

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

COMPTON ACRES

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Name:	COMPTON ACRES
District:	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.705646 Longitude: -1.9267335 National Grid Reference: SZ 05270 89559 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000714 Date first listed: 19-Dec-1986

## Details

Early C20 formal and informal gardens forming a circuit, probably conceived as a tourist attraction, in a variety of styles inspired by different historical periods and geographical regions.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The house around which the gardens were subsequently laid out was constructed on a virgin site overlooking Poole Harbour and Brownsea Island in 1914, but was not initially occupied. After the First World War the property was sold to Thomas William Simpson, who began to lay out a series of enclosed gardens around the house. During the 1920s and 1930s Simpson expended some £220,000 on the gardens, assembling a collection of sculptures and other architectural features, together with many rare and exotic plants (guidebook). It is possible that the garden was, from its inception, intended to be a tourist attraction (Mowl 2003). As laid out by Simpson, the garden comprised seven discrete themed enclosures (CL 1966). Simpson died in 1944, followed closely by the head gardener, Mr Middleton. Other staff were called-up for active service during the Second World War, leading to a significant deterioration in the gardens (ibid). The gardens were cared for by Mr Gritton, formerly Mr Simpson's chauffeur, until they were sold (ibid).

In 1950, Compton Acres was purchased by J Stanley Beard, a London architect, who undertook a programme of restoration and opened the gardens as a tourist attraction in May 1952. The large numbers of visitors necessitated various changes to the gardens, including the construction of new paths and the replacement of peat banks used to retain planting beds with Purbeck stone walls (guidebook). The property was sold in 1964 to Mr and Mrs J R Brady, who had previously owned Lindridge Park, Devon (qv). Various garden ornaments now at Compton Acres were apparently brought by Mr Brady from the gardens at Lindridge. Compton Acres continued to open as a popular tourist attraction, and several new features were developed in the late C20; other areas were lost at the same period when the early C20 house was demolished and replaced by flats. Areas of woodland on the northern and southern boundaries of the gardens were also sold off for development in the late C20.

Compton Acres was sold to a consortium of local businessmen in 2002, and today (2004) continues to open to the public. New visitor facilities have recently been constructed, and restoration work has been undertaken in the gardens.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Compton Acres is situated in the Canford Cliffs district of Poole, c 2km south-east of the centre of Poole. The c 5ha site occupies undulating ground which drops sharply away to the

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west and south-west towards Parkstone Golf Course situated in the Luscombe Valley, and Poole Harbour beyond. The site is bounded to the east by Canford Cliffs Road, while to the north it adjoins a large C20 car and coach park. To the north-west the site adjoins a late C20 development of flats, which replaced an early C20 house known as Forsyte Shades (OS 1933), while to the west it is bounded by open ground in Luscombe Valley. To the south and south-west the site adjoins a late C20 domestic development known as The Glen, and to the south-east an early C20 house fronting Canford Cliffs Road. The site of the original Compton Acres House, towards the centre of the site, is today (2004) occupied by two substantial late C20 blocks of flats known as Charlcombe. This area is excluded from the site here registered. The setting of the site is characterised by pine woodland and extensive planting of rhododendron which would have originally screened much of the surrounding early C20 residential development. There are extensive westerly views across Poole Harbour and Brownsea Island towards the Isle of Purbeck from many points in the gardens.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Compton Acres is today approached from Canford Cliffs Road at a point c 20m south of its junction with Lilliput Road. To the north of the entrance, North Lodge has been demolished and replaced by a late C20 apartment block. A drive leads west from the entrance to a large area of car and coach parking which encircles the early C20 New Lodge. To the south-east of the car park is an early C21 visitors' reception building with shops, plant sales, restaurant and other facilities, which forms the entrance to the gardens. This building partially occupies the site of the double herbaceous borders (guidebook), and replaces a mid C20 reception building and shop. The visitors' reception building, car park, drive, and North Lodge are not included in the site here registered.

The former entrance to Compton Acres House is situated on Canford Cliffs Road at a point c 60m south of North Lodge, and is marked by the early C20 East Lodge, which stands to the north of the drive. The drive, which today (2004) serves as access to the late C20 flats which occupy the site of Compton Acres House and the late C20 houses in The Glen, sweeps c 130m south-west and west to reach the site of the house. The drive is carried across one of the garden walks on a bridge. The drive formerly serving Compton Acres House and the site of the house itself are not included in the registered site; East Lodge is within the registered boundary.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Compton Acres House, constructed in 1914, was demolished in the late C20 and there is no longer a principal building associated with the gardens. The house was a substantial two-storey villa constructed in red brick with stone dressings, and was set in an area of level lawns, known as the English Garden, which afforded views across Poole Harbour. The English Garden was lost to the late C20 development on the site of the house.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The circuit of the gardens begins with the Roman Garden c 10m south of the visitors' centre. Circular on plan, the garden is largely paved and is enclosed by a mid C20 brick wall. A central circular pool contains a late C20 fountain sculpture of Pegasus, which replaces a lead figure. Pedestals arranged round the perimeter of the garden support early C20 lead figures, although these are not the same as those shown in mid C20 photographs (guidebook). A pedimented arched gateway closed by wrought-iron gates set in the south-east side of the Roman Garden leads to a grotto tunnel. Lined in rough stone, the tunnel emerges onto a raised terrace at the south-west end of the Italian Garden. The terrace is ornamented with a pair of Venetian bronze lanterns and a group of four lead figures of putti set on stone pedestals, which flank a centrally placed alcove containing a bronze bust of J S Beard, owner of Compton Acres between 1950 and 1964. The terrace is terminated to the south-east by a pedimented arched gateway, while to the north-east it is enclosed by a stone balustrade which supports a series of stone urns. Two flights of stone steps descend from the terrace to the Italian Garden, emerging each side of a semicircular pool. The Italian Garden is symmetrical on plan, with a central cruciform pool, the crossing of which is marked by a three-tier stone fountain. At the south-west end of the pool stands a pair of bronze figures after the classical 'Wrestlers of Herculaneum', while at the north-east end of the pool a stone tempietto contains a stone sculpture of Bacchus. The tempietto is flanked by a pair of stone bench seats. The pool is edged with an early C21 low yew hedge and gravel walks, beyond which are outer panels of lawn and geometrical beds for seasonal planting. The perimeter of the garden is marked by a low, mid C20 Purbeck stone wall, beyond which is a belt of pines and rhododendron. A series of stone columns surmounted by ball finials was formerly planted as rose swags (guidebook). The detail of the planting and ornamentation of the Italian Garden

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has been simplified in the early C21, with several urns and stone benches, together with flower beds which are shown in mid C20 photographs (guidebook) having been removed.

The gateway at the south-east end of the terrace, and a further pedimented gateway at the central point of the south-east side of the Italian Garden, both lead to the Palm Court, a rectangular garden enclosure planted with specimen palms in central beds which are enclosed by paved walks. Stone bench seats are set in recesses in the perimeter Purbeck stone retaining walls, while at the south-west end of the garden a semicircular pool contains a fountain in the form of a carved stone putto. The centre of the garden is marked by a carved stone Venetian well-head. Other artefacts recorded in this garden in the mid C20 (guidebook), including a bronze figure after the classical Hermes, and a further bronze of the 'Dying Spartan Soldier', have subsequently been removed.

To the south-east of the Palm Court, the walk passes beneath the drive which formerly led to Compton Acres House and passes to the west of a mid C20 tea room which stands at the northern end of the Wooded Valley. A series of paths connected by flights of steps traverses the valley, where exotic specimen shrubs are planted beneath a canopy of pines. A series of pools occupies the floor of the valley, with further streams and cascades descending the west-facing valley side. From a point immediately south-west of the tea room, another walk passes beneath the drive leading to the late C20 development, The Glen, to emerge in the Rock Garden and Water Garden. A series of stone-flagged paths winds through the Rock Garden, which is formed from sandstone boulders, and an area comprising three pools linked by a series of rocky watercourses. An island in the larger pool is crossed by a late C20 timber walkway, and connected to the shore by large, late C20 timber bridges of vaguely oriental appearance. To the south-east of the Water Garden, a belvedere and timber summerhouse afford views across the Wooded Valley.

A walk leads west from the Water Garden through the early C21 Winter Garden to reach a terrace affording extensive views across Poole Harbour towards the Isle of Purbeck, and a further mid C20 refreshment pavilion. The refreshment room stands immediately below and to the west of the site of Compton Acres House and the former English Garden (ibid).

To the north of the terrace, a walk leads to the Heather Garden, a dry, west-facing valley developed as a rock garden with winding paths and sandstone boulders, planted with a collection of heathers. The area was originally laid out by Thomas Simpson in imitation of an American desert and was planted with a collection of cacti and succulents. The present planting scheme was substituted in the late 1940s following the loss of the cacti during the Second World War (information board). A further summerhouse stands on a knoll to the north of the Heather Garden, enjoying wide views across Poole Harbour.

From the Heather Garden a walk leads north-east, parallel to the northern boundary of the garden, passing to the north of a circular stone-walled enclosure known as the Garden of Memory. Flagged with crazy paving, the enclosure has a central Purbeck stone tazza and three curved timber bench seats. The entrance is flanked by two pairs of lead urns, while opposite the entrance a carved stone plaque records the name of the garden together with an inspirational inscription. The garden was originally the Picnic Arbour, but was redesigned in 1956-7 as a memorial to J S Beard's son Dick, who was killed while serving in the RAF in 1942, and his daughters Elizabeth and Anne, who died from polio (guidebook).

The Japanese Garden is the final element of the garden circuit. An irregularly shaped pool is surrounded by winding stone-edged paths and luxuriant oriental-style planting including bamboos, maples, and azaleas. A collection of oriental artefacts including stone pagodas, figures, and snow lanterns is distributed around the pool, while a thatched Japanese-style summerhouse stands at the head of a flight of stone steps at the southern end of the pool. A further Japanese tea house stands on the east bank of the pool, which is fed at its northern end by a stepped stone cascade. The Japanese Garden was constructed by Thomas Simpson following a visit to the gardens at Kyoto, Japan, using buildings, artefacts, plants, and even fish for the pool, exported from Japan under licence (CL 1966).

#### REFERENCES

Compton Acres, Poole, guidebook, (c 1965) *Country Life*, 140 (27 October 1966), p 1096 T Mowl, *Historic Gardens of Dorset* (2003), pp 149-51 Compton Acres, guide leaflet, (c 2003)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1933 edition

Description written: May 2004 Amended: October 2004, December 2004 Register Inspector: JML 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.