

ST JAMES'S GARDENS AND CRESCENT

Ref number	PGW (Gm) 55 (SWA)
OS Map	159
Grid ref	SS 643 930
Former county	West Glamorgan
Unitary authority	City and County of Swansea
Community council	Uplands
Designations	Listed buildings: St James' church Grade II; Walls and railings to St James' church Grade II; St James' church hall Grade II Conservation Area: Ffynone
Site evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	A small, well preserved, late Victorian urban public park, designed in two separate sections - the Gardens and the Crescent - as an integral part of the town layout, flanked by substantial villas. Minimal modern intrusion results in the Gardens in particular retaining a Victorian character.
Type of site	Urban public park
Main phases of construction	1863-67; 1878-1913

Site description

St James's Gardens and Crescent lie in a central residential district of Swansea, on ground sloping to the south, to the west of the city centre. The area was developed for housing in the mid to late nineteenth century and the plan incorporated a semi-circular open space, the Crescent, to the north of Walters Road and a central, rectangular open space to the north of it, the Gardens. The Crescent was developed first and St James's church was built in the centre in 1863-67. The Gardens were laid out between 1878 and 1913 (1st and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey maps). Housing was first built, before 1878, to the south, along Walters Road, and around the west side of the Crescent. Between 1878 and 1913 the remainder of the periphery was filled in. The houses were substantial villas and the area contained several mansions - Brooklands, Ffynnonau, Rheanva, Bryn-y-mor - with large gardens.

The Gardens consists of a rectangular block, surrounded by roads and Victorian housing, laid out informally with ornamental trees and shrubs set in grass, winding tarmac paths and island flowerbeds. The park is dominated by the dense planting of Victorian conifers, many of which must be original plantings. There are simple entrances at each of the corners, but a former entrance in the middle of the east side has gone. The ground slopes down from the north end, where there is a belt of tall pines with an underplanting of shrubs. A path runs along the front of this belt, with a

modern single-storey brick shelter set back from it in the centre. The park is fringed by wavy-edged belts of evergreen shrubs and tall specimen trees. On the west side these include fir, pine, wellingtonia, holly and Bhutan pine (*Pinus wallichiana*). On the east there is a line of large pines.

The interior is a sloping lawn planted quite densely with a variety of specimen trees, mostly conifers, including monkey puzzle, wellingtonia, cypress, cedar and tulip tree. Island beds are planted with coniferous shrubs and birch. Winding paths, following the lines of the original ones, criss-cross the park. A few sections, such as the path along the east side, have been grassed over. In the centre is a circular, rock-edged bed with a *Trachycarpus fortunei* planted in the middle. At the south end another path has been grassed over and there are public lavatories and a drinking fountain given by Miss Gertrude F. Emery-Stone.

The Crescent lies to the south and extends to approximately three times the width of the Gardens. Its character is much simpler than that of the Gardens, with an open centre and a perimeter planting of trees. In the centre lies the church of St James, built by Thomas Nicholson of Hereford. To the north is the slightly later church hall. The interior is largely open, mown grass. The Crescent is bounded by iron railings on a low coursed stone wall. Entrances have iron gates flanked by square stone piers of roughly dressed blocks with gabled dressed stone tops. There are pedestrian entrances on the north side and south-west corner and wider, double gated entrances to the church hall on the north side and church forecourt on the south. Around the edge is a row of horse chestnuts, evergreen oaks, robinias, hollies and limes. On the south side the trees are planted on a low bank, with a grassed over path along its north side.

The western half of the interior has two rectangular levelled lawns cut into the slope, one above the other, with low scarps on their west and north sides. To their north is a large oak tree. The eastern half, which slopes down to the east, has two similar levelled lawns, with a pine and a sycamore to their north. An earthen, disused perimeter path runs along the boundary inside a row of evergreen oaks.

Sources

Secondary

Newman, J., *The buildings of Wales. Glamorgan* (1995), pp. 584-85.