

FIELD SEARCH OF MILLER PARK

***Part of Avenham Park,
Accessed via Ribblesdale Place***

PRESTON

PR1 2NA

LEANNE TONGE

WEDNESDAY

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Aims

To conduct an initial field search on site area 'A' at Miller Park, Preston. To look for any evidence of a disturbance or physical evidence from a crime being committed in the area.

Objectives

Record all features of the scene through diagrams, notes and photographs. Conduct a full search of the area and record any physical evidence found. Make contemporaneous notes of any evidence found including whereabouts, photos and significance. Come to a conclusion based on any evidence and signs of a disturbance.

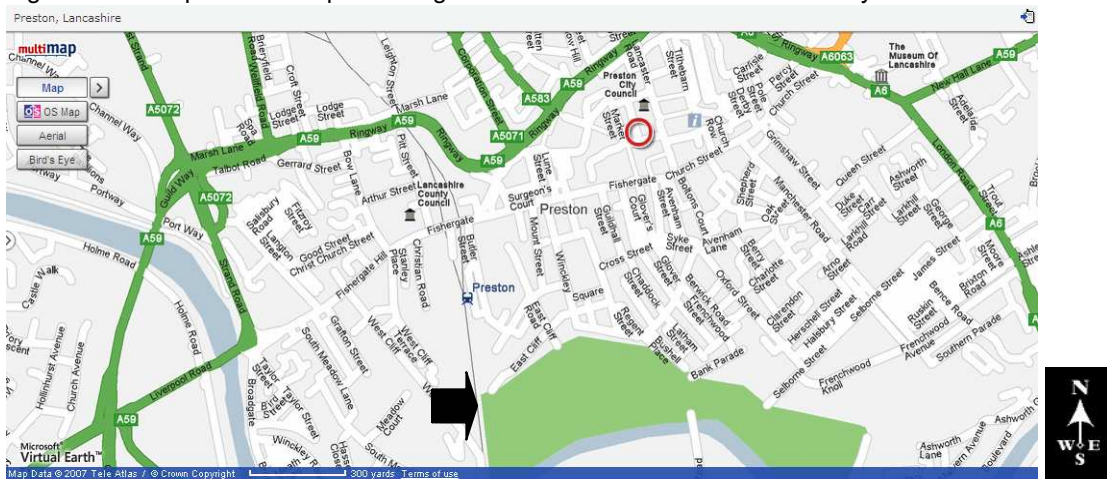
Location

Avenham & Miller Park is located within walking distance from the busy city centre of Preston. The map below shows a regional map highlighting Preston in the north west of England (fig.1) and fig. 2 shows a local map positioning Avenham & Miller Park in the city of Preston (both maps courtesy of www.multimap.com).

Fig. 1: Regional map of north west of England locating Preston in Lancashire.



Fig. 2: Local map of Preston positioning Avenham & Miller Park in Preston city.



The park is only 5 minutes from the train station and 10 mins from the bus station. From the main street in the centre of Preston, Fishergate, head down Chapel Street towards Winkley Square and onto Ribblesdale Place.

The search site was area 'A' at the far side of Miller Park (see arrow on previous map). Fig. 3 shows a sketch made of the area and initial search perimeters. Fig. 4 shows the Avenham & Miller Park and all the access routes for cars, pedestrians and cyclists. Once at Avenham Park follow the path/ road down the hill pass the pavilion in the far corner (south) to the rail house and go under the bridge. Once through the metal gates there is a long stretch of road (south east), follow this right down to the end until you reach the second rail bridge which is on the right. Directly ahead on a downhill slope is search site 'A'. This consists of manicured gardens and the huge rockery display behind.

Methods

- Search area 'A' was allocated to a team of 4 people who arrived at Miller Park at 10.30am.
- Access routes were established and perimeters checked.
- Area surveyed and potential evidence photographed and recorded.
- Photographs taken from all angles of the site and close ups taken on specific features.
- Contemporaneous notes taken during the search including details of weather, ground condition, specific features, and evidence found.
- Adhere to health & safety, be aware of the dangers.

Results & Discussion

Entry and egress routes were established first. The park is accessible from many routes but the main entrance at Avenham Park is accessed from Ribblesdale Place. This access point has bollards allowing permitted vehicles only, which is the same situation at the access point to Miller Park. Avenham is north east to Miller with a rail bridge entrance and large metal gates, padlock visible which is likely to be locked when the park closes (tbc). To the north of the bridge a track is clearly visible showing constant use of the short cut, leaves moved aside and many shoeprints – too many for an efficient footwear cast to be made.

From here a long stretch of road with mature gardens to the south east leads on to another access point, a second rail bridge with bollards. This bridge is north of site 'A' and adjacent is an access route behind a set of benches (see Fig. 5). At the top of this path is a multi storey office building and the area is clearly used by staff for cigarette breaks, notable litter and cigarette ends, the path has a central line cleared of leaves showing regular use.

To the north and running in a north west direction, alongside the railway track, is a very large rockery display incorporated around a path leading to two ponds and access to the river Ribble. The rockery area to the north holds several hiding places (see Fig. 6). The path shows clear signs of frequent use (cleared central line of leaves) up to the point where the path reaches the circular planted gardens – search site 'A'. The remainder of the path shows little sign of usage.



Fig. 5: Picture showing access route from higher path used regularly by staff at the offices in the background during breaks. This path is located to the north of search site '▲'.



Fig. 6: Picture showing large rockery walls and adequate storage areas for hiding incriminating evidence. Located north east of search site '▲'.

There are two ponds east of search site 'A', which is very murky and undisturbed. Leaves covered the surface area making it difficult to determine depth and nothing available to drop in to determine depth of each pond. Estimated size of the first pond, located at the bottom of the rockery wall path, to be approximately 18ft x 8ft and teardrop shaped. The second pond has an 8ft drop opposite the first pond and is west to site 'A'. Approximate size is 35ft x 15ft which narrowed to approx. 6ft at the smallest point and 20ft at the widest point, in a kidney bean shape. Both ponds could hold weapons and other evidence but closer inspection of the ponds would be required.

The far west of site 'A' displays the river Ribble, easily accessed and runs all around the south border of both Avenham & Miller Parks. The river provides an excellent

opportunity to dispose of any evidence, bodies or weapons with a little chance of retrieval due to the current and size of the object.

A car park and a fourth access route is situated adjacent to the river, south west to site 'A'. Once again, bollards restrict the vehicle access. Behind the car park are shops and a construction site with a recreational football ground. Also a road runs parallel to the rail track and leads directly to Fishergate.

Site 'A' consists of a circular spiral winding path surrounded by raised beds and turfed in between (see Fig. 7). The gardens are well maintained and must be visited regularly for the upkeep of the gardens and flower beds. There is virtually no litter in this region of the park suggesting that a grounds man is employed to keep the park tidy and clean.



Fig. 7: Picture of search site 'A'. Taken from north of search site. Very idyllic and manicured gardens.

Open fields stretch south and east of site 'A' with an access road that runs around the open field, starting at point north and travelling around the open fields (east) in a clockwise direction along the river (south) and behind the rail track (west) meeting back at the start.

Large shrubbery surrounds site 'A' making it easier for a suspect to hide and/or dispose of any evidence or weapons. A deeper search of the underside of large shrubbery areas and the ponds may prove useful. A search in the evening to determine the visibility after dark. There are several street lamps, which are situated around the access roads, need to determine if working lamps or ornamental – provide better lighting and improve witness sightings.

The Lancashire Evening Post (LEP) reported many crimes and the presence of gangs, creating an unsafe atmosphere and making the locals uneasy but since the £5 million regeneration last year these incidences have slightly subsided. It attracts many people and is surrounded by offices and residential homes. Many dog walkers, joggers, cyclists and pedestrians use the park to cut through to the city centre. The trains run frequently through Miller Park.

There are known murders, child abduction, rape and muggings in this park but in the last year alone the LEP reported on 11/1/08 a teenager robbed at knife point in Avenham Park, 13/1/08 a 30 year old found stabbed at Miller Park and later died in hospital, 18/4/08 a 42 year old pregnant woman raped at Avenham Park. Lastly 15/1/09 a man was ordered to pay fine after assaulting taxi driver at Avenham Park in October 2008.

This park, as with many parks are considered a high traffic area. During the search (1.5 hours) 4 dog walkers, 2 joggers, 1 cyclist, passerby's, several office staff sat for cigarette breaks, trains passing every 5-10 mins and several vehicles were granted access to the park. In the situation of a crime, especially during the day and around a similar time there would be at least 10 potential witnesses. Other witnesses include people over-looking the park from the offices north of the site, a ny grounds men or staff of the park and workmen. East of the site was a football ground a construction site and shoppers passing by.

In a case of rape or abduction there are several places for someone to hide in waiting. The very large shrubs provide a very good cover to hide persons or evidence. The river is another good source to dispose of items or bodies. There are plenty of places to park a car unseen from park users where a person can sit in waiting. CCTV is a deterrent and would provide evidence of a crime. Due to the magnitude of the park it would be difficult, especially at a certain time of day/ night , to provide evidence to a crime. The park is quite secluded at night and petty crimes may go undetected and unsolved.

Evidence Collected

Very little evidence was found in relation to a crime being committed. All the evidence found has photographed, recorded and sent to the lab. Figure 3 is marked with all the discovery sites of all the evidence found. A black sock was found first, believed to be a man's sock due to the size and material. The sock was soaking wet to the touch and covered in leaves suggesting it had been there a while. It is not likely to retrieve any biological material from the sock (DNA), nothing inside but further examination would reveal if it is of any significance. It was found on the rockery path north west to the search site. See Fig. 8 for the condition of the sock and the size (the pen is in the picture to illustrate the size).



Fig. 8: Picture of a black sock found during the search of site '▲'. Found north west of search site '▲'.

Marked as EV1 on Fig. 3.

Several large and small pieces of glass were found along the rockery wall further down from where the sock was found. Glass lay around near the rock wall, the cork and part of the label was also found (see fig. 9). The glass, cork and label were dirty with some of the glass embedded in the soil, they could have been sat there a while. Glass can be used as very reliable evidence if comparative samples are found. The refractive index can be calculated and match to another piece of glass from the same source with very high accuracy. Further analysis on these pieces of glass will provide more data and possible DNA if the neck of the bottle is swabbed, but unlikely depending on how long the pieces have been exposed to wet and cold weather conditions.



Fig. 9: Picture of several shards of glass, cork and label found during the search of site '▲'. Found north west of search site '▲'. The pen is there to illustrate the size of the pieces in situ.

Marked as EV2 on Fig. 3.

Above the rockery wall is the rail tracks and all along the track is wire mesh to keep people away from the tracks and any danger. There is a distinct bend in the mesh at the corner, above the first pond showing signs of a disturbance (Fig.10). This part of the fence is situated west of site 'A'. The surrounding area is covered in leaves and not recently disturbed. A closer search of this part of the fence may provide hairs or



fibres caught on the shape edges of the mesh, which can then be analysed under the microscope for comparison.

Fig. 10: Picture taken of the mesh fencing which runs along the rail track.

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The wire mesh at the top of the first pond shows clear signs of disturbance. Taken north west of the search site.

Marked as EV3 on Fig. 3.

A tyre mark was discovered parallel to the road that runs along the river. Tyre marks can be cast and compared to other marks on a database, providing the manufacturer of tyre and the types of cars or vans they are used on. This information can narrow down the search criteria when looking for a suspect.

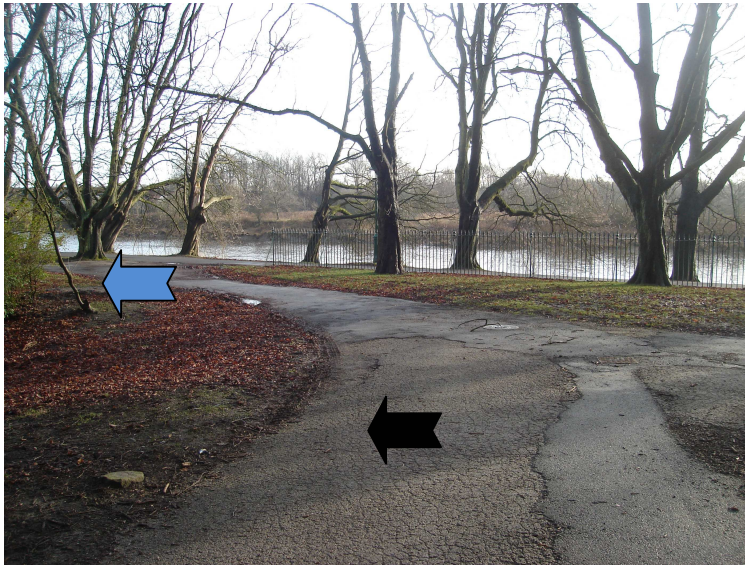


Fig. 11: Picture shows tyre tracks in the mud. Taken south west of search site opposite the river. The black arrow shows the tyre marks in the mud while the blue arrow shows where the large disturbed mound is.

Marked as EV4 on Fig. 3.

A large mound of soil was found behind a group of shrubs south of site 'A' (see Fig. 12, 13). The large shrubs are approx. 6ft high and 4ft wide. The disturbed soil is approx. 6ft long and 3ft wide. This area shows evidence of recent disturbance. Possible that evidence has been buried here or thrown is an already made hole. Further analysis of the mound and the surrounding area could provide more information. The mound has several smaller holes within it and it likely to have previously been a small flower bed. The small holes are possibly where flowers were planted and since pulled out. The small holes have collected debris and leaves. The soil is compacted and washed smooth by the rain so likely to been dug up a while ago.



Fig. 12: Disturbed soil mound previously been dug over. The rain has smoothed out the soil and leaves have collected in the small holes, suggesting

dug up several weeks ago if not longer.

Marked as EV5 on Fig. 3.



Fig. 13: Close up of Fig. 12 showing leaves and smoothed soil.

Vegetational changes were noticed south to site 'A' in the open field. There are three distinct square marks in the grass from what were previously flower beds, possibly (Fig. 14). Note the change in grass colour and the muddy borders. An aerial photo of the park taken from approx. five years ago show these were once flower beds (courtesy of Google maps). Aerial photographs at oblique lighting show many differences and patterns in the ground providing information on burial sites.



Fig. 14: Picture of open field, south to site 'A'. The three black arrows show the three square outlines on a diagonal.

Marked as EV6 on Fig. 3.

In conclusion the evidence found at the scene has not provided any significant evidence of a crime. There are notable changes to the gardens that can provide clues and a possible starting point had there been a crime committed and more evidence found. A more thorough search amongst the large shrubs and ponds may have provided more information.

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