Sussex Gardens Trust

Parks and gardens of local importance in Sussex

Parks and Gardens of the Sussex Coast
Research and Recording project

WARRIOR SQUARE HASTINGS



c1870



2025

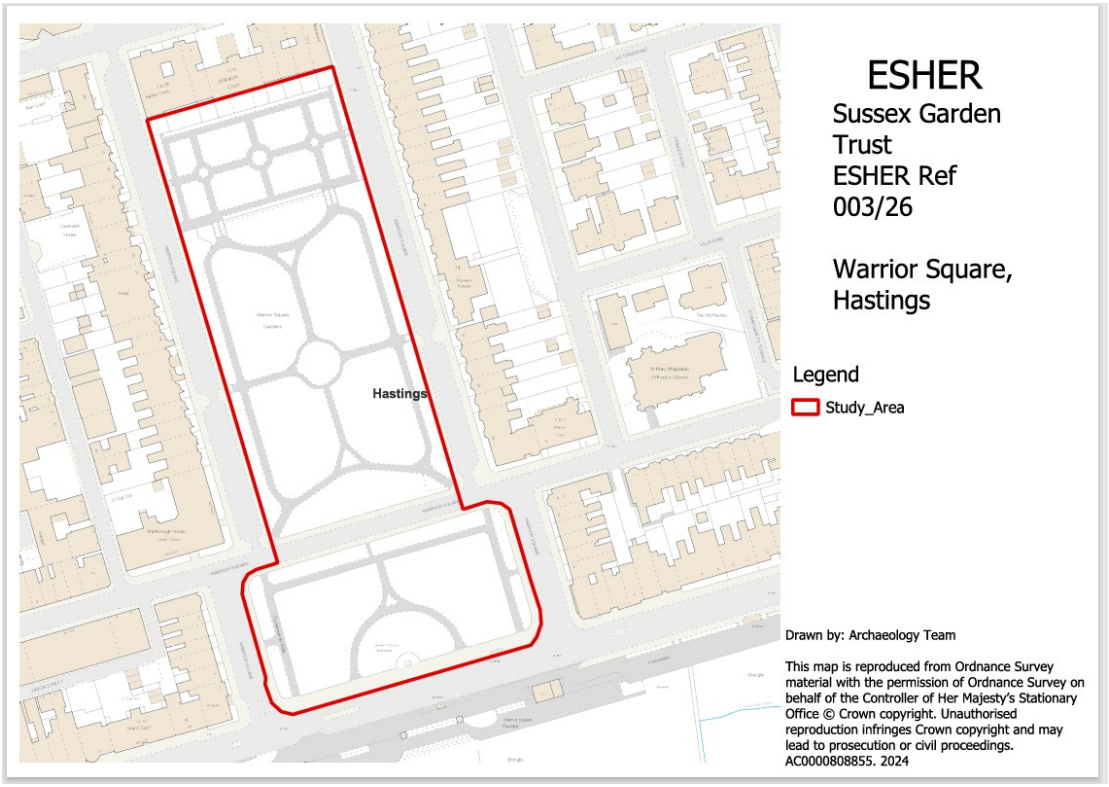
SUSSEX GARDENS TRUST

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

WARRIOR SQUARE

COUNTY East Sussex

ESCC HER REF 137753

DISTRICT Hastings

OS GRID REF TN37 6DF

OVERVIEW

Warrior Square comprises 17,300 square metres of green space in central St Leonards divided into three sections and open to sea views. The gardens' surrounding terraces, originally part of the Eversfield Estate, were developed for housing from 1833 by James Tropp and completed by a Mr Moreing in 1865 on a site known as Warrior Field. The square and its garden was a focus for social, political and civic activity from the mid C19 and continues to be a popular social space.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Warrior Square is a site on the seafront of St Leonards on Sea for recreational use by residents living in the surrounding flats and houses, residents of both Hastings and St Leonards on Sea and for visitors to the town. It is a large space with decorative flower beds, lawns, trees and shrubs along the walls edging the space. There are no surviving buildings, the Church of St Columba was destroyed during WW2 as was the Royal Concert Hall, which was rebuilt and then destroyed by fire. The Upper Gardens at the north end of the square was originally a subscription garden for residents and is now a rose garden open to all. The gates and railings are still in place surrounding the rose garden with the paths laid out between the flower beds.

Warrior Square is a large space where people can meet up, walk their dogs or sit on the many benches. Events take place in the square during the summer organised by residents for the benefit of local people. It is an important focal point for Hastings and St Leonards's residents and visitors alike.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The area known as Warrior Square was part of the Eversfield Estate and an Act of Parliament dated 14 June 1827 empowered trustees to set out part of the land as a square with lawns for the use and convenience of the occupiers of the houses and other buildings.The construction of Warrior Square's surrounding terraces began in 1833 with a single dwelling owned by a Mr James Troup on ground known as Warrior Field. In 1834 the upper, northern section of the present gardens were conveyed to Mr Troup with the condition that they should 'forever be a pleasure ground' (trustees of Eversfield Estate) and that no building should be erected on them. Mr Troup resumed construction of the terraces in 1854 (which were known at that time as Belgravia). However, in 1855 he was declared insolvent and the 15 acres of the Warrior Square estate were sold on 3 May 1855 for a mortgaged price of £11,000 with a lease of 99 years. The purchaser, a Mr Moreing, completed the construction of buildings numbered 18 to 24. The terraces were finally completed in 1865.

The Square's gardens, finally completed in 1864 (OS 1st edition surveyed in 1873 records the layout), comprised upper and lower sections connected by 2 sets of steps and enclosed by railings mounted on plinths and with entrance and intermediate piers (photograph c1905); a third section lay south of the main seafront road (now St Margaret's and Norman Road) facing Grand Parade. The Upper Gardens, recorded in 1908 as Warrior Square Terrace (OS 3rd edition) had opened in 1852 but to subscribers only. They were planted with carpet bedding (now, 2022, replaced with roses), the arrangement of beds shown on the OS 2nd edition map. In 1930 a Major Holman purchased the Upper Gardens and gave them to the Borough of Hastings to be maintained as a pleasure ground and they were finally opened to the public in 1931 (*Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, 21 February 1931, p6). An attempt in 1935 by Hastings Corporation to compulsorily purchase the land to build a new town hall failed.

The Lower Gardens (opened to the public in 1920) comprised lawns divided into 4 more or less equal quartiles separated by paths meeting at a central diamond shaped flower bed and a perimeter path lined by trees. A band played in the gardens three times a week and on 23 April 1939 a military band is recorded as playing. Two small glass houses, removed between 1927 and 1938 (revised OS 4th and 5th editions) were in the extreme north-west and north-east corners (OS edition surveyed 1873). The third, southernmost section of the Square's gardens is shown in 1873 as a simple lawned rectangle (OS 1st edition) probably also enclosed by railings from at least this date (they are shown in c1900 photographs) and with a perimeter path lined with planting. The bronze statue of Queen Victoria located in a niche in the railings on the seaward side of the enclosure was commissioned by Hastings Corporation from the sculptor Francis

John Williamson (1833-1920) and unveiled in 1903. The knee of the statue was damaged in 1942 by a stray bullet from an enemy aircraft. Most of the Gardens' subsequent history concerns their changing social and games use, changes to the planting and the impact of wartime activity and some curiosities.

In 1855 a flagstone-floored tunnel was uncovered leading south from the Lower Gardens under the main road. Local contemporary history sources such as those compiled by Thomas Brandon Brett state that James Troup constructed a tunnel connecting his house (built 1833) to the Gardens and a surviving contemporary photograph (https://historymap.info/Warrior_Square) may be of the tunnel. This tunnel is also mentioned in 1862, when the annual Hastings and St Leonards Horticultural Exhibition was held in the Gardens, the tunnel providing access between both portions of the Gardens and being 'illuminated by gas-jets and other devices' (Whiteman, *Guide to Hastings, St Leonards and the Neighbourhood*, 1869). Alternatively, the photograph (featuring parks foreman Charlie Eldridge) may be of a further tunnel which formed a culvert carrying a stream beneath Warrior Square. Neither tunnel now survives, having been backfilled and/or incorporated into Southern Water's Storm Drain project.

Wartime damage around the Square included the destruction by enemy action in October 1942 of St Columba's Presbyterian Church (opened in 1882) which stood on the north-west corner of Warrior Square and Terrace Gardens. Also damaged and later destroyed by fire (in 1947) after conversion to a cinema in 1921 were the Warrior Square Opera House and Royal Court Hall. Built in 1879 but on the north side of Warrior Square Terrace (and therefore not contiguous with the Gardens) the Hall was a hub for local organisations and activity, including the formation in 1866 by Barbara Bodichon of the Women's Suffrage Committee. A circular bandstand of concrete designed by Reg Clayton was constructed in the Lower Gardens during 1972. This was subsequently demolished, firstly to the plinth level in 2003 and completely in 2004 due to deterioration in the concrete making up the structure (Planning applications available at The Keep).

SITE DESCRIPTION

Location, Area, Boundaries, Landform, Setting

Warrior Square Gardens lie to the north of the main A2102 (St Margaret's and Norman Roads) approximately 615m west of Hastings pier and 200m south of St Leonards Warrior Square Railway Station. The gardens comprise approximately 2.3ha (5.7 acres) and are framed by the Squares' terraced buildings. They are formed of two parts, the Upper Gardens (approximately 38m x 87m) and the Lower Gardens (approximately 135m x 87m), connected by 2 sets of steps to accommodate the seaward slope of the

ground. A further section of gardens of approximately 0.73ha lies south of the A2102 and is bordered on the south by Grand Parade.

Entrances and Approaches

The main entrances to Warrior Square Gardens are from the south-west and south-east corners of the Lower Gardens, which are level with no steps. Two further entrances are centrally placed on the west and east sides of the Lower Gardens. These entrances are each through a pair of pillars surmounted by ornamental lights from which a flight of seven steps bordered on each side by iron railings descends to the garden. A pair of smaller pillars terminate the steps. Access to the Upper Gardens is from flights of seventeen steps on the north-east and north-west corners of the Lower Gardens, as shown on the 1873 OS map. The steps are bordered by stone walls with an ornamental light on the top plinths and culminate in metal gates. The garden containing the statue of Queen Victoria is surrounded by railings with two open gateways either side of the statue accessible from the pavement on Grand Junction. There are two further exits on the north side of the garden to the A2102.

Garden

The Upper and Lower Gardens are enclosed by low walls with intermittent buttresses and pillars (some in poor condition), which replaced the iron railings removed during WW2 to aid the war effort. Intermittent trees and shrubbery form an inner boundary. The Upper Gardens, laid out as planting beds from the 1870s (OS 2nd edn) and as rose beds from the early twentieth century (postcards from 1920), have recently (2025) been restored. The Lower Gardens retain the perimeter paths around a lawn with a central flower bed, as shown on OS maps from 1873. The lawn is now divided into three sections, the lower north-to-south dividing path having been grassed over by 1928 (OS 4th edn). Perimeter beds contain colourful shrubs and exotic plants, including palm trees, phormiums, agave, veronica, wild roses, agapanthus and hydrangeas. The garden containing the statue of Queen Victoria is surrounded by green railings and mainly grassed with two large oval beds filled with mixed shrubs. The gardens are well maintained by Hastings Borough Council and flowering annuals are arranged in decorative pots near the southern end of the garden in summer.

REFERENCES

Books, articles and publications

Baines, J. M., *Historic Hastings* (1986).

Brooks, Ken, *Hastings Then and Now* (2002).

Cousins, Henry*, Hastings of Bygone Days and the Present* (1911).

Haines, Gavin, *Hastings and St Leonards: Britain in Old Photographs* (2001).

Marchant, Rex, *Hastings Past*, (1997).

Marshall, M. A. N., *Hastings Saga* (London, 1953).

Maps

OS 1st edition 6" surveyed 1873 pub.1878
OS 2nd edition 25" revised 1897 pub. 1899
OS 3rd edition 25" revised 1908 pub. 1910
OS 4th edition 25" revised 1928 pub. 1930
OS 5th edition 25" revised 1938 pub.ca 1947
OS 6th edition revised 1950 pub.1952

Archive material

Hastings & St. Leonards Observer (21 February 1931) p6; (17 October 1936), p16; (18 July 1844), p. 3.

https://historymap.info/Brett_Manuscript_Histories, vols 1,3,6,10.

https://historymap.info/Warrior_Square

Storm Drain project: https://historymap.info/Southern_Water_Storm_Drain

Illustrations and photographs

http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/epw026208%20)

Early c20 photographs https://historymap.info/Warrior_Square

Research: Lynn Gausden & Val Barnes	**Completed:** January 2014	**Editor:** Virginia Hinze & Barbara Simms