



Heritage Trail

Parks & Gardens

The final cost of the works was in the region of £20,000 with the new gardens formally opened by King George V and Queen Mary on 8th July 1913, after whom they are named.

It was during these works that the arts and crafts structure was built as storage for tennis equipment. Games would have been played on the courts opposite, where the crazy golf course and play area are now situated. The building provides a spacious verandah enclosing built-in seating. An unusual, but highly functional feature of its design is the cantilevered seating units above a sweeping curved rendered base. This was included to make for easier sweeping by maintenance staff and to reduce the build-up of litter beneath the seats.



Shelters (14)

As part of the development, the layout of the existing South Marine Gardens was slightly altered, with new linear paths constructed. Two new ornamental glass and iron shelters were erected upon raised concrete bases within these rectangular compartments adjacent to the Promenade, equidistant from the new main axis through the gardens, with a further six identical shelters erected within the new King's Gardens on the lakeside promenade. The shelters remain a prominent feature of the gardens and are all Grade-II listed. (14)

The improvements also saw the creation of a fountain. This was originally a straight sided pool with a single jet surrounded by railings. This has since been upgraded into a somewhat more impressive installation set within what is now known as the community gardens.

By the turn of the 20th century the sea had retreated quite some distance. To compensate for this, an open air baths was constructed north of the pier in 1914. The building of the linear route was the last major phase in the development of the King's Gardens and was designed to create an attractive path connecting King's and Marine Gardens to Princes Park and the new Sea Bathing Lake.



Venetian bridge (15)

A Venetian Bridge was constructed in 1931 with two flat sections and a central arch. The design of the bridge over the lake necessitated the formation of two islands each approximately 200ft long. These were built using sand extracted from the foreshore and the site of the Floral Hall. Art Deco lighting was introduced along the new route and the bridge continues to be one of Southport's most recognisable features. (15)

Acknowledgements:
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Lifeboat memorial (11)

severe gale the Mexico, a German barque, found herself in difficulty. Three lifeboats were launched to come to her rescue, namely the Eliza Fernley from Southport, the Laura Janet from St Annes, and the Charles Biggs from Lytham. The crew from the Mexico were rescued by the Lytham lifeboat, but the other two lifeboats capsized. All thirteen of the crew of the St Annes lifeboat were lost, and only two of the sixteen members of the Southport lifeboat crew survived. It was the worst disaster in the history of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. As a mark of respect, an impressive granite monument was commissioned in honour of the men and unveiled on 28 June 1888. This extraordinary obelisk stands prominently within the town near to Scarisbrick Avenue and is Grade-II listed. (11)



Tea rooms (12)

Looking to the future and building on the success of Marine Gardens, a second lake and gardens were created north of the Pier in 1892, with the two being joined together several years later. Noticeable additions to the landscape from this period include the charming tea rooms. (12)



Marine Lake Café (13)

This building had earlier been a ladies lavatory and dates from the early 1900s. Its appearance is similar to that of the nearby Marine Lake Café which had originally been built as a ticket office for a fairground attraction. (13)

In 1911 Southport Town Council began piling work for foundations for what was to become King's Gardens. Throughout the following year officials underwent a process of commissioning plans and ideas for the new layout. In Thomas Mawson's book Civic Art (1911) his vision for improvements to Lord Street and the wider seafront are illustrated. He viewed Southport as a lost opportunity and although not asked to implement his designs by the Corporation, his plans without doubt influenced its future appearance. See the Southport Lord Street trail for more information.



Rotten Row (8)

Since then The Friends of Rotten Row have received awards from North West in Bloom, with their work officially recognised in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. Additionally in October 2014, the volunteers were awarded the City of Liverpool Trophy Best Neighbourhood Award and the Top Honour of the North West in Bloom Helena Homes Trophy for the Best Overall Neighbourhood. In 2015 they also received the coveted Community Green Flag Award and in 2016, they were awarded The Scottish Power Heroes Award for Best Community Group.

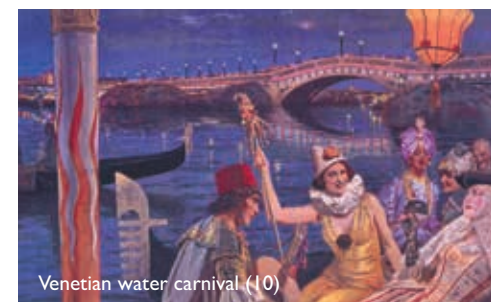
Despite its somewhat unflattering name, Rotten Row is now once again one of Southport's most delightful floral charms, attracting admiration and acclaim from locals and visitors all year round.

KING'S GARDENS



Kings Gardens in the early 20th century (9)

From its early beginnings at the end of the 18th century, Southport quickly developed as an upmarket bathing resort and residence for fashionable and wealthy Victorians. However, the retreat of the sea from its shoreline left the town's founding fathers with the dilemma of how to compensate for the increasingly distant seafront. The landowners of the foreshore, presumably seeing its development potential, were initially reluctant to release this land to the Corporation. Ultimately, and after much discussion and negotiation, the land was sold to the town on the proviso that it was only to be used for recreational purposes. (9)



Venetian water carnival (10)

Marine Gardens and its lake were the first to be developed south of the Pier in 1887. A Venetian water carnival saw the park open with a flourish and the lake and gardens were covered in a mix of coloured electric fairy lights. The new park was a resounding success and resulted in calls for similar landscaping elsewhere in the town. This rallying cry was the first step to the creation of King's Gardens and signalled a happy and prosperous future for the people of Southport. (10)

In the previous year, tragedy had befallen this maritime community when during a



Examples of planting (5)

'Particular mention should be made of the herbaceous border on the fringe of Victoria Park in Rotten Row, which is only a minute's walk from the South-Westerly end of the Promenade. The border is about half-a-mile in length, and in the Season is greatly admired by both visitors and residents. Much that is best in hardy and half-hardy flowering plants is to be seen there in profusion'. (5)

By the 1930s the border itself had become one of the most important elements in the 'floral Southport' image which the Corporation sought to convey in its tourist literature. The 1937-1938 guidebook, 'Sunny Southport', suggested to readers that: 'the famous herbaceous border on the fringe of Victoria Park in Rotten Row ... is a continuation of the Promenade at its south westerly end. This herbaceous border is about half a mile in length, with an average width of 26 feet, and in the height of the season is



Public information panel (6)

one of Southport's greatest floral attractions. Much that is best in hardy and half-hardy flowering plants is to be found there in profusion. The variety and arrangement, together with the wealth of colour, is magnificent. Until recently the floral display in Rotten Row was confined to one side of the Row, but now practically the whole of the opposite side of the thoroughfare is also laid out as a flower border some ten feet in width. The grass slopes behind this new border have been planted with various varieties of narcissi and scillas, which when in flower in the spring of the year make a delightful picture'. (6)

Throughout the latter years of the 20th century the border suffered from a lack proper care and maintenance and its floral appeal disappeared. Many local residents regretted the deterioration of Rotten Row and the loss of what had once been one of Southport's jewels in its crown. In 2011 volunteers from The Friends of Rotten Row community group commenced works to restore the site to its original condition after a successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Together with Sefton Parks and Greenspaces along with members of The Landscape Group, an extensive programme of replanting began that summer. (7)



Heritage Lottery funded works (7)

PARKS & GARDENS HERITAGE TRAIL

Southport is home to a number of beautiful parks and gardens and for this reason the town is often referred to as the floral capital of the North West. These verdant spaces have contributed to the enjoyable floral character of the town for many years. Visited by thousands, the gardens are an important cultural asset for the people of the region, and have become much-loved tourist attractions in their own right.

ROTTEN ROW



Rotten Row (1)

Southport's Rotten Row dates from the mid-19th century. It probably derives its unusual name from the more famous Rotten Row in London's Hyde Park. This was a fashionable thoroughfare along the southern edge of the park laid out in the seventeenth century, originally used for horse riding. (1)

In 1848, the Lord of the Manor of Birkdale, Thomas Weld Blundell, commissioned the landscape architect and garden designer Edward Kemp to lay out a new and exclusive suburban development on part of his estate close to the Southport boundary. It included over one hundred detached houses set on broad tree-lined roads.



Rotten Row as seen in the 1930s (2)

The emergence of this new suburb was followed by the development of other amenities, such as the construction of a new rail line from Aintree by Cheshire Lines Railway in 1881. The track isolated a section of former sandhills and rough grassland lying at the foot of an old dune slope and sea-cliff. This vast and unassuming stretch later became the beautiful floral masterpiece of Rotten Row. (2)

The Birkdale Local Board proposed the development of a recreation ground in the area which would be separated off by the new railway line. The civil engineer for the railway, Elias Dorning, was a prominent railway surveyor who had worked on schemes in Lancashire as early as 1845. It is possible that the framework of the design for the recreation ground and other landscaping was his responsibility.

In 1884-1886, the railway company laid out Victoria Park and the Birkdale Recreation Ground on the land between the old cliff and its new line. At the same time it constructed a new road, Rotten Row, running straight along the foot of the slope parallel to the new track. The basic structure of the present landscape



The borders shown in 1925 (3)

can be dated to the mid-1880s, with the farsighted policy of the Birkdale Local Board in insisting that the building of the line should enhance the visual amenity of the area. (3)

The construction of the northern section of Rotten Row was only finished in 1908 by the Birkdale Local Board, some ten years after the first section had been completed. However, it would appear the landscaping of the new park, recreation ground and roads was fairly basic. Trees or shrubs were planted along the inland side of Rotten Row, on the slope, and there were some planting and ornamental walks in the park, but the rest of the area was featureless grassland.



The borders seen in Autumn (4)

Stephenson's Guide to Southport of 1905 notes that one of its attractions was 'an ornamental Park, called the Birkdale Victoria, which has been beautifully laid out, and already affords an excellent example of landscape gardening'. The text makes no reference to Rotten Row, suggesting that this was not yet considered a feature of note or merit. (4)

This remained the case until after the amalgamation of Southport with Birkdale in 1912. At that point Victoria Park and the Birkdale Recreation Ground, which had been separated by a large hedge and shrubbery, were joined together. Through the same works Rotten Row, previously described as a very indifferent thoroughfare, was remodelled as a magnificent half-mile herbaceous border.

Further enhancement was delayed until the early years of the inter-war period. The 1922 edition of Stephenson's Guide was the first to single out Rotten Row for special mention. It refers to Birkdale and Victoria Parks, and then notes that 'the Park is in [sic] Rotten Row, which is bordered by beautiful flower beds, and shrubberies, and is a delight both in summer and winter.'

Within a few years the border had become one of the sights of Southport, as Stephenson's 1926 edition makes clear:

Kings Gardens were added to the National Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in 2001 sealing its place as one of the country's most important areas of outdoor space.



Restored balustrades (16)

In 2012, the gardens were awarded funding as part of the Parks for People Programme. At the time this prestigious scheme was the largest single investment in parks by the Heritage Lottery Fund in the North West. The gardens have since been restored to their former glory with Victorian shelters and the Venetian Bridge showcasing the beauty of the park. The gardens have sprung to life with an array of colourful flowerbeds and displays, lovingly maintained by the community. (16)

HESKETH PARK

Hesketh Park covers no less than 30 acres of land making it one of the biggest parks in Southport. The land, upon which the park lies was originally owned by the Reverend Charles Hesketh who donated a large share of his property to create a welcoming place for public recreation in the 1860s.



1860s public recreation (17)

The Southport Commissioners set about bringing the park into existence through the passing of the Second Southport Improvement Act 1865, and the employment of the renowned Victorian landscape gardener Edward Kemp. His designs saw the creation of the park with an oval layout, similar to the design of Birkenhead Park in Wirral on which Kemp worked under the stewardship of Sir Joseph Paxton. (17)



Winter at Hesketh Park (18)

Hesketh Park was formed from an area of sand hills and its topography was exaggerated using spoil from the construction of its large lake. This allowed for the creation of small secluded gardens of differing character between the hills and a system of winding paths allowing for continuously changing prospects. The lake with its irregular outline surrounds three tiny islands situated in a hollow slightly west of the centre of the park. The lake is home to a mixture of wildlife with numerous birds breeding here. (18)

The total cost of creating the new park amounted to £12,000 with its official opening taking place in the summer of 1868.



Park conservatory (19)

A decade later a large conservatory was erected and housed an array of rare and exotic plants. It had originally been part of Brunswick Villa on Lord Street, but was purchased by the corporation and moved to the park in 1878. Today the conservatory still stands and remains a fantastic addition to the park. (19)



Park observatory (20)

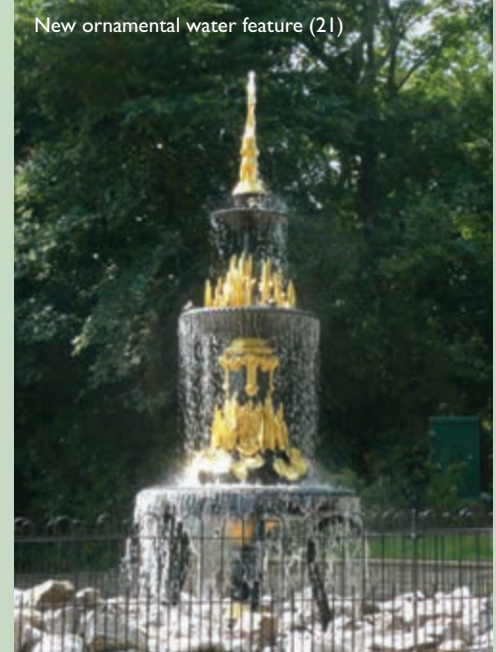
An unusual feature of the park is the Victorian observatory which can be found at its centre. This had been the private observatory of Joseph Baxendell who had arrived in Southport in the late 1800s, having retired from his post as Timekeeping Astronomer for the City of Manchester. After his death in 1901 the Baxendell family offered the observatory and its equipment to the Southport Corporation and it was duly opened to the public. Nowadays it is managed by the Fernley Observatory Heritage Group which helps maintain the building and provide tours on specialist open days. (20)

During the First World War Hesketh Park remained unaltered and was maintained to a reasonable standard. During the Second World War however; the boundary railings and the two large Crimean Cannons were removed, believed to be for the war effort. The park's original water fountain was removed in the early 1920's, but a new ornamental water feature replicating the historic fountain was reinstated as part of a 21st century Heritage Lottery Funded restoration. (21)

During the works the formal American Garden containing the floral clock was also replanted to its original 1930s design. The surrounding planting incorporates species of American specimen shrubs, bulbs and herbaceous plants, with the clock face planted with carpet bedding. (22)



Floral clock (22)



New ornamental water feature (21)

THE BOTANIC GARDENS



1874 Botanic Gardens taking shape (23)

The Botanic Gardens are situated in Churchtown, the ancient village that spawned the nearby resort of Southport. The gardens first began to take shape in 1874 when a number of discerning Southport gentlemen leased an area of land from the Lord of the Manor; the Heskeths of Meols Hall. (23)

These forward-thinkers bound together to form a company for the establishment of Pleasure Gardens at Churchtown. A number of park architects along with landscape gardener John Shaw were commissioned to develop the 20 acres of green space into a welcoming floral utopia. The formal opening of the Botanic Gardens took place on 15 May 1875, with the service performed by the Reverend Charles Hesketh of St Cuthbert's Church, and the Mayor of Southport, Mr Walter Smith. For over 50 years these new and beautiful gardens, featuring a large conservatory, museum and café were open to the public on payment of a small fee. (24)



Botanic Gardens entrance (24)

As the years passed the gardens fell into a state of neglect and were later sold to a private investor who had the intention of transforming the site into streets and housing. This notion displeased many of the town's well-to-do residents who in no uncertain terms aired their opposition to the scheme. Thankfully the Southport Corporation came to the rescue and the gardens were bought back into public ownership in 1936. (25)



Botanic museum (25)

The Corporation had previously acquired the lake and adjoining walkways, providing for all time the preservation of the Botanic Gardens for free public enjoyment. This was further enriched in 1937 by the laying of park sections under the King George's Playing Field Scheme to provide recreational facilities for young people. A new side entrance was also built to mark the occasion, complete with splendid Memorial Gates and outstanding commemorative panels built into the piers. (26)



Memorial gates commemorative panels (26)



Beautiful tree lined lake and bridges (27)

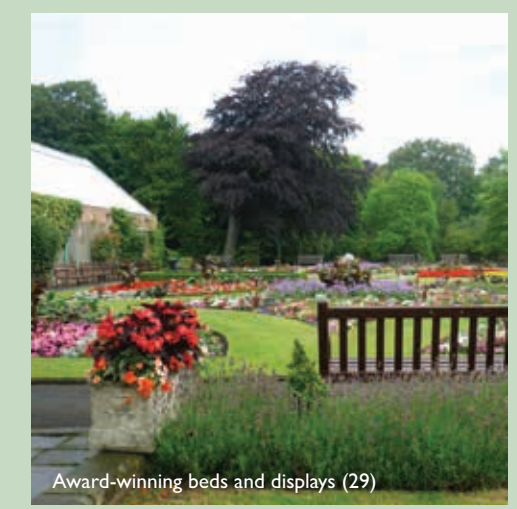
The gardens were reopened by Roger Fleetwood Hesketh Esq of Meols Hall in 1937 and have flourished ever since. The Gardens boast a beautiful tree-lined serpentine lake with Victorian bridges, and plentiful examples of contemporary architecture. (27)

Today its fernery is ranked No 1 in England, and sits alongside a very popular aviary, pets corner and much-loved children's play area. The café is open from dawn to dusk and brass band concerts are held on summer Sundays. (28)



Park Fernery (28)

As befits a botanical garden, its crowning glory is the many seasonal floral garden beds and award-winning displays to be found within. (29)



Award-winning beds and displays (29)

In addition to the work of Council staff, a local resident's volunteer group known as the Botanic Gardens Community Association help with gardening maintenance and general upkeep. They also run a successful flowerbed sponsorship scheme and organise year-round events, as well as developing an educational Wildlife Nature Trail following the lakeside paths. All involved are determined to help in preserving the rich heritage of the Botanic Gardens and its public benefits as was envisaged by its founders over 140 years ago.

