

Aristotle Lane Recreation Ground, North Oxford

Urban/Recreational Park Project
Oxfordshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Group

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COUNTY	OXFORDSHIRE	Aristotle Lane Recreation Ground, North Oxford
DISTRICT	Oxford	
DISTRICT WARD	Walton Manor	
NGR	SP 504 078	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

A well-used recreation ground with play and sports amenities, which lies adjacent to an historic canal and bridge.

Archaeological interest

The crop marks on Port Meadow suggest there is potential for prehistoric and Romano-British archaeology in the vicinity of Aristotle Lane and the adjacent modern housing developments.

Historic interest

A listed Grade II canal bridge lies adjacent to the ground.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The field which was to become the recreation ground is shown on the 1st edn Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1878, with the canal to the east, allotments to the north-east and fields on other sides. Housing was developing northwards within Jericho as a consequence of university growth, college expansion and the various industries in the area such as Lucy's Eagle Ironworks. By 1899, the OS map shows housing had spread to the north and east of the field but there was still no development to the west and to the immediate south, where the ground is indicated as marshland. In 1910, the owner of the field and other land in the vicinity was St John's College (DVS, 1910). The field was purchased from St John's College in 1938 by the City for £325 on the condition that it would only be used as open space and that adequate drainage and stock fencing would be provided and maintained (St John's College archives).

The 1957 OS map shows the recreation ground has a playground at the north-east corner, as today. Land to the south is still indicated as marshy. By 1957, Lucy's Eagle Ironworks had expanded into their Walton Meadow site, just north of Walton Well Road (Winckworth & Hobbs, 2009). In 1965, Lucy's bought a 1.6 ha site from St John's College to create a sports and social club. This lay immediately to the west of the recreation ground and only

210m north from their new workshops. The 1977 OS map shows that the west boundary of the recreation ground had been straightened, and the two adjacent grounds continue alongside each other until at least the mid-1990s. Today, all the land once occupied by Eagle Ironworks and their sports ground in Jericho was bought by Berkeley Homes and developed between 1996 and 1999 (OWRA, 2018).

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM SETTING

The sub-rectangular recreation ground of 1.3 ha lies on the south side of Aristotle Lane. It is 1500m due north of the rail station and 250m east of Port Meadow. The long east boundary is adjacent to the Midlands to Oxford canal that runs due south into the city. A drainage ditch lies alongside this boundary and separates the recreation ground from the canal path. The ground is surrounded by tall modern housing on three sides whereas on the east side, on the opposite side of the canal, the Victorian houses of Kingston Road are set further away.

The geology is silty clay alluvium (BGS, 2021). The land is low and is proximal to the floodplain of Port Meadow where there are additional drainage ditches associated with the railway and its bridge from Port Meadow to Aristotle Lane. There are drainage ditches along the east and south edges of the recreation ground. The east drainage ditch alongside the canal continues towards town almost as far as Walton Well road. The boundaries on the south and west sides are served by the brick walls of the housing developments. The north boundary is Aristotle Lane.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The ground is open from Aristotle Lane on the north side, separated by a narrow verge, with a path running east to west and parallel to the verge. At the north-east corner, the path across Aristotle Bridge extends down six steps into the recreation ground and then divides three-ways into paths to the playground, along the north side of the ground, and as an entrance from the canal. A second entrance from the canal is via a wooden bridge towards the south. Another approach is from Port Meadow (see below), across the bridge that runs over the railway lines.

AMENITIES

There is a railed play area at the north-east corner with play equipment aimed at younger children: swings, roundabout, rocker, rope climbing frame, rope bridge and multiplay equipment. Immediately outside the railings is a basketball goal and a table tennis table. South of the railed play area are six new exercise and climbing frames and swings intended for older children. Further west is a multi-use goal and within the grassed field are two football goals. There are two picnic tables and four wooden bench seats around the ground.

ADJACENT LAND

The ground is only 250m from Port Meadow via a bridge over the railway lines, which provides a popular route from Jericho. Port Meadow is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is one of the largest (137 ha) open spaces in the north of the city, with the River Thames flowing through and causing annual winter floods, but also attracting flocks of wildfowl and waders. It was inhabited in prehistoric and later times and the continuity of grazing has created a unique flora (OCC, 2021). A desk-based study by Oxford Archaeology determined a high potential for prehistoric and Romano-British archaeology in the area (CBA, 1999).

The proximal narrow road bridge over the canal at the north-east corner of the ground was built by 1790 by the office of James Brindley. It is listed by English Heritage at Grade II. Just north of this bridge is the site of the post-medieval canal wharf that was built to serve the Oxford Canal when it was opened to Hayfield Road in 1789 (HE, 1972; Oxford HERs 1001 & 12838).

HORTICULTURE

The east, south and west sides of the ground have areas of dense scrub that include mature, semi-mature and saplings of single- and multi-stemmed trees and shrubs. Willows dominate, some of which have been pollarded or have fallen or been felled.

The playground has one mature golden weeping willow. On the east side of the ground, between the two play areas and backing onto the canal, is an area of scrub that includes around 20 mature and younger trees, predominantly willow, plus one large cherry tree, hawthorn, blackthorn, holly, wild rose and bramble. Behind this scrub is the drainage ditch that runs the length of the recreation ground and separates it from the canal. On the park side of the ditch are willow and hawthorn, and along the southern half there are also five ash trees.

Along the south side of the recreation ground there is a wider drainage ditch and areas of scrub where there are many willows, some fallen or with ivy-clad trunks, plus ten or more mature cherry trees, cherry saplings, and one Scots pine. There is a specimen weeping willow near the south-west corner of the ground. In summer, the areas of scrub are very dense comprising abundant willow and bramble, but nevertheless pathways are mowed amongst the scrub.

The west side has c. 5m depth of scrub, with a deeper area at the south end. Here, there is a group of mature trees comprising willows, a horse-chestnut, a field maple, two cherry trees and a group of nine young cherry trees together, mainly self-sown, plus a yew bush.

Further north along the west boundary there are mature and young willows, four ash trees and a field maple at the north-west corner of the ground.

The narrow north verge has 17 trees comprising seven alder, five willows (some pollarded), three field maples, a young maple, and a *Sorbus* (possibly Swedish whitebeam, *Sorbus intermedia*).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Appendix 1: Photographs



From south-west corner looking north-east towards the play areas



The play and sports areas from the south-west