Sussex Gardens Trust

Parks and gardens of local importance in Sussex

Parks and Gardens of the Sussex Coast
Research and Recording project

THE PEACE GARDEN EASTBOURNE



1905



2025

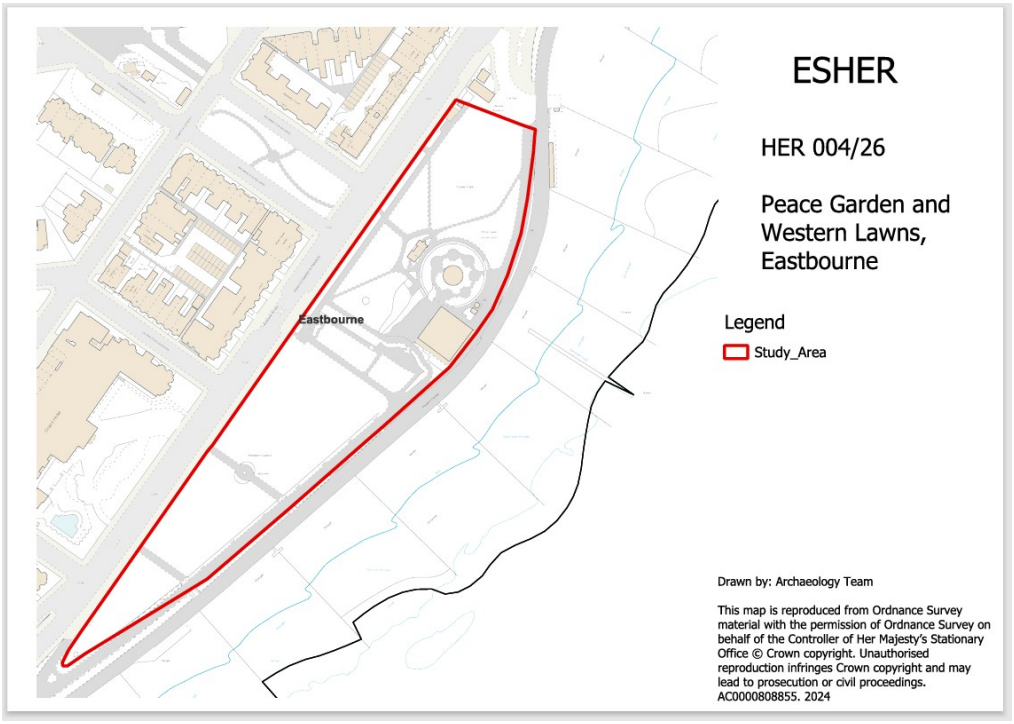
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East Sussex County Council

west sussex county council

THE GARDENS TRUST

SITE BOUNDARY (1)



SITE BOUNDARY (2)



INTRODUCTION

Background to the 'Parks and Gardens of the Sussex Coast' Project

Our project aim, to research and record the parks and gardens of the Sussex coast, began in 2013 and is nearing completion. Most of the sites recorded are now in public i.e. local authority ownership where their special historic development is not necessarily recognised and therefore conserved. We hope our reports will help improve knowledge and guide their future management.

The variety and period of sites is huge, from C19 and early C20 town squares, 'Old English' and Italianate-style gardens with ponds, pergolas and seating, gardens with salt-resistant traditional bedding and C21 ecological planting, to large parks which began life as farmland owned by influential local families and aristocracy and provided the recreation and leisure space for new urban development.

The administrative areas covered are: Worthing and Adur jointly-run DC, Arun DC, Brighton and Hove City Council, Eastbourne and Lewes jointly-run DC, Rother DC and Hastings Borough. Only Brighton and Hove and Hastings hold a list of local heritage assets (see Historic England's guidance for a definition of local heritage assets and how to identify and protect them . https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/local-heritage-listing-advice-note-7/)

Brighton and Hove City Council's list is the most comprehensive (https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/planning/heritage/local-list-heritage-assets) so our project has not addressed their sites although we may select a few of the more major ones for a deeper level of research in the future.

Content

All research – in local and national archives and on site – is undertaken by a team of volunteers who have received training from professionals expert in appraising designed landscapes who have worked extensively for English Heritage (now Historic England) on sites on its National Heritage List for England. All reports are peer-reviewed.

Each report comprises the following:

- A site boundary map drawn on the current Ordnance Survey map.

- The area within the boundary represents the area of designed historic interest; it does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.
- A current aerial photograph with the boundary shown.
- An overview and statement of significance based on the guidance set out in the *National Policy Planning Framework* – the government's guidance for local planning authorities in discharging their planning responsibilities.
- A written description, derived from documentary research and a visual site survey, the format following that used by Historic England for sites on the national *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2nd edn.

Supporters and Acknowledgements:

The Trust would like to thank the volunteers, owners, local authority staff (especially the East and West Sussex Historic Environment Records) and the many Friends groups who have participated in this project and given time and effort to completing this challenging task.
Further information is available from: www.sussexgardenstrust.org.uk

THE PEACE GARDEN

COUNTY East Sussex

ESCC HER REF 137755

DISTRICT Eastbourne

OS GRID REF TV 61328 98240

OVERVIEW

The Peace Garden was constructed by volunteers in the former dry moat of a Martello tower (Wish Tower) located at the western end of Eastbourne. Opened in 2018 as a memorial to the 174 civilians and members of the emergency services who died in WWII, in 2020 it was adopted by Eastbourne Borough Council as a public park. The Peace Garden offers a serene retreat for locals and visitors, providing a stark contrast to the bustling seaside attractions nearby.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Peace Garden was created as a memorial to the 174 civilians and members of the emergency services who died in WWII. It was constructed in the former dry moat of a Martello tower (Wish Tower, a Grade II Scheduled Ancient Monument), which retains many of its original components and associated features, including part of its glacis bank. It represents one of a series of six low-lying towers, originally constructed along the beach at Eastbourne and, together with the Eastbourne Redoubt provides a significant contribution towards our understanding of the strategic integration of Martello towers and associated fortifications, and their role in the defence of Britain during the early 19th century (Historic England). The Peace Garden offers a serene retreat for locals and visitors alike, providing a stark contrast to the bustling seaside attractions nearby.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Peace Garden was created in the former moat of a Martello tower (The Wish Tower) as a memorial to the 174 civilians and members of the emergency services who died in WWII. The site was chosen in 2016 by the newly formed Eastbourne Civilian War

Memorial Trust and the garden publicly funded for £70,000. A brass plaque was mounted upon an 8-ton granite boulder recording the names of those who had perished. This replaced an earlier nearby memorial, the Wish Tower Café and Sun Lounge built in 1961 with funding from the Foyle family, which fell into disrepair and eventually demolished in 2012.

The Martello tower was one of seventy-four built along the south coast at the time of the possible Napoleonic invasion during the 19th century and was the last of six built between Langney Point and Eastbourne. A house on the cliffs was demolished in 1805 and the tower built surrounded by a moat. The tower was initially used as a garrison of 24 men, but by the time its construction was finished, the threat of invasion by Napoleon had passed and it was used from 1812 by Eastbourne Volunteer Corps and Coastguards in their defensive role to prevent smuggling. Families of the coastguards lived in the tower from 1837 onwards (1842 and 1851 Census – Ancestry UK). The tower was decommissioned in 1873 by the War Office, being described as 'an objectionable outhouse in a potato field' (wishtower.org). Eastbourne Local Board took over the lease in 1874 and ten years later let it to Harry Holloban, a local shopkeeper, who developed a geology museum there. In 1897 the Duke of Devonshire bought the tower from the War Office for £675 (wishtower.org.uk). The building and surrounding paths and slopes are shown on engravings from 1850 (Alamy.com) and 1870 (https://www.antique-prints-maps.com) and the site of the tower is shown on OS maps from 1874.

In WWII, the tower became home to the 342 Coastal Defence Battery responsible for defence from Langney Point to Beachey Head with two naval guns pointing seaward. A first aid post was housed in the now public toilets, and the troops were billeted at the Lansdowne Hotel nearby. By 1942, the Home Guard took over manning the battery. By the late 1950s, there were plans to demolish the tower and build a sun lounge, but following an outcry, in 1959 the tower was designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument and in 1971 a listed building grade II. The moat was filled in to about 1.5 metres above its original depth making it level with the land and raised flowerbeds were created around the moat. The seaward side wall was removed and levelled, and an arch was cut through the moat wall to allow access from the sea front. The tower became an 'Invasion and Coastal Defence Museum' in 1970, and an exhibition of its history was held in 1993 and 1995. It reopened as a puppet museum in 2001.

In December 2013, the 'Wish Tower Friends' were granted a two-year lease to open the tower to the public again, received a Heritage Lottery grant in 2016 and developed a conservation management plan for its maintenance (wishtower.org.uk). The new Peace Garden in the moat, designed by architect Wendy Thomas, was officially opened in 2018 and in 2020 was adopted by Eastbourne Borough Council as a public park and the Friends of Meads Parks and Gardens took over its maintenance.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Location, Area, Boundaries, Landform, Setting

The Peace Garden lies within the former moat of the Martello tower (the Wish Tower), which is located on a natural chalky grass mound (Wish Tower slopes) at the western end of Eastbourne opposite Wilmington Square and forms part of the South Downs. To the site's west lie the triangular-shaped Western Lawns. The whole area, measuring 420 metres from north-east to south-west, including the Western Slopes and the Wish Tower slopes, is bordered on its north by King Edward's Parade and on its south by Eastbourne Promenade. The Peace Garden in the moat together with the tower are 39.88 metres in diameter. The Bistrot Pierre Restaurant lies to the south of the tower with vehicular and pedestrian access on the seaward side. The Wish Tower slopes are laid to lawn with some islands of shrubs and palm trees behind the gardens, and on the perimeters. The parallel path is divided by shrubs and palm trees on the land side.

Entrances and Approaches

Three paths lead eastwards from King Edward's Parade across the Wish Tower slopes towards the tower. There are two entrances into the Peace Garden, one through an arch in the moat wall from Eastbourne Promenade and the other from a wide opening from the Bistrot Pierre Restaurant carpark.

Garden

The Martello tower, now set in a small lawn, is the predominant feature of the Peace Garden. At the base of the high brick walls of the dry moat, raised beds (c. ½ m high) with brick and flint walls and lower beds edged with ornamental rusty metal have been constructed and planted with well-tended perennials and shrubs. Along the wide gravel path between the flower beds and the tower, long curved benches are positioned in alcoves within the raised bed design. Victorian-style lamp posts have also been included.

REFERENCES

Books, articles and publications

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1842 and 1851 Census – Ancestry Uk

https://wishtower.org.uk/history

https://eastbournemeads.co.uk/attractions/environment-outdoors/the-peace-garden/

https://martellotowers.co.uk/sussex

https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/82019

https://www.friendsofmeadsparksand gardens.co.uk

Maps

OS 1st edition 25" 1874 Sussex LXXX.14
OS 2nd edition 25" 1898 Sussex LXXX.14
OS 3rd edition 25" 1908 Sussex LXXX.14
OS 4th edition 25" 1925 Sussex LXXX.14
OS 5th edition 25" 1930 Sussex LXXX.14

Illustrations and photographs

The Francis Frith Collection – Wish Tower, Devonshire Park and Beaches

http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/EAW026327)

https://www.friendsofmeadsparksand gardens.co.uk

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