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INFORMATION SHEET

Landscape Components

This is one of a series of information sheets issued by Scotland's Garden and Landscape Heritage, intended to introduce people to the subject of garden history, to encourage research and to promote the conservation of historic gardens and designed landscapes in Scotland.

Introduction

For the purposes of analysing and understanding gardens and designed landscapes, it can be useful to think of them as being made up of a combination of many different elements or components, whether living or inert. This information sheet lists common components of these landscapes which may be found throughout the United Kingdom, with special attention given to those terms which are more or less exclusive to Scotland, or which vary in different parts of the country.

Definitions

'Gardens and Designed Landscapes' is the term chosen by Historic Environment Scotland and most other agencies in Scotland to describe a wide range of sites from large country house estates, through villa gardens and cottage gardens to small town gardens, wherever design has played a part in their creation. The term also embraces other sites such as public parks, botanical gardens, cemeteries, allotments, walled kitchen gardens, and sites where natural landscape elements have been included or modified so as to influence a visitor's experience of the landscape. In England and Wales the term 'Parks and Gardens' is more or less equivalent, while in Ireland landscaped estates are generally referred to as 'Demesnes'. In Scotland, though rarely in other parts of the United Kingdom, the wooded and landscaped environs of a country house are commonly referred to as 'The Policies', a term derived from the Latin word '*politus*' meaning refined or embellished, usually distinguishable from the wider rural landscape by the style of planting.

Pre-existing Natural and Cultural Landscape

Most gardens and designed landscapes are comparatively recent in origin, being overlaid on earlier natural and cultural landscapes which may have had a significant influence on their character and development. Consequently, it is a good idea to have some understanding of the local geology and landform, and of the processes involved in the formation of local topography and soils prior to their alteration by human activity ; of the natural vegetation cover prior to changes brought about by cultivation ; and of the climatic factors such as aspect, prevailing wind, and maritime or continental influences. Also, there is need to be aware of the effects of human activity prior to the formation of the designed landscape ; of the impact of past human activity which may be evident in the form of old settlements, field systems, cultivation rigs or other historical monuments.

Buildings and Other Structures

Most designed landscapes contain a mansion house or some other principal building which serves as a focal point. In addition, estate landscapes may include stables, coach houses, laundry etc. (sometimes referred to collectively as the 'Offices') and a home farm (often termed the 'Mains'). Other structures include estate boundary walls, gates and gate-lodges, temples, hermitages, view houses, grottoes, eye-catchers, dovecots, ice houses, chapels, mausoleums, private burial grounds, conservatories, ferneries, mock fortifications, pergolas, flagpoles, sundials, statuary etc.

Pleasure Grounds

These are usually located immediately around or within easy walking distance of the house, separated from the wider policies and parkland by a hedge, fence or ha-ha (sunken wall). They may include lawns, terraces, rockeries, shrubberies, parterres, bedding schemes, herbaceous borders, bowling greens, tennis courts etc. Planting can be formal or informal, often with a high proportion of exotic and or ornamental species. Planting may be thematic, with plants chosen for their colour, scent or type – e.g. rose gardens. Flower beds may be planted with annual or perennial plants. As these spaces were intended for recreation, they might incorporate shady walks, mazes, sheltered corners with seating. Naturalised species such as yew and box can serve as useful ‘indicators’ of old gardens which have been abandoned and which have returned to a semi-natural state.

Woodland

Policy woodlands in Scotland are usually comprised of mixed species – broadleaves such as oak, ash, beech, elm, sycamore and lime, and conifers such as Scots pine, spruce, larch etc., possibly with a mixture of more ornamental species such as horse chestnut, copper beech, lime Douglas fir. They are rarely made up of conifers only, or of a single species. Rhododendron, laurel etc. may be planted along drives and walks, together with specimen trees such as Wellingtonia, Douglas fir and monkey puzzle, to add visual interest and winter colour. Lime has long been the favoured tree for the planting of avenues. Woodland may be formed into belts, strips, clumps etc. to create a sense of enclosure or to increase privacy, as shelterbelts, or to frame inward and outward views and vistas. Some woods may have been underplanted with smaller species such as willow, hawthorn, hazel to provide cover for game. Government incentives meant that policy woodlands which were felled for timber during the two World Wars in the 20th century were often replanted with quick-growing commercial conifers such as spruce and larch. Where woodlands were not replanted, they are likely to be dominated by self-seeded pioneer species such as sycamore, ash and birch, or may have become infested with *Rhododendron ponticum*.

Parkland

Usually found within the estate boundary wall, intermixed with policy planting, parkland is usually maintained as permanent grassland for the grazing of cattle, sheep, horses etc., or cut as hay meadow. It can be ‘open’, i.e. unplanted, or planted ornamentally with single trees (standards) or groups of trees (clumps). Parkland clumps may be underplanted with smaller species to add visual interest, to enhance habitat value or as cover for game. Some high status houses had deer parks, the presence of which may be indicated by place names incorporating words such as ‘hart’ or ‘hind’. Deer parks were normally surrounded by walls or embankments.

Kitchen Gardens and Orchards

These were generally located on well-drained south or south-west facing slopes, partly or wholly enclosed by walls or hedges, set aside for the growing of fruit and vegetables. Walls were sometimes of natural stone, sometimes of brick, or frequently of a combination of the two, with the outer face of natural stone and the inner face lined with brick to help the ripening of wall-planted fruit trees. Most gardens were primarily functional, though larger and more sophisticated examples incorporated a proportion of ornamental planting. Some gardens had flued (heated) walls, and included vineries, glasshouses, mushroom houses etc. Orchards, slip gardens and nursery gardens were sometimes formed on adjacent ground outwith the garden walls. Grander gardens can include a head gardener’s house, bothy accommodation for under-gardeners, potting sheds, fruit houses etc. It was common for walled gardens to be linked to the main house by carriage drives or shrubbery walks, or included in path circuits.

Drives and Walks

Depending on the size of the house and estate, carriage drives could include a main approach, a secondary or scenic approach, or circuit drives beginning and ending at the house. They might include bridges over water, or 'dry bridges' allowing access to parts of the estate without the need to mix with traffic on public roads. Drives might be accentuated by planting, and were sometimes designed to give distant glimpses of the house. Larger estates and villa gardens often had service drives, separate from carriage drives, giving access to working areas of an estate. These were often hidden from the house, or made to approach the service wing without the need for traffic to pass in front of the house.

Water Features

Some larger landscape gardens might include existing water features such as streams, lakes, waterfalls etc. with or without artificial embellishments. Smaller gardens might contain water features such as fishponds, basins, fountains, swimming pools and wells, while those with an abundant water supply might form artificial cascades to create sound and movement.

Wider Setting

This term can be used to describe features lying outside the garden or estate wall, but which nonetheless relate to it from being visible from the house or its approaches. There may be designed elements which extend beyond the 'core' landscape in the form of field boundary planting, roadside planting, hill planting, shelterbelts etc. Features which do not belong to the landowner, but which happen to serve as background or as eye-catchers in outward views, such as hills, lochs, villages, churches, ruins etc. can be referred to as 'borrowed landscape'.

Archaic Terms

There are a number of terms which have fallen out of use, or the meaning of which has changed with the passage of time :

CUNINGAR / CONYNGAR – A rabbit warren.

HAUGH – Low lying alluvial land alongside a watercourse, so prone to flooding.

PALISADE – Either a fence of stakes or pales such as used to enclose a deer park ; Or closely planted trees with interlocking branches clipped so as to form a tall hedge.

PARK – In older Scottish records this is used to denote any enclosed ground, the purpose or use of which is usually indicated a prefix – e.g. cowpark, deerpark, broompark etc.

RIG – Either a long narrow strip of ground raised in the middle and sloping to a furrow on either side, often being a feature of pre-enclosure arable farming ; Or the strip of land behind a property in a medieval street in a Scottish town.

SHADE – Either a strip or portion of land larger than a rig ; Or a field on a north facing slope so turned away from the sun.

STANK – A Scottish term used in old records to describe a pool, ditch or drain, sometimes serving as a fishpond.

WILDERNESS – Until the early 18th century this was used to describe a grove or plantation beyond the pleasure grounds with straight or serpentine paths cut through it intended for walking, some of them leading to cabinets or compartments.

YARD – In older Scottish records this is used to denote ground, usually close to a house, enclosed by walls for growing of crops, or for safe storage of crops etc. – e.g. orchyard, kaleyard, barnyard etc.