Over time, the principal landscape features came to include a long carriage drive, meandering footpaths, several water features and a series of smaller gardens including rockeries, floral and shrub borders, greenhouses, conservatory, formal gardens, kitchen garden and a hobby farm.

From the drawing room at the eastern end of the house there was a door into a conservatory which then led into a series of glasshouses, for Chamberlain was already a collector of orchids and liked to grow hothouse subjects. Beyond this on the northern boundary there was to be a kitchen garden with fruit trees along the dividing paths and it was proposed to mask from view from the grounds by dense shrubberies. From the pleasure grounds a circuit path led round the outer margins of the grounds to the lodge entrance, and continued to the house via the drive.

Details of the gardens include mention of the 'crucible wall' near the northeastern boundary with Ufculme:

An important alteration was made in about 1904 when an embankment was made on the far eastern boundary of the pleasure grounds after the service lane to the farm was relocated. The embankment was formed of industrial crucibles and was 20 feet high on its outer face and had a double bank on its inner face, and thus effectively blocked out sight and sound from Ufculme.

Chamberlain and his family kept the grounds in top shape until his 1914 passing.

The house was put at the disposal of the military and became a hospital for orthopaedic cases and in 1919 Austen Chamberlain gave the mansion to the Highbury Trustees for institutional use as a hospital for the treatment of limbless ex-servicemen. In 1921 the trustees leased fifteen acres of the Highbury grounds to the City's Parks Department for use as a public park, the remaining sixteen acres of land continued to be part of Highbury as private grounds.

Highbury Park

On the park's opening in June 1921 an article on 'the Beauties of Ufculme and Highbury' recognized that whilst many were familiar with 'the natural beauty of the grounds' having visited them for fetes and shows 'there are many thousands who are ignorant that so many delightful acres of richly wooded parkland lies behind the wall that borders the Queensbridge Road.'

In January 1923 the Birmingham Civic Society bought 42 acres of the Henburys from Barrow Cadbury, then conveyed it to the City 'with an understanding that the Society is to be consulted in the lay-out and treatment of the grounds'.

With that purchase the park as we know it was largely in place. Much of the three estates and the ancient farmland had been brought back together as one.

Do you want to learn more?

The details presented here are a small part of the Highbury Park historic landscape report. If you want to learn more about the park, history or landscapes, contact your library or any of the organisations listed below. Have an excellent adventure!

Kings Heath Library, Kings Heath Local History Society

www.birmingham.gov.uk/kingsheathlibrary.bcc
0121 464 1515

Highbury Park Friends

www.highburyparkfriends.org.uk

This leaflet is sponsored by Kings Heath Centre Partnership as part of the 10,000 step Kings Heath Floral Trail. The trail makes a circuit through historic Highbury Park, award-winning Kings Heath Park, and Birmingham's third largest shopping district.

Butterfly image: Flickr/Squeezyboy/3554264l.

HISTORIC LANDSCAPES *of* HIGHBURY PARK

A new report traces the 19th and 20st Century history of what is now Highbury Park.

The *Highbury Park Historic Landscape Appraisal* tells a story of three estates, their gardens and landscapes, and how they combined to form a very special Birmingham park.

Excerpts from it give an impression of the depth and breadth of the report and of these historic spaces.

One Into Four, Four Into One

What is now known as Highbury Park was created from at least four parcels of land, all of which were once farmland in the King's Norton berewick of Bromsgrove Manor. Three distinct parts of the land were converted to grand homes and gardens over the course of a hundred years, with a fourth parcel remaining in agricultural use. Parts of all four were recombined to form Highbury Park during the 1920s.

The landscape of the area has distinct natural features that were adapted during the decades and centuries of agricultural, village and residential use. Similarly, artificial features like the railway and roads system created distinct areas and features within and around the parkland.

Details of these features have been researched and published by Phillada Ballard on behalf of Birmingham City Council and local interest groups. The report is a very detailed and important step toward preserving and renovating these historic landscapes.

The Henburys

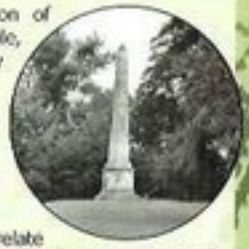
Before 1800, much of the area around Kings Heath was in agricultural use, but as Birmingham grew in population and stature, outlying areas were built up with villages and grand homes. One of these came to be known as the Henburys, said to have come from a field name of 'Hemeryes'.

The Henburys was a small rural estate consisting of a residence with grounds and a small farm, a type of property that was popular with Birmingham's wealthier manufacturers and professional men from the 17th century onwards.

These were located in the rural hinterland of Birmingham, two to three miles from the urban centre, and were initially used for occasional occupation in the summer months.

Details from this era are scant, and are drawn from things like tithe maps, Aris's Gazette, and the landscape itself.

Among other things is an 1840 tithe list of descriptive field names from the area, including Monument Piece, Spring Meadow, Poor Barley Field, Yew Tree Field, Hopyard, Six Day Math, Pit Meadow and Shuttuck Meadow.



The names give an indication of landscape character. For example, Monument Piece is probably named for an obelisk set at the top of a small rise sometime before 1840. This high point would have given good views across the Rea valley to the Lickey Hills.

The obelisk and its setting may relate to details from a sale notice in Aris's Gazette of May 1826, which mentions

an excellent garden in high state of cultivation abundantly stocked with choicest fruit trees, a large greenhouse, 2 hothouses, cucumber and melon frames.

The large greenhouse was followed by others. A vinery was added alongside the conservatory in 1834. A camellia house was built in 1864 that may have contained a very large specimen.

In 1893 G. F. Lyndon presented a double white flowered camellia (Camellia alba fl. pl) to the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. The age of the plant was not known but it had clearly been at the Henburys for a very long time, possibly from the early 19th century.

Remains of the obelisk and garden structures are still visible in the park, next to the Henbury rose garden wall. The fact that these remain at all may be down to the sale of Henburys to cocoa magnate Richard Cadbury, who extended the pleasure grounds of Uffculme into the older property.

Uffculme

Around 1890, Richard Cadbury bought 13 acres of land just north of the Henburys, then built a magnificent house and gardens, calling it Uffculme after the Devon village of his ancestors. Soon after, he took the opportunity to buy 65 acres of Henbury land. He kept the eastern part for his own use, tearing down part of the house and outbuildings, whilst making minor changes to the gardens.

This section of the Henburys was added to the Uffculme estate to the north of it and most of the outbuildings to the north of the house and the glasshouses were demolished together with a substantial portion of the house. In c. 1910 the area of the kitchen garden was extended as far as the lodge.

Cadbury offered the western fields under lease to Joseph Chamberlain, who had been developing the neighbouring estate since 1878. Chamberlain extended his own pleasure grounds into parts of the former Henburys landscape, but left much of the land in agricultural use.

This arrangement continued for some years after Richard Cadbury's death in 1899, as his son Barrow developed the network of paths and expanded the kitchen gardens. But in 1916, the bulk of the former Henburys estate was given to the City of Birmingham. In 1921, this was transferred to the Parks Department.

Highbury

In keeping with the fashion of the times, Chamberlain had bought a piece of farmland with with good views of rural scenery. His house and gardens were arranged to give the visual impression of a large rural estate.

Starting with a parcel of about 25 acres along the Moor Green ridge, Chamberlain and landscape designer Edward Milner laid out paths and gardens close to the estate boundaries, leaving much of the central area as pasture.

The Milner design for Highbury provided the basis for the addition of many new features, some said to have been designed by Joseph Chamberlain himself, which were implemented over the next thirty years, together with elements provided by Henry Ernest Milner (1845-1906). Highbury became arguably the most elaborate of the many extensive gardens created by Birmingham industrialists and professional men in the late 19th century, and due to Chamberlain's high political profile, was widely written about.