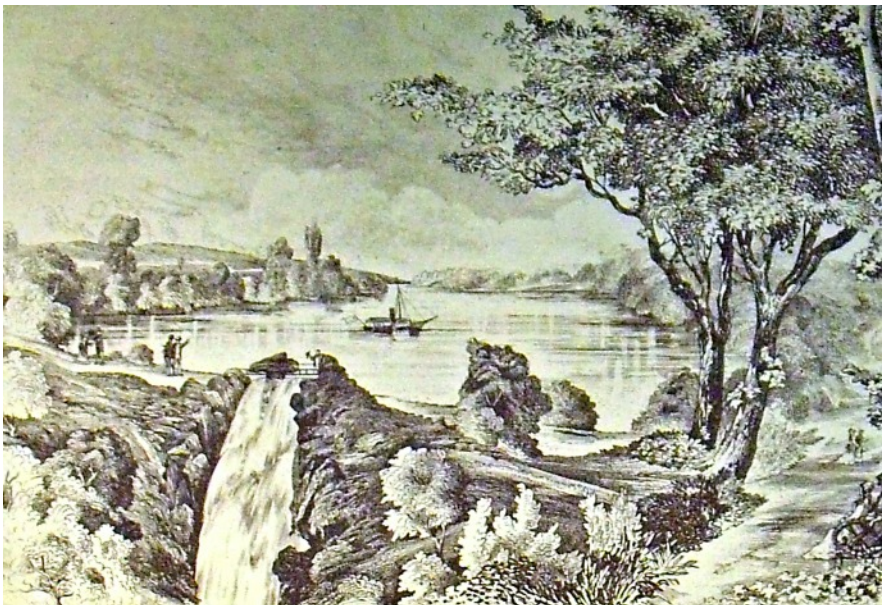




JOHN BARRAN'S FIGHT FOR THE PEOPLE'S PARK

By N. R. Hurworth based mainly on
reports in the *Leeds Mercury*



Published by Neville Hurworth
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The pictures on the cover are of the Waterloo Lake and waterfall from 'Goodall's Illustrated Royal Handbook to Roundhay Park' (Leeds 1872), and of Roundhay Park Mansion from Hepper's Sale Book of 1871. The small picture is of Sir John Barran M.P. by A.W. Braithwaite of Leeds, circa 1895.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Those of us who are interested in Roundhay Park, and especially those who have read Steven Burt's book 'An Illustrated History of Roundhay Park', will know that the Park was bought in 1871 by the Mayor of Leeds, John Barran, and a few others, until an Act of Parliament enabled the Town to take over the purchase. Although Leeds was very wealthy then, its spending for improving the town was controlled by a level of borrowing which was set by Parliament.

The town had insufficient borrowing power to buy as much of the Roundhay Estate as the Mayor wanted. When the Estate came up for auction, there was not much time for the major decisions to be settled about buying part of it for a park. It was later said by some that lack of time to consider the pros and cons properly for the future of Roundhay Park, was the main cause of a public row between two opposing factions that eventually emerged.

Public viewings were arranged before the sale, and everyone who saw the Park was enchanted by it. All agreed it was one of the most beautiful places in Yorkshire, but there were many different opinions as to what should, or could, be done about it. The way forward was strewn with difficulties for Barran and his supporters, and this was the case for long after the public sale was over.

It was a heavy responsibility John Barran had shouldered but he never faltered in his fight to secure the Park for the people. All this provided interesting news which the *Leeds Mercury* reported for many months to come.

Relying mainly on the accounts and letters in the *Leeds Mercury*, I have tried to represent in this book, how matters progressed to the time when Leeds Corporation could at last claim to have bought Roundhay Park for the people of Leeds. Because of the nature of the source and the chronological sequence of events there is repetition of the main arguments in the text. I hope this does not spoil the enjoyment of the story for the reader.

I am sure too that the *Leeds Mercury* was biased in favour of the purchase of the Park by the Corporation, but I think this had little effect on the main facts it reported.

What I have written in the following pages is but a small part of the accounts that appeared in the *Leeds Mercury* on this subject. I have tried to be selective in summarising and editing the text without selling the events short.

On the covers I have used a map and a picture from Hepper's Sale Book of 1871 and a picture from 'Goodall's Illustrated Royal Handbook of Roundhay Park' (Leeds 1872). I wanted to include photographs of the main Councillors and Aldermen in the story but with the exception of John Barran and George Tatham, I failed to find any.

Finally, I am grateful for the facilities at the Leeds Library and the Leeds Central Library, and to the staff at both these places. My thanks too to Anne Wilkinson, Hilary Dyson, Peter Dyson, Margaret Plows and Anthony Silson for their useful comments.



Sir John Barran MP (1821-1905) circa 1895
(Photograph by A.W. Braithwaite, Leeds)

Introduction

For nearly three quarters of a century, the Nicholson family owned most of Roundhay, including Roundhay Park. Here, they created their own pleasant country estate, complete with church, school and almshouses.

The previous squire and lord of the manor of Roundhay, William Nicholson Nicholson, had died three years earlier in 1868. He had a large family and his wish was to dispose of his extensive real estate in Roundhay, Chapel Allerton, Shadwell and other areas, and to divide the proceeds among them. However, it seems there was a family dispute about the administration of his will, and his widow, Martha Nicholson, filed a suit in the High Court of Chancery asking the Court to intervene. The Court found in her favour and from thereon all matters concerning the will were controlled by the Court of Chancery.

In September 1871, adverts were placed in the *Leeds Mercury* with details of the sale. The whole of the Roundhay Park Estate, 1,364 acres with the Mansion, lakes and buildings, would be auctioned the following month by order of the High Court of Chancery.

The Weeks Before the Sale

Members of the Leeds Town Council, and especially the Mayor, Alderman John Barran, were acutely aware that the town needed a park for the people. The borough had a few recreation grounds, including Woodhouse Moor, but unlike several neighbouring towns, it had no public park of any size. Members of the Council's Corporate Property Committee were allowed a viewing of Roundhay Park at the end of August, just two days before Martha Nicholson died from bronchitis. A month later they resolved 'to appoint a Committee to purchase Roundhay Park ... at such sum as they may deem reasonable.' The Park was to be opened to the public on two consecutive Saturdays. Word got round of the Council's interest in buying it, and on those first two Saturdays thousands came to see it. The Mayor was impressed and persuaded the auctioneers to open the Park every day up to the auction. It was estimated that between 100,000 and 200,000 people visited it before the sale.

The *Leeds Mercury* was enthusiastic and descriptive when it reported the first day of viewing on the Saturday and concluded:

Almost every part of the estate was roamed over by the multitude of visitors who poured into the grounds on Saturday, and who throughout the afternoon, thinking the distance neither a check nor a grievance, continued to arrive and depart in a seemingly endless stream. At the lodge a petition was exhibited for signatures, urging the expediency and wisdom of the town acquiring the Park, and requesting the Mayor to call a public meeting to consider the question. Around the little table where the requisition sheets lay for signature large numbers were continuously in waiting, desirous of affixing their names, and had there been more tables it is probable thousands would have signed. With the limited accommodation, however, 530 signatures were obtained in four hours, being an average of 132 per hour.

But 'R.W.' wrote to the *Leeds Mercury*, complaining about the distance Roundhay Park was from the further parts of the borough and pouring scorn on one correspondent's suggestion that a Tramway Company 'would only be too glad to lay down a line ... and make a very easy tariff for all who asked for a return ticket to the Park ... People do not want to be always putting their hands in their pockets when they take a stroll round a public park.' In his view the Royal Park in Headingley was a better place for people to get to and especially if the Council wanted to hold two or three galas a year, 'similar to those held at Peel Park, Bradford'; something like a thousand pounds a year could be raised. He concluded that Roundhay Park, would be a burden to the ratepayers, if purchased.

For some months before, the Council had, in fact, been seriously considering buying the Royal Park, but now their attention was centred firmly on Roundhay, and when the Royal Park came up for sale by auction at the end of September, there was little interest and every lot was withdrawn.

B. Naylor of Highfield House, Armley also believed there was a better alternative to Roundhay Park as a park for Leeds. He wrote to the *Leeds Mercury*, proposing the purchase of Gott's Park at Armley. He considered a gala day at both locations with a possible 50,000 people converging on the park. Roundhay Park would not be able to cope. It did not yet have the means to convey them there without problems whereas Armley had the Leeds and Bradford Railway passing within a hundred yards of the lodge gates with 'good roads on every side' and it was 'central for the townships of Headingley, Burley, Kirkstall, Bramley, Farnley, Beeston, Holbeck and Wortley,' and Leeds, Hunslet, Woodhouse and the east end of town had only to make their way to the Wellington Station, from where they could be at the gates in about seven minutes by train. Also, the park at Armley was neither 'larger nor smaller' than was required. It stood on high undulating ground, was well timbered, had a first class museum and was in a good state of repair so that it didn't require much money spending on it.

Roundhay Park, however, was so far away that half of the out-townships could not visit it. It was also too large and expensive, and would require 'the best part of a lifetime' to alter and re-sell to recover the high cost, to say nothing of the need for roads and railways. Gott's Park was ready for use, he thought.

Nevertheless, Gott's Park at Armley remained in private hands for another half century.

'Pad The Hoof' was also unhappy about the distance of the Park from town and when he learned that the Mayor, Alderman John Barran, had invited members of the Council to accompany him to view Roundhay Park, he wrote to the *Leeds Mercury* suggesting they should go 'as if they were working men out for a holiday ... start from the Town Hall ... and walk to and from Roundhay Park instead of riding as customary' so they would then experience the 'great fatigue' of the journey. He mentioned too, that 'a kind working man usually takes his wife' and his 'infantile representative.'

The Mayor, however, did not heed Pad the Hoof's suggestion. About forty of the Town Councillors accompanied him to Roundhay Park on Thursday 28th September and they travelled in two omnibuses. As the weather was good at the time, the Leeds Mercury reported rather quaintly that 'the visit ... was the reverse of disagreeable.'

There was a difficulty in raising the finance to purchase the Park, since the amount of money the Town Council could borrow was restricted by Act of Parliament. For the moment the Town Council had only £40,000 at its disposal. A new bill would be required to increase the Town's borrowing power. This would take time and could not be done before the auction.

'A Friend of the Working Classes' wrote to the *Leeds Mercury*. He declared himself 'an ardent sympathiser of those who toil in vitiated atmospheres throughout the week' and of 'the opportunity of securing for their use, a park, where they can enjoy a pure atmosphere, and ... feast their eyes upon the beautiful ...' He admitted 'The distance of Roundhay does at first seem to present a disadvantage' but he pointed out 'you cannot get away from the smoke of Leeds within a less distance.'

He proposed an economic strategy for paying for the Park ... 'Assuming the purchase money to be something over £100,000, you may have 600 acres of land to deal with. 300 acres or more might be resold for villa sites, and £200 an acre is but a small estimate of what these unrivalled sites would realise' thus recouping £60,000 of the £100,000 outlay, 'You then have the Mansion and 300 acres left for a park, including the magnificent lakes, for a little over £40,000.'

Bradford had two parks, together amounting to only 100 acres, and Bradford was 'now going for a third park.' He asked 'Was Leeds to be left behind Bradford?' Furthermore he had learned from Bradford's Borough Surveyor that 'last Whitsuntide, at the annual gala in Peel Park more than £2,000 clear of all expenses was realised ...'

Another letter to the *Leeds Mercury*, this time by 'A Large Ratepayer', suggested that several gentlemen 'out of the immense wealth of the borough' might be induced to give £5,000 each to raise £60,000 and that the rest could come from the borough's existing borrowing allowance. Purchasing Roundhay Park, he said, would 'place us in that enviable position, not to be pointed at by many very inferior towns both as to wealth and numbers.'

But not everyone who wrote to the local papers was in favour of the purchase of the Park. One who signed himself 'B' expressed himself at length, eloquently and firmly against the Corporation's purchase of Roundhay Park, as follows:

Are the rates so light, and the town's obligations in the matter of public works, past, present, and future, so trivial, that in a gush of sentimentality, we are to pour out our money for winding paths and velvet lawns, and romantic ravines, and noble sheets of water, and blackbirds and thrushes?

So long as our Corporation undertake works which will have pure air and pure water into the centre of the town – so long as they spend their energies and our money wisely in broadening streets, improving drainage, removing nuisances,

pulling down foul masses of old buildings, and otherwise consulting the sanitary and commercial welfare of the borough, – so long are they deserving of our support

...

But when, in an excess of maudlin rural feeling, they propose to shed our money over little bits of scenery, three miles out of town, it is our duty to try and bring them back to common sense ... Those who can get as far as Roundhay, can get all the exercise and oxygen they need without asking the town to spend thousands upon thousands of pounds to enable them to conclude their walk by mooing about the “magnificent landscape, broken into hill and dale” to which Mr. Hepper [the auctioneer for the sale] ... invites us.

In the meantime, a deputation called upon the Mayor, John Barran, and presented him with a memorial with six hundred signatures asking him to call a public meeting to consider the purchase of Roundhay Park for the public. The Mayor readily agreed.

The Public Meeting on Thursday 28th September 1871

The meeting took place indoors in the Corn Exchange since the weather was bad. At five o'clock when the meeting was due to start, there were few people but by the end of the meeting the room was filled with an estimated three to four thousand, most of them working men on their way home from work. The Mayor presided, supported by many of the Town Councillors.

From the *Leeds Mercury* :

The Mayor came forward amid applause to open the meeting. He felt the time had come when the people of Leeds must have a park, but the question was where was it to be, what was to be its size, and what were the conveniences surrounding it?

The Roundhay Park estate was to be offered for sale next week but it was a question whether a park of that magnitude, and at that distance, with all the surroundings, was such as they would like to have as a public park. The distance to the gates from Boar-lane was 3¼ miles. The distance to the corner of Gledhow-lane was half a mile less. His own impression was that the Council should purchase lots 19 and 20 [see map on the back cover], by which means an entrance could be made half a mile nearer to the town.

By the Improvement Act of 1866, the Corporation took power to purchase parks and recreation grounds. They had also power to purchase estates that were larger than were required, and to sell that which they did not require so they might recoup themselves but the fund they had at their disposal at the time was only about £40,000, and if the people of Leeds in public meeting assembled and the Town Council should decide to purchase the park they would be obliged to apply to Parliament for a short Act to get the powers to borrow additional money.

Could they afford a beautiful estate like this? If the people willed it, they could have it, he said and he had no hesitation in saying that the inhabitants of Leeds might purchase this park without having to pay a single penny extra in rates. The Corporation had the gas works, and besides paying off the interest on the purchase

money, they would make sufficient from the works to pay the interest on considerably more than would be required to buy the Park.

Mr. Ald. Tatham moved the first resolution :-

That the Council be requested to purchase such portion of the Roundhay Park estate as they may think desirable for the purpose of providing a public park for the borough, provided the same can be obtained at a fair market price.

He was favourable to buying Roundhay Park for public use if it could be done at a fair price. In a large town like Leeds the wants of the whole population could not be supplied by one park. There ought to be a park at every side of the town and if those who might not directly benefit as much as some others by Roundhay Park, would bide their time, they would no doubt be helped in the same way.

The distance of the park was no doubt an objection, but they could not have pure air in the middle of town. In his opinion the two lots referred to by the Mayor should be purchased. This would give them an entrance to the park half a mile nearer to the town than the present entrance. Steps should be taken to access the park either by railroad or tramway.

He thought if they got 770 acres, and assuming they kept 200 acres, at a cost of £100,000, since a penny in the pound on the borough rate should realise £3,300, it would require thirty years at a cost of one penny in the pound, to pay off the principal. A further sum would be required to pay for the interest for money borrowed. At 4 per cent, the interest would necessitate about an extra two thirds of a penny in the pound. If they bought a park, therefore, costing £100,000, the ratepayers would have to pay an additional 1 2/3d. in the pound for thirty years.

The cost to a man with an £8 rental would thus be one shilling a year, and a man having a £4 rental, sixpence in the year. It was for those who were in that position to say whether an estate which would stand unrivalled in the north of England as a public park, was worth the concession of sixpence or one shilling yearly ...

When he was in the park the other day he made it a point to ask people what they thought of the place. The reply was "Oh, we ought to have it" in all but one instance, where a man said they were too poor to buy the Park. Too poor to buy it! He would tell something which might surprise some of them. The beer money – what was spent in drink in the borough – would buy a park like that at Roundhay Park every year!

Councillor Thomas Mosley seconded the motion and spoke enthusiastically in favour of it. As for raising the money by public subscription, he knew of one councillor who had said that he was prepared to give £1,000 and 'he had heard so many gentlemen express their readiness to assist ... there would be but little difficulty in raising the required sum.'

Several councillors spoke in support of the motion for the Corporation to purchase the park and commented on its beauty. The distance of the Park from the town was not seen as a problem and Councillor Woodcock had no doubt 'there would be tramways ... to get to the Park' in due course.

Not all who spoke at the meeting were in favour of the motion. Mr. Thomas Carlton thought 'the matter had been cooked beforehand' and he ...

proposed, as an amendment, that the question of purchasing Roundhay Park be postponed until the whole of the borough had had a fair chance of expressing an opinion ... Armley, Holbeck, Bramley, and Kirkstall would have an equal right to the Park as Leeds, but it would be at too great a distance. The inhabitants of Wortley would have 4½ miles to walk to the Park, while those of Kirkstall would have to walk 6¼ miles, or 12½ miles there and back. Roundhay Park was very beautiful but owing to its great distance, it was, in his opinion, not suitable for a public park for this borough.

Mr. John Firth from Bramley seconded this amendment. He said :

Let those who were anxious that the town should have a park, open a subscription list, and follow the example set at Birmingham, where a gentleman had presented the people with a park at his own expense.

Councillor James Mosley quickly demanded to know 'Are we to have a park?' and when the reply was 'Yes. Yes.' he continued:

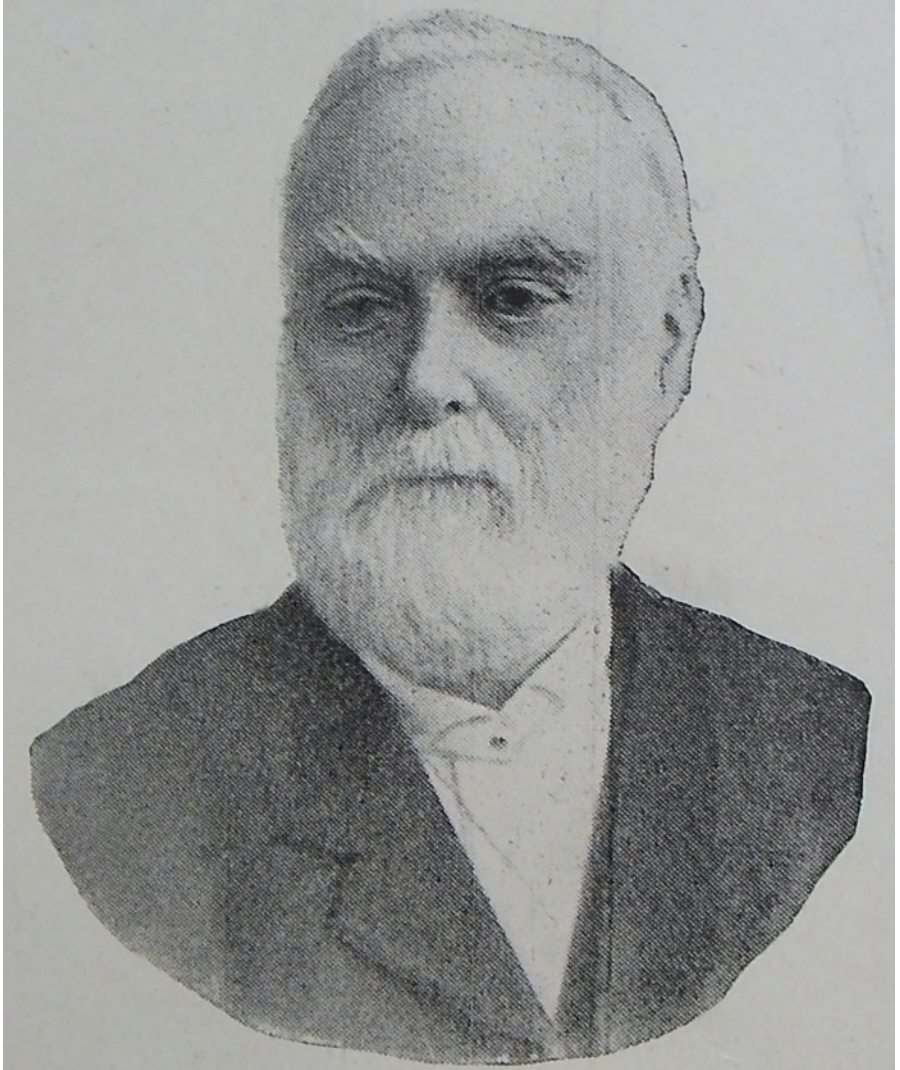
then ... it ought to be Roundhay Park ... his Worship had said that they might have the park without its costing a penny. Why should they ask anybody to subscribe for a park without its costing them a penny? He was at Roundhay Park on Saturday, and saw the large number of working men who visited it. He talked to many hundreds respecting the question of a park, and nearly every one said, "We must have a park, and it must be Roundhay Park."

A Mr. Walton advised the dissatisfied districts to join with those which would be most benefited by the Park, and said that in time the whole borough would be supplied with parks and recreation grounds.

The amendment had very few supporters, so the original motion was carried by an overwhelming majority amid loud cheers.

A Public Meeting at Hunslet

That evening, another public meeting was taking place to consider the proposal to buy Roundhay Park. It was in the Hunslet Mechanics' Institute and was attended mainly by working men. The representatives of the Ward, Councillors Dockray, Bramham and Child declared themselves willing to be guided by the meeting as to whether they should support the purchase in Council meetings. The distance to Roundhay Park would be a problem to the working class people of Hunslet, Holbeck and Beeston. What was wanted, it was said, were a few smaller parks, distributed around the borough. Four parks at 150 acres each, could probably be bought with the £100,000 that Roundhay Park at 600 acres [lot 19], was expected to cost.



George Tatham (1815-1892)

Revered Alderman of Leeds, and a Quaker. He served as Mayor in three consecutive years 1880, 1881 and 1882, the first person to do so. He was a teetotaler and a tireless worker in the cause of abstinence from intoxicating liquors.

Photograph by Roxby, Leeds

Councillor Bramham mentioned:

It had been said that they might get the park and have nothing to pay for it; but that would be accomplished out of the profits arising from the gas works. £14,000 had been cleared this year out of the gas, he was informed, and, allowing £8,000 on account of the purchase, £6,000 was left.

Councillor Child was strongly impressed by the Park. He thought 'that next to the Town Hall, it would do more to raise the town in the estimation of Yorkshire and other counties than anything else Leeds could buy.' But were they prepared to pay 3d. in the pound in perpetuity for the purpose of securing Roundhay Park?

Mr. W. Green opposed the proposal. Hunslet now had a population of 37,000 and he thought they should have a recreation ground of their own.

Mr. P. Gilston proposed:

That the Councillors of the ward be instructed to support the Leeds Corporation by their votes in the endeavour to purchase Roundhay Park at the market price.

He said he would rather see one grand park where the people could go and enjoy themselves to the full than four small ones that would neither do credit nor be an ornament to the town. People would be able to go to Roundhay on their days of pleasure instead of going to Bradford or Hollingworth Lake.

Mr. England seconded the motion. Since the working man could afford to go to Harrogate and Ilkley, they could surely pay their sixpence to go to Roundhay and have a more beautiful park to visit.

A working man supported the motion, saying he had carried a child in his arms or on his back a far greater distance to see a London park, and would do so again.

Even so, Edward Green proposed a counter-amendment to the motion:

That the meeting recommend the Councillors for the ward not to support the motion for the purchase of the Park.

It was seconded by Mr. W. Green on the grounds that a park was needed in Hunslet.

When the vote was taken, the amendment was carried by a majority of nearly two to one. The Councillors for the Hunslet ward would not be supporting the Council's proposal to buy Roundhay Park.

Special Meeting of the Town Council the Following Day

A Mr. Moody presented a memorial from the inhabitants of Farnley asking for a recreation ground there. After some discussion, it was referred to the Corporate Property Committee and the meeting then turned to the matter of Roundhay Park.

Alderman Shepherd proposed the following resolution:

That the Council be recommended to support a committee to purchase Roundhay Park, for the purpose of a public recreation ground at such sum as they may deem reasonable.

In his opinion it was one of the most important questions which had come before the Council during his connection with it. He presented data to show how poorly Leeds stood in comparison with Bradford, Birmingham, Chester, Manchester and Hull with regard to public recreation grounds and how far these grounds were from the town centres. There was now, he thought, the prospect of obtaining a park for Leeds which would rival any of these.

The Council was aware that many sites had been pointed out near Leeds as being suitable for public parks. Some of them were within easy distance of Leeds, but this very fact convinced him that they were not worth being converted into a public park for a great and important borough like Leeds. Some of them were surrounded by public works and other buildings, and however cheaply some of these sites could be purchased, and whatever the amount they might spend on them, they would never be anything like what Leeds should possess as a public park.

He believed there was not a finer estate in Yorkshire than Roundhay. After summarising details of the estate, he said he hoped that at the sale of the property, which was fixed for next week, some portion of it would be preserved for the town.

The park was a little over three miles from Boar Lane. He did not look upon that as a distance which would prevent the great bulk of the working classes from using it. Transport to the park was not what it ought to be, but if the park was purchased for public use, he was sure it would not be long before there would be a tramway or buses and maybe even a railway line to it.

He was not asking them 'to do something which would just be a benefit for a few years or a lifetime even,' but to give something 'to the inhabitants of Leeds which would be a joy to them forever.'

If they had to borrow, say, £100,000, the interest at 4 per cent would be paid by less than 1½ d. in the pound. Bearing in mind that within the last two or three years, the rates of the township of Leeds, if not the borough, had been reduced more than one shilling in the pound, he was not asking for a great sacrifice to be made for a public park like the one he wanted to see at Roundhay.

Suppose, too, they bought the principal lot of 600 acres, they would be able to resell a large quantity of land for building sites, and the land would be eagerly bought up in small lots, there being no finer sites for villas in all Leeds, in his opinion. They would thus be able to recoup themselves to a great extent.

The Corporation had power to borrow £40,000. He saw no objection in going to Parliament for a short Act to extend their borrowing powers.

The Borough Treasurer explained that an Act of 1866 gave the Corporation the power to borrow £50,000 for the purpose of providing recreation grounds. About £10,000 had been already disposed of, leaving £40,000 to deal with.

Alderman Luccock agreed that Roundhay Park was a very beautiful spot, and it was not a great way from the North and North East Wards. However, he felt that the Council should be seeking to provide several smaller parks, or recreation grounds, more conveniently situated in various parts of the borough,

which would be more readily visited by the working man and their families. If a portion of the Roundhay Park estate could be secured, and it was suitable as a recreation ground for the North and North East Wards, he would not oppose it.

It seemed to him that it was not worth voting on Alderman Shepherd's proposition, since they had not the power to purchase the Park and they should also bear in mind that the Park was beyond the jurisdiction of the borough (at that time Roundhay was not part of the borough of Leeds).

There was then a long discussion on the subject of how the Corporation might buy Roundhay Park. The Mayor agreed with Alderman Luccock they had not the power to purchase the Roundhay estate with their present funds. The £40,000 borrowing limit was not enough. The Mayor said they may be able to make a conditional agreement to buy the estate, subject to their getting sufficient power to purchase it by Act of Parliament.

Alderman Carter MP asked if the Court of Chancery, the real vendors, had been approached to see if such a conditional agreement would be allowed. The Mayor replied that no such move had been made yet and he thought the Council should appoint a committee to secure the Park Estate.

Alderman Carter was not content with this. He was concerned about individual Councillor's responsibilities in any provisional agreement. He was not prepared to be responsible for anything over the £40,000 that the Council could borrow legally. Also if the Council were to make a conditional agreement to purchase the Park, and then go to Parliament next session for a bill to sanction the agreement, the whole of the expense would have to be borne by the individual members of the Council and then met by the ratepayers.

Alderman Addyman was also concerned. Purchasing the Park at the present time seemed to him to be so surrounded with difficulties that it ought not to be entertained. Indeed, he was so satisfied of the legal difficulty that he would not vote for the motion. He would not accept the responsibility of an illegal or irregular transaction. Also, the Park was outside of the borough, and so if it was purchased by the Corporation, the Council would be in the position of having their property controlled by the West Riding police.

Furthermore, he thought the Park was too far from Leeds. Woodhouse Moor was 'a magnificent piece of land' and the Council should put it into a good condition. It was a disgrace to Leeds, 'being little better than a foul quagmire decorated by all the deceased cattle in the town.' It was 'far removed from the stench of the becks', and 'pure air could be obtained there.'

Mr. Buckton, referring to the figures quoted by Alderman Shepherd, thought that Leeds already had more acreage as recreation grounds than any of the towns Alderman Shepherd was asking them to emulate. There was Woodhouse Moor, which consisted of 60 odd acres, Holbeck Moor, Hunslet Moor, the Bramley Recreation Ground, and the Bank Lodge Estate.

He wanted Council not to vote away £150,000 or £200,000. Farnley was asking for a recreation ground, Bramley ought to have a gymnasium, a cricket

ground, a croquet sward and there ought to be similar grounds at Hunslet, Holbeck, Chapeltown, and other parts of the borough. For £20,000, he thought, a number of easily accessible public recreation grounds might be provided.

It had been said that the cost of the Park would be not more than 2d. in the pound, but there had been no mention of the cost of maintaining the Park. The Mayor had said at the public meeting that the Park might be got without its costing the ratepayers a penny by taking the profits of the gas works.

The Mayor interrupted him, saying that the Act allowed for half the profits to go towards reducing the borough rate. The cost of the Park had to be paid out of the borough rate, and therefore profits from the gas works could be used to pay for the Park.

Mr. Buckton was against it. He was on the Gas Committee. He did not believe in Leeds paying 3s. 6d. per thousand for gas, while Nottingham paid only 2s. 10d. The people ought to know that if they spent £150,000 or £200,000, they would have to bear the cost, and he hoped the Corporation would pause before imposing upon the people a 3d. rate for thirty years.

The Mayor reminded them that when the Town Hall was built, £80,000 of the cost was paid out of the profits of the waterworks. There was no reduction in the price of water, but the people got a Town Hall.

Returning to the reference about the gas works, Alderman Carter pointed out that next year the Council would have to begin paying off the principal, and at least £8,000 of the profits would have to be devoted to that purpose.

Mr. Mosley proposed, as an amendment:

That a committee be appointed to devise some plan to secure Roundhay Park by subscription, over and above the money at present at the command of the Council, or otherwise.

He did not think that Woodhouse Moor was a suitable place for a park. It was only fit to be visited by persons with strong constitutions, and was entirely unsuited to persons of poor health, whereas Roundhay Park was adapted to all.

Mr. T. Mosley seconded the amendment.

Alderman Joy had noticed that all the fine scenery that had been spoken of in connection with Roundhay Park was round about the larger lake. All they wanted could be obtained if they purchased 150 acres.

Mr. Iredale was in favour of appointing a committee to deal with the question. They would soon find out some means of disposing of the difficulties.

Alderman Tatham was confident the vast majority of the inhabitants were anxious to pay for the Park out of the rates. He also thought that if they were to wait until they got a park to suit the whole borough they would never get a park at all. He admitted the force of what had been said about not exceeding their borrowing powers, and proposed an amendment to this effect:

That the Council be recommended to support a committee for the purpose of watching the sale of the Roundhay Park estate, and of purchasing such portion as they may think desirable for the purpose of a public park, provided the same can be had at a fair market price and that the amount can be legally obtained.

It was seconded, but Alderman Carter was not happy. Alderman Tatham's amendment left it to the committee to exercise their own judgement in the way they thought proper, he said. The Council ought not to give this power.

He would not agree to any resolution which would involve the expenditure of more than £40,000, because whatever they voted above £40,000 would be done upon their own responsibility. £40,000 would buy 270 acres at £150 per acre. Surely that would be a big enough park for them?

Mr. Harrison, a representative for Bramley, at the extreme end of the borough, said he approved of the purchase of Roundhay Park, and he had not heard any of his constituents speak in opposition to the proposal. But another Bramley representative, Mr. Hutchinson, opposed the proposal because of the distance of the park from parts of the borough. He preferred to improve Woodhouse Moor.

Mr. Croft went to the other extreme. He urged the Council to purchase as much of the park as they could. He was confident they would be able to resell parts at a handsome profit.

The Mayor said he felt very strongly on the subject. If they could secure lots 19 and 20 they would be able to get a park at little or no cost to the town. They would be able to resell at a good profit. Once the Park became public property, he was confident there would be many persons ready to build villas in its neighbourhood.

On being put to the meeting the amendment was carried, but Alderman Carter was still not satisfied. He moved that in any arrangement entered into for the purchase of Roundhay Park, the committee be instructed not to exceed the amount which the Corporation by Act of Parliament had the right to spend on recreation purposes.

He was moving this, he said, simply so that they might be kept within the law. If the purchase exceeded £40,000 they must find some other way of meeting the excess than by making individual members responsible for it.

Alderman Nussey agreed with him and seconded the amendment. However the Mayor assured them that the amendment was already covered by the words 'provided that the amount required can legally be obtained.' This seemed acceptable to Alderman Carter. So long as the resolution was intended to prevent responsibility resting upon individual members, he would agree to it.

The Mayor then went further. He would clear the Council of the responsibility himself. He promised he would ensure that the Corporation would not spend more of the public money than £40,000, but if someone offered to guarantee to pay any excess of this figure to meet the purchase price, that would be legal and so they should not rule it out. The best possible advice would be taken, and nothing would be done which would tend to jeopardise the Corporation. The committee, acting under legal advice, should be left to take such steps as they may deem desirable.

Mr. Buckton and Alderman Carter were still unconvinced. Mr. Buckton asked if the committee would have the power to buy the whole estate for any amount they thought proper, if it could be legally done, and Alderman Carter wanted to make it clear that the Council could not be made responsible for more than

£40,000 whatever the committee decided. Also, speaking directly to the Mayor, he said the Council would not join with any individual in buying the property and in leaving it to that individual to say afterwards what share the town should have.

The vote was then taken with the following result :-

For the motion 33

Against16

and so the motion was carried by seventeen votes.

For the motion were Aldermen Luccock, Nussey, Tatham, Blackburn, Addyman and Shepherd; and Councillors Smith (J.W.), Fletcher, Brook, Woodcock, Mosley (J), Nettleton, Pickering, Wood, Iredale, Cogill, Cornock, Mosley (T.), Mason, Thompson, Turton, Swales, Higgins, Wray, Cross, Gallsworthy, Hudson, Mathers, Hobson, Whitehead, Harrison, Moody, and Roberts.

Against the motion were Aldermen Hornby and Craven; and Councillors Titley, Bissington, Bingley, Snell, Clayton, Dockray, Bramham, Child, Sheldon, Hutchinson, Lee, Smith (G.), Jackson, and Buckton.

The following were appointed a committee to carry out the resolution:-

The Mayor, Aldermen Luccock, Tatham, George, and Shepherd, and Councillors Iredale, Mathers, Mosley (Thomas), and Wray.

The discussion about the Park question had lasted for nearly three hours.

The Sale on the 4th October 1871

Roundhay Park Estate was auctioned at the Great Northern Railway Hotel in Leeds. The auctioneers were Hepper and Sons of East Parade.

The *Leeds Mercury* reported:

... His Worship was yesterday accompanied to the sale by the following members of the committee – Ald. George, Ald. Tatham, Ald. Shepherd, Councillor Wray, Councillor Mathers, and Councillor Iredale. In the absence of the Town Clerk, the professional advisor of the committee was Mr. Thomas Simpson. Amongst the other members of the Town Council who were also present was Ald. Stead and Councillors Fletcher, Woodcock, Wood, Cornock, Thompson, Croft, Gallsworthy, Bramham, Sheldon, and Marsden.

The attendance of the general public, which was very large, included Mr. Kitson, Mr. Louis Oxley, Mr. B. Goodman, Mr. Walter Stead, Mr. R. Gouthwaite, Mr. Dibb, Mr. H. Nelson, Mr. J. Kitson, jun., Mr. Jas. Holroyd, Mr. J. Barran, jun., Mr. Jabez Woodley, Mr. Thos. Turner, Mr. J. Hall Thorp, Mr. Geo. Corson, Mr. W.F. Masser, Mr. Joseph Walker, Mr. John Crabtree, Mr. W. Hey, Mr. Thos. Fenwick, Mr. J. Sagar Musgrave, Mr. John Eddison, Mr. J. Eddison and Mr. Henry Dyson.

Additional accommodation was afforded by a temporary gallery at one end of the room, but notwithstanding this the apartment was crowded, and there could not have been fewer than 500 persons present.

The trustees of the estate were represented by Mr. W.J. Armitage, Mr. Walter Nicholson, and Mr. Fison. Mr. Wood of the firm of Wood and Killick, Bradford, was present as the solicitor for the sale and Mr. John Eddison, Leeds, was in attendance as the surveyor for the estate.

Mr. John Hepper, in opening the sale, said it was one of most extraordinary importance. Though he had been connected with the auction business for upwards of 20 years there had not been during that period a sale of similar importance and of similar interest to the Town of Leeds.

The sale derived its importance from two or three circumstances, one being the immense extent and value of the estate, the aggregate value being at least £200,000 and the size 1,364 acres. Another was that it would open out a new suburb of Leeds. Roundhay had been, as they knew, a suburb of Leeds, but it was only thinly populated. In all probability, however, Roundhay would become a fashionable and favourite, as well as a populous, suburb of the town. Then again it had been visited by immense crowds of people who had forced, as it were, the Corporation of Leeds to take into consideration the viability of the estate as a public park ...

Mr. Hepper then proceeded to offer lots 1, 2, 3, and 4, and after they had been disposed of, he directed attention to lot 19, the residential estate called Roundhay Park.

The Mayor suggested that Lots 19 and 20 should be put up together.

Mr. Hepper said the trustees were given to understand that there were too many bidders for the lots respectively and they felt that they would not be justified in putting them up together.

He then invited attention to Lot 19. The rent of the portions that were let off, he said, was £550 8s. 4d, while the permanent charges, so far as they had been able to ascertain, amounted to 14s. 2d. The total acreage was 601 acres 1 rood and 12 perches, of which 290 acres 3 roods and 30 perches were in hand, and the rest let off to various tenants ...

He referred to the advantages it offered to various classes of persons, and spoke of the committee that had been appointed by the Town Council for the purpose of watching the sale and securing the lot, if possible, as a park for Leeds.

He was one of that large majority of people who were anxious that the Corporation should purchase this lot and form it into a public park for the town. He had attended the public meeting and the Council meeting, and had carefully read the articles and correspondence in the newspapers, and he found that the great objection to the park being purchased for the town was its distance. If the Corporation did not secure this park, they could not get a park to be at all compared to it. If they went in the direction of Holbeck, Hunslet, Wortley, or Armley, there was smoke at every turn; while if land had to be secured elsewhere for a park there would have to be an immense outlay in laying out and planting, and before the trees could grow, they would be smothered with smoke. In the case of Roundhay Park, however, they were removed from the smoke of the town altogether. As to the distance of the park from the town, he was satisfied that if the park were to be opened to the public there would soon be travelling accommodation equal to that to Headingley and Chapeltown, and it was probable that in the course of time there would be a suburban railway.

It was a mistake to say that there was not a piece of ground in the park where cricket could be played, as there were one or two places which, at a trifling expense might be made suitable. The most extraordinary objection to the purchase of the park was that there were 37 acres of water which would have to be paid for as land ...

Mr. Hepper invited an offer for the park. The biddings were commenced by Mr. J. Eastwood ... and they speedily ran ... up to £90,000.

The Mayor [bid] - £100,000.

Mr. Hepper said there was no gentleman in the borough of Leeds who had taken so active a part in endeavouring to secure a park for the people as the Mayor and he would only be too glad if his worship should succeed in purchasing the park at anything like a reasonable price for the ratepayers.

... The biddings were continued until they reached £106,000 (the Mayor) when the auctioneer intimated his willingness to accept advances of £500 at a time. He took occasion to state that if the mansion were to be built now it would cost £20,000, and that there was £15,000 worth of timber on the estate. This was followed by a bid of £106,500.

The Mayor [bid] - £107,000.

Mr. Hepper then said he was authorised to declare the sale open. No further offer being made after a brief delay, Lot 19 was knocked down to the Mayor for £107,000.

The result was greeted with loud applause, followed by "Three cheers for the Mayor," on the invitation of the auctioneer.

Lot 20, a farm and homestead, known as "Hartley's Farm," including five cottages known as "Horse Shoe Cottages," and the house occupied by Mr. Hobson, and containing an area of 173a. 2r. 25p., was next offered. The annual rent was said to be £490 15s. The biddings commenced at £20,000, and they continued until the lot was knocked down to the Mayor for £32,000. The two lots were therefore acquired on behalf of the town for £139,000. The names of the gentlemen who entered into competition with the Mayor did not transpire.

The remainder of the lots were, after a short adjournment, then proceeded with. The biddings were spirited. Of the 45 lots on the list, 28, including those sold to the Mayor, were disposed of for the aggregate of £170,545. 17 lots were withdrawn.

The day after the sale, Thomas Newman of 1 Alfred Terrace wrote to the *Leeds Mercury* complaining about 'the wretched state of a plot of land purchased by' the Corporation 'about two years ago, to be used as a recreation-ground for the east end of the town, known by the name ... Paddy's Park.' So far as he was concerned the Corporation had done nothing to it, except remove the fence and allow it to become a wreck. He wanted it to be restored to 'anything like the condition it was in before they purchased it.' Then they would rest content with their 'very humble but more convenient Paddy's Park' leaving their 'share in the grand park, three miles away ... to those who can afford to ride in cabs and buses.'

The Council Agree to Buy the Park

A special meeting of the Council shortly after the sale on Friday 13th October 1871 was attended by all the members of the Council and the MP Mr. Baines. The Town Clerk read a letter from the Mayor, Alderman George, and Councillors Iredale and Wray, the purchasers of lots 19 and 20 of the Roundhay Park Estate, offering these lots to the Corporation for a place of public recreation at the cost price, with interest and charges.

The Mayor made a statement about the actions of the committee appointed with the power to buy, at a fair market price, such portions of Roundhay Park Estate as they could with the funds at the disposal of the Corporation. He was proud that three gentlemen in the Council had joined him in purchasing the two lots. They were willing to have the estate left on their hands, but he wanted the town to have the whole estate and so to have a cheap park.

Some of the smaller lots were sold for £100 an acre more than they had paid for the two lots. If the town bought the whole estate, 'they would have at little or no expense, one of the finest parks in England'. Part of it could be sold, at a fair profit, to provide some of 'the most splendid villa sites to be found in Yorkshire.'

There was some doubt as to whether they could get the necessary Parliamentary powers. He had met a number of Members of Parliament and eminent counsel during the past week (at dinner in his home at Chapel Allerton Hall, as was reported in the *Leeds Mercury* earlier) and not one of them expressed any doubt as to their being unable to get a bill. They all said 'there would be a very strong disposition on the part of the House of Commons to help them rather than otherwise.'

The Mayor ended his speech by saying that :

If the resolution were carried, and their lives were spared fifteen or twenty years, he was confident they would have cause to rejoice that they were members of the Leeds Corporation in that year when Roundhay Park was purchased for the public use.

As he was an interested party in the motion that was to follow, the Mayor then left the room, and his place was taken by Alderman Joy.

Alderman Shepherd then proposed the following resolution:

That the offer of the Mayor, Mr. Alderman George, Mr. Councillor Iredale, and Mr. Councillor Wray, of Lots 19 and 20 of the Roundhay Park estate, for a place of public use or recreation, be accepted on condition that the necessary Parliamentary powers be obtained, and the additional borrowing powers be applied for in the coming session of Parliament to enable the Corporation to carry out such purpose, and that the Town Clerk be authorised to take all necessary proceedings for the above-named purpose.

Alderman Shepherd started by saying a few words of thanks and admiration for the actions of the Mayor and Messrs. George, Iredale and Wray, and in support of his resolution. He agreed that recreation grounds were needed in different parts of the borough but he did not think they could be compared to a public park such as at Roundhay. Holidays were increasing year by year and if they did not buy the Park, what would they do with the great masses of people on Saturday afternoons and on Sundays and the holidays?

As to the objection that the Park was too far from parts of the borough, he thought it was within walking distance for two-thirds or three-quarters of the working classes. They were not legislating merely for today, but for generations to come.

The borough had increased greatly during the last fifty years. The population of Leeds in 1821 was 83,791, and at the time he was speaking, it was 259,000. If the same rate of increase continued over the next fifty years the inhabitants of Leeds at the end of that time would number upwards of 800,000, and the Park would be very much nearer the population.

As to the cost, lot 20 had been purchased as well as lot 19 so that an entrance to the Park might be made nearer the town. These lots, about 775 acres, had cost the gentlemen who had bought them, £139,000, an average of £180 per acre. If the Council were to take the whole of the property, keep 300 acres for a park, and sell the remainder at the average sum per acre it had cost, they would then get the 300 acres for £54,000. The rest of the Park might probably be sold at a profit of £20,000 and that would reduce the cost of the Park to £34,000.

Converting the 300 acres into a public park by improving the roads and making other alterations could add £10,000 which would bring the cost of the Park up to £44,000, the annual interest on which, at 4 percent would be £1,760. Adding £2,000 per year for the maintenance of the Park, would make the annual cost £3,760, equivalent to a rate of about 1d. in the pound, which would not be felt heavily by anybody. He was sure a large majority of the people were in favour of the Park, and he asked for a unanimous vote in favour of the resolution.

Alderman Joy said the Mayor had received a letter from the Archbishop of York, congratulating him 'on the splendid acquisition' he had made 'for the great town over which you preside.'

Mr. Croft was thoroughly convinced that the Park could be obtained without cost to the town, and that the North Eastern Railway Company would run a branch line through the estate.

Mr. Bingley thought there were some members of the Council, as well as persons outside it, who had lost their heads on the question of a public park. Roundhay Park was a beautiful place, and it was true that a public meeting had decided the town should acquire it. Had there been more time, however, he was convinced, that that feeling would have been less evident. It was too far away for most people, and he thought that in a very short time it would only be a place for galas and picnic parties. He did not think the building sites would sell as readily as was imagined. There was strong objection to the Corporation's speculating in land, and it was not unlikely that this might prevent additional Parliamentary powers being granted.

He agreed that people were having more holidays, but experience showed that after parks of this kind had been visited two or three times by the people, they returned to going to such places as Scarborough and Whitby. To purchase Roundhay Park would be unwise, and he thought that before seven years had passed, all present would be of the same opinion. He preferred to establish recreation grounds in various parts of the borough.

Mr. Buckton felt the Council had no business to speculate with the ratepayers' money. Instead of going to Parliament for further borrowing to spend on Roundhay Park, the Council ought to devote the £40,000 at its disposal in providing recreation grounds which the working man would reach with his wife and family after he had done his work, in ten minutes or a quarter of an hour.

He proposed an amendment that the sum of £20,000, half of the amount now at the disposal of the Council, should be used to purchase and fit out four recreation-grounds – one for Armley and Kirkstall, another for Hunslet and Holbeck, a third for the East-end, and a fourth for Headingley and Chapeltown, at a cost of £4,600 each, and that the £1,600 left should be spent improving Bramley Recreation Ground.

Mr. Hutchinson was in favour of Mr. Buckton's amendment. He objected to the purchase of Roundhay Park on the grounds of distance, cost, and cost of maintenance. Also, the people were told that the Park might cost them nothing. He believed that this influenced many to vote in favour of the Corporation's making the purchase. The result had been almost unanimous, and it was looked upon as the voice of the people.

He believed that the profit from the gasworks could not be legitimately applied to the payment of interest on any sum spent for a park. Any profits from the gas works should be used to reduce the cost of gas to the consumers.

He moved an amendment, which, after some alterations, read as follows :
That the question of the purchase of Roundhay Park by the Corporation be deferred until the result of a poll of the ratepayers has been undertaken, and that the Mayor be requested to obtain the poll in the usual way.

Mr. Lupton would only support the motion after obtaining a promise that within two years, recreation grounds would be provided in those districts where just now they were greatly needed.

Alderman Carter thought that 200 acres out of the 700 acres would be enough for the Park for all purposes, being nearly four times as large as Woodhouse Moor. He was strongly against the Council's speculating in property. They should bargain with the purchasers for 200 acres, and leave them to sell the rest privately.

Alderman Luccock agreed with Alderman Carter. They should buy 200 acres which should be achievable with the money at their disposal

Mr. James Mosley, Mr. Higgins and Mr. Roberts supported the original resolution. Mr. Harland opposed it, as did Alderman Yewdale and Mr. Titley, who spoke in favour of Mr. Hutchinson's amendment.

However, the amendment was lost by a large majority. The result of the vote on the original motion was :—

For the motion 34

Against 13

and so Alderman Shepherd's motion was carried by 21 votes.

Votes for the motion, Aldermen Nussey, Craven, Joy, Tatham, Blackburn, Carter, Shepherd; Councillors Smith (J.W.), Dixon, Fletcher, Brook, Woodcock, Mosley (James), Nettleton, Pickering, Cogill, Barker, Mosley (Thomas), Mason,

Thomson, Turton, Swales, Higgins, Gallsworthy, Clayton, Dockray, Bramham, Child, Hudson, Mathers, Hobson, Whitehead, Moody, Roberts.

Votes against, Aldermen Yewdall; Councillors Titley, Dufton, Bissington, Bingley, Snell, Harland, Hutchinson, Lee, Lupton, Smith (George), Jackson, Buckton.

Some of the members declined to vote including Alderman Luccock.

Leeds now had its park, albeit, in the safe hands of the Mayor, John Barran, and three other members of the Town Council.

These new owners of lots 19 and 20 of the Roundhay Sale of 1871, had acquired by this vote, the assurance that Leeds Corporation would buy these lots from them soon after the necessary public borrowing powers were sanctioned by Parliament. With a little luck, all that would be necessary from hereon would be to draw up a Bill for submission to Parliament, canvass the MPs and other eminent persons, and they could look forward to their Improvement Bill becoming an Act of Parliament.

Unfortunately things did not work out quite so simply. The Mayor and his supporters still had further struggles ahead of them before Prince Arthur would declare Roundhay Park open.

The New Year

On January 2nd 1872, the *Leeds Mercury* reported that a meeting had taken place between Leeds Corporation and a committee from the West Riding Quarter Sessions concerning Roundhay Park and that reasonable agreement had been obtained. The committee was appointed to assist the Riding solicitor in preparation of Parliamentary clauses protecting the Riding.

Almost a month later, the Council approached the Court of Chancery concerning the sale of the Park. The balance of the purchase money was required within twelve months from the day of the sale. The Mayor and the Council asked the Court for more time to pay the amounts outstanding and the Court agreed subject to various conditions.

The 'Stab in the Dark'

There was no further news about Roundhay Park for a while. Then suddenly, out of the blue, the *Leeds Mercury* reported on the 20th February 1872 some extraordinary news. A petition had been drawn up against the Council's purchase of Roundhay Park and it was being signed by 'a great number of influential ratepayers.' The petitioners asked 'that the question may be seriously reconsidered by the Council before any further steps are taken towards obtaining Parliamentary powers for acquiring the property.'

They gave the following reasons:

1. The Park was too far from the larger part of the borough. It would be of 'no practical value' to the inhabitants of many townships.
2. The existing access, would not be able to cope with crowds of people on foot and in carriages, and could only be improved at very considerable expense.

3. The acquisition of an estate three or four times the size required for a park, at so large a cost as £139,000, in the hope of reselling at a profit the parts not required, was unjust to the ratepayers, who would have to bear the cost of interest on the capital until the surplus land could be sold. Indeed they believed it was questionable whether the profit would ever be realised, or if so, within any reasonable period.
4. The large costs of the purchase and completion of a park on the scale proposed, and its maintenance, could not be justified.
5. Although the town was enjoying a period of prosperity, the Council should 'guard against the temptation to increase local taxation', which in future more difficult times, 'may render the burdens on manufacturing and other productive works too serious to be contended with, and the direct effects of which' on the working classes would not make up for 'their very limited enjoyment of the proposed park.'

This news evoked surprise and hostility. A letter from a working man who signed himself as 'A Ratepayer' was a masterpiece of sarcasm as he railed against those who signed the petition:

I was very much surprised to find that a petition bearing the signatures of many of our leading merchants, manufacturers, etc., is to be presented to our Corporation, asking them to reconsider their intended purchase of Roundhay Park.

I looked at once for the cause and found, to my great surprise, that these worthy gentlemen thought that the park was too far away from the town and that the great bulk of the working classes would be unable to avail themselves of it. Well, I am sure I can speak for my fellow working men when I say that we feel deeply grateful for the awakened spirit of sympathy for us that has been evinced by the petitioners; but when we come to examine the signatures to the petition what are they composed of? Why half of the first twenty names either live, or have near relatives who live, in the neighbourhood of the park, or have to pass up and down the principal road to it, and they do not want the masses to invade their domain.

They perhaps think, "Oh, they have the moors of Woodhouse, Holbeck, and Hunslet, and they must do without a park – at least, if they will have one let it be in the centre of town, and not near us." Let me just say that we do not want a recreation ground alone; we want a place where we can take our families, and enjoy the pure air, and see the beauties of nature without having to go to Studley or any of those places.

I would ask the ratepayers of Leeds to carefully examine this petition, and they will find it bears the names of many of our wealthy Leeds merchants, but few who can boast of having done anything to improve the social position of the masses. I trust our Corporation will remain firm in the decision they have arrived at, and not comply with the wishes of those who would deprive the people of Leeds of a park that cannot be surpassed either for position or beauty.

I know for a fact that there are many names attached to that petition who object to paying anything for a park. It is not that it is too far away, but they do not like to pay for it. It was only yesterday I heard a gentleman (whose name is prominent on the petition) say that he did not want a park – he had a nice garden of his own, and he did not see why he should be called upon to pay for other people's enjoyment.

I am sure the inhabitants will strongly support the Council in this decision, and they will have the satisfaction of knowing they will have conferred a great boon on the people.

And then 'One of the Multitude' wrote:

A town's meeting was called last year to say whether we were to have a park for the people of Leeds, and it was decided at that meeting, by an overwhelming majority, for the park. The inhabitants thought they had now got one, second to none in the country. But just at the last moment, when all is about to be settled, we have bankers, merchants, manufacturers, etc. – not a single working man amongst them, – stepping forward to petition the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors, praying them to stop the purchase of Roundhay Park.

What use is there in having a town's meeting, if the decision arrived at is to be put on one side? As for the distance to the Park, if the working classes do not think it too far, why should these gentlemen feel so very much anxiety about it? If they are not satisfied, let them by all means call another public meeting, not by ticket, attend themselves, and hear what the inhabitants of Leeds have to say. After all I do not think the distance or the cost is the real grievance. If these bankers, etc., did not reside somewhere near this park, I do not think we should have heard so much noise about either. What a pity that we, the working classes, are such a nuisance, because we should go to the Park in such large numbers, and perhaps disturb these would-be kindhearted gentlemen.

If these gentlemen would imitate that "despised" Councillor, Mr. Wray, and say, "We will put our £1,000 to yours, and purchase a park, and make the town a present of it," following the example of Miss Hyland, of Birmingham, they would confer on us a great boon.

The Fight Back Starts

The *Leeds Mercury* reported on the 22nd of February that a memorial was being 'very largely signed throughout the borough.' It was addressed to the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors of the borough of Leeds and was as follows:

We the undersigned ratepayers of the borough of Leeds, beg to express our surprise at the steps being taken by a few of the residents of the neighbourhood of Roundhay to deprive the people of Leeds of Roundhay Park as a place of resort and recreation, and would respectfully submit that during the month of September 1871 upwards of 200,000 inhabitants of the borough visited the park, and were delighted with the varied scenery, and expressed an earnest desire that it should become the property of the town.

That a public meeting called by the Worshipful the Mayor, was held in the Corn Exchange, and upwards of 1,500 voted in favour of the purchase by the Corporation as a public park for the borough of Leeds. That the Corporation visited the park at the request of the Worshipful the Mayor, and a large majority voted at the Council meeting, specially convened to consider the question of providing a park for Leeds, in favour of its being purchased by the town. That if Leeds is to place itself on a level with ... other towns by providing parks for the people ... Roundhay Park is peculiarly adapted to be one of them.

While not approving of the Corporation becoming speculators in land, yet to secure a park for the inhabitants of Leeds, laid out and ready for them to enjoy, of such varied beauties of wood and water, hill and dale, your memorialists venture to express their great satisfaction at the measures already taken by the Council to secure Roundhay Park, and would urge them to complete the purchase, believing that if ordinary care and prudence are exercised, the land for sale, after leaving sufficient for the park, will amply repay the cost of the whole undertaking, ... without cost to the ratepayers.

That to withdraw from the position, in respect to the park, already taken by the Council, at the request of the inhabitants in public meeting assembled, will show a want of public spirit, which your memorialists feel confident would not be sanctioned by the large body of ratepayers of the borough, who have a lively interest in all which affects the honour and prosperity of the Town of Leeds.

We are certain that those who have paid for the improvement of the town, ... are not unwilling to undertake the provision of places of healthy and rational recreation and enjoyment for themselves and their children a little removed from the hives of industry, where too often unhealthiness prevails.

A few days later on a Saturday afternoon (24th February 1872) there was a public meeting in the Leeds Corn Exchange. The weather was poor but about 4,000 attended, mainly working men. The Chairman, Mr. H.B. Legg said:

He felt that the question which had drawn them together was one of momentous importance and one that interested every man, woman, and child in ... Leeds. He was competent to speak of the natural beauties of Roundhay and the salubrity of its atmosphere ... eleven years ago, he thought so much of the locality he took a small farm there for the benefit of his health and that of his family, and it had been his privilege for many years to have the entree to Roundhay Park. He had tried to get a residence at Roundhay but some of the gentry there, knowing he had a large family, thought perhaps he might become chargeable on the parish (laughter) – and he was told to go to Shadwell, ... where he settled.

He was exceedingly sorry that they had been called together to consider a question which he had understood, was settled long ago. Had they been called together to move a vote of thanks to gentlemen who out of their princely fortunes had purchased that magnificent domain and given it for the public use, thus following an example which had been set in some other towns, he could have understood it, but to see gentlemen who had been considered the friends of the people, and many of whom had risen from the ranks, come forward to try to prevent the public obtaining that on which they had set their hearts, and to offer them no alternative, was, to say the least, a matter of surprise and regret.

They must support the Town Council in the steps they had taken. These steps had not been taken in a hurry. There had been no demonstration against the public acquisition of the park, but ... tens of thousands of them went out and saw the park ... and having seen it, decided that it was the place of places ...

Mr. John Johnson proposed the first resolution, as follows:

That this meeting desires to express its opinion that from its beautiful situation, its ease of access to the dense mass of the population, Roundhay Park is peculiarly adapted for a people's park for Leeds; and would express its strong

disapproval of the conduct of these persons who desire to deprive the men of Leeds of it for that purpose, believing that it is unfair and unjust to attempt to set aside the deliberate opinion of the inhabitants of Leeds and its Corporation in regard to any object and especially one which was almost a unanimous vote at the town's meeting, held in the Corn Exchange, in October last, presided over by his Worship the Mayor.

The motion was seconded, and carried with only three or four against it.

Mr. E. W. Batley hoped that the opposition to the Roundhay Park scheme was now almost buried. The Mayor and Corporation were with the working classes on this important point. It was the duty of the working classes to uphold the man who had fought the battle so far for them.

He moved:

That the meeting desires to express the sense of the obligation under which the town has been placed by the Mayor and Corporation of Leeds for the steps they have taken to secure Roundhay Park for Leeds and would urge on them the desirableness of their using every effort to complete the purchase and open it as early as possible to the people.

Mr. Hector Davidson seconded the motion. He mentioned that an objection to the purchase was the increase in the rates but 'he, and others who were more competent to do so' had estimated that 1¼ d. in the pound would meet the entire purchase money of Roundhay Park. Since the poorer inhabitants were in favour of purchasing the Park why should 'a few large ratepayers ... raise such an outcry against paying so small a sum.'

He continued:

Liverpool had as many as seven public parks, including the Botanical Gardens, and for one now in course of formation, the Corporation had paid £250,000. In addition they would have to spend an equal sum laying out the ground. This was Sefton Park, which had an area of 365 acres, and was distant rather more than two and a quarter miles from the centre of the town. Then there was Newsome Park, distant two and a half miles and Stanley Park, distant about two and a quarter miles. Within the last four or five years Liverpool had spent on her parks nearly a million sterling, and when they compared Leeds, where there was no park, with a town as Liverpool, they must feel that they stood in anything but a creditable position.

Then there was Manchester, Birmingham, Bradford, Halifax – all having parks at considerable distances from the centre of the town ... Peel Park, in Manchester, which was farther off than any other recreation ground in that town, came in for the greatest share of popularity. If a park were provided for Leeds, where there would be something worth seeing and enjoying, the inhabitants would not hesitate about half an hour's walk to reach it.

The action of the gentlemen who were now opposing the scheme ... had already allowed the question to be decided by the ratepayers. The Corporation had acted upon that decision ... had now gone to Parliament for powers to acquire the estate, and ... therefore ... the opposition had no legitimate right to come forward at this stage. – It was too late. They ought to have taken action at the first and they would have been perfectly justified in doing so, and what they ought to

do now was to gracefully stand on one side and allow the people of Leeds, who were able and willing and ready, to purchase a park for themselves.

The motion was carried with only one person against it.

Mr. John Geves, representing Holbeck, moved the adoption of a petition embodying the resolutions, to be signed by the Chairman, and presented to the Council. The motion was carried unanimously and large numbers signed a petition in favour of the purchase of the Park, exhibited in the hall.

The following Monday, the 26th February, a deputation consisting of Mr. H.B. Legg, Mr. Hector Davidson, Mr. S. Freeman, Mr. F.W. Batley and Mr. I. Pickard were received at a Council meeting. Mr. Legg explained that they were there on behalf of a meeting held in the Corn Exchange on Saturday to support the purchase of Roundhay Park. Every opportunity was offered for expression of dissent but the resolutions were passed with only one or two dissentients. Having made this statement, he handed in the resolutions and the address. The Mayor said the Council would accept them, and give them every consideration. Mr. Legg continued, saying that a petition in support of the purchase of the Park by the Council was having signatures collected, and would be forwarded to the Council when ready.

Before the deputation withdrew, the Town Clerk pointed out that Friday was the last day for petitions to be presented to the House of Commons against any of the clauses in the Leeds Improvement Bill. The overseers, surveyors, and inhabitants of Roundhay had lodged a petition. The overseers complained of the clauses about the rates, the surveyors said the roads would be depreciated by the wear and tear of the additional traffic, and 'certain gentlemen said it would not be a nice thing to have a public park at Roundhay'. Mr. Kitson also complained in a petition, of the annoyance crowds going to the Park would cause him at Elmete Hall. These were petitions against the Park. There were no petitions from the ratepayers.

A few days later, the *Leeds Mercury* received a letter from T. Louis Oxley, who lived in London near Hyde Park but who owned property in Roundhay:

I cannot resist congratulating ... the working classes of Leeds on the unanimous verdict which they gave at their meeting ... on the purchase of Roundhay Park.

As the largest landowner in Roundhay, after the Corporation, I feel almost entitled to speak, and I say that whether my property be injured or improved by the appropriation of this grand estate, I care not, so long as so golden an opportunity is not lost for ever ...

I am writing within a few yards of the Green Park. I live close to Hyde Park, ... at this moment it holds thousands who are waiting to see the procession pass through it, yet from its extent each individual will enjoy a view of the Queen equal to any one for which pounds have been paid. Had a narrow, selfish view guided our legislation in the park, where would these "lungs of London" be now? Wildernesses of houses!

Let the same spirit actuate the same ratepayers of Leeds, and then their children's children will be able to watch God's handiwork in nature ...

The Opposition Rallies

On the 7th March 1872, the *Leeds Mercury* printed a piece about James Kitson's petition against the Council's proposal to purchase Roundhay Park:

Mr. Kitson states that he is the owner of an estate [at Elmete Hall] comprising forty-two acres, and a mansion, which he has at considerable cost erected thereon, and which he and his family occupy as their permanent residence. The petitioner's grounds slope from his residence towards Roundhay Park, affording extremely beautiful views over the Park estate and the lakes therein. The appropriation of the Roundhay estate to the purpose of a park or place of public use and recreation would, in great measure destroy the seclusion and privacy of his grounds, and the enjoyment of his mansion and estate as a private residence, and would injure and depreciate the value thereof to a very large extent.

He submits that such appropriation is altogether unnecessary, as other and more convenient sites might be selected nearer to the centre of the town. After entering his protest against the Corporation becoming land speculators, Mr. Kitson proceeds :- "If any portion of the Roundhay estate, near or adjoining the petitioner's property, is (according to the apparent intentions of the Corporation) cut up into small building lots, and devoted to the erection thereon of dwelling-houses, the value of his residence and estate will be still further depreciated, ... whilst the bill does not contain any provision whatever for compensation being made to him for the great injury and annoyance which he would sustain ..."

The same day as the *Leeds Mercury* was reporting this, a deputation with the petition opposing the purchase of Roundhay Park was being presented to the Mayor. The leader of the deputation was Thomas Greenwood, and he was accompanied by A. Lupton, J. Manning, Walter Stead, J. Rhodes, W. Farrar Smith, John Butler (Stanningley), Chas. Hainsworth, and J. Bradshaw. Mr. Greenwood claimed that the petition had been signed by twenty five magistrates, five bankers, the whole of the employers in the flax, iron, and machine-making trades, and a large number of merchants and manufacturers.

A heated and somewhat acrimonious debate followed between the petitioners and the Mayor, lasting about an hour. The Mayor was annoyed, and said:

You [the deputation] only come forward at the eleventh hour, when we are going on the second reading of the bill, and say, "We are opposed to this." You never came to me as the Mayor before the bill was proposed but you come just when the House of Commons is going to sit on the bill, and ask us to withdraw our application to Parliament. We have a Council meeting on the 30th of this month, and I shall present this memorial at that meeting.

The Town Clerk hurriedly pointed out that if the memorial had to wait until then, the bill might be into committee and out again by that time. If the deputation thought there ought to be a Council meeting earlier, they could obtain the signatures of five members of the Council to request the Mayor to call a meeting.

When the Mayor reiterated that he would put the memorial before the Council meeting on the 30th, Mr. Manning said they had just been told that would be of no use. The Mayor refused point blank to call a special meeting. The Town Clerk had told them how to do it. It was up to them, but he would not do it.

The Mayor asked:

Supposing the Town Council, at your suggestion, were to say – “Well, now, owing to this memorial being presented to us, we require the Town Clerk to cease from prosecuting this bill in Parliament,” what would the result of that be?

Not receiving a satisfactory reply, the Mayor continued:

The result would be that the four gentlemen who had entered into the contract for the purchase would have the estate thrown on their hands, and he appealed to the deputation as citizens of a town that had a name for honour and integrity, and asked if they were prepared to place the town in this position.

It was possible, that a Council meeting would have to be summoned earlier than the 30th for the consideration of other matters, and if so, he would lay the memorial before it.

The deputation then withdrew.

Those in Favour Redouble their Efforts

Meanwhile, printer Charles Goodall reported in the same paper in a letter, that the petition for those in favour of the purchase of Roundhay Park now had 26,000 names ‘including magistrates, solicitors, medical men, and clergymen, large employers of labour in engineering and the iron trade and textile manufacturers, shopkeepers, clerks, operatives, and all classes of people.’ This demonstrated, he claimed, that all elements of their fellow-townsmen wished the Corporation to purchase the Park.

The *Leeds Mercury* announced on the 16th March that Roundhay Park would be open to the public over Easter (but not Sunday) and that tickets for admission on any day of the week (but not Sunday) could be obtained from the Mayor or any of the other three owners.

A special meeting of the Council was convened on the 28th March. The petition against the purchase of the Park was read by the Town Clerk.

Next, a deputation of twenty was admitted to present the petition in favour of purchasing the Park. It was headed by Sir Andrew Fairburn and included H.B. Legg and Charles Goodall. After the petition had been read, Sir Andrew Fairbairn

said the petition had been signed by 'upwards of 29,300 persons' and it 'might easily have been increased, but there had been lately many wet days, and this had prevented them from obtaining signatures at stands in the streets.' The signatures came from all classes of society and so 'it would, therefore, be seen that the town was not all on one side with regard to Roundhay Park.'

The Mayor thanked the deputation on behalf of the Council, and said that the memorial would 'have their serious consideration'. A deputation from the Leeds Band of Hope League, representing from 8,000 to 10,000 children, also presented their petition in favour of the purchase of the Park.

A Letter Against the Purchase

'A Londoner' wrote to the Leeds Mercury on Easter Monday. He was a visitor to Leeds and recently he had noticed on Roundhay Road 'perhaps twenty middle-aged men and about ten women with young children.' He was concerned for the ten women whom he felt would be 'too much exhausted with their day's work and quite unfit ... for their ordinary duties, and that their children would be crying and cross.' The rest of the crowd were 'strong youths who can any day walk to the charming fields in the neighbourhood of Harewood, Adel, etc. and feel no fatigue therefrom' and whom, he reasoned, did not need a park to obtain fresh air.

As for a railway to the Park, he said:

How many men with a wife and six children can afford to pay 3d., 4d., or 6d., each to enable them to spend a couple of hours in the fresh air? They may afford it once or twice in the year, as many do afford an excursion to Harrogate and other distant places ... Roundhay Park will be a charming place for the middle classes, who will drive out and enjoy the fresh air and the society they will meet in the Park, but the people can only see it once or twice a year.

If Woodhouse Moor were planted and laid out with beautiful flower beds and plenty of comfortable seats, such as you see in Battersea Park, and if Hunslet and Holbeck Moors were done the same to benefit those at the other end of the town, then you would see the sight I dream of, and children would grow up with a love of beauty, and an acquaintance with Nature's loveliest works, which they could not have from a dim recollection of a day when "mother took us to see a grand place a long way off, but we were all so tired out when we got there, we only sat down and cried, and mother said her back ached for a week afterwards."

... Roundhay Park will be a delightful resort if you have a grand restaurant in it, and a band and a promenade, but hard working, prudent people, with families to bring up respectably, will not waste their money in dear refreshments and fine clothes.

A Set-Back for Those in Favour of the Purchase

The *Leeds Mercury* of the 16th April 1872 reported that the Leeds Improvement Bill had come before the Court of Referees in the House of Commons. Mr Kitson had withdrawn his petition against the purchase of the Park by the Corporation

but this still left petitions against the Bill from the surveyors, overseers and the ratepayers of Roundhay. They were legally represented by Mr. Littler, and Leeds Corporation, by Mr. Serjeant Sargood.

Mr. Littler argued to allow his clients to be heard by a Committee of the House of Commons. This was precluded by the standing orders of the House. In legal terms he was asking for a '*locus standi*' for a temporary dispensation.

[In what follows, we must remember that Roundhay was not part of the borough of Leeds at this time]

Mr. Littler complained that Leeds Town Council :

... proposed to transfer his clients, for the purpose of police, to the borough of Leeds. The petition was signed by every owner and occupier, except two, in the township of Roundhay; and the only persons who could appear [before the House] were his clients, as there was no Local Board or sewerage authority. The Corporation proposed to acquire 770 acres ... and ... to exempt the Park from rates. The justices of the West Riding objected to have their jurisdiction transferred to the borough of Leeds. If the Corporation got those powers of jurisdiction for police purposes, the next step would be to take his clients over for all purposes ... the Corporation sought to carry out such agreements as they thought fit with the Justices of the West Riding, but the latter did not represent Roundhay.

Mr. Sergeant Sargood said the rating of the district was in the hands of the Guardians of the Leeds Union, and 'these were the proper ... representatives of the ratepayers to appear in that Court' to oppose any measure they felt was not in the interest of the people they were elected to represent and serve at the Poor-law Board. It would be a bad precedent he thought 'to allow a few ratepayers to come in and make themselves the mouthpiece of the whole body, when the latter had been properly elected.'

The objectors' proper course of action should have been to convene a public meeting of the inhabitants, to test the feeling and opinion of the township generally. He spoke at length against the petitioners' case for the *locus standi*, but it was in vain. They were granted it. The overseers, surveyors, and inhabitants of the township of Roundhay, would be able to present their objections to the Court of Referees, - at least to so much of it as related to Roundhay Park.

Grimshaw's Paintings of the Park

The *Leeds Mercury* of the 19th April 1872 reported on three paintings by Atkinson Grimshaw of views in Roundhay Park. These were commissioned by the Corporation as part of the case in support of the Leeds Improvement Bill 'to bring them under the notice of the House of Commons, and thus give them a better idea of the extent and beauty of the Park ...'

Liverpool Shows the Way

On the 20th May, Prince Arthur in a great ceremony, opened Sefton Park, a new public park in Liverpool. A competition had been held to design the park. The winning entry was elaborate and expensive. Only part of the design was carried out, including an artificial lake. The *Leeds Mercury* said:

When the timber grows a little it will be a very charming resort as the ground is well undulated, and there is a fine sheet of water. The margin of the park will be laid out for villa residences.

Whitsuntide Celebrations at the Park

Roundhay Park was again open to the public at Whitsuntide. The *Leeds Mercury* described the scene enthusiastically:

As might be anticipated, there was a "rush" to the Park at Roundhay ... the stream that poured in from an early hour in the morning until the shades of the evening found ample room to enjoy at leisure the scenery, which judging from the ... delight and astonishment heard on every side, was evidently witnessed for the first time yesterday by many thousands. One noticeable feature ... was the large proportion of middle-aged and even elderly persons who apparently had not been daunted by the distance they had to walk ... By the banks of the charming lake and near it, there were hundreds of very primitive-looking picnic parties, all evidently enjoying with a keen relish the good things with which they had provided themselves. The summit of the ivy-mantled ruin [the Castle] was rarely without its occupants all day. A refreshment marquee in the vicinity of the "Hall" was, as might be anticipated, well patronised.

Eighty boys from the Leeds Industrial School and some girl-inmates of the Workhouse were there. Buckton and Son, Hunslet Linen Works, gave a tea to their workpeople in a tent, with a band playing during the afternoon.

There was still room for complaint though. A 'Pedestrian' wrote to the *Leeds Mercury* about the dust on Roundhay Road. He said, 'Chapelton road was watered nearly the whole length yesterday, although there was not one-twentieth part of the traffic there was on Roundhay-road.'

Further Opposition Threatened

On the last day in May, members of Leeds Corporation including the Mayor and Alderman George, met Lord Redesdale, Chairman of Committees of the House of Lords, about some details of the Leeds Improvement Bill and the proposals to purchase the Park. As the Town Clerk had been told the previous afternoon, solicitor Mr. Thomas Dibb and Mr. Frank Lupton were there representing the petitioners against the purchase.

Lord Redesdale said he was completely against the practice adopted by the House of Commons in refusing to hear ratepayers against their 'representative body' and he allowed ten days' time for the ratepayers represented by Mr. Dibb

and Mr. Lupton to present a petition to the House, and moved a suspension of the Standing Orders of the House so that the petitioners could be heard.

Back in Leeds opponents of the purchase were meeting at the Queen's Hotel to decide what they should do next, and on the same day, representatives of those in favour of the purchase of the Park met in the Town Hall, to consider how they should respond to the opposition's appearing before the House of Lords.

Another Meeting for those in Favour of the Purchase

The next day (Tuesday, 4th June 1872), in the evening, another but more substantive meeting took place in the Town Hall. It was to form a committee, and decide what steps should be taken 'to secure a full expression of the opinion of the inhabitants of Leeds on the opposition which is being made in the House of Lords.' The attendance grew, and eventually 'a great many persons could not gain admission.'

Speakers were again concerned that a 'small minority of gentlemen' should have come forward at the last moment 'in opposition to the will of the people.' The Chairman, James Holroyd, explained that the Bill seeking to give the Corporation power to buy the Park had been before the House of Commons and how Lord Redesdale had allowed them ten days in which 'to promote their opposition', and to get up a petition to bring before him, whilst those supporting the Corporation had the same length of time to show 'they did not wish to run away from it.'

Alderman George Tatham moved the first resolution. It was an expression of support for the purchase of the Park by the Corporation and a condemnation of their opponents and their late actions.

He saw that the memorial presented against the Park, 'numbered about 500 names of the most influential magistrates, bankers, manufacturers, and tradesmen that he ever saw attached in a memorial' and

he never read a memorial with so much pain as he did that. It distressed him to see these 400 or 500 gentlemen who ought to be the leaders of the people, placing themselves in direct antagonism to the wishes of the great bulk of the people ... There were about 500 of the objectors, but they must bear in mind that nearly sixty times as many had signed the petition in favour of the purchase.

Alderman Tatham agreed with the fifth clause in the objectors' petition. He did not believe the Corporation should speculate in land. However, they were compelled to buy 700 acres of the Roundhay Estate at the time they did, or not buy it at all, since the Court of Chancery had advertised the sale of the estate in certain lots. If they could have bought 350 acres for a park for the £40,000 they had at their disposal, he thought it would have been wrong to buy 700 acres to recover their costs. However, if the estate had not been sold at that time, the order of the Court of Chancery was that the estate would be offered for building lots, and the chance of getting the Park for the people would have been lost for ever.

J.W. Denton was against the purchase. The Corporation owed about two and a quarter million pounds, which amounted to about £10 per head of the whole of the population of Leeds. He moved an amendment saying it was 'not judicious to purchase Roundhay Park at the present time.'

Arthur Lupton got up to speak but he was received 'with groans and other expressions of disapprobation' to the dismay of some of the later speakers and he immediately left the meeting. He later wrote a letter to the *Leeds Mercury* complaining of his treatment.

The amendment was lost; only three hands went up for it. The original motion was therefore carried almost unanimously.

A Major Moore moved a resolution asking the Mayor to call a public meeting of the inhabitants of Leeds as soon as possible, to support the Corporation in the purchase of Roundhay Park and to protect against the actions of those opposing the Leeds Improvement Bill in the House of Lords.

J.F. Cousins was one of those who had signed the petition against the purchase of the Park. He did not want to see the whole of the money the town had to 'deal with recreation grounds' spent on a park which he thought was inaccessible to a large number of the inhabitants of Leeds. But, he said, if 140 gentlemen could be found to subscribe £1,000 each, he was prepared to do so himself.

However, the motion was carried by a large majority and it was decided that they would ask for the public meeting to be on Saturday afternoon. It was also decided to draw up a petition to be signed by both ratepayers and inhabitants of the town, for presentation to the House of Lords.

More Meetings

The next day (Wednesday, the 5th of June) there was a meeting of the Town Council but before this took place a deputation presented a petition containing 550 signatures to the Mayor asking him to convene another town's meeting about the purchase of Roundhay Park. The Mayor was pleased to comply with their request and he asked for their help 'to secure for any opponent who might wish to address the audience, a silent and patient hearing'.

Shortly afterwards, the Mayor was not a happy man. At their last meeting the Town Clerk had read a report on the Improvement Bill after it had passed the House of Commons. He had now prepared another one for this meeting but the report had been seen by Alderman George before the Mayor had set eyes on it.

As Chairman of the committee that had gone to London, the Mayor insisted he should have been allowed to read the report before it was presented to the Council or any member of it. He was not concerned for himself, but what had happened was a slight to the office of Mayor and while ever he was serving in that capacity he would always uphold the dignity and rights of the position. Alderman George and the Town Clerk gave some excuses for their behaviour, with which the Mayor was somewhat reluctantly satisfied.

Later in the meeting the Mayor reported that the North Eastern Railway Company were considering a railway line from Leeds to Roundhay Park but they would not be making any application to Parliament until they had arranged with the landowners as to the price to be paid for the land required. It would run from Leeds to Roundhay Park, on to Moortown and Meanwood and then join the line to Harrogate at Headingley. It was then agreed that the Corporation Seal would be fixed to a conditional agreement between the Corporation and the Railway Company.

The next day, Thursday the 6th June 1872, there was a meeting in the Town Hall of the 'General Council' appointed previously for the supporters of the purchase of the Park. It was 'to arrange the order of business at the town's meeting and demonstrations on Saturday afternoon.'

Bands would play from Hunslet, Holbeck, Woodhouse, and York Road, and on to the Coloured Cloth Hall. After the meeting the bands would march via Boar Lane, Briggate and North Street, to Roundhay Park and would play there until dark. If Saturday afternoon was wet, the meeting would be held in the Corn Exchange.

On the Saturday morning the Leeds Mercury urged:

As it is of supreme importance that the petition in favour of the purchase should have as many signatures ... as possible, arrangements have been made for those attending the meeting this afternoon to sign as they enter the Cloth Hall Yard.

Shortly after midday, it started to rain and it became heavier as the time for the meeting drew near, so it was decided to adjourn to the Corn Exchange. In spite of the downpour, between 5,000 and 6,000 attended. The gallery inside the building was crowded. The four bands marched from different parts of the borough to the Cloth Hall but instead of marching to Roundhay Park after the meeting, they were sent to the Flower Show at the Royal Park, because of the bad weather.

The National Anthem was played at the start of the meeting and after the Town Clerk had read the requisition convening the meeting, the Mayor spoke at length. He outlined events leading to the purchase of the Park and how the Council had accepted the offer to purchase lots 19 and 20. He said:

There was ample time given for meetings to be held, for petitions to be signed, and for general expression of opinion by the opponents of the Park, to influence ... the Council ... No such notice was taken at that time by the gentlemen who were now opposing the park scheme ... Those who were opposing the Corporation in their application to Parliament for their Improvement Bill were many of them ... men who had earned ... the esteem of their fellow-townsmen.

He regretted

that some of them ... should have come forward at a time like this and tried to stem the current of progress by an act such as they had committed ... As Englishmen there was nothing more distasteful to them than a stab in the dark.

Turning to the question of whether the Corporation of Leeds should purchase lots 19 and 20 of the Roundhay Estate, the Mayor said that by the Council resolution of the 13th October 1871, the inhabitants of Leeds had in fact already bought it all. 'They had entered into a contract with the four purchasers, and that contract was as binding as any contract in the world could be of a moral character.' It would reflect badly on the reputation of the Town if the contract was repudiated.

He was confident he said:

that in the eyes of a committee of the House of Lords, ... they would see there was no other way possible than the completion of the contract. If the case should be otherwise, where would a Corporation like that of Leeds stand in the future in connection with any other of their great movements?

He thought the purchase of 770 acres at Roundhay was a bargain and compared it to Sefton Park. There, 350 acres plus building land had cost the people of Liverpool £440,000, and £180,000 had been spent on making it a suitable park. They had nothing to do at Roundhay. They 'had hill and dale, lakes, waterfalls, and streams, beyond anything that could be produced by artificial means.'

He then turned to land speculation. They had been told many times they had no right to be speculators but he was sure that 'if they had speculated a little more, the Corporation would have been a deal better off.' In support of this, he gave examples of where the Corporation had either saved money or could have saved money by selling off surplus land in connection with various projects in the town.

Next, the Town Clerk read the memorial which was to be presented to the House of Lords. He was followed by Sir Andrew Fairburn.

After a few pleasantries, Sir Andrew spoke about the distance of the park from town. He considered this to be no objection at all. He said:

In fact it was the very reason they should buy the Park ... Suppose a park were made out of Mr. Gott's property, if it were vacant, and the Cardigan-fields, who would like to go there to be between the smoke of Kirkstall Forge on the one hand or Whitham's Forge on the other? ... Woodhouse Moor ... was also becoming very much exposed to smoke ... that was one of the reasons why he had left the town.

He did not think they would like a park in Holbeck or Hunslet. In his opinion there was only one park they could possibly get and that was Roundhay Park.

The North Eastern Railway Company was ready to construct a railway which would take them to the Park. When it was finished there would be no difficulty in getting there at the cost of a few pence. It would be better to spend money this way once a week than stay at home and spend it in a public-house, he thought.

As for those who were saying that the Corporation should not buy land to recover costs by selling what was not required, they could do so under the Improvement Acts. He referred them to the Improvement Act of 1866, section 73, which gave them power 'to buy land to increase Woodhouse Moor, and in other parts of the borough or in the neighbourhood of the borough'. It also specifically stated in the Act that 'they might recoup themselves by the sale of the land they did not require.'

Although he was in favour of the Roundhay Park scheme, those who were not were perfectly justified in their opposition if they had spoken out at the proper time. He continued:

It was not, however, until the month of February – four months after the sale – that it oozed out through the newspapers that there was going to be opposition raised to the purchase but no formal opposition was offered until the 8th March last, when all the notices had been given and other formalities complied with, when the bill might have been in committee, and just as the Corporation were ready to appear before the Committee, then the opposition showed itself ... And now, at the last moment, just as the Mayor was going before Lord Redesdale in the full expectation that the bill would pass without further trouble, a certain number of gentlemen came forward and said, "We are going to oppose it," and therefore Lord Redesdale suspended the standing orders of the House in order that they might appear.

Sir Andrew concluded by moving the following resolution:

That this meeting tenders its warmest thanks to the Worshipful the Mayor and Corporation for the efforts they have made to secure Roundhay Park for the people of Leeds. It also assures them it will be a great disappointment to the vast majority of the ratepayers of this borough if so desirable a place of resort and recreation be not secured for them, and expresses its surprise and regret at the opposition which has been raised to its purchase before the Committee of the House of Lords. This meeting therefore urges the Corporation to carry out the engagements already entered into in their integrity; and, in order to support the action of the Corporation requests the Worshipful the Mayor, as Chairman, to sign, for presentation to the House of Lords, the following petition.

Finally, he was going on Monday to London and if he could help the Corporation by appearing before the House of Lords, he would do so with pleasure.

James Holroyd and the Reverend S. Flood spoke for some time afterwards. In particular they made the same point that in these arguments about the cost of the Park, and the rates from out of which these costs would be mainly paid,

the wealthier ratepayers should not be regarded as having more weight than the poorer ratepayers. The poorer ratepayer could be making as great a sacrifice in some cases than a richer gentleman who could afford paying the rates with less hardship.

The Reverend Flood, thanking the Mayor and his supporters for their efforts to secure the Park, sensed the feeling of the meeting gathered there was saying 'with the mighty voice of that great multitude, "God helping us, we will stand by them."

Hector Davidson, 'as a working class representative', said:

he urged them all to sign the petition in favour of a purchase, and be careful that they did not sign the wrong one. He mentioned the instance of a man having been deluded in this way, and when he found out his mistake he tore his name off the petition, and gave the canvasser twopence to buy a clean sheet.

The resolution was then put to the meeting and carried with about half a dozen against it.

Subsequent speakers spoke warmly of the efforts of the Mayor in the attempts to buy the Park for the people of Leeds, and a vote of thanks to him was carried.

The Mayor stood up to say:

He felt obliged to them for the support they had given him ... the effort they were making was worth the sacrifice of a life, and if to attain this object he was to sacrifice his life, he should feel that he had given to the people of Leeds ... a result which would be far more than commensurate with anything he had done. Never in the course of his life had he experienced a responsibility as weighty as that which he felt resting on him ... He was quite confident that if they assisted him, and worked in procuring as numerously-signed a petition as they could procure, the result they sought would be obtained.

The meeting came to an end shortly afterwards.

A week later, the *Leeds Mercury* reported that 'the petition in favour of the purchase of Roundhay Park had been signed by upwards of 40,000 persons of all classes ... including a great many large ratepayers.'

The Final Action, - in the House of Lords

The Leeds Improvement Bill came before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Thursday and Friday, the 19th and 20th June 1872.

On the Thursday, Mr. Denison Q.C., for the Corporation, the 'promoters' of the Bill, spoke first, presenting the case for the Corporation. He said:

Technically the object of the bill was merely to give the Corporation further powers with respect to raising money to provide public parks, because they had already, by the Act of 1866, powers to provide parks, but that Act only gave them power to raise £50,000 which was insufficient for the purchase. The Corporation was now applying to Parliament to sanction the purchase already provisionally allowed.

The population of Leeds was, in round numbers, 260,000. There were in the town 60,000 ratepayers, and the area of the borough was 34 miles round, comprising eleven townships, and a fraction of one or two others. Nothing was more fully recognised now ... for populations of this kind, to have some place where fresh air could be obtained out of the reach of smoke, where people see green trees and green fields, and if they could possibly enjoy a sight of water, so much the better.

In the present instant, the people would enjoy the sight of a very fine piece of water. The park ... was now fully laid out as a park, and was not ... waste land which would have to be made into a park at some large expenditure of money.

In Leeds, trees 'absolutely refused to grow' because of the smoke, and sheep were 'black or blue'. Roundhay Park was 2½ miles from the centre of Leeds but for 'a park to be effective for such a town it must be about that distance from the centre.' He argued that only the north of the town centre was suitable, and this spot in particular.

Mr. Denison continued at length summarising the sale of the Park and how lots 19 and 20 were purchased by the Mayor and others, and accepted by the Council, conditional to their acquiring the necessary power from Parliament. He vigorously defended the Corporation's case against that of the opposition. Both petitions had been presented and it seemed to him that the petition in favour of the purchase, signed by between 60,000 and 70,000 inhabitants of Leeds paled into insignificance that of the petitioners against the bill which had been signed by 2,400. Finally, he concluded:

The loss of this opportunity would be a calamity to be deprecated perhaps for a hundred years to come, should Leeds be prevented from acquiring the public park it so much required.

John Barran spoke next, again at length, under examination by Mr. Rodwell Q.C., who represented Leeds Corporation. He said:

I have lived in Leeds thirty years, and have taken an interest in public affairs. I employ more than 1,500 hands directly and indirectly. The population of Leeds is about 270,000, ... and the open spaces in the neighbourhood are rapidly decreasing. It has long been the object of the people of Leeds to have a public park ...

Barran then spoke of the events up to and beyond the sale of the Roundhay Estate lots 19 and 20, and how he and three others had bought them, and offered them to the Corporation at cost plus interest and charges. Their offer was accepted by a Council meeting resolution, provided the necessary powers could be obtained from Parliament.

He continued:

The object of this bill is to get the powers named in the resolution. We received congratulations and thanks from all parts of the borough for the purchase we had

made, and I heard very few objections. The conditions of the sale were modified to suit us and to defer payment.

That was in October, and until March it was considered that the matter was to proceed without opposition; and when I heard of the opposition in certain quarters I was very much astonished. In consequence of this, a large public meeting was held, at which a resolution was passed condemning the conduct of those who would prevent Leeds from getting this park, and urging the Corporation to use every effort to complete the purchase. Another resolution was passed expressing surprise that a few inhabitants of the neighbourhood of Roundhay Park should attempt to deprive the town of the means of recreation. Afterwards a memorial, signed by 30,000 inhabitants, was presented to the Corporation by Sir A. Fairbairn and a very influential deputation, in favour of the purchase, and the Corporation of Leeds continued in its determination ...

We ... understood that the bill would pass the House of Lords as an unopposed bill, but at half-past six o'clock on the evening before the day on which we had to appear before Lord Redesdale we had the first intimation of that opposition.

The Mayor continued under cross examination:

There was a strong expression of feeling against the gentleman who had raised this opposition, and particularly to the manner in which the opposition had been offered under the circumstances ... I was requested to call another meeting, and did so on the 8th June. It was after that date that this large petition in favour of the bill was signed. At the meeting a resolution was passed urging the Corporation to carry out their engagements in regard to the Park. From first to last there has been strong unanimity in Leeds on this question, and it has latterly increased considerably. I have no doubt we should be able to recoup a considerable amount of the purchase money. Even if we could not, it would be desirable to have this park, for I believe there is not another public park like it in Her Majesty's dominions.

The Mayor was then cross-examined by Mr. Venables, Q.C. for the petitioners about some items reported in the *Leeds Mercury* at the time but mainly about the incident involving Alderman Carter and his attempts to restrict the purchasers to the £40,000 allowed by Parliament. The Mayor was steadfast under questioning and Mr. Venables seemed rather exasperated with the Mayor's replies, so much so that there was an occasion when their Lordships 'expressed an opinion that time was being wasted by the style of cross-examination.' In the end the Mayor just said, 'I merely confined the liability of the Corporation to the sum it then had power to spend.'

Shortly afterwards the meeting adjourned.

The following day they reconvened. The Mayor was recalled and was told by the Chairman of the Select Committee that the value of the land was the chief point on which the Committee desired to be satisfied with regard to the promoter's case.

To this end, Mr. Eddison was examined by Mr. Rodwell. He was a land surveyor and agent, and he lived in Leeds. He had known the Roundhay Estate for eight years and had been employed by the vendor of it previous to the sale. The vendors consulted him as to the valuation and the probable amount for which it would sell. He had also suggested the reserve prices for the Court of Chancery. On lot 19 the reserve price was £107,000, the exact amount given. On lot 20 the reserve price was £32,000, and the amount given was £37,000. He believed on the basis of sales since the purchase that there had been an increase in value to the extent of 50 per cent. Purchasers regarded the park as a security that the land would not be built on, and that was a temptation for them to buy the surrounding lots for building purposes.

When he was cross-examined by Mr. Venables, for the petitioners, Mr. Eddison said he did not know whether anyone had bid besides the Mayor. The auctioneer implied there were other biddings, but he himself did not remember seeing any one bid except the Mayor. He also admitted that portions of the Roundhay Estate that were not purchased by the Mayor and the other gentlemen, sold for more than his reserve price, 'in many cases 30 and 50 per cent more'.

At this point Mr. Rodwell was about to call another land agent but the Chairman of the Select Committee said they were satisfied.

Mr. Venables now spoke at length for the opposition to the bill.

He said:

Although there was a significant majority in favour of the scheme, they thought most of them ... had probably not considered all the circumstances and conditions of the scheme, and believing that they saw a very serious objection to the plan, the petitioners confidently appealed to their Lordships to give a fair hearing to a minority, and asked that they should not be taxed, and that the town should not be taxed foreign to the proper functions of the Corporation ...

To a large part of the town of Leeds this scheme would be practically useless, for a distance of three miles would prevent an ordinary use of the Park. Also their objections applied to the 500 acres purchased beyond the 260 acres needed for the park. They themselves appealed to Parliament for protection against the Corporation going out of its proper province to speculate on land at their expense

...

Another land agent, Mr. Gouthwaite was examined by Mr. Venables. His testimony was very colourful. He was present at the auction.

There was a great mob of people and a great row. The Mayor made his bid very loudly ... and the audience cheered ... I saw no-one else bid. It had been known for some time that the Mayor intended to buy these two lots ... I have no doubt that the price given by the Mayor was £20,000 too dear.

Mr. Arthur Lupton, formerly a partner in the firm of Lupton and Co., but now retired and living at Headingley, was examined by Mr. Venables. He thought the people were not likely to visit the Park except on holidays and special occasions.

Workmen could not go four or five miles to the park after their hours of work were over. He objected to the Corporation's taking such a large quantity of land. It might not be sold for twenty years. He complained that when he and others went to present the memorial, they were received by the Mayor 'in a manner which he was sorry to see, and those who got up to speak on behalf of the deputation were interrupted by the Mayor.'

According to the *Leeds Mercury*, Mr. Denison then 'replied upon the whole case, combating the arguments of the Learned Counsel on the other side and criticising the evidence given by the petitioners, and particularly that of Mr. Lupton.'

Shortly afterwards the room was cleared and when the public had been readmitted, the Chairman of the Select Committee declared 'The preamble is proved.'

Mr. Littler proposed an amendment to the clause including the Park in the borough, for police purposes, but it was objected to by the promoters and rejected by the Committee.

The remaining clauses were disposed of without opposition, and the bill having gone through the Committee, it was ordered to be reported to the House of Lords.

The Mayor Announces Victory

At a meeting of the members of the Council at the end of July, the Mayor congratulated them. The bill had received the Royal assent and they could now call the Park their own. With the passing of the 'Leeds Improvement Act, 1872 (35 & 36 Vict.),' Leeds Corporation could borrow sufficient money to buy Roundhay Park from its owners.

Charles Goodall's Bills

There was another meeting of the Council in August in which the cost of getting up the petitions was considered. The printer, Charles Goodall, had been a busy man. Whilst he was a keen supporter of the purchase of the Park, it had also brought him a considerable piece of business which was extra to the printing contract he had with the Corporation. The Mayor had encouraged him all along and Goodall tendered his bills for payment.

The Council's Parliamentary Committee had somewhat reluctantly endorsed them, and at this meeting, when Alderman George moved that some items be reduced or should not be paid, a vigorous discussion ensued. Now the town had secured the Park, many of those who had openly opposed the Corporation's purchase of it had expressed their intentions to move on and do their best for the town. Here, however, they could not help themselves and some of the old rivalry surfaced.

The first bill, for £206, was the cost of raising the first memorial to the Council in favour of the purchase of Roundhay Park. The Town Clerk advised them that they could not legally pay this and the Mayor accepted the responsibility for it.

'From the first I was anxious that the charge should not be presented to the Council', he said, and when the subject of music was raised he admitted he had also paid for the bands' services at events in connection with the purchase of the Park.

In viewing the whole situation, Mr. Harland said he believed he had been misled. He did not know that the movement in favour of the purchase was being progressed by money from wealthy gentlemen and was not really a spontaneous wish of the people of Leeds. Also, he said if the Council 'paid for getting up the petition in favour of the purchase, it would only be fair to pay for the getting up of that against it'. The Mayor reminded him that the Council had already decided to buy the Park by that time. The second bill contained £537 10s., which had been spent in pursuit of the Council's resolution to get the Improvement Bill through Parliament.

Mr. George Smith was so concerned at what he had heard, that he wanted to send a copy of Goodall's bill to every ratepayer, but Alderman Kelsall recalled the Council's resolution to use all fair and legitimate means to obtain the Park, so he felt the Corporation had no choice but to settle it.

Mr. W.L. Jackson told how Mr. Goodall had presented his bill to the Parliamentary Committee and when the Committee sent it back 'for correction', Mr. Goodall had said 'the bill would have to be paid by the Corporation' or 'he should charge interest.' Mr. Jackson took a dim view of this 'considering the amount of business Mr. Goodall got from the Corporation.' He was disappointed too, since he had signed the petition against the purchase of the Park but he stopped short of signing the second petition against it because he thought 'the public were exceedingly desirous to have it, and now he found that it had been an organised affair, got up by Mr. Charles Goodall.'

Discussion continued along these lines and concluded with the Mayor saying that he 'would rather pay every shilling' of Goodall's bill than have the Council pay 'any expense which it had not incurred.' He explained that 'when Mr. Goodall came to him and said he could not undertake the risk and expense of getting up this petition, he (the Mayor) told him he would take the responsibility upon himself.'

Charles Goodall was paid most of what he had asked for, one way or another. After Roundhay Park was officially opened by Prince Arthur on the 19th September, 1872, he quickly published a book entitled 'Goodall's Illustrated Royal Handbook to Roundhay Park' with the following note on the front cover:

Dedicated, by permission, to John Barran, Esq. Mayor of Leeds, to whose untiring assiduity and zeal the Inhabitants of the Borough are mainly indebted for the enjoyment of so splendid a Public Pleasure Ground.

The Corporation Buys the Park.

It was some considerable time before John Barran and the other three purchasers of the Park received the money owing to them. The Corporate Property Committee in July 1873, passed a resolution asking that:

the sum of £16,604 10s. 9d. be paid to the four Gentlemen who purchased and sold to the Corporation, the Roundhay Park Estate, being the balance due to them, [and] that all deeds and documents relating to the purchase be delivered to the Town Clerk on the payment of such sum ...

The amount was 'in satisfaction of all claims they may have against the Corporation in respect of the purchase.'

A few months later the Borough Accounts were finalised for the year from the 1st of September 1872 to the 31st August 1873. Under 'Expenditure' and 'To Roundhay Park', there were items under 'Payments by the Purchasing Committee' amounting to £17,985. This included 'Deposit Money' and 'Interest', totalling £15,3034. Under 'Payments by the Treasurer' there was a total of £136,189 which included 'Balance of Purchase Money', £125,100, and 'Interest', £8,459. The Corporation had spent £154,175 on the Park during that financial year but the purchase of the Park by the Corporation was now complete.

Final Words.

There were still many challenges and problems in the development of the Park and the means of access to it before it became visited regularly and enjoyed by all cross-sections of the community. We must never forget it was the achievements of John Barran and his supporters that made this possible. We owe them a great debt of gratitude for their commitment and farsightedness in securing the 'People's Park', one of the finest places of



Map of Lots 19 & 20 bought by John Barran

Lot 20 can be recognised today as Soldiers' Field bounded by Old Park Road from where it meets Lidgett Park Road, on to Gledhow Lane, down to Oakwood and along the Wetherby Road almost to the Park Gates. As shown by the red dots, the boundary over the fields keeps to the higher ground above Hill 60 and for most of its length until descending to Wetherby Road.

Adapted from Hepper's Sale Map of 1871