

History of Parc Cefn Onn

The Friends of Parc Cefn Onn



Within the area of North Cardiff known as Lisvane, Cardiff City Council owns a 66.6 acre park known as Parc Cefn Onn. This Welsh name means “Hillside of ash trees”.

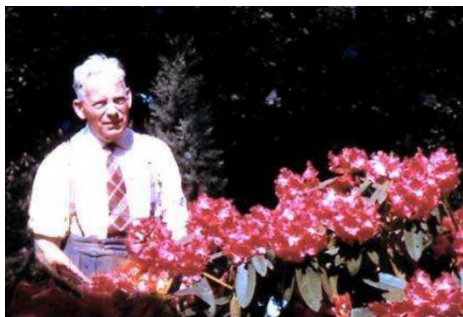
We need to look back in time to see how this Park came to be established.

The past

The Dingle area of Parc Cefn Onn (the upper garden area below the top picnic field) was laid out during the period of 1911 to 1933 by Ernest Albert Prosser, general manager of the newly formed Rhymney Valley railway.

Prosser was a widower, with a son Cecil who was 14, when his father purchased the estate. Prosser’s intention was to build a new house on the land adjacent to Cwm Farm (now the top picnic field). He lived in Llanishen; but he never built the house on his new estate.

His purchase of the land caused some local resentment as he closed established footpaths. Following a protest by local residents this dispute was resolved amicably.



The majority of the gardens appear to have been laid out after the First World War.

Mr Prosser’s head gardener was Tom Jenkins (left), and it was he who laid out the paths, plants and trees, including building the top pond.

It is thought Mr Prosser’s son, Cecil, suffered from TB possibly as a result of his war-time service. The summerhouse overlooking the top pond was constructed for Cecil to rest, as part of his treatment for TB. At that time, fresh air was an important part of the treatment for this illness. Near the pond was a circular changing room, this was built out of railway sleepers and had a conical thatched roof. You can see what’s left of that building today. The top pond was in fact a swimming pool with a tiled bottom, built to a depth of 6ft with the adjacent summer house used to sit in and change prior to swimming.

The garden was laid out with beds of Azaleas, Rhododendrons, several varieties of Magnolias, Oak, Ash, Bamboo, Chinese Witch Hazel, Conifers, rare evergreens like Nothofagus, Eucalyptus, Niphophila (snow gum). A lower pond was also constructed, with the gardens linked with an extensive path network.



Cecil died in 1922, so by the time of Ernest Prosser’s death in 1933, aged 66, there was no direct heir to the estate. It passed to his nephew Donald who lived in England. By 1944, Donald decided to sell the estate, it was put on the market. However, the head gardener tipped off Bill Neams, Chief Parks Officer for the Council at that time. The estate of 169

acres was purchased for £7,500 with a personal cheque from Councillor Alderman George Williams, who then sold it for the same price to Cardiff Council.

The Council have turned this estate into a Country Park purchasing the land to the South of the Dingle. In its peak, several full-time gardeners were permanently employed, with an onsite nursery growing a fantastic range of plants for the Park. To date we record there are still nearly 100 rare trees and plants within the Park.



The Park became known as a famous beauty spot and was visited by hundreds of people who came to enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of the

Park. It even had its own railway station, Cefn Onn Halt (this was situated north of the existing Lisvane & Thornhill station, the other side of the Cherry Orchard Road). Cefn Onn Halt station was closed in 1986.



Unfortunately, during the period from 1986 - 2009 the Park was not maintained by the Council to its previous high standard. This was mainly due central government financing rules requiring the contracting out of local authority park maintenance.

In 2005 that the Park was found to have an outbreak of a plant disease known as "Sudden Oak Death", Latin name "Phytophthora Ramorum". This affected trees and the extensive display of Rhododendrons. The Council were able to get a grant from DEFRA, the government department, to fund a study and focus on eradication of this problem. The only cure was to cut down and burn the diseased plants/trees. Other local woodlands, such as Coed y Felin, were checked and thankfully found to be clear of the disease. Until the disease is eradicated very few new trees and plants can be planted. The good news is that this is problem is now regularly monitored by DEFRA and our Cardiff City Council Park Rangers and any problems are immediately contained.

The present

By 2010 Cardiff Council realised they needed help looking after Parc Cefn Onn. Since a major problem was finance, they asked local people to help them set up a Friends group; thus allowing the new group to seek grants not available directly to the Council. A series of meetings were arranged to try to establish this new group.

At a meeting in February 2010 that there was sufficient interest from representatives of the local Lisvane Community Council, members of the public and local conservation groups. Several volunteers made themselves known to the Council representatives; from this group a Committee was formed.

The existing local Friends group, Friends of Coed y Felin, helped to help set up and provide advice to the new Friends of Parc Cefn Onn. The local Lisvane Community Council and the Lisvane Community Association supported and provided grant money to help fund the new group. These grants have been used to cover the cost of hiring the meeting room for Committee meetings.



The new Friends group held a well attended public launch meeting in May 2010 where the group's purpose was defined as to help take care of and restore the lovely natural and historic Cardiff resource that is Parc Cefn Onn Country Park.

The Friends of Parc Cefn Onn are a legally formed organisation consisting entirely of volunteers, with its own constitution and bank account. The Friends meet on a monthly basis with the Council Park Ranger to carry out work in the Park – come rain or shine. They are a non-political group of dedicated amateur volunteers, who assist Cardiff Council's work within the Park.



To date the Friends have planted over 5000 bulbs, cleaned out the two ponds silt traps (these had not been cleaned for over 20 years), cleaned and painted park benches, cleared overgrown areas and re-laid paths. A circular path at the top of the woods is now reopened and drainage ditches are regularly cleared.

To aid the Park's resident dormouse and bat populations, the Friends have installed new nesting and bat boxes which are monitored by local wildlife experts.

The Friends received a small start-up grant from Environment Wales which was used to provide information leaflets, notice boards and to set up our website. They have been able to apply for other grants which we have used to purchase tools, upgrade the entrance area, including the lighting and plant bee-friendly plants. A local artist, in conjunction with local schools, created the mural on the underpass wall that depicts the history of the Park since its creation in 1911.



The next 10 years

In early 2010, the Council produced a management plan which set out their vision of the development of the Park. In 2016 the Council's bid for significant National Heritage Lottery funding was successful and this marks the next generation of changes. Work started in 2017/18. A new notice board situated in the car park area board will provide information on the programme of work.

The Friends group are looking at several areas to develop the project further and can seek additional grant funding that is not available to a council but is to a volunteer group.

In 2015, the Friends secured a second grant from Environment Wales to carry out an ecological survey of the Lower Pond. The plan is to revitalise the Lower Pond and surrounding area and create a focus point for children to be taught about nature and conservation.



The Park has nearly 100 rare trees and bushes and the Friends have begun labelling them so visitors can learn of their name, species, and origin. In March 2016, the Friends installed labels on the rare trees and bushes in the lower Park. This was financed by grants from the Lisvane Community Association and CJS. Electrical Ltd., both local organisations. A map of the rare trees in the Park can be found on the website.

In order to maintain Parc Cefn Onn as a place of tranquillity and natural beauty the Friends volunteers rely fully on the support of the local community and the many households registered as members. Please visit their website at www.friendsofcefnonn.org.uk.