

# What's to be found in the Arboretum

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What is there to be found in the Arboretum? Much of its layout would not look unfamiliar to visitors to its original opening. The two lodges at the eastern and south west entrances are much as they were – at least externally - and the entrance drive from the eastern lodge under Addison Street into the park is now one of the Arboretum's several English Heritage Grade II listed features. One original structure in the park which has now been lost are the tea rooms built by James Hall, which originally were claimed to hold up to 1500 people in bad weather. Over the years the tearooms transmuted into a pub facing externally out of the Arboretum, before being burnt down a few years ago. Attempts by a local school to seize the land for a car park have been rigorously rebuffed, and we await the emergence of a new tea room, though perhaps not quite on the scale of its predecessor.

## Birds

Several features dominate the Arboretum, not least the aviary. The impetus for this development in 1889 was Charles Rothera, then Vice-Chairman of the Nottingham School Board, along with 450 residents who presented a 'memorial' to the Public Parks Committee which voted £100 for the erection of an aviary. Rothera intended that it should be stocked at no expense to the Council. The dome which we still see today was later added in 1892. But birds have long existed in the Arboretum outside of the Aviary. Henry the Goose was an apparently famous attraction and another well-known visitor was Cocky the cockatoo who, according to a local newspaper report, was brought to the Gardens for the delight of visiting children and died at the alleged age of 114.

## Statues

At the south-western entrance appears the bust of Samuel Morley, a wealthy merchant, philanthropist and, briefly, MP for Nottingham. That it is only a bust is entirely due to the fact that as it was being transported from its original site outside of the Theatre Royal, it literally fell off the back of the lorry and what was once a statue was sadly reduced. Such a fate did not befall one of Nottingham's great political figures, Feargus O'Connor, whose statue is situated at the south-eastern entrance.

O'Connor was one of the national leaders of the Chartist movement which during the period 1839 to 1848 obtained millions of signatures to support petitions to Parliament making a number of democratic demands, central to which was the extension of voting rights to working people. The Chartist organisation did not confine itself to mere signature gathering, but in many parts of the country organised itself into marvellously inclusive movements which intervened in local political activities and strikes. For many years during that period Chartism had widespread support in Nottingham, particularly in its lace and framework

knitting industries, so the election of O'Connor to parliament as a Nottingham MP in 1847, was not entirely surprising. A better agitational speaker than a parliamentary orator, O'Connor only served one term before a bout of insanity took him from parliament to an asylum. One feature of O'Connor's political platform was to seek a return to the land, so it's entirely appropriate that a campaign by local Chartists, hotly opposed at times, should have seen his statue, carved by Derby sculptor, J.B. Robinson, successfully installed in 1859 in a park which celebrates civic control of land.

### **The Bell tower and cannons**

This is one of the features of the Arboretum which has attracted much attention over the years and still does today. Two of the cannons which flank the tower were captured at the battle of Sebastopol during the Crimean War and were presented to Nottingham in 1857 by Lord Panmure, Secretary of State for War. Originally they would have been stationed on either side of the Refreshment Rooms, mounted on copies of Russian Gun carriages obtained from Woolwich Arsenal. With the completion of the Bell Tower in 1863 two additional cannons that had been cast in a local Canal Street foundry were added, and so we have their location at the four corners of the Pagoda. Not without controversy, the Bell which was presented to Nottingham in 1861 by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Nottinghamshire Regiment of Foot, had been stolen from a temple in Canton during the notorious Opium Wars. The Nottingham Review of 3 July 1863 records how a local councillor and friends at the end of June 1863 were arrested after going into the Arboretum to try out the bell. The Councillor was discovered with a plank with which to beat the bell. He was subsequently fined £5. Local youths today still find the Tower a favourite spot around which to congregate but, unfortunately the possibility of ringing the bell has been much diminished, as in 1956 it was presented in turn to the Preston Museum of the East Lancashire Regiment which included Canton on its battle colours.

### **The Bandstand**

Another later addition to the Arboretum, the Bandstand was brought from the Castle grounds in 1882

### **Botanical Features**

Many of the plants were supplied by J.F Wood of the Coppice and were originally grouped together according to similarity of features. Maples. Spruces and Cedars feature, and the London Plane tree, on the edge of the western path is thought to date from the first opening of the Arboretum. Visitors today can follow an Arboretum Tree Trail which describes the main species.

## Uses of the Arboretum

Agricultural and horticultural shows have regularly been held in the Arboretum over the years including the 1st Annual Exhibition of the Nottingham and Midlands Counties Rose Show in 1875 and in the 1950s the St Ann's Rose Show. More recently the Arboretum has become host to the Nottingham Green festival and its bandstand has been venue to an assortment of silver and brass bands, and continues this tradition during the summer months.

It is ballooning though which surely seems to have provided the greatest excitement. Right from the first anniversary event in 1853 ballooning and, more interestingly, its attendant mishaps have featured. In 1853 Mr Chambers is described making a successful ascent and to return to the ground to give several partial ascents to anyone who wanted to go up. At the 1854 event, however, the Nottingham Date Book describes how Veteran Green's balloon, Britannia, was caught by the wind shortly before it was due to ascend, driven onto a pole and collapsed with a loud noise. In 1855 Green's son Charles made his 270<sup>th</sup> ascent in a balloon only for it to collide with a local house before attempting to land near Grantham, where a strong wind snapped the anchor rope, 'dashed' the balloon through trees and hedges and completely destroyed the balloon. No-one was badly injured.

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