

BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**BRAINTREE AND BOCKING
PUBLIC GARDENS**

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Late C19 public park originally part of the gardens of Bocking Place, home of Sydney and Sarah Courtauld who gave the land to the town in 1888.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Courtauld family who enriched Braintree and Bocking through the manufacture of silks were liberal benefactors, donating to the town a hospital, nurses' home and an institute with a considerable library. Their generosity extended to giving part of their grounds and garden to the town. The 1875 25" OS (first edition) shows the gardens of Bocking Place divided by the Causeway, the road which runs north-east out of Braintree to Halstead and Sudbury. By 1888 the townspeople were celebrating the opening of the public gardens created on the area of the grounds to the west of the Causeway with a torchlight procession and open-air feast, washed down with champagne at 7/- a bottle or Bass's beer at 6d. At the opening ceremony the gardens were described as being 'between five and six acres in extent...pleasantly situated on a gentle slope...opposite the site of Mr. Sydney Courtauld's old residence. ... The grounds themselves are divided into two portions by a light iron fence, the upper part being left as greensward, to be used as a playground for young children; and on the lower part being beautifully laid out as ornamental gardens. The accessories include a band-stand and shelter, a lawn tennis court, and a drinking fountain. Then there is a good sized piece of ornamental water with an artistic wooden bridge across; and a small forest of shrubs. ... At the top end of the ground a well has been sunk to the depth of 30 feet, and the water supply comes from this abundant source. A star windmill surmounts the boring, and forces water into a spacious tank in the roof of the cottage for use in that little establishment.' Credit is also paid to the tradesmen and craftsmen who worked on the park: Mr Silas Parmenter, builder, for turfing, paths and construction of the ornamental water basin and the band-stand; Mr. C. H. Bevan who supervised the landscaped gardens; Messrs. Saltmarsh of Chelmsford for supplying the shrubs and to Mr. Crittall, ironmonger of Braintree who supplied the railings, entrance gates and lamp, garden seats and chairs and who also sunk the well and supplied the windmill over it, besides laying the water mains and supplying the drinking fountain. The design of the gardens included the elements that can still be seen today: rose beds, shrubs, tennis courts, band-stand, and, with the children in mind, a safe

area for play away from the road. Further endowments were made by members of the Courtauld family in 1912 and 1924 and more recently in the 1980s by other benefactors. The gardens are maintained mainly by the trust funds set up by the Courtaulds in 1888 and by additional help from Braintree District Council. In 1986 a knot garden was created to honour John Ray (1627-1705), the famous philosopher and the 'Father of English Botany' by the John Ray Trust. In 1996 'The Friends of the Public Gardens' was formed to promote awareness of the gardens and to raise funds for additional projects. In 1999 path renovation was made possible by a successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

Braintree and Bocking Public Gardens are situated in Bocking End on the western side of the Causeway, covering an area of 2ha (5 acres) in a rectangular shape, narrowing at the northern end with a slope down from south to north.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance to the gardens is on the corner of St. Peters Road and the Broadway through iron gates hung on brick pillars. They are decorated with the town coat of arms and 'B.B./EIRR/1953' indicating that the gates were remade or renovated for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953. A second entrance is sited at the northern end of the garden leading down a narrow path between houses to Bocking End. There is also an entrance from the upper part of the gardens near St. Peter's Church which is a service entrance.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The lodge sited at the main entrance is the original building and is grade II listed. It was described at the opening ceremony as 'a remarkably pretty rustic cottage...built for the garden-keeper (William Moat) by Messrs. J & A Brown'. It is still used as accommodation for the gardener. It carries engraved stones on the north-east façade paying tribute to the various Courtauld endowments in 1888, 1912 and 1924, and a further plaque on the south-east side of the entrance façade of the lodge detailing more recent benefactors in 1988 and the plants they subscribed. The inaugural plaque reads: '*These Gardens were presented to the inhabitants of Braintree and Bocking on the 26th November 1888 by Sydney Courtauld of Bocking Place, and his wife Sarah Lucy Courtauld.*' Also mounted on the house is the original drinking fountain and below it a raised grilled stand so that one could drink without getting one's feet wet.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The entrance path divides round an open lawn bordered by mature trees and shrubs. An oak stands on the corner of the lawn with the inscription: *This Oak Tree was planted by Mrs.*

Sydney Courtauld in commemoration of the opening of these gardens on 28th November 1888. Directly to the north-west across the lawn and sited at a lower level is a large thatched bandstand. To the west and out of alignment with first views is the children's play area, its potentially visually intrusive colourful form limited by being placed under trees and with a background of planting. Further north and set back within the shrubbery, the east circuit walk passes the war memorial built to commemorate the men of Braintree, Bocking and some of the surrounding villages who died in the First World War, its approach defined by a paved apron and splayed low walls. There is an additional commemoration to the men of the Second World War placed on a sloping plaque at the base of the war memorial on the roadside. Another oak was planted further along this path to honour Edward Holmes, the Clerk of the Council, who had supervised the creation and upkeep of the gardens. Further north the circuit walk divides into a maze of minor curving paths among mature planting, mainly of shrubs, defining discrete compartments with formal elements such as a knot garden made in honour of John Ray. Ray was born in Black Notley and educated at Braintree Grammar School and went on to study the adaptation of wild plants to their local conditions and to publish *Historia plantarum* in 1686. At the bottom of the garden is the round pool containing water lilies and goldfish, but no longer with its 'artistic wooden bridge', and to the west a wild garden and a laurel walk. The path then climbs back up through mature woodland to the thatched bandstand and the tennis courts, which are discretely sited into the slope of the land. There are over 250 trees, many of which are of native origin and also a number of special interest, such as a Blue Atlas Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica glauca*), 3 Deodar cedars (*Cedrus deodara*), a young Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) and a Lucombe Oak (*Quercus lucombeana*).

REFERENCES

Guide to Braintree and Bocking Public Gardens, October 2000

M Baker, *The Book of Braintree and Bocking*, 1981

The 'Borough' Guide to Braintree, No 268, nd

The Pictorial Record, Braintree, 1898

Maps

OS 25" to one mile scale first edition surveyed 1875/6

Archive items

Newspaper cutting from *Braintree and Bocking Advertiser*, November 1888, mounted in scrapbook (Essex Record Office D/DU65/93)

Researchers: Gloria and John Hammond