

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CONNAUGHT GARDENS

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Name:	CONNAUGHT GARDENS
County:	Devon
District:	East Devon (District Authority)
Parish:	Sidmouth
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.675652 Longitude: -3.2459520 National Grid Reference: SY 12059 86962 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001532 Date first listed: 01-Jun-2001

Details

An early C20 public park laid out in 1934 by the Gardens Department of Dartington Hall Ltd.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Until the late C18, Sidmouth was a small fishing village at the mouth of the River Sid. In 1792 the lord of the manor, Thomas Jenkins, commissioned the architect Michael Novosielski, who had worked in London as a developer and theatre designer, to build Fortfield Terrace, a seafront crescent which was intended to provide accommodation for fashionable visitors; the scheme was never fully realised (Cherry and Pevsner 1989). By 1796 the Copper Plate Magazine commented that, 'the town is of late tolerably frequented in the bathing season', and a group of cottages ornés was constructed around the edge of the old town in the first two decades of the C19. These cottages were illustrated in Butcher and Haseler's Sidmouth Scenery published in 1816-17, and a collection of lithographs published by Rowe in 1826. A grand public mall 'railed and rolled in very good style' existed adjacent to the beach by 1810 (Cherry and Pevsner 1989), and in 1835-8 The Esplanade was constructed to designs by G H Julian. During the C19 the resort developed slowly, partly constrained by its location between cliffs to east and west and partly by the absence of the railway, which arrived only in 1874. Modest development continued into the early C20, with the resort generally catering for older visitors.

In about 1820, Emmanuel Lousada of Peak House, Sidmouth, constructed a detached marine villa known as Cliff Cottage on a headland west of The Esplanade, overlooking Chit Rocks; this headland is shown on a panorama of Sidmouth painted by Hubert Cornish in 1814 (Sidmouth Museum). This house was occupied in the 1830s by the Kent family, who were followed by a succession of private owners, the last, Mr Jemmett, being eccentric and reclusive (Creeke 1992). The property, which from the late C19 was known as Sea View, was placed on the market in 1930; it was bought by Sidmouth Urban District Council for £3500 in order to create public gardens. The house, which was found to be in a dilapidated condition, was demolished, and some of its walls were incorporated into the layout for the public gardens. These were designed by the Gardens Department of Dartington Hall Ltd, which was based at Dartington Hall, Devon (qv). An illustrated publicity brochure published by the Dartington Gardens Department in 1935 (private collection) notes that it was responsible for the design, construction, and

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planting of the gardens. The gardens were opened on 3 November 1934 by Field Marshal HRH the Duke of Connaught, in whose honour they were named.

Today (2001) Connaught Gardens remain in municipal ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Connaught Gardens are situated on a coastal headland c 0.5km south-west of the centre of the old town of Sidmouth, some 250m beyond the western end of the early C19 Esplanade, from which it is separated by a group of early C19 cottages, ornés and villas, including Clifton Cottage (listed grade II). The c 1.25ha site is bounded to the north by Peak Hill Road; this is situated at a slightly lower level than the gardens, which are retained by stone and flint walls. To the south the boundary of Connaught Gardens is formed by the coast and Chit Rocks, while to the east the site adjoins the grounds of Clifton Cottage. A promenade walk retained by flint and rubble-stone walls (listed grade II) extends along the south side of the gardens belonging to Clifton Cottage, allowing views east along the seafront towards Salcombe Hill Cliff. To the west, Connaught Gardens adjoin Jacob's Ladder (listed grade II), a three-flight timber stairway which descends from the cliff top adjacent to Connaught Gardens to a platform just above the beach. A staircase was first constructed in 1853 with the permission of Mr Lousada of Peak House; this was rebuilt in the late C19, and again following the Second World War (Creeke 1992). The public gardens are largely sheltered from the coast by high brick, stone, and flint walls, but various openings and outer promenade walks allow extensive coastal views.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Connaught Gardens are approached from Peak Hill Road to the north, with a principal entrance situated opposite the early C19 Pilgrim Cottage (listed grade II) and a secondary entrance c 50m west of the junction of Manor Road and Peak Hill Road. The principal entrance is of simple form with a tarmac walk leading from the public road into the site. Its location corresponds to the C19 carriage entrance to Sea View (OS 1889), while the walk leading into the site and sweeping south-east corresponds to the line of the drive to the C19 villa. The secondary entrance comprises a double flight of concrete and stone steps which ascends to the level of the gardens from the public road; this entrance formed part of the mid 1930s scheme for developing the villa gardens for public use.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS A tarmac walk sweeps south-east from the principal entrance, passing through an area of lawns shaded by mature trees and surrounded by ornamental shrubbery. Set into the bank to the south of the walk c 15m south of the entrance is a Second World War pill box with associated information panels. To the south there is access to a promenade walk which follows the western boundary of the site, affording views south-west to the sea and Jacob's Ladder. Some 80m south-east of the entrance, the walk leads to the northern end of a pergola which leads c 40m south-south-east, forming the east side of a walled garden enclosure. The pergola comprises rustic brick piers to the west and a brick wall to the east which support an oak superstructure planted with wisteria; beneath the pergola a stone-flagged walk extends the length of the garden. Stone steps descend from the pergola walk to the garden which is enclosed to the west and south by high, partly castellated walls of stone and flint; these formed part of the C19 villa garden (OS 1889). At the south-west corner rises a castellated, partly rendered, flint clock tower (listed grade II); the clock tower was developed from redundant lime kilns by the owners of Sea View in the mid C19 into a picturesque folly (ibid). The formal garden is laid out with a rectangular sunken lawn with symmetrically placed rectangular flower beds. The lawn is divided into two equal areas by a stone-flagged walk leading west from the pergola to a gothic arch in the western boundary wall. Closed by ornamental wrought-iron gates, this arch leads to the outer promenade on the western boundary of the site. Immediately east of this arch is an approximately square, sunken stone-flagged area from which stone steps rise north and south to reach raised terraces on the north and south sides of the garden. The north terrace comprises a stone-flagged walk with flower beds to the north retained by low brick walls; recesses set into the retaining walls contain bench seats. The southern terrace comprises a lawn. A further gothic arch leads south from the garden to an outer promenade which extends along the southern coastal boundary of the site. The formal garden forms part of the scheme developed in 1934 by the Gardens Department of Dartington Hall.

The stone-flagged walk forming the east-west axis of the formal clock tower garden extends east beyond the pergola to a further enclosed formal garden, which is reached by an arch set in the eastern boundary wall of the clock tower garden. The second formal garden is enclosed by further brick, stone, and flint walls, and has a central sunken area with rectangular stone-kerbed

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beds for seasonal planting separated by stone-flagged and cobbled walks. To east and west the raised outer areas of the garden are laid to lawn, while to the north there are herbaceous borders. The north/south axis of the garden is terminated to the south by stone steps which ascend to an early C20 timber and glass shelter allowing views to the sea; to the north stone steps ascend to an entrance set in the northern boundary wall which comprises a pair of rustic brick piers which support a single oak beam. This formal garden was illustrated by the Dartington Hall Gardens Department in their promotional brochure for 1935, at which date it appears to have been planted as a rose garden. It was developed making use of an existing walled garden enclosure immediately south of the early C19 villa, although the present north and south boundary walls with their ogee parapets were rebuilt in the 1930s.

To the north of the former rose garden, the gateway leads north to a raised, stone-flagged terrace which forms the west side of a further informal garden. The terrace is backed to the west by a high brick wall which returns to north and south. In the angles are constructed a pair of L-shaped loggias with hipped tiled roofs supported on brick piers. In the central recess a wall-mounted bronze plaque commemorates the opening of the gardens by the Duke of Connaught in 1934. The terrace occupies the site of the early C19 villa known variously as Cliff Cottage and Sea View; this was demolished following the acquisition of the property by the local authority in 1930. To the east of the terrace is an area of informal lawns bounded to the north and south by mixed ornamental trees and shrubs, and to the east by further shrubbery and a brick wall. A serpentine walk surrounds the lawn and shrubberies, linking the terrace to the west, a formal garden to the east, and a promenade to the south-east. A mid C20 bandstand stands against the eastern boundary wall opposite the terrace. The lawn, walks, and shrubberies correspond closely to the late C19 layout of the pleasure grounds associated with Sea View (OS 1889, 1905), which appear to have been incorporated more or less intact in the 1930s' park scheme. To the south-east of the lawn a walk extends east for c 30m to join the coastal promenade. To the north this walk is bounded by a brick wall against which stands a range of timber-framed, lean-to glasshouses; these late C20 structures stand on the site of a range of glass indicated on the 1889 OS map. To the south the walk is bounded by a bank which is treated as a rockery, with alpinists and specimen shrubs. An early C20 timber and glass shelter is built into a recess on the south face of this bank, affording sea views. The walk extends c 30m east beyond its junction with the cliff-top promenade to reach a viewpoint which allows a vista east past the cottages ornés east of Connaught Gardens and along the length of the seafront to Salcombe Hill Cliff. This extension of the promenade is bounded to the north by shrubbery which shelters a group of seats. The promenade returns west along the cliff top which forms the southern boundary of the site to reach the arch leading north to the clock tower garden.

East of the lawn is a further walled formal garden. Approximately rectangular on plan, this garden comprises a central stone-flagged sunken area with geometrical flower beds flanking a central circular pool and fountain. The sunken area is approached by stone steps placed at the centre of each side, and is surrounded by panels of lawn. An outer tarmac walk separates the lawns from borders planted with herbaceous subjects and tender shrubs. The eastern formal garden was constructed as part of the park scheme designed by the Dartington Hall Gardens Department in 1934, and occupies the site of a kitchen garden associated in the late C19 and early C20 with Clifton Cottage to the east. When the formal garden was constructed, the eastern boundary, which here forms the eastern boundary of the site, was realigned (OS 1889, 1905).

REFERENCES

- Copper Plate Magazine, 1796 (quoted in Cherry and Pevsner 1989) B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Devon* (2nd edn 1989), pp 734-6, 738-9 J Creeke, *The Life and Times in Sidmouth... A Guide to the Blue Plaques* (1992), pp 16-19 S Pugsley (ed), *Devon Gardens ? An Historical Survey* (1994), p 162 English Heritage Register Review: Devon (1999)
- Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1888, published 1889 2nd edition published 1905
- Illustrations Butcher and Haseler, *Sidmouth Scenery* (1816-17) H Cornish, *Panoramic view of Sidmouth, 1814* (Sidmouth Museum)
- Archival items Dartington Hall Gardens Department Catalogue, 1935 (private collection) Postcard views, early and mid C20 (22442/224), (Devon County Record Office) Photographs, mid C20 (Chapman prints 24064 (4), 24065), (Devon County Record Office)

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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.