Many beautiful shrubs and trees are likewise artistically set throughout the grounds; including the golden yew; the delicate Wellingtonia; the weeping gean, with its drooping foliage and bridal blooms; the gorgeous rhododendron plant; and the golden-tressed laburnum

Dollar Park
Geoff B Bailey

Dollar Park lies on the road heading west towards Camelon from Falkirk town centre and is often seen as the town’s own park. It occupies 4.6ha (11.36 acres) of land to the north of this busy road in what used to be the Victorian estate of Arnotdale. The name was changed in 1922 when Robert Dollar gave it to Falkirk Burgh.

The estate was formed around 1830 by James Russel, a prominent writer and businessman in the town. His partner, Henry Aitken, took the land to the west and established Darroch. Russel set up all the normal accoutrements of a gentleman’s estate – a large mansion house (SMR 945), doocot (SMR 4), walled garden, greenhouses, potting sheds, lodges, sundial, drives, a fountain, and appropriate tree planting. Over the years the garden ornaments were augmented with statues and vases. After the Russel family the house was occupied by other well-known citizens of Falkirk, including Robert Barr, James Ross and Sheriff Moffat.

Illus 1: 1940s OS Map.

Writing in 1869 Gillespie was effervescent about the planting: “We are also overpowered with the blaze of gay and gaudy blossoms. Still, from the exquisite commingling of colours, the loveliest, if not the grandest, of the floral beds, is that in which the grey cantauria, with its richly-powdered leaves, alternates with the “cloth of gold” geranium, the blue lobelia, and the dwarf beet. Many beautiful shrubs and trees are likewise artistically set throughout the grounds; including the golden yew; the
delicate Wellingtonia; the weeping gean, with its drooping foliage and bridal blooms; the gorgeous rhododendron plant; and the golden-tressed laburnum. But on the south lawn there is, perhaps rarest of them all, an old Scotch yew, which was transplanted into Arnotdale from Mungalhead, some six years ago.” (Gillespie 1868, 35).

In 1904 the small estate was advertised for sale. The following particulars were given: “The House contains 4 public rooms, 6 bedrooms, and 2 dressing rooms, day and night nurseries, bathroom, cloak-room, lavatories, kitchen, servants’ accommodation, etc. The grounds extend to several acres, and there are first-class vineries, conservatories, etc.; also large swimming bath under cover with means of heating. Ample stable accommodation and all other conveniences. Two lodges, occupied by gardener and coachman.”

The estate was bounded on the east by Kilns Road that northwards runs into Burnbrae Road, which since the construction of the railway in the late 1940s had become a cul-de-sac. The railway had also taken away the north-western tip of the estate, though it did increase its privacy. There were two drives. The main drive was off Camelon Road, adjacent to the Kilns Road junction. From the lodge here it curved through a small arboretum to the north-west to reach the main south-facing door. From there it continued as a footpath to a fountain set in the centre of a large shallow stone bowl. The secondary drive was off Kilns Road where there was another lodge. Here the gate piers were capped with sculptures of goats. This drive curved slightly to follow the edge of the tree plantation and then ran parallel with the main drive to a small courtyard at the back of the house. The north side of this drive was bounded by a fence and the 3.84 acre field beyond was used to graze animals. It was divided in two by a narrow west/east path leading from Burnbrae Road to a cottage. To its west was another grass park of 2.0 acres. The small court north of Arnotdale House had stable in its west range and a coachouse in the north-east pavilion. A north-west pavilion appears to have been for accommodation and between them must have been the indoor swimming pool alluded to in the advertisement. North of these courtyard buildings, on the other side of a track, was a doocot and outbuildings (presumably a laundry and dairy). North-west of the House was a large walled garden built with the liberal use of brick. There was an extensive range of greenhouses and hothouses along its north wall, with a tall central bay. In front of this stood a sundial.

Illus 2: The entrance to Arnotdale House from Kilns Road showing some of the “valuable trees”. The gate piers are capped with now headless sculptures of wild sheep.
The facilities had changed little by December 1920 when it again was on the market: “The House, which contains 4 Public Rooms, 7 Bedrooms, 2 Dressing Rooms, 2 Bathrooms, Butler’s Room and Pantry, stands in its own Grounds, extending to fully 11 Acres. The Offices, which include Stables, Coach-House, etc., are commodious. There is a Walled Garden, with Vineries, etc., and a Swimming Bath. The Ornamental Grounds and Shrubberies are tastefully laid out with rare and valuable Trees and Shrubs. The Grass Parks on the Property extend to about 5½ Acres. There are also 2 Lodges and a Cottage on the Property.”

On this latter occasion it was sold at a public roup held in Falkirk’s Royal Hotel for the upset price of £5,600. The purchaser was acting at the instance of Falkirk’s provost using money made available by Robert Dollar. Dollar had been born in Falkirk, but left at the age of 13 for Canada and made an immense fortune in shipping timber all over the world. Before long he made the property over to the burgh for the good of the people. He was very modest and records it thus in his memoirs: “Was pleased to have the opportunity of visiting Falkirk, my native town, and actually gave up business for three days. But I was not exactly idle as I carefully looked over twelve acres of land in the town, called the Estate of Arnotdale. There were four houses on it, all rented, one of them a fine big mansion. I did not make it known, but I gave the Mayor enough money to buy it. Some time after this I got a telegram that they had closed the transaction. It will make a fine park right in the town. There is a swimming bath on the place, and the rents they receive will make it self-supporting.”

Illus 3: Truncated Pier at the entrance to Dollar Park with brass plaque commemorating the opening.

The burgh council decided to enhance the public amenity of the park and to open it up as soon as possible. The tall wall fronting the main road was lowered and topped with iron railings. An additional pedestrian entrance was inserted in the south-west corner of the Park and the path to the cottage considerably widened and provided with benches to form a promenade. Four tennis courts were constructed to the north of the walled garden and an 18-hole putting green was formed to the east of that garden. The “cottage” became the tennis pavilion and a kiosk, and a lavatory was attached to its west side for the users of the new park. A second toilet was placed in the outbuildings north of the mansion. The mansion itself was turned into offices for the burgh’s staff such as the Dean of Guild and the engineer. The park was officially opened in May 1922 and a brass plaque attached to the pier on the west side of the entrance from Camelon Road commemorates this: “BURGH OF FALKIRK/ DOLLAR PARK/ OPENED/ MAY 1922/ BY/ G. RUSSELL ESQ./ PROVOST.”
Illus 4: Kiosk on the left and Tennis Pavilion on the right, looking West. Park benches were very popular in the 1920s.

Illus 5: The Putting Green looking north with the chimney stalks of Camelon Iron Works in the background.
On his next visit Dollar approved the pace of progress: “Great improvements have taken place in the Park and it has become one of the public gathering places in the district and frequently three thousand people use it as a recreation center on holidays and Sunday, and there is never a time when it is not visited by scores of people so I feel that in some small measure I have been able to bring a little happiness into the lives of my former townspeople. A band stand was being built and over two thousand, five hundred seats, were also being installed…” The Falkirk Herald noted that he had been “previously photographed by Mr J C Brown, proceeded on a tour of the Dollar Park grounds, visiting the pleasure gardens at present in course of construction, the tennis courts, putting greens, children’s playgrounds, and the tea rooms. In the pleasure grounds Mr Dollar especially admired the beautiful floral pedestal on which is set the statue of the ‘Prodigal Son,’ but in everything he saw and had pointed out to him he evinced a keen and close interest. He expressed his entire satisfaction with the manner in which the grounds have been laid out and utilized, and, in particular, favoured the system of gradual progress adopted in connection with the introduction of new features. Later, at the request of the Provost and Magistrates, Mr Dollar, to commemorate his visit and at the same time mark the attainment of his eightieth birthday, planted a ‘Cypressus Lawsoniana’ tree by the side of the carriageway leading to the house.” This augmented the already valuable arboretum with its oaks, beeches, American redwoods, birches and various types of yews.

Illus 6: Robert Dollar planting the tree.

The seating that he mentions was in connection with the “bandstand,” which was installed at the west end of the walled garden or “entertainment enclosure” as it was now called. This structure was in fact an open-air theatre. It was 50ft long and 20ft broad and constructed of wood. The floor was level with the heads of the audience, leaving plenty of storage room beneath it. Erected under the supervision of W Gibson, the burgh engineer, it cost around £100. However, timber to the value of £70 was gifted by the owners of four local yards. Seating was actually provided for 800 people, with room for the same number standing. Between the stage and the audience was a flower plot with plants arranged in the design of a harp and other musical instruments. It was officially opened in June 1924. Musical and theatrical performances were frequent with local talent to the fore. Falkirk’s other parks, Victoria Park and Princes Park, were a little way out of the town and the new park was an instant success.
The statue of the Prodigal Son, which stands 1.7m high on its base, was executed by the Lanark sculptor Robert Forrest. It shows a caped young man leaning on a truncated tree, with a pig between his feet. It was probably acquired in 1854 at the sale of the artist’s work following his death two years before. James Russel of Arnotdale was one of the group of leading citizens of the town that arranged for the purchase and display of another of Forrest’s pieces - the statue of Wellington - in Falkirk’s High Street.

**Illus 7: The Prodigal Son on its brick plinth.**

At the same time as the bandstand was opened it was proposed to emulate the People’s Palace in Glasgow by having a small museum in the park. Collections were assembled from a small number of enthusiastic antiquarians including Mungo Buchanan, who had pioneered work along the Antonine Wall. It was formally opened in the house by one of their number, Thomas McGrouther, in June 1926. Thereafter the public could gain entry in the afternoons. Hypocaust pillars from the Roman fort at Rough Castle were placed outside the house.

1926 was also the year that the war memorial was unveiled (SMR 590). It was built facing the main road and its design reflected that of the cenotaph in London. Around it were geometric flower beds – the park had become noted for its brightly coloured displays and the greenhouses were opened to the public.

Robert Dollar on one of his trips to Peking to obtain return cargoes for his timber ships acquired two large lion statues. He had these shipped to Falkirk and in September 1928 the Parks Department placed them on shallow concrete platforms astride the main drive where these alien creatures still guard the entrance. They are 10ft tall and made of Chinese marble, with the lions erupting from artistically moulded oriental bases placed on legged sub-bases. One of them has a stone ball rather than a tongue, which rolls freely inside the mouth but cannot escape – an item that fascinates children.

Despite the rents from the two lodges and fees from the tennis courts and putting green the park was not self-financing. The voluntary contributions from those attending the acts at the “bandstand” simply were not keeping pace with costs, particularly in the bad weather. Performances were cut back and the costs “placed on the rates.”
The park was very popular with the public. It appears that the old heated swimming pool was unsuitable for their use and moves were made to construct an open-air pool on similar lines to that at Zetland Park. In 1929 Festus Moffat campaigned in the local elections on the basis that he would get the pool. In the event it never happened. There was, however, a fish pond by 1929. This was simply the bowl for the fountain and also appears in guides as a goldfish pond or lily pond. The cast iron bird finial with its outspread wings from the Gentleman Fountain, which had been dismantled in 1923, was placed in the centre of this. Together they were the most photographed feature of the park. A sand hole also gets a mention at this time.

Illus 8: The Fountain or Fishpond looking North-West with the Theatre in the background.

Illus 9: The Swimming Pool designed for Dollar Park and advocated by Festus Moffat.
Extending the appeal of the park an aviary and a pets’ corner were added in the early 1930s. The “zoo” included rabbits, guinea pigs, a squirrel, and even a monkey. The aviary housed an owl, a white cockatoo, pheasants, budgerigars, a magpie and a hawk. In 1952 it was noted that the aviary still held “exotic” birds. 1931 saw the installation of an outdoor draught board. This was still being advertised in 1973 and can be seen opposite the tennis pavilion.

Illus 10: The Aviary looking South-East in the snow.

The sloping bank on the west side of the main entrance lent itself to formal floral displays and before long became the floral clock. In the 1930s the hands were formed from plants – and so it only told the correct time twice a day. In 1959 Falkirk Rotary Club donated the mechanism for a working clock, helped by a donation from Robert Dollar’s son.

In the Second World War the park became the centre of Falkirk’s Holidays at Home campaign. The stage of the “bandstand” was roofed and changing rooms provided. Military bands featured heavily in a packed programme. In the summer of 1943 the bands included the Band of the Royal Scots, Glasgow Corporation Gas Dept Band, Royal Dragoons Band, Royal Corps of Signals Band, Jack Short’s Concert Party, the National Fire Service Silver Band, a piano recital, Alexander’s Transport Pipe Band and the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society Band. On a more practical level extra toilets were fitted up near the bandstand. The iron railings on the west side of the park were not removed for scrap because Walter Mitchell, the occupant of the neighbouring property, kept cattle in the parkland to the rear of his house. He also ran a market garden.

To the south of the mansion a report centre was constructed early in 1939. This brick single storey building with a thick flat concrete roof was intended to coordinate the town’s response to enemy actions, particularly bombing raids. The Home Guard provided protection in the hours of darkness.

In the years of austerity the park was still popular. The gardeners’ nursery was extended in 1959 and the new hothouses with their ferns, palms and dark green tropical shrubs were well visited. In 1961 a large toilet block was constructed just east of the walled garden at a cost of £3,000. In the 1960s Falkirk Council acquired South Bantaskine estate in which was a bronze sculpture of a boy riding a seahorse. This had been executed by the famous English sculptor, Alfred Hardiman RA (1891-1949) to commemorate the peace of 1918. It was transferred to Dollar Park for safekeeping and replaced the bird at the centre of the fountain. This was
unfortunate for such an important work and the water and the public caused its deterioration.

Just beyond the Peking lions a number of trees were removed in 1960/61 to create a small rock garden on the east side of the main drive. This garden was created specifically for the blind with scented flowers and braille signposts for guides.

In 1963 Falkirk Round Table reached its target of £1,000 to enable it to construct at small paddling pool to the east of the tennis pavilion (where the children’s playground is now). It consisted of two connecting ponds, one 40ft in diameter and 12ins deep, and the other 20ft in diameter and 6ins deep. Constructed in concrete with paving, it created a kidney-shaped layout. Nearby punch and Judy shows attracted children. A table tennis area was established opposite the tennis pavilion/kiosk. The bandstand had to be dismantled in the late 1960s.

**Illus 11:** Pond announcement in the Falkirk Herald.

In 1990 Falkirk District Council rationalised its horticultural activities and centralised its nurseries. Such activities ceased at Dollar Park. For a short time thereafter the walled garden was used as a training centre for a Youth Opportunity Project.

**Illus 12:** Sheila McKechnie, looking North.

A bronze bust of Sheila McKechnie OBE, a Scottish trade unionist, housing campaigner and consumer activist, was placed on a tall plinth not far from the war memorial in 2006. She had been born in Camelon in 1948. The bust is by Suzanne Robinson. In 2012 the revival of the walled garden began when a new bandstand was constructed there using cast iron pillars reclaimed from Grahamston Railway Station and lent for the purpose by the SRPS. This was immediately followed by a picnic area, a rock pond, a reading area, a sunken chess board with a Roman arch, and new paths and lawns to present an informal setting; completed in 2015.
In summary the infrastructure of the park appears as:

- 1922 Park opened.
- 1924 Bandstand/open air theatre built
- 1926 Museum launched; war memorial unveiled
- 1928 Peking lions installed
- 1930 Zoo and aviary
- 1931 Outdoor draughts board
- c1943 Bandstand roofed
- 1959 Hothouses erected; floral clock tells time
- c1960 Seahorse statue moved to the park
- 1961 Toilet block
- 1963 Paddling pool built
- 2012 New bandstand
- 2015 Walled garden re-opened as an informal leisure area

Illus 13 (left): The Boy riding Seahorse Fountain in the 1970s. Note the wooden trellises and the greenhouses in the walled garden.

Illus 14 (top): Draughts board looking north.
Appendix

**Arnotdale doocot** (SMR 4)
The doocot was built shortly after the house in 1834, as is testified by the date on a sundial set below the blank window on the south side. Two doors on the N side of a square base, and a small window in each of the W and E walls suggest that the ground floor was used as a garden shed. The upper floor is octagonal with blind arched windows in each side under a projecting cornice which carries the roof in a Greek Revival style. It is built of ashlar masonry placed upon a plain square string-course, whilst the masonry of the lower storey is of random rubble with dressed quoins. The roof is slated, ogee in form rising to a pointed spike which used to possess an iron trefoil finial. A small dormer in the roof, facing south towards the house, gives access for the birds. This is one of three which formerly crowned the gracefully curved pitched roof, each with two dove openings. The roof was re-slated in 1994.

![Illus 16: Arnotdale doocot looking north-east.](image)

**Arnotdale House** (SMR 945)
A large 2-storey mansion house originally built c1830 but remodelled in the third quarter of the 19th century. It is constructed of droved ashlar with panelled pilaster angles. The main façade faces south and is symmetrical with twin canted bays and consoled first floor balconies and pediments. The latter supported large urns, which were removed in the early 1960s. In the centre is the fluted Roman Doric column doorpiece. The flanks of the house differ in design. The west has a bay with shell headed niches on splayed sides. To the rear a cobbled courtyard is created by blocks of one and a half storey with pedimented Venetian fronts (the west one has lost its pediment).

![Illus 17: Arnotdale House looking north-north-east.](image)
The mansion was set in extensive grounds with a small walled garden incorporating greenhouses and vineries. A brick structure with a concrete roof was added to north in c1939 as the Falkirk ARP Control Centre. Windows inserted into this after the war. These occupy the upper part of the walls. The exterior of the house was extensively repaired by Falkirk Council in 2010 and the house placed on the market. The house had been built for James Russel, writer in Falkirk. It was later owned by Robert Barr, James Ross, Sheriff Moffat, and Robert Dollar. The latter gave it and the park to Falkirk Town Council in 1922. In 1926 the house was used as a museum, which closed in the late 1960s. Until the 1990s the property was leased to Age Concern and used as a day centre.

Illus 18: The courtyard at the back of Arnotdale House looking west.

**Falkirk War Memorial** (SMR 590)
At first a site in Newmarket Street owned by the Burgh Council was favoured for the erection of a war memorial, but in the event this was thought to be too intrusive. In the end a location next to the road from Camelon to Falkirk in Dollar Park was chosen, a site also in the ownership of the Council. The keynote of this monument is simplicity almost to the point of severity. There are no mouldings on the stonework, instead all the offsets are cut starkly at right angles. A cenotaph structure stands centrally on an elevated rectangular terrace enclosed on three sides by a wrought iron balcony railing on a low parapet wall with stone pillars at regular intervals. The fourth side presents seven broad steps to the main road, which was subsequently widened to front them. The seven stone pillars in the enclosing fence are 6ft 6ins high and 2ft square at the base and cap which are stepped out from the main body. The platform is paved with concrete slabs radiating from the cenotaph. This has a shallow platform of its own, with the main monument stepped in by two feet on all sides to provide a ledge for the placement of wreaths. The cenotaph is 7ft 6ins long by 6ft broad and stands to a height of 12ft 6ins. On the front and back are bronze festoons of laurel wreaths and a plaque bearing the burgh coat of arms and motto "Touch ane, Touch a". Below this, on the side facing the road, is a bronze plaque with a thistle motif border bearing the inscription "Over Eleven Hundred Bairns Died for their King and Country and in the Cause of Freedom, 1914-1919. They died that we might live." On the north side a similar panel reads "In Proud and Grateful Remembrance of those who Fell and those who Carried On in the Great War. Let us Forget them Not." On the east and west sides are swords, 5ft 10ins long, with laurel wreaths entwined in their handles.
Illus 19: The War Memorial looking North-East.

The monument was designed by Leonard C Blakey of Copland & Blakey, architects, Falkirk. The masonry work was executed by Ramsay Brothers. The burgh had considerable trouble raising the necessary funds by subscription. An estimate put the price of the work at £1,100 if executed in freestone, and £1550 if done in granite. The committee in charge of the arrangements had no hesitation in prompting for freestone. It was unveiled by the Duke of Montrose on Sunday 13th June 1926, and dedicated by Rev Alexander Loudon. In 1953 alterations were approved to add two bronze plaques that bore the following inscriptions:

"On the sea, in earth's distant places, or at home, and in the air, nearly 220 men and women of Falkirk died for their country in the cause of righteousness -1939-45"

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them."

The alterations of cost £1,400, and were paid for by the Burgh Council. It was re-dedicated on Sunday 19th July 1953 by Rev T M Linkie after being unveiled by ex-provost Wallace. There are no names on this monument.
The Fountain

Illus 20 & 21: The Fountain with Bird looking East, and with the Child on Seahorse looking North.

The fountain was already in the grounds of Arnotdale House when it was bought for Dollar Park. The circular pool or bowl is 6.6m in diameter and has stone kerbing (patched with cement), with a round moulded lip, and a concrete base. Soon after the opening of the park the cast iron finial from the demolished Gentleman Fountain, which had been kept in storage at the old tannery buildings, was used as a centrepiece and a pipe extended up its back. The finial took the form of a bird with head raised aloft and wings outstretched, perched on a rock. Benches placed around this on a perimeter path were very popular, as was the introduction of fish and lilies. Children in particular, were attracted to the water.

After the acquisition of South Bantaskine a fine bronze fountainhead that stood there was transferred to Dollar Park to replace the bird there. It featured a young boy with his arms raised sting on a seahorse. This topped a slender tapering pedestal carrying art deco patterns, vertical lines interspersed with salamanders and tendrils. Around its base were two rows of upstanding acanthus leaves, and one row of conventional leaves. These all sat in a large copper alloy basin, 1.2m in diameter, whose upturned edges were also formed of acanthus leaves. The basin was raised a few feet off the ground by a tapering pedestal. This beautiful work of art was executed by the English sculptor, Alfred Hardiman RA (1891-1949), to commemorate peace 1918. The whereabouts of the crowning statue are no longer known, but the base remains, now filled with soil and planted with annuals – a sad reminder of the health problems associated with water in parks.
Illus: The bandstand and sunken chess board in the walled garden, 2015.