

CHAPTER 9. ORNAMENTAL PARKS AND RECREATION

National Parks are designated primarily for their natural beauty, but they also have the statutory purpose of enabling understanding and enjoyment. Outside those areas with open public access, the HLC mapped only 1%, or 2,784 hectares, of the total area of the Lake District National Park as specifically designed for recreational use. This landscape type includes land both in modern recreational use, urban parks and cemeteries,¹ and ornamental parkland.

Recreation

Recreational areas cover only 674 hectares, and comprise urban parks and cemeteries, golf courses, camp sites and caravan parks. It also includes part of the site of the former Kendal race course, which lies on the lower slopes of Helsington Barrows. Half the race course lies outside the National Park, and it is divided by the Park boundary, which follows the line of a parish boundary. There are only four golf courses within the National Park; at Underbarrow, Embleton, near Cockermouth, Threlkeld, and Cleabarrow near Windermere, all of which are modern establishments.

The small golf course at Underbarrow was not distinguishable as such because of the retention of historic boundaries, and was thus not mapped by the HLC. Urban parks and gardens were mapped in Keswick and Ambleside only. In Keswick public parks were recorded around the northern shore of Derwent Water and at Fitz Parks on the north of the town. In Ambleside two urban parks were recorded, at the head of Lake Windermere at Waterhead, and at Rothay Park where there is also a cemetery.

¹ Urban cemeteries are considered public ornamental spaces in English Heritage's national Register of Parks and Gardens, www.english-heritage.org.uk

The remaining recreational sites mapped by the HLC are either caravan parks or permanent camp sites, and these are concentrated around the central valleys between Bowness-on-Windermere and Ambleside, around Ullswater and near Keswick. Temporary accommodation such as camping and caravans provide an important source of budget accommodation for visitors to the Lake District National Park, with 22% staying a tent, static or touring caravan.² In general, camping and caravan sites are the result of the diversification of farm land, and have been established either within existing farms or on the edge of urban areas.

Ornamental Parkland

Ornamental parkland covers 2,110 hectares of the Lake District National Park and comprises mainly late eighteenth and nineteenth century designed landscapes, and represent the efforts of numerous wealthy landowners to enhance the natural beauties of the landscape and the vistas across it. This did not generally involve hard landscaping, but the enhancement of the countryside, with the scattered planting of trees in the agriculture landscape and the beautification of existing features.³ This process, known as *ferme ornée*, not only allowed those with fewer means to create ornamental landscapes, but encouraged followers of the Picturesque movement to perfect their concept of ideal beauty. In some areas, for example around Ullswater and Windermere, the designed landscapes do not relate to a specific house or park, but are an enhancement of the vistas around the lakes. This practice of informal planting and landscape enhancement was difficult to map by the HLC process, and so the total area

² LDNPA 2006, 32

³ Williamson and Bellamy 1987, 196-7

recorded by the mapping process is an underestimate of the total area of ornamental parkland, particularly around lakes such as Windermere and Derwent Water. Elsewhere, however, landowners have created pleasure grounds around their own villas and country houses. This phenomenon was not restricted to the properties of

visitors to the Lake District, as the creation of landscape parks grew rapidly across the country in the eighteenth century, and many were the results of local landscape gardeners or the landowners themselves.⁴

One of the more elaborate of these landscaped grounds was at Wray

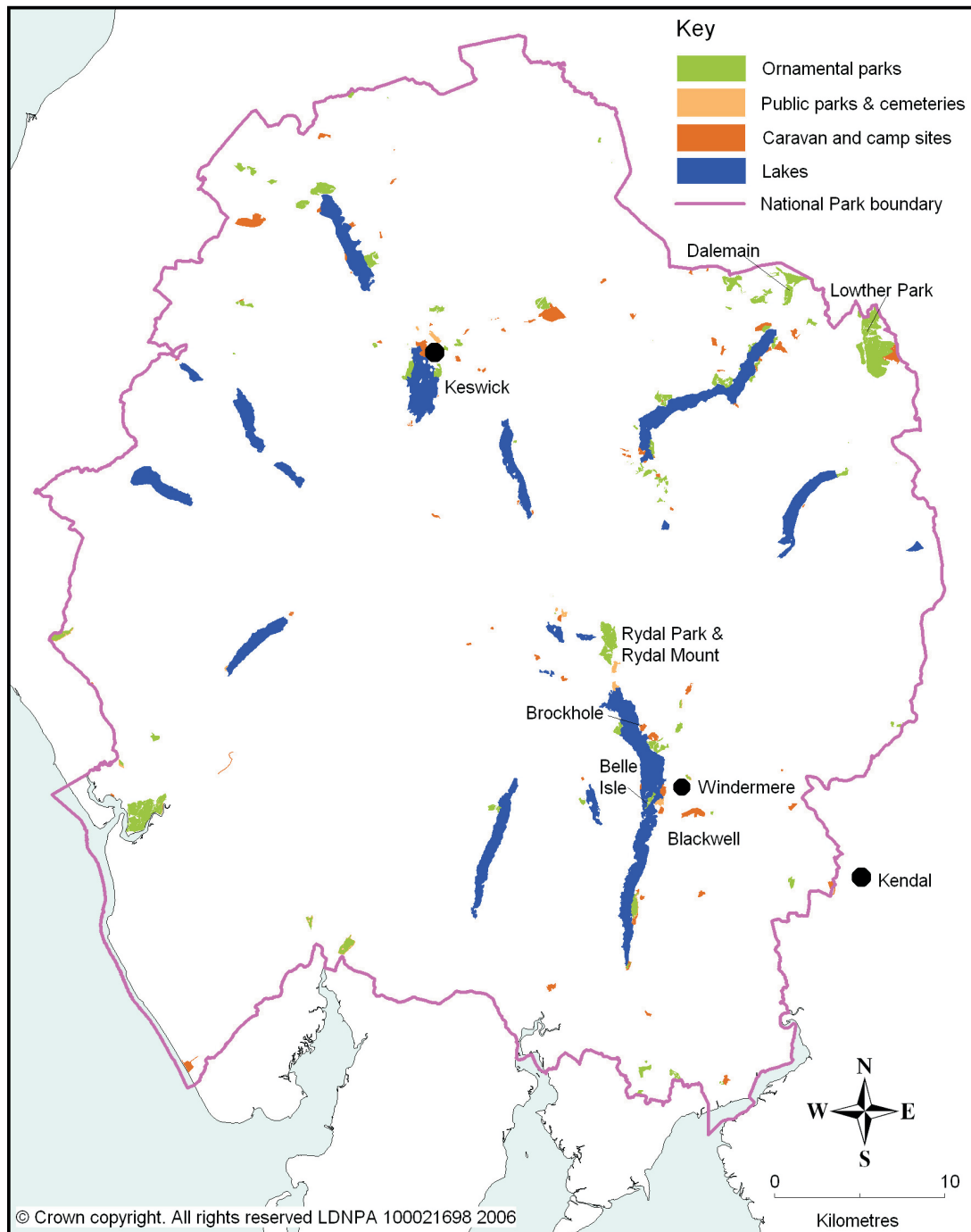


Figure 31: The distribution of ornamental parkland, public open spaces and caravan and camping sites in the Lake District National Park

⁴ Williamson and Bellamy 1987, 145

Castle, built in the mid-nineteenth century by Dr James Dawson, a retired surgeon from Liverpool, within the estate of Low Wray Farm.⁵ As well as the construction of Wray Castle, built in the Gothic Revival style, the grounds contained two follies suggesting the ruins of a more extensive castle. There was also an arboretum, containing many exotic tree species, a walled garden and an orchard. The surrounding farmland was substantially altered, to provide unbroken views across the estate. Field boundaries were removed, whilst mature trees within hedgerows were allowed to remain to form part of the parkland vistas. At the same time, conifers were planted around the estate.

Table 1: Registered Parks and Gardens in the Lake District National Park⁶

Name	Grade	Size
Belle Isle	II*	15ha
Blackwell	II	11ha
Brockhole	II	13ha
Dalemain	II*	109ha
Lowther Castle	II	558ha
Muncaster Castle	II*	287ha
Rydal Hall	II*	85ha
Rydal Mount	II	>1ha

The greatest concentration of the ornamental parkland recorded by the HLC was in the north of the National Park, around Bassenthwaite Lake and between Ullswater and Penrith. Many of these parks are the grounds to country houses, but few of them are on the register of parks and gardens, which lists those sites considered to have particular historic importance. Within the Lake District National Park, there are eight parks or gardens on



Plate 57: Belle Isle, possibly the first mansion to be specifically designed to fit Picturesque ideals (© LDNPA)

the register, and these are listed in Table 1.

Although there are only eight parks or gardens on the Register, they represent 55% of all the ornamental parkland in the Lake District National Park. The smallest is Rydal Mount, a garden created by the poet William Wordsworth, and which demonstrates his Picturesque ideals and his interest in historical continuity and the vernacular. It is situated next to Rydal Hall, with its early twentieth century formal gardens designed by Thomas Mawson and containing a seventeenth century grotto built around a natural waterfall. The hall and gardens are set within an extensive park, laid out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with exotic tree planting designed to enhance the natural landscape, and based around an older deer park. Mawson was an important garden designer of the Arts and crafts Movement, and influences designed landscapes of the Ambleside Windermere area. He was also responsible for the design of the gardens of both Brockhole and

⁵ Lund 2002

⁶ Except where specified, the following information is taken from the Register of Parks and Gardens, www.magic.gov.uk



Plate 58: *The Parkland at Rydal Mount*. A watercolour of 1831 by William Westall. This sketch which is in Dora Wordsworth's album, was drawn at a time when Westall was a frequent visitor at Rydal Mount (Authors' own collection)

Blackwell. Brockhole is now a Lake District National Park visitor centre and Blackwell is one of the best examples of the Vernacular Revival style and has been restored as an art gallery. Their gardens, and several others designed by Mawson, were not mapped by the HLC, as both are relatively small and lie within the general urban extents of Bowness and Windermere. Nearby are the grounds of Belle Isle, on the largest island in Lake Windermere. The neo-classical house is domed, and thought to be the first cylindrical mansion built in England. It occupies a dominant position and is surrounded by parkland laid out in the late eighteenth century, and it is considered to have been the first to be designed and built for Picturesque reasons.⁷ Lake Windermere itself was one of the most

popular attractions for tourists to the Lake District, and Belle Isle was one of the principal attractions and features of it.

Muncaster Castle is the second largest park and garden on the Register. Situated on the west coast, the small grounds of Irton Hall and the park of Calder Abbey are the only significant other landscaped grounds in this part of the Lake District National Park. Its extensive parkland is based around an earlier deer park, and stretches along the ridge on the north side of the River Esk, close to its mouth at Ravenglass. The gardens were laid out in the eighteenth century or earlier, and the nineteenth and twentieth century pleasure grounds are renowned for the rhododendron collection. The gardens were designed to take advantage of the spectacular views along the Esk Valley and the fells beyond. The park

⁷ Pevsner 1967, 228



Plate 59: A view across the park at Dalemain from the garden wall walk (© Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd)

is well wooded, much of it planted in the late eighteenth century.

The last two registered parks lie in the north-western part of the National Park, at Lowther Castle and Dalemain. The character of these two parks differs from the others on the Register, in that they lie in a much more gently rolling landscape. Lowther, which was based around a medieval deer park, was created in the late seventeenth century, and involved the removal of Lowther village. The park was successively augmented over the next 200 or so years and reached its greatest extent, of more than 1200 hectares, in the early twentieth century.⁸ Only around half this extent is included on register. The park contained a number of avenues, but it mostly comprises open grassland with scattered trees. Around this open land are large areas of woodland, mostly coniferous and mixed plantations. Dalemain lies to the north-west of Lowther, south of the A66 near Penrith. The gardens were laid out in the seventeenth century by Sir Edward

Hasell, and the parkland enhanced with woodland planting in the late eighteenth century by his grandson Williams Hasell, who was known as 'The Planter'. Most of the woodland lies around the perimeter of the park, and a walled deer enclosure, of probable seventeenth or eighteenth century date, is also well wooded. The highest point of the park is Evening Bank Wood, from where there are views looking south into the fells, framed by park woodland. The gardens, which are on the south side of the house, also have views looking south across the park and into the fells.

The Changing Countryside

The character of ornamental parklands varied according to the tastes of the owners, although generally they used exotic species, created vistas and eye catchers and managed the surrounding land to create fine swards. The character of modern urban parks and cemeteries varies again, although there is an increasing recognition of the important wildlife value of cemeteries, while golf courses and

⁸ LUAU, 1997b

caravan parks would seem to have little in common with eighteenth century parkland. It is therefore not always possible to define this landscape type generally and the character of individual sites needs to be determined on a case by case basis.

Parks and gardens which are included on English Heritage's 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England' are given no statutory protection, but are a material consideration in the planning process. The current list excludes the highly designed landscape around Derwentwater and on the islands in Derwentwater, despite its associations with the picturesque movement, the growth of tourism and the conservation movement and its links with Beatrix Potter and her inspiration for Peter Rabbit and Squirrel Nutkin.⁹ This exclusion from the list perhaps needs to be revisited although the scale of design is such that it may simply be too large for the register. Derwentwater is a designed landscape rather than a designed parkland.

A Conservation Management Plan for historic parklands, urban parks and cemeteries ensures that the asset is fully understood and that management can be based on informed decisions. It is important that the owners understand the evolution of the designed landscape, explore historic plans and proposals for the site and create policies for future management. Such Conservation Management Plans may flag up the need to replace railings and trees or it may propose returning degraded areas back to their original state. Alternatively, areas may be identified for a new innovative twenty-first century design. Such plans are best carried out when there are no current proposals to alter the site, but an impact assessment can be appended if necessary. Conservation



Plate 60: The entrance into parkland on the edge of Derwentwater (© Archaeo-Environment Ltd)

Management Plans are multi-disciplinary and will ensure that the approach to future management takes both historic character and wildlife value into account. It may also be possible to explore ways of improving access for all without a loss of character through an Access Plan. Funding for such schemes is available from the Heritage Lottery Fund, but are more likely to be successful if the applicant is a public group rather than a private individual and that there is a clear public benefit to the work. Where funding is restricted, a simple Conservation Statement may be more appropriate.

The main threat to ornamental parkland is from neglect leading to a gradual loss of character, a particular problem in the Bowness – Ambleside area, or more radically they may become subject to planning applications for conversion to golf courses.¹⁰ For urban recreational land, the pressure for new development can often lead to the loss of historic open spaces. Where such proposals exist, early consultation with the Lake District National Park archaeologist is vital and the proposals should be fully assessed prior to determination for impact on below

⁹ See the Derwent Water case study, 'Through a Glass Darkly'

¹⁰ English Heritage 2005a

ground remains, the effect on the wider historic character of the area and the loss of historic character within the recreational area.

The approach to enhancing and maintaining such parklands is quite different to the approach taken for managing other woodlands. While the Forestry Commission¹¹ and the National Park seek to increase the stock of native species in woodlands generally, in designed parks and gardens the National Park Plan seeks to retain the individual character of different areas of the Lake District and thus will ensure that replanting proposals reflect the original design.¹²

Such designed landscapes often included follies, eye catchers, aviaries, club houses, drives and ponds and cottages for gardeners or park keepers. Where the garden is not included on the register of historic parks and gardens, such buildings may not be listed. They need to be considered as an essential part of the character of the parkland or recreation ground and their loss will lead to a loss of coherence and an adverse affect on character. Even nationally important buildings within registered parklands may be in poor condition, such as Lowther Castle within a grade II parkland and described in the Buildings at Risk Register as being in 'very bad' condition.¹³ A current project is seeking to address the conservation requirements of both the building and the surrounding parkland¹⁴. Golf club houses can be important buildings in their own right, sometimes having been converted from country houses and so can often be found within historic parklands. Draft guidance on golf courses and



Plates 61 and 62: Many parkland trees have reached maturity, providing good examples of veteran trees (top). Elsewhere, new planting or management is needed to establish replacements for trees which have reached the end of their lives. The expense of maintaining boundary walls and fences can lead to neglect (© Archaeo-Environment Ltd and Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd)

¹¹ Forestry Commission and DEFRA 2005

¹² For example policy L13 Ensure that the full range of woodland types, native to the Lake District, is represented across the National Park. LDNPA Management Plan 2004, 19

¹³ www.english-heritage.org.uk

¹⁴ Lowther Estates, nd



Plate 63: A designed landscape near Derwentwater (© Archaeo-Environment Ltd)

historic landscapes has been produced by English Heritage and identifies the history of golf courses, the changing needs of the game and the effect this can have on the historic landscape and management guidance¹⁵.

Ornamental parklands have considerable amenity value and where access is not already possible, owners may wish to consider opening them on Heritage Open Days.

Such designed landscapes can also be affected by the division of the land into different ownerships leading to differing management regimes, intrusive boundaries and a change in character. This can be avoided if owners are able to approach the management jointly, perhaps through an agri-environment scheme.

The land use of eighteenth century and later parklands is often at a low intensity, once the original landscaping has been carried out. This means that

such areas have a high potential to contain buried remains relating to earlier land use. This earlier land use could relate to entirely different periods of use, or could represent earlier versions of the designed landscape, such as former parterres and ponds. It is therefore important that any proposals for works should be fully assessed to examine the impact of any new works.

Concerns regarding health and safety have resulted in a number of gravestones in cemeteries being deliberately knocked down to avoid accidental tumbling. If carried out on a significant number of headstones, the character of the cemetery will change. The diocesan authorities should seek support and permissions to fix headstones rather than knocking them over. Graveyards can be a valuable wildlife habitat as well as a place of solitude. Their long term management should seek to enhance this added value. Headstones have a wealth of social and religious information on them, but acid rain and age can

¹⁵ English Heritage 2005a

combine to erode the faces and the information they contain. Graveyard surveys offer an opportunity for local residents to record the inscriptions on headstones and any associated symbols and the name of the monument mason. Such surveys have in the past been funded by the Local Heritage Initiative.¹⁶

Shaping the Future: Recommendations

- Conservation Management Plans (and Access Plans) for ornamental parklands, urban parks and cemeteries should be carried out to inform their future management. Funding may be available from the Heritage Lottery Fund, although simple conservation statements can be created at very little cost.
- Ornamental parklands originating in the eighteenth century are now reaching maturity. Replacement planting should take place if their character is to be conserved and this should reflect the balance of plant species in the original design. Consideration should be given to complete felling and replacement of features such as avenues which have become over-mature.
- Associated structures within the park or recreation ground should be maintained if character is not to be changed. Some grant aid may be available through English Heritage or the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- Where parkland is in multi-ownership a joint management agreement should be implemented to ensure coherence throughout the original parkland.
- Heritage Open Days offer an opportunity to open private ornamental parkland to the public.
- Parklands have a high potential to contain evidence of earlier land use including evidence of earlier designed landscapes, due to their low intensity of use. Proposals or works within the park need to be assessed in order to assess their impact on buried remains as well as parkland setting and character.
- Many ornamental landscapes are the subject of proposals for conversion to golf courses, however the Lake District National Park Local Plan is opposed to the creation of new golf courses.¹⁷ This policy should be retained in future revisions of the Local Plan thus ensuring on-going protection for historic landscapes within the National Park.
- The deliberate knocking down of a significant number of headstones in graveyards for health and safety reasons will result in a change of character. Graveyards also have the potential to be wildlife havens and gravestones have a wealth of social and historical data. Graveyard surveys could be carried out by local residents.

¹⁶ The Weardale Churchyards Survey, Margaret Manchester pers comm

¹⁷ LDNPA 1998, 11.17, policy S7