

# History of Hermitage Park

Hermitage Park was developed as a public park in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and originally formed the grounds of a private house with views over the Firth of Clyde. The landform of the area, with the valley of Milligs Burn a major topographic feature, dictates the layout of a large proportion of the site.

Hermitage Park is a place of great significance in the history of Helensburgh both from its time as a private villa garden and as a public park for over 100 years, with features of importance from both periods of its development. Some aspects of the site are much older, particularly the history of Milligs Mill and its associated features.



*Milligs Mill remains*

## 13th Century

A grain mill known as Milligs Mill (or Muleig, Malig, Milligs or Milniggs Mill) operates on Milligs Burn, servicing the region's farmers and supporting local businesses including a bakery, brewery and distillery which leads to the founding of the town of Helensburgh.

## 18th Century

The site of Hermitage Park features in the formal parkland landscape known as Boutcher's Banks designed by William Boutcher for Sir John Schaw, 3<sup>rd</sup> baronet of Greenock in 1732.

## 19th Century

**1802** Helensburgh becomes a free burgh of barony by Royal Charter. **1836** Hermitage House is built by Glasgow merchant, Robert Fulton Alexander. **1860** survey date for 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (published 1865) shows Hermitage House and garden in detail for the first time. **1876** John and James Cramb, sons of retired leather merchant David Cramb and successful proprietors of a photographic business, buy Hermitage House and grounds for £11,000. The history of both these families illustrate how Helensburgh grew from the wealth and patronage of Glasgow business men. The Crambs subsequently sell land for Victoria Halls and Hermitage School to the town.



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## 20th Century



**1911** Hermitage House and grounds is acquired by the town council for £3750 and turned into a public park.

**1914** A rustic bandstand is erected probably designed by William Leiper. The grotto is formed along with the Hermit's Well.

**1914-18** Hermitage House is used as an auxiliary hospital for up to 58 wounded soldiers during WW1. Medicinal herbs are grown in the walled garden.



**1919** The park is extended to include Millig Mill, dam and pond. The mill is subsequently demolished in 1922.

**1923** The war memorial, designed by noted local architect A.N. Paterson, is erected in the walled garden. Now known as the Garden of Remembrance, it was once considered 'One of the most beautiful and appropriate in the country'.



**1925** Tennis courts, bowling green and putting area are built on the site of the dam and reservoir.

**1963** Hermitage House is finally demolished.



**1985** Dumbarton District Council produce the first booklet listing the trees and shrubs of Hermitage Park. The grounds have a long association with notable gardeners, botanists, horticulturalists and plant collectors, as well as at various times containing allotments, supporting a commercial plant nursery and hosting flower shows.



For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the park continues as a beautifully cultivated public garden where children could play, visitors (majority arriving from Glasgow on commercial steamship) and residents could relax, play sports and listen to music.

## 21st Century



**2002** Garden History Society considers heritage of the park is diminished by its degraded condition.

**2010** Walled Garden placed on Buildings at Risk register due to collapsing west wall. **2010-11** Formation of Friends of Hermitage Park Association (FoHPA), **2014** Confirmation of HLF Stage 2 funding. **2016** HLF awarded £2.3 million to the park this makes a total of £3.1 million for the full project. Work in the park will start September 2016.

