

Hamilton Square Gardens and the Holm Oaks Wirral Parks, Coast and Countryside

Hamilton Square

The construction of Hamilton Square, described by Pevsner Architectural Guides as "very grand indeed", commenced in 1825. William Laird of Cammell Laird shipbuilder's renown lived at No. 63. Laird had employed the architect James Gillespie Graham to prepare plans for the town. The style is reminiscent of the Moray estate in Edinburgh, designed by Graham in 1822, including cast-iron balconies of the same pattern.



Birkenhead Town Hall (adjacent to the gardens) was built as late as 1883-7 to a competition winning design by C.O. Ellison & Son. The design was chosen from 138 entries. The building was damaged by fire in 1901 and restored by Henry Hartley. On February 1887 a crowd of 5,000 people watched the opening ceremony. Built from Storeton stone and Scottish granite, it cost £43,000. The clock tower rises to 200 feet (60m). The renovations cost £15,000. The gardens were purchased in 1903.



Edmund Kirby built the unusual Queen Victoria Monument in the middle of the squares gardens in 1905. A Gothic spire a type of Eleanor Cross with two tiers of arches on freestanding granite shafts, Edmund Kirby did not charge for his design.



The 75 feet (23m) high octagonal memorial stands above Newby granite steps. The motto 'She brought her people lasting good' shows the affection that the nation had for Queen Victoria.

On the west side of the square is a statue of John Laird, 1877, by A. Bruce Joy. On the east side, the restrainedly classical war memorial, 1925, is by Lionel B. Budden, with sculpture by H. Tyson Smith.

Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*)

A surprising evergreen member of the Oak family, with dark green shiny upper to its foliage and a downy white underside. The acorns appear in loose irregular cups. Holm oak is a native to the Eastern Mediterranean but has been naturalised in the UK. It is one of the few evergreen oak trees found in Britain today and lends itself well to shaping - the shrub/bushy part of the tree is reasonably fast growing. It is found growing in a variety of situations, such as parks and gardens.



Holm Oak are resistant to salt-spray from the sea, and are often planted as a windbreak in coastal situations. However, during severe winters they are prone to dying or losing their leaves, so are more commonly found in the south of the UK. The bark is black and often looks burned and has close small scales all over, and often appears in unique growth patterns, new growth is often downy and red- brown in colour.

Folklore and uses

In ancient Greek lore the leaves of the Holm oak were used to tell the future and to make crowns to honour people. The acorns were seen as a sign of fertility and it was believed that wearing acorn jewelry increased fertility. Acorns in Britain were seen as a symbol of knowledge although not in Ireland where they were replaced with hazelnuts.

The romans were particularly fond of the wood of the Holm Oak which they used to create cart and chariot wheels as well as agricultural tools, today it is less sort after and has limited use as fire wood as it is very slow burning. The acorns of the Holm Oak are particularly sweet and therefore were cultivated over Southern Europe, it is said that many ancient Greek tribes were said to have a staple diet of acorns, and they can be used to make a sort of coffee and flour once leached of tannins. The bark and galls were used to create medicine for diarrhoea and dysentery and the galls especially sort after for the creation of fine ink.



Oak Gall

Other names

The Holm oak is also known as the Holly Oak, which is synonymous with its scientific name *Quercus ilex* with ilex being the latin for Holly. The meaning of Holm in the name Holm Oak means hard Wood.

