

Southend Cliff Gardens – A review for National Listing on the Register of Park and Gardens

Milton Society - September 2024



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Abstract

Southend cliff gardens were formed from the naturally occurring estuary-side rolling cliffs at the centre of the town and became an important part of the town's development. A small copse at the eastern end of the cliffs formed a convenient route from the developing Georgian estate at cliff top to the beach and the new health giving pastime of sea bathing. The cliffs also lent themselves to the idea of promenading and socialising in the outdoor garden spaces, taking in the spectacular views across the estuary. A large statue of Queen Victoria was erected in 1898. From this time the gardens expanded; shelters and a network of paths through the planted cliffs were provided by the landowners and then the council. The gardens became a place for public entertainment with the construction of a bandstand and a variety show venue in Happy Valley and, later, Floral Hall. The events grew and more people gathered. As a demonstration of this, political rallies were held at Floral Hall. Other structures were added, including a funicular cliff lift and yacht clubs. Planned from the 1930s and clearly linked to the growth in local entertainment, the Cliffs Pavilion was eventually built in the 1960s. As a very large regional theatre the building took its very name from the location.

During the pre and post World War Two periods the gardens expanded again to the west with large 1930s shelters, extensive terraces and pathways being added. Plantings can be evidenced from the present-day array of native seaside species and some exotic species such as palms, cordylines and phormiums.

Today the gardens are challenged by slippage and difficulty with maintenance but remain largely in their original form; a beautiful, restful and popular place giving identity to the seaside city centre.

The gardens appear to meet the criteria for Listing and compare well with other national examples. Listing would give recognition to the gardens and the raised profile would assist in future management, protecting and celebrating the local and national heritage asset.

1.0 Introduction

This document is prepared by Milton Society, a local conservation and heritage-led regeneration community group. The purpose of the document is to review and report on the history of Southend Cliff Gardens so that the significance of the place may be understood and considered for Listing on the National Register of Parks and Gardens, as a Listed heritage asset and for designation as a conservation area.

The gardens were laid out in stages, from the late C18 Shrubbery in the east, through the central Victorian and Edwardian expansion to the wider, interwar terraces to the west and general development. This development responded to and facilitated the expanded use of the gardens over time.

2.0 Location

Southend-on-Sea is located to the east of London, some 40 miles from the capital city, at the mouth of the Thames estuary. It is the closest seaside resort to London and enjoys many day tripper visits from the vastly populated Thames corridor and north-east London.

Southend is noted for its tidal estuary condition, exposing many square miles of mud flats at low water. The city has 7 miles of beaches, backed by a long promenade. This is very heavily used by locals and visitors throughout the year. Southend's 1¼ mile Grade II Listed pier (1830) is known throughout the world as the longest pleasure pier in the world.

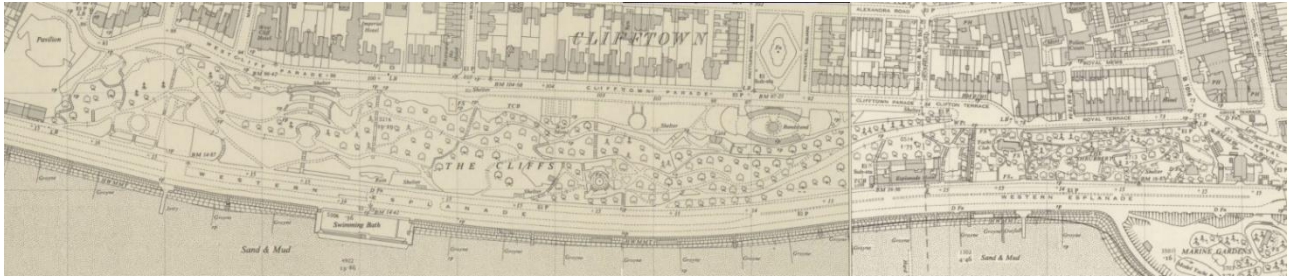
Southend Cliff Gardens are located at the centre of the city, immediately to the west of the High Street and pier. The gardens are easily accessible from the pier, Adventure Island pleasure grounds and promenade.

Immediately to the north of the gardens are the Grade II Listed Georgian Royal Terrace and Clifton Terrace, and the Victorian Clifftown residential estate (a conservation area) which all overlook the head of the cliff gardens.

3.0 Topography and General Description

On the north side of the Thames estuary Southend-on-Sea seafront has a south-facing aspect and the natural feature of sloping cliffs at the centre of the town. These rise 70 feet or so from the seafront promenade, creating a place for leisure and lookout, most appropriate to a seaside resort. The cliff gardens afford extensive and magnificent panoramic views of the estuary and its activity, across to the south side of the estuary and the north downs of Kent. The gardens are a perfect environment for recreation and escape from urban existence. They undulate along a ¾ mile section of the seafront and today comprise herbaceous, shrub and tree plantings with terraces, meandering footpaths and steps, a funicular lift, seating, and shelters.

The gardens maintain most of their integrity from the original layouts of hard landscaping including pathways, retaining walls, steps, stepped terraces, and some ornamentation including lanterns and decorative planting plinths and urns. Nearly all of the pathways from the 1949 Ordnance Survey sheet are intact with only minor additions/alterations



1949 Ordnance Survey sheet showing pathways throughout the garden (Southend Library)

The cliffs have always experienced some movement as might be expected from the alluvial clay formation. This has manifested itself in widespread minor slippage over time, creating cracks and some displacement requiring frequent maintenance. Some of this maintenance has not been carried out as required in recent years resulting in some pathways being barricaded from public use. One major land slip occurred in 2002 which saw the loss of the 1930's bandstand shelters at the head of the cliffs and the gardens below. Two retaining walls were later installed and the gardens locally re-levelled to form new grassed terraces at the top and mid levels and an east-west connecting footpath.



Two of the several barricaded and now overgrown stepped pathways

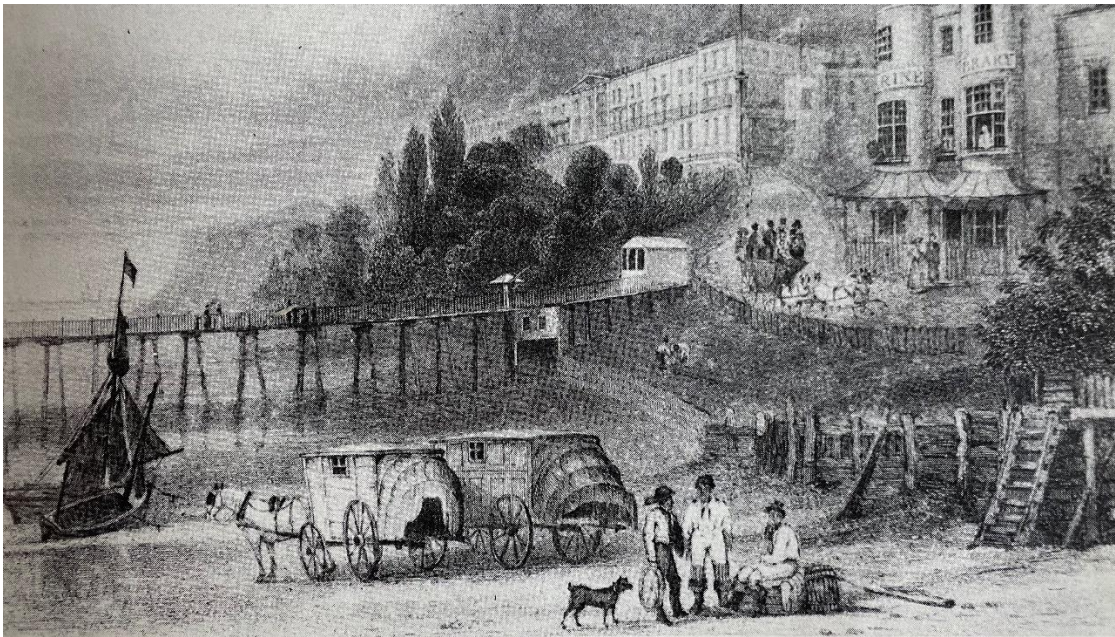
4.0 The History of the Cliff Gardens

4.1 General history

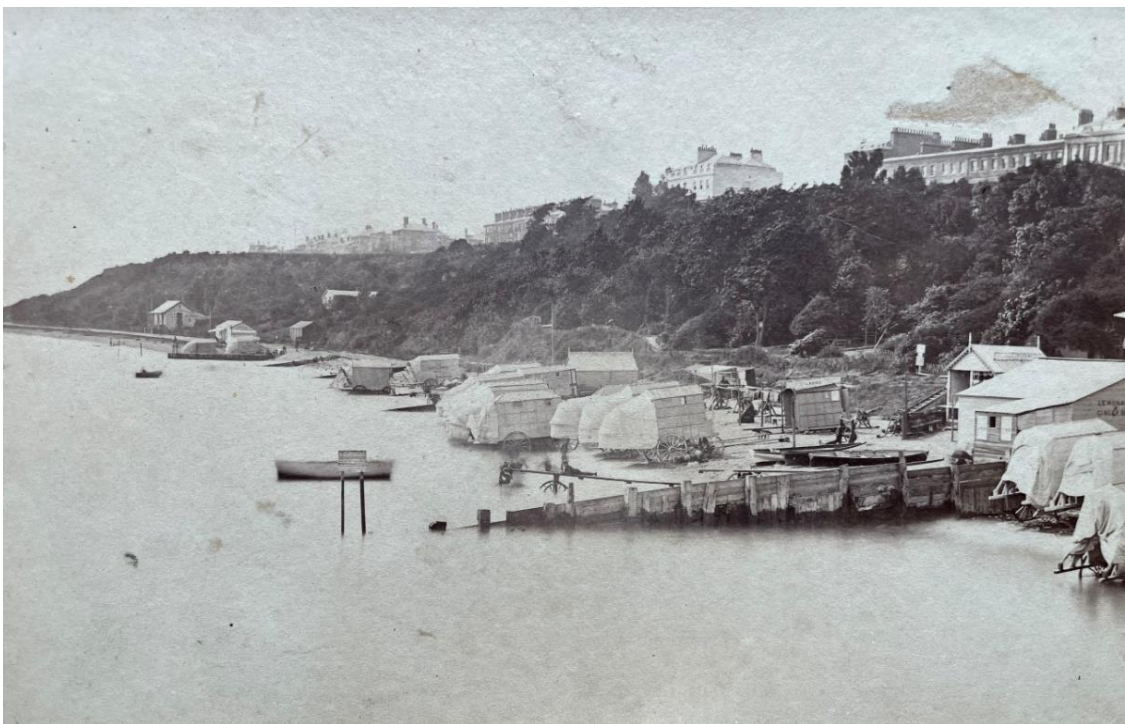
Southend-on-Sea is a well known seaside resort that grew to prominence in the 18th and 19th centuries. Following the C12 monastery and then medieval settlement in nearby Prittlewell, Southend first became urbanised in the 1700s with the development of oyster fishermen's huts followed by humble terraces of cottages. The earliest *polite* development of the city that can be seen today was the development of Georgian buildings, including the Grand Terrace and Grand Hotel, overlooking the seafront. These date from the early 1790's. It appears that from around the mid C19 the tree grove on the cliffs in front of the buildings gave access via pathways to the beach for the occupants and guests of the terrace and hotel. This sheltered and discreet access is the earliest sense of the use of the cliffs becoming a garden.

Located just forty miles from London the town could be easily reached by horse drawn carriage from the metropolis for the medical benefit of taking in the clean coastal air and for the new activity of the time, sea bathing.

This was most significant for well-to-do visitors following the latest fashion or their doctors prescribed remedy for overcoming respiratory conditions resulting from the poor air conditions in London. A significant patron of the town was Princess Caroline of Brunswick, wife to the Prince Regent, who stayed at Grand Terrace (later renamed Royal Terrace), in 1804. This royal patronage made Southend-on-Sea even more popular at the time and visitor numbers began to grow. Nearby, the Georgian Clifton Terrace and Victorian Clifftown estate, became the earliest residential development in the town. These were most desirable places to live and the locals could enjoy perambulating and socialising at the cliff top, through the cliff gardens and along the promenade. Bathing became well established.



Pier Hill c1831 (Essex Record Office)



Early bathing machines adjacent to the shrubbery (Essex Record Office)



An C19 etching of the newly built Cliff Town estate and its relationship to the unmade Cliffs, with the exception of the diagonal footpath cut into the slope (Essex Record Office)

In 1856 the London, Tilbury and Southend railway was extended to Southend. This made the most significant contribution to the development of Southend, both as a commuter town linked to London but also as a place on the coast that was easily visited. This became the beginnings of the town as a popular seaside resort.

The cliff gardens, located at the centre of the town, were a central part of this change in social custom with the gardens giving discreet access to the sea and rise to the social practices of perambulation, taking in views, sitting within the gardens and the accompanying social etiquette with fine clothing. This led onto entertainment within the gardens and great social gathering - the early development of the seaside resort that continues today. The gardens were extended towards the west by the Victorians, particularly with the addition of pathways and multiple shelters in response to this wider use. The gardens became very heavily used for social gathering and seaside entertainment. From the turn of the C18-19 various impresarios were putting on performances and crowds gathered at Happy Valley with makeshift performance shelter and staging. Political rallies took place on the cliffs. Later in 1920 Floral Hall was also built as a more permanent entertainment venue and for flower displays, clear recognition of the gardens location.

The gardens as a prominent and important social gathering place, overlooking the sea, is evidenced by its selection as the place for the First World War memorial in 1920, designed by Edwin Lutyens and still in use today.

The gardens were extended further during the interwar years where planting schemes were developed and large shelters added.

Trends, of course, changed with the post-war growth of foreign air travel and continental holidays. The use of the gardens changed with the resort generally but retained their popularity with the retired generation and musical performance at the bandstand. In the early 1990's the café owner at the bandstand referred to the value of the 'grey pound'. Events such as the town carnival, air shows and, latterly, Halloween parades have taken advantage of the cliff gardens' elevation for viewing. The covid pandemic and cost of living crisis has further modified societal behaviour and

the vicissitudes of the cliff gardens. Southend-on-Sea has national seaside resort significance and the gardens have retained their importance to the resort.

In 2021 the town was granted city status, following the tragic death of Sir David Amess, the then Member of Parliament for Southend West, who had strongly advocated the town for this recognition. This status has raised the city in the public consciousness and the visitor economy is a priority part of the Council's forward vision. The cliff gardens should be a vital part of that vision, following historical precedent, both as useable leisure space but also as a bio-diverse, restful alternative environment to the excitable activity of the seafront and dense residence of the hinterland.

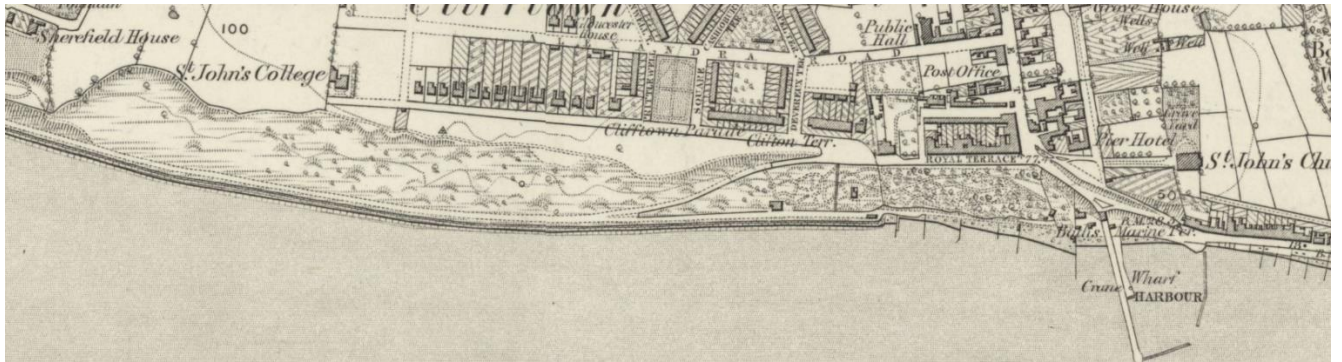
4.2 The Georgian Shrubbery

The Shrubbery was the first part of the natural cliffs that was worked upon as a garden. By 1790 the lord of the manor of Prittlewell, Daniel Scratton, undertook a speculative development which would ultimately lead to the rise of modern Southend. By 1794 nos. 1-15 Grand Terrace and the Grand Hotel were substantially complete and the land between the terrace and the shore was laid out as an informal private garden for residents which became known as The Shrubbery. A significant patron of the seaside was Princess Caroline of Brunswick, wife to the Prince Regent, who stayed at Grand Terrace, at numbers 7,8 & 9 in 1804. This royal patronage made Southend-on-Sea and gave attention to the town. Grand Terrace and Grand Hotel were respectively renamed Royal Terrace and Royal Hotel.

In 1809 Lady Langham planted and enclosed a grove of trees to mark the forthcoming Jubilee of George III at the western end of the Shrubbery. The presence in the gardens today of many very mature oak trees suggests that these may have survived from this planting.

Although early leases indicate that residents were required to pay to maintain the Shubbery in good order, 'A Guide to Southend', published in 1824, said that it "has been allowed, in a great measure, to fall to decay, and now deserves more the name of wilderness" though in a footnote it noted that a 'gentleman has entered upon the work of improvement with zeal and activity'. The result of this activity was the creation of a Board of Trustees to manage the gardens. They enclosed the Shrubbery in 1825 creating walks, adding benches, planting trees and shrubs. They also employed an attendant "to expel improper persons and to keep the place in order". An entrance charge of 3d per day was applied with subscribers paying a further 10s per year for a family and 1s per week for visitors. Entrance fees continued up until the early 1970's.

The Shrubbery appears to have been formed from an existing copse or small wooded area on the cliffs. As the incline is moderate, it was possible to layout a network of paths, generally following the slope contours and thereby create routes through the wood and from the top to the bottom of the cliffs. From the early C20 photographs it is possible to see that the design and layout at that time was rustic with simple gravel paths and steps, and rustic features including protective fencing and rose bowers. Some post and chain edging is evident. In front of Royal Terrace a straight level pathway was laid out, separated from the road by planting, and this would have afforded an elegantly short opportunity for perambulation for the genteel folk from the adjacent terrace and hotel.



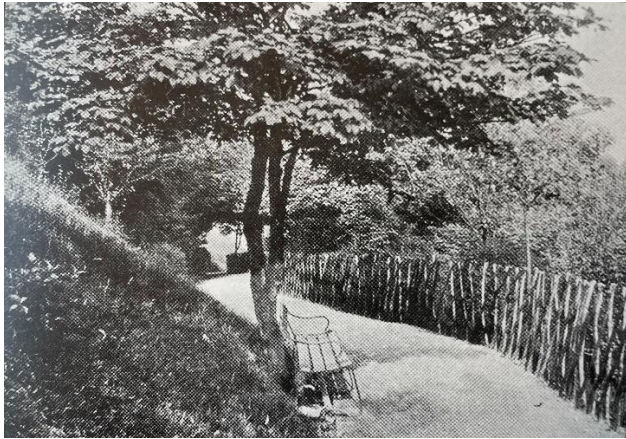
The Shrubbery, immediately west of the pier, in context with the cliffs to the further west - 1873 (National Library Scotland)



Enlarged plan view of The Shrubbery in front of Royal Terrace – 1873. Note the footpath network (National Library Scotland)



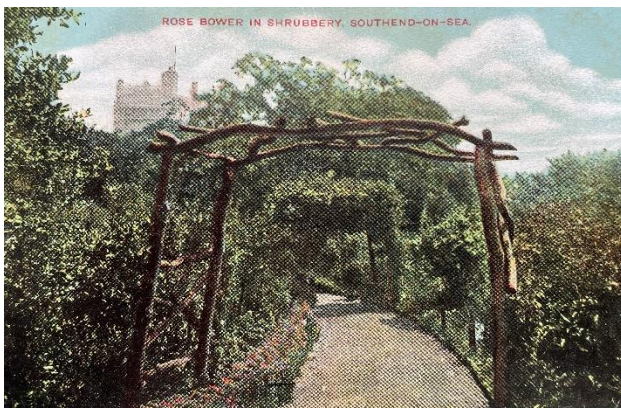
In the Shrubbery etching of 1879 showing the managed seating, pathways, planting and grassed banks and the implication of heavy use (Essex Record Office)



The Shrubbery c1908 (Essex Record Office)



The Shrubbery c1908 (Essex Record Office)



Rose bower in the Shrubbery c1908



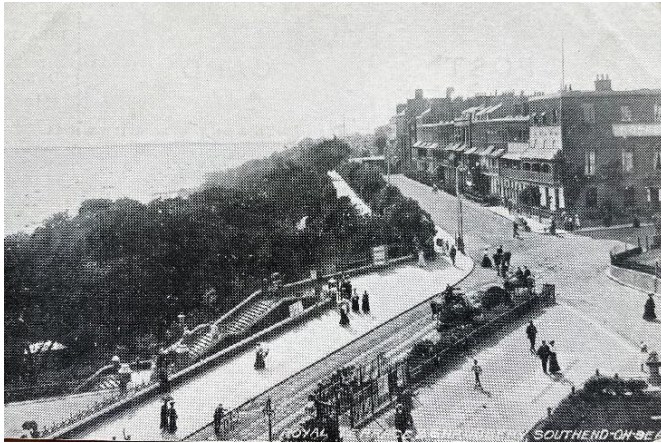
One of the Shrubbery entrances with the pier in the background c1908



The Shrubbery in context showing Royal Terrace and the Beach c1900 (Essex Record Office)



The formal tree row planting and decorative street lamps to the west of the Shrubbery in the Edwardian period (Essex Record Office)



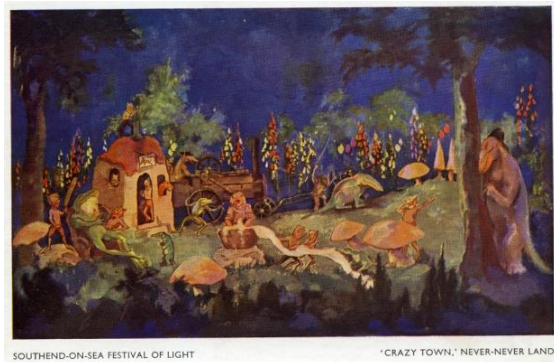
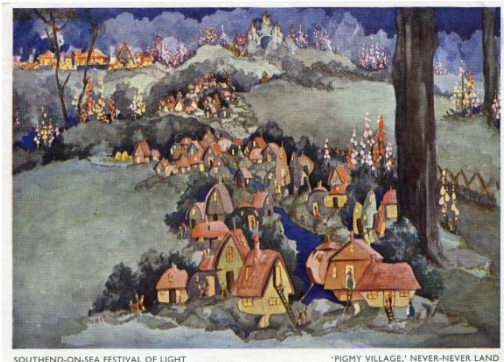
The head of pier hill with Royal Terrace in the background. Note the parallel walkway at the head of the cliffs (Essex Record Office)



The Shrubbery in January 2023. Note the grove of mature oak trees, the footpaths and pier in the background

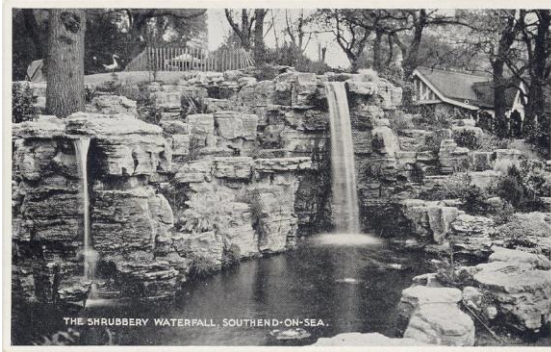
4.2.1 Never Never Land

Set within the Shrubbery, Never-Never Land was a magical themed park featuring model cartoon characters, goblins, smoke breathing dragons, fairies with magical castles, thousands of multicoloured lights and a model railways running throughout the park. Owned by the Council, these displays were refreshed every year to maintain their attraction for visitors. It opened in 1935 and coincided with the first Festival of Light, which was Southend's answer to the Blackpool Illuminations. For a few weeks in late summer through early autumn it proved a popular attraction, drawing many visitors into town.



Postcards from the mid 1930's produced for the Festival of Light featuring Never Never Land

The heyday of Never-Never Land was during 1950s when people would queue for hours to visit the park, but as the popularity of modern theme parks and the attraction of cheap foreign holidays grew, the numbers wanting a more sedate visit to Never-Never Land dwindled and it closed at the end of the 1972 season. Most of the models, castles, lights and railway were scrapped, the area was then returned to an open park. Today a small remainder of the fairy castles and streambed rockwork remain.



The waterfall with the chalet behind



The waterfall scene today

4.2.2 Other Structures

The Chalet

Situated within the south-eastern corner of the Shrubbery, this was described in an 1824 guide as “a neat cottage exceedingly well fitted up with warm baths which are constantly supplied by machinery”. Paths led down to the Esplanade below so residents could stroll down through the Shrubbery to the bathing machines located on the shore where nearby public sea-water baths existed until the late 1870s, or visit the Chalet for a more select and private, warm sea-water bath. Later the Chalet was converted to café rooms and became known as the Shrubbery Café, which continued until the building was demolished in the late 1930s to be replaced by a modern building, which continued as a café until 1986 when it was converted into the Fisherman’s Wharf restaurant – itself demolished in 2018/19.



The Chalet c1890



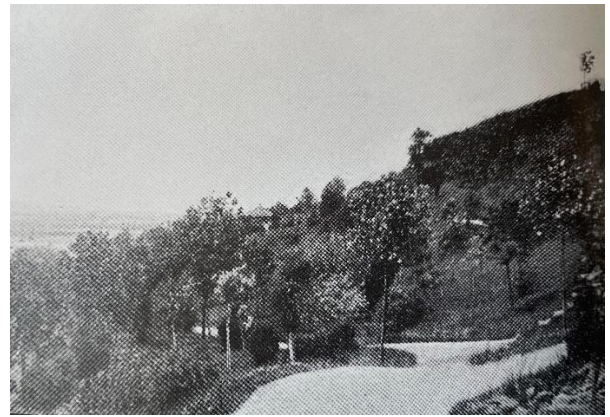
The eastern half of the Shrubbery from the pier c1870 showing Ingram’s public sea baths and bathing machines on the foreshore.

4.3 Victorian and Edwardian expansion

From the late C19, as development of the new town moved westward along the cliff top, the gardens were extended towards the west with property developers planting trees and shrubs on the 15 acres of the West Cliffs. But here too, as properties changed hands, the front became neglected. By 1878 the land owner H A Brassey was willing to transfer ownership to the Local Board with a cheque for £500 but the board was divided and no decision made.



A late C19 etching of the extension area beyond the Shrubbery with an informal levelled pathway and a seat



A later extension area photograph (looking west) with very few mature trees but new pathways and plenty of young trees and shrubs showing the early transformation to a garden space

By 1881 problems continued as weathering from rain and frost often caused land slips to block the Esplanade below. A meeting of ratepayers resolved that the poor state of the Cliffs were threatening an important feature of the town. Further negotiations were entered into with the Board prompting much controversy amongst ratepayers who were fearful of the likely future costs in repairing the slippages. However, by 1885 an agreement was reached whereby Mr Brassey paid the Board £750 and the other owners and occupiers paid £250 for the cliffs to pass into the ownership of the Board who undertook preventative drainage works that consisted mainly of trenches dug from top to bottom, which were filled with brick burrs and chalk.

The owner of the cliffs to the west of Wilson Road also offered his land to the board in 1887 but they were unable to make a decision and the land was divided into plots and sold on.

Following the creation of the Borough in 1892, concern over the state of the cliffs continued so through a series of purchases made privately or in open market sales the Council gradually acquired nearly all the land we recognise today as the Cliff Gardens and resolved in 1911 to purchase the remainder through compulsory purchase powers which was completed by the acquisition of the Nore Yacht Club site in May 1914.

During the late C19, the top of the cliffs was developed as a formally planted and lawned area with a number of seating shelters erected at the top and bottom of the cliffs. Six of these shelters survive and three at the top of the cliffs are Listed Grade II with the listing describing the 'good examples of late C19 seaside street furniture, with distinctive architectural form and decorative detailing' and their group value with other structures. Large decorative street lights were added, recognising the significance and formality of the cliff top as a place for perambulation and sitting. These lights survive today.

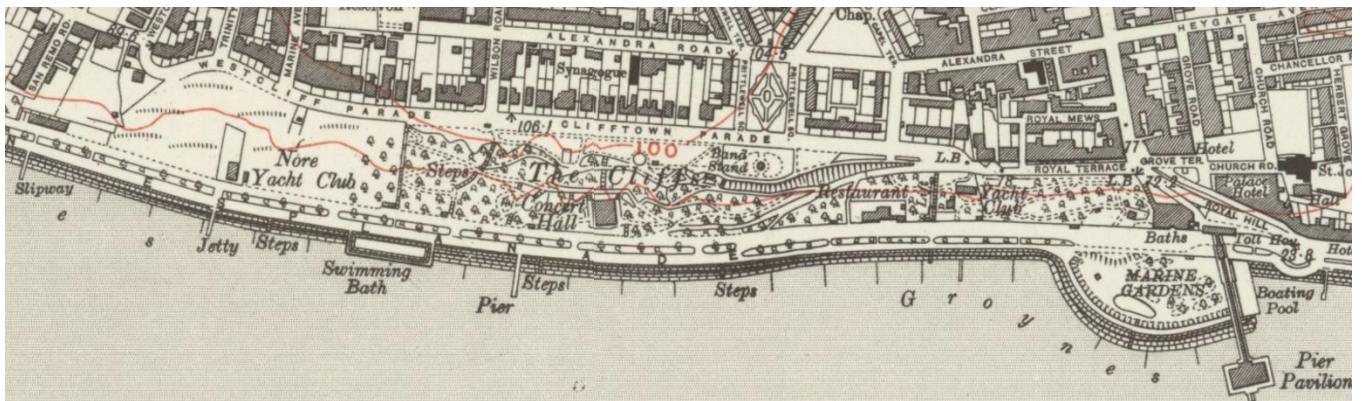


An ornamental Victorian lamppost today

A wider expanse of pathways across the managed cliff gardens was added as recorded on the 1895 Ordnance Survey.



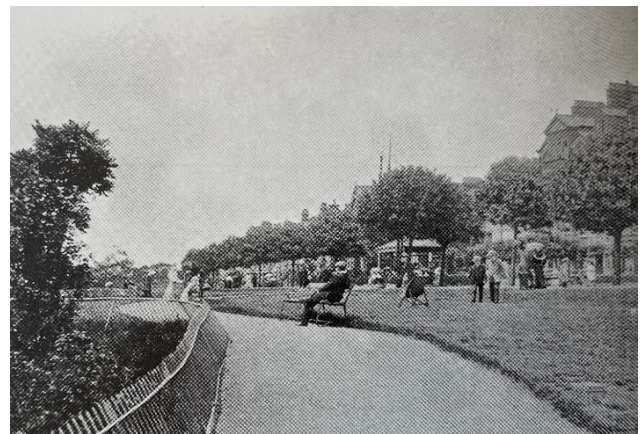
Expansion of the gardens into the central area, west of the shrubbery with unmanaged cliffs shown further west – 1895 (National Library Scotland)



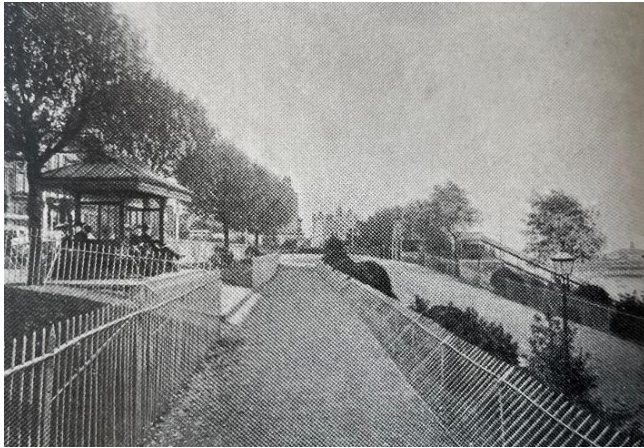
1920 OS plan illustrating the further development of the central area and showing the bandstand and Floral Hall additions. The earliest plantings in the west section can be seen as indicated (National Library Scotland)



Cliff top row tree planting (see next image) with shelter popular for perambulation (Essex Record Office)



Cliff top formally planted trees, probably *Quercus ilex* (a later planting further down the slope flourishes today) (Essex Record Office)



A shelter at the head of the long diagonal footpath with curiously angled railings indicating a response to the view (Essex Record Office)



One of the shelters today



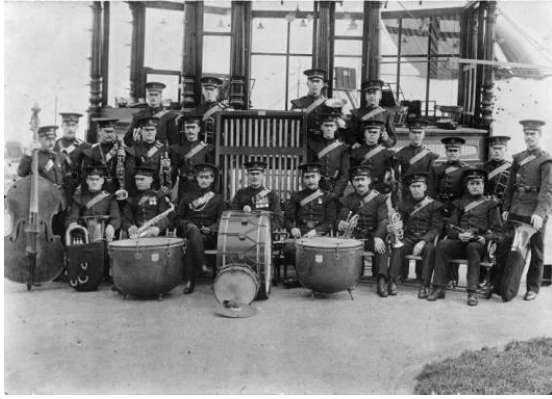
The top of cliff promenade today



The mid-cliff walk way today, looking west

4.3.1 The Bandstand

By February 1902, the Corporation discovered that Southend was alone amongst major seaside towns in not providing a band during the summer season. By May 1902, the first wooden bandstand was erected and a local band formed. This proved instantly very popular and that year the season was extended by 3 weeks to the end of September. By 1906, the Corporation began engaging regimental bands and the bandstand needed to be enlarged to accommodate up to 40 musicians. It was also felt that the town deserved a more imposing bandstand than the wooden original and it was decided to move it to Happy Valley to be replaced by a more ornate bandstand that was supplied by Walter Macfarlane & Company of Glasgow. This opened at the end of May 1909 and soon became known as the 'Cakestand'. In 1920 it was replaced with less ornate bandstand and remained a popular attraction until its removal to Priory Park following the 2002 land slip.



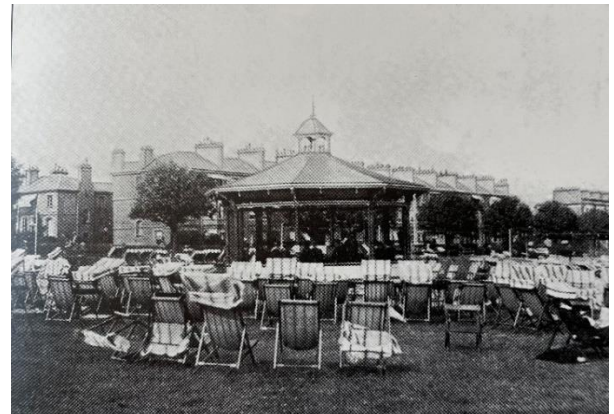
The Corporation Band c1907



The 'Cake Stand' c1909



The 1920s bandstand, showing the significance of entertainment and social gathering



4.3.2 Happy Valley and Floral Hall

In the late-19th century, the increasing numbers of trippers coming to Southend led to a surge in demand for open-air entertainment across the town. As early as 1898, potential impresarios were seeking permission from the Council to allow them to use the Cliff Gardens as a venue. The Council agreed and the first season for such entertainment on the Cliffs was for the 1901 season in an area that became known as Happy Valley. Set in a natural amphitheatre, many hundreds could be accommodated on benches arranged around the stage with more outside the enclosure able to enjoy the performance, albeit free of the charge paid by those seated within. In 1909, the old wooden bandstand from the Cliff top was moved to Happy Valley, and seating for paying customers increased. Cover was also provided from the elements, for some at least. In 1920 a more solid wooden and metal structure was built and named the Floral Hall, allowing a much extended season and the introduction of flower shows within the gardens. Floral Hall was lost to fire in 1937.



An early view of Happy Valley, dated 1902



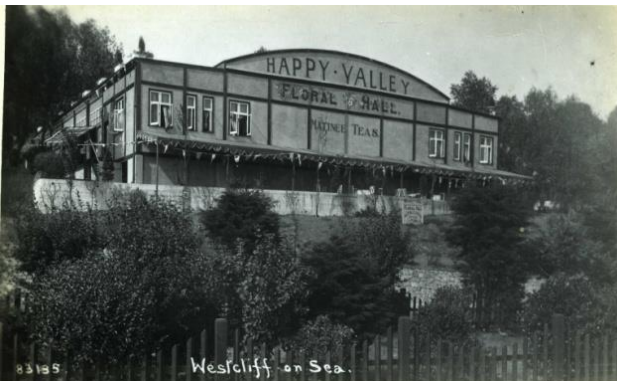
One of the regular and very popular troupes of entertainers performing twice daily was Chirgwin's Concert Party



Happy Valley, dated 1910



Floral Hall



Floral Hall viewed from the seafront



Floral Hall interior

4.3.3 The Funicular Cliff Lift

This was originally the site of Reno's Electric Elevator, also known as the Revolving Stairway, which was a forerunner to the escalator. It opened in 1901 and would carry people quickly to the top for 1d. However, due to its exposed location and pioneering technology was both noisy in operation and prone to breakdown, and by 1911 the decision to replace it had been taken. The Cliff Lift also known as Southend Cliff Railway, is a funicular railway which runs on a single elevated track. Constructed by Waygood & Co (now part of the Otis Elevator Co), it opened in 1912. Since then there have been 3 renovations in 1930, 1959 and 1990. In 2003 a serious problem resulted in the lift being out of action for 7 years until service was restored with the help of Heritage Lottery Funding and reopened in 2010.



The electric stairway c1905 with the Alexandra Yacht Club in the background to the right



The Cliff Lift pictured in the late 1930's with the fairy windmill feature of the Festival of Light illuminations



The cliff lift today, from the base of the cliff



The cliff lift today, viewed from the cliff top (showing some of the magnificent outlook)

4.3.4 The Queen Victoria Statue

The Queen Victoria statue was erected in 1898 at the head of Pier Hill. It was presented to Southend by Mayor Bernard Wiltshire Tolhurst to mark the Queen's diamond jubilee in 1897. The carrara marble statue was made in studios in Rome by the celebrated artist and sculptor Joseph William Swynnerton. In 1962 it was moved to its current position in front of Royal Terrace



The Queen Victoria statue erected on Pier Hill to the east of the Shrubbery showing the planting enclosure of the time, with clipped perimeter hedging, shrubs and seasonal decorative beds



The Queen Victoria statue today, located about 360m to the west of its original position

4.3.5 Other Structures

The Flagstaff

According to the inscription on the former flagstaff, it was erected in 1877 by 'SCS'. It originally stood on the site of the cenotaph and it is not clear who or what SCS was but in 1900 HM Coastguard sought permission from the Council to move it to a site on Marine Parade. The Council offered that a new flagstaff would be allowed on Marine Parade provided this one was left in situ with ownership passed over to the Borough, which was agreed. In 1921 it was moved westwards to a site opposite Wilson Road to make way for the building of the cenotaph. The flagstaff survived until 2014 when it was taken down for maintenance and rot was discovered, which was deemed beyond economic repair. The Council have so far chosen not to replace it on grounds of cost although the base mounting remains in situ.



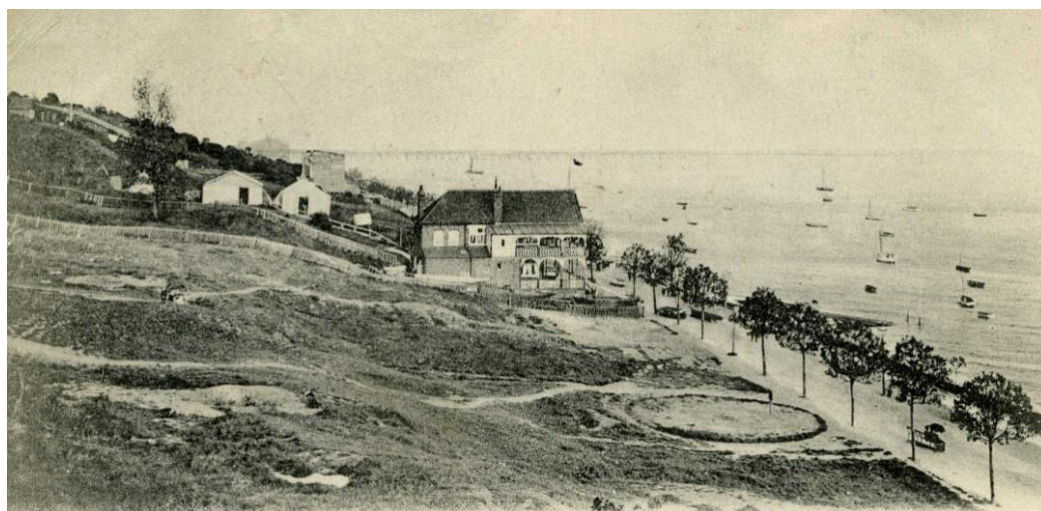
The flagstaff at its original site c1907



The flagstaff opposite Wilson Road 2007

The Nore Yacht Club

Built in 1893 as a branch of the London based Minima Yacht Club, this building became home to the Nore Yacht club in 1895. The building was destroyed by a high explosive bomb during World War Two. After the war, the Nore Yacht club amalgamated with Westcliff Yacht Club to form the Thames Estuary Yacht Club whose clubhouse is now situated on the foreshore opposite the site of the old building.



The Nore Yacht Club circa early 1900s

The Alexandra Yacht Club

The yacht club building was designed in the style of an Indian hill station pavilion and opened in 1884 to house Britain's fifth-oldest yacht club, which had been started in 1873 for "gentlemen of known respectability". The club was instrumental in getting various national yacht races to start off Southend, including one for Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1887 attended by the Prince of Wales. In 1921, King George V raced in his yacht Britannia in the first Southend Yachting Week, which attracted large numbers of entrants as a result.

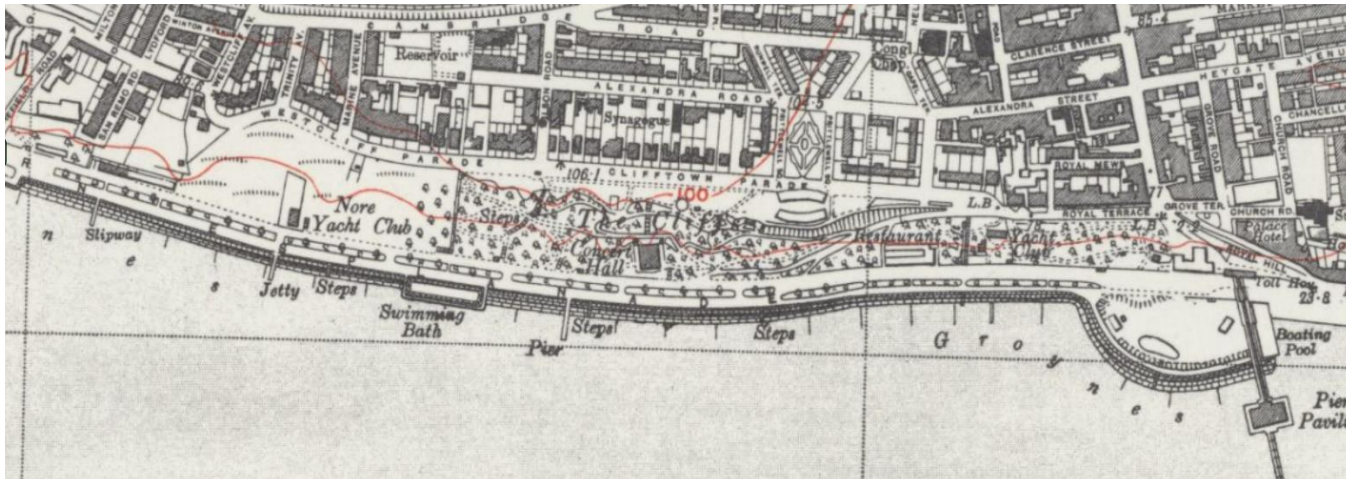
By early 2014, the threat of subsidence caused the building to be abandoned only for it fall victim to arson a few months later. The building is lost today.



Alexandra Yacht Club c1890

4.4 The pre and post Second World War Gardens

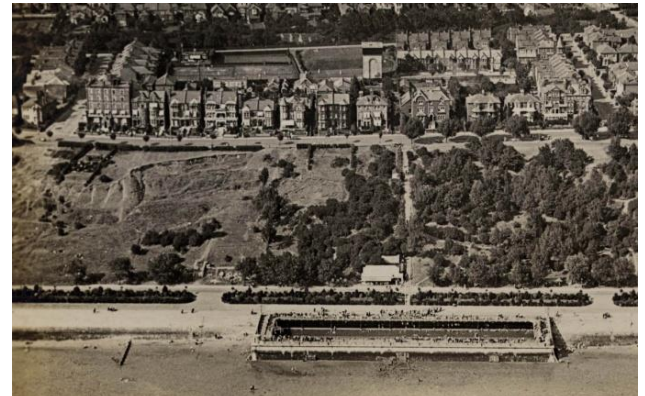
The interwar period was a time of heavy use of the gardens, especially at the head of the cliffs. This can be seen in the 1938 Ordnance Survey where the two crescent-shaped shelters were erected either side of the bandstand to provide shelter from the sun or inclement weather. This was a time of increased visitors to Southend and particularly older parties of people. In the 1990s a new reproduction bandstand was erected between the shelters. The author recalls speaking to the owner of the Bandstand café at this time who ran a successful, if largely seasonal, business here and referred to the significance of the 'grey pound'.



1938 plan showing the then forthcoming crescent-shaped bandstand shelters (National Library Scotland)



A 1956 photograph of the bandstand shelters with a horizontally glazed and curved design, typical of the 1930s. Here the earlier decorative 'Cake Stand' bandstand has been replaced with a more prosaic rectangular stage

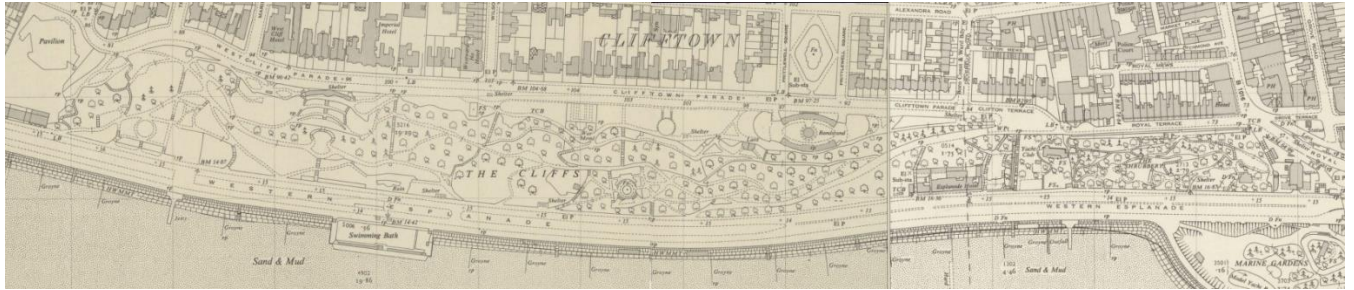


The west end of the cliff gardens in the early 1920s (the swimming baths opened in 1915) showing the largely unmade area

During the mid-1920s, the council recognised the need to cater for increasing numbers of visitors and undertook to provide a number of sun shelters, two of which were situated within the Cliff Gardens; one at the top of the cliffs and another at the foot of St John's steps on the Esplanade. In addition to providing amenity, it was hoped that they would also provide some stability for the Cliffs, as can be seen below, subsidence was as always an issue. The contractors were unable to offer any such guarantee. The upper shelter was started in 1928 and the lower one in the early 1930s, although the upper shelter is recorded as something smaller on the 1938 Ordnance Survey sheet so may have been extended at the end of the 1930s.

In the early Thirties the ground below the upper shelter were formally laid out as a rock garden with terracing that largely survives today. The lower shelter is now lost.

At this time, the west end of the gardens underwent development to complete the ornamental gardens – a three-quarter-mile total length from Pier Hill to the Cliffs Pavilion. This can be seen in the 1949 Ordnance Survey sheet. Low stone walls with large piers, topped with terracotta urns were set out, dividing the area into planted beds and sweeping lawns with a network of pathways.



1949 Ordnance Survey plan showing the fully developed interwar garden and the Cliffs Pavilion in the west (Southend Library)



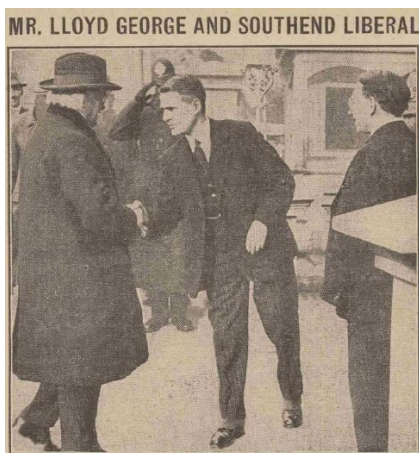
Late 1930s showing the west section of the gardens and the two sun shelters



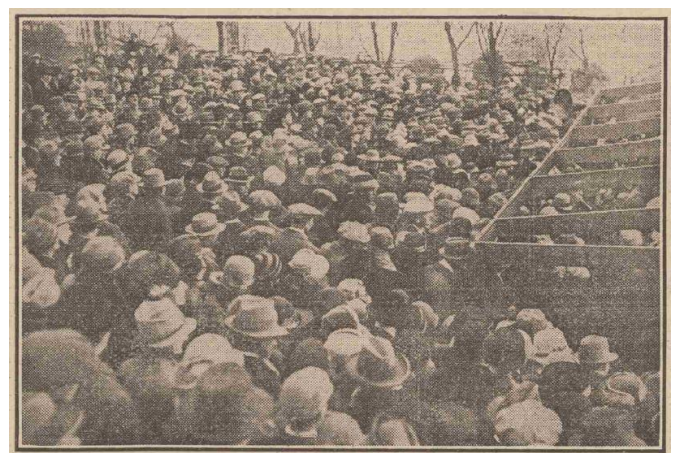
The upper sun shelter today

4.4.1 Political Rallies

The gardens, and particularly Floral Hall, were also used for some very large political gatherings and speeches. In 1927 this included separate visits by Lloyd George (12th November) and J Ramsay MacDonald (17th November), respectively earlier and later prime ministers of the UK.



Caption says 'Mr Lloyd George shaking hands with the Hon. Dougal Meston, Liberal candidate for Southend, Before making yesterday's eagerly awaited speech'



Caption says 'Part of the great crowd outside Floral Hall, Westcliff yesterday, listening to Mr Lloyd George. Unable to find room in the hall they heard the speech through amplifiers'

4.4.2 The Cliffs Pavilion

Unfortunately, the construction of Floral Hall left it vulnerable and in 1937 it was destroyed in a fire that spread rapidly through the building. Although the fire occurred at the end of the season, Southend Borough Council paid a compensation sum to 'Paramount Follies' for loss of work. The site was cleared and a formal garden with a large lily pond was laid out to be ready for the following season. It was around this time that the first plans were being made for the future cliff top Cliffs Pavilion, further to the west. In 1938 the piles were driven for a new 'Shorefields Pavilion' with dance floor, stages, sun lounges, tea rooms and magnificent views over the estuary. These plans were interrupted by World War Two. After the war plans were updated and the pavilion was due to open in 1957 with 1,500 seats and a 250-seat restaurant. More land became available locally when landowner Fred Ramuz died in 1946 and the building actually opened, as the renamed Cliffs Pavilion in 1964. But from the mid-1930s this project had been discussed and this shows the linkage with the established local entertainment and need to facilitate large crowds from the early Happy Valley and Floral Hall days. Today the Cliffs Pavilion is a flourishing regional theatre with international acts.



The site of Floral Hall that later became a formal lily pond



The same site today, now a small rose garden

At Westcliff-on-Sea.
A plan to borrow £50,000 with which to build and furnish a new entertainment pavilion at Westcliff is meeting with some opposition from ratepayers who consider other matters of more importance. An inspector from the Ministry of Health has been holding an inquiry locally, and has heard the views of all parties. The idea is to do away with the old Floral Hall and build a pavilion worthy of the town on the site formerly occupied by Shorefields Pavilion. With the Mayor and a large proportion of the town council in favour of the scheme it seems likely that it will go through.

A clipping from The Stage 18th March 1937 evidencing the direct link of the Cliffs Pavilion to Floral Hall



The Cliffs Pavilion today, located at the top of the cliffs with the sea seen just below the tree canopy

4.4.3 The Cenotaph

The memorial is located at the head of the cliff gardens and was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. It was unveiled by Lord Lambourne, the Lord Lieutenant of Essex, and was dedicated by the Bishop of Colchester on November 27th, 1921. It was designated a Grade II listed building in 1974 and upgraded to Grade II* in 2015. The structure is in good condition and today is the focus for an increasingly popular Armistice and Remembrance Sunday Commemoration for the city.

In 2018 the memorial and a small section of the surrounding garden was nominated by the Council to become a Centenary Field to protect the green space and commemorate the centenary of the end of the Great War. In 2019 the space became a Centenary Field in Trust.



Cenotaph unveiling 1921



The Cenotaph today with a successful herbaceous planting scheme

4.4.4 Other Structures

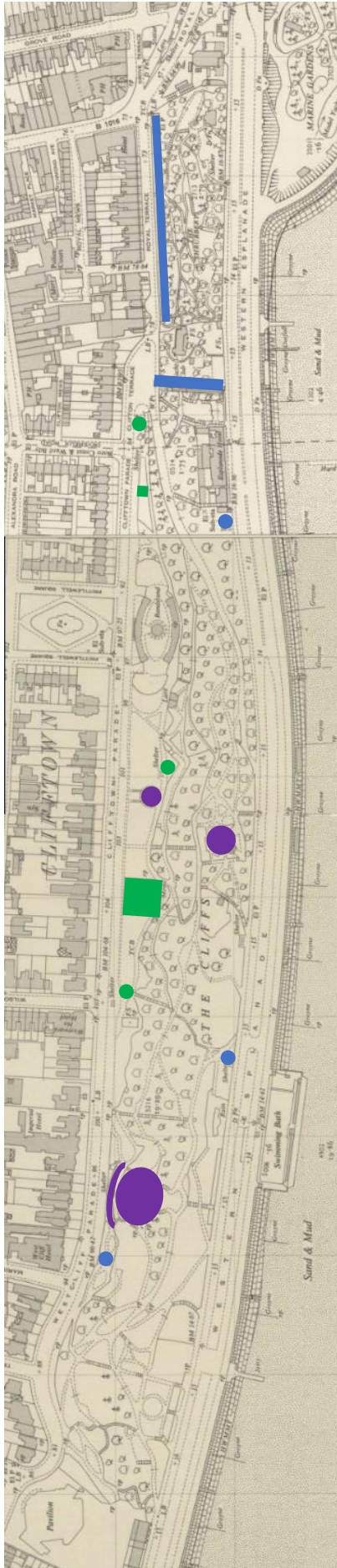
The lower sun shelter

The lower sun shelter (see section 4.4 above) was lost, believed to be in the 1970s. It was around this time that development options were being considered for the failing swimming baths opposite.

4.5 The Cliff Gardens today


The gardens today are largely intact and all still in use as gardens. The upper parts are well maintained with seasonal decorative planting beds and lawns. There are attractive *Quercus ilex* trees and a row of ornamental cherries that give a wonderful spring display. Most of the original network of paths survives and many trees and shrubs are mature. The gardens are used by residents and visitors, offering a quiet area away from the frenetic seafront. Families picnic and fitness groups regularly use the gardens. The gardens have been used as a natural viewing bank for past air shows and seafront parades. They also still fulfil a civic function with the annual Remembrance Day service and the gathering at the cenotaph of the military, clergy, civic leaders and the public. The local catholic church have used the gardens for Easter vigils.

The existing significant structures within the gardens are mapped below. These provide constant reminders of the history of the place throughout the green space.



The Existing Structures in the Gardens

KEY

-  Edwardian/Victorian Shelter
-  Victorian Shelter (Listed)
-  Inter War Sun Shelter and Terracing
-  Cenotaph War Memorial and Centenary Field (Listed)
-  Floral Clock
-  Rose Garden (former site of Floral Hall)
-  Queen Victoria Statue (Listed)
-  Edwardian Funicular Railway
-  Victorian Walk

Overall, the council struggle to maintain these gardens and this is most notable where persistent minor slippage is evident, distorting and cracking some pathways, and displacing steps. In one area below and to the west of the cenotaph, slippage has disrupted a planted area that has been fenced off and grown wild. In some places, pathways have been barricaded from public access (see Section 3.0). At the upper, lower lawns and some intermediate lawn areas beds are maintained and generally look good through the spring and summer seasons. Elsewhere, throughout the middle and lower slopes maintenance is minimal although grass is cut and excessive growth managed. In some areas a no-cut policy is followed for improved bio-diversity. In odd places, maintenance is more apparent with row planting of memorial trees (Olives) with seating benches.

The planting today is typical of seaside gardens with a mix of sea air tolerant species including:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Pine | Mixed palms |
| Cordyline | Mixed conifers |
| Tamarix | Cherry |
| Field Maple | Pittosporum |
| Euphorbia | Cercis siliquastrum |
| Paulownia tomentosa | Hawthorn |
| Shrub roses | Mixed grasses |
| Laurel | Hibiscus |
| Eucalyptus | Hydrangea |
| Hebe | Alder |
| Phorium | Buddleia |

and many more (the plants have not been comprehensively surveyed)

Some of these are very mature specimens and likely to have achieved great age. They therefore represent some of the earlier planting although we would expect earlier planting to have been based largely on more commonly available native species with sporadic and focal 'exotic' plantings.



Two of the planting bed areas demonstrating the current trend towards the visually soft 'new perennial style' – these late season photographs do not show the lawns off to their best

In 2002 a major landslip occurred at and below the site of the bandstand and the outer of the two shelters was lost. The bandstand itself was relocated to Priory Park and the road-side shelter removed. The site was piled to retain the land, the entire gardens below re-levelled to new formations and seeded with grass. To this day, the area remains at these new formations, largely grassed with some naturalised scrub. The general sense of gardens here is lost for the time being, but the overriding sense is of pleasant, seaside, public gardens with magnificent views over the

Thames estuary with a significant past, still providing a unique peaceful place that is unmatched elsewhere in the city or regionally.



The landslip area today, managed with a no-cut regime

5.0 Historic England's criteria for Listing

The guidance for Listing gardens of the type in Southend-on-Sea can be found in Historic England's 'Urban Landscapes: Register of Parks and Gardens Selection Guide'. Here the cliff gardens can be seen to be described under numerous categories:

Public Walks (section 1.6)

The cliff top, cliff gardens and seafront promenade were evidently all laid out and developed to facilitate and encourage walking or promenading. Pathways with many seats and extensive ornamental planting are evidence of this function of the gardens. Grand Victorian street lamps, far bigger than the residential street alternatives, are also evidence of the celebration of this place for walking. This was a clear use of the gardens from the first formation of the shrubbery gardens and the gardens being associated with clean air to aid recovery from respiratory conditions. In a south-facing seaside resort this might be seen as the primary function of the gardens.

Pleasure Gardens (section 1.7)

The cliff gardens had widespread use as a place of entertainment, from the early use of Happy Valley to the development of Floral Hall and the bandstand (precursors to the Cliffs Pavilion theatre that remains in very popular use today) to the inter war development of Never Never Land in 1935. Use of the gardens for viewing seafront parades and air shows from 1912 onwards is further evidence of the gardens for pleasure use.

Public Parks and Municipal Gardens (section 1.8)

The gardens became more of a public park or municipal gardens with the evolutionary loss of the entertainment venues of Happy Valley, Floral Hall and Never Never Land. The gardens still retained the bandstand entertainment venue and their use for viewing seafront parades and air shows.

Seaside Gardens (section 1.9)

By definition the gardens have always been seaside gardens, from the earliest C19 days of bathing to today. They have included all of the features associated with this typology, from pathways for promenading, seating and shelters, laid out ornamental gardens and pleasure uses. In particular, the funicular railway provided not only a convenient means of ascending but a highly decorative celebration of seaside garden

Site age and rarity are given as criteria for Listing.

The relevant guidance that is applicable for Southend Cliff gardens states:

- Sites laid out between 1750 and 1840 where enough of the layout survives to reflect the original design
- Sites with a main phase of development post 1840 that are of special interest and relatively intact, the degree of required special interest rising as the site becomes closer in time
- Particularly careful selection is required for sites from the period after 1945

In the case of Southend Cliff Gardens the earliest layout dates from the 1790s with the main development into large formal and semi-formalised gardens (a feature of the gardens has been the mix of formal bedding, lawns and terracing with informal shrubbery and grassed banks) occurring from the 1880s. We suggest the different phases of Southend Cliff Gardens meet the test of these three criteria. Furthermore, additional criteria are listed as follows:

- Sites which were influential in the development of taste, whether through reputation or reference 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 historic events
- Sites with a strong group value with other heritage assets

Further considerations are indicated in the guidelines and Southend Cliff Gardens could be described as influencing the development of taste with regards to seaside culture and changes in public behaviour and dress from the advent of bathing to relaxing in the garden environments or participating in recreation (later, leisure) supported in the gardens. To put it another way the gardens contributed to the concept that then developed in the public persona of 'leisure time'. In this case, the relationship to Southend's famous pier and other local seafront attractions is also pertinent. There is also little doubt that the layout of the gardens with a mix of some semi-tender plants suited to a slightly warmer seaside micro-climate does provide an early example of its type. Finally, the group value of numerous surviving historical assets, throughout the gardens, has significance. This is already recognised by Historic England in the group value of the Listed shelters where it is stated:

'They have group value with the other listed buildings and structures on Clifftown Parade, notably Clifftown Terrace, the statue of Queen Victoria by J H Swynnerton and the War Memorial by Edwin Lutyens, all of which are listed at Grade II'

However, these Listed and non-designated but significant historic assets extend further to include the following:

- Victorian shelters (all intact, 3 Listed)
- 1 inter-war shelter (intact but not Listed)
- 1920s war memorial by Sir Edwin Lutyens (intact, Listed)
- Statue of Queen Victoria (intact, Listed, relocated to gardens)
- Edwardian funicular railway (intact but not Listed, restored)
- Victorian lamp standards (intact but not Listed)
- Cliffton Terrace (1-6) (Listed)

- Royal Terrace (3-15) (Listed)
- The Pleasure Pier (Listed)
- Clifftown Conservation Area

6.0 Significance

The great significance of the Southend Cliff Gardens lies not in a great landscape design and a named designer but in two most important aspects.

Firstly, the remarkable location of the gardens, central to the city and seafront, and their elevated relationship to the river Thames. The gardens have always been part of the identity of Southend-on-Sea from the early visitors, including royalty, using the Shrubbery gardens to access the then newest pastime of sea bathing. It's almost as if the gardens provided a veil of privacy and discretion, appropriate to this new and fashionable activity. The gardens then became a celebrated location for the social activity of perambulation and taking in the air and the spectacular views. The gardens were laid out to give access across the slopes and facilitate these activities and outlook. Numerous structures described these activities.

Secondly, the gardens achieved a growing community use over almost 200 years, extending as activities grew more popular. This starts with the Georgian bathers, extends through the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian middle classes discovering the delights of recreation (early leisure) and the growth of entertainment in the gardens. First small side shows, then music hall performance and political rallies with huge audiences, right up to a large regional theatre. The gardens enabled and supported this social development.

These aspects give the gardens significance, worthy of National Listing.

There are also the structures which enabled the extent of occupation and enjoyment of the gardens. Many of these are already Listed and together they have group value. The group is held together by the gardens, imparting significance.

7.0 Comparators

Throughout England other seaside towns and one resort city of Brighton (Southend and Brighton are England's only seaside resort cities) have similar seafront gardens. Some are located on or near cliffs, others are on level ground at or near seafronts. This can be seen in places with cliffs like Scarborough and Felixstowe or without cliffs in Clacton and Bournemouth or in Brighton where the Kemp Town Encloses are partly cliffs. Most of these gardens were laid out from the mid C19 which means that Southend's earlier Shrubbery is a very early example of this type of garden space. In terms of the Victorian and Edwardian development of the gardens, Southend is contemporaneous with the comparators.

Some of these gardens are small and compact. Southend's cliff gardens are of a different scale and are large. This does make them more of a challenge to keep in good order but it does not diminish their history and their significance.

8.0 The importance of Listing the Gardens and Future Management

As is the case with all gardens they are at risk from climate change. However, the plantings do appear to be resilient and we are confident that appropriate species selection will continue.

However, the gardens are clearly, as demonstrated, at risk from slippage which may result from changing moisture levels in the alluvial clay formation. This may be exacerbated by climate change and either excessively dry or wet periods. It is vital that the gardens are recognised as a significant part of Southend's and England's heritage and this can happen through the Listing programme. This will help to give focus to an appropriate management plan.

Without Listing (or any other status recognition such as that of a conservation area) the gardens will remain unrecognised and this risks leading to further deterioration and eventual loss of the gardens. The barricading already described demonstrates the beginning of this decline and it is not difficult to see further decline leading to further barricades and eventual closure and loss of the gardens. Given the history of Southend and the gardens, this would be tragic.

The proposed boundary to the gardens can be seen on a Google map here:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=17CIY0OGAZKXGBcMb2QQaeWbdmXF0DtY&usp=sharing>

A very good illustration of the gardens can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JlqZLkCX1E>

and here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmnDO_PjC_4

National Listing of the gardens would clearly help the gardens to survive and succeed in future.

9.0 Conclusion

Southend Cliff Gardens are a rare example of some of the earliest seaside gardens in the UK. First managed as a garden space in the Shrubbery of the 1790s and then more evidently as a seaside garden and public walk during the mid C19. As the town grew the popularity of the seaside resort grew and the gardens were central to this in Southend, located right at the heart of the expanding town, immediately beside the worlds longest pleasure pier and spectacularly overlooking our most important national river. The gardens first attracted the well-to-do and significant royalty, which would have given more attention to the town. The gardens attracted entertainment and large crowds at the bandstand, Happy Valley and Floral Hall venues, with many acts and performances from the music hall and band traditions. This popularity demonstrated itself in the political rallies attracting the national political leaders of their time to Southend, and very large crowds. This linkage from this to the Cliffs Pavilion, a very large regional theatre, at the west end of the cliff gardens, is unmistakable.

While public tastes in travel and use of the gardens changed over the second half of the C20, the gardens retain their historic form and adapted purposes, remaining a place of high public regard, if challenged by the issues of residual slippage, public maintenance and climate change.

The gardens appear to meet the criteria for Listing and this can help give recognition and focus to future management as well as access to heritage funding opportunities, all helping to overcome the challenges of keeping and celebrating the expansive heritage asset.