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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Durlston Castle Historic Landscape

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Name:	Durlston Castle Historic Landscape
District:	Dorset (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Swanage
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.593987 Longitude: -1.9542720 National Grid Reference: SZ 03333 77141 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001701 Date first listed: 04-Jan-2007

Details

The ornamental park at Durlston is an interesting example of a late Victorian composition whose walks, shrubberies, tree planting, architectural features and inscriptions are largely well preserved. It was initially laid out as part of a grand scheme for residential development but was also intended to be accessible to the public. It is a sublime landscape with its walks, drives and pleasure grounds, and also a moral one which is reflected in the literary quotes inscribed on stone tablets and the educative information provided by architectural elements such as the Globe and the Chart.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT Swanage was associated with stone quarrying during the C18 and C19, but improvements to communications in the later C19, including the arrival of the railway in 1885, led to the town becoming a popular seaside and health resort. From 1863 George Burt, a local Swanage man, began buying up a narrow coastal strip of land to the south of the town overlooking Durlston Bay. The site commanded splendid views and Burt hoped to develop it as an idyllic housing estate. With the assistance of Weymouth architect George Crickmay, Burt drew up a plan for a major residential development which would be enhanced by plantations and pleasure grounds. It was to be the 'New Swanage' reflecting prevalent ideas for a suburban village, set within an elaborately planted ornamental landscape. Although Durlston Park Estate was conceived as a commercial venture; the ornamental landscape was intended from the start to be a public one. The residential development never really took off but new roads and walks were planned out and thousands of trees and shrubs were planted: tamarisks, rhododendrons, fuschias, Pampas grass, holly, yews and variegated laurels. From 1887 in an attempt to boost the estate's flagging fortunes Burt introduced new attractions to Durlston including the Globe, opening Tilly Whim Caves to the public, the construction of Durlston Castle which was intended to be a restaurant and refreshment facility and introducing stone inscriptions.

Burt died in 1894 and the development gradually stagnated. In 1921 Swanage Urban District Council was offered most of the land for its preservation as a public open space. Dorset County Council established the area as a country park and acquired the freehold of the Castle in 1973. During the C20 additional elements were introduced to the park including further seating, the installation of lettered stones marking walking trails, and some hard landscaping. However much of the late C19 designed landscape and its associated features remain and are an enduring legacy of Burt's plans for Durlston.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The ornamental park at Durlston lies on the southern fringes of Swanage, overlooking Durlston Bay, and an area at the summit of cliffs which rises precipitously from the sea. Lighthouse

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Road defines much of the western boundary beyond which is open pastureland and the coastline forms the eastern and southern boundaries.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach to the park from Swanage is via Lighthouse Road which provided vehicle access to Durlston Head and also defines the park's western boundary. It was constructed at the same time as Durlston Park was laid out to provide access from Swanage to the Castle and Anvil Point Lighthouse. It was originally called Tilly Whim Road but had been renamed by 1889. The road is bounded on its west side by a double row of stone walls between which a hedgerow of hazel, hawthorn, holm oak, laurustinus, oak and spindle was planted, interspersed at intervals with pine standards.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS Durlston Head Castle (listed grade II) was designed by the architect George Crickmay in 1887 and was a restaurant that formed the centrepiece of Burt's scheme. It is built in a mock-baronial style of Purbeck stone with Portland stone dressings. It is a prominent landmark occupying a platform cut into the hillside commanding views over Durlston Bay that acts as a focus for the park. To the east of the Castle is the massive Purbeck stone globe (listed grade II) that was erected from fifteen segments in 1887. It carries an interesting depiction of how the Victorians viewed the world and the colonies, focussing on the British Empire. It reflects Burt's desire to draw people to Durlston and to educate them while they were there. The Globe is surrounded by a circle of cast iron railings beyond which are stone tablets inscribed with literary quotations that are attached to a retaining wall. The Globe is approached from the south east by a flight of stone steps and along a path from the north west.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The basic framework consists of Lighthouse Road to the west, Isle of Wight Road which was a cliff top walk, and further east a coastal path known as Undercliff. All run north-south approximately parallel with each other and terminate at Durlston Head, close to the Castle which formed the centrepiece of Burt's planned landscape and was a venue for refreshments and entertainment. From the Castle a cliff top path, Tilly Whim Road, runs westwards to Tilly Whim Caves which mark the western limit of the Burt landscape, although it then continues further west to Anvil Point Lighthouse.

An entrance was created at La Bell Vue restaurant (demolished 1972) at the northern edge of the park. Close by was the Sunnysdale pleasure garden, a typical late C19 shrubbery laid out with meandering paths to either side of a stream, seats and shelters. One part was set aside for lawn tennis courts laid out on terraces with a pavilion at the east end. The pavilion has gone but the lawns for the courts are still visible. Much of Sunnysdale was originally planted with fuschias and Pampas grass and although the exotic species and designed aspect have since been lost, the original stone benches, one inscribed with Burt's initials, survive. From Belle Vue restaurant a zigzag path, the starting point for one of Burt's planned walks, ran eastwards to connect with Undercliff, the main coastal walk that led towards the castle. The First Edition OS map shows a mixed plantation of conifers and deciduous trees established along the coastal side of the path, designed to give protection from the elements, but also to screen early views of the Castle. Halfway along the route the planting ceases which allowed a picturesque view of the headland and the castle. Unfortunately much of this path had largely been lost in 1881 as a result of landslip; it had been repaired by 1902, but because of further landslips has been closed to the public. Close to the Castle, Undercliff walk terminates at an arched stone bridge. It has circular openings to either side of the central arch and has a granite plaque inscribed GB 1890 on its west side.

To the west of Undercliff is the Isle of Wight Road that was laid out in 1880 along the cliff top. It was built as carefully graded walk that ran southwards from the northern extent of the park towards the Castle at Durlston Head and represents the backbone of the designed landscape. It is bounded by a low drystone wall on the seaward side and a high wall on the landward side at its northern end. It runs down through plantations now dominated by holm oak, but originally comprising ash, hazel, holm oak, horse chestnut, pine, sycamore, spindle and yew. Viewing platforms are sited at various points although some of the views of Durlston Bay and Swanage have been partially or completely obscured by trees (2006). At the southernmost end of the Isle of Wight Road and Undercliff walk, just to the north of the stone bridge was a Dell that was probably originally planted with ferns and hardy exotics. A narrow gateway opposite the main castle gates provides access into the Dell. The planting has disappeared and the area is overgrown but drystone walls, perhaps marking the edges of pathways, survive in places.

From the Dell the Round the Head walk, a circulatory path, extends around Durlston Head below the Castle. It is bounded by a stone wall and a clipped tamarisk hedge on its seaward side. A number of simple stone blocks placed at intervals along the walk served as convenient seating from where the views could be admired. The area between the walk and the Globe is largely

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sloping grassland and has a number of seats consisting of granite blocks each marked with the points of the compass. Two broad areas of tamarisk shrubberies were introduced below the Globe in 1902. It was intended that the Globe would be viewed from the Castle Garden above, or from the circuitous path below. Immediately south of the Castle is the Chart (listed grade II), a low relief map carved on a slab of Purbeck stone. It was erected in 1891 and depicts southern England, the English Channel and north West France. Close to the Chart a further coastal walk, Tilly Whim Road, runs westwards along the cliff top to Tilly Whim Caves. It continues westwards along the coast beyond the limit of Burt's scheme. The northern end of Tilly Whim Road has a plantation of holm oak on its east side and a broad band of holm oak and a large wedge-shaped sycamore plantation to the west. The latter was established in 1902 on the western boundary of the Durlston Estate. The coast path which was bounded by a stone wall on its seaward side was planted with blocks of tamarisk shrubbery at intervals. Along its route are viewing alcoves and inscribed stones that Burt introduced to provide directions and information. The path runs alongside Tilly Whim Caves, a former stone quarry, which was opened to the public in 1887 and was an important attraction at Durlston. Access to the caves (closed to the public since 1976) was via steps and a passageway and there are simple stone benches close to the entrance. The caves opened out onto a shelf above the sea where there is a Burt inscription from *The Tempest* carved into the rock face.

REFERENCES Dorset County Council, Durlston Management Plan: 2005 - 2010 (2006) Dorset County Council, Durlston World Heritage Gateway Project - Outline Intermediate Zone Management Plan (2006) Wessex Archaeology, Durlston Castle and Durlston Country Park, Durlston, Swanage, Dorset (2005) Wessex Archaeology, Durlston Castle, Durlston Country Park and the Legacy of George Burt, Durlston, Swanage, Dorset (2004) T. Mowl, *Historic Gardens of Dorset* (2003), 114-20 D. Lambert, *Four Purbeck Arcadias* (1998), *New Arcadian Journal*, No. 45/46, 15-61 First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1889)

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.