

Sale of Surplus Land from the Roundhay Park Estate. The Pursuit of 'a Park for Nothing'.

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In 1871 the Mayor of Leeds, John Barran and four associates, bought (as it turned out, on behalf of Leeds Corporation) Lots 19 and 20 (see Fig. 1) for £139,000 at the auction of 1364 acres of the Nicholson Roundhay Park Estate. These lots contained 770 acres of land and lakes, three farmhouses, and other buildings including the Mansion. Barran's dream was to provide a park for Leeds out of these two lots at no cost to the ratepayer.

His first proposal was to finance the purchase by a surcharge on the Corporation's gas sales, but instead, it was decided to sell off as much of Lots 19 and 20 as would not be required for the Park. In fact the plan was to sell more than half of the land for superior housing.

Land which later became Park Avenue and West Avenue was auctioned by John Hepper of Hepper and Sons (see Fig. 2), on the 16th June 1876. John Barran set an example, buying two lots (coincidentally Lots 19 and 20) on which he later built 'Parcmont' for his son, John Barran junior. 'Parcmont' still exists and in recent years it has been divided into apartments.

Joseph Hobson, a black beer manufacturer, bought lot 1, where he was living as a tenant. It was the only plot in the sale with buildings on it and was called 'Roundhay Villa' in those days. It also still exists, now known as 'Green Acre', 17 Wetherby Road.

All the lots, nearly 50 acres, were sold, and as Chairman of Leeds Corporate Property Committee, Barran reported that land for which the Corporation had paid £11,000, had been sold for £26,000. This was only £6,000 short of the £32,000 he had paid for the 173 acres of Lot 20 five years earlier. What was left unsold of Lot 20 was virtually the whole of Soldier's Field as can be seen from Fig. 1 and Hartley's farmhouse and other buildings.

This was a good start. If surplus land on the Park Estate could continue to be sold so easily, the capital sum of £139,000 paid for the Estate would soon be recovered.



Fig. 1. Map of Lots 19 and 20 bought by John Barran et al. Adapted from Hepper's Sale Map of October 1871. Lot 20 is the lighter-shaded lower section. The boundary between the two lots is shown by the dark line along the top of what is known today as Hill 60.

ROUNDHAY PARK ESTATE
 Sale of Surplus Land By Auction
 Friday 16th June 1876
 Details from Hepper's Sales Plan

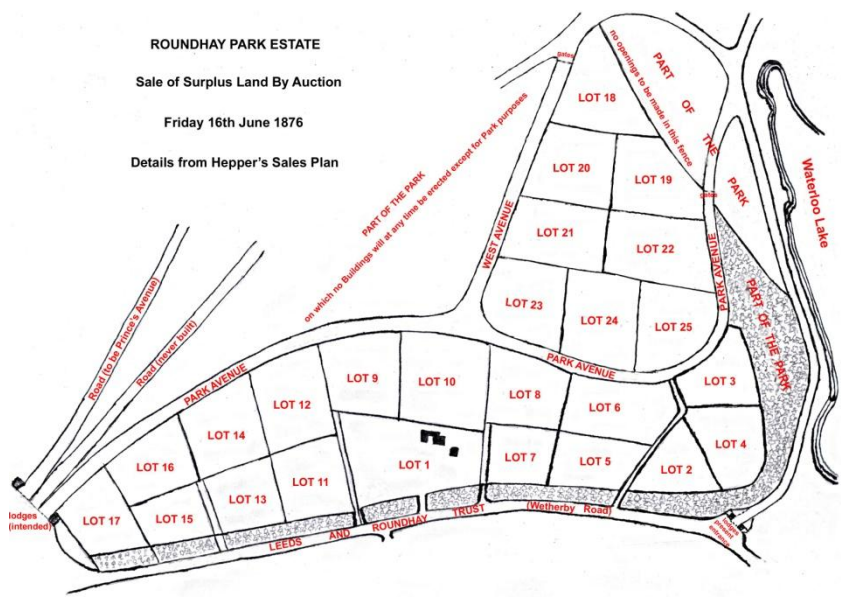


Fig.2.

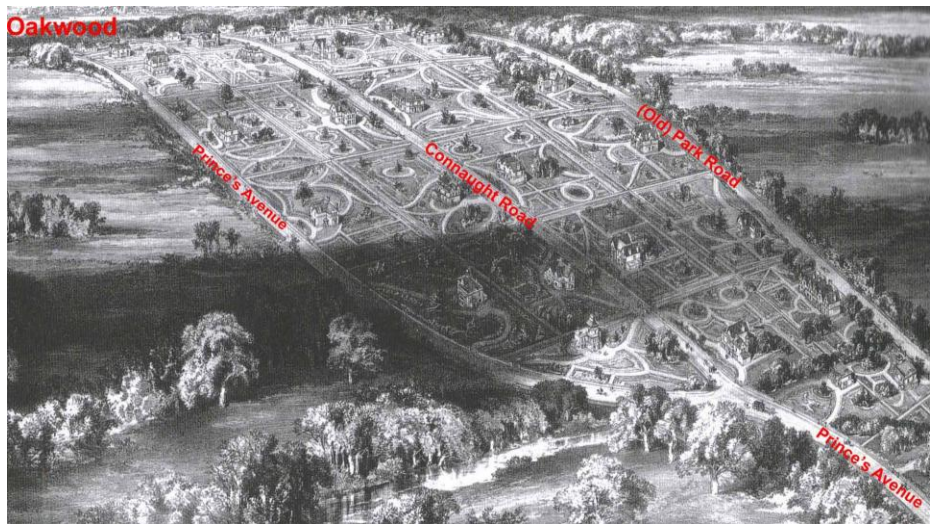


Fig. 3. Leeds Corporation's second sale of surplus land from the Roundhay Park Estate, September 1876. An artist's impression of the Villa Sites as viewed from the roof of Roundhay Park Mansion. Adapted from Steven Burt's 'An Illustrated History of Roundhay Park'.

The next sale of the Park Estate took place a few months later in September when more of Lot 20, land and buildings between the current boundaries of Old Park Road, Gledhow Lane and Prince's Avenue, up to and including, Canal Gardens (See Fig. 3), were auctioned.

It was not a success. Only 5 plots totalling about 11 acres were sold, out of the 38 villa sites which had been staked out. These were bought by Thomas Green, the iron founder, whose premises in North Street with the blue plaque and the clock with his name on it, are still standing.

At the same sale, only one bid of 3 shillings (15p) per square yard was offered for Canal Gardens. This was rejected, to the apparent relief of the Park's Manager, Joseph Clark. Clark mentioned respectfully in a report soon afterwards that the Canal Gardens were 'our headquarters for every kind of work which is carried out in this place' leaving his masters to think about the effect on the daily running of the Estate if the Gardens had been disposed of, as could have happened.

In the same sale, lots 23 and 24, just over 4 acres of land and the buildings called Hartley's Homestead, which had been vacated by farmer Richard Hartley and his family, were withdrawn because of the poor showing. This is the site of 'The Homestead' group of buildings on the Park side of Old Park Road. There has been a farmhouse and outbuildings here since at least the 1770s.

At least three generations of the Hartley family had farmed in Roundhay. Richard's grandfather, his namesake, was farming here before the days of Thomas Nicholson at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Richard Hartley junior was given notice to quit by the Corporation shortly after he complained that their surveyor's pegs marking the line of the proposed new roads through the Estate were a problem for his mowing machines.

In June 1877, the Homestead lots were successfully auctioned off and sold to John Holmes, fetching a total of £2,800. John Holmes had been a draper in Neville Street in Leeds in his early years and later a shoe manufacturer. He was a talented man of

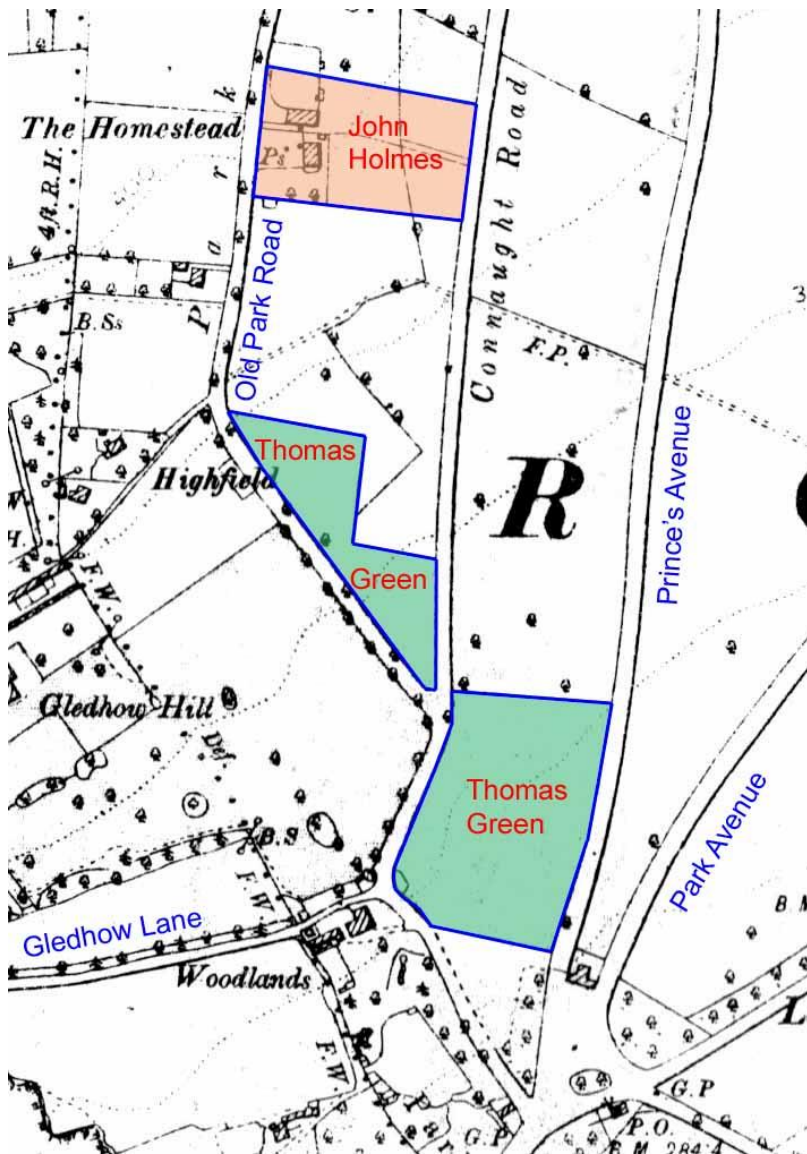
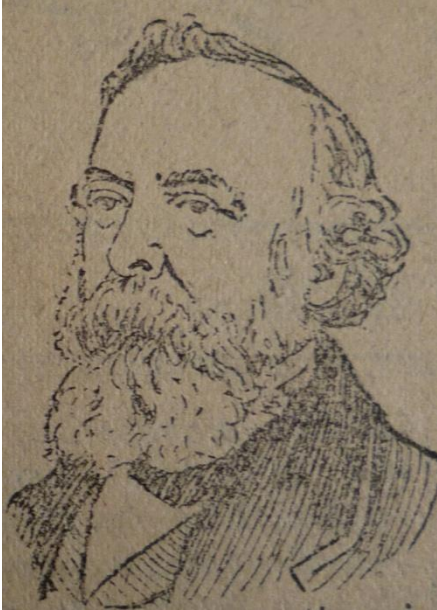


Fig. 4, based on the 1891/1892 OS map, showing land bordering on Old Park Road, at that time belonging to John Holmes and Thomas Green. Connaught Road exists as just a grass track these days from the rear of the North Leeds Cricket Club field along to the junction of Lidgett Park Road and Prince's Avenue.



John Holmes

many parts, a reformer, a philanthropist and a respected antiquarian. The OS map of 1891/92 shows the plots he bought extended from Old Park Road to border on Connaught Road (see Fig. 4). The land from the back of the Homestead group of houses to Connaught Road is now part of the Park so this must have been sold back to the Corporation at some stage.

The same thing happened to the plots of land bordering on Old Park Road owned by Thomas Green mentioned earlier (see Fig. 4). By the time Thomas died in 1892, the plots had not been developed for building and they remained so until 1900 when the Corporation bought them back from his family to restore the continuity of Connaught Field on the Old Park Road side of Prince's Avenue. According to a newspaper article the Corporation had recently hosted the show for the Yorkshire Agricultural Society and they were hoping this would help them to attract the bigger prestigious Royal Agricultural Society show some time in the future.

All manner of difficulties had prevented the extensive sale of land from the Estate after that first successful sale in June 1876 and the interest on the capital cost of this surplus land was considered by many to be an unnecessary burden on the ratepayer in the earlier years of the public park. By the beginning of the new century, the infrastructure and transport links were at last in place and Roundhay was established as a highly desirable place to live.

The time was right. The Corporation decided to sell land in the north of the Park Estate. The homestead and several of the fields

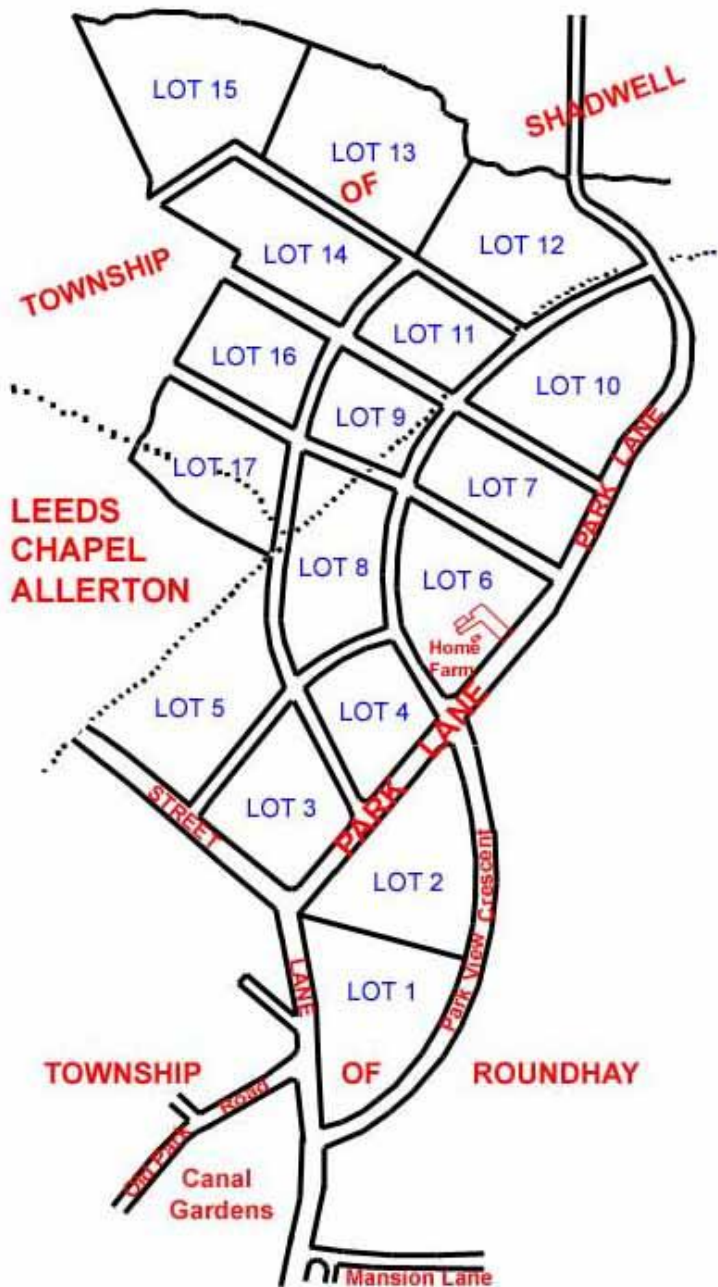


Fig. 5. Leeds Corporation's Roundhay Park Estate. Sale of Surplus Land at Home Farm on 25 April 1902.

of Home Farm (sometimes also known as Park Farm as shown in Fig. 1) were auctioned off in 17 lots (see Fig. 5), on 25 April 1902. A total of 65 acres fetched £32,000. This land was part of Lot 19 in the Hepper sale of 1871, which Barran et al had bought, 601 acres including the lakes and the Mansion, for £107,000.

The total sum of money raised from the sale of surplus land in the Park Estate is clearly well short of achieving Barran's ideal of 'a park for nothing'. Nevertheless, it is pleasing to suggest that the capital cost of the grand playing area of Soldiers' Field on both sides of Prince's Avenue, well over a hundred acres, was more than recouped by money from this source. In the end, it was maybe more a case of 'park playing fields for nothing' - still a great public asset as we know.

Liverpool had earlier gone through a similar cash process in creating Sefton Park. Compared to the expenses involved there, Roundhay Park was a huge bargain.

Liverpool paid £264,000 for 375 acres of land for Sefton Park. Some 110 acres were later sold off. This was not done just to offset the capital sum, but to provide funds for the development of the park. Unlike Roundhay Park where all the landscaping and lakes had been done years ago before the Corporation bought it, Liverpool had it all to do, including the construction of an artificial lake. At 7 acres in size, it is not much bigger than the 5 acre Upper Lake at Roundhay where there is also the magnificent 33 acre Waterloo Lake. In the end Liverpool had a park of about 270 acres, much less than half the size of Roundhay Park.

Thanks and Main Sources

Leeds Mercury, Leeds Directories, sales literature and the Internet. Minutes of the Roundhay Park Sub Committee of Leeds Corporate Property Committee (West Yorkshire Archives Service LLC 29/A/- series).

Steven Burt's 'An Illustrated History of Roundhay Park'.

I am grateful to Steven for permission to use the lower picture on page 32 in his book as the basis for Figure 3 in this article.