

Factsheet - St. Agnes Park

By 1850, Bristol was declared the third most unhealthy city of mid-19th century England. Most of Bristol's parks were made because the city was so unsanitary. Many people had left the countryside and moved into the city to find jobs in industry. There were no dustmen to take away rubbish, drinking water was polluted and there were not enough drains to take away the sewage. So much land had been built upon that there was little open ground for recreation.



1 The Park came about through the energy of the Reverend James M. Wilson, who was Headmaster of Clifton College. He also ran the College Mission in St. Agnes. The Mission's curate was Hardwicke Rawnsley who helped to found the National Trust. The Park, together with church, the Mission Hall and the Lodge was part of Rev. Wilson's plan for improving the lives of the urban poor in St Agnes.

2 In 1882, Rev. Wilson organised a petition to try to get the council to buy an old orchard. He offered to pay for laying out a park there if the council would look after it.

3 Rev. Wilson's plan included a lodge, a refreshment room, a retiring room for ladies, a room for men, a fountain, an ornamental pond, a bandstand, a greenhouse and a summerhouse, two drinking fountains, storage sheds and shelters.

4 The council eventually bought the orchard in 1885. The only thing they added from Rev. Wilson's list was one of the drinking fountains because they were short of money.

5 Most features were added by Rev. Wilson who was good at persuading wealthy people to give donations. These included a fountain, rocks, plants and trees.

6 Eventually the Council added some features and made some improvements. These included mens' toilets, tar paving, boundary shrubs and trees, and appointing a park keeper. By 1898 the City Forester was spending more on flowers for St. Agnes than any other public park in his care.

7 Until the mid-1980s, the Park was known for its shrubberies, rockeries, and pond in the north east corner. The straight walk that lines up with the west window of the church and the lodge can still be seen but little remains of the original character of the Park. The slope of the mound at the western end has been changed and the rocks and plants that should decorate it are missing. Also lost is the bandstand that stood in the separate garden east of St Thomas St. This area is still a playground as it began.

8 New features include a diagonal row of cherry trees and a memorial garden to the community leader, Evon Berry. Today St Agnes is the only park in Bristol to have a park keeper. He lives on site in the Lodge. A very active local community group is working to improve the park.



The
City
Forester