

Moseley Park & Pool Walk

*Admission to the Park is generally for keyholders only although **keys are available on a daily basis at no charge** (subject to a £10 deposit) from Moseley Travel at 172 Alcester Road. Open access is provided at certain times, such as farmers' market days and during the annual festivals.*

The Walk starts at the Alcester Road entrance to the Park & Pool in Victoria Parade (95 Alcester Road next to Dixons Estate Agents)

Introduction



Moseley's historic Park & Pool is situated two miles from Birmingham city centre and has been unaltered for over a hundred years. It consists of eleven acres of peaceful parkland, a beautiful lake packed with fish and water fowl and surrounded by trees.

To understand the history of the Park & Pool it is necessary to appreciate the history of Moseley Hall because historically the Hall and the Park were one place. The Park was originally the grounds of Moseley Hall and provided a picturesque setting surrounding the Hall until 1896 when the cutting of Salisbury Road and the development of houses along that road isolated the Hall from the Park. Moseley Hall (a grade 2 listed building) still survives today and is used as an NHS Hospital but it now has a separate entrance further down Alcester Road and is thus physically divorced from the Park. This was the result of most of the Moseley Hall estate being sold off for residential development towards the end of the 19th Century. Fortunately, as the developers closed in, the area around the Pool was rescued from development by a group of public spirited Moseley residents who bought the land and in 1899 founded the Moseley Park & Pool Company to create the private park you see today. The Park is now run by a charitable trust whose terms of reference ensure it can never be sold.

The **original entrance to the grounds** was not far from the current entrance, roughly opposite the Fighting Cocks, and the boundary wall ran along this side of Alcester Road. The gateway was flanked by a wood with tall trees and rookeries and a curved drive led downhill past the lake, across where Salisbury Road is today and up to the house. The grounds of the Hall originally stretched from here over 160 acres all the way to Cannon Hill in the west, to Edgbaston Road in the north and Moor Green Lane in the south. The entrance and trees were demolished when the current shopping parade, Victoria Parade was built in 1900-1901.

Follow the path down into the Park past the tennis courts.

The tennis courts are the premises of the Chantry Tennis Club, an active tennis club which welcomes players of any ability. The club has five shale courts and a pavilion a little further on. Two of them will shortly be upgraded to all weather surfaces. The triple tennis courts were laid out when the Park and Pool Company took on the Park but the other courts were formerly a bowling green.



Stop on the lawn overlooking the lake

History of Moseley Hall

Moseley Hall was a grand gentry estate and was the focal point of Moseley from the 15th to the 19th Centuries when Moseley was a small rural village in Worcestershire. The earliest owners of this estate were the **Grevis family** who arrived on the scene in the 15th century and gradually built up their land holdings from then to the 18th century. It is likely that the Grevis family originally lived in a large farmhouse situated near the Alcester Road entrance to Moseley Park, which was demolished in 1842. **Sir Richard Grevis** who was a favourite of James I, High Sheriff of Worcestershire and Lord of the Manor of Yardley and Solihull, built a new residence on the site of the current hall, enclosed the land around as a deer park and began planting on the estate.

The Grevis family eventually fell on hard times and **in 1764** Moseley Hall and its estate were bought for £9,000 by **John Taylor**, a wealthy manufacturer of "toys" (buttons and guided and japanned goods such as snuff boxes). John Taylor made a fortune of £200,000 and was on friendly terms with Matthew Boulton and other leading industrialists of the day.

John Taylor bought the house as an investment and never lived in it himself (unlike his descendants), letting it out instead to family and friends. (He himself had a town house at 65 High Street, B'ham and country properties at Bordesley Hall and Southam, Warks).

His son John Taylor II inherited the Hall in 1775. He added banking to his business interests in manufacturing and **founded Taylor & Lloyd's Bank** (now Lloyd's) with his friend Sampson Lloyd. He was also a magistrate and Deputy Lieutenant of Worcestershire.

In 1776 Taylor demolished the old Hall and build a **new brick and stone mansion** roughly on the site of the present Moseley Hall at a cost of £6,000. The only buildings remaining from the Hall & Estate of that time are the Dovecote and Cowhouse (originally part of South Farm) which can be seen

further down Alcester Road at the hospital entrance and the Icehouse here in the Park (of which more later).

In 1791 during the '**Priestley Riots**', **Moseley Hall was attacked and burnt** down by angry mobs who were opposed to those with republican sympathies, fearing the spread of French revolutionary ideas to Britain. They were particularly angered at that time by a banquet held in Birmingham to celebrate the fall of the Bastille. Taylor was a dissenter (a Unitarian) and probably friendly with those at the banquet but did not attend it himself and was not even in the Birmingham area at the time. He nevertheless became a target for the Priestley Riot mobs. Moseley Hall was at that time let out to a tenant, the Dowager Countess Lady Carhampton, the old blind mother of the Duchess of Cumberland, whose sympathies were with the King. The rioters treated her in a very gentlemanly way, helped her to remove her valuables and possessions and allowed her to leave before burning the place down.

Taylor received £2,700 in damages from the Worcestershire Assizes in 1792 and **from 1792 - 1796 set about rebuilding the Hall** to a design by the architect John Stanbridge of Warwick. This is the building that still survives today, largely unchanged except for the addition of the east wing in 1838. It is reputed that suggestions for the landscaping the Park in 1791 were made by Humphry Repton, who was the first person to describe himself as a "landscape gardener". His ideas were published in his 'Red Book' (now located in the Frances Loeb Library at Harvard University, USA).

Taylor lived at Moseley Hall until his death in 1814, when he was succeeded by his son, also John Taylor, who continued to live here. This Taylor was MP for East Worcestershire and supported the Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel on the issue of the Corn Laws. He was also a captain in the Queen's Own Worcestershire Yeomanry and entertained troops here on the annual Waterloo Day with a banquet on the lawns followed by a dance.

In the 1840s further work was undertaken on the Park, including the extension of the pool which required the building of a new dam (New houses were later built on part of the land used for the dam). In 1843 John Taylor owned 938 acres but he died in 1852 and was the last Taylor to live at the Hall.

The Taylor Estate rented out the Hall to various tenants and finally to **Richard Cadbury**, the chocolate manufacturer in 1884. Richard Cadbury and his wife Mary held many charitable events in the grounds for poor families and their own children enjoyed playing in the grounds, swimming in the lake and skating in winter. In 1890 Richard Cadbury bought the Hall and in 1891 donated it to Birmingham Council as a **convalescent hospital for children**. After **absorption into the NHS in 1948** it became a centre for children's ear, nose and throat surgery and then (in 1970) a geriatric unit.

Start to walk around the Pool in a clockwise direction and stop on the corner at a path leading up through bushes.

This is the path to the **Salisbury Road** gate which roughly follows the line of the original drive leading up to the house. When Salisbury Road was cut in 1896, the drive continued in use for a while crossing over Salisbury Road but after the entrance gateway in Alcester Road was demolished to make way for Victoria Parade (in 1901) the original drive was abandoned and access to the hall provided via a new drive near to the Dovecote further down Alcester Road. If you walk up the path for a short distance you will see it crosses a small stream from a nearby spring, shown as Moseley Brook on old maps. The Pool was created by damming that stream. The area of woodland around here dates from the original Park.

Continue your walk following the path around the shore of the Pool in a clockwise direction.

The walk leads around the southern shore of the Pool passing the backs of several large houses in Salisbury Road and offering good views across the Pool to the backs of large houses in Chantry Road that overlook the Pool. Beware - the path is uneven in places and there are some tree roots.

Stop at the north western end of Pool on small lawn.

You have now reached the northwest corner of the Pool and are standing on the dam which supports the lake, constructed about 1840.



There is a rich variety of wildlife on and around the Pool including great crested grebe, parakeets and pipistrelle bats. This year the Pool has a couple of young Black Swans which have built a nest on the island.

From this point you have a more distant view of the large houses in Salisbury Road (on the southern shore) and a closer view of those in Chantry Road (high above the northern shore with terraces) possessing in many cases an excellent outlook across the water. The original

boundary fencing remains in parts and here the Park and the gardens of the houses appear to merge giving uninterrupted views in both directions.

Continue along the northern shore and stop on the large lawn.

From here you can see the island, which is the remains of an earlier dam that existed before the enlargement of the lake.

Housing Development

After the completion of the railway through the Village in 1840, Moseley became a sought-after residential suburb, helped by its elevated location, high above the smogs of Birmingham. In the latter part of the 19th century the Taylor Estate took advantage of the demand for housing by selling off land on the edges of the estate **for housing development.**



Park Hill was the first of the roads to be built in the Park, in **1865**. The promotional literature in 1865 for the new first class villa sites in Moseley Park reads:

"A portion of beautiful park attached to Moseley Hall has recently been laid out for the erection of building leases of villa residences exclusively, for which it is admirably adapted. The situation is elevated; the scenery well wooded and picturesque, the soil is sandy and gravelly. For particulars, application may be made to Messrs William Fowler and Sons, surveyors Waterloo Street Birmingham".

Park Hill developed slowly and was shielded by trees so it could not be seen from the Hall, though they could see the spire of the newly erected St Anne's Church on Park Hill. This however was considered to enhance their view and was remarked upon in 1890 by Richard Cadbury's daughter during her father's lease of the estate.

By the late 1880s the Taylors had plans for further housing developments with a grid of additional new roads planned. In **1890** they gained permission to build **Chantry Road** and in **1896 Salisbury Road** was cut across the park from Alcester Road to Edgbaston Lane, isolating Moseley Park from the Hall. The building of Salisbury Road (named after the then current Prime Minister) also entailed filling in one of the two great pools. Development was subsequently extended to Reddings, Moorcroft and Amesbury Roads.

There were fears that the remainder of the Estate would be bought up for housing and the surviving open space and pool would be lost. Consequently in 1899 a small consortium of local businessmen, many of whom owned houses in Chantry and Salisbury Roads overlooking the Park, founded Moseley Park & Pool

Company to preserve the Park from potential future residential development. The Company took out a 40 year lease on about 14 acres around the Great Pool and laid it out as a private Park, planting new trees and establishing a path around the Pool. The Park was opened by Austen Chamberlain MP on 29th September 1899. The Moseley and Kings Heath Journal of October 1899 recorded:

"The future generations of Moseley will have cause to remember and thank their forefathers for having saved from spoilation one of the most charming spots in their midst - Moseley Park and Pool Estate. This beautiful sylvan retreat, has, through such estimable and enterprising gentlemen in the locality been secured for the next 40 years Mr Henry Heaven (22 Chantry) and his fellow directors mean to make the place a "demi-paradise".

In 1958 the freehold of the Park was purchased for £3,500 and it is now run as a charitable Trust.

Follow the poolside path down steps through a low-lying wooded area.

This area is known as **Dingley Dell** and was the quarry that provided the material used to construct the first dam. Nearby you will pass the **boathouse** and a **fishermen's hut**. The Park has an active Angling Club and holds summer and winter contests. Fish caught include carp, bream, roach, perch and tench. Be careful of the steps and uneven paths.

Continue to follow the path until you reach the lawn area where you started. Look for the Icehouse which is approached by a hollow path (see picture below)



The **Icehouse** is at the end of the hollow path beneath the mound. (The Icehouse is normally closed but is open to the public on open days and festivals). Before the invention of the refrigerator, most people were limited to seasonal foods or to those preserved by drying, salting or pickling. However, from the 17th. century, the rich and privileged increasingly built icehouses in the grounds of their large houses in the country, and occasionally actually within town houses, to preserve food and provide ice for the table and especially to cool wine. Over the years many icehouses have collapsed or been demolished but many have been conserved and opened to the public.

The Icehouse here was used to provide cold storage and ice for the residents of Moseley Hall in the days before invention of the refrigerator. Ice was collected from the surface of the Pool in the winter and tipped into the Icehouse where it would remain throughout the summer for use as required. The surface of the ice was covered by sacking, straw or other insulating materials to help keep it cold and frozen. At the base of the chamber there was a drain to allow the melt water to run off so keeping the ice dry and frozen, being colder than the melt water. It is estimated that up to 20 tons of ice could be accommodated and the space above would provide the cold storage where food could be stacked on the surface of the ice or hung from hooks in the roof.

The Icehouse here was built probably in the late 18th century, around the same time as the Moseley Dovecote and Cow-house. The original plan for this, in mirror image and with a pitched roof, is kept in the Taylor Archives in Birmingham Central Library.

When the estate was broken up the ice chamber was abandoned, filled with soil and used for storage. In 1999 however after funds had been raised through public appeal, it was restored under the auspices of The Moseley Society. After the entrance passageway had been made safe the ice chamber was cleared of the earth infill. A portion of a shoe was found in the excavation, dated to around 1900, suggesting the date when the chamber was filled in. After clearance the ice chamber was found to be in excellent condition requiring no attention apart from cleaning of the walls. The exit drain has been probed to a distance of 35 feet horizontally and appears substantially clear. Some of the trees around the ice house mound are original and would have provided shade to improve the cooling qualities of the Icehouse. The Icehouse is now popular with visitors, musicians and film makers alike!

This concludes our tour of the Park. Return to the Alcester Road gate using your original entrance path.