stone (SMR 02975) was found near the Henburys ornamental pool, but this was peculiar to the Mediterranean and is considered to an item that was once in the collection of an owner of the Henburys and was part of an antiquarian collection. It is now in the archaeological collection of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

Evidence of ridge and furrow of medieval and post medieval date, and pre-enclosure survives in the Henburys and Highbury meadows also. The fact of its survival lends weight to the theory that once the fields were enclosed in the late medieval period they were laid to pasture as subsequent ploughing would have eliminated this feature. There is also some ridge and furrow of more recent date to the right of the Shutlock Lane entrance.\(^2\)

2 BACKGROUND HISTORY & THE FIRST PHASE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE Highbury ESTATE 1878-1893

Background History
The Highbury Estate is situated in the Moseley area of King’s Norton four miles from the centre of Birmingham, at a place called Moor Green. The road from Alcester provided a good route to the town centre and this was improved when it was turnpike in 1767.\(^3\) From the late C17, and, increasingly in the C18 the area attracted wealthy manufactures seeking rural residences for summer occupation. One such estate was Henburys, to the south of where Highbury was eventually built. It was probably established by the third quarter of C17, and owned by a succession of Birmingham manufacturers. Figure 2 shows Henburys to have had a house amidst fields reached from the turnpike road.

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\(^2\) *Birmingham Mail* 16 June 1921
Fig 2: Section of the Ordnance Surveyors Drawings, 1814 showing the location of the Henburys estate within the rectangle. The turnpike road runs north to Moseley village. Courtesy of the British Library
Figure 3: Map of the Henburys Estate in 1840, based on the King’s Norton Tithe Map of 1840, showing the land usage which was predominantly pasture. Land subsequently added to the Henburys part of which was leased and added to Highbury in 1894 in shown in cross hatching. The future sites for the Highbury and Uffculme Estates are also shown to the north.

At the time of the King’s Norton tithe of 1840 and the Apportionment of 1844, the Henburys estate was forty acres, five acres having been sold to the Birmingham to Gloucester railway, built by an Act of 1836. It was predominately pasture. The subsequent building of a station was to be a significant factor in the later development of the area. The tithe map also shows two other residences in substantial grounds near to Henburys. To the south was The Grange estate whilst to the north-west of Henburys was Moor Green House later known as Moor Green Hall.

The layout of Henburys is shown in more detail on the 1st edition 25” Ordnance Survey Map of 1884 (fig 13) which has been annotated with some of its landscape features. The house was reached from the Alcester road via a tree lined drive. A branch of the drive led to stables, farm buildings and glasshouses. The pleasure grounds included a detached conservatory, a D-
ended pond and winding walks terminating with a summerhouse. On rising ground, and seen from the drive there was an eye-catcher, a stone obelisk. By the 1880s the Henburys estate had increased in size to 65 acres by the purchase of more land and was owned by G F Lyndon, a Birmingham edge tool manufacturer. The estate had a drive that ran from the Alcester road to Shutlock Lane.

The First Phase of the Landscaping of Highbury

In 1878 Joseph Chamberlain acquired c.25 acres of land at Moor Green Moseley in the parish of King’s Norton in order to build a new residence, shortly after being elected a Member of Parliament in 1876. This he named Highbury after his boyhood home in North London. The plans for the house were passed in June 1878.

The initial landscaping was carried out to a design by Edward Milner (1819-1884), a Surrey landscape gardener, who was favoured by several clients in the North, Midlands and Home Counties, mainly rich industrialists. His clients included H.D. Pochin at Bodnant, N. Wales; James Dugdale at Wroxall Abbey, Warwickshire; M. T. Hicks-Beach at Oakley Park, Basingstoke and the public parks of the Pavilion Gardens, Buxton and the Crystal Palace, Sydenham. From 1870 he was in partnership with his son, Henry Ernest, who in 1890 published The Art and Practice of Landscape Gardening and this sets out the philosophy of the designs by father and son. Several of the features advocated in this book were implemented at Highbury. Milner had previously laid out Chamberlain’s garden at Southfield in Augustus Road, Edgbaston.

The Milner design for Highbury provided the basis for the addition of many new features, some said to have been designed by Joseph Chamberlain himself, which were implemented over the next thirty years, together with elements provided by Henry Ernest Milner (1845-1906). Highbury became arguably the most elaborate of the many extensive gardens created by Birmingham industrialists and professional men in the late C19, and due to Chamberlain’s high political profile was widely written about in the general and gardening press.

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4 The Library of Birmingham, Archives and Heritage Services, (henceforth BAHS) Poor Rates Book for King’s Norton, 1886
5 BAHS King’s Norton Building Register 1875-90, Plan number 279 mansion at Moseley, J H Chamberlain for Joseph Chamberlain, 4 June 1878
7 Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham University, BC5/11/1 Reminiscences of Austen Chamberlain’s childhood by Ida Chamberlain, January 1941
The reasons for Chamberlain choosing to build in the Moor Green area of Moseley are not recorded, but family and locational factors must have played a part. Joseph Chamberlain's brother, Arthur who was chairman of Kynoch's the chemical and munitions manufacturers, had been leasing the adjoining estate of Moor Green Hall, formerly called Moor Green House, since 1874, which from 1866 had been the home of Joseph Chamberlain, senior, their father. Chamberlain was therefore familiar with this area. At the time when he purchased the land the area was predominantly rural and had good views over the Worcestershire countryside. For a man embarking on a career in national politics and needing to spend much time in London it had the advantage of proximity to King's Heath station and the train service to New Street. Moor Green was favoured by the wealthy for new residences as parcels of freehold farmland could be acquired relatively easily and in sufficient quantity to ensure a measure of privacy.

The development of Highbury will be considered in two phases: the first up to 1893 prior to the leasing of further land to the south, the western portion of the Henburys from Richard Cadbury, and the second phase of further developments up to 1921 when some of the land of Highbury became a public park.

FORMER AGRICULTURAL USE OF HIGHLBURY LAND

The land for Highbury had previously been in agricultural use. At the time of the Moseley Yield of the King's Norton Tithe in 1840-3 it had consisted of the following fields which were owned by William Congreve Russell, with the exception of Spring meadow which was owned by John Taylor.

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Usage</th>
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<td>Plantation</td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>0a 0r 23p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3306</td>
<td>Shuttock meadow</td>
<td>meadow</td>
<td>2a 0r 16p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3307</td>
<td>Pit meadow</td>
<td>meadow</td>
<td>3a 1r 28p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3313 (part)</td>
<td>Long piece</td>
<td>pasture</td>
<td>5a 3r 25p (c.2a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3314</td>
<td>Poor barley field</td>
<td>meadow</td>
<td>5a 0r 14p</td>
</tr>
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<td>3315</td>
<td>Six day math</td>
<td>pasture</td>
<td>4a 2r 29p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3316</td>
<td>Spring meadow</td>
<td>pasture</td>
<td>c.7a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3317 (part)</td>
<td>Hinterfold</td>
<td>pasture</td>
<td>7a 3r 35p (c.3a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3318 (part)</td>
<td>Poor barley field</td>
<td>pasture</td>
<td>4a 1r 3p (c.2a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Plantation, Shuttock Meadow, and Pit Meadow were part of the land farmed by Joseph Simmons whose farm was immediately to the north of the site for Highbury, but which soon after Highbury was built became a gentleman’s residence named Moorgreen House. Long piece and Poor barley field to the south of it were part of Moorcroft Farm farmed by John Austin. This farm was just to the north of Moor Green Cottage. This property was later named
Pitmarton. Six Day Math, Spring Meadow and Hinterfield were leased by Samuel Cox who farmed some of the land of The Firs Estate to the north east of Highbury.

The eight fields on a south facing slope that were the site for the Highbury estate were rectangular in shape and were used for pasture or meadow. Their names give some indication as the nature of the ground. Pit meadow indicates the presence of a clay pit, of which there were several in the area. The name Poor Barley Field for two of the fields indicates the poor nature of some of the soil, and Spring meadow indicates the prevailing feature of this landscape of numerous springs giving rise to streams that flowed westwards to the river Rea.

**LANDSCAPING 1879-1893**

The principal information on the landscaping of Highbury is Milner’s landscape plan, the series of 25 inch Ordnance Survey Maps, articles in the general and gardening press, Chamberlain family photographs and photographs in the Library of Birmingham. The extensive collection of family letters in Birmingham University Library provides some further formation. No detailed information in the form of planting plans, nurserymen’s orders, garden notebooks or account books have survived.

Milner’s landscape plan for Highbury (figure 4) was drawn up in 1879 before Chamberlain had purchased Spring meadow, which must have been acquired some time shortly after 1879 and increased his acreage to just over 30. The plan shows the line of the new roads, Yew Tree Road and the first section of Queensbridge Road, which had been cut just to the north of an old field path that had crossed Long Piece, Poor Barley Field and Hinterfield and which, beyond Highbury, still continued south eastwards to near Queen’s Bridge over the railway.

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8 BAHS, Edward Milner’s Landscape plan is included in J. H. Chamberlain’s roll of drawings for Highbury, MS1338/3
Figure 4: Milner’s landscape plan for Highbury, 1879
Courtesy of Birmingham Archives and Heritage Services
Figure 5: Photograph of the eastern section of Yew Tree Path in c.1891, similar to the western section which had been incorporated into Highbury in 1879 when Yew Tree Road had been made. Courtesy of Birmingham Archives and Heritage Services

The name for the path and the road was taken from an old yew, said to have been mentioned in Domesday. This was in the field that became the site for Richard Cadbury’s house, Uffculme, some ten years later. The line of the old field boundaries is also shown on the Milner plan as dotted lines. The house was reached by a lodge entrance drive from Moor Green Lane on the west and the house was positioned well to the east of the entrance and at the northern edge of the site at the highest point, in order to optimize the views from it.
Figure 6: Photograph of the Highbury Lodge entrance on the corner of Yew Tree Road and Moor Green Lane, 1922. 
*Courtesy of Birmingham Archives and Heritage Services*

The length of the carriage drive added to the impression that the estate was larger than it was, as well as affording views over the grounds when travelling along it. The drive terminated at a turning circle on the entrance front. In the initial landscaping the garden was divided between pleasure grounds of 12 acres and 18 acres of fields for pasturing stock.
The house, designed by the gifted Birmingham architect, John Henry Chamberlain, in a robust Venetian Gothic style had its principal reception rooms aligned along its south front and Milner commenced the pleasure grounds a small way to the west of the house. Immediately on the south front there was a formal area comprising a straight terrace which could be accessed from the house and, which led at each end via steps to a semi-circular path with a formal planting of shrubs.
Figure 8: Photographs of the garden front of Highbury showing the terrace and the start of the semi-circular path (above) and circular beds and clipped shrubs near the path (below). Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham
Henry Milner in his *The Art and Practice of Landscape Gardening* considered that:

The terrace is not only the narrow strip of raised level ground placed parallel with the house, or the more tately portion – often with architectural adornments – that is laid out along the face of the structure, but must be understood as the whole of the ground that forms the base, or setting for the building.

![Figure 9: Example of a terrace layout from Henry Milner’s *The Art and Practice of Landscape Gardening* 1890, similar to that designed for Highbury although there the elaborate parterres were omitted in favour of circular beds in the lawn.](image)

The terrace path continued south-eastwards in a series of paths and beds that wound gently down the slope. From the drawing room at the eastern end of the house there was a door into a conservatory which then led into a series of glasshouses, for Chamberlain was already a collector of orchids and liked to grow hothouse subjects. Beyond this on the northern boundary there was to be a kitchen garden with fruit trees along the dividing paths and it was proposed to mask from view from the grounds by dense shrubberies. From the eastern pleasure grounds a circuit path led right round the outer margins of the grounds enclosing the meadows as far as the lodge entrance, and pedestrians could continue to the house via the drive.

Two areas of water were proposed, the Milners considering that ‘of all beautiful features in a landscape, none is more attractive than water.’ The stream that started
from a spring in Spring Field and flowed westwards along the southern boundary of the grounds was to have a channel cut to provide water for a long sinewy lake with two islands and bridges carrying the circuit path. Cascades were built at either end of the lake. Again, this followed the Milners’ precepts – ‘when the surrounding land surface is undulated, water may enter the lake at its highest point by a waterfall or cascade, and the outfall maybe also formed to rush over a ledge or brawl over a rocky bottom.’ Henry Milner’s book had three examples of designs for bridges one of which in a simple rustic style, was used at Highbury.
Figure 10: Milner’s design for a rustic bridge, and photograph of the lake looking westwards with the Milner bridge that carried the circuit path in the distance, 1888. Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham
The Milners also designed a boathouse for the pool, and again the design appeared in Henry Milner’s book.
Figure 11 (left): Photograph of the lake at Highbury with the boathouse and the summer house in the background (top), and one of Milner’s designs for a boathouse (bottom). An upper pool with a small island was made in an old clay pit. It was to be viewed from a branch of the circuit path which at this date cut across the field to join the drive. The pool was known as Oak Tree Pool after a large tree by its edge which had a seat and Chamberlain was particularly fond of this spot.

Figure 12: Photograph of the Upper Pool near the lodge, 1888, The pool was later called Oak Tree Pond
Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham

Milner’s plan also shows the proposed planting. On the Moor Green Lane/Shutlock Lane boundary the existing plantation was retained and in the wider estate many of the hedgerow trees were kept after the hedges were grubbed up. New plantations were proposed on the boundaries of the property, particularly on the southern boundary and the southern margins of the lake.

For the northern boundary on Yew Tree Road Milner proposed a brick wall to run from the lodge to the end of the stables with an entrance to the stable yard and an entrance to the kitchen garden where the wall terminated. The wall was to be deeply masked by shrubs along the drive.
Fig 13: Section of the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25” map, surveyed 1883, published 1884. The Henburys estate is outlined in red, and Highbury to the north is outlined in green.

The first edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map of 1883 (figure 13) shows the extent of the Highbury landscaping after five years and the considerable amount of agricultural land in the vicinity of Highbury. A comparison of this map and Milner’s plan (fig 4) indicates that most of his plan had been implemented, but some minor amendments had been made. Some of these amendments were as a result of
Chamberlain having acquired the additional land of Spring Meadow after Milner’s plan was drawn up. This enabled the boundary of the pleasure grounds to be further south and the circuit path system to be extended, and for the construction of a third body of water.

A set of farm buildings for a hobby farm had been built in part of Spring Meadow and the meadows could be used for pasture for the stock and carriage and riding horses. The fact that Highbury had a hobby farm necessitated the circuit path being enclosed by railings on its meadow side to prevent the stock straying on to the path. The central field was divided into three areas by railings and the new plantation in the centre was also enclosed. This created what in the 18th century was termed a ferme ornée, a farm with beautified margins.

The northern boundary had not been made as Milner had recommended it. A boundary wall had been built, but it ran from the back wall of the stable south eastwards to the edge of the property forming a fruit wall for the kitchen garden. A second lodge had been built for the head gardener. These amendments are sketched in pencil on Milner’s plan and were probably decided at an early stage. A short wall range of glass houses had also been erected and later a metal arch for growing fruit. A back drive ran from the gardener’s cottage to the farm buildings.

Fig 14: The fruit arch in the Highbury kitchen garden with the fruit wall in the background
Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham
The treatment of the Yew Tree Road boundary from the lodge entrance to the rear elevation of the mansion was described by Chamberlain in a letter to Richard Cadbury to whom he subsequently recommended it as a boundary treatment for an area between Highbury and Uffculme ‘it should be laid out with a mound and plantations similar to the one I have made here to mask the road of the northern boundary of Highbury.’ On the boundary there was a fence and from the road all that could be seen were ‘tall palisades and young trees.’ The long boundary along Moor Green Lane had a tall fence on the outer edge of the mound.

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9 The Library of Birmingham, Archives and Heritage Services, Cadbury Collection MS 466/292/3-4 Letter JC to RC Highbury 8 January 1894
Figure 15: The Moor Green Lane Boundary Fence to Highbury, 1922. Courtesy of Birmingham Archives and Heritage Services
Only five years after they were laid out the gardens at Highbury were the subject of an article in The Gardeners’ Chronicle of October 25, 1884. The writer was very impressed by the careful control of the views both from the house over the garden, and from the gardens to the house ‘the natural beauty of the curves and undulations of the hilly ground no doubt suggested many of those beautiful views which now present themselves, each complete in itself and having a totally different aspect when viewed from different points, but nevertheless all in harmony with one another.’

He continued ‘Highbury commands on all sides an extensive view – that on the garden side, which stretches far away over the Worcestershire country being truly magnificent and reminding one of those lovely Surrey views which are so pleasant at all seasons of the year.’ Viewed from the highest point the new landscaping was in harmony with the scenery around and ‘indeed seems to form an uninterrupted part of it, no fence or wall or any line of demarcation being visible anywhere around the estate.’

The features in the pleasure ground that were singled out in this article were a hardy flower garden, beds of flowering shrubs, rockeries with alpine plants, and a large rockery descending to an ornamental pond. Above it there was a lookout.

Figure 16: Photograph showing the lookout, plantings of rhododendrons and the lower pool, 1888. Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham
There was also a large rose garden surrounded by shrubberies near the mansion. A circular rose garden with beds in the shape of a flower’s petals had been specified on the Milner plan but had not been implemented. A second rose garden which had probably been only recently established and was not mentioned in the article, was a rectangular enclosure with arbours for seats at the four corners, and is evident on the 1884 map. This was enclosed by a yew hedge but this would not have grown into a significant size by this date. It was later called the Elizabethan rose garden. What the writer in the Gardeners’ Chronicle article emphasized was the informality of the planting, giving the garden an old fashioned air. Chamberlain did not like straight lines as he had written to Richard Cadbury ‘a straight line is always exceedingly ugly to look on’.

The lake was also praised, and at the eastern end where the diversion of the stream fed the lake, near the Swiss cottage style boathouse designed by Milner, there was a waterfall together with one at the outfall. Near by the stream there was also a circular thatched summerhouse, evident on the map of 1884 and illustrated in a later article. The circuit path continued with more shrubberies and beds for herbaceous plants. On this walk the most notable feature was a large sunk rockery for hardy ferns ‘planted with the most varied collection of hardy ferns available.’

By 1884 the area of glass for exotic specimens was already extensive. The conservatory, later known as the Palm House, led into the fernery. It then continued into thirteen span houses which were reached from a two hundred feet long corridor. These were all designed by Henry Hope, who started building the range in November 1878 and it was completed a year later.11

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11 BAHS MS 1056/161 Illustrated catalogue of Henry Hope Greenhouses January 1889, list of clients on back cover. The order also included 2 lean-to vineries, a peach house, a tree cover and pits; MS 1056/251 Messrs Clark and Hope Order Book 1877-86
In 1888 Chamberlain added a rose house prior to his marriage to Mary Endicott. He wrote that he feared the flowers would not do as well as those in her native
America. The house itself ‘is to be 60 feet long and the best and latest model but I fear it will never equal the American roses as our winter has so little sunshine.’ 12

When Mary Chamberlain arrived at Highbury after their marriage in December 1888 she found everything to her liking – except the view from the pleasure grounds to the rickyard below the farm, and this view was masked by the building of an ornamental thatched dairy, with a veranda at the eastern end of the tennis lawn. Mary Chamberlain told her mother that the interior was tiled with white tiles with a border of cream and blue at the top and bottom. 13 The tennis lawn had been made in an area formerly part of Spring Field, which was added to the pleasure grounds by taking in part of the meadow and adjusting the estate railing boundary.

Figure 18: Photograph of the front of the thatched dairy built for Mary Chamberlain in 1889. This photograph dates to the First World War when the dairy was used as an isolation ward and guarded by a policeman.

Courtesy of Birmingham Archives and Heritage Services

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12 Chamberlain Family Archives, A/1/25 Joseph Chamberlain to Mary Endicott, May 29 1888
13 Chamberlain Family Archives, AC4/3/155 Mary Chamberlain to Mrs Endicott, June 28 1890
However it proved less easy to mask a development that occurred on the land adjoining Highbury’s eastern boundary when Richard Cadbury commenced the building of Uffculme in 1890. This house was positioned at the head of its site in order, like Highbury, to take advantage of the extensive views, but this position was very near the Highbury boundary and made it very visible from its pleasure grounds, Mary Chamberlain wrote to her mother, ‘really it is too cruel. Neville has dubbed it the cocoa palace in honour of its builder and we all heartily wish he had found a site for it elsewhere.’

However after the acquisition of forty two acres of the Henburys on a lease from Richard Cadbury to the south of the original area of Highbury in 1894 the Chamberlains added many new features to the grounds and were able to greatly extend the hobby farm.

PLANTING AND GARDEN MANAGEMENT

It is evident that the Highbury garden and its collection of exotics was Joseph Chamberlain’s all absorbing hobby and one in which he included his children. His return to Highbury from London at the weekend was followed by a tour of inspection such as that reported in July 1888 – ‘The morning I spent walking in the garden and greenhouses making the tour accompanied by Cooper the head gardener and Hilda, Ethel and Austen, we were noting defects and arranging to rectify them.’

14 Chamberlain Family Archives, AC 4/3/182 MC to Mrs Endicott, Prince’s Gardens, 27 Feb 1891
15 Chamberlain Family Archives, JC28A A/1/42 JC to Mary Endicott, Highbury, July 27/29 1888
The choice of planting at Highbury was very much dictated by Joseph Chamberlain’s taste, and he often personally staked out the area when beds were being added. On the one hand he had a liking for native English plants, with his first wife he had made a fern rockery at their first house in Edgbaston,\(^\text{16}\) and in a letter to Mary Endicott describing the gardens he had expressed his love of buttercups –

In the drive the railings separate the gardens proper from the fields where the cows and horses pasture. I suppose roughly that the house and gardens occupy about twelve acres and the fields about 18 acres. They are beautiful just now when the buttercups are outflanking the grass with immense spots of gold. Is the buttercup an American plant? It makes the beauty of an English meadow as the poppy and cornflower add to the cornfield.\(^\text{17}\)

This in turn led to much use of hardy perennials, biennials and bulbs, including bluebells and an interest in alpines.

\[\text{Figure 20: Alpines planted in rockwork with a shrubbery at the back and a bed of heathers in the foreground. Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Collection, University of Birmingham}\]

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\(^{16}\) Chamberlain Family Archives, AC 1/1/58 Harriet Chamberlain to Mrs Chamberlain, 24 Harborne Road Edgbaston, 24 April 1862.  
\(^{17}\) Chamberlain Family Archives, JC 28A A/1/29 JC to Mary Endicott, Highbury, 29 May 1888.
The planting at Highbury was unusual in that there was minimal use of bedding plants which was a characteristic of the gardening on many large estates at that period and so despised by William Robinson. The limited amount of bedding was restricted to a series of circular beds on the perimeter of the formal semi-circle of lawn as specified on the Milner plan. Bedding plants would have required much space to raise them in heated greenhouses for schemes which were changed twice a year. On the other hand Chamberlain had a love of exotics which he indulged as did many wealthy manufacturers at this period. His collections were not exclusively orchids but a wide range of subjects such as azaleas, carnations, begonias, cyclamens and primulas.

Many of the existing field trees and former hedgerow trees were retained to give the estate a feeling of maturity. The trees were predominantly oaks and ashes.
Of the hardy shrubs, rhododendrons were a particular passion of Chamberlain’s but he also liked heathers, kalmias, and pernettyas. The rhododendrons were used extensively throughout the grounds. The finer kinds were planted in a dip in the grounds above the lookout in the eastern part of the pleasure grounds. However the poor quality of the shallow soil above gravel, formerly part of the aptly named Poor...
Barley Field, necessitated them being replanted in 1903 in loam and peat to a depth of thirty inches.

3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHBURY 1894-1921

INTRODUCTION

The gardens of Highbury continued to develop with many changes implemented after the acquisition of the Western Henburys land. After Joseph Chamberlain’s paralysing stroke in July 1906 the impetus for new features waned but the gardens and glasshouses were still maintained to a high standard. Chamberlain died at Highbury in July 1914 and his widow left to live at their London residence. None of the Chamberlain children had the means to live at Highbury, although Austen inherited the house and estate. Neville lived at Westbourne in Edgbaston, Beatrice in London, and Ida and Hilda bought the Bury House at Odiham in Hampshire. Here they created a notable garden ornamented by many of the garden sculptures and other decorative items that had once been at Highbury. Some of the garden ornaments were transferred to Westbourne. The garden seats were sold with the surplus household furniture in 1915.

The house was put at the disposal of the military in 1915 and became a hospital for orthopaedic cases. In 1919 Austen Chamberlain gave the mansion to the Highbury Trustees for institutional use as a hospital for the treatment of limbless exservicemen. His gift did not include the thirty one acres of grounds which he offered to sell for the price his father had purchased it for. This land was bought for £15,000 with voluntary contributions and vested with the Highbury Trustees.

In 1922 single storey additions were made to Highbury consisting of operating rooms and additional wards which were built on the footprint of the long glasshouse range. The Palm house and fernery remained until 1940 until they and the 1922 additions were replaced by a double storey brick extension, subsequently known as Chamberlain House.

In 1921 the trustees leased fifteen acres of the Highbury grounds to the City’s Parks Department for use as a public park, the remaining sixteen acres continued to be part of Highbury as private grounds.

LANDSCAPING OF HIGHBURY 1894-1914

In the late C19 the population of Moseley and King’s Heath was expanding rapidly with the introduction of suburban train services, trams and buses and this had consequences for the semi-rural retreats of the wealthy with their hitherto unspoilt views. To the south of the railway line which from 1840 had formed the boundary of the Henburys estate was another C18 estate, The Grange. When Mr Lyndon, the owner of the Henburys discovered it was to be sold for building he decided this would intrude too much on his privacy and decided to sell the Henburys. The Grange was offered to Joseph Chamberlain 1894 in order that he could safeguard his southern views from Highbury but he did not at this time did have the means to purchase the estate. He wrote to Neville, at that time overseeing the sisal venture in Andros, that he had been offered all the fields on the other side of the railway ‘but
alas we have no money. I wish we had been able to go into fibre ten years ago and we should then have been able to indulge all our tasks'. The Grange was sold to the Freehold Land Society and developed for terraced housing from March 1895. The development of The Grange estate is shown on the 1904 and 1913 Ordnance Survey Maps (figs 22 and 32). The Henburys estate had been purchased by Richard Cadbury in 1893 and he had already built Uffculme on a portion of the Firs Estate and whose property adjoined the Henburys. He added its 65 acres to his existing estate of 13 acres.

The fact that in the early 1890s the Henburys was not developed as a building estate by G F Lyndon but sold as amenity land, and that in 1916 Barrow Cadbury gave the land of Uffculme including the Eastern Henburys to the City has been critical in the survival of open land to form part of Highbury Park.

**Landscaping of the former grounds of The Western Henburys by the Chamberlains**

Richard Cadbury did not wish to retain the whole of the Henburys Estate but offered to lease the Western portion to Joseph Chamberlain who although he had not bought it could therefore effect changes to ameliorate the views of the Grange Building estate. The additional 42 acres of the western Henburys land was integrated into the existing Highbury estate after 1894 by a number of changes as shown on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition Map of 1904 (fig 22).

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18 Chamberlain Family Archive, NC1/6/20 Joseph Chamberlain to Neville, 11 March 1894. I am grateful to Claire Simpson for this reference.
19 *Moseley Society Journal*, March 1895 p.65
Fig:22 Section from the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25" map, 1903. The Highbury estate is outlined in green and the Uffculme estate in blue

Principally this consisted of the making of an extensive circuit path system that replicated that already in situ. The new path started from the western end of the lake continued round the two Henbury pools, then ran towards Shutlock Lane, before doubling back and running along the curving hedgerow boundary of
the Hopyard field through a new plantation parallel to the railway and heading
northwards to Spring meadow and continued to the dairy. Several hedges were
grubbed up but the field trees were retained to give a park-like character. New
field divisions were made, probably of estate railings, as the area gave much
additional land for grazing stock. For visitors with the energy it was clear that
they might be taken through this second circuit until as Charles Curtis in The
Gardeners’ Magazine of 18 April 1903 said ‘you are prepared to assert that
Highbury consists of a thousand acres rather than of one hundred.’ Changes
were also made to the planting, either by removing it as happened along the
former southern boundary of Highbury, and by adding to it on the new
boundaries such as along Shutlock Lane and in the plantation walk by the
railway to shut out the view of the rapidly developing Grange Building Estate,
together with planting along the western Henburys drive of c.1850. This drive was
altered and the section that had continued to the Henburys, but was now part
of Richard Cadbury’s property, was eliminated, and the drive was continued
along a new course northwards to the Highbury farm.

The changes to the Henburys landscaping were subject to much discussion among
the Chamberlain family, Mary, as Hilda wrote to Neville, wanting to keep the hedges
to ‘preserve the countrified look and to have the new land as farm rather than
park’ and her step-daughters a more park-like pastoral look. The plan sent by Hilda
in a letter of March 1894 to Neville in the Bahamas where he was managing the ill-
fated sisal scheme, shows their preference and this was carried out.

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20 The Highbury estate was c. 73 acres from 1884 to 1914

21 Quoted by Maureen Perrie ‘Hobby Farming among the Birmingham Bourgeoisie, ‘The
Agricultural History Review vol 61, Part1, 2013 p. 114

22 Chamberlain Family Archives, NC1/15/12, HC to NC 20-22 March 1894
In Joseph Chamberlain’s discussions with Richard Cadbury over the new boundary line between their properties and the site for the new kitchen garden he wished to make, Chamberlain said he was waiting for the visit of Mr Milner to advise as to the best position for this garden. The boundary was to be a bank three feet high and three feet wide. Austen planned to cut down to the hedges and the lines of the new circuit path were staked out by Joseph Chamberlain and Hilda. Joseph Chamberlain himself is credited with the design of two new features at his American mother-in-law’s country estate at Glen Magna near Salem, Massachusetts, they are similar to features at Highbury, so he was quite capable of designing a path line.

From the Ordnance Survey Map of 1903 (fig 22) and a published discussion of the views from and to Highbury of the same date it appears that the use of deciduous trees for the new planting was not an effective barrier when the trees were out of leaf. As Curtis wrote:

About forty years ago when Mr Chamberlain made his home at Highbury, the surrounding country was well wooded, but now King’s Heath has grown up right opposite the south front of the mansion, and is plainly seen so long as the trees in the intervening portion of the Highbury grounds are leafless. To the south-west, however, in the direction of King’s Norton, there are still many woods, and much planting has been done on the borders of Highbury, so that during the summer and autumn the grounds are beautifully enclosed in green foliage.

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24 Chamberlain Family Archives, NC1/15/4 HC to NC 5 Jan 1894
However conifers did not do well in the quick draining gravel soils and would take some time to blot out the views.

**Productive side of the Highbury Estate**

Changes were made to the productive side of the Highbury estate after the additional land was leased. The farm buildings were considerably extended by the building of two new ranges, the second one in 1900. In 1898 a corrugated iron dairy was added in the rickyard for Mary Chamberlain to make cheese. The size of the farming activities after the new land of the Henburys was added can be seen by the fact that a farm bailiff was employed and a cottage was built for him by the back drive in 1904.

**Fig 24:** Photograph of Highbury Farm buildings, with Hilda Richards, Joseph Chamberlain's granddaughter and the farm bailiff, and elevation and plan of new farm buildings, 1900. Photograph courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, plan courtesy of Birmingham Archives and Heritage Services

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25 BAHS, King’s Norton and Northfield Building Register, plan no. 878 30 Nov 1900 farm buildings for Highbury, James Bullock and Sons, builders, Alcester Road, Moseley

26 Chamberlain Family Archives, BC1/2/31 Ida to Beatrice Chamberlain Feb 6 1898

27 BAHS, King’s Norton Building Register, plan no. 1785 17 Sept 1904 Bailiff’s lodge to Highbury, James Bullock and Sons, builders, Alcester Road, Moseley; For a fuller discussion of the Highbury Farm see Perrie, ‘Hobby Farming’
The drive from Queensbridge Road to the farm buildings had been repositioned so that it ran by the western boundary of Uffculme, and was not visible from the pleasure grounds by being sunk, the grounds being retained by an embankment of crucibles. Below the farm an area was laid out as an orchard, and a triangular field area at the triangular piece near the southern boundary of the Henburys was used for an additional kitchen garden.

By 1891 the farm was producing milk and cream from a herd of dairy cows, sheep, pigs, chicken and ducks were also kept and honey was produced. In the original kitchen gardens more glasshouses had been built including a curved range 200 feet x 15 feet adjoining the northern boundary wall of the kitchen garden, by Wright and Holmes in 1896, which had necessitated rebuilding the garden wall. This had four vineries and three peach houses. The firm had also built two carnation houses.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{28} Advertisement by Wright and Holmes in Birmingham Botanical and Horticultural Society’s Annual Report, 1905/6
**Fig 25:** Wright and Holmes advertisement showing glasshouse erected by them at Berrow Court and at Highbury in 1896

2 THE ORIGINAL HIGHBURY ESTATE 1899-1906

In the period from 1899 to 1906 many new features were added in the original Highbury Grounds and these were mostly concentrated in the western side of the circuit path. These additions differed from the earlier features in that there was a
greater use of garden structures and statuary and probably demonstrate the increased influence of Mary Chamberlain’s taste.

The area between the western pool and the sunk hardy fern garden was taken in from the meadow and re-landscaped as three new gardens. The first of these was a rectangular area originally known as the ‘pleasance’ in 1899 and subsequently the Italian Garden. The garden was Hilda’s idea but Mary and Joseph Chamberlain worked on the ideas for the layout and planting. It was surrounded by a beech hedge on three sides with shaped enclosures for wooden seats. The layout consisted of an area of sunk lawn with small rectangular beds planted with perennials. The corner of the beds had dwarf cypresses. Cast iron gates from Sienna were added in 1904, and stone benches. In 1906 a fountain of swans and cherubs and small pool were placed in the centre and in 1908 large terracotta pots were placed in the corners together with lead urns for carnations. Two mature oaks previously in the meadow had been included in the garden and tree seats were built around them. At the southern end there was a brick pergola and a terracotta balustrade with steps leading to the new rock garden. The pergola was initially planted with a hop, and later with roses, and in July 1901 Mary Chamberlain reported to her mother ‘the upper part of the Pleasance looks as if it had been established for years. It is really a wonderful addition to the garden and makes it so much more interesting at this time of year.’

The rock garden was laid out in 1900 by Messrs Pulham and Sons to a design by Joseph Chamberlain, and this too was enclosed by a beech hedge. It was probably an extension to what had been the hardy fern rockery. It was planted with cotoneasters, berberis, alpine rhododendrons, helianthemums and ericas and other alpine plants.

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29 Chamberlain Family Archives, AC4/2/902 and AC4/2/904 Mary Chamberlain to Mrs Endicott, 16 and 23 August 1899; Peter Marsh with Justine Pick, ‘The House where the weather was made ’A Biography of Chamberlain’s Highbury (Birmingham,2019) p. 42
30 Chamberlain Family Archives, AC4/3/10/8 Mary Chamberlain to Mrs Endicott, July 23 1901
Figure 26: Photographs of the Italian Garden 1901-8
Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham
The trio of gardens was completed by a Dutch Garden in 1901 beyond the Italian garden and this was enclosed by a holly hedge from the meadow. It was laid out in a series of geometric beds divided by terracotta tile paths and was devoted to a succession of bulbs. It was ornamented by an astrolabe in the centre bed and the two flanking beds had stone bird baths. The garden was said to have been inspired by one Joseph Chamberlain had seen on the Continent and he was largely responsible for its design.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Figure 27:} Two photographs of the rock garden, with Joseph Chamberlain on the right checking the plants received, 1901. Note the decorative pots on the balustrade. \textit{Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham}

\textbf{Figure 28:} Photographs of the Dutch garden with the Italian Garden in the background, c.1902-4. The sundial was a gift from Hilda Mary Richards to her grandparents. \textit{Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham}

\textsuperscript{31} Chamberlain Family Archives, AC4/3/1059 Mary Chamberlain to Mrs Endicott, 27 December 1901
In 1902 a shrub garden of two acres was made in an area of former meadow between the lodge entrance and the branch of the circuit path. The latter was planted with a lime avenue. This garden was described in The Gardeners’ Chronicle of 26 November 1904 as being for the purpose of displaying a very choice collection of flowering trees and shrubs, with groups of bamboo and sufficient evergreen trees and shrubs to afford relief to the bareness of other species in winter... the whole of the surface is covered with grass, which is mown with scythes occasionally; and winding grass covered paths, kept closely mown, serve to guide one through the miscellaneous assortment of beds and isolated trees.

Figure 29: The Flowering shrub garden with rustic seats on the right c.1904
Courtesy of Chamberlain family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

The last improvement, the tea garden, was made in 1904, again in an area of former meadow at the edge of the pleasure grounds, and this time near the eastern circuit path. Again, Joseph Chamberlain was largely responsible for the layout.32 After the line of the estate railings was altered a large area was levelled.

32 Chamberlain Family Archives, AC4/3/1235 and AC4/3/1246 Mary Chamberlain to Mrs Endicott, 30 September and 29 November 1904
and lawned with an area of stone slabs for tables and chairs. This was reached via a set of turf steps from the lawns in the pleasure grounds to a semi-circular look out surrounded by a balustrade with an elaborate sundial and seat. From here there was a formal approach to the tea lawn via a ramp set with stone slabs and lined with statues of Bacchus, Ceres and Cupid.

**Figure 30:** Photographs of the Tea Garden showing the ramp, the sundial seat and a general view from the meadows, c.1905-6

*Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archies, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham*
Roses had been planted extensively at Highbury from the garden’s inception, near the mansion and in the ‘Elizabethan’ garden but more were added on arches on the circuit path and in experimental rose beds in a lower part of the garden near the lake.

Figure 31: Photographs of the Elizabethan Garden and the rose arches on the circuit path, c1903
Courtesy of Chamberlain Family Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham

An important alteration to the boundary of the pleasure grounds was made in about 1904 when an embankment was made on the far eastern boundary of the pleasure grounds after the service lane to the farm was relocated. The embankment was formed of industrial crucibles and was 20 feet high on its outer face and had a double bank on its inner face, and thus effectively blocked out sight and sound from Uffculme.

These changes to the pleasure grounds can be seen on the third edition of the Ordnance Survey Map of 1913, fig 32.
No further significant alterations appear to have been made after 1906 when Joseph Chamberlain had a stroke, although the grounds continued to be maintained to a high standard. Chamberlain won prizes for orchids at the shows of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens until 1913 and also for chrysanthemums at the Birmingham Chrysanthemum Show. Periodically the Moseley Flower show and the
Moseley and King’s Heath Horseshow were held in the grounds as well as political garden parties and rallies.

![Fig 33: The Moseley and King's Heath horse show in the Highbury Meadows, c.1906](image)

Chamberlain died in July 1914 and Highbury became a military hospital in 1915. The orchid collection was put up for sale and the 701 lots realized £826, though much of it had probably been transferred to Neville Chamberlain’s home, Westbourne, in Edgbaston. All the other exotic plants were also sold as were the garden seats.

The Conservatory became a hospital ward with some of the glasshouses being used as operating theatres, wards and workshops (fig 34). There was an open-air ward in a wooden hut near the house’s main entrance. Surviving photographs of the period such as that of the Italian Garden (fig 35), show that the grounds became very overgrown and the lawns unkempt due to the steep reduction in the garden labour force.

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33 The Orchid Review XXIII, May 1915 p. 138
34 Protheroe and Morris Catalogue of sale of stove and greenhouse plants at Highbury, April 22 1915; Edwards, Son and Bigwood, Catalogue of sale of surplus household furniture at Highbury, April 28-29 1919
Fig 34: ward for convalescent Soldiers in one of the corridor glasshouses Courtesy of Birmingham Archives and Heritage Services
**5 Highbury in Institutional Use 1921 to Present**

**Introduction**

In 1921 the corridor glasshouse range was demolished and replaced by wooden pavilion buildings to provide wards, an operating theatre and treatment rooms for the continuing needs of disabled ex-soldiers.\(^{35}\) It worked in conjunction with Sorrento in Wake Green Road and Uffculme. By 1932 after seventeen years as a hospital Highbury was transferred by the Highbury Trustees to the Public Assistance Committee and became a Home for Aged Women. In 1934 the Joseph Chamberlain Memorial Museum was opened in the former library and breakfast room of the mansion.\(^{36}\) Extensive additions from 1936 to 1940 resulted in the demolition of the last of the Chamberlain glasshouses, the Palm House and the Fernery, the new additions being joined directly to the east front of the mansion.\(^{37}\) Some changes to the landscaping of the grounds were made at the same time with an entrance constructed from Yew Tree Road near the house consisting of a wicket gate and footpath for staff and a vehicle entrance made in Yew Tree Rd near

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\(^{35}\) King's Norton Building Register, Plan no. 30193 Sept 8 1919, Additions to Highbury Hospital, architect P B Chatwin

\(^{36}\) Memorial Booklet for the Opening Ceremony of the Joseph Chamberlain Memorial Museum, 9 July 1934

\(^{37}\) BAHS Architectural Plans 1993/33 Alterations to Highbury, 1936
the junction with Queensbridge road. The terrace designed by Milner which had only run along the garden front of the mansion was extended along the front of the new institutional buildings. The eastern half of the Elizabethan garden was levelled and made into a tennis court. In 1940 the wicket gate entrance was widened by cutting through the bank to provide vehicular access through an entrance that had cast iron gates hung on stone pillars.

In the 1950s a long section of the 1879 garden boundary wall in front of the institutional buildings was considerably lowered so the buildings could be seen from the road. In the late 1950s a house for the caretaker was built opposite the entrance front of the mansion.

By 1974 the Highbury farm buildings and the dairy had been demolished or had fallen down. However, the kitchen garden had continued to be used for the growing of fruit and vegetables for the Highbury residents.

In 1984 Highbury ceased to be Home for Aged Women, having been transferred to the General Purposes Committee, and the mansion was refurbished for civic entertaining. By the C20 it was mainly used for commercial catering being managed by Acívico. A section of the institutional building, Chamberlain House, still vested with Social Services was demolished and an area created that represented the footprint of the Chamberlain’s conservatory and fernery, and this was made into an enclosed terrace. At the same time a garage for the Lord Mayor was built near drive together with parking spaces. Whilst the grounds near the mansion were well maintained the eastern portion was considerably neglected and became very overgrown, and from the 1980s and ‘cruising’ areas resulted. In 1985 3.39 a. of this land was declared surplus and appropriated to Leisure Services for inclusion in Highbury Park, though as yet this has not been put into effect.

A substantial portion of the kitchen garden was made into a car park in c.2000. The Four Seasons Gardening Project, which provides work experience and training for adults with special needs, has occupied the surviving eastern section of the kitchen garden since c.2004. The bailiff’s house has been repaired for their use.

In 2016 the Highbury Trustees vested Highbury and its original grounds of 30 acres in the Chamberlain Highbury Trust. A programme of restoring the house for exhibitions relating the Chamberlain family, and for Community events is being drawn up together with plans to restore the grounds to their layout in 1900.

6 THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGBURY PARK 1921 TO PRESENT

Highbury Park is unusual among the city’s parks in that the land for it came from three estates which had been established at different periods as private residences with grounds. The land for the park was acquired piecemeal from 1921 to 1924.

The park opened in 1921 and consisted of thirty acres, fifteen of which were part of the grounds of Highbury and fifteen were part of the Uffculme estate which had formerly been the eastern part of the Henburys.
In 1923 forty two acres of the western part of The Henburys were added to the Park from a purchase made by the Birmingham Civic Society from Barrow Cadbury and donated to the city, whilst in the following year the Society gave a further 3 acres of land adjoining Highbury. In 1933 3 ½ acres were transferred from Highbury to the park, but withdrawn in 1939. The land from The Henburys, Uffculme and Highbury was known as Highbury Park from February 1933.38

Fig 36: Map showing the areas of land acquired for Highbury Park

38 BAHS Parks Committee Minutes Nov 1931-March 1933; Joseph Trevor Jones History of the Corporation of Birmingham vol V, 1915-35 part11 (Birmingham, 1940) p. 431
The several pieces of land which over time have been acquired for Highbury Park are shown in figure 36.

The first land used for a park was leased to the parks committee by the Highbury Trustees in March 1921, for a nominal rent of £1 per annum. This consisted of the grounds of Highbury marked A in figure 36. This comprised the lodge entrance on Moor Green Lane, the shrub garden, the Dutch garden, the Italian Garden and the rock garden and the bottom two sections of the enclosed meadows. Later in the same year the General Purposes Committee of the City Council transferred fifteen acres of Uffculme to the Parks department ‘on condition that the first portion was retained for that purpose’, and this marked B on figure 36. This land was part of the Henburys estate that Richard Cadbury had retained with Uffculme in 1894, and consisted of the lodge entrance on Alcester road, and the land to the south of the drive up to the house and its former pleasure grounds. Richard Cadbury had considerably simplified the layout of the Eastern Henburys when he added it to Uffculme, demolishing the glasshouses, stables and outbuildings and reducing the size of the house. He had eliminated most of the paths in the pleasure grounds.

On the park’s opening in June 1921\(^{39}\) an article on ‘the Beauties of Uffculme and Highbury’ recognized that whilst many were familiar with ‘the natural beauty of the grounds’ having visited them for fetes and shows ‘there are many thousands who are ignorant that so many delightful acres of richly wooded parkland lies behind the wall that borders the Queensbridge Road.’

In January 1923 the Birmingham Civic Society bought the forty two acres of the Western Henburys from Barrow Cadbury for £9,000. This purchase was of considerable importance, ‘for it preserved the amenity of the adjoining estates of Highbury and Uffculme, with which it is naturally associated, whilst those portions of the estate which are to be used as athletic fields will be found especially convenient, not only for residents of the district itself, but for teams which come from greater distances by train or tram.’\(^{40}\) This land was the western portion of the Henburys which had been leased to Joseph Chamberlain in 1894, and is marked C on figure 36. The Civic Society then conveyed the land to the City ‘with an understanding that the Society is to be consulted in the lay-out and treatment of the grounds. In conformity with this condition various new paths and shelters have been agreed on. ‘The Civic Society wished that part of the land be reserved as playing fields for specific schools that lacked such facilities’. In 1925 the western most ten and a half acres section was put under the control of the Education Committee together with seven acres which continued to be allotments until 1927.

In two years the majority of the land for Highbury Park had been acquired. The boundary between the western and eastern sections of the Henburys was mostly removed and the two parts of its drive reunited.

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\(^{39}\) BAHS, Newspaper Cuttings on Parks, Birmingham Mail 16 June 1921

\(^{40}\) The Work of the Birmingham Civic Society (1946) p. 46
Fig 37: Section from the Ordnance Survey 25” Map 4th edition, 1937. Uffculme is outlined in blue, Highbury Park in light blue and Highbury (Home for Aged Women) in green

By 1926 the western end of this drive had been diverted to run to a new entrance further south on the junction with Dad’s Lane and Shutlock Road and this entrance was improved in 1939 after road widening at a cost of £700 of which the Civic Society contributed £100. Tennis was played on the Lyndon’s former

41 BAHS, Parks Committee Minutes, 3 April 1939
tennis ground and on new tennis grounds to the west of the lily pool where there was also a bowling green and a cricket pitch. The cricket pitch was let at 4 shillings for an afternoon match 2/6 for an evening one and six pence for schools.\textsuperscript{42} A sports pavilion was erected by the Birmingham Civic Society in 1926 on levelled ground where the western drive used to exit. Permission for this was granted by the Parks Committee –

Subject to the building being thatched with Norfolk reed and the walls covered with elm boards and the building being erected near to the brick outbuilding fronting Shutlock Lane\textsuperscript{43}

Refreshments were available in the park from early on. Initially these were sold from a wooden hut\textsuperscript{44} but by 1924 the Henburys house was being leased as refreshment rooms, known as Bunkums. When the park was first opened the house was being used by the Dolobran Athletic club.\textsuperscript{45}

The fourth edition of the Ordnance Survey 25 inch map of 1937 (figure 37) shows that two drinking fountains had been installed and also some public lavatories. There was a pavilion by the tennis courts and a six-sided shelter by the entrance drive.

The circuit path system that Chamberlain had installed in the Western Henburys in 1894 had not been retained nor had the field boundaries which they had put into place. In 1951 the sports facilities comprised seven cricket pitches, an 18 hole putting green, one crown bowling green, two football pitches, two grass netball pitches and seven grass tennis courts.

An area of land, formerly the kitchen garden of the Henburys, and its continuation enclosed by the Cadburys, was let as allotments, probably by 1922. In the Henburys portion of Highbury Park there was little ornamental gardening although the shrub borders were maintained around the house and there was a rose garden in the lawned area contained by the brick garden wall.

In the area of the park formerly part of the grounds of Highbury few changes had been made when it became a public park. A wide curving border 15 yards long and 50 yards wide was made near the walk-in entrance from Shutlock Lane, probably an extension to the Highbury rose beds laid out by 1903, was initially used for the display of Dahlias but was later planted as rose beds. The areas of ornamental garden such as the flowering shrub garden, the rock garden and the Italian garden were well maintained, although they lacked the garden statuary which had been removed by the Chamberlain family in 1914.

\textsuperscript{42} BAHS Parks Committee Minutes Nov 1926-Oct 1927 p. 20
\textsuperscript{43} BAHS Parks Committee Minutes Nov 1925-October 1926 minute 6770
\textsuperscript{44} BAHS Parks sub-committee for Administration, 1922
\textsuperscript{45} BAHS News cuttings of Parks, \textit{Birmingham Mail} 6 June 1921
After 1924 when the three acres of Highbury land were added a new boundary was installed between the land for the park and that which was retained with the house. The boundary was of estate railing using sections removed from the circuit path boundary. In 1933 an extra 3 ½ acres of land was granted to the parks department by the Public Assistance Committee which brought the land of the public park nearer to the private grounds of Highbury.

However, in 1939 this land was withdrawn and reverted back to the Public Assistance Committee who altered the boundary to also include land below the thatched dairy, as the building’s proximity to the park in the period from 1933 to 39 had resulted in it suffering ‘severely from the depredations of boys from the park area.’

They also requested that the Park Department put up notices indicating that the Highbury grounds were private. 

During the Second World War the Dutch garden was no longer maintained and was said to have been used for growing vegetables by the parks superintendent, and vegetables were cultivated in the Italian Garden and other flower beds. Hay was made in the meadow land and cut in June by hand scythe round the edge and then by horse-drawn reaper. It was stored in a rick constructed near the bottom rose garden, the hay being sold to local farmers. The staff were augmented by women if there were staff shortages, and towards the end of the war a Land Girl was employed.

The allotments in the Henburys were let to patients from Uffculme. Additional allotments were laid out in the large field which had been used for that purpose in the previous war, and these continued until 1951. As part of ARP precautions in 1939, a shed for a trailer pump was constructed by the site of the boathouse to use water from the lake. ARP trenches were made 100yards down the Alcester Road drive, and a barrage balloon was installed on the playing field.

After the War the former Dutch garden became a nursery area with glasshouses for raising bedding plants. Some of the tiles from its paths were used to make a central path in the Italian Garden and a similar path of broken concrete slabs was made in the Rock Garden.

The landscaping of the park in the 1950s is shown in figure 38.

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46 BAHS Parks Committee Minutes, 30 May 1939
47 ex inform Mr H. Cookson former Foreman of Highbury Park, personal interview, 19 February 1987
48 BCC Highbury Park Records Card
Fig 38: Section from the Ordnance Survey 25"Map, 1955-7 Uffculme is outlined in blue, Highbury Park in light blue and Highbury (Home for Aged Women) in green.
Changes to the path systems throughout the park were made when the original gravelled paths were replaced by tarmac after complaints about the rutted and broken nature of the paths. A letter in the Birmingham Mail on 3 July 1930 signed ‘Tenderfoot’ said ‘It is quite impossible to walk on some part of the paths without being crippled owing to loose pebbles. I think it is time considering the numbers who visit this otherwise beautiful park, that something was done to make the path better to walk on’.

In one area near the site of the Henburys house the original surface can be seen where the tarmac itself has worn away. The paths in the former grounds of Highbury were resurfaced in 1951. Teak seats were provided in the park in 1951 and 1953 paid for from the Keep Bequest.
After the War the park was well maintained with a staff of fourteen gardeners under a foreman gardener and there were two full-time parks policemen on bicycles.  

In 1951 it was decided that Highbury Park could be used for garden fêtes and an area was designated for ‘galas’ in the Highbury meadow area, the Parks Committee minutes recorded that ‘authority to be given for permanent public lavatories, water supply to marquees, fencing, entrance pay boxes and necessary alterations to the Shutlock entrance at a cost of £945’. The hiring fee was £25 up to 1971 and £40 thereafter. Three fêtes were held annually - the Moseley Round Table, a flower show and the Conservative fête, together Scouts groups, and Boys’ clubs events, up to 1978. Other events included the CND Festival of Life in September 1971 and a Festival of Light in July 1972.

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49 Reminiscences of Mrs Beryl Gibbs daughter of Arthur Markham Highbury Park Superintendent, 1950-1963, 8 October 2008, courtesy of The Friends of Highbury Park

50 BAHS, Parks Committee Minutes, 5 February 1951
In 1971 an additional piece of land of 556 square feet was added to the park from the General Purposes Committee, to the north of the Alcester Road entrance.\textsuperscript{51}

For several years from 1966 to 1975 the National Cyclo-cross Championship was held in Highbury Park, with a course of 1.3 miles predominantly in the Henburys but also extending into the Highbury meadows and near part of the circuit path.\textsuperscript{52,53}

![Fig 41: Plan of the cyclo-cross course and a competitor (right) Courtesy of Birmingham Archives and Heritage Services](image)

In 1967 it was decided to extend the range of planting at Highbury Park by making it the site for the Midland Rose Centre.\textsuperscript{53} A competition was held but subsequently the landscape architect Paul Edwards was commissioned to prepare a scheme, but the full scheme was not proceeded with due to restrictions in funding. Some roses were planted in the big bed near the Highbury lake.

In 1969 the Alcester Road entrance was altered by replacing the high wall with a low one, and the lodge cottage was demolished soon afterwards. Many other buildings and features have been lost in the subsequent half century including all those erected for park purposes, predominantly through vandalism and lack of money for repairs. The remaining portion of the Henburys was demolished in the 1965 when it was found to be in an unsuitable condition for catering purposes. The obelisk had been demolished earlier in 1957 as it was considered to be in a dangerous condition.

New culverts for flood prevention along Shutlock Lane were installed in 1970. and further flood prevention work was done opposite Tilbury Grove in the early 2000s.

\textsuperscript{51} BCC Estates Dept, Memo 9 March 1971
\textsuperscript{52} BAHS, newscuttings of Parks, Daily Telegraph, 5 February 1966
\textsuperscript{53} BAHS, newscuttings of Parks, Birmingham Mail, 17 April 1967
In 1974 the lake was dredged and in 1989 major work was carried out on the lake including desilting and replanting. The various brick farm buildings remaining from the Henburys as a private estate, including the one adapted as the Park Office and mess room in former bridle room of the Lyndons’ stables, have also been demolished as have the sports pavilions, drinking fountains and the toilet blocks at the Henburys and Highbury. When sections of the Shutlock Lane boundary fence fell into disrepair they were removed and the boundary left open.

In 1992 a major planting initiative was adopted with the decision to establish an arboretum in the Highbury meadow land to commemorate the Jubilee of the fortieth year of the Queen’s accession. Some funding was provided by the Townswomen’s Guild. This involved very extensive planting of a wide variety of species including a pinetum and an avenue of Redwoods that seriously altered the historic character of the meadowland and drastically reduced the area of open space. In spite of representations from the Garden History Society’s Conservation Officer and garden historians the scheme was mainly implemented. Highbury Park’s inclusion on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest since 1986 having failed to carry any weight.

In 2000 the park was used for Walk 2000, a 2km walk route promoted in conjunction with NHS.

Highbury Park Friends were formed in 2002 to promote and safeguard the park, and they have carried out a tree survey and produced trail and wildlife leaflets. The Highbury Orchard Community runs projects in connection with replanting the orchard and they have cleared the former farm revealing the footprint.

More recently a car park has been made at the Henburys. The anti-social problem of ‘cruising’ was first identified at the Henburys in 2001 and recently there has been much clearing of neglected shrubberies around the apsidal ended pond and along the allotments boundary as a result. An Assistant Ranger was appointed in 2007.

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54 BCC Highbury Park Records Card
PART 2 RESTORATION PROPOSALS

Aims

The predominant aim for Highbury is to restore the landscape to its appearance in the years prior to Chamberlain's death in 1914. Although at this date the Highbury estate consisted of over seventy acres the restoration would concentrate on the original site of thirty acres which Joseph Chamberlain owned before leasing further land to the south in 1894. The thirty acres are under the management of the Chamberlain Highbury Trust. The land leased in 1894 by Joseph Chamberlain of the Western Henburys is now part of the public park and access to it and the remainder of the park would be an important component of the scheme.

The Highbury grounds have been under various maintenance regimes so their present condition is very variable. There has been much self-seeding of trees and little attention to succession planting but this has increased the bio-diversity of the estate which should be maintained within the aims of historic restoration.

Improvement of public access is a necessary consideration as the drive and many paths are inaccessible.

The grounds and the adjoining public park are well used but lack amenities such as toilets and a café and provision should be made for them.

Highbury in the Chamberlain era was intensively gardened and had high labour requirements. Any restoration should take into account the need for volunteer labour for continued maintenance and new planting. There are a number of active stakeholder groups from which volunteer gardeners might be recruited to work under qualified staff.

Restoration proposals

The proposals for restoration are discussed below under six character areas (see plan below). The first two character areas are omitted as these refer to the Henburys estate and this land is under the control of the CHT.

Each area is discussed under its history, condition and actions required for a restoration.
1 Highbury: Lodge Entrance, Driveway to Mansion

Historical Development

This area was laid out to the designs of the landscape architect, Edward Milner, for Joseph Chamberlain in 1879 on what had previously been agricultural land. The lodge entrance, with a lodge cottage designed by J.H. Chamberlain the architect of the mansion, was on Moor Green Lane from where the drive ran eastwards to the house, parallel to Yew Tree Road, but masked from it by an earth embankment and tree planting. The lengthy curving drive terminated in a turning circle by the entrance front. A branch of the drive led to the stables (now demolished) on the north of the house.

There was an edging of lawn on either side of the drive and southward views over the meadows from the drive. The drive was also used by pedestrians as it formed the first stage of the circuit path that went round the perimeter of the grounds.

When part of the grounds were leased for a public park in 1921 the lodge entrance and a short section of the drive became part of the park, the remainder of the drive continuing to be part of the grounds of Highbury in institutional use. On the southern side the drive was separated from the meadows by a boundary of estate railings and these remained in situ until the 1950s but were moved to form the park boundary. A curving hedge was planted in part of the meadowland by 1955 and formed part of the boundary to a caretaker’s house built in the late 1950’s/early 60’s opposite the entrance front to Highbury. The northern boundary was the embankment with close boarded fence by the road. A new vehicular entrance to Highbury from Yew Tree road, near to the house, was made in 1940 by excavating through the bank. A car park was laid out on part of the driveway in 1984 together with a garage for the Lord Mayor’s car. Modern shrub planting was undertaken near the mansion in 1984.

Condition

The lodge cottage had additions in 1950 and c.2000. It is in relatively good condition but needs some repointing and the replacement of rotten wood. The porch has been enclosed. It is currently leased and not available to the CHT. The gate piers are damaged and have lost their lanterns and the gate is in very poor condition but retains its contemporary ironmongery.

The drive way is impassable beyond the car park and up to the boundary line between the park and Highbury by large deposits of branches and decaying vegetation. The planting along the drive way is very overgrown on both sides and has encroached over the areas that were formerly lawned. All the views have been lost. Much self-seeding of trees has taken place either side of the driveway. The area is no longer delineated by estate railings on its southern boundary but the embankment and the close boarded fence on the northern boundary are still in situ and in relatively good condition.
ACTIONS REQUIRED

- Restore the line of the C19 driveway and turning circle, resurfacing with resin bound gravel. Make one-way vehicular entrance from lodge towards the house with new signage internally and externally. Retain 1940 entrance for vehicular exit. Remove park signage. Install interpretation panel on history of the estate. Restore lodge gate, replacing woodwork but retain and restore ironmongery. Restore brickwork of gate piers and reinstate the lanterns

- Clear self-seeded trees along north and south sides of the drive, thin trees, replant with period appropriate trees and shrubs, and restore lawn edges. Plant bulbs in lawned areas.

- Retain Lord Mayor’s garage for use by garden volunteers, remove car park but create parking spaces on southern side

- Consider reinstating estate fencing on original boundary line

- Demolish caretaker’s house and remove planting associated with it including the hedge. Create lawned area for use by wedding parties for photographs

Consider replacing fencing along northern boundary

2 Highbury: Pleasure Grounds

Historical Development

The pleasure grounds were laid out in 1879 to the design of Edward Milner. They commenced with a formal layout on the garden front of the house. A pair of stone steps led from a terrace to a semi-circular path enclosing a sloping lawn with a series of circular beds for annuals. Heart shaped beds were planted with rhododendrons by the steps. Clipped yews and hollies added to the formality. Beyond this there was a ring of specimen trees. From the formal area a series of gravel paths enclosing beds, led down the sloping site. A stone viewing platform with a rockery below it was added to the original design by 1883, above a pool with an island. Above this, and to the east, a rhododendron garden was established. On the eastern boundary a formal enclosure hedged with yews was planted with roses. This was called the Elizabethan rose garden and was in the position for a rose garden designated by Milner but not following his suggested design. Estate railings formed the southern boundary of the pleasure grounds and there were extensive views from the house and pleasure grounds towards the Lickey Hills.

The pleasure grounds were twice enlarged by taking in land from the meadows and realigning the estate railings. Firstly, on an extension below the pool a double tennis lawn which could also be used for croquet was laid out and an ornamental thatched dairy was added at the eastern end in 1889. A further extension was made in 1904 to the west of the tennis lawn for a tea garden. This was reached via steps
from the lawn leading to a semi-circular viewing platform overlooking the park from where a ramp gave access to a paved area for a table and wooden seating. The eastern boundary of the pleasure grounds was realigned in 1904 and subsequently a twenty foot high embankment built of crucibles provided a barrier from the neighbouring estate.

In 1915 Highbury passed into institutional use and all the statuary from the rose garden and the tea garden was removed by the family as were the garden benches. By 1922 the terrace fronting the house was extended along the front of the hospital buildings that replaced the glasshouses in 1922, and by 1934 a tennis court had been laid out in the eastern half of the Elizabethan rose garden which was levelled for the purpose. The estate railings that formed the 1904 boundary of the pleasure grounds with the meadows were removed in the 1950s to a different position to form the park boundary. The Midland Beekeepers Association have been established in the former tea garden for many years. The ornamental dairy was burnt down in the 1960s. The southern boundary of what was Chamberlain House, on the footprint of the glasshouse ranges and, since 2016 Uffculme School, now has a high boundary fence planted out with Japanese laurels.

CONDITION

The western pleasure grounds are reasonably well maintained but the topiary plantings of yews and hollies have lost their shapes. Shrub planting from the 1980s in beds near the house strikes a discordant note. Wooden seating and picnic tables placed on the south front of the house and lawn do likewise. The lawn has been invaded by Himalayan balsam. The specimen tree planting is largely intact but has some self-seeding and the views have been lost.

The eastern area is very overgrown with much self-seeding of trees and shrubs and weed infestation and some paths have disappeared.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

• Consider reinstating the 1904 boundary of estate railings between the pleasure grounds and the meadows. Include gates for access
• In formal section of pleasure grounds clip the yews and hollies to regain their original shapes and remove inappropriate replacements. Reinstall circular beds in the lawn
• Replace terrace with resin bound gravel and reinstate footpaths with the same material
• Restore/replace rhododendron planting in heart shaped beds
• Establish beds of roses, heathers, rhododendrons, kalmias and pernettyas in beds by the path system
• Undertake the restoration of the pond, removing recent bridge
• Thin out trees and remove self-seeded ones
• Consider re-establishing tennis/croquet lawn in eastern pleasure grounds
• clear area around site of thatched dairy and repair surviving floor and put up interpretation board
• Re-establish views over meadows
• Replant rockery below look out
• restore rhododendron garden
• Determine the viability of reinstating the tea garden depending on finding an acceptable new site for the bee keepers. The statuary is still in the possession of descendants of the Chamberlain family and could be copied
• Consider the restoration of rose beds near the mansion and the Elizabethan rose garden

3 Highbury: Western Boundary, Circuit Path and Specialist Gardens

HISTORY

The western boundary on Moor Green Lane and the circuit path were laid out in accordance with Edward Milner’s landscape plan of 1879. The boundary with Moor Green Lane had a close boarded fence and retained trees from the former hedgerow boundary. There was a gated exit on Shutlock Lane. A boundary of estate railings on the meadow-side was installed soon after the area was laid out. The circuit path led to points of interest. These were a pool with a small island, made in an old clay pit, which acquired the name of Oak Tree Pool and was a favourite spot of Joseph Chamberlain’s where he could observe the pool from a seat built round the tree. A sunk fern garden was also mentioned in the gardening press in 1884 as being near the circuit path.

However in the second phase of landscaping the sunk fern garden was altered in c.1901 to form a new rock garden, laid out by Pulham and Sons to a design drawn up by Joseph Chamberlain himself. To the north of this was another new specialist garden, the Italian garden, made between 1899 and 1908 in an area formerly part of the meadows, and both were enclosed by a beech hedge. The Italian garden had a sunk lawn and beds for perennials and was ornamented with containers. It was entered by a wrought iron gate, said to have been brought back from Italy by Joseph and Mary Chamberlain. In the centre there was a fountain and there was a seat around one of the original field or hedgerow trees. The boundary with the rock garden was marked by a pergola planted with roses and a terracotta balustrade and central steps leading down to the rock garden. The third garden, the Dutch garden, lay to the east of the Italian garden and was contemporary with the other small gardens, and had three geometric beds devoted to bulbs. It was bounded by a holly hedge from the meadows. The three gardens were relatively well maintained in the early years of the public park but their statuary was removed when the Chamberlains left Highbury in 1914 and the wooden seats sold in the 1915 sale of surplus furniture. The Italian garden was used for growing vegetables during the Second war and the Dutch garden likewise became a vegetable patch and after the War had greenhouses and frames for raising plants. These have been removed
and the area has reverted to meadowland. A fourth garden was created as a new shrub garden at the same time as the three gardens just described. This was made in the meadowland bordered by the Western circuit path starting near the lodge and a branch of the path that led from the drive. This path was planted with a lime avenue. The area was transected by mown grass paths and had rustic wooden seats.

The circuit path had other areas of interest in the form of beds of perennials either side of the paths in the section near the lake, and beds of roses were established by 1903 in beds along the southern boundary of the estate. When the additional land was leased in 1894 the boundary fence was removed and a path led from this area into the second circuit path that was created around the former Western Henburys. When the public park was developed these rose beds were enlarged and have been replanted several times.

In 1930 the gravel of the paths was replaced with tarmac, and in the 1950s central paths were laid down in the Italian and rock gardens.

CONDITION

The Moor Green Lane boundary fence fell into disrepair and has not been replaced so the grounds can be accessed at any point. The estate railings from the boundary with the meadowland have been removed. The Dutch garden is no longer in situ but some of the tiles from its path system have been re-laid as a central path in the Italian Garden. The Italian garden no longer has a sunk lawn or its original bed layout or planting. The gates and decorative pots were removed by the Chamberlains in 1915 and the seats in the alcoves sold at the same time. In recent years the pergola has been completely vandalised and only the base of the supports remain. Much damage has been done to the balustrade between the two gardens and only one section remains. The steps have been replaced by concrete slabs. In the rock garden the plating is very overgrown and invaded by ferns. There are considerable problems with waterlogging. The rockwork is in good condition. The shrub garden has some recent planting but is in relatively good condition.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- Restore Oak tree pond and replace Joseph Chamberlain’s oak and seat
- Replace tarmac surface of path system with resin bound gravel
- Consider reinstating estate railings boundary by meadows. Include gates for access to the meadows
- Restore Italian garden, removing inappropriate planting and reinstating sunk lawn, beds, fountain, alcove and tree seat, pergola and balustrade. Commission historically based planting scheme
- Restore Rock Garden after rectification of hydrology problems. Commission historically based planting scheme
- Consider re-instating Dutch Garden or use interpretation board
- Re-establish herbaceous borders and replant rose beds with historic species
4 HIGHBURY: LAKE AND EASTERN CIRCUIT PATH

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The lake and eastern circuit path were part of Edward Milner’s landscape design for Highbury of 1879. The lake was made from a stream that ran from east to west forming the original southern boundary of the property, and was used for boating and fishing with skating in the winter. There was a wooden boat house on the southern edge of the lake and a thatched summer house by the stream below. The water entered via a rockwork cascade at the eastern end and the overflow ran down a cascade at the western end. Milner designed two rustic bridges that carried the circuit path via an island at the western end. The margins were planted with aquatic plants and the southern area of the lake with rhododendrons. The circuit path had beds of herbaceous plants and rose arches beyond the lake. This area had a boundary of estate railings on its inner side. The rustic bridges gradually fell into disrepair but survived until the 1950s when the path was realigned to run wholly along the northern edge of the lake. The boathouse gradually fell down and was chopped up for firewood from 1917 as probably was the summerhouse.

The estate railings were removed in the 1930s.

In the Second World War a shed for a trailer pump was constructed by the site of the boathouse.

CONDITION

The lake is very silted up and the cascades at either end do not function. The planting on the lake margins is likewise very overgrown and there are many fallen trees. The eastern circuit path is no longer in situ.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- Restore the lake including de-silting and the replanting of the margins and adjoining borders, remove intrusive vegetation, repair the cascades, realign the paths to historic route via the island using modern replacement bridges.
- Reinstall eastern circuit path and its herbaceous plantings and rose arches
- Consider reinstating estate railing boundary
- Use interpretation panels to show the history of the boathouse, the summerhouse, and the World War II trailer pump and shed
5 Highbury: Meadowland

History

The meadowland has evidence of ridge and furrow in the area immediately to the north of the lake.

The meadowland was part of Milner’s original landscape plan of 1879 and to give it a park-like character Milner recommended the retention of many trees from the hedgerows that were to be grubbed up. In addition the centre was planted with a new group of beech trees and some new clumps of trees were planted. It was not initially planned that the meadow should be enclosed but with the early development of a hobby farm the meadows provided grazing for the stock and were separated from the circuit path by metal estate fencing as well as being divided into three compartments for the efficient management of the grazing regime.

The meadowland was used for public events by the Chamberlains such as political rallies and horse shows. Some of the meadowland to the northeast was retained with Highbury as an institution and has never been part of the public park. During the Second War the meadowland was used for the production of hay. The estate railings were removed, possibly at various dates during the park period.

Much planting has taken place in the meadowland particularly since 1992 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Queen’s accession.

Condition

The recent planting has obscured the clarity of the design and it is no longer possible to appreciate the area’s original purpose. There are considerable drainage problems and many boggy areas have developed and large patches of brambles

Actions Required

- Consider undertaking the restoration of the boundary between the pleasure grounds and the meadow to that of the Chamberlain period (see sections 3 and 4) but omitting the three divisions
- Remove inappropriate planting, particularly Queen’s Accession Anniversary planting of redwood avenue, pinetum and geographical beds and hedge, reduce the areas of brambles
- Commission a hydrological investigation
- Reassess tree clumps in meadowland and remove and add trees as appropriate
- Provide interpretation panel for the ridge and furrow area
6 HIGHBURY: PRODUCTIVE AREAS

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The productive areas of Highbury consisted of glasshouses, a kitchen garden, farm buildings and an orchard. These were mainly in the northern section of the estate. In Edward Milner’s plan a substantial area to the east of the mansion was designated for glasshouses and beyond this was the Kitchen Garden. The glasshouses commenced with a large conservatory, later known as the Palm House, designed by Henry Hope and Sons of Birmingham and with a marble wall fountain designed by the architect of the house, John Henry Chamberlain. This was entered from the drawing room, and led to a fernery with rockwork. From here a long corridor gave access to a sequence of span roofed glasshouses to which several additions were made between 1879 and 1904. At the rear were potting sheds and frames. The Kitchen Garden was bounded on the north by a wall which also acted as the boundary of the estate. This was altered in 1906 when extensive range of wall glasshouses was built. The kitchen garden was laid out in rectangular compartments separated by pebble paths lined with blue brick edging tiles. One section of the path had a long metal pergola for fruit trees. The cottage for the head gardener, probably designed by the architect of the house, was on the eastern boundary of the kitchen garden by the road. A drive led from here to the area for a set of buildings for a hobby farm in what had been Spring meadow which was purchased shortly after Milner drew up his plan of 1879.

The farm buildings were extended after the Henburys land was leased in 1894. A cottage was built for the farm bailiff in 1904 and the farm drive was relocated eastwards to the boundary with Uffculme when the crucible wall was built. Beyond the farm buildings there was an orchard. An access drive from Shutlock Lane across the Henburys’ land also gave access to the farm.

Most of the range of glasshouses was used by the military hospital for wards and rehabilitation workshops during the First War and in 1922 the corridor range was replaced by new hospital buildings. In 1940 the palm house and fernery and the 1922 range were demolished and replaced by the brick range later known as Chamberlain House. In the 1987 refurbishment part of Chamberlain House nearest Highbury was demolished, roughly corresponding to the footprint of the palm House, and an enclosed terrace laid out.

The kitchen garden continued to function for the same purpose when Highbury passed into institutional use but half the boundary wall was considerably reduced in height where it fronted Chamberlain House in the 1950s and the areas of kitchen garden were gradually taken over for car parking. Prior to Chamberlain House being sold to Uffculme School, in the remaining portion of the kitchen garden a new boundary wall was built at right angles to the existing wall and new access with a gate was made from Queensbridge road through the historic garden wall. Uffculme school now has a new road boundary of a brick wall topped with railings.

CONDITION

The kitchen garden has been in use by Four Seasons for many years so is in productive use. Highbury Orchard Community have cleared the area of the farm
and re-established the footprints of the buildings and yards. They have also planted fruit trees in the orchard area.

**ACTIONS REQUIRED**

- Consider rebuilding the Henry Hope Palm House in the area of the enclosed terrace made in 1987, for use as a café with public toilets
- Consider reintroducing the historic layout of the remaining section of the kitchen garden, reinstating paths with blue edging tiles, repair the fruit pergola, put up interpretation panel
- Continue with clearing rubbish in area of the farm, consider site for and suitable design of HOC shed, reinstate farm boundary estate fencing, put up interpretation panel
- Replace gate at top of farm lane near gardener’s cottage

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