

West Bank Park

The Lord Mayor of York formally opened 'West Park' on the 28th July 1938. The site had originally been the private garden and house of James Backhouse, his son and grandson.



He built the house in 1840 surrounded by 12 acres of private grounds adjacent to his extensive botanic nursery gardens. Over the next few decades many rare trees were planted and the well known alpine rock gardens with their lakes were made. In 1910 the 3rd James Backhouse sold the house and garden to Sir James Hamilton but his nursery gardens were not to follow until 1921. Sir James lived there with his family until he died in 1935.

Negotiations began for the City to purchase West Bank with the express intention of creating a park (in accordance with Sir James' wishes). In 1938 the house and gardens were purchased from his estate for £3,500.

The next 50 years see the present park layout and surroundings come in to being. In 1972 both West Bank House and Lodge were demolished, the rock gardens and lakes filled in and some of the smaller rocks removed. In 1994 the Council's own plant nursery was closed and most of the remaining land outside the park sold to the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust for the James Backhouse estate development.



The plants of West Bank Park

West Bank Park, with its origins as the Backhouse Nursery, boasts a fine collection of specimen trees, including Dawn and Giant Redwoods. One survey identified some 768 trees covering 44 species.

The Friends of West Bank Park have restored the Rockery within the park as a commemoration of the Backhouse Nurseries that once stood on the site. The Backhouses were renowned for their ferns so the Friends

have planted a wide variety of ferns in the rockery along with complimentary bulbs for colour.

The woodland area of the park has been under-planted with small trees and shrubs to add structural diversity with plants such as holly, hazel, spindle and yew. Woodland bulbs such as wild garlic, snowdrops, english bluebells, winter aconites and wood anemones give added interest. The small meadow area has been planted with wildflower plugs such as

White Campion, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Oxeye Daisy and Knapweed for visual interest and for the benefit of insects.

In other areas of the park, formal planting beds have year round colour with a variety of ornamental species on display, along with a traditional terraced rose garden in the centre of the park.



Sights to delight

- 1: The busy Annual Summer Fair at West Bank Park
- 2: The house that once stood in the picnic area of the park
- 3: Woodlice are abundant in habitat piles and rotting logs
- 4: A new wildlife pond is home for dragonflies
- 5: Great Spotted Woodpeckers are a frequent sight in the park
- 6: Millipedes thrive in woodland
- 7: Delicate displays of snowdrops in springtime
- 8: Knapweed proves an instant attraction for bumblebees
- 9: One of the secret wood carvings in the park
- 10: A Skipper butterfly takes a rest on one of the many white campion flowers

The animals of West Bank Park

Many insects, mammals and birds live and feed in West Bank Park. The wide variety of habitats makes it ideal for a diverse range of animals.

Habitat piles and rotting logs within the woodland area are home to millipedes, centipedes, beetle larvae and woodlice and the numerous

shrubs are home to spiders, harvestmen and caterpillars. Wood mice are frequent and you may also be lucky enough to spot weasels hunting.

Areas of longer grass have been left in the park which attract flying insects such as lacewings, ladybirds and butterflies. With the creation of a new wildlife

pond dragonflies, damselflies and water beetles can be seen along with a healthy population of frogs who breed in the damp long grass and hibernate under the log piles.

Bats are regular night time feeders along the woodland edges and hedgerows

within the park. Common and Soprano Pipistrelle bats are common with occasional Noctule bats flying above the tree tops.

The Friends of West Bank Park have been keeping a keen eye on the park's bird populations for many years and have found 26 resident species.

Great Spotted Woodpecker, Bullfinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch are colourful sights and you may be lucky enough to spot a Tawny Owl at dusk or even an occasional Pheasant passing through!

