

Self-Guided Walk

Grosvenor & Hilbert Park

A jewel in the heart of Tunbridge Wells



Explore this historic Park with the Heritage Trail map and this extra information sheet.

The Park is made up of two distinct areas, both given to the town by local philanthropists.

Grosvenor consists of the Lake, children's play area, bowls green and wetland.

It is Tunbridge Wells' first municipal Park, opened in 1889. The land was donated by the town's first mayor, Alderman John Stone-Wigg.

Hilbert is made up of the woodlands, football pitches and orchard. Once part of a farm, the land was donated by Councillor Edward Strange in 1930 (Hilbert was his mother's maiden name).

Apart from the paths and football pitches, development plans were not realised, due to WW2 and post-war austerity. So Hilbert has largely remained a piece of countryside within the town.

i On the walk you will find 7 Interpretation Panels, with information on significant features.

W Look out for the 10 waymark posts, with images to reflect the Park's history, plants and wildlife.

1 Grosvenor Rocks

Installed in April 2013, the artwork was designed by architecture studio We Made That.

It is made from local Wealden sandstone and the carvings are taken from marks made directly on the stone by local people.*

2 Marnock Lake

The lake is named after celebrated Victorian landscaper Robert Marnock (1800-1889), who designed the Grosvenor section of the park.

His layout remains in the island and the sweeping paths around the Lake and the wetland.

i Interpretation panel: by the Dripping Wells.

W Waymark post: a mallard. Look for moorhens too.

3 former swimming pool

Calverley Waterworks consisted of 3 reservoirs, supplying part of the town from 1835 until Pembury Reservoir was built. The largest reservoir was a popular open-air swimming pool for nearly 80 years.



It was located where the hardcourt, cycle track and toddlers play area are now.



Open from May until September, the pool hosted water polo matches, frequent races and a grand Aquatic Gala every year.

The sun terrace was at the Marnock Lake end, with the changing rooms on the railway line side.

It's easy to be nostalgic, but the pool was unheated, with no chlorination or filtration, and next to a steam railway line. Soot and newts were added extras!

4 Grosvenor Bowls Club

The current Bowls Pavilion dates from 1971, refurbished in 2015 during the Heritage Lottery Fund regeneration.

The Rochdale Road entrance was reopened as part of the HLF project.

5 wetland

At the start of the wetland are three pieces of carved gneiss (a metamorphic rock): the artwork Zephyr. Sculptor Richard Perry was inspired by the water, wind in the trees and the rolling nature of the Park.*

Around the wetland specimen conifers were planted in partnership with Bedgebury Pinetum. This reflects the 1889 design, as conifers were in fashion at the time. Victorian plant hunters introduced new species and landscape designers used them in many parks

i Interpretation panel: near the railway footbridge.

W Waymark post: fir cone. Can you see other cones in the conifers around the wetland?

5 wetland continued

Robert Marnock used natural springs to form two lakes here, filled in during 1934 after drying up.



The springs reasserted themselves and this became a wetland area, developed in 2015 with three ponds, boardwalk and dipping platforms.

i Interpretation panel: along the boardwalk.

W Waymark post: a frog. There are newts as well.

6 Folly Shaw Bridge

Despite the colour, the iron-rich stream is unpolluted, shown by the population of freshwater shrimp.



Look for the carved beaver, next to the leaky dam, which slows the stream during heavy rain, to prevent flooding downstream.

i Interpretation panel: by the bridge.

W Waymark post: a dragonfly. You may see them flying around to catch their insect prey, as well as patrolling the wetland.

W Waymark post: a cow in Appledore Wood. This habitat was once grazing pasture, now a woodland meadow mown annually by conservation volunteers.

7 Roundabout Wood & Folly Shaw

Ancient woodland is an area that has been continuously wooded since 1600. This unique habitat develops as leaf litter and decaying wood gradually accumulates on the woodland floor.

Once part of a farm, these woods provided useful timber, mainly through hazel coppice. The hazel is cut back at intervals, increasing the trees lifespan.



Kent High Weald Partnership and their conservation volunteers have reintroduced the coppice cycle.

W Waymark post: hazelnuts, which are an important food source for mice as well as squirrels.

i Interpretation panel: along the boardwalk.

W Waymark post: English bluebells. These are one of many 'indicator species' of ancient woodland found in these woods.

8 Community Orchard & Wildflower Meadow

The 15 first trees were planted in 2014 as part of the Heritage Lottery programme, with further trees planted in three phases by the local community.

As an organically managed orchard, it is a valuable wildlife resource, with blossom for pollinators, a variety of fruit and the wildflower meadow.

W Waymark post: a pear by woodland path.

i Interpretation panels: in the centre of the orchard & in the wildflower meadow.

9 The Oast House

This characteristic Kentish oast house, now changing rooms for the football pitches, was once used for drying and storing hops.

At the Oast House end of the lower football pitch, the flower beds are part of the Cross-Pollination Project. This 3 year Heritage Lottery Funded study has created demonstration gardens in the Tunbridge Wells area with pollinator friendly plants. To learn more, see their website www.cross-pollination.uk/

W Waymark post: a spade, by the allotments next to the Cross-Pollination Project beds.

10 Bandstand & British Restaurant

After the war, the British Restaurant became St Barnabas' School canteen, then the Satellite Youth club. It was a nursery before demolition in 2003.



To learn more, see the Friends of Grosvenor & Hilbert Park website – www.fogh.org.uk



This leaflet was produced by the Friends of Grosvenor & Hilbert Park for the 2020 Heritage Open Days event.

* The artworks Grosvenor Rocks and Zephyr were funded by the developers of flats and housing recently built in the vicinity of the Park.