

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PRINCESS GARDENS AND ROYAL TERRACE GARDENS

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Name: PRINCESS GARDENS AND ROYAL TERRACE GARDENS

District: Torbay (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

National park: N/A

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.461493
Longitude: -3.5295499
National Grid Reference: SX 91530 63525
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.localisation: [50.4611859863732,-3.53020723040566], [50.4610823163197,-3.52976885354067],
[50.4612696326089,-3.52967203282325], [50.4613633660628,-3.52961720700187],
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[50.4615355673829,-3.53077354766709], [50.461462973665,-3.5306769182048],
[50.4614318653139,-3.53065020086058], [50.4613983815001,-3.53059553837998],
[50.4612319234278,-3.5303544376725], [50.4611859863732,-3.53020723040566]

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001507
Date first listed: 30-Mar-2001

Details

A group of late C19 seafront public gardens and picturesque terraced cliff walks.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Torquay developed as a fashionable seaside resort from the late C18 when the Napoleonic Wars made continental travel impossible. The emerging resort was controlled by two land-owning families, the Carys of Torre Abbey, and the Palks, later lords Haldon, who owned the manor of Torre and Torwood. Sir Lawrence Palk initiated improvements to the harbour under John Rennie in 1803, and from the 1820s development of the resort was tightly controlled by William Kitson, a local solicitor, entrepreneur, and agent to the Palk estate. By the mid C19 much of the estate was let on building leases for the construction of large villas set in secluded grounds on winding drives around Braddon Hill and Warberry Hill (Cherry and Pevsner 1989). A new road was constructed along the foot of the cliffs below Waldon Hill in 1840, leading to new developments known as Abbey Crescent and Belgravia, and beyond, to the railway station (Russell 1960).

As the resort continued to develop in the second half of the C19, there was a need for further facilities for visitors. In 1878 a group of speculators planned to build a pier which would serve as both a promenade and a landing stage for steamers; this scheme did not find local support and was not executed. Further attempts to build a pier adjacent to Abbey Crescent in 1881 and 1883 also met with failure. In 1883 the town acquired control of the harbour and planned a scheme of improvements which aimed to create a sheltered outer harbour through the construction of a new stone pier or groyne; at the same time the road below

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Waldon Cliff would be widened and public gardens laid out on ground reclaimed from the sea to the north of the new harbour. The foundation stone of the pier was laid on 5 May 1890 by Princess Louise, daughter of Queen Victoria; it was subsequently named in her honour. Under powers conferred by the borough charter of 1892, the local authority implemented proposals for a public garden, using some 200,000 tons of spoil to reclaim the ground east of the pier and south of Cumper's Hotel. The gardens, known as Princess Gardens, were laid out to the design of Major Garrett, the Borough Engineer and Surveyor, and were opened on 1 June 1894; the Princess Gardens were the first public gardens in Torquay laid out by the municipal authority. The final phase of the improvement scheme involved the construction of a series of terraced walks along the face of Waldon Cliff above the improved Torbay Road. Known as the Royal Terrace Gardens, these walks were designed by Major Garrett and planted with a collection of exotic plants and palms donated by Dr Robert Hamilton Ramsay (1824-1907) of Duncan House, Torquay (Russell 1960).

In 1909 plans by Garrett for a new pavilion on a site at the eastern end of the Princess Gardens were approved, and the structure was completed in 1911 (Russell 1960; Cherry and Pevsner 1989). A war memorial was constructed in the gardens to the design of Sir Reginald Blomfield (1856-1942) in 1920, while the gardens were extended to the south of Princess Parade c 1930. Further land west of the Princess Gardens reclaimed as part of a coastal defence scheme c 1928 was also laid out as a promenade with a group of sunken garden enclosures. The Princess Theatre was constructed on a site at the western end of the Princess Gardens in the late 1950s; at the same period shelters were built in the Princess Gardens and at the eastern end of the Royal Terrace Walks. Today (2001), the site remains in municipal ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Princess Gardens and the Royal Terrace Gardens are situated to the south-west of Torquay on the north shore of Tor Bay. The c 5ha site is divided into three areas: to the south-east the Princess Gardens are bounded to the south by the New Harbour, while to the east the boundary is formed by the early C20 Pavilion. To the west the Gardens are separated from the early C20 promenade gardens by the mid C20 Princess Theatre. The Princess Gardens and promenade gardens are separated from the Royal Terrace Gardens by the B3199 Torbay Road. To the west the Royal Terrace Gardens are bounded by a mid C19 single-storey toll-house (listed grade II) and Abbey Crescent, today known as the Palm Court Hotel. The northern boundary is formed by a footpath, Rock Walk, which separates the Royal Terrace Gardens from the gardens of a group of mid C19 villas on Warren Road. The villa gardens are enclosed by high rubble-stone walls in which are set doors giving access to the footpath and Terrace Gardens. The Terrace Gardens are separated from the footpath by late C19 cast-iron spiked railings in which are set several gates. Further railings form the eastern boundary, separating the Terrace Gardens from the garden of the Torbay Hotel, known in the late C19 as Cumper's Hotel. Princess Gardens and the promenade gardens occupy level ground reclaimed from Tor Bay, while the Royal Terrace Gardens are constructed on the steep south-facing slope of Waldon Cliff to the north of the B3198 Torbay Road. There are extensive views across Tor Bay towards Paignton, Brixham, and Berry Head from all parts of the site, together with views from the Royal Terrace Gardens to Princess Gardens, the harbour, and Beacon Hill. To the north-east the site adjoins Carys Green, an area of open space to the north of the Pavilion which has been landscaped in the late C20.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is approached directly from the B3199 Torbay Road which passes from east to west through the site separating Princess Gardens and the promenade from the Royal Terrace Gardens. There are informal entrances leading north to the Royal Terrace Gardens from Torbay Road, while there are further gated entrances leading south into the site from Rock Walk which forms its northern boundary. Princess Gardens is open to Torbay Road to the north.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The Pavilion (listed grade II) stands at the eastern end of Princess Gardens and is entered from Vaughan Road to the north, and directly from the Gardens to the west. Approximately rectangular on plan, the Pavilion comprises two storeys and is constructed with a steel frame clad in cream and green Doulton tiles. A central two-storey hall running from north to south is covered by a tunnel-vaulted roof with a central dome and cupola surmounted by a gilded figure of Britannia. The central hall is flanked by single-storey wings which break forward in centrally placed bays. The roofs of these wings serve as promenades which lead to octagonal, copper ogee-roofed pavilions placed at the corners of the Pavilion. A theatre extension of 1939 to the east of the original building was demolished in 1986-7 at which time the east facade was

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reconstructed; it adjoins a late C20 car park (outside the area here registered). The Pavilion was constructed in 1911 to designs of 1909 by the Borough Engineer and Surveyor, Major H A Garrett (Cherry and Pevsner 1989).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Princess Gardens comprises an approximately triangular area of level ground to the west of the Pavilion. Areas of lawn are divided by curvilinear tarmac walks which connect Torbay Road and Princess Parade. To the west of the Pavilion an approximately elliptical-shaped lawn is planted with specimen Torbay palms (cordyline) and geometrical-shaped beds for seasonal planting schemes. Some 50m west of the Pavilion a sunken elliptical-shaped lawn is ornamented with further segmental-shaped flower beds, and has as its focal point a three-tier cast-iron fountain (listed grade II) which stands in a painted circular stone-kerbed basin. The fountain is ornamented with figures of putti riding dolphins which serve as jets at the base of the pedestal, while the central column supporting the basins has ornamental reliefs of country scenes. The late C19 fountain follows a pattern produced by the Saracen Foundry, Glasgow and was donated by the proprietor of Cumper's Hotel on condition that the Borough provided the basin (Ellis 1930). The fountain lawn is overlooked by a double-sided mid C20 shelter.

Immediately west of an axial walk leading south from Torbay Road to a bastion overlooking the New Harbour, the early C20 war memorial (listed grade II) stands within a hedged enclosure on a level lawn. Constructed to designs by Sir Reginald Blomfield in 1920, the memorial comprises a square-section stepped Portland stone pedestal surmounted by a bronze urn finial. Each face of the memorial bears bronze inscription plaques, draped wreathes, and inverted torches, also executed in bronze. West of the memorial is a further area of lawns planted with specimen trees and a group of mature ilex oaks. The lawn is terminated to the west by a single-storey, open-fronted mid C20 shelter which is constructed against the east facade of the mid C20 Princess Theatre which forms the western boundary of the gardens. These lawns are overlooked by a further free-standing mid C20 shelter.

Princess Gardens was laid out on reclaimed land between 1892 and 1894, to the design of the Borough Engineer and Surveyor, Major Garrett. Shown on the 1906 OS map before the addition of the Pavilion in 1911, the path pattern and layout of the Gardens remains (2001) substantially unchanged.

To the north of Princess Gardens Torbay Road is lined by a single line of mature London planes, while to the south the Gardens adjoin Princess Parade, a wide paved promenade which extends c 320m west from the Old Fish Quay (listed grade II) c 50m south-east of the Pavilion, to the northern end of Princess Pier. Some 100m west of the Old Fish Quay, the line of Princess Parade is broken by a circular sunken garden which projects as a semicircular bastion into the New Harbour. Splayed stone steps on the axis of Princess Parade descend into the garden which comprises a circular lawn surrounded by a tarmac walk. The lawn is ornamented with geometrical beds for seasonal planting, and surrounds a central circular raised fountain basin. To the north the garden is enclosed by low rubble-stone walls with a further splayed flight of steps ascending to an axial walk leading north through Princess Gardens to Torbay Road. To the south of the garden a higher curved stone wall is pierced by glazed openings allowing views of the New Harbour; the wall supports a late C20 raised promenade approached by flights of steps to the south-east and south-west of the garden. The sunken garden formed part of a scheme of coastal protection and improvement conceived by Major Garrett before the First World War and implemented in the late 1920s. This scheme included the construction of a promenade which continues the axis of Princess Parade north-west of Princess Pier. The promenade is laid out with a broad paved walk parallel to the sea from which it is separated by ornamental cast-iron railings. On the landward side of the promenade three rectangular sunken gardens are enclosed by low rubble-stone walls with corner piers and piers flanking flights of semicircular stone steps which descend into the gardens from east and west. The gardens are of differing lengths, but each is laid out to a similar plan with lawns surrounding a variable number of geometrical beds for seasonal planting, specimen palms, and cordylines.

The Royal Terrace Gardens to the north of Torbay Road comprise a series of three principal walks terraced into the south-facing Waldon Cliff. The lower walk extends c 375m parallel to the cliff, from the mid C19 toll-house at the western end of the Gardens to the Torbay Hotel (formerly Cumper's Hotel) at their eastern end. The walk is retained above the level of Torbay Road by rustic stone walls which are planted with ornamental trees, shrubs, and specimen cordylines. This narrow retained bed contains several low rustic ornamental cairns, one of which retains a collection of ferns. To the north of the walk further

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rustic stone walls retain ornamental planting with an exotic and Mediterranean character. Bench seats are set in recesses at regular intervals in the south-facing wall, while c 100m west of the Torbay Hotel a rustic stone recess lined with quartz and coral formerly contained a pool (dry, 2001). An early C20 cast-iron notice set into the south-facing retaining wall towards the western end of the lower terrace requests visitors to 'assist in protecting flowers & shrubs and to give notice to the Gardener ... in case of theft or injury thereto'. Lateral, partly crazy-paved stone-edged paths and flights of steps ascend from the lower terrace walk to reach the upper terraces, from which further stone-edged steps ascend to Rock Walk at the summit of the cliff. The upper terraces and slopes are planted with mixed ornamental shrubs and trees including mature specimen pines and Monterey cypress. The trees and shrubs retain some herbaceous and bulbous underplanting. To the west and east the upper terraces are terminated by lengths of sheer cliff and picturesquely exposed rock, while both upper terraces are carried over shallow clefts in the cliff face by picturesque timber footbridges; the present bridges are late C20 reconstructions. The south-facing retaining walls associated with the upper terraces also contain recesses for bench seats, some surviving examples of which date from the late C19 or early C20. At the eastern end of the Royal Terrace Gardens a continuous flight of steps ascends c 80m north-east from the lower terrace to the Rock Walk. Below and immediately south of this staircase an approximately triangular lawn is planted with specimen flowering cherries. To the north of the lawn a mid C20 concrete shelter of curved plan is placed against the south-facing slope. The interior of the arcaded shelter retains the original continuous teak bench seat and teak panelling. The lawn and shelter terminate the eastern end of the lower terrace walk.

The Royal Terrace Gardens were constructed to the design of the Borough Engineer and Surveyor, Major Garrett, in the early 1890s as part of a comprehensive scheme of improvements associated with the formation of the New Harbour and Princess Pier. First shown on the 1906 OS, the layout of paths, terraces, and steps remains substantially unchanged today (2001).

REFERENCES

C A Ellis, *An Historical Survey of Torquay* (2nd edn 1930), p 380 P Russell, *A History of Torquay and the famous anchorage of Torbay* (1960), pp 142-51 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Devon* (2nd edn 1989), pp 844-5, 854
Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1860(1, published c 1880 2nd edition published 1906
Archival items Aerial photograph, Torquay and the harbour from the south-west, c 1955 (in Russell 1960)
Description written: February 2001 Register Inspector: JML Edited: May 2001

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.