

“they should have breathing spaces – that they should provide lungs for a community such as Falkirk was, so that they might have a healthier people”

Victoria Park, Falkirk

Geoff B Bailey

In 1895 Falkirk Town Council bought the lands of Thornbank extending to 16.25 acres, including the house and gardens, for the sum of £5,500. Mr Rankine of Rosebank donated £1,000 of this and public subscriptions contributed significantly to the fund. With the permission of the queen the new park was named Victoria Park. The park is located on the east side of Thornhill Road along which was a broad bank dipping down to the flat carseland. On the east the park was bounded by the Mill Burn. A drain along the northern boundary fed it. At the time there were no other buildings on this side of the road in the vicinity. The Falkirk Trotting Club had a lease of the ground, but gave this up so that the Council got immediate entry.



Illus: Swings in the SW corner of Victoria Park, c1900.

Falkirk Local History Society

"LIST OF SUBSCRIPTIONS RECEIVED

BY FALKIRK BURGH COMMISSIONERS FOR VICTORIA PARK:-

	£	s	d
Commissioners of the Burgh, voted from Public funds	£1,000	0	0
R W Rankine of Cunnoquhie	1000	0	0
William Forbes of Callendar	200	0	0
James Aitken	200	0	0
James Ross & Co	200	0	0
H C Fairlie	100	0	0
J A Henderson, Leith	100	0	0
Robert Baird	100	0	0
Councillor Baird	100	0	0
A C Russell, Manchester	25	6	0
William Russell, do	25	6	0
William Baird	25	0	0
Alexander M Baird	25	0	0
James Wilson & Sons	25	0	0
John Wilson, MP	25	0	0
D Mitchell of Millfield	21	0	0
J H Melville	20	0	0
Andrew Beveridge, London	10	10	0
Mrs A Neil, Manchester	10	10	0
James Wilson of Bantaskin	10	0	0
%,	10	0	0
Andrew Allan	10	0	0
Robert Dobbie, Larbert	10	0	0
F J W Sutton	10	0	0
William Jacks & Co	5	0	0
William Elliot	5	0	0
Hugh Macpherson	5	0	0
A G Whyte	5	0	0
William Bell	5	0	0
William McKinnie	5	0	0
Thomas Gibson	5	0	0
T J Lipton	3	3	0
William Low & Co	2	2	0
John Gardner	2	2	0
George Ure, Wheatlands	2	2	0
Thomas Wylie	2	2	0
James Millar	2	0	0

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A G Turnbull		1	1	0
David McNair		1	1	0
G D Page		1	1	0
James Strang		1	1	0
George Liddell		1	1	0
Thomas Fleming		1	0	0
Councillor Hendry		1	0	0
Superintendent Gordon		1	0	0
Employees of :	Falkirk Iron Co	13	15	9
	Abbots Foundry Co	3	9	6
	Parkhouse Iron Co	3	4	9
	Springfield Foundry Co	3	4	3
	Gas Works	3	2	0
	Springfield Saw Mills	2	18	9
	Burnbank Foundry Co	2	8	6
	Walker, Hunter & Co	2	8	0
	Forth & Clyde Iron Co	1	13	3
	R & W Baird	0	13	0
	Camelon Iron Co	0	11	3
Three subscribers		0	8	6
		£3,359	3	6

James Robertson, Burgh Treasurer.

Falkirk, 1st Nov., 1895"

The park was officially opened on 3rd August 1895 by John Wilson MP. The band of the Black Watch performed on the day and the Falkirk Volunteers performed various manoeuvres. The most prominent feature in the early years was a broad running track that followed the perimeter of the lower field. A flagstaff was erected. The gardens of the house were retained for the public.

In 1899 the hedge and fence fronting Thornhill Road were removed and the pavement considerably widened. A handsome parapet wall, 2ft high and 430ft long, was erected along the new frontage and surmounted by an iron railing 4ft 6ins high. This incorporated a fine set of wrought iron gates designed by the burgh architect, Ronald, and executed by Jones and Willie of Birmingham. The main double gate was 12ft wide with iron piers. These incorporated the burgh coat-of-arms. To either side of this was a 6ft wide gate hung on a stone pier 2ft 9ins square and 10ft 6ins high, capped with an ornamental lamp. Four more lamps were erected on the line of the railing.

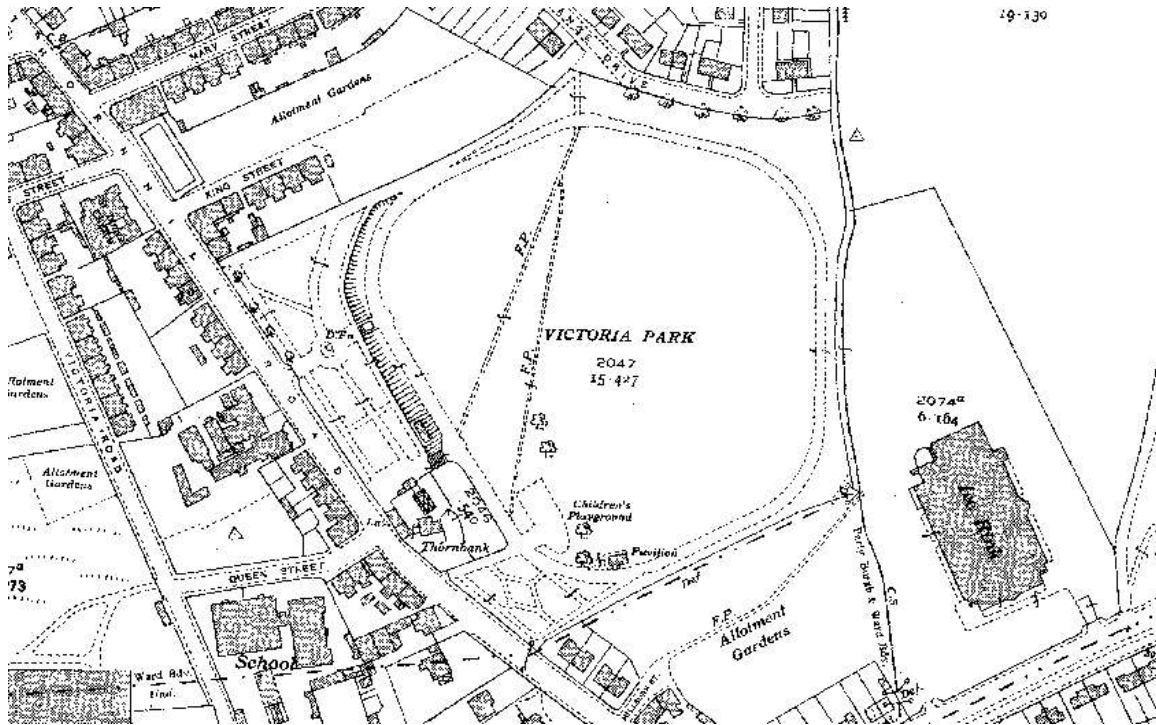


Illus: The new park gates designed by David Ronald.

Further improvements were made to the grounds with a number of trees planted along the paths in 1902. At the beginning of 1912 the park was described as “bare and uninviting”. Later that year Robert Dollar provided money for the erection of an ornate drinking fountain (SMR) to commemorate the First Battle of Falkirk, which tradition said was fought in this area. The fountain was placed on line with the entrance gates and a wide concrete flight of stairs was placed down the bank on this alignment. The Council initiated a three-year programme of improvements that included formal flower beds and paths to the north and south of the fountain, culminating in the erection of a propagating house measuring 30ft by 10ft on the site of the house. The house was demolished, but some of the outbuildings were retained for use as a lavatory and so on. At the same time the earth bank used to retain the skating pond was removed and the ground levelled.



Illus: The formal flower beds arranged around the fountain commemorating the First Battle of Falkirk, looking SE.



Illus: 1940s OS map.

A bitter dispute arose in 1931 when the residents of the new housing schemes to the north and north-east started to use the park as a short cut, causing grass erosion on the football pitches. The Council locked the gate on Grange Avenue, which had been opened seven years before, for an arbitrary period of three months. Thereafter a footpath running diagonally across the park was put in place. In 1939 a sports pavilion was erected at the southern end of the park near to a children's playground with swings.

In 1950 a new public convenience was built against the rear wall of King Street. Alterations were made to the sports pavilion in 1953. By the mid 1960s the population living close to the park had grown considerably in size and there was a demand for a community centre. It was 1971 before work began on the ground to the north of the fountain. The new hall was of prefabricated construction and was designed to seat 200 people, with changing rooms, showers, a committee room, a kitchen and toilets. In front of the hall an 18 vehicle car park was placed within the park. The old pavilion was demolished soon afterwards.

APPENDIX



First Battle of Falkirk Monument (SMR 602)

Centrally placed on the W side of Victoria Park facing Thornhill Rd on the traditional site of the battle of 1298. The monument takes the form of a drinking fountain with arched recesses on each of the four sides. It is surmounted by a canopy bearing a sculpted lion holding a shield.

The rock-faced stone tapered base is 105 cm square and rests on a three tier concrete plinth. Above this is a broad moulded string course. At the side facing the park entrance this swells outwards to form a semi-circular basin with a water spout set above it. The anchor points for a chain to secure a drinking cup remain. In the arch above the spout is the date "1912" in relief. The two panels in the recesses on either side of the water spout are inscribed. That on the north reads "THIS MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN/ IS ERECTED/ NEAR THE SPOT WHERE/ SIR JOHN DE GRAEME FELL". That on the south "PRESENTED BY/ ROBERT DOLLAR ESQ/ OF SAN FRANCISCO/ TO FALKIRK HIS NATIVE TOWN/ IN HONOUR OF/ SIR JOHN DE GRAEME/ AND HIS MEN/ WHO FELL IN/ THE BATTLE OF FALKIRK/ 22ND JULY 1298". The arches are rusticated and sit under a moulded eaved couse. A grantire block above this forms a segmented canopy upon which the upright lion sits. The monumental masons were William Roberts & Son of Falkirk.

The Park Gates

The gates formed the main entrance to the park, and were situated in the centre of the Thornhill Road frontage. They were installed in 1899 and were manufactured, from a design prepared by David Ronald, burgh surveyor, by Messrs Jones & Willis, art metal workers, Birmingham. The main gate was 12 feet wide, in two halves, hung on wrought iron piers, with two small side gates, 6 feet wide, hung on stone columns, 2 feet 9 inches square, and 10 feet 6 inches high, and finished with ornamental lamps on the top. The mason work was executed by John Gardner, builder, Falkirk and the smith work by Kidd Brothers, Camelon. The sum paid for the entrance gates was £120. These incorporated the burgh coat-of-arms.



Illus: The park gates in situ.

The gates were removed when the community centre was built and are now in the possession of Falkirk Museum (accession no. 1977-48-1).