



A brief history

The Trust is responsible for maintaining, protecting and enhancing the natural beauty of the park, and is also actively researching the fascinating history of the park and the hospitals originally situated there.

The Park is managed by an independent charity, the Highfield Park Trust, which was established in 1996 as part of the residential redevelopment of the hospital sites. The Trust is governed by a Board of Trustees from the local community with representation from both St Albans District Council and Colney Heath Parish Council.

Hill End Hospital was opened in 1899 and was originally known as the *Hertfordshire County Asylum*. The hospital played a role in both world wars. During World War II, it was decided that St Bartholomew's Hospital (Barts) was to be evacuated to Hill End Hospital. In the aftermath of the evacuation of Dunkirk, 600 untreated casualties arrived in a single week, and from 1939 to 1947 most of Barts surgical operations were performed at Hill End. Barts eventually relocated back to their London base in 1961.

Cell Barnes Hospital was opened by Hertfordshire County Council in 1933 as *Cell Barnes Mental Hospital (Cell Barnes Colony) - 'a Colony for Mental Defectives'*. The site had been owned by the Earl of Verulam, and earlier still (circa 1481) had once belonged to Dame Juliana Berners, Prioress of Sopwell Nunnery. It was originally her retreat 'cell' for when she wished to leave the priory. The Emmaus charity for the homeless is now located in the main house, once known as Great Cell Barnes.

Following the closure of both hospitals in the early 1990s and the creation of Highfield Park, most of the hospital buildings were demolished as part of the residential development of these sites, although a few examples were retained. On the Hill End site these include the Hill End Chapel in Russet Drive which, after considerable refurbishment, is now the Trestle Arts Base, home to the Trestle Theatre Company. Also the former wards now called Anderson House, Nicholas House and Hine House in Cairns Close. On the Cell Barnes site, the former gate house (West Lodge), the nurses training centre (The Birch Centre) and the occupational health building (Rowan House) have been converted for use as a nursery and offices.

Events

The Trust manages a number of events throughout the year for the benefit of the local community. These events not only attract a large number of visitors to the park, but also provide an important source of income to enable the Trust to continue its maintenance and development work. Specific details on the event programme are available on the Trust website.

Volunteering

With limited resources available to manage the Park, the Trust is always looking to attract volunteers to help support its work in a number of ways:



Highfield Helpers - this group of volunteers meets every Tuesday morning, and work with the Trust's ground staff to carry out practical maintenance and development tasks. No experience is needed and all tools are provided. It is a great way to help the environment, meet new people and support a local charity - all new members are welcome.



Event volunteers - there are always opportunities to volunteer at our events throughout the year e.g. assisting with set-up or serving teas.

Corporate volunteering days - The Trust welcomes local companies to spend a day volunteering in the Park. Such days can form an important part of businesses' Corporate Social Responsibility agenda, as well as providing a great team-building experience.

Working with local schools

The Trust is keen to encourage as many local schools as possible to use the natural resources found within Highfield Park for educational purposes, and regularly welcome groups of all ages for various activities.



Sponsorship and local business partnerships

The Trust has an active sponsorship programme to help generate funds for the maintenance and development of the park. The Highfield Park annual tree sponsorship scheme provides an ideal opportunity for an individual to make a contribution to the park. Some people have chosen to sponsor a bench or tree in order to commemorate a special occasion, or the loss of a loved one.

There are also corporate opportunities to sponsor specific areas within the park, or items such as park benches or notice boards. The Trust is supported by several local businesses and is keen to work with local organisations to develop innovative, long-term partnerships.

Hiring the park

With over 80 acres of parkland, and stunning scenery, Highfield Park provides an idyllic location for events. It is an excellent summer venue for children's parties with immediate access to fields and woodland, and has also hosted corporate events as well as being used as a location for TV filming.

Please remember:

- To take your litter home
- To clear up after your dog and use dog bins provided
- To keep your dog under control at all times
- Cyclists and horse riders should give way to pedestrians
- Do not pick any flowers
- Do not pick the apples in our orchards - these are used to make the delicious apple juice which can be purchased at Apple Day in October and the following months. (Visitors are welcome to collect windfall apples from the ground.)
- Report any problems to the Park staff

For more information on any aspect of Highfield Park or the work of the Highfield Park Trust, please contact the Park Office via:

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HIGHFIELD PARK TRUST

AN INTRODUCTION TO HIGHFIELD PARK

Located on the eastern edge of St Albans, and originally established from the parkland grounds of the former Hill End and Cell Barnes Hospitals, Highfield Park provides over 33 hectares (82 acres) of public open space. It offers visitors and the local community a diverse rural environment to enjoy throughout the year, with a range of wildlife, landscape and community features.



Parkland

A large proportion of the park is a landscape of open grassland, specimen trees and wooded areas, which can be traced back to the Edwardian gardeners who planted the hospital grounds. There



was competition between them to create the most beautiful arboretums, stocked with exotic trees from all over the world. As a result, many superb specimens can now be found throughout the park, which are now included in the Highfield Park Tree Trail. This signposted, 3km circular walking route showcases 40 trees, some of which have been recently planted to create a legacy for the future, and provides a great introductory tour of the park. Further information is available in the Highfield Park Tree Trail guide.

A network of paths throughout the park ensures access to visitors with bikes, pushchairs and mobility restrictions.

Orchards and Apple Juice

Both hospitals produced much of their own food and each site had a large orchard growing apples, pears, cherries and plums.

Hixberry Orchard is situated at the most northerly part of the park adjacent to Hixberry Lane, and is the remnant of the much larger Hill End Orchard which occupied the land opposite the Garden of Rest in Hill End Lane. The roads here are named after apples e.g. Russet Drive, Sturmer Close, Greensleeves Close, Grenadier Close, Egremont House and Bramley Way.

Cell Barnes Orchard once belonged to the nearby Great Cell Barnes House. There is an unusual example of fruit tree training



called 'Arcure', a cordon system which involves bending the main stem into an "S" to encourage more spurs off the main stem in a given space. It is a Belgian method of training and there is a splendid example at Versailles in France. The orchard was bisected when Highfield Park Drive was constructed.

The Trust harvests apples from our orchards each year. The majority of these are pressed to produce delicious Highfield Park Apple Juice which is also sold at the Trust's annual 'Apple Day' event and is also available throughout the year from the Park Office.

Hill End Garden of Rest

This area of the Park was used as a cemetery for patients and staff of Hill End Hospital and later Cell Barnes Hospital. Investigations into the cemetery site uncovered some of the several hundred numbered grave markers which had become buried over the years. Records held at the County Archives show that each grave was used for a number of burials. It is known that over 1,000 people were buried in the cemetery between 1898 and the 1960s, although the records held are not complete.



This "forgotten" area now has a stone sculpture, commemorative arch and information boards to commemorate the souls who lie here. It has been designated a County Wildlife site and the majority of the site is minimally managed in order to encourage the natural development of wildlife.

The Hill End Hospital Community Garden



Created in 1999 as a sensory garden, it has plants to excite visitors' sense of smell, touch, sight and sound.

Woodland Garden

Originally established with the help of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, this peaceful area is tucked away off the main path amongst the trees and has a more natural feel, reflecting the wildlife found in a woodland area.

Maze

The horticultural charity Earthworks constructed the maze in 2000 to mark the Millennium. It was originally built as a wildflower earth-mounded maze and designed for use by young children. However, many of the flowering plants were lost, and the Trust has recently replanted the maze with a Copper Beech hedge, which should result in an exciting attraction in the coming years.



Mediterranean Garden

The Garden was created in 2000 following a design competition in collaboration with Oaklands College. It is designed to be low maintenance, drought resistant and adaptable to climate change.



There are two Petanque "pistes" (courts) which are used regularly by the Highfield Park Petanque club. Boules sets can be borrowed from the Park Office, subject to court availability.

Cell Barnes Hospital Memorial Garden

This small circular Rose Garden, located opposite West Lodge, was created in 1999 using some of the roses rescued from the gardens of Cell Barnes Hospital before it was demolished. Several benches have been installed in this area including one in honour of John Ely, the first Director of the Highfield Park Trust, who was instrumental in the creation of the Park.

Cell Barnes Pond

The pond is likely to have been constructed in Victorian times when formal gardening became fashionable. It is now managed with a light touch to create a natural wildlife habitat.



Winchfield Wood

This wood is located in the southern area of the Park and is the only area of established woodland within the Park. With trees on the site since 1600, it is thought that it could be ancient woodland, containing an abundance of plants which take a long time to establish including bluebells and dog's mercury. As such it has a high biodiversity and wildlife value.



Hither Wood

Hither Wood is a Jubilee wood planted in 2012 to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Some 6,800 trees were planted by the Trust, helped by local schools, businesses and individual volunteers. Supported by an English Woodland Grant, Hither Wood includes a range of native species to create a diverse woodland. The majority of trees are oak and hornbeam but also include small leaved lime, field maple, wild cherry, hazel,



whitebeam, silver birch, alder, crab apple, elder, guelder rose, spindle, hawthorn and dogwood. At the bottom of the wood are two areas for coppicing, one planted with hazel and the other with willow.

In one of the glades there is a beacon which was lit as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in the Park.

Allotments



There are currently the equivalent of 83 full size allotments (some are let as half plots) at Highfield Park. Residence of St Albans District is required for eligibility as a tenant.

Park Buildings

The Trust owns several buildings which are leased to independent businesses and other community organisations. These form an important income stream supporting the work of the Park.

West Lodge – Originally there were two lodges at the main gates of Cell Barnes Hospital; East Lodge, now demolished, stood at the entrance to what is now Puddingstone Drive and was the boy's entrance and West Lodge the girl's entrance. West Lodge currently houses the offices of the Trust and Earthworks.

Highfield Park Centre – The building of a community hall formed part of the original planning permission for the redevelopment of the hospital sites, and was funded from the social and community contributions (so-called "section 106 monies") made by developers. It is leased to YMCA Watford and provides facilities for use by the local community.

The Birch Centre – this was the former Cell Barnes Nurses training school, and now houses a Children's Day Nursery.

Rowan House – the former Occupational Therapy department building, now used as office space.

Hill End Hospital Chapel – situated in what is now Russet Drive, the chapel was originally constructed in 1899 as part of the Hill End Hospital, but had fallen in to a state of disrepair when the Trust was established. With the help of a National Lottery grant, it was converted to a theatre and is now the Trestle Arts Base.



Sport and Exercise in the Park

Highfield Park is the home of St Albans City Youth Community Football Club, with eleven football pitches to suit players from 7 to 18. The Trust worked in partnership with the Football Foundation, the Club and St Albans District Council to restore the playing fields and provide the new sports pavilion. The Club have priority use of the pitches but they can be hired on Saturday afternoon or mid-week by other clubs or individual groups.



During the summer months, there is archery on the cricket field organised by Elswood Bowmen Archery Club.

A number of other exercise-related activities also take place regularly in the park, including orienteering, organised Health Walks, and fitness bootcamps. Suggested running routes are also available.