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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PASMORE PAVILION

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Name:	PASMORE PAVILION
District:	County Durham (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Peterlee
label.localisation:	Latitude: 54.749888 Longitude: -1.3461578 National Grid Reference: NZ 42184 39633 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001606 Date first listed: 29-Apr-2002

Details

A mid C20 public open space designed by Victor Pasmore as part of the Sunny Blunts residential development within the New Town of Peterlee. The focal point is the Pasmore Pavilion sculpture, designed by Pasmore in 1963 and erected in 1968.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The New Town of Peterlee was designated in 1948. As well as providing residential accommodation, it was intended as a recreational and shopping centre for south-east Durham and to provide alternative employment for ex-miners and their wives in an area where coal mining was already being reduced and concentrated in a few of the more productive pits. The New Town's first masterplan, conceived by Berthold Lubetkin, was rejected, and in 1950 he resigned. In 1955 the Development Corporation's General Manager, Vivian Williams, brought in as a senior member of staff, the artist and designer Victor Pasmore. His role was to serve as a representative of the visual arts to improve the continuing design of the Town. Pasmore, appointed Master of Painting at King's College, Newcastle in 1954, advised at Peterlee on house plans, the grouping of houses, landscaping and tree planting.

The Town was made up of a group of individual housing areas surrounding a central civic nucleus. One of housing areas with which Pasmore was closely involved was Sunny Blunts at the south-west side of the Town, laid out c 1964-70. Here the housing, for a mixed-age community, was at low density, with flat-roofed houses and bungalows punctuated with a few low-rise blocks of flats, set in a green landscape. At the centre was the Blunts Dene stream valley which was dammed and laid out by Pasmore and the Corporation's landscape architects to provide a small lake as the recreational focal point of this local development. The scheme utilised the natural fall of the land, and allowed many access points from the surrounding housing. The road system and pedestrian path systems were kept entirely separate from each other.

In order to emphasize the lake as a focal point between the road and pedestrian system, the Apollo Pavilion (now known as the Pasmore Pavilion) was designed in 1963 by Pasmore to crown the lake at the east, pedestrian end. Pasmore described this monumental sculpture as 'an architecture and sculpture of purely abstract form through which to walk, in which to linger and on which to play, a free and anonymous monument which, because of its independence, can lift the activity and psychology of an urban housing community on to a universal plain'. He intended it to emphasize the environmental function of the lake, and to function as an integral feature of the pedestrian path system, in part as a bridge as well as a cover for the ground-level path

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over the dam. Although designed in 1963, the sculpture, Pasmore's only truly three-dimensional work, was not erected until 1968, and in 1970 an additional piece was added by his son Jon. It originally had murals on its walls, but these have faded.

The site remains a public open space within the Sunny Blunts estate, owned by Easington District Council (2002).

LOCATION, AREA, SETTING, LANDFORM The Pasmore Pavilion and the open space surrounding it stands 1km south-west of the centre of the New Town of Peterlee at the centre of the Sunny Blunts residential development (1960s). The 1ha site is enclosed on three sides, to the north, west and south, by Oakerside Drive and its associated houses, bungalows and flats, and to the east by the east half of the development flanking Sunny Blunts road. The site overlies part of one arm of a small valley known as Blunts Dene, the other arm of which starts at the centre of the town. The two arms join 800m east of the site, eventually entering Castle Eden Dene which runs south-west to north-east 600m south of the site. The Sunny Blunts arm of Blunts Dene valley slopes gently down from west to east, above Castle Eden Dene.

The setting is largely urban, with a large playing field adjacent to the north-east, and other open spaces bounding the Sunny Blunts development to the north, west and south. To the east Blunts Dene becomes wooded, set in a steep gorge which runs into further woodland. The site is overlooked by the residential buildings of Sunny Blunts, with views of the fingers of open space with which it is integrally linked, which extend out between the groups of houses, flats and bungalows. The whole forms a single, integral composition.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are several points of open access to the Pavilion landscape (as here registered) from around the perimeter of the area. One of the main approaches enters the site at the west end from a path 20m north of the east end of Severn Close. A path broken by short flights of steps leads east, flanked by sloping lawns, beneath a brick bridge carrying Oakerside Road. From the bridge there are views down to the lake and Pavilion to the east. A short tunnel shelters the path beneath the bridge, which leads out between further banked lawns sloping upwards towards the houses and bungalows beyond, the view east being dominated and terminated by the Pasmore Pavilion. The path curves eastwards, retained by a brick wall to the north, and overlooks the lake and the west side of the Pavilion.

The Pavilion landscape is approached from the east half of the Sunny Blunts development via a path which runs between the northern side of the houses and flats and the south side of the Dene. 15m east of the Pavilion a short spur off this path curves south down the Dene bank, bounded to the east by a brick retaining wall. As it reaches the stream bed the spur opens out into a circular viewing platform retained above the stream by a brick wall. The platform is overlooked by the Pavilion to the west, the two being connected by the stream, and views extend west beyond the Pavilion and lake to the distant housing. Views also extend north-east towards a playing field and east for a short distance along the wooded Dene. The main path continues 15m west from the spur to arrive at the south side of the Pavilion.

Paths also lead to the Pavilion from between the housing to the north and south, giving access from Oakerside Drive. That from the south descends a slope via a flight of shallow steps.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The Pasmore Pavilion (1968, extended early 1970s, listed Grade II*), originally known as the Apollo Pavilion, stands towards the east end of the site as here registered. In Brutalist style, of two stories in reinforced concrete, it is constructed so as to cantilever over the lake to the west. The upper storey is designed to serve both as a bridge over the lake and as a roof for the main circuit footpath. The original steps at the north and south ends of the Pavilion which led to the upper storey have been removed. Pasmore designed the Pavilion to accompany the lake so that together they would form a visual and pedestrian centre for the housing area in Sunny Blunts; also to symbolise architecturally the idea of a modern New Town. The monumental sculpture served as an eyecatcher and as a visual link to the road bridge to the west, with the dammed stream serving to enhance the prospect.

The Sunny Blunts residential development (outside the area here registered), for which the Pavilion landscape forms a focus, was constructed during the 1960s. The relatively low density development consists mainly of bungalows and two-storey houses, with occasional four-storey blocks of flats punctuating the skyline, of brick with flat roofs. Many of the roofs have subsequently been replaced with pitched roofs. The buildings immediately surrounding the Pavilion landscape were designed in small groups separated by open green space. They were not designed to have extensive gardens of their own, and those garden spaces allocated to individual dwellings are either entirely unbounded or else are enclosed and shielded by high wooden fences of which the

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original design was peculiar to this development. The landscape detailing of steps, paths, fences and other structural elements surrounding the housing in Sunny Blunts forms part of the character of this development.

OTHER LAND The site (as here registered) consists of an open space, with little planting other than grass, which is dominated by the Pasmore Pavilion sitting at the east end. A sinuous c 80m long lake flows through the centre of the landscape. Carefully graded grass banks lead down from the surrounding houses and bungalows to the shore line, the point where the banks meet the lake being marked by a band of cobbles. Around the lake leads a circuit path which passes beneath the Pavilion. There is no direct point of vehicular access, rather the Pavilion and lake are designed to be reached by foot from the surrounding housing. At the west end of the lake a spur leads south from the northern shore path as part of the circuit walk, carried across the inflow pipe by a concrete retaining wall set into the sculpted bank.

From here the circuit walk runs east across the lawn on the south side of the lake, to arrive at the south side of the Pavilion. From here the circuit path runs north in serpentine form across the lake dam, beneath the Pavilion and between its legs. The tarmac serpentine path is set in a broad bank of cobbles over which the Pavilion stands. Views extend from the path above the dam, east along Blunts Dene and north-east towards a playing field. At the east end of the lake stands a concrete, pillar-like, abstract sculpture by Jon Pasmore (1970s), held above the water by a metal rod.

East of the Pavilion and dam the stream falls into an open concrete culvert, the steep banks of which are retained in some places by large expanses of cobbles and in others by rough grass. The serpentine culvert curves around the north side of the viewing platform before entering the wooded end of the Dene (outside the area here registered).

REFERENCES F Osborn, A Whittick, *New Towns Their Origins, Achievements and Progress* (1977), p 274 A Bowness, L Lambertini, Victor Pasmore (1980), pp 230-40, 250-64 N Pevsner, E Williamson, *The Buildings of England, County Durham* (2nd ed 1983), pp 376-77 F Spalding, *British Art Since 1900* (1986), pp 177-80 E Harwood, *Notes for Twentieth Century Society visit to Peterlee* (1995) (copy on EH file)

Description written: 25 April 2002 Register Inspector: SR

This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 19/12/2011

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.