

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SOUTHSEA COMMON

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	SOUTHSEA COMMON
District:	City of Portsmouth (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
National park:	N/A
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.780424 Longitude: -1.0893465 National Grid Reference: SZ 64299 98267, SZ 65609 98363 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001624 Date first listed: 21-Jun-2002

Details

A large common developed as pleasure grounds from the C19 and purchased from the War Department in 1922 by Portsmouth City Council for use as a public park.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Southsea Common was part of the manor of Fratton or Froddington on Portsea Island, and at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries was vested with the Hospital of St Nicholas the Domus Dei. The hospital surrendered the land in 1540 to Henry VIII, who wished to strengthen the fortifications along the south coast. Southsea Castle was largely built in 1544 and it was from Southsea Castle that the King witnessed the sinking of his flagship, the Mary Rose, in 1545. The ground to the north continued to be used as a common but much of it was waste ground known as the Great Morass and Little Morass. In the 1780s boundaries were put up around the Common to prevent development and ensure an open space around the Castle for a 'field of fire'.

Southsea began to develop from the 1810s as a residential suburb of Portsmouth and a seaside resort. Southsea Common was levelled in 1831⁴³ and gradually laid out as a pleasure ground, with Clarence Esplanade constructed in 1848. Housing development to the north and east of the Common continued in the 1840s and 1850s under Thomas Ellis Owen, a local speculator. Avenues of holm oaks had been planted around some of the roads by 1870 and after the Council took a lease of the Common in 1884, a walk known as the Ladies' Mile (1884) was laid out for parades, the Canoe Lake (1886) was formed, and various avenues were planted in the late C19 and early C20. The housing development to the north was largely complete by 1900 but the Common was further planted and developed with gardens after 1922, when it was purchased from the War Office by Portsmouth City Council for use as a public park. Further sports and recreational facilities were added between the wars and during the second half of the C20. Southsea Castle remained in military use until c 1960 when it was purchased by Portsmouth City Council. The later additions were demolished and the C16 part of the Castle was restored and opened as a museum. The Common remains (2002) in municipal ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Southsea Common is situated in the Southsea area of Portsmouth and covers an area of c 82ha. It lies between residential and retail districts within Southsea to the north and the

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English Channel to the south, and consists of two irregularly shaped sites connected by South Parade. The larger, western part of the Common is bounded by Pier Road (A288) and Pembroke Road to the north-west, Southsea Terrace to the north, Western Parade, Clarence Parade, and South Parade (A288) to the north-east, Clarence Esplanade to the south-west, and the sea to the south. The eastern part of the Common is bounded by St Helen's Parade to the north-west, Eastern Parade to the north, playing fields and a miniature golf course to the east, and the Esplanade to the south. The Common is on uneven but largely level ground. The boundaries of the western part are open on all sides but the eastern part is partly enclosed by short sections of wall and fencing. There are extensive views within the Common, and across the sea, especially from the batteries of Southsea Castle.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Vehicular access is from the roads which surround and cross the Common including Serpentine Road and Avenue de Caen which run north/south across the western part, and Duisburg Road which runs from north-west to south-east across the north-west corner of the western part of the Common. The main points of entrance for pedestrians are the principal paths which run from the boundaries. Further pedestrian access to Southsea Common can be gained from most points around its boundary.

OTHER LAND The area to the west of Serpentine Road in the western part of the Common is largely open, with a few scattered trees on the grass. Rows of holm oaks line some of the edges and the roads which cross the Common. There are good views throughout, across the Common and to the sea, which are dominated by the monuments around the edges of the Common. At the north-west end is Clarence Pier (outside area here registered), which was rebuilt in 1961. There is a series of large Victorian monuments along Clarence Parade, on the south-west boundary of the Common, including, from north-west to south-east: the Peel or Shannon Naval Brigade Monument (1860, listed grade II); the Trafalgar Monument (listed grade II); the Chesapeake Monument (T J Willis and S J Nichol 1862, listed grade II); the Trident Memorial (Macdonald Field and Co c 1860, re-erected 1877, listed grade II); the Aboukir Memorial (Baker of Southsea c 1875, restored 1984, listed grade II); and the Crimean Monument (1857, listed grade II), a Portland stone obelisk by H J Andrews, erected by the Portsmouth Debating Society. Nineteen early C20 cast-iron lamp columns (together listed grade II) are placed along the south side of Clarence Esplanade.

The main feature on the west side of the western part of the Common is the Royal Naval War Memorial (1920?4, listed grade II) by Sir Robert Lorimer, which has a slightly tapered square column on a stepped base. The Second World War memorial was added to the north, and has a low walled enclosure terminating in winged pavilions.

In the north-west corner of the Common between Pembroke Road and Pier Road is a monument to Lieutenant-General Fitzclarence (1852, listed grade II) by J Truefitt, and on the north side of the Common, along Southsea Terrace, are a drinking fountain in memory of Charles McCheane (1889, restored 1977, listed grade II), and an early C20 tram shelter (listed grade II). The east side of the western part of the Common (to the east of Serpentine Road) is laid out in four main parts, divided by roads. To the north-west (between Serpentine Road, Clarence Parade, Avenue de Caen, and Clarence Esplanade) there is a series of tennis courts and putting and bowling greens with pavilions, known as the Southsea Recreation Area (laid out in the 1920s and 1930s), and to the north-east (east of Avenue de Caen) there is a large late C20 roller-skating rink on the site of an early C20 bandstand. Running from north-west to south-east across these two areas, to the north of the sports development, is the late C19 Ladies' Mile Walk with a double avenue of elms (many late C20 replacements but with some earlier trees).

The southern part of the Common is dominated by Southsea Castle (scheduled ancient monument) and its C19 batteries. Adjoining the West Battery are a late C20 Sea Life Centre immediately to the west, and a car park and the D-Day Museum to the north. To the south of the West Battery the grass-sided banks slope down to an open grassed area with a small early C20 bandstand or pavilion. There are extensive views from the top of the earthwork batteries, which were partly demolished in the 1960s. A bedding scheme between two paths runs north from a five-sided pond by Southsea Castle to a floral clock, and is aligned on Avenue de Caen. A lighthouse (1828, listed grade II) is situated on the north face of the Western Gallery gun platform of the Castle. To the east of the Castle is the East Battery with a lawn to the north of it, flanked to the east by a late C20 swimming pool complex (Pyramids Leisure Centre) and its car park. To the east of the complex, in the triangular-shaped piece of land between Castle Esplanade to the south and Clarence Esplanade to the north, is a 1920s rock garden with winding paths between rocks, plantings, and pools. Along Castle Esplanade is a row of early C20 lamp columns (together listed grade II) and three cast-iron and timber shelters (each listed grade II) of c 1900.

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The narrow, rectangular section between South Parade to the north and Clarence Esplanade to the south was laid out in the 1920s as two sunken Italian gardens. These now (2002) have a simplified formal scheme of bedding set in a lawn, bounded by paths and low walls. Along the south side of South Parade Pier are three early C20 lamp columns (together listed grade II). The easternmost part of these gardens is a low-lying section known as The Dell.

The two parts of the Common are joined by South Parade, which runs east through a narrow strip of ground between buildings to the north and the sea to the south, with South Parade Pier (listed grade II), built by G E Smith in 1908?9 in iron, timber and stucco, to the south (outside area here registered). To the east of the Pier the road divides, with St Helen's Parade running north-east and the Esplanade continuing to the east; the triangular plot of land between the roads is planted with a bedding scheme. The late C19 Canoe Lake occupies the north-west side of the eastern part of the Common and is surrounded by lawns with scattered trees and a row of holm oaks along St Helen's Parade. To the south-west of the lake are lawns with areas of formal bedding and the Emanuel Emanuel Memorial Drinking Fountain (c 1870, listed grade II). To the south-east is a playground and a car-parking area adjoining the Esplanade.

To the north-east of the lake is a C20 single-storey cafe and store, with the walled garden to the south of Cumberland House (listed grade II) immediately beyond to the east. Cumberland House, a two-storey villa built in c 1830?40, is now the Natural History Museum. Within the walled garden to the south is a late C20 butterfly house against the south wall of House, shrubberies around the walls, and formal bedding on the lawn in the centre.

To the east of the Canoe Lake and playground is an open stretch of grass, terminated to the east by the mid C19 Lumps Fort which was purchased by the Council in 1932. The fort, which was partly dismantled, is laid out with a 1930s formal rose garden in the centre and a model village at the west end. The rose garden is laid out with formal beds on grass quarters formed between two crazy-paving paths which cross at a sundial in the centre. A path with a pergola circuits the edge of the garden and there are entrances to the north, south, and east. To the north-west of the fort and east of Cumberland House are bowling greens, with grass and hard tennis courts to the east.

REFERENCES

N Pevsner and D Lloyd, *The Buildings of England: Hampshire* (1967), pp 459?63 *The Growth of Southsea as a Naval Satellite and Victorian Resort*, (Portsmouth Papers No 16, July 1972) W Curtis, *Southsea: Its Story* (1978) *Memories of Southsea*, (Portsmouth WEA Local History Group 2000) A Triggs, *Sunny Southsea: Memories of a Golden Age* (2001) *The Seafront, Southsea Conservation Area, An Appraisal*, (Consultation Draft prepared by Portsmouth City Council Planning Service, June 2001) [copy on EH file]

Maps I T and C Lewis, *Island of Portsea, 1833* (Portsmouth Records Service) Bacon, *Map of Portsmouth, 1883* (Portsmouth Records Service) E Stanford, *Map of Portsmouth, 1866* (Portsmouth Records Service)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1911 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1862, published 1867 2nd edition revised 1896, published 1898

Description written: May 2002 Register Inspector: CB Edited: November 2002

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.