

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

NORTH AND SOUTH MARINE PARKS AND BENTS PARK

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Name: NORTH AND SOUTH MARINE PARKS AND BENTS PARK

District: South Tyneside (Metropolitan Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 55.000068
Longitude: -1.4216201
National Grid Reference: NZ 37097 67430
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001466
Date first listed: 02-May-2000

Details

A chain of three municipal seaside parks developed from the 1870s and into the early C20 on reclaimed land.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1855 the Health Committee of South Shields Corporation was instructed to obtain a site for recreation within the Borough, but they reported that they saw no need as the Bents, an extensive sea-dune system, and the sea beach were readily available to the public.

In 1869, a 2ha children's recreation ground, including a pond for sailing model boats was opened on a former brickyard and dump in South Shields. In 1875 this was extended northwards, by incorporating 7.5ha of ballast hills lying south from The Lawe, an open area of headland at the mouth of the Tyne, which had been leased from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners by the Tyne Plate Glass Company. As The Lawe had been furnished with seats in 1862 this meant that the town was fronted on its northernmost, sea-facing side by an open expanse for recreation. Subsequently the Corporation employed Mathew Hall, Borough Engineer and Surveyor to incorporate this recreation area into his design for the new North Marine Park, where work began in 1883. In 1884 construction of the park offered a labour relief scheme for 200 men over several months who were employed in levelling the ballast hills.

The creation of South Marine Park (which Hall does not appear to have designed) was underway also in the 1880s and was completed in 1890 at a cost of £20,000. Sir John Mowbray, an Ecclesiastical Commissioner and formerly MP for Durham, opened the Marine Parks on 25 June 1890. The Gardener's Calendar, writing of the scheme in 1886, commented that the parks said 'volumes for the taste and skill of Mr Mathew Hall as he had transformed the barren waste into a landscape which will form a most healthful ornament to the town when the southern half, just commenced, has been completed'.

By the 1890s living conditions in the Borough had worsened due to the town's continual and unremitting industrial expansion and exploitation and the sea-dune system along the sea shore gave cause for concern. In 1896, the Corporation passed a Town Improvement Bill to extend their powers to take over, control and develop the sands and foreshore for recreation and bathing, and prevent their abuse and exploitation. In return for various concessions allowing them to construct and extend their mineral railways within the Borough, the Harton Coal Company surrendered their leasehold to 25ha of the foreshore between the South Marine Park and the Trow Rocks. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners who owned the freehold of this area invested the freehold in the Corporation on the condition that the northernmost 12ha, which were covered with old ballast hills and refuse from the

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glass works, were levelled, laid down to grass and developed as a recreation ground. This was done in 1901(2 when Bents Park was laid out under a contract costing £23,000.

Thus by the early C20 a chain of Marine Parks and recreation grounds covering c 58ha stretched for nearly 3km along the seaward frontage of the Borough, providing a significant example of industrial land reclamation. An ugly industrial landscape was transformed into what was regarded as one of the most charming promenades in the country (Robinson Penn 1998). In the 1920s and 1930s further features were added to the park but in 1955 the elegant bandstand below the terrace in South Park was removed, and in the 1970s the glasshouse standing towards the centre of South Park was also removed. A series of improvement schemes from 1988 to 1992 reinstated some of the boundary railings removed during the Second World War, alongside other environmental improvements. The parks remain (1999) in use as a public facility.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Marine Parks are components of an area of open space extending 1.8km along the foreshore from the mouth of the River Tyne, southwards to the sand-dune system north-west of Trow Rocks. Within this area the Marine Parks form a continuous chain of parks from the northernmost point at The Lawe, a lookout area guarding the Tyne estuary, to Bents Park.

The 31ha of parks are bounded on their west side by residential roads of terraces and marine villas. From north to south these are Lawe Road, along the western boundary of North Marine Park; Seafield Terrace and Seaview Terrace along South Marine Park; and Bents Park Road bounding Bents Park. To the east of the parks is the seafront. North Marine Park is now fronted by Harbour Drive (reclaimed land. South Marine Park and Bents Park are fronted by Sea Road and the Promenade.

Pier Parade, a broad thoroughfare leading to the Pier Pavilion (a commercial and amusement area, 1999) separates North Marine Park from South Marine Park. South Marine Park is separated from Bents Park by Beach Road, which is lined by the parks' perimeter beech belts. Bents Park and the South Marine Park are enclosed with iron railings (mid C20 replacing original late C19/early C20 railings which were removed during the Second World War) while North Marine Park is unenclosed apart from a sea wall on its easternmost side.

The Marine Parks enjoy panoramic views over the North Sea. The ground rises northwards to form an elevated bluff at The Lawe, 26m above sea level. From this point views northwards embrace Tynemouth Castle on the north shore of the Tyne with 'The Haven', redeveloped (late C20) with a group of sculpture, The Conversation Piece by Juan Munoz, overlooking Littlehaven Beach and the Groyne (1998). To the east are views over to South Shields Pier which extends north-east from Pier Parade, dividing the North and South Parks. The southern, lower land at Bents Park is sheltered behind a series of sand dunes at Herd Sand.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES North Marine Park is unenclosed, with an entrance into the park marked from Fort Street (situated at the north-west corner of North Marine Park) by two mock Roman-style Imperial standards (late C20). A northern entrance leads off The Lawe through an entrance gate with gate piers to the north of a 'lodge', originally a Pilot's Lookout House. On the seaward side a series of steps leads into the park from River Drive. To the south another entrance with flights of steps leads up into the park and onto the topmost lawns. Two entrances lead off from Pier Parade, one at the corner of Ocean Road marked by flanking ornamental ironwork (part of a 1999 environmental improvement scheme) while another leads in by the Jubilee Memorial.

South Marine Park is entered at its north-west corner from Ocean Road and its central north side through original late C19 ornamental iron gates incorporating the letter 'S'. Bents Park is marked by entrances at the junction of Sea Road with Beach Road, and Beach Road with Bents Park Road. The gate piers of both entrances are decorated with elaborate finials.

PLEASURE GROUNDS Each park has its own character. The northernmost section of North Marine Park reaching down from The Lawe is made up of open lawn with a broad terraced walk laid out downslope on the seaward side. Both the upper lawns and the terrace are bordered by large areas of shrub planting. The focus of this area is the two Lawe Beacons. Erected as navigational aids in 1832 by John Turnbull at a cost of £60, they replaced C18 structures and complement the High and Low Lights at North Shields.

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The southern section of North Marine Park is laid out with an informal network of roadside and seaside paths, a playground, bowling greens and a pavilion, and a braille garden (opened 1995). The site becomes more wooded towards Pier Parade, with some glade planting. The centre of the park is marked by an extensive scheme of C19 rockwork elaborated with formal Japanese gateways and railings, marking late C20 economic links between Tyneside and Japan (1999). Extensive limestone rockwork edges the paths and there is a substantial rockery along the length of the bowling greens, flanking the pavilion, the source for the limestone probably being the Magnesian limestone cliffs that form the coast south of South Shields. The southern entrance leads out directly onto Pier Parade with the Jubilee Memorial (1890, listed grade II) and the Lifeboat 'Tyne' (built 1833, sited on Pier Parade 1894, listed grade II) as prominent civic features.

At South Marine Park, the main entrance off Seafield Terrace leads onto a broad, balustraded terrace which stretches south-eastwards to Beach Road. Central to the terrace is an extensive rockwork cascade (now enclosed by railings), flanked on either side by four bronze female statues by Alfred Drury, each holding a lamp, two waking, Morn, and two sleeping, Even. These are copies of statues in City Square, Leeds (Inspector's Report).

A series of balustraded steps with the remains of lighting standards on their piers descend north-eastwards from the terrace, to a lower terrace with a viewing platform flanked with shrubberies. From the steps a long-distance view reaches out to an open circular area with a vista through to the yachting lake with the pier and sea beyond. To the south-west of these steps another series of steps leads down to the terrace where there is an open-air seating area for listening to music from the bandstand, which has been demolished (mid C20) although its site is still visible. The paths crossing the lower levels of the park are lined with natural limestone.

Bents Park is laid to a large open lawn, enclosed by serpentine shelter belts of mature trees and hedges with a perimeter path. On the east side of the park an ornamental building (previously public conveniences) fronts Sea Road, laid out as a seaside promenade. The south-east area of the park, previously tennis courts, is now a caravan park (1999) which divides the Park from Bents Recreation Ground beyond. From Bents Recreation Ground (outside the registered area) the string of seaside open spaces continues south-east to Gypsies Green, where stands a glazed, tiled pavilion.

REFERENCES

The Gardener's Calendar (1886) Marine Parks, South Shields, (English Heritage Inspector's Report 1992) A Guide to the Historic Parks and Gardens of Tyne and Wear, (Tyne and Wear Specialist Conservation Team 1995), pp 36(7 South Marine Park, South Shields, Restoration Feasibility Study, (Robinson Penn Partnership 1998)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1855 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1921 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1897

Description written: 1999 Amended: February 2000 Register Inspector: Sarah Rutherford Edited: September 2000

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.