

# **Chapter 10: Historic Parks and Gardens**

## **Historic Parks and Gardens**

The Historic Parks and Gardens Register is largely unheard of in comparison to the similar Listed Buildings, and Scheduled Monuments Registers, however since the early 1980's when the Register began, it has grown to some 1500 entries. The Register was established – and is maintained by – English Heritage to record those historic parks and gardens which make such a rich and varied contribution to our landscape. From town parks to country estates, such places are an important, distinctive, and cherished part of our inheritance and we have a duty to care for them.

Section 8C of the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 (inserted by section 33 of, and paragraph 10 of Section 4, to the National Heritage Act 1983) gives English Heritage powers to compile the “*Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England.*” This is done to draw attention to these sites so that owners and users are encouraged to recognise their value and take steps to treat these places as special, and protect them for the future. This should not be seen as a blanket ban on development, but rather as a safeguard to ensure that any changes are made in the interests of the park or garden.

At the local level, the Local Plan sets out the framework for development affecting a Historic Park or Garden:

### ***POLICY EN9***

***DEVELOPMENT WHICH IS LIKELY TO BE DETRIMENTAL TO THE SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST OF WYNYARD PARK WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.***

Whilst the above Policy only refers to Wynyard, the designation of Ropner Park as a Historic Parkland means that development proposals there will be assessed in the same way as those at Wynyard.

Parks and Gardens are classified into grades to indicate their relative importance.

- Grade I are of international historic interest;
- Grade II\* are of exceptional historic interest; and
- Grade II are of special historic interest.

The grading of sites is independent to the grading of any Listed Building(s) which falls within them.

Although inclusion on the Register has no additional statutory controls, it is a Material Consideration (*Planning Policy Guidance Note 15, 2.24, September 1994*), and Local Authorities are required to make provision for their protection.

Because of the sensitivity of Registered parks and gardens, the Council is required to seek professional advice when considering development proposals affecting them. The Garden History Society should be contacted in any development, and in addition, English Heritage should be contacted where the proposal affects a Grade I or Grade II\* site.

The criteria for including parks and gardens on the Register rests with English Heritage, who assess the site and evaluate whether it can be said to be of "*special historic interest*". Although not relevant to the assessment, a site may also be of note for other reasons such as its amenity value, nature conservation value or perhaps for its collection of features which give it particular interest, and these should be given attention to ensure the correct management of the site. The entries on the Register are assessed on their current state rather than any past glory, so some once-impressive gardens that have since been lost cannot be included.

As a rule of thumb, English Heritage considers all parks and gardens over 30 years old to be "historic", but this does not necessarily mean it is of "*special historic interest*". Sites are chosen for the age of its main features, its rarity as an example of historic landscape design, and the quality of the landscaping.

English Heritage have developed nine criteria used to assess sites to see whether they are "special". In order to ensure consistency across the country, these assessments are only used by EH experts with extensive knowledge of the country's historic parks and gardens as a whole. The criteria are:

- Sites with a main phase of development before 1750 where at least a proportion of the layout of this date is still evident, even perhaps only as an earthwork.
- Sites with a main phase of development laid out between 1750 and 1820 where enough of this landscaping survives to reflect the original design.
- Sites with a main phase of development between 1820 and 1880 which is of importance and survives intact or relatively intact.
- Sites with a main phase of development between 1880 and 1939 where this is of high importance and survives intact.
- Sites with a main phase of development laid out post-war, but more than 30 years ago, where the work is of exceptional importance.
- Sites which were influential in the development of taste whether through reputation or references in literature.
- Sites which are early or representative examples of a style of layout, or a type of site, or the work of a designer (amateur or professional) of national importance.
- Sites having an association with significant persons or historical events.
- Sites with strong group value.
- These criteria are not mutually exclusive categories and more than one of them may be relevant in the assessment of any particular site.

### Registered Parks and Gardens in Stockton-on-Tees

There are two Historic Parks and Gardens within the Borough.

1. Ropner Park is an impressive Victorian Park dating back to 1890. Ropner Park has recently be awarded a £2.6 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore the park to its former glory and works are set to be complete by 2007.
2. Grade II\* listed Wynyard Park is an early 19<sup>th</sup> century landscaped park with a lake and formal gardens. Wynyard Park compromises of around 53 hectares and is situated within a larger woodland and agricultural estate.

## Ropner Park

Colonel Sir Robert Ropner Bt., M.P., V.D., J.P. (1838-1924), was the son of John Henry Ropner of Magdeburg, Prussia. As a child, Robert Ropner was fascinated by the sea, even though he had never seen it. He dreamed of being a sea captain, however in 1857 his maiden voyage as a stowaway on a freight ship bound for Hartlepool soon made him realise that he was a landlubber through and through.



The entrance on Hartburn Avenue

Instead, Ropner settled in England working for a coal exporter. He quickly realised that he and his partners could make more money if they owned their own fleet rather than chartering them. Ropner's business empire grew rapidly, fuelled by the remarkable industrialisation and the thirst for coal to fuel ever-more powerful machines.

Ropner used his Germanic origins to develop a healthy trade with a number of Baltic ports, and became exceedingly wealthy. His astute mind helped him find investors quickly, as his reputation preceded him.

In 1888, Ropner bought his own shipyard at Stockton on Tees, and he set about building a unique trunk deck ship. The design was such that the vessel weighed far less than an equally-sized conventional ship, and as such operators of the ships would pay less tax for each journey.

The Ropner empire was vast, and the family were resident at Preston Hall, now a museum. Within the museum one may find "The Dice Players", a painting by Francis de la Tour valued at circa £2million, which was part of the Clepham bequest that also included a Turner watercolour.



The restored fountain

In June 1890, Major Robert Ropner gifted a parcel of land to the residents of Stockton to be used as a public park. He addressed the Stockton Corporation:

*"I think a park for a town like ours most desirable, if not absolutely necessary, and I have therefore much pleasure in offering to pay for the cost of the*

*ground now under consideration, provided the Council will undertake to lay it out tastefully and keep it up for ever"* Robert Ropner

On 4 October 1893, the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George V and Queen Mary) officially opened the park for the people to enjoy.

Ropner Park is a large public park situated in between Hartburn and Oxbridge. Logos of Ropner Park carry the symbolic stars for his three sons, and also the Hart. The Hart is associated with Major Ropner and the area, as

it features in Hartlepool's town crest.



The ornamental lake

The Park is laid out in a very traditional formal Victorian style, with a large pond created from the damming of the Lustrum Beck. As with most Victorian Parks, a bandstand and pleasant walks were created amidst the trees and flower beds. Some sporting provision was also included in the form

of tennis courts and bowls, but it is not known whether these are later additions.

After more than a Century of enjoyment by the residents of Stockton, the park has fallen into disrepair. However, the Heritage Lottery Fund has donated over £2.6million in order to restore the park to its former glory. Work started in 2004 and is well on schedule to be completed by 2007. There will be a new Pavilion incorporating the Park Ranger's office and a cafe, a new bandstand built to the original 1890's design, and the fountain will be fully restored to working order and the lake sides reinstated as an ornamental pond.

The park is not being recreated entirely as it was, as more modern needs have dictated a modern play area, security CCTV system and an impressive



New sculpture

oxygenation system in the lake to keep the water from stagnating.

Work on replacing the lime trees that were lost in the January storm of 2005 has started. The trees are located at the main Hartburn Lane entrance, and trees on both sides of the footpath will be replaced. This will keep the symmetry of the tree line, and a new avenue of trees will also be restored either side of the terrace steps leading down from the bandstand to the lake.

## Wynyard Park

Wynyard Park is an early 19<sup>th</sup> century landscaped park and lake with 19<sup>th</sup> century formal gardens. The park lies within a larger wooded and agricultural estate with various associated buildings. The parkland is on the register of historic parks and gardens and is grade II.

Nearly in the centre of the park, at the top of a slight slope rising from the side of the ornamental lake, stands the mansion; Wynyard Hall. The entrance to the Hall is dominated by a vast Corinthian portico of 6 columns constructed in large blocks of stone. Not only does this give the Hall an impressive frontage,



Wynyard Hall from across the lake

but it is also considered one of the finest examples of this type in the north of England. At the foot of the rear left hand column of this portico is a plaque commemorating the laying of the foundation stone. The inscription reads:

*“This mansion was erected by Charles WM Vane third Marquis of Londonderry and the*

*first Earl of vane of the United Kingdom and Great Britain and Ireland and by Frances Anne Vane, Marchioness of Londonderry and Countess Vane who was sole heiress to all the collieries in the County of Durham belonging to the Vane and Tempest families inheriting the same from her father Sir Henry Vane Tempest Bart, who married Anne Countess of Antrim, this building was commenced in December Anno Domini 1822 the whole of the stone of this fabric was brought 26 miles from the quarry belonging to the family estate at Penshaw Colliery.”*  
*Phillip W Wyatt, Architect*

The Hall was officially opened in 1826.

Twin lodges dating to the early 19<sup>th</sup> c lie 1.5 km to the North of the Hall on the A689. The main entrance to the parkland is through the Golden Gates which lie 1km to the south with gate piers and lodges. The Hall is approached across an elegant 18<sup>th</sup> Century Lion bridge across the broad lake which leads to a shaded and peaceful valley, planted with a wide variety of evergreens. The parkland extends on all sides of the hall and covers an area of some 6800 acres.

Throughout the parkland are a number of landscaped areas and structures, revealing the changing tastes throughout the Hall's existence. Some of the larger and most interesting examples are:

- An obelisk 127 ft high on a square base erected to commemorate the Duke of Wellington's visit to Wynyard in 1827. Originally inscribed 'Wellington friend of Londonderry' this was later changed to 'Wellington' after Londonderry was not given a place in cabinet.
- A walled kitchen garden, although this has not been harvested for many years.
- An Italian ornamental walled garden
- An early 19<sup>th</sup> century Roman Temple - one of a pair of summerhouses with the Greek temple designed by Benjamin Wyatt. It features circular roman Doric, saucer dome with pinecone finial, 4 fluted columns 2 attached to the ashlar back wall.
- A grade II listed Greek Temple, installed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, probably by Benjamin Wyatt. The temple features a Tera style Greek Doric portico with fluted columns, entablature pediment ashlar stone with brick cement rendered back and sides and a podium of 5 steps.

A fire in February 1841 destroyed nearly two-thirds of the house, leaving nothing by the east wing, which has since become used as private living quarters. Later that year, in June, work began on rebuilding the Hall. Sadly the original architect Phillip Wyatt had died in 1836, so a number of other architects were commissioned to undertake the reconstruction project. Principal among whom were John Dobson and Ignatius Bonomi, who took it upon themselves to recreate the original house designed by Wyatt, rather than design a new one. Upon completion, the replacement was all but indistinguishable from the original.

Local labour was used again, including a great many skilled men whom had worked on the previous house. The same Penshaw quarry again supplied the stone, and some reputable names such as Henry Burnell who created the magnificent mahogany doors in the mirror room and ballroom. The new house was also upgraded to include warm air 'central heating', supplied by Thomas Mather which was one of the earliest examples in this part of the region.

In 1846 the Hall was completed, and an official opening and consecration ceremony was held in the chapel in January 1849.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Marquis undertook extensive renovations in approximately 1955 after Wynyard had suffered from comparative neglect since the First World War. He demolished the stables and landscaped the grounds between the house and the lake. He also restricted the family's living quarters to the East wing using approximately one third of the total structure. This restoration was completed in 1963.