

SITE NAME: Address	Verdin Park with Northwich Infirmary , formerly Winnington Bank House				
Unitary Authority:	Cheshire West and Chester				
Parish:	Northwich				
Location:	Northwich town centre, west of the confluence of the Weaver and Dane rivers				
Grid Ref:	SJ 655 738				
Owner:	Northwich Town Council				
Recorder:	BM JW	Date of Site Visit	24.06.2020 28.01.2021	Date of Report:	28.01.21

Summary

Victoria Infirmary, the town's first brine baths and public park given to the town by Robert Verdin, MP and local salt magnate, to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee 1887. The Victoria Infirmary, considerably extended, continues to operate as a local hospital. The brine baths were demolished c1912 due to subsidence. Subsidence has also impacted the park and continues to affect the slopes to Castle Street.

Principal remaining features

Park

Gates and gate piers, Grade II

Statue of Robert Verdin by Joseph William Swynnerton

Mature trees

Infirmary

Northwich Infirmary, Old Wing (formerly Winnington Bank House), Grade II

Half timbered Lodge, Winnington Lane

Large stone, an erratic?

History

Letters in brackets refer to maps and numbers refer to images

Earliest evidence of development is of a Roman fort, c70AD, constructed on an elevated and naturally defensive point above the confluence of the Rivers Weaver and Dane, and beside the Roman Road from Manchester to Chester.¹ Kelly's Directory of 1896 says that the castle "probably became ruinous before the time of Richard I: no vestige of the building now remains".²

Burdett's County Map of 1777 indicates the hollow way below the site of the castle as the route from the river crossing ascended the escarpment (A, 1). Greenwood 1819 and Bryant 1831 both show 'Castle Northwich', with Bryant indicating a property at the top of Winnington Hill, probably Winnington Bank House (B & C). The house was built in the early 19th century, of cream ashlar with a symmetrical window pattern and a central door with a radial fanlight.³ Facing east it would have had views across the Weaver valley to the Pennine hills. (3 & 4)

The Tithe Map shows the house, drive and another small building, thought to be the half timbered Lodge (D, 8 & 9).⁴ Within the lodge garden is a stone with the following date and inscription "1663 PRCHA I William Rowe Over Seers", suggesting the origins of the lodge are 17th century.⁵ The Tithe apportionments indicate that Thomas J B Hostage owned and occupied

plot 59, "House, offices, gardens and land". He owned adjacent plots of land, occupying some and renting out others, plots which included two smaller plots 64 and 65 fronting Winnington Street. Thomas Hostage was a local lawyer and clerk to the Trustees of the River Weaver.⁶

The First Edition Ordnance Survey published 1882 shows the branch line to Winnington, which opened on 1 September 1869, primarily to serve the chemical works at Winnington,⁷ and formed the western boundary to the Winnington Bank grounds (E). The 25 inch edition shows the cast iron verandah to the east elevation of the house, wrapping round to the south where there is a small glasshouse against the house wall. Another glasshouse lies within a formally laid out section of the garden which, together with some other small buildings, suggesting that this was a kitchen garden (F, 7).⁸

1884 Winnington Bank House was put up for auction, described in the catalogue as:

"Lot 26 All that Desirable Family Residence known as Winnington Bank together with the Outbuilding, pleasure grounds, conservatory and entrance lodge, late in the occupation of Mrs Hostage..."

Lot 27 All that piece of building land consisting of a well stocked kitchen garden with two vineries, garden house, shippon and paddock. This lot is well adapted for Building purposes, having an extensive frontage to the high road leading from Northwich to Runcorn....

Lot 28...

Lot 29 All that piece of garden land...now in the occupation of Mr L W Marsh. The lot consists of walled Terrace Gardens in a good state of cultivation, situated close to Northwich and having a southern aspect.

It is intended to offer... lots 26-29...in one lot in the first instance. The property is very compact, is nicely wooded and commands an extensive view, and is admirably adapted for a Hydropathic Establishment similar to the Brine Baths now in operation in Nantwich and other places."⁹

The property was purchased by Robert Verdin, a salt manufacturer and philanthropist who lived at the Brockhurst in Leftwich.

1887 It was at a meeting in January held to affirm "the desirability of commemorating the Queen's Jubilee" that Robert Verdin "first communicated to the public his intention to confer upon his local town a great and lasting boon in the shape of a public park and recreation ground, baths and an infirmary".¹⁰ That he was able to do this was due to his family's salt business. Joseph Verdin and Sons owned six salt plants (Marston, Witton, Moulton, Over, Wharton and Middlewich), employed over 1000 people and built houses and shops for their workers. They owned a fleet of steamers, barges and narrowboats and had over 500 railway wagons and rail vans. By 1881 Joseph Verdin and Sons were the largest salt manufacturer in the country producing over 353,000 tons of salt annually.¹¹

At the time of the park opening, Winnington Bank was described as:

"charmingly situated in close proximity to the centre of the town and commanding a fine view of a wide expanse of country. Mr Verdin bought from Mr Neumann the adjoining field, which added to his previous purchase, and the full extent of the property is now 14 acres. He could not have been more fortunate in the selection of a site, for the park is in great measure ready made. The ground undulates beautifully, and is studded with fine old trees, which deprive it of the look of newness, and give it a picturesque park-like appearance. The layout of the Park and the execution of various works therein came at a most opportune time, as employment was found for a long period for a hundred men or more, many of who would otherwise have been idle. The landscape work was entrusted to Messrs F and A Dickson and Sons of Chester who have been represented during progress by Mr Reckie."¹²

The park was laid out by James Holland¹³ who was also described as the architect of the baths.¹⁴ Research indicates that this was James Holland, a ship's carpenter, who lived in Wincham and whose household included Joseph Ellis Verdin in the 1881 census.¹⁵ The presence of a Verdin child in the household, the son of a relative of Robert Verdin, suggests

that James Holland was a trusted employee. As a ship's carpenter he would have been able to draw, and thus prepare a layout for the park.

The park included tennis courts and bowling greens behind the infirmary (on the former kitchen garden), and two lodges, one for Mr R Fowles the park keeper and the other for Mr F Starkey, baths superintendent. The work to improve the Castle Street side of the park was described as a transformation.

"What was formerly a rough, unsightly heap of ruinous brick walls and terraces is now made into a wall, laid out and properly formed grass slopes and terraces, with gravel walks between, the lower portion being well planted with selected shrubs and trees, and the whole backed up with a good substantial brick wall two feet thick."

The Castle-street entrance to the Park, near to Dr Browne's surgery, has been greatly improved, Lord Tollemache having kindly allowed a length of the narrow footpath leading over Castle-fields to Weaverham to be absorbed in the roadway, which now forms a spacious approach to the entrance gateway. Here there are two large wrought iron gates and substantial massive oak posts, flanked on either side by circular wrought iron railings on a stone plinth. This ironwork was supplied by Messrs Morton and Co of Liverpool...

*Opposite the ends of the Baths are some miniature waterfalls planted on each side with shrubs and ferns."*¹⁶

*The Winnington Street entrance had a wrought iron gate surrounded by stonework with a panel saying "Entrance to the Verdin Park and Baths". Each side stone walls supported embankments and there were evergreen shrubs each side of the path. The Welsh gravel for the paths was brought by Messrs Joseph Verdin and Sons vessels, and hundreds of trees and shrubs supplied by Dicksons with planting and laying out by their landscape gardener Mr Reckie."*¹⁷

Northwich Local Board appoint Mr Joseph Dale of Bostock Hall gardens as park keeper at 24s a week, *"responsible for the work in connection with the laying out, planting, improvement, and maintenance of the park and pleasure grounds, including the lawn tennis ground, bowling green, and garden and ground attached to Victoria Infirmary."*¹⁸

Robert Verdin's bequest was to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 but Robert died aged 51, on 25 July 1887 just before the park was due to be opened on August 1st. As a consequence, the park opening was deferred until 12 October 1887. The brine baths consisted of a 60-by-20-foot (18.3 m x 6.1 m) cast-iron plunge bath and five slipper baths¹⁹, and were situated north of the footpath from Castle Street. The Victoria Infirmary, Verdin Park and Verdin Baths were opened by Lord and Lady Stanley.

1888 It was decided to erect a statue of the park's benefactor, Robert Verdin. The sub-committee concerned with funding and commissioning the statue went on a fact finding visit to Manchester and Ashton-under-Lyne. Both Mr Swynnerton, sculptor, London, and J and H Patterson of Oxford Street Manchester who provided the pedestal for the Hugh Mason statue in Ashton, had submitted estimates to the committee. The fund had reached £750.²⁰

Sculptor Joseph William Swynnerton came from the Isle of Man.²¹ The statue of Robert Verdin was located directly opposite the main, north entrance to the baths.

1889 14 September – the unveiling of the Memorial Stature of Robert Verdin J.P, M.P took place at 4pm, accompanied by a "Grand display of ornamental and scientific swimming in Verdin Public Baths. Mrs R M Whitehead, the champion lady swimmer of the world, will give feats in ornamental and scientific swimming", with various swimming races.²²

1890 5 July – The Northwich Guardian carried a full description of the proposed new bandstand in the park, a gift of Joseph Verdin, designed by "Mr James Holland of Castle". See Additional notes

The same edition also records that "Among the many improvements which have been carried out at the Verdin Park, the one at the Castle entrance... is sure to be appreciated by the public. It will be well remembered that to reach the Verdin Baths or Statue by the entrance names was not altogether a pleasant task. A stiff climb was absolutely necessary....The Local Board, however have at last come to the rescue, and by transforming the steep walk into a series of wide and substantial steps, have made the ascent and descent much more easy and comfortable."²³

1903 Tenders were submitted for the repair of the eastern side of the baths and for an extension. The tender of Mr S Appleton was accepted by Northwich Rural District Council Parks and Baths Committee.²⁴ This extension is shown with a relief in the apex that appears to be of terracotta, probably made locally by Jabez Thompson of Northwich Brick and Tile Works (14 & 15).²⁵

1904 The council published a brochure extolling the benefits of Verdin Brine Baths, located in Northwich and describing the attractive, pastoral environs.²⁶

1908 *"Of late years quite a number of subsidences have occurred in Verdin Park, Northwich, but beyond the formation of cavities which have been quickly filled up, no damage has been done. The Bath Superintendent's house which is situate in the Park, has, however, revealed marked defects, caused by the moving earth from time to time, but repairs have hitherto rendered it habitable. On Monday however, signs of further sinkage were observed immediately in front of the house and Mr Starkey wisely resolved to remove the sleeping quarters of himself, his wife and family. It was a fortunate and timely resolve, for in the early hours of Tuesday morning a big subsidence occurred directly opposite the front door of the house involving a portion of the Park road leading to the Verdin Baths. A couple of large trees near the establishment on the ground forming Castle Hill, which skirts the Park, were brought down and one of these just struck the gable end of the house causing some damage.*

*The cavity formed was 29ft deep, and the affected area 50 to 60 yards in circumference. Mr J Brooke, the Urban Council Surveyor was early on the scene with a gang of workmen who began to fill in the dangerous area.*²⁷

1909 Park Subsidence: "The surveyor was authorised to employ men at his discretion during the winter months for the purpose of filling in the subsidence in the park. The amount to be expended not to exceed £10."²⁸

1910 The Ordnance Survey shows the layout of the park with baths, bandstand, monument, drinking fountain and a simple layout of paths (G). The trees in the park appear to be ones retained from former field boundaries. The map also shows a new wing added to the infirmary in 1902 and further extensions of 1905.

1910 Northwich Urban Council urgently considered a site for new baths.²⁹

1911 Verdin Baths closed due to subsidence, and were replaced by baths on Victoria Road, Northwich, which opened in 1913 (16 &17).

1912 Tenders were invited for the "Purchase, Demolition and Removal of part of the Verdin Public Baths, Northwich...Included in the sale are an iron plunge bath tank, steam boiler, donkey engine and feed pump, iron girders, pipes, valves etc."³⁰

1938 Ordnance Survey indicates that the baths had not been demolished though they were no longer in use but that the statue of Robert Verdin, had been removed to a safer location in the middle of the park (H, 18, 19). The map records further development at the infirmary with an Orthopaedic Clinic which opened in 1919, a children's ward in 1924 and further additions in the 1930s.³¹

1935-45 During the war volunteers filled sandbags by the bandstand and the bags were put in front of the Infirmary's windows in case of a bomb blast.³²

1948 The infirmary joined the NHS.

Wrought iron gates and stone gate piers from the north entrance to Bostock Hall were relocated to the Castle Street entrance to Verdin Park.³³

2020 The gates and gate piers were removed for repair (24).

2021 The restored gates and gate piers are installed (38 &39) and the new play area completed.

Description

Location

Verdin Park is situated west of the confluence of the River Dane and Weaver Navigation and Northwich town centre, at an elevation of 30m AOD. It is bounded to the east by Castle Street, to the south by private properties and Queensgate Allotments, to the west by the Winnington branch railway and to the north by the Victoria Infirmary and private properties on Winnington Street. The park comprises two predominantly grass areas north and south of a steeply wooded valley, with a wooded slope towards properties on Castle Street and a steep bank with grass and ornamental planting to the south. The east facing slope lies within Northwich Conservation Area.

The eastern slopes and the central valley have been subject to considerable subsidence due to the geology and geomorphology of the Weaver Valley. At the end of the ice age, the ice sheet retreated north towards the Irish Sea. The melt water, scouring at pressure beneath the ice, created an over deepened depression or tunnel valley in the Weaver valley immediately south of Northwich. Glacial till and sediment filled the valley over the bedrock of rock salt. Ground water percolating through the fill reached the rock salt (wet rock head), dissolving some of the salt and washing material away so that the ground above subsided. The valley through the park was probably created by glacial melt water. It has suffered similar instability to the slopes of the Weaver Valley and for the same reasons.

Boundaries and Entrances

The principal entrance to the park is situated on Castle Street, entered by gates relocated from the north lodge at Bostock Hall, though at the time of recording the gates had been removed for restoration (24). The railings each side also came from Bostock and are flanked by beds with bedding. This vehicular and pedestrian entrance leads to a historic route up a valley through the centre of the park (25), which continues as a footpath over a pedestrian railway footbridge towards Winnington. To the south, a second pedestrian entrance from Castle Street has steps up to the highest part of the park (26). Footpaths enter the path from the south from Barbers Lane (27) and between Queensgate Allotments and the railway. These pedestrian entrances are all un-gated.

There is a northern vehicular entrance from the main entrance into Victoria Infirmary from Winnington Lane, used to provide access for park events (28), and a narrow pedestrian entrance to the north-west from Winnington Street (29). This entrance passes between gate piers and up steps alongside the former garden of Winnington Bank, now the Victoria Infirmary, to enter the park.

Relict garden area within Victoria Infirmary grounds

The historic entrance to Winnington Bank House is situated at the top of Winnington Street and is used as a service entrance to the infirmary. It is flanked by a black and white half timbered lodge now part of the infirmary accommodation (9). This entrance leads to the historic drive to the house, which remains and is enveloped by later development of the infirmary. The present drive appears to follow the historic alignment, and either side are the remnants of planting from the garden including mature hollies (4). Opposite the house is a small staff memorial garden and down the slope to the south a large boulder, possibly a glacial erratic, beneath the trees (6). Most of the area of the former garden is occupied by a car park for the infirmary, and is bounded by a modern chain link fence. The straight alignment of the fence does not follow the historic garden boundary. The area occupied by the kitchen garden and then developed as bowling greens and tennis courts has been totally developed with additional infirmary facilities and car parking.

The Park

The northern part of the park comprises a gently undulating grass space bounded by mature trees and with a few trees within the grassland. The infirmary boundary and car parking is softened by a group of mature beech and oak trees (30). A diagonal footpath from the Winnington Street entrance to the railway bridge passes the stature of Robert Verdin, benefactor of the park (19). Chains between the small pillars around the statue plinth have been removed and one of the intermediate pillars has been damaged by fire. On the western side of the space is a concrete foundation marking the site of the bandstand and in the south west a modern play area (31).

Trees along the eastern edge of the northern park hide the steep bank down towards the river and screen the town from view. Two large beech trees situated at the top of the bank, probably contemporary with the early 19th century Winnington Bank House, mark the entrance to an informal path through the woodland. Much of the woodland is comprised of naturally regenerated trees many of which are leaning, a sign of ground movement indicating that the land remains unstable (32). The woodland continues into the valley where there is less undergrowth. The site of the former brine baths is not defined in any way though some pieces of stone suggest the location. Nearby and towards the end of the woodland is an enclosed dog exercise area.

The southern treed slopes of the valley are more open and contain two very large mature oak trees, probably of comparable age to the two Beech trees mentioned previously(33). The southern part of the park is more undulating and contains several distinct tree groups comprising a north/south line of lime trees (34) and to the east a north/south line of Lombardy poplars; a small avenue of Laburnum trees lining one of the paths (35), several specimen trees including a mature Red oak and a young red oak, and a group of mature lime trees on the highest ground near the southern boundary. The tree canopies limit views over the town but the glimpsed views indicate the extent of view once possible from the castle, and the prominence of St Helen's Church c.1350 which replaced an earlier structure (22).

The steep slope down to Castle Street (23) is crossed by a series of paths with steps, and planting beds some with clipped evergreens. The different styles of steps and path edging suggest work of different periods perhaps correlating with incidences of subsidence (36 &37).

Appended information/ additional notes

STATUE OF THE LATE MR. ROBERT VERDIN

IN THE VERDIN PARK, NORTHWICH.

The bronze statue of the late Mr. Robert Verdin, M.P., is the work of Mr. J. W. Swynnerton, sculptor, London. The height, including the bronze base, is 8ft. 6in., and the weight of metal is 15 cwt. The casting was entrusted by Mr. Swynnerton to Messrs. Singer and Co., of Frome, who adapted the *cire perdue* process in the production of the head and hands. The pedestal is a fine piece of workmanship, and reflects credit upon the contractors, Messrs. J. and H. Patteson, of Oxford-street, Manchester. It is composed of polished grey Aberdeen granite, and stands about 8ft. 6in.

high, the base being six feet square. On the principal face there is a raised die, which bears the following inscription, deeply cut and gilded:—
"Robert Verdin, M.P. Born, 1836. Died, 1887."
The pedestal is surrounded by a parapet of the same granite, unpolished, with eight pillars, the top portion of which are polished, a strong bronze chain hanging between each. The work has been carried out under the supervision of Mr. Burgess, from Messrs. Patteson's works. The site of the statue is on the brow of the park, some 30 or 40 yards from the entrance to the baths, overlooking the town.

Northwich Guardian - Saturday 05 July 1890

THE NEW BAND STAND IN THE VERDIN PARK, NORTHWICH.—Operations have been commenced in connection with the erection of the band kiosk, the gift of Mr. Joseph Verdin, J.P., C. Ald., of The Brockhurst, in the Verdin Public Park, Northwich. The structure, which is from a design by Mr. James Holland, of Castle, is octagonal in plan. The lower portion just above the floor line is formed of diagonal framing, with open arched head panels to the transom height, and over these are framed ornamental panels filled in with glass immediately under the eaves of the roof. The main roof will be covered with Ruabon red tiles with a lantern light, formed of small squares of glass in various tints in the centre. The roof of the lantern itself is to terminate in the middle with a floriated finial. Special means have been adopted by Mr. Holland for allowing the musical sound waves to escape through the roof. The overhanging eaves of the roof are to be supported with moulded and perforated wood brackets secured to each angle pillar. The base of the building will be of pressed brickwork, with a York stone plinth above, surmounted by a strong wood sill to carry the whole super-structure. The sill, and the whole portion of it, including the floor, will be so constructed and bound together, that it can be easily lifted by screw jacks, at a very small cost, should the ground at any time unfortunately subside. The work above the plinth is to be of varnished pitchpine. The contractors for the stand are Messrs. Rylance and Taylor, of Witton-street. When the kiosk is completed it promises to be a decided acquisition to the park, as well as a comfortable

Please note that this report contains the research and recording information available to Cheshire Gardens Trust at the time. It does not purport to be the finite sum of knowledge about the site as new information is always being discovered and sites change.

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- ¹ Excavations of the site took place from 1983. http://www.cheshirearchaeology.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/HTS_Arch_Assess_Northwich.pdf
- ² <https://forebears.io/england/cheshire/northwich/castle-northwich>
- ³ Listing description for Northwich Infirmary, Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list>
- ⁴ Tithe Map EDT 436/2, n.d. [Cheshire Tithe Maps Online \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](http://cheshireeast.gov.uk)
- ⁵ CHER Monument Record number 5848. Not seen
- ⁶ <https://books.google.co.uk/books>
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Cheshire_Railway
- ⁸ Caldwell's Business Ledger 363/10, entry 21.10.1833 records the purchase of 1 Coes Golden Drop Plum (Standard Trained) delivered by mail coach. <http://www.caldwellarchives.org.uk/plants/caldwell-ledgers/customer-reports.html>
- ⁹ CALS Local Studies Collection 224104
- ¹⁰ Northwich Guardian Saturday 15th October 1887 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ¹¹ [Robert Verdin - Wikipedia](http://jobar16.tripod.com/) . <http://jobar16.tripod.com/>
- ¹² Northwich Guardian Saturday 15th October 1887 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> Dicksons undertook the planting of Grosvenor Park, Chester.
- ¹³ Hartwell, C, Hyde, M, Hubbard, E and Pevsner, N. 2011. *The Buildings of England: Cheshire*. Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 515
- ¹⁴ Northwich Guardian Saturday 15th October 1887 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ¹⁵ [Ancestry® | Genealogy, Family Trees & Family History Records](http://ancestry.co.uk)
- ¹⁶ Winsford and Middlewich Guardian Saturday 15th October 1887 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ Northwich Guardian Saturday 23rd July 1887 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ¹⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwich>
- ²⁰ Northwich Guardian - Saturday 10 March 1888 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ²¹ [Joseph William Swynnerton - Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851-1951 \(gla.ac.uk\)](http://gla.ac.uk)
- ²² Northwich Guardian - Saturday 14 September 1889 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ²³ Northwich Guardian - Saturday 05 July 1890 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ²⁴ Northwich Guardian - Saturday 16 May 1903 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ²⁵ Jabez Thompson (1838-1911) was the ninth son of John Thompson Senior (1799-1867). In Northwich, in the 1860's the Thompson's had two family businesses, the Alliance Salt Works and the terracotta brickworks on Manchester Road. In 1867 Jabez's father died and Jabez inherited the terracotta brickworks and so took over the running of the Brick and Tile Works in Northwich (first established in 1824), whilst his brothers ran the Salt Works. The brickworks produced common, fine and moulded bricks. Jabez expanded the works and specialised in terracotta, including making panels and ornamental pieces. [Northwich and terracotta | Northwich Townscape Heritage Project \(northwich-th.co.uk\)](http://northwich-th.co.uk)
- ²⁶ Northwich Guardian - Saturday 02 July 1904 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ²⁷ Saturday 26 December 1908 Northwich Guardian <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ²⁸ Northwich Guardian - Saturday 06 November 1909 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ²⁹ Northwich Guardian - Thursday 19 May 1910 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ³⁰ Northwich Guardian - Friday 23 August 1912 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ³¹ <https://books.google.co.uk/books>
- ³² <https://www.warringtonguardian.co.uk/news/5221798.we-had-bags-of-fun-in-verdin-park/>
- ³³ [GATES AND GATEPIERS TO VERDIN PARK, Northwich - 1139109 | Historic England](http://historicengland.org.uk)