

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

OSBORNE

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Name: OSBORNE

District: Isle of Wight (Unitary Authority)

Parish: East Cowes

District: Isle of Wight (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Whippingham

National park: N/A

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.754196
Longitude: -1.2617713
National Grid Reference: SZ 52172 95215
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000929
Date first listed: 09-Jan-1987

Details

Formal terraces, pleasure grounds, and a park surrounding a contemporary Italianate house which, from 1845 to 1901, was the family home of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, the house and grounds being designed and planted by Prince Albert in association with the building firm of Thomas Cubitt and incorporating a former C18 and early C19 park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Osborne and that part of the manor of Barton which together form the present Osborne estate, date back to the C13, Barton Manor being owned from 1439 until the mid C19 by Winchester College. Osborne passed through a number of hands; in 1630 it was bought by Eustace Mann who probably built the house which, on the marriage of his granddaughter Elizabeth to Robert Blachford (VCH 1912), passed with the estate to her husband's family. In 1755, a descendant, Robert Pope Blachford, inherited a fortune and between the 1770s and 1789, carried out numerous improvements. A new house was begun in 1779 and the former one demolished, stables and the present kitchen garden were built, pleasure grounds laid out west of the House, and a park created on the east side (Phibbs et al 1983). The park was extended between 1810 and 1835 before the estate was first leased out and then put on the market by Lady Isabel Blachford. It was purchased, in 1845, along with Barton Manor to serve as the Home Farm, by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert as a private residence for their growing family. The House was rebuilt and the present stables added, the system of drives and paths was laid out, and the park and gardens landscaped with extensive ornamental and woodland plantings. After Prince Albert's death in 1861, the Queen continued to stay at Osborne until her own death in 1901, following which, in 1902, Edward VII gave Osborne to the nation. The majority was vested in the Crown and administered by the Crown Estate Commissioners, while the House and immediate grounds and gardens were placed under the management of the Commissioner of Woods, later to become Secretary of State for the Environment. The Main and Household wings were converted into a convalescent home for officers and a small part of the estate, including the Swiss Cottage area and the terrace, was opened to the public. The Victorian stables and an adjacent part of the park were occupied by the Royal Naval

College between 1903 and 1921, while the present golf course was licensed and laid out in 1904. In 1936 the eastern end of the estate, which contains the main woodlands, was leased by the Forestry Commission and from then through to the 1950s was replanted with large-scale commercial tree crops. Parts of the estate including Barton Manor and Norris Wood were sold off in the 1920s but the remainder of the estate continued substantially unchanged from 1901. In 1983, English Heritage assumed management of Osborne House, the gardens and grounds and, by the 1990s, the parkland and the woodlands except for Barton and Pier Wood which remain (1999) in private ownership. Barton Manor was sold again privately in the late 1980s while the Golf Club renewed its lease for a further thirty years in 1989.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Osborne is situated on the north coast of the Isle of Wight overlooking Osborne Bay, on the east side of the Medina River and the town of East Cowes. The 240ha registered site comprises c 20ha of formal gardens and pleasure grounds and c 220ha of parkland and woodland. The western boundary is enclosed from the abutting York Avenue (A3021) and housing of East Cowes by walling along the frontage of Albert Cottage (listed grade II) and by fencing and, along its southern half, by a boundary tree belt planted by Prince Albert in 1846-7. The western third of the estate occupies level ground at the head of a shallow valley which falls gently north-eastwards to Osborne Bay, the valley sides rising onto broad ridges to the north-west and south-east. The tree-fringed shoreline forms the eastern site boundary. The parkland and woodland covering the valley sides and ridges merges with that of the adjacent estates of, respectively, Norris Castle (qv) to the north-west and Barton Manor to the south-east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The present, public entrance to Osborne lies on the western, York Avenue boundary, at Prince of Wales Lodge (listed grade II) 400m west of the House. The Lodge is a two-storey Italianate building with an arcaded porch erected by Thomas Cubitt in 1845-6. The drive enters through an ornate cast-iron gateway (piers, gates and railings listed grade II) then curves gently south-eastwards between clipped evergreen hedging, its course following the approach to the former, late C18 house (OS Surveyor's drawing, 1793). Immediately beyond the Lodge the drive passes, on its south side, the extensive stables (listed grade II) designed and built by J C Mann and Prince Albert in 1859-60. The rendered brick building consists of a two-storey central pavilion flanked by wings, the second storeys of which were added c 1904 for the Royal Naval College. On the east side of the stables, the drive gives access to the public car park, laid out on the site of former Naval College buildings. Beyond the car park, the drive turns sharply northwards and runs past the principal, south-west front of the House, a short spur leading off it onto the entrance forecourt which is laid to sealed gravel with a central circular granite vase planted with heaths. Immediately beyond the House, the drive turns north-westwards to run the 500m length of the Great Avenue or Royal Drive which leads to the Royal Entrance (listed grade II) at the junction of York Avenue and New Barn Road. The cement-rendered entrance gateway, flanked by single-storey lodges, was built, probably by Cubitt, as the principal entrance to Osborne. The Avenue, which is lined with a double row of mature cedar and evergreen oak with some late C20 replanting, was constructed in 1851 (Queen Victoria's Journal), although the principal approach to the late C18 house also ran from the north-west corner by the mid C19 (Tithe map, 1841).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Osborne House (listed grade I) stands on level ground towards the west side of the estate, at the head of the valley running down to Osborne Bay. A large, irregular house of cement-faced brick in the Italianate style and arranged around three sides of a south-west-facing entrance forecourt, it was designed by Prince Albert and built by Thomas Cubitt, who probably also had a role as architect. The first house at Osborne probably dated from the C17; this was replaced from c 1777 by a new house by Robert Pope Blachford which in turn was demolished to make way for the present house, built between 1846 and 1850 (Phibbs et al 1983). The central three-storey Pavilion block, completed in 1846 and housing the private royal apartments, is entered beneath a porte-cochère, adjacent to which a flag tower rises to five storeys. On the south-east side of the forecourt, the Pavilion is linked by a Grand Corridor, with an open loggia at first-floor level, to the three-storey Main and Household wings, completed in 1851 and 1848 respectively. The north-west side of the forecourt is occupied by the Durbar Wing which was constructed to provide a state banqueting hall to designs by Bhai Ram Singh and Lockwood Kipling (father of the author Rudyard Kipling) in 1890-1. A further range of service buildings (adapted in 1861 from the C18 stable block) and a chapel (built 1880) lie to south-east of the Main and Household wings (guidebook).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Formal gardens, with vistas out over the valley parkland to the Solent, lie north-east and north-west of the House, with the north-west, south-west, and south-east sides wrapped around by informal pleasure grounds. The principal, north-east garden front opens onto two levels of interlocking L-shaped terraces, each retained by walls surmounted by pierced cement balustrades with urns (terraces, walls, statuary, and fountains listed grade II). These, restored in 1997-9, were constructed in 1847-53 by Thomas Cubitt's firm under the supervision of Prince Albert and his advisor in art, Ludwig Gruner. The Upper Terrace is laid to intricate geometric parterres set in gravel and planted with seasonal bedding; those outside the Pavilion, which are edged in white-painted stone. The parterres outside the Main Wing are set in grass surrounds and are centred on a tiered fountain. The present gravel on the Upper Terrace replaces the original which consisted of differently coloured metallic lava by Orsi and Armani. From the north-east edge of the Upper Terrace outside the Main Wing, axial flights of steps, embracing a triple-arched alcove, descend to the Lower Terrace. Its central feature, axial on the alcove and set within a square of parterres in gravel, is the Andromeda Fountain, designed by John Bell in 1851 and surrounded by eight 'marine monsters' cast in 1858-60. The north-west side of the square, formed by the retaining wall to the Upper Pavilion Terrace, contains a semicircular alcove with a shell roof; the south-east side is enclosed by a timber pergola. Beyond the pergola, the Lower Terrace, laid to further parterres in gravel, continues below the south-east end of the Upper Terrace.

On their immediate north-west side, the Terraces and Durbar Wing open onto a large level lawn surrounded and quartered by gravelled paths, the path along the north-east side continuing the axis of the Upper Terrace. Known as Mount Lawn, this was created by Prince Albert in 1850-2. The north-west side of Mount Lawn abuts the Mount itself, an elongated oval mound housing a reservoir surrounded by iron railings. Constructed in 1851-3 to supply water to the fountains, its slopes are thickly planted with ornamental evergreens and threaded by paths. At its northern end is a rockery built in 1852. The pleasure grounds west of the Mount, on the south-west front of the House, extend westwards to the Prince of Wales Lodge, enclosing the walled kitchen garden and largely occupying the area of the C18 garden laid out by Robert Blachford within a ha-ha (filled in by Prince Albert). Their present layout dates from 1846 to 1850 with an extension westwards made in 1859 (Queen Victoria's Journal). The grounds are laid to lawn planted informally with exotic trees of mixed ages and species including mature cedars and other conifers. At their northern end they are enclosed by The Bank, a long, low mound, planted with evergreen shrubbery, which extends in a south-westerly curve from the foot of the Mount to the west wall of the kitchen garden. The principal lawn opening immediately from the entrance forecourt is surrounded by a perimeter walk and planted with island belts and beds of mixed shrubbery and herbaceous plants, with further lawn and shrubberies extending west along the south side of the kitchen garden. Lodge Walk, laid out in 1846, runs along the north side of the kitchen garden to connect the House with Prince of Wales Lodge. North-east beyond the Terraces and Mount Lawn, the head of the valley is enclosed from the surrounding parkland by the Ring Walk, to form an inner park or extended pleasure ground. Restored in 1996, the Walk extends from the north side of Mount Lawn in a broad arc eastwards then south-eastwards to meet High Walk, also known as Swiss Cottage Road, which runs eastwards from the House along the crest of the south-east side of the valley. The slopes of the inner park, known as Park Lawns, are open in character with occasional trees and clumps, these including a large evergreen clump with holm oaks (30m north-east of Mount Lawn) and Ice-well Wood (c 220m north-east of the House) which survive from Blachford's planting in the late C18 (Phibbs et al 1983). Ice-well Wood contains an icehouse with a rusticated stone entrance built in 1852-3 and restored in 1996. The inner park is bisected centrally by the Broad Walk which continues the central axis of the Main Wing and Terraces north-eastwards to meet the Ring Walk. Laid to gravel and lined with clipped yew trees, Prince Albert built up the level of the north-west side of the valley to provide the level platform along which the Broad Walk runs. At its south-west end, 30m beyond the Terrace, it is punctuated by a fountain in the form of a bronze boy with a swan.

PARK Beyond the Ring Walk and the pleasure grounds west of the House, the outer park extends in all directions to the site boundary, its parkland and woodland threaded by a network of drives and walks laid out by Prince Albert largely between 1846 and 1849 (ibid). North-eastwards from the inner park, the valley descends through further open parkland now (1999) divided into three paddocks. Developed further as parkland by Prince Albert from plantings by the Blachfords (Tithe map, 1841), its lower reach towards Osborne Bay, and the long vista from the House to the Solent, was reopened from its mid to late C20 tree cover in 1998-9. Valley Walk, which continues the Broad Walk beyond the Ring Walk to the sea, is flanked on its southern side

by Osborne Wood; established by 1793 as Bucketts Coppice (OS Surveyor's drawing) and now (1999) containing remnants of plantation woodland from the early 1950s, it was planted by Prince Albert in 1849 with '500 fine and rare trees' (Phibbs et al 1983) and with ornamental shrubbery along the Valley Walk edge. Crossing the tree-fringed Boundary Drive, which runs parallel with the shore but some 60m inland, Valley Walk emerges onto the beach which is retained by a sea wall with a gravelled walk running along it. Immediately to the south-east stands the Queen's Alcove (listed grade II), a semicircular, half-domed structure lined with tiles and with a mosaic floor, built 1865-9. Some 240m north-west is the Landing House (listed, as the Queen's Tea House, grade II), a combined boathouse and teahouse built in the Italianate style in 1855-6 (Phibbs et al 1983). Southwards, on the crest above the south-east side of the valley, High Walk (also known as Swiss Cottage Road) runs from the House 1.4km eastwards to meet Boundary Drive. It serves, c 800m along its route, Swiss Cottage and its associated buildings and gardens. Swiss Cottage (listed grade II), constructed in 1853-4 from tarred wood in a Tyrolean style and its adjacent, similarly styled Museum of 1862 (listed grade II), were built, probably by estate workers, for educational use by the royal children (guidebook). The surrounding gardens, which are mostly enclosed by hedges, include formal fruit and vegetable beds, orchards, and lawns with exotic conifers; a weatherboarded toolstore (listed grade II) stands inside the western boundary hedge while 50m south of Swiss Cottage, Albert Barracks (c 1860, listed grade II) consists of an earthwork toy fort. East of Swiss Cottage, High Walk passes through the mixed woodland of Barton Wood which covers the ridge down to the Bay and which contains remnants of the commercial plantations established in 1952-6. Shown on the OS surveyor's drawing of 1793 as the Great Wood, it was also planted with exotics by Prince Albert.

West of Swiss Cottage, between High Walk and Barton Wood Road on the southern boundary, lies the South Park; this is planted with a number of isolated parkland clumps on land now (1999) largely under arable cultivation. Created as parkland in 1847 by Prince Albert from former fields and incorporating boundary trees with new planting, his more intensive scatter of clumps and individual trees (recorded on the OS map surveyed 1863 and that published 1898) has now (1999) disappeared. South Park is bisected by Barton Road which runs south-east from the House to gates on Barton Wood Road. Now (1999) closed as a through route, this drive was built in 1845 to serve the adjacent Barton Manor which, purchased with Osborne, functioned as the Home Farm until its sale in 1921. North and South Barton Lodges (c 1850, listed grade II) stand at the York Avenue entrance to Barton Wood Road.

The majority of the parkland north of the valley is occupied by the golf course which is bounded to the north and west by Pier Road, constructed from 1846. Laid out as nine-hole course in 1905 on parkland developed by Prince Albert from the Blachfords' C18 park and from adjacent fields to the north, its C19 planting is now (1999) augmented with considerable mid to late C20 ornamental trees. Of the broadleaf woodlands north-east of the golf course, Pier Wood, which Prince Albert replanted c 1848, contains remnants of the Forestry Commission plantations of 1956. Both Pier Wood and Norris Wood (sold to Norris Castle in 1924) are shown on the OS surveyor's drawing of 1793. West of Pier Road, Mortuary Field and Cottage Field, lying either side of The Avenue, are planted as parkland with occasional small woods, informal clumps, and individual trees, a number of which date from the Blachfords' extension of their park in 1810-35. The southern end of Cottage Field (also known as Grieve's Field) is dotted with memorial trees.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden stands in the pleasure grounds some 150m west of the House. It comprises an enclosure measuring c 75m x 55m walled in red brick with both buildings built against the outside of the north wall and two lean-to glasshouses against the inside. The garden appears to date from Robert Pope Blachford's improvements in 1775 (Phibbs et al 1983), with the present east door framed by a doorcase removed from the main entrance to the demolished Blachford house and installed in 1850. The garden is currently (1999) being laid out to a new design of beds and arbours of fruit, vegetables, and flowers.

OTHER LAND Along the western edge of, but separated by garden boundaries from, Cottage Field is a series of estate villas and cottages (all listed grade II) which face onto York Avenue: Albert Cottage (immediately south of the Royal Entrance), a large Italianate villa enlarged from the former York House in 1868-9 (Phibbs et al 1983); Osborne Cottage (120m further south), a two-storey red-brick cottage with an iron-work greenhouse, rebuilt in 1856 and connected to Albert Cottage by a

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covered passageway and summerhouse of 1899-1900; Victoria Cottage, a small stuccoed villa dating from 1843; and, furthest south and adjacent to Prince of Wales Lodge, Arthur Cottage, an Italianate stuccoed cottage begun in 1864 (ibid).

REFERENCES

Victoria History of the County of Hampshire V, (1912), pp 198-200 N Pevsner and D Lloyd, *The Buildings of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* (1967), pp 756-9 J Phibbs et al, *Royal Parks Historic Survey: Osborne, Isle of Wight* (English Heritage 1983) *Osborne House: Management Plan*, (English Heritage 1993) *Osborne House*, guidebook, (English Heritage, 4th edn 1994)

Maps Tithe map for Whippingham parish, 1841 (Isle of Wight Record Office)

OS Surveyor's drawing, 2" to 1 mile, surveyed 1793 (British Library Maps) OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1863 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition revised 1907 1938 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1863-4 2nd edition revised 1896, published 1898 3rd edition published 1908

Archival items Records held by the Royal Family at Windsor include: Queen Victoria's Journal, edited by Princess Beatrice (RA QVJ); A summary of the various works proposed and executed on the Osborne Estate from 1845 to 1861 inclusive, by direction of HRH the Prince Consort, with continuation to the end of 1890 [printed privately by W R Yelf in 1891 (RL II 42 Gall.C)]. Records are also held at the Isle of Wight Record Office in Newport, at the PRO at Kew, at Parkhurst, Isle of Wight (Forestry Commission records), and at Winchester College (Barton Manor).

Description written: June 1999 Amended: June 2000 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: January 2005

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.