

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

THE DELL, DONCASTER

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**THE DELL, DONCASTER**

Name:	THE DELL, DONCASTER
District:	Doncaster (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.512261 Longitude: -1.1588350 National Grid Reference: SE 55879 02060 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001501 Date first listed: 30-Mar-2001

## Details

A quarry garden laid out by the Doncaster Estates Surveyor, R E Forth, between 1928 and 1929, as part of the development of Hexthorpe Flatts, an early C20 public park situated on the western edge of Doncaster, on the east bank of the River Don.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Quarrying at Hexthorpe is recorded as early as 1568 (Pearson 1991), on land then owned by the Corporation of Doncaster, although part of another parish. The stone quarried was known as slate, geologically termed Upper Magnesian Limestone. Characteristically thinly bedded and easily split, the stone was initially useful as roofing slates for example, with some local use in house and wall building. During the C19, with competition from other local quarries yielding more versatile stone from the Lower Magnesian Limestone seams, the importance of quarrying at Hexthorpe declined until it became unprofitable.

In the 1850s Mr Robert Paxton visited Hexthorpe Flatts at the invitation of the Town Council, to assess its suitability for use as a public pleasure ground, but he recommended that the Council should concentrate instead on the provision of a cemetery and the improvement of the local waterworks. With the coming of the Great Northern Railway in 1849, and the subsequent completion of the South Yorkshire Railway in 1850, many new trades were set up and the consequent rapid expansion of population at Hexthorpe by the end of the century demanded the provision of more recreational space.

Improvements began in 1902, heralding the development of Hexthorpe Flatts as a popular holiday centre for local families in the Edwardian period. These improvements included the provision of a tea house, toilets, and new planting. Boating on the River Don was popular, with boats available for hire by 1903 and the building of a boathouse in 1904. The bandstand was a popular centre for music and dancing, and there was ample provision for children's play.

In 1914 Hexthorpe was incorporated into Doncaster and further expansion and improvement of the recreational facilities followed. Hexthorpe Flatts was officially declared a public park in 1928. As part of the expansion, plans were drawn up by the Council Estates Surveyor to create a garden in the northern quarry, north of the main path through the park. The aim was to create a focus of horticultural interest, with proposed water and rock gardens. The Dell, as it was named, opened in April 1929 and from the 1930s to the 1950s was a popular venue both locally and regionally, offering elaborate planting schemes, water features, rock gardens, and a bandstand in an unusual and unique setting. It was also noted for its illuminations, for which it became famous, and as an occasional setting for musical productions.

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With a fine collection of specimen trees and the surviving features of bandstand, rock and water gardens, The Dell retains much of its original character.

**DESCRIPTION**

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The Dell is situated in an area called Hexthorpe c 1km to the south-west of Doncaster town centre, located within the public park of Hexthorpe Flatts. The boundaries of The Dell are formed by the former council nursery and housing to the north-west, to the north-east by the access path off Bramworth Road, to the south-east by the avenue of plane and sycamore trees that leads to the boathouse, and to the south-west by the bank of the River Don. The Dell, a roughly square area of c 1.3ha, occupies the sunken hollow of a former limestone quarry.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main entrance to Hexthorpe Flatts public park is to the east off Greenfield Lane. The gate piers, built using the Upper Magnesian Limestone typical of the Hexthorpe quarries, were erected in 1929 by the firm Hill & Smith Ltd. From the gates an avenue of alternate plane and sycamore trees leads south-west into the park. Some 100m south-west of the main gates, the entrance to The Dell is immediately to the north-west, through metal gates into an area clearly defined by perimeter metal railings and a change of character. On entering The Dell, immediately to the west runs the main path, situated on an upper terrace with views down into The Dell.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The central focal point of the garden is a bandstand located 75m north-west of the entrance. It is situated on a small island surrounded by a narrow water channel or 'moat', fed by a rivulet issuing from a series of rock gardens and small cascades 35m to the south-west of the bandstand. The 'moat' channel leads through to a large ornamental pond situated 20m south of the bandstand. There is a broad grassed area on the floor of the garden north-east of the bandstand, and to the north-west and north-east the original stone faces of the quarry are in parts visible. Several large specimen trees, with accompanying structural shrubs, enhance the character of the garden. There are a number of routes, both stepped and ramped, leading down into The Dell. A network of paths, with the original crazy paving, are terraced into the sloping edges of the quarry, and there are several seating niches with views towards the central features. This is a sheltered, inward-looking garden, at its lowest point being c 4m metres in depth.

From the entrance one route follows a ramped path leading south-west down into the garden. Immediately to the south-east of the path are the sloping sides of the quarry, heavily planted with shrubs such as laurel and berberis. To the north-west the ground falls away giving glimpses through specimen trees and shrubs to the central bandstand and island. Along the ramped path, 75m from the entrance, a flight of steps leads north-west down into the garden with a direct view into the ornamental pond, edged with rockwork. Immediately south-west of the pond is a large shrub-planted rockery edged with rockwork which appears to be of imported stone, possibly Lower Magnesian Limestone. The stone is more weathered and thicker than the local stone and resembles tufa in character. Following the water channel from the pond north towards the island, the channel splits and completely surrounds the island forming a narrow 'moat'. The channels are based with concrete and edged with rockwork. Early photographs show that the original design had a more substantial 'moat' with much wider channels, enhancing the central island. At present (2000) the water channels are empty of water, except at times of flooding. A water pump located on the river bank used to circulate water through the garden but is no longer working.

Only the basic structure of the bandstand remains, it having been stripped down to walls and main supports. It has lost its windows and acquired a modern roof. Early photographs show the bandstand, with a thatched roof, surrounded by a network of paths and ornamental flower beds laid out with bedding plants, flower-filled urns, and flower-covered frames. The Dell at one time contained a lot of seating in various locations allowing the whole scene to be viewed from a great many angles. Very little seating is now present (2000). Immediately north-east of the bandstand, beyond the 'moat', is a broad grass area backed by the quarry walls. This area was once used for seating on a grand scale for bandstand concerts and musical productions and there were also several elaborate ornamental flower beds.

From the bandstand, the route proceeds towards a small bridge 5m to the south. Immediately west of this, another channel leads past an ornamental rose garden and an area of crazy paving to the source of the water. The water was pumped from the Don and fed the garden through a series of small cascades and rock pools located in a large rock garden 25m south-west of the bandstand. A series of more recent planting terraces (late C20) have been created to the west of this area, using contemporary materials,

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and a broad flight of steps leads west to an upper level with views of the Don through the branches of trees. This upper walk, situated 70m west of the bandstand, continues around the perimeter of The Dell allowing views into the garden. As it proceeds on the north-west side, a flight of steps returns into The Dell some 40m north-west of the bandstand. At intermediate levels off these steps are crazy-paved seating niches. At the bottom of the steps is a large raised planting bed on the site of a former formal area situated 20m north of the bandstand which was part of the central focal group of features. This comprised a small formal garden, a central fountain with a heron fountainhead, and a small pool (Forth, 1927); there is now (2000) no visible evidence of this feature. The quarry face 5m north of the formal garden has been modified to create interesting rockwork and planting. Retracing the steps up out of the garden to the upper level, on the north side of The Dell there is a modern aviary (late C20). The path progresses round to the east to a broad grassed area where there is a shelter typical of the 1950s, and ornamental planting beds. From here there are further views into The Dell through specimen trees and shrubs, before the path returns back to the entrance.

#### REFERENCES

F Pearson, *From a Quarry to a Park* (1991), pp 1-5, 16-28

Maps R E Forth, *The Dell: layout and sketches*, 1927 (Doncaster Archives)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1854 2nd edition published 1901 1956 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1930 edition

Archival items Early photographs, 1930s ( 1960s (Doncaster Local Studies Library) Photo album, early 1900s ( 1930s (Outdoor Services Section, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council)

Description written: March 2001 Register Inspector: JS Edited: May 2001

#### 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.