

LLANDUDNO: HAPPY VALLEY

Ref No	PGW (Gd) 1 (CON)
OS Map	115
Grid Ref	SH 782 831
Former County	Gwynedd
Unitary Authority	Conwy
Community Council	Llandudno
Designations	Listed building: Drinking fountain (Queen Victoria Golden Jubilee) Grade II
Site Evaluation	Grade II

Primary reasons for grading Nineteenth-century public gardens with later additions situated on the Great Orme headland with superb views; interesting features including a large rockery, a camera obscura and a colonnaded walk.

Type of Site Urban, public, later nineteenth- and twentieth- century gardens.

Main Phases of Construction 1887-90; 1930s.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The gardens, a public park, occupy part of the site of a former quarry on the south-east of the Great Orme, just north of Llandudno. The land was given to the town by Lord Mostyn, following closure of the quarry, to commemorate Queen Victoria's golden jubilee, and the gardens have been known in the past as the Jubilee Gardens. The site is an irregular shape, taking up a rocky bluff and a steep, small dry valley to the north of it, and with only Happy Valley Road separating it from the sea on the east. The topography has influenced the use of the site, so that the garden falls into three distinct sections.

The north-eastern part of the garden forms the focal area, and this consists of a plantation of pines and native hardwoods, with zig-zag paths within it, on the steep slope to the north, and an area of lawn on which a commemorative Victorian drinking fountain and the Gorsedd circle have been erected. The drinking fountain lies towards the eastern edge of the garden, and faces out to sea. It is a large, square, marble and sandstone edifice, with a bronze bust of the Queen under a canopy supported by four marble columns. There are marble basins on the base at front and back, with ornamental iron railings in the corresponding positions at the sides. Dwarf iron railings topped the base on all four sides, but are now missing at the back.

A Gorsedd circle occupies a large part of the grassed area behind the drinking fountain, to the west. A tarmac path runs along the eastern edge of this area, with a row of modern seats, carrying memorial plaques, facing the sea along the inner side of it. Below this the ground falls away sharply in a grassy bank crossed by paths and steps ascending from the road below. The plantings of trees and shrubs originally made on this bank have been cleared to allow the word 'Llandudno' to be laid out on the turf, probably as beds for bedding plants rather than chalk-cut letters, but this has now been allowed to revert to grass, although it can still be seen. This feature was designed to catch the eye of steamer passengers.

The children's playground is in the north-eastern corner of this part of the garden, near where several paths meet at the entrance by Happy Valley Lodge (not part of the garden, although its small roughly-terraced garden enclosures on the hill behind have become incorporated into the area). The bulk of the rest of the visitor facilities (cafe and shop, lavatories and the site of the Happy Valley theatre) is immediately to the south of the grassed area. Along the south edge of the grassed area, near these, is a row of Camperdown elms, continuing round the east side to the drinking fountain.

The second main part of the garden is the rockery or terraced garden, occupying the head of the small valley leading up to the west. This is fenced off from the rest of the garden, which is grazed, to exclude the sheep, but several gates give access. The structure is mainly of rough stone walling, with many steps, some level areas, and numerous paths criss-crossing it. It becomes steeper towards the top, and the revetting walls higher; there is a shelter belt of pines at the western apex, with a large shelter at the very top. A significant collection of alpine and other plants was planted on the terraces, of which part survives.

These two areas of the garden are separated from the third by the road which leads up to the artificial ski slope, situated above the high western end of the rockery. Crossing this road at the top, access is gained to a part of the former quarry which is left wild, the quarry face giving a home to nesting birds, wild wallflowers and so on. This area is largely grown over with scrub, but there are one or two open grassy glades. Below this wild area, a tarmac path parallel with the road, on the south side of it, leads into the third, southernmost, part of the gardens. The bank between the path and the road is planted with native and ornamental trees, a few shrubs and bulbs, and the steep slope above carries rougher grass with bracken. There is some planting of trees and shrubs giving on to natural scrubby woodland.

The southern area of the garden consists of a craggy bluff overlooking the town, and giving extensive views to the south, east and west. To the north of this an area has been levelled for a putting green, some of the native trees formerly planted there being sacrificed. The south-western extremity of the garden contains another levelled grass area which has the appearance of a bowling green, but is not named as such on any map consulted.

The bluff is clothed in natural turf, with patches of scrub, especially on the steep south-eastern slope. A narrow tarmac path leads all around this slope, and another branches off it back down to the road. On the top of the bluff, on the southernmost

high point in the gardens, is the camera obscura; a recent replacement of the original nineteenth-century one. At the other end of the bluff is the cabinlift station, from where a ride can be taken to the Summit Station on the Great Orme.

The quarry was closed in 1887 and the site given to the town by the Rt Hon. Llewellyn, 3rd Baron Mostyn; the drinking fountain was unveiled by Lady Augusta Mostyn in 1890. Some planting and minor landscaping had been done by this time. It seems that the southern part of the area had been public open space for some time already, however, as the original camera obscura was built on the bluff in 1860 and there are records of 'nigger minstrels' performing in the arena which preceded the theatre in 1873. A souvenir album with photographs of the minstrels is dated 1886. Later photographs show that they still performed in the gardens in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In 1896 the Eisteddfod was held in Llandudno, and the Gorsedd circle was constructed in the gardens; the banner still used today by the Gorsedd received its first outing on this occasion. A new circle was erected when the Eisteddfod returned in 1962; the stones of the old circle are supposed to have been incorporated in the rockery, presumably at this time.

The colonnaded walk ascending beside the road was opened in 1932 and the theatre in 1933, to replace an earlier structure which had burned down. The 1933 theatre was demolished within the last ten years, having fallen out of use and into decay. The 1930s seems to have been a period of activity in the gardens and it seems reasonable to ascribe construction of the rockery (which is not shown on the 1913 Ordnance Survey 25-in. map but appears on the 1951 version) to the same time. The putting green had also been constructed by 1951.

Sources

Primary

Information from the former Aberconwy Borough.

Many postcards and photographs in the County Archives, Caernarfon, especially XS/1877/2 (1886), souvenir album with photographs of the minstrels; XS/1401/14, later photographs of the minstrels; XS/1775/7 and XS/1948/12/68-70, rock gardens.

Secondary

Wynne Jones, I, *Llandudno, Queen of Welsh Resorts* (1975), p. 43