

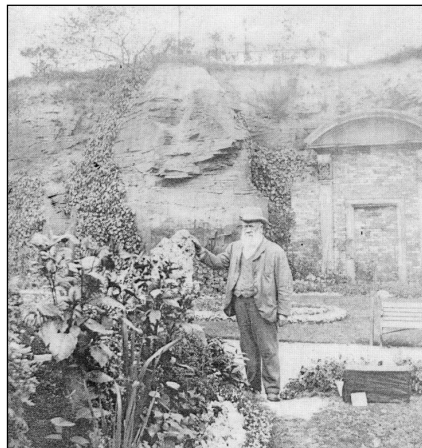
Henry Albiston

In 1881 and 1891 Henry Albiston, born in Dalton Magna in 1823, a widower, curator of Rotherham Park, was living in Boston Castle with six adult children.

Previous to 1872 Boston Wood was merely woodland and quarries worked by Mr. Birks. We were all very proud when the Corporation decided to lease this and convert it into a park. After its completion, thousands of visitors from all around the district came to see its beauties. On Easter Mondays trains from the sister towns were crowded with people on their way to this lung of Rotherham, and in the evenings the stations were thronged with the returning multitudes. We looked upon it as a thing of beauty. Its flower beds were the envy of the whole of Yorkshire and many were the compliments paid to the park keeper, Henry Albiston, for his floral displays. Galas were constantly held in the Park. One in particular, I remember, caused a deal of comment in the town. Promoted by the Corporation for the purpose of improving the park funds, amusements were thought necessary to draw a big crowd. These were placed in the hands of Mr. Sam Sweeney proprietor of the local theatre. Acrobats, knockabouts, comic singers, dancers, etc., were staged. The quality was considered to be of a very inferior character and not calculated to uplift the younger generation. It was at this gala that Miss Milly Sweeney, afterwards well-known in the theatrical world, made her debut. The Council wisely decided against a repetition.

A very different form of entertainment was the visit of the America's famous regimental band of sixty-five performers. Gilmore's band was visiting the chief towns of the country, and we were considered, fortunate in securing them. They occupied in America a similar position to that of the Life Guards in this country. At the expiration of the lease some years ago the Corporation purchased the park from the Earl of Effingham.

A Retrospect of over 60 years, by Alderman George Gummer, J.P.



Henry Albiston was the Park curator

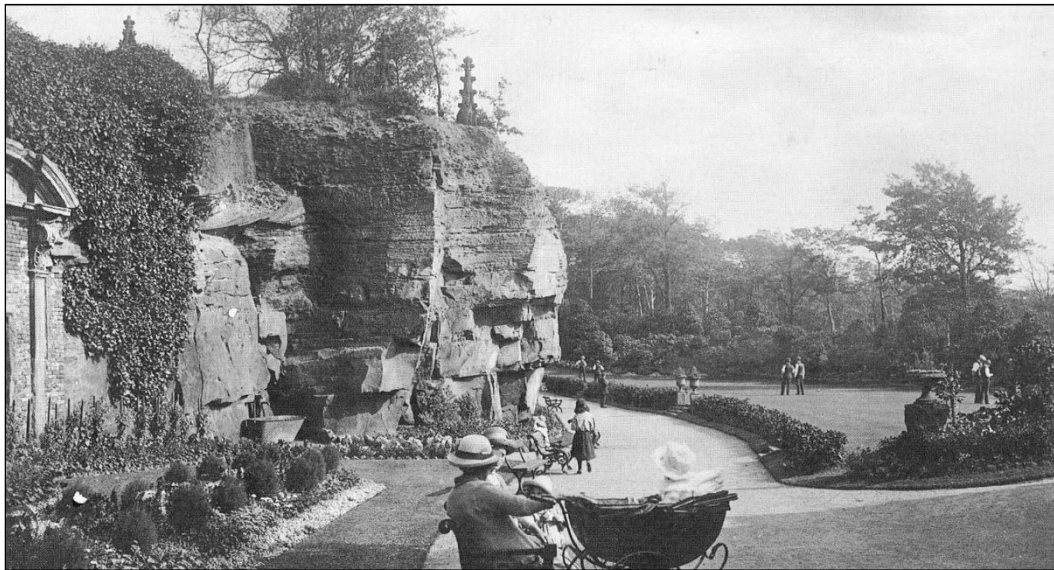


We deeply regret to have to record the death, which took place on Saturday evening, of Mr Henry Albiston, curator of Boston Park, Rotherham, who has held the position over thirty years and was in his 86th year. About six months ago Mr Albiston suffered from an attack of influenza, which left him weak and for about a fortnight, before his death he was gradually sinking. The end came quite peacefully.

Mr Albiston was one of the oldest servants of the Rotherham Corporation and he commenced his duties at Boston Park at an age we would consider much too old for one entering the municipal service.

Boston Park was ceremonially opened for the use of the public of Rotherham on July 4th 1876. Two years ago, on the anniversary of the interesting event, a representative of the Advertiser had a chat with Mr Albiston, the substance of which was printed at the time. Though then at the ripe age of 83 Mr Albiston continued his daily duties, often rising before six o' clock in the morning and seldom finishing until about nine o'clock at night during the summer months.

Mr Albiston was born at Dalton, and his first place as a gardener was at Alwarke Hall, which does not now exist. In the years that followed he held positions at Owston Park, near Doncaster, The Woodlands, near Doncaster, at Arksey, at the York Nurseries and in 1847 or 1848 he came to Rotherham, or rather Masbro', one of his first important professional tasks being to lay out the grounds of Ferham House, the occupant of which was then Lawyer Royle. After this he served at Carr House and at Oakwood Hall Moorgate. He was at Oakwood Hall nearly ten years serving Mr James Yates. He there had control of fifty two men and fourteen horses. He planted all the large trees at Oakwood, and indeed Mr Albiston gained a high reputation for that kind of work, becoming known as the "King of tree-lifters". He removed and replanted trees six hundred years old, which are still living to testify his skill.



The 'People's Park' was developed around a sandstone quarry

From Oakwood, Mr Albiston went to Cairnforth, then occupied by Mr George Brown and he was in this service at the time he was appointed by the Corporation to lay out Boston Park. It must not be forgotten that Boston Castle Hills at that time were little more than a quarry hole. Large deposits of stone remain yet and anyone examining the face of the stone will find traces of fastenings where pent roofs were secured when cattle shelters leaned against the rock. The land was acquired by the Corporation for forty years at a rental of £50 a year. The magnificent carpet bedding for which Boston Park is famous for miles around was Mr Albiston's favourite. During his long career as a gardener, Mr Albiston acted as judge at many important horticultural exhibitions in various parts of the country. Among many other horticultural triumphs he achieved was the raising of two special lobelias, which are known all over the country as "Rotherham Park" and "Boston Castle". He had gardening friends and acquaintances on many large estates in the kingdom. Mr Albiston was chiefly responsible for the arrangements of Clifton Park, so far as the plants and shrubs are taken into account; and he performed similar services in connection with the Masbrough Recreation Ground, and more recently the Corporation Isolation Hospital grounds in Badsley Moor Lane.

Rotherham Advertiser August 1908

The Rotherham Advertiser of 19th August 1905 described how the park contained 40,000 plants of various descriptions including 8,000 lobelias.

The lobelia 'Rotherham Park' was placed in the border bed around the Bowling Green. It was of a bright blue colour and had been raised at Boston Park for the previous twenty years.

There is another lobelia which Mr Albiston has brought to a high state of perfection. It has a larger white centre than the other and is known as the 'Boston Park'.

On the 5th December 2001 the Rotherham Civic Society sponsored the planting of a Flowering Cherry Tree in Boston Park in memory of Henry Albiston. Henry's great grand – daughter, Mrs Jean Brown of Hull, planted the tree with the help of Civic Society members, family and friends.