

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The importance of the landscape of Old Park is that its setting in the magnificent natural landform, 'The Undercliff', speaks directly to the 18th century 'Picturesque' aesthetic. This unique setting has been enhanced by skilled design and planting over a sequence of ownership, each phase a product of the prevailing taste of its time, to produce a landscape rich in nuances and cultural reference.

This report has taken evidence obtained from the site and from archive material and developed the history of the landscape. It has considered the different periods that make up the surviving landscape and examined the concepts underlying them.

The document is divided into sections. The first deals with the location and geology of the site, the origins of the Old Park estate as a whole and sets out the evidence for the development of the designed landscape. The second part details the surviving features of the Old Park landscape in 2001, and assesses its significance in the historic context. The third part focuses on and addresses fully the Lake Site and associated Walled Garden complex, considering their future in separate ownership and potential for restoration.

Passages throughout the text referring specifically to the Lake Site and Walled Garden complex are highlighted with a background tint.

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Old Park is situated at grid reference SZ526761 within the Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, four kilometres to the south west of Ventnor and to the south of Undercliff Drive (A3055). Access to the house from Undercliff Drive is via Old Park Road which approaches the property from the east. Old Park shares a boundary with the Mirables estate to the west. The setting of Old Park consists of dramatic cliffs forming a backdrop to the north, with the coastline to the south. Within the grounds the land slopes down towards the southern boundary.

Historically, the farm of Wrongs was situated to the east of Old Park, with the Woolverton estate beyond. Today the Old Park estate is surrounded to the north and east by low density modern development, although Mirables remains undeveloped to the west and the ruins of a medieval hall and a building of seventeenth century date survive at Woolverton.

The Old Park estate has medieval origins but the original farmhouse was converted into a fashionable marine residence by Thomas Haddon from 1820. Haddon also created pleasure grounds, ornamental lakes and walled gardens. Notable later owners were Sir John Cheape and William Spindler, both of whom improved the estate and modified the designed landscape. From 1906 the house stood empty for over forty years but was purchased by Mr William Thornton in 1947 and developed as a hotel, this business being continued by his son Mr Robin Thornton until 1999 when the hotel changed hands.

In 1968 it was decided to develop a commercial aviary in the walled gardens, combined with a woodland walk around the adjacent lake. The Tropical Bird Park ran for twenty seven years but in 1998 planning permission was sought for the building of seven holiday units within the walled garden and the conversion of the bird park shop into two units. Planning permission was granted but the development was only partially commenced. The walled gardens are now disused but both they and the lake site retain evidence of their former use in the shape of aviaries and associated structures.

In the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Old Park estate comprised approximately 144 acres but the present day hotel is set within fourteen acres of partially wooded grounds extending to the seashore at Binnel Bay. The site of the former Tropical Bird Park, adjacent to the hotel, was retained by Mr. Robin Thornton at the time of the sale of the main building, the area in question amounting to about four acres.

Geology, Topography and Climate

The Old Park estate is set within the Isle of Wight Undercliff, a remarkable and distinctive landscape zone less than one kilometre wide, stretching from Blackgang Chine in the west to the nineteenth century coastal resort of Ventnor in the east and continuing northward to Luccombe. This narrow coastal strip is an ancient landslip backed by Greensand and Chert cliffs to the north and caused by groundwater lubrication of slip planes within the underlying Gault Clays

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Situation and Site Description

and Sandrock beds. This area of 'slippage', said to be the largest rotational landslip in Europe, lies beneath the chalk downs, from which it is separated by dramatic vertical cliffs, and forms a sheltered, secret landscape with open sea views. Tilted towards the south, the Undercliff enjoys a Mediterranean-like micro-climate where sub-tropical bedding schemes luxuriated in Victorian gardens and still thrive in the present day Ventnor Botanic Gardens, although from time to time a harsher winter than normal will affect the more tender plants. Strong salt laden winds can also be a problem and woodland shelter belts were established around ornamental gardens in the nineteenth century. The Undercliff, in its present form, is very recent in geological terms. It is likely that a landslide topography was formed here under Pleistocene periglacial conditions over a million years ago but further instability within the last 10,000 years has created the present landscape. There is archaeological evidence of landslip in the form of three skeletons of a woman, child and baby, found with a pot of Iron Age date at Furzebrake near Steephill in the 1940's. The three family members are thought to have been victims of a sudden landfall.

The Archaeology of the Undercliff

A Bronze Age hut site was excavated just above the landslip at Gore Cliff in 1931. A late Iron Age hut was excavated at Gills Cliff near Ventnor in 1947 and two Iron Age currency bars were found at St Lawrence in the 1940's. The main evidence for early occupation of the Undercliff, however,

is in the form of midden sites of Iron Age and Roman date found at St Catherine's Point, Binnel Point, Steephill and Gills Cliff. Middens are ancient rubbish dumps which in the Undercliff contain a mixture of pottery, shells and bones. They suggest that local people were exploiting the resources of the seashore by gathering shellfish. Medieval middens have also been recorded from the Undercliff and recent work by Southern Water at Flowers Brook, west of Ventnor, revealed a previously undiscovered medieval site.

Within the Undercliff there were no less than six separate medieval parishes extending from their inland hinterlands into the Undercliff and running down to the sea. The land belonging to Whitwell Parish included the estates of Old Park, Mirables and Woolverton, all of which were held by the de Estur family. Old Park may have been a tenement of Southwathe (the medieval name of Woolverton).

The field names *Warren* and *Green Park*, shown within the Old Park estate on the Whitwell Tithing Map of 1838/9, can be equated with medieval references to *The Warren* and *Green Park*. These names suggest the presence of a hunting park in this area during the Middle Ages. The whole of the Undercliff is in fact shown as *St Lawrence Park* on John Speed's map of 1611. This presumably would not have been an enclosed park but an area of rough country suitable for hunting, indicating that much of the Undercliff may have been uncultivated in medieval times. It has been suggested that the medieval hall at Woolverton may have been a hunting lodge. The names *Warren* and *Green Park*, however, imply a more well defined hunting park within the estate that was later called *Old Park*. The Worsley family probably owned this estate from the sixteenth century and the name *Old Park* was perhaps used to distinguish the estate from their own deer park at Appuldurcombe, referred to in Thomas Worsley's will of 1604. The first recorded mention of the name *Old Park* is in 1628.

The central core of the present house at Old Park became a farmer's

residence in the early 1600's. Worsley Account Books for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries record rents paid by the Coleman family who were the tenant farmers of the estate. The Harvey family were also associated with Old Park in the eighteenth century.

The Estate in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century

As a farm Old Park was quite small, being around 144 acres, but it had all the qualities for being successful as can be seen from the rents recorded in the Worsley Account Books. There were three strong sources of water rising from the base of the cliffs, and the estate had pockets of very fertile soil amongst the outcrops of rock, sheltered by the cliffs to the north, and warmed by the Gulf Stream on the shore. The growing of a good quality corn seems to have been the main income. A map and survey of the Worsley estates was made for Sir Richard Worsley in 1774 by William Watts, Surveyor. The survey records that the farm of Old Park comprised 84 acres of arable, 46 acres of pasture, and 10 acres of woods. The map indicates that the farmhouse of Old Park was a plain rectangular building with an associated farm building adjacent. No ponds, water features or garden enclosures are shown on this map.

After the death of Sir Richard Worsley in 1803 his property on the Isle of Wight was inherited by his niece Henrietta. In 1806 she married Charles Anderson Pelham, whose main seat was Brockleby in Lincolnshire. As founder and first Commodore of the Royal Yacht

Squadron, he kept Appledurcombe as a convenient base for his sailing at Cowes but in 1809 part of the Appuldurcombe estate, comprising some 2300 acres, was put up for sale. In the sale document it was stated that Old Park was in the occupation of Mr John Harvey, on lease, until Michelmas 1826 and this outstanding lease seems to have prevented the sale of the property. It was not until 24th December 1817 when John Harvey died, that serious interest was taken. Circa 1820 Old Park was purchased by Thomas Haddon.

The Creation of the Designed Landscape

Very little is known about Thomas Haddon except that he was a London solicitor, and that he followed the fashion of having a seaside retreat and second home. He and his wife purchased the farmhouse of Old Park and the accompanying farmland and set about converting the farmhouse into a cottage orné and creating a designed landscape around it. They spent much time in building, changing and modifying their ideas, and the house and grounds were greatly altered. A serpentine lake was dug out to the north and east of the house and was stocked, no doubt, with fish and ornamental ducks and swans. A large farm building shown on the Worsley Estate Map of 1774 was demolished and new model farm buildings were erected slightly to the south east in a new position where they did not obscure the view from the house. In 1844 Brettell's description of Old Park mentioned that '*near the shore a large bathing house has been erected*' and it

is known that Haddon was also responsible for constructing a mill just above the shore, this building being shown on the 1838/9 Whitwell Tithe Map, although not on the Worsley Estate Map of 1774.

Thomas Haddon built the walled gardens at Old Park with the intention of establishing a vineyard within the gardens. The walls, eleven feet in height, were intended to provide shelter and anchors for the vine stretcher wires. In attempting to establish a vineyard Thomas Haddon was following in the footsteps of Sir Richard Worsley who had tried to establish two vineyards at Sea Cottage, to the east of Old Park, but without success. The vineyard at Old Park also appears to have been unsuccessful and fruit and vegetables were grown in the walled gardens at a later date.

George Brannon in the 1831 edition of *Vectis Scenery* states that '*Old Park is the newly-formed residence of THOMAS HADDON, Esq. situated considerably below the public road, towards the sea. The house is handsomely built, and the ground highly varied and profusely planted*'. Sheridan, in his *Historical and Topographical Guide to the Isle of Wight (1832)* refers to a dairy with a fountain at its centre and also comments on the '*magnificent masses of rock [that] ornament the lawn*'. A drawing made in 1832 shows the house with the northern lake in the foreground and depicts a picturesque waterfall beside it. A second, undated, illustration also shows the northern lake in the foreground with swans on it and like

the 1832 drawing provides a useful indication of the appearance of the house before later Victorian additions.

Mark William Norman in his memoirs blamed Mrs. Hatton (Haddon) for much expense at Old Park with her whims and caprices in causing portions of the building to be pulled to pieces and altered to suit her ideas. This and an unfortunate speculation caused the proprietor to be reduced to bankruptcy around 1832. A newspaper cutting of July 13, 1832 announced the sale of *Furniture, linen, rich cut Glass, Wine, Fixtures and Fittings up, the Machinery of a Flour Mill, Brewhouse & Dairy Utensils, Garden Plants, Melon Frames, and valuable costly Effects on the premises of the Old Park Farm,late the residence of Thomas Haddon Esq.* Farm stock and crops were also advertised as being for sale.

Clear evidence for the changes carried out by Thomas Haddon can be seen on the Whitwell Tithe Map of 1838/9 and in the associated survey (known as the Apportionment Book) which lists and names all the fields belonging to individual landowners. This map shows both the ornamental lake created by Haddon as well as the walled gardens and an area of cultivation (probably a vegetable garden) to the south east of the walled gardens. Two buildings are shown just above the shoreline, one presumably being the mill. (The plot of land containing the two buildings is described in the Apportionment Book as 'Bath's Mill and Ground'.) The second building shown on the tithe map may possibly be the bathing

house referred to by Brettell & Cooke.

It is noticeable that the land around Old Park to the north, south and west is coloured green on the Tithe Map and listed as pasture in the Tithe Apportionment Book whereas the fields stretching from the east of the pleasure grounds to the boundary with Wrongs Farm are coloured brown and listed as arable. This was, perhaps, a conscious management decision to ensure a 'pastoral' landscape around the house, which would have been in line with Picturesque concepts of landscape. The Tithe Map does not indicate the ornamental planting on the estate but Brannon, writing in 1837, commented that the plantations were 'very extensive' although 'as yet too young to reflect any additional charm on the scene'.

A summary of Haddon's achievements was given by Cooke in 1849 when he wrote '*....the private road leading to [Old Park] winds through an extensive plantation of firs and a sheet of water, a dairy, a cornmill and a bathing house contribute in giving variety to the ground*'.

The Estate Marks Time

After Thomas Haddon went bankrupt in 1832 the estate appears to have been sold to an Irishman named Captain Bowles but by 1835 a Captain Beard was occupying the house. Joshua Horton is the first owner mentioned in the Old Park deeds where he is described as 'a boiler and gasometer maker, late of Handsworth, Staffordshire.' When the Whitwell Tithe Apportionment Book

was compiled in the 1840's Joshua Horton was listed as the owner of Old Park and William Reynolds as the occupier, probably of the farm. At the time of the 1841 census Joshua Horton was living at *Island House* in Handsworth and James Walkinshaw was listed as the person in residence at Old Park, with William Reynolds living at Old Park Farm. The deeds for Old Park state that Joshua Horton died in March 1843. A long dispute then started as to whom was the next of kin. At the time of the 1851 Census William Reynolds was listed as a farmer of 100 acres but the house is recorded as being uninhabited. James Walkinshaw must have maintained an interest in the estate, however, because the deeds of Old Park refer to a suit in the High Court of Chancery of 21st July 1863 where James Walkinshaw was the defendant. The plaintiffs were members of the Dawes family who were trustees of Joshua Horton. A decree or order was made by Vice Chancellor Wood that the property ought to be sold for the benefit of the infant plaintiffs, and that a proper conveyance be executed to Sir John Cheape, confirming an agreement made on 28th January 1863.

Development of the House and Grounds in the 1860's and 1870's

General Sir John Cheape was a Lieutenant General in the Bengal Engineers and a Knight Commander of the Bath. Having retired from service in India Sir John decided to live on the Isle of Wight and discovered Old Park. The General was an acclaimed civil engineer and put his talents to work at his new home. An east wing and a new entrance were added to

the house and the portion of the lake at the back of the house was filled in, The route from Wrongs Farm was re-aligned and upgraded and a lower section of road was constructed to the south of the kitchen gardens and walled gardens in order to separate house and farm traffic.

The extension of the house to the north had necessitated the infilling of the lake behind the house but an additional reason for the draining of this lake was the continuing existence of malaria in the area. Sir John's Indian experience told him that water and mosquitoes were the cause of malaria and he therefore encouraged the draining of marshland within the Undercliff. The surviving lake to the east of the house became a storage pond or stew pond for fish supplies.

Sir John Cheape died in 1875 and the estate was eventually put on the market.

The Vision of William Spindler

Theodore William Spindler, a retired industrial chemist, spent his working life at the Spindler Dye Works in Berlin, living at the Villa Semiramis, Maassen Strasse, Berlin. After his health deteriorated Spindler sought out a place to which he could retire and which would be good for his health. After much consideration he finally settled on Ventnor because of its climate and reputation as a health resort. In 1872 he stayed at the Royal Hotel and subsequently leased a property in the town. In 1881 Spindler returned to the Isle of Wight to settle down as a naturalised Englishman and purchased Old Park from the daughters of Sir John Cheape.

Although his time at Old Park was short, the impact of William Spindler upon the locality was enormous, for in the space of some seven years he was the inspiration and driving force behind various projects such as the laying out of Ventnor Park, Park Avenue and the Whitwell Road, and the collection and piping of water to Whitwell and other areas. At various points around the Whitwell Village can be seen several stand pipes painted bright red and known as Red Boys or Lion Heads. Water outlets for quite a different purpose can be seen within the hotel where 'wet-risers' for fire fighting were installed on each floor at strategic points.

At Old Park Spindler built the sea wall and esplanade, constructed a better drainage scheme, laid out the grounds, and imported from the Mediterranean over a million trees, shrubs and sub-tropical plants.

In the house central heating was put in, a form of double-glazing installed and an air conditioning system built in. The west staircase, built around 1884, was to enable a shorter route between the library and his living quarters. An underground water reservoir was constructed close to the house, holding 30,000 gallons. This was hand pumped into a large slate tank in the roof and used to provide soft washing water. All of these projects were designed by his architect Major Theodor Saunders.

During the ownership of William Spindler the kitchen gardens were extended with the building of two massive greenhouses. A photograph from the Spindler archive gives an indication of the labour intensiveness

of the gardens, it shows some eleven gardeners posed beside one of the new greenhouses, each with the tools of his craft. The first of the glasshouses was for garden foodstuffs, but to accommodate his interest in orchids an elaborate two-storey stone and glass orchid house was designed by Boulton and Paul. The orchid house was an L shaped structure divided into three sections. To obtain the correct humidity water tanks were let into the first floor, over which ran large central heating pipes heated by a coal boiler situated beneath. To remove any risk of lime from the well water, a rainwater collecting tank holding 8000 gallons was constructed underground. The water from this tank was then pumped into the greenhouse.

Drainage work on the estate included the gathering together of water from the many springs which arose on the upper estate and piping the resulting outflow to the sea. This greatly contributed to the stability of the land of Old Park compared to surrounding estates, as ground water could not penetrate to, and lubricate, the underlying blue 'slipper' clay.

The prolific planting undertaken by William Spindler totally changed the character of the estate, giving it a much more wooded appearance, and also indirectly contributed to the stability of the ground from the binding action of the roots within the soil matrix.

William Spindler died in 1889 but his wife remained at the property until she died in 1906. The estate however lost some of its former glory during this period, lack of maintenance taking its toll on the gardens and grounds. Writing in 1911, Dr Whitehead refers to *'the late lamented proprietor of Old Park who promised to give us a "New Ventnor", embodying all the large philanthropic views that actuated all Mr Spindler's efforts'*. Whitehead refers to the million trees planted as windbreaks and remarks that *'roads were planned, the purity and abundance of the water supply attended to, and the drainage of the estate laid out on the latest scientific principles.'*

A Snapshot in Time – The Sale Catalogue of 1906

The death of Mrs Spindler in 1906 meant that Old Park was put on the market and the estate agents produced a sale catalogue to advertise the property. A very clear picture the Old Park Estate at the beginning of the twentieth century is provided by this catalogue. The whole estate comprised an area of about 143 acres, having hardly varied from the time of the 1774 Worsley survey. Just over thirteen acres of this total were taken up by the mansion, pleasure grounds, stabling, farm buildings, kitchen and walled gardens, orchard etc. A photograph of the house reveals that Sir John Cheape's new wing had achieved a satisfactorily venerable appearance by this date, being clothed in ivy. A photograph showing planting around the house records the presence of fairly young shrubs and trees, as

well as more established specimens. Another photograph entitled *A Walk in the Grounds* may show the curiously incomplete South Avenue recorded on the Ordnance Survey of 1907.

The grounds are, predictably, described in the sale catalogue as being of 'exceptional beauty'. The description beneath this eulogy states that these grounds are *'well timbered and beautifully planted with fine specimen trees and shrubs (Yucca, Eucalyptus, Pine, Rhododendron, Cypress etc) of many years growth and intersected by extensive and lovely walks. There are well kept lawns on one of which is a flagstaff and a sundial, and especial mention must be made of the ornamental pond'*. A photograph shows that the 'pond' contained water lilies and a variety of aquatic marginals and that the bank alongside it was planted with yuccas and cabbage palms. Photographs from the Spindler archive and probably of late nineteenth century date and early twentieth century date give different views of the lake and increase our knowledge of this important feature of the grounds. Many of the photographs show the lake being actively used for boating (either rowing or punting), while in others boats are moored beside the bank. One photograph, taken in winter or spring, shows the lake being remodelled, with over a dozen workmen busy within the area of the drained pool. The line of the bank to be reconstructed is marked out with canes. On the far bank can be seen a black poplar, which can still be identified today, but which has now fallen into the water. Another

photograph, taken in the summer or autumn, shows a lady with a parasol standing beneath the black poplar and looking into the lake. The black poplar seems a little larger than in the first photograph and the style of the lady's clothing suggests that this photograph was taken at the turn of the century and presumably before the property fell empty in 1906.

The farm and farm buildings are fully described and the attention of the reader is drawn to *'an erection of brick supporting cast iron tank (by Warnes, London), to hold about 1,000 gallons with windmill for pumping liquid manure'*. Other contemporary evidence suggests that the liquid manure was pumped up to a holding tank and then transported from the farmyard to the walled gardens and kitchen gardens, an example of the application of technology to estate management that was typical of William Spindler. A photograph of about this date (Spindler archive) shows the farm buildings and windmill.

The description of the fruit gardens, kitchen gardens and glass houses in the sale catalogue is of special significance for, taken with contemporary map evidence and the evidence provided by a photograph in the Spindler archive, it allows us to reconstruct the functions and appearance of these gardens and their associated buildings, following the improvements carried out by William Spindler. Page 8 of the catalogue refers to *'Two capital walled in Fruit Gardens', 'Large and productive Kitchen Gardens', 'The Erection of Stove house and*

Greenhouse', 'Ranges of 12 Forcing and 24 Cold Pits', 'An expensive and well built range of ORCHID HOUSES', 'A lean-to Vinery', 'Propagating House and Potting Shed'. From this description we can be clear that the walled gardens were used for fruit growing in 1906 and that the cultivated beds shown on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1862 and 1907 to the east of the walled gardens must be the kitchen gardens used to produce vegetables for the household. The sale catalogue notes that the walled fruit gardens were *'planted with choice trees and covered in with wire netting on iron supports'*.

It is in connection with the glasshouses at Old Park that the combination of evidence from Ordnance Survey maps, an early photograph and the sale catalogue is particularly useful. The 1862 Ordnance Survey map shows three structures in the north west corner of the kitchen garden. Two of these structures abut the northern boundary of the garden, one of these structures being hatched, indicating that it was a glasshouse. The other structure on the northern boundary, right in the corner of the garden, is unhatched, but immediately to the south of this structure another small glasshouse is shown.

By the time of the 1907 Ordnance Survey two much larger glasshouses had been erected to the south and east of the earlier glasshouses and a range of forcing and cold pits are shown further to the south. These additional glasshouses and other structures were built for William

Spindler. The two new glasshouses correspond with the 'Greenhouse' and 'Orchid Houses' described in the sale catalogue. The new greenhouse is described as being '70ft by 20 ft, by Boulton & Paul' with *stone foundations, tiled floors, porch entrances, top and side ventilating sashes, centre and side staging and filled with spring water tanks. Furnace and Coke house. The rain water tanks are supplied from two large underground tanks, each of about 1,000 gallons capacity*'.

The Orchid Houses were also by Boulton & Paul and are stated to contain 'Cattleya, Intermediate, Cool and Exhibition Houses'. A detailed description of the orchid houses is given as follows:

Whole length 75 ft. by 20 ft., return end 25 ft. by 20 ft., three entrances, stone foundations, tiled floors, top and side ventilating sashes, iron, slate and cement staging, galvanised iron water tanks throughout. Spring and rain water. The rainwater is supplied from an underground tank of about 4,000 gallons capacity. The basement accommodation is Furnace Room, Men's Room, Fruit Store, and Coke House about 50 tons capacity.

The 1907 Ordnance survey map shows that the orchid house was an L shaped building which corresponds with the description in the sale catalogue.

In the Spindler archive is a photograph that bridges the gap between the 1862 and 1907 Ordnance Survey maps, as it shows the large greenhouse described in

the sale catalogue but not the orchid house. We know that both these structures were built for William Spindler so the photograph must date from between 1881, when Spindler purchased Old Park, and his death in 1889. The photograph also shows the lean-to Vinery, (a modern greenhouse exists on part of the original base), the propagating house or potting shed and forcing pits and cold pits.

Unmentioned in the sale catalogue but recorded in photographs within the Spindler archive is the Pets' Burial Ground, a typical feature in the grounds surrounding Victorian country houses.

The Estate Falls Asleep

Despite the attractive description of Old Park in the sale catalogue a number of circumstances prevented the sale of the property. These circumstances including the decline of the Island as a high class resort after the death of Queen Victoria, a dispute between the son and daughter of Mr and Mrs Spindler, and two World Wars. As a result the house and grounds were unoccupied until 1947 although the trustees of the estate had the wisdom to retain a maintenance man who was responsible for the fabric of the house and the clearing of the streams and pipes. The walled gardens were purchased by Ventnor Urban Council and used as a market garden, with pigsties being built during the Second World War.

In 1947 Mr William Thornton, walking along the cliff from Ventnor, became lost and discovered, beneath overgrown ivy, a house. He made

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Historical Perspective

enquires and learnt that the Ventnor Estate Agency of Francis Pittis still had the property on their books from 1906! The purchase of Old Park by William Thornton was completed in 1948 and the enormous task of bringing the property into the twentieth century was commenced. In 1962 Mr and Mrs Thornton Senior retired and the business was continued by their son Robin Thornton. Old Park Hotel was subsequently sold to new owners in August 1999 and has been maintained as a hotel.

The Recent History of the Lake Site, Walled Gardens and Greenhouses

In 1953 the walled gardens and greenhouses belonging to Old Park, which had been owned by Ventnor Urban Council for some time, came onto the market and were purchased by William Thornton. The walled gardens were very run down with just a little horticulture around the one upstanding greenhouse. The wooden Orchid House superstructure had collapsed, the walled gardens were a jungle and the lake was silted up and overgrown. On the retirement of Mr and Mrs W Thornton in 1962 permission was granted to build three houses on the plot. To date, one dwelling has been built on the site of the derelict greenhouse but with the death of Mr Thornton the two other proposed dwellings were not built. From 1972 the walled gardens were used as a tropical bird park, open to the public, with a woodland walk around the lake. This coincided with the leasing of the former farm buildings at Old Park as a Glass Studio which was also open to the public. The Tropical Bird Park ran

for twenty seven years but eventually the cost of wages and of feeding the birds became too high and the venture proved uneconomic. Planning permission was sought for the building of six self-catering holiday units within the walled garden and the conversion of the existing cafeteria and shop into three more units. This planning application was successful but the development was only partially commenced. Currently, the walled gardens and lake site are unused, but retain the aviaries, fencing and other structures relating to their former use.

This section presents an overview of the surviving features of the estate compiled from a ground survey, photographic records, as well as the comparison of early and current maps.

Approach and Access

In the earlier part of the nineteenth century Old Park could be approached from the western side of the estate at the boundary with Mirables and this drive continued in use even after the eastern approach route became more important in the late nineteenth century. By 1907 the western entrance to the estate had been slightly re-aligned because of changes to the route of Undercliff Drive. **Stone gatepiers** still mark the re-aligned entrance although by 1939 part of the western drive just beyond the former entrance had been destroyed by ground movement and access could no longer be gained to Old Park by this route.

Today Old Park is approached from the east along the lower section of Old Park Road. (A one way system is in operation for vehicles and the exit from the property is along the upper section of Old Park Road.) There are **stone gatepiers** flanking Old Park Road at the eastern entrance to the estate (grid reference SZ 53097626). Just to the west of these gatepiers a new lower section of road has been constructed in recent years to facilitate access to the I.W. Glass Studio and Hotel. Further to the southwest, there are beech trees beside the original lower section of Old Park Road and also the remains of a line of Holm Oaks on the south side of the road.

On the upper section of Old Park Road, at its eastern end, there are Stone Pines (*Pinus pinea*) to the south of the road, probably planted by William Spindler. At grid reference SZ 52687614 is **Old Park Lodge**, a building shown in nineteenth century photographs within the Spindler archive as a single storey stone structure with decorative slate roof. (The Lodge has now been greatly altered and extended.) The main house at Old Park is approached over a **stone bridge** to the west of the surviving lake and this approach to the house seems to have been in existence by the time the Whitwell Tithe Map was drawn up in 1838/39. The bridge itself is constructed of greensand stone rubble and has been partly rebuilt in recent times.

On both the 1838/39 Tithe Map and the 1862 Ordnance Survey map an alternative route to the house is shown leading around the southern perimeter of the pleasure grounds and there is still a track following this route outside the random stone rubble **perimeter wall** surrounding the grounds to the west and south of the house. At the north west corner of this wall there is an entrance to the pleasure grounds with gatepiers in stone ashlar, from where a drive leading eastwards to the house is shown on the 1862 and 1907 Ordnance Survey maps. The perimeter wall surrounding the pleasure grounds was originally about two metres high although it is now ruinous in places. To the south of the house a **rustic stone archway** pierces the perimeter wall and today provides a private pedestrian exit from the hotel grounds. On the Tithe Map and

the 1862 Ordnance Survey map a path is shown leading up to the house from this archway. The archway would have been too narrow to have allowed the passage of carriages up to the house by this route. On the 1907 Ordnance Survey map a wider drive to the house is shown leading from the south east corner of the grounds to a carriage turning circle in front of the house. Fine stone ashlar gatepiers can be seen today at the southeast corner of the grounds, indicating that carriages were certainly using this route, although the entrance to the hotel grounds at this point is now blocked.

The House and Pleasure Grounds

The principal building at Old Park is currently in use as a hotel. The house is a **Grade II listed building** and is of great significance in terms of the nineteenth century development of the Undercliff. This one building embodies the history of the Old Park estate, with the original vernacular farmhouse encased by later additions. The picturesque gothic west wing with arched windows added by Thomas Haddon in the 1820's can be seen, as can his half octagon corner turret. Part of the original farmhouse was demolished by Sir John Cheape when he built a new 'Elizabethan' east wing with Dutch gables that now forms the main entrance front of the house. A modern hotel extension has been built to the south east with a linking passage to the main building.

The pleasure grounds around the hotel are mainly laid down to lawn with sub-tropical planting including Chusan Palms, Cabbage Palms,

Yuccas, Agaves and Pampas Grass. Some of these plants can be seen on late nineteenth century photographs in the Spindler archive although annual bedding was also used at the time. On the western side of the pleasure grounds there are more trees, mainly Holm Oak and Sycamore. Holm Oak was a favourite species with the Victorians but the Sycamore have almost certainly self-seeded, as they have done elsewhere on the estate, particularly beside the lake, and throughout the Undercliff.

The Farm and Ancillary Buildings

The farm buildings as previously described, are thought to have been built by Thomas Haddon, and are largely formed of dressed stone under slate roofs. Today the farm buildings are occupied by a glass studio open to the public. In the north west corner of the farm complex is *The Cottage*, a Grade II listed building considered to be of seventeenth century origin but not shown on the 1774 Worsley Estate Map. The cottage has been enlarged and deepened with the addition of an attic in the early nineteenth century. It has a tooled ashlar front, leaded pointed casement dormers and a rustic porch, while the gable end reveals an earlier masonry line. *The Cottage* is a picturesque building and was almost certainly modified (if not built) by Thomas Haddon; evidence from the building, in the form of large ovens discovered during refurbishment, suggests that it originally functioned as the bakery for the estate.

The Mill and Associated Landscape

From the western side of the pleasure grounds a path diverges from the perimeter track and leads down to the shore. This route is shown on the 1862 Ordnance Survey map. In the 1860's the northern half of the track led through fields (probably laid down to pasture as at the time of the 1838/39 tithe map) and was not surrounded by any trees or shrubs. At this time, the southern half of the track looped around an area of broken ground subject to coastal slumping, with three mill ponds being shown in woodland to the east of the track, accompanied by the legend *Old Mill Dam*. A photograph in the Spindler archive shows this private road to Binnel Bay, the land on either side of the road being quite unwooded at the time. Today the path leads through secondary Sycamore woodland and at its southern end wooden steps allow a more direct course to the beach than that shown on the 1862 map. The outline of the northernmost **millpond** is still visible beside the track, now empty of water but with a stream flowing through the pond basin. The **mill dam** can also be identified. It is constructed of stone rubble and soil and is breached at its base, allowing water to pass through. Just above the shoreline a small amount of stone and brick masonry can be seen, this being the remains of the **mill** which was described as *Mill (Ruin)* on the 1862 Ordnance Survey map. Despite being described as a ruin on the 1862 map, late nineteenth century photographs in the Spindler archive show an inhabited building beside the shore. Remains of a well have been observed on the beach at extreme low water directly

south of the mill ruins. On the shore can be seen the remains of William Spindler's breakwater which is marked on the 1907 Ordnance Survey map.

In a field approximately 250 m to the east of the millpond is the remains of a **ha-ha** consisting of a section of stone revetment wall with a ditch to the east. North of the visible section, the ditch of the ha-ha has been backfilled, whilst to the south the feature has been lost to coastal slumping and erosion. Ha-ha's were used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries within a parkland setting to separate grazing land from amenity land or arable without the necessity for a visually intrusive fence or wall to spoil the view. The ha-ha at Old Park runs along a field boundary separating two fields known as Pigeon Close and Twelve Acres. On the 1838/39 Whitwell Tithe Map Pigeon Close is coloured green as pasture and Twelve Acres is coloured brown as arable. The Tithe Apportionment book corroborates this difference in land use.

In the woods to the north of the hotel a rill or watercourse flows in a south-westerly direction from a spring. After passing underground for a short distance the rill then flows south and joins a stream flowing out of the ornamental lake. This watercourse then skirts the western side of the hotel and passes underground in the southwest corner of the pleasure grounds, where a sluice is marked on the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map of 1970s date. A depression in the pasture field to the south west of the hotel grounds shows the

line of the underground watercourse. The 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map dating from the 1970's shows this watercourse re-emerging close to the site of the most northerly millpond.

The Dairy

An interesting survival at Old Park is a roofless octagonal building to the north of the hotel, constructed of greensand stone rubble. This building is shown on the 1907 Ordnance Survey map and is marked as Fountain on the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map of 1970's date. There is an arched entrance on the southern side of the building and all the other facets of the building have large unglazed arched window openings. The building has a brick lined interior with dressed stone dado and shelf, the upper walls being plastered. A circular pool is set into the floor of the building, this pool having a base of stone flags and being lined around the sides with vitreous glazed cream tiles. In the middle of the pool is set the remains of a fountain, with a lead pipe severed about a metre above ground level.

This building is now known to be the ornamental dairy mentioned by Sheridan in 1832, who commented that the '*dairy with the fountain in its centre is worthy [of] inspection*'. A dairy is also mentioned by Cooke in 1849. A small building of circular or octagonal shape is shown to the east of the main house on the 1862 Ordnance Survey map and a building in the same position is shown on an undated early nineteenth century illustration of the house beside the northern arm of the lake; the building in the illustration appearing to have

a thatched roof. This small building seems to have been moved to its present position in the later part of the nineteenth century, almost certainly when Sir John Cheape demolished the original eastern part of the house and constructed a new east wing. The sale catalogue of 1906 mentions '*A stone and thatched Dairy in the Grounds*'.

It may seem puzzling that nineteenth century tourist guides should mention the dairy at Old Park, as such books do not generally concern themselves with farming matters. The **Old Park Dairy**, though, was an ornamental feature and was in a long tradition of such buildings which can be traced back to the eighteenth century *Chinese Dairy* at Woburn Abbey and the dairy maid make-believe of Marie Antoinette. The adjoining estate of Mirables had an ornamental dairy, as did the landscaped park at Northcourt in Shorwell. The fountain at the centre of the Old Park Dairy, mentioned by Sheridan, would have been a decorative addition to the building but would also have created a moist atmosphere and helped to cool the pans of fresh milk placed around the pool; the pans later being placed on the stone shelf running around the inside of the building. The real work of dairying would of course have taken place in the Old Park farmstead, suitably tucked away beyond the ornamental grounds.

The Lake

Of the two joined lakes created by Thomas Haddon in the 1820's only the eastern portion survives, the western lake behind the house having been filled in by Sir John Cheape.

The site of the western lake is now occupied by the car park for the Old Park Hotel. To the north of the car park there is a fountain that is shown on the 1907 map, restored in modern materials. A fountain beside the main eastern entrance to the Old Park Hotel appears to be modern, as it is not shown on either the 1907 or the 1939 Ordnance Survey maps.

The surviving portion of the lake was reconstructed in the late nineteenth century, as can be seen from the early photograph showing workmen remaking the banks. After its reconstruction the lake was smaller than its original size as can be seen by comparing the 1862 and 1907 Ordnance Survey maps. In 1862 the lake extended as far as the bridge carrying the driveway but by 1907 it terminated about 40 metres to the east of the bridge. A stream now emerges from the end of the lake, flowing under the bridge and continuing in a westerly direction along the bed of the filled-in pool to the north of the house. The lake is marked as *Fish Pond* on the 1907 map and a **fountain** is shown within it, this feature also being shown on the 1970's 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map. The fountain base remains but the figure and bowl shown in a contemporary photograph from the Spindler archive have vanished. The fountain is no longer viable and its water supply in need of restoration.

The Lake banks have become somewhat overgrown since the Tropical Bird Park closed, with self-sown Sycamore much in evidence. A single **Black Poplar** (*Populus nigra*), identifiable with a tree shown in early

photographs, has now fallen across the water. The Black Poplar is native to SouthEast and Central England but is becoming scarce as a mature tree, being short lived and seldom planted in the countryside. Cuttings of the Old Park black poplar have been raised for possible future replanting.

The Walled Gardens

The two **walled gardens** to the east of the lake are constructed of coursed greensand blocks, with a common wall dividing the two enclosures, Entrance to the walled gardens is from an arched gateway with central keystone in the southern wall of the smaller, eastern walled garden. There is another similar gateway in the north east corner of the smaller walled garden giving access from the area of the former kitchen gardens. Immediately outside the south west corner of the western walled garden are a group of small modern buildings which were formerly the ticket office, shop, cafeteria and toilet block to the Tropical Bird Park.

The walled gardens were built by Thomas Haddon in the 1820's and, as previously noted they are said to have been built originally to protect a vineyard, with 11 feet high walls which provided shelter and anchors for the vine stretcher wires. The Whitwell Tithe Map of 1838/9 shows the walled gardens and another area of cultivated ground to the southeast. The sale catalogue of 1907 refers to **Two capital walled in Fruit Gardens** *Planted with choice trees and covered in with wire netting on iron supports*. It seems, however, that at least one of the walled gardens may have been used as a rose garden in the

late nineteenth century. Photographs showing an elaborate rose garden can be seen in the Spindler archive and the 1907 Ordnance Survey map suggests no possible site for this rose garden except in one of the walled gardens.

Investigation of the ground in the walled gardens has revealed that all the calcareous soil within the gardens was removed to a depth of four feet and a slate bed laid, sloping to a central drainage system which takes surface water off to the sea via a nine-inch pipe. Imported soil was then introduced to give the walled gardens a neutral pH content. It is not known precisely when this work was carried out.

The Greenhouses and Orchid House

As previously described, by the time of the 1862 Ordnance Survey two small greenhouses and another structure had been erected in the kitchen garden to the east of the walled gardens, but William Spindler purchased two much larger glasshouses from Boulton and Paul, one of these being an L shaped **Orchid House**. There is no known photograph of the orchid house but it must have been erected prior to 1898, as Mr. W. Spindler of Old Park is mentioned in the comprehensive Boulton and Paul catalogue of that date as having installed such a building. The catalogue gives a clear idea of the quality and complexity of the likely structure that was erected on the base now remaining. The other large greenhouse is pictured in a photograph dating from the 1880's showing the gardening staff on parade, (described earlier). Both

greenhouses were fully documented in the sale catalogue of 1907, again as previously described. The two Boulton and Paul Greenhouses, the earlier glasshouses and a range of forcing and cold pits described in the sale catalogue are all shown on the 1907 Ordnance Survey map.

In 1962 a **modern chalet bungalow** called Parkland was erected on part of **the footprint of the Boulton and Paul Greenhouse**. This was the first of the three units for which planning permission had been granted. To the east of this bungalow the stone steps and eastern entrance to the greenhouse still survives, together with a small section of floor in red, white and black tiles.

The stone base of the **Boulton and Paul Orchid House** has survived to a height of about 1.3 metres above ground and the basement of the building is intact, as described in the 1907 sale catalogue. This survival is quite remarkable. The building is not shown accurately on the 1970's 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map as it was totally covered by vegetation at the time. It is only since vegetation has been cleared from the site that the building has been revealed. Within the structure a 'hypocaust' system of pillars has survived that would formerly have supported the floor of the building and allowed circulation of warm air beneath the floor. The orchid house base is L shaped and is constructed of squared greensand blocks. The entrance to the orchid house was at the southern end of the shorter wing and here the entrance steps still survive. On the southern side of the longer wing there

is a brick barrel-vaulted subterranean chamber, said to have been used for storing rainwater. (Please refer to plan of existing Orchid House footprint.)

To the south of the Orchid House are the brick foundations of garden frames, which are described in the 1907 sale catalogue and indicated on the 1907 Ordnance Survey map. The stone foundations of a small greenhouse shown on the 1862 Ordnance Survey map survive on the northern boundary of the kitchen garden, part of the foundations now supporting a small glasshouse of recent date. The foundations may be the remains of the '*lean-to Vinery*' mentioned in the 1907 sale catalogue. To the west of these foundations is a stone lean-to shed against the northern wall of the kitchen garden. This building also appears to be shown on the 1862 map and could be the '*Potting Shed*' mentioned in the 1907 catalogue. In woodland to the north of the kitchen garden is a tall rectangular stone chimney, which is marked on the 1970's Ordnance Survey map. This chimney was, no doubt, associated with the heating of the greenhouses and orchid house.

The 18th century saw fundamental changes in the aesthetics of landscape design in a turn away from the formality and enclosure of Tudor and later Dutch styles towards a more naturalistic, but, nevertheless man-made, sylvan landscape. By the late 1700's formality had been swept aside in favour of the serpentine curves, circuit walks and ornamental lakes which punctuated the great parks of England. Bridgeman's pioneering work at Stowe, which in turn influenced Brown, in fact heralded the change from the geometric layouts of the early 1700's to a more natural estate, a fundamental shift in style which would have been known to families of the standing of the Haddons. Overlying these ideas were notions of the '*Picturesque*' relating closely to the idealised landscape of rugged grandeur portrayed in the art of Gaspard, Rosa and Lorrain. In essence, given that the intellectual heart of 18th century garden design was landscape painting and the appreciation of nature – the dramatic quality of the Undercliff setting of Old Park was already irresistibly close to this ideal.

The Significance of the Isle of Wight Undercliff as a Picturesque Landscape

The Isle of Wight and the Lake District were two of the most popular destinations in the tours undertaken by the English landed gentry at a time when Continental wars precluded travel abroad and when there was a new appreciation of picturesque landscape. Within the Isle of Wight it was the Undercliff and other coastal areas that were most appreciated

by these first wealthy tourists. The scenery of the Undercliff fitted perfectly with contemporary concepts of natural beauty, with the inner cliff forming a *sublime* background to the *picturesque* wildness of the coastal strip. Even before the first tourists arrived wealthy Island residents had started to establish summer homes within the Undercliff. Steephill Cottage was built in the 1760's by Sir Hans Stanley, sometime Governor of the Isle of Wight. It appears to be one of the earliest examples of the cottage orné, although built long before the term itself was invented. Sea Cottage, later known as Marine Villa or St. Lawrence Cottage, was built in 1791 by Sir Richard Worsley, an Island landowner with a large landscape park at nearby Appuldurcombe. By this date George Arnold, a Gentleman from Northamptonshire, had acquired Mirables, setting the trend for wealthy mainlanders to establish holiday homes in the area. At Mirables George Arnold transformed a simple vernacular farmhouse into a cottage orné, as Thomas Haddon was to do at Old Park a few years later. Mirables abutted Old Park to the west and further west, beyond Mirables, was 'The Orchard' where by 1808 there was a Cottage Orné belonging to James Mackenzie and later remodelled by Sir James Willoughby Gordon. At Niton Undercliff, Puckaster Cottage was designed by Robert Lugar for James Vine before 1824 (Lugar being the architect who first coined the phrase cottage orné in his book '*Architectural Sketches for Cottages, Rural Dwellings and Villas*', published in 1805).

By the early nineteenth century there were, within the Undercliff, eight cottages ornés with associated picturesque gardens. All of these properties except Steephill Cottage survive but often the historic interest of the grounds has been affected through later changes, although Victorian and Edwardian overlays to these gardens are themselves of interest. Any surviving remains of the original *Picturesque* garden designs within these properties are, though, of special importance.

The Undercliff in Victorian Times

Tree planting and the development of secondary woodland had a dramatic impact on the landscape of the Undercliff from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Whereas paintings and engravings at the beginning of the century show the Undercliff to be largely bare of trees, photographs and paintings at the end of the century show a much more well wooded landscape, the result of ornamental plantings around the early cottages ornés but, more importantly, of ambitious Victorian planting schemes undertaken by landowners such as William Spindler.

The Importance of the House and Grounds of Old Park

As an example of a picturesque landscape within the Isle of Wight Undercliff, designed around a cottage orné, Old Park is of considerable importance. Surviving landscape features and buildings can be combined with cartographic and documentary evidence to give us a very full picture of this estate. The evolution of the estate from a simple farm into a picturesque

designed landscape and then into a Victorian model estate run on scientific principles can be clearly traced.

On the Island itself, the landscaping of Appuldurcombe by Lancelot Brown for Worsley c. 1770, made the new style immediately accessible to those in the Worsley circle, and design work on the park at Northcourt, Shorwell by the talented owner Elizabeth Bull, c. 1800, was also widely praised. It may be assumed that these idealised and beautifully composed versions of the romantic English Landscape were some influence on the design of Old Park by Haddon in the early years of the 19th century.

As the study of garden history has progressed over the last thirty five years it has become apparent that most surviving garden landscapes consist of a series of overlays representing different phases of garden design with greater or lesser degrees of survival from different periods.

At Old Park two main design phases can be identified, these being the picturesque landscape created by Thomas Haddon and the considerable Victorian modification of that landscape brought about by Sir John Cheape and by William Spindler. As a result of the house lying vacant for 42 years there has not been an overwhelming twentieth century impact on the estate although the appearance of the house has been modified by an extension of 1960's date. The main impact on the estate in the twentieth century has been a lower level of maintenance due to the

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An Assessment of the Landscape of Old Park in its Historic Context

cost of labour.

A clear picture of the landscape changes made by Thomas Haddon can be gained by comparing the 1774 Worsley survey map with the 1838/39 Whitwell Tithe Map. Whereas the 1774 map depicts a working landscape, the tithe map shows the plantation around Thomas Haddon's new house, the Serpentine lake, the walled gardens and the kitchen garden, as well as the new model farmstead and the mill. Land to the south and west of the house was laid down to pasture to provide a picturesque outlook.

By the time of the 1862 Ordnance Survey map the effects of tree planting around the house by Haddon and his successors can be clearly seen but the fields beyond this planted zone are still quite bare of trees. The impact on the landscape of the planting undertaken by William Spindler in the 1880's was dramatic and can be clearly seen on the 1907 Ordnance Survey map.

Old Park remained largely undeveloped in the twentieth century except in the north east corner of the estate where there has been low-density residential development along Hunts Road and along the eastern end of Old Park Road.

As we have seen above, the house at Old Park is one of a group of important picturesque dwellings of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century date surviving in the Isle of Wight Undercliff and Landslip area; these dwellings including St Lawrence Cottage/Marine Villa, Mirables, The Orchard, Puckaster Cottage, East

Dene and Lisle Combe. Like St Lawrence Cottage/Marine Villa and Mirables. Old Park, like Mirables, exemplifies the transition from simple farmhouse to cottage orné, with the early house being embedded in the later structure. As at Mirables, Old Park also has a significant Victorian phase of architecture.

In all of the Undercliff picturesque dwellings some of the original landscape around the house survives but at Old Park the main outline of this landscape survives in a surprisingly intact condition although individual features and plantings have disappeared or been modified over time. The ornamental dairy at Old Park has already been mentioned as a significant feature in Haddon's picturesque landscape. Other surviving features at Old Park include gatepiers, drives and tracks, rills and watercourses, the stone bridge to the west of the ornamental pool, the stone perimeter wall around the pleasure grounds with its rustic stone archway and two grander gateways constructed of ashlar blocks. More fragmentary remains that can be seen at Old Park include the ha-ha, the millponds, the site of the ruined mill and the breakwater erected on the shore by William Spindler.

In conclusion, there is no evidence that the landscaping of the grounds surrounding Old Park ever involved the services of a professional landscape designer, and no contemporary plans survive, (assuming that any were ever made). It would seem that the owners of Old Park from the very early years of the 19th century – the Haddons,

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through to the later Cheape and Spindler families simply used their own imagination in developing the estate. They then employed the skilled labour that their position and wealth allowed them, to bring their schemes to fruition. Fortunately, Cheape and Spindler essentially extended the scope of Haddon's estate; rather than radically altering the existing layout, they simply augmented previous planting and facilities, while bringing contemporary ideas to bear on the practical running of the estate in terms of water supply and management.

The result of their efforts is an inherently delightful landscape, rich in variety, influences and the nuances of history; although not extensive or grandiose, it must surely rate serious consideration as a product of its time, and of the taste of its custodians over succeeding generations.

The best preserved features at Old Park dating from the time of Thomas Haddon are the ornamental lake and the walled gardens. It is fortunate that the eastern pool has survived, unlike the second large pool to the west of the bridge, which was filled in by Sir John Cheape. Although modified in the late nineteenth century, the surviving lake is a direct link with Thomas Haddon's landscape. It is also a feature of considerable environmental value. Like all garden features the lake at Old Park requires active management to retain its intended form, together with a long-term strategy for major maintenance events such as desilting. An appropriate and beneficial use is required for the lake to ensure that it is conserved for the future.

The walled gardens at Old Park are in very good condition and the interest of these gardens is enhanced by the fact that they can confidently be attributed to the ownership of Thomas Haddon (1820-1832). The Isle of Wight has a number of surviving walled gardens (shortly to be surveyed by the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust) but very few can be dated as closely as the Old Park example. Viewed as an architectural and garden history feature, walled gardens, nationally, are under threat because of the difficulty of finding appropriate contemporary uses that conserve their structure, character and interior open space. Obviously a contemporary solution that restores the walled enclosures at Old Park largely to horticultural use is to be preferred to other less sympathetic activity. Likewise, the survival within

the kitchen gardens of the Orchid House cellar and base walls at Old Park is quite remarkable and offers a chance to conserve a feature which is a part of the Island's garden history.

The Potential for Conservation

Though retained by Robin Thornton in 1999 when the bulk of the estate, including the Old Park Hotel, was sold, the lake site, walled gardens and former kitchen garden are now likely to change hands. This change of ownership presents the potential for restoration and conservation of certain elements of the original design.

It can be argued that the most appropriate conservation strategy for the area under consideration, the lake site, would be to take the point c. 1889 where the newly completed work of Spindler at its zenith incorporated the layout of Haddon and the modifications of Cheape – that moment in time being well-documented in the Spindler archive.

The lake and surrounding planting, although linked to the larger walled garden by a door, can be seen as a discrete unit; likewise the two walled gardens are separate from each other but share a connecting door. The site of the former kitchen garden is adjacent to the smaller walled garden, but is again linked to it by a door. The kitchen garden itself contains the footprint of the former Orchid House, and also the single-storey dwelling 'Parkland', which was built in the 1960's on the footprint of the other large Boulton & Paul greenhouse.

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The Future for the Lake, Walled Gardens and former Kitchen Garden

The Lake

Although currently encumbered with remnants of its former use, the overall impression of the lake site is of a tranquil, verdant and idyllic place, made even more appealingly picturesque by virtue of the recent relative neglect of the walled gardens and lakeside planting. Strongly enclosed and enfolded by the landform of the Undercliff and its own dense planting, the lake counterpoints the formality of Old Park House itself. The site has a distinctive aesthetic quality relating to its obvious antiquity, scenic appeal and intangible factors of 'timelessness' and 'sense of place'. The visual harmony of woodland contrasted with open water; and of lush water-fed vegetation set against the spare and windswept coastal strip are important factors in contributing to the unique character of the site. No less important aesthetically is the contrast of a still discernible, but decayed, 'designed' planting, with the rugged wildness of nearby natural land forms.

The lake site today is approximately 2.5 acres, while the lake itself covers an area of one-third of an acre within it. It is fed by a number of springs piped from the spring line above, and outflows to the west into the Hotel grounds via a small stream, and thence to the sea. The sharply rising ground to the north is densely wooded, showing an interesting mix of species including Wych Elm and Black Poplar, but now dominated in some locations by sycamore due to self-seeding, particularly beside the water. Other species present include ash, beech, Holm Oak, pine and horse chestnut.

The lake itself, although desilted in the 1970's, has again become over-shallow, and is in need of careful remedial attention, with the emphasis on minimum disturbance of the important and varied wildlife habitat it presents. The lake contains substantial populations of carp, tench, rudd and perch, while the margins are home to many waterfowl including moorhens and mallard. The Spindler network of carefully constructed gravelled paths around the lake and through the surrounding woodland has been lost over time, but sufficient traces of the walkways remain to make reinstating them a viable proposition. Likewise, the base of the original lake fountain remains insitu, although the water supply has been lost, and the fountain figure and bowl lawfully removed, or stolen, at some time in the distant past.

Along the lake margins and through the associated woodland are the remains of aviaries, cages, sheds and public safety fencing dating from the use of the site as a Tropical Bird Park open to the public. Removal of these structures in their entirety would form a major part of any restoration strategy. The boundary fence of the entire lake area also has the characteristics of a zoo enclosure due to its former incarnation, and its form and state of repair would need addressing. Adjacent the walled garden, but within the lake site, is one small dwelling recently converted from the former gift shop of the Bird Park; this however is unobtrusively placed in one corner and does not detract significantly from the overall landscape value of the site.

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The Future for the Lake, Walled Gardens and former Kitchen Garden

The Walled Gardens

The two adjoining walled gardens, built by Thomas Haddon in the 1820's of coursed greensand, were originally intended as a vinery, but later became the site for the production of choice flowers, fruit and vegetables for the estate in the Cheape and Spindler eras. The larger is approximately 120' x 80', while the smaller is about 80' x 80'. The 11 ft high surrounding walls are still handsome and remarkably well preserved, although in need of some remedial pointing in places.

The original system of vine stretcher wires, pole supports and netting which kept the area bird proof is still in evidence, however the netting itself has been destroyed in places by trees growing through it. The simple path layout within the gardens shown on the 1838/9 Whitwell Tithe Map, can still be identified, although presumed to be originally of gravel, some of the paths have concrete surfacing of a recent date. The remarkable drainage and water supply system described earlier appears to remain substantially intact, with the original troughs and standpipes, gravity fed from the catchment tank above the lake, still present within the walled gardens. As with the lake site itself, the walled gardens contain within them many aviaries and cages dating from their former use.

Essentially, there is nothing to prevent the walled gardens being returned to their original horticultural use, with a pleasing and productive mix of fruit, flowers and vegetables forming a decorative 'potager'. As with the adjacent lake site,

restoration of the walled gardens would involve the removal of all traces of derelict cages and other structures currently filling their interiors. The wire support and stretcher system would need investigation, as would the drainage and water supply arrangements, with a view to any remedial work. The original paths may well be in a sufficiently good state of preservation, once recent concrete overlay has been removed, to reinstate them to their former pattern.

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Appendix 1 — Chronology of the Development of the Landscape at Old Park

- 1774** Farm of Old Park approx. 140 acres (84 acres arable, 46 acres pasture, 10 acres wood)
- 1820** Old Park purchased from Charles Anderson Pelham by Thomas Haddon.
- 1820-32** Thomas Haddon remodels farmhouse as cottage orné, constructs new farm buildings, digs two linked lakes, builds ornamental dairy and constructs seawater bathing pool/house and mill on foreshore. Haddon also builds the walled gardens for use as a vineyard.
- 1863-75** Sir John Cheape adds east wing and new entrance to house and drains lake to north of house. Lower road constructed to separate house and farm traffic.
- 1881-89** William Spindler adds west staircase to house and modernises heating and water supply system. Massive planting scheme undertaken, involving over one million trees and shrubs with numerous shelter belts. Sub-tropical planting undertaken in pleasure grounds. Construction of greenhouse and orchid house in kitchen garden. Drainage work carried out on estate. Remaining lake re-modelled.
- 1906** Death of Mrs Spindler. Estate advertised for sale but remains unsold, unoccupied and on care and maintenance basis until 1948.
- Early 20thC** Ventnor Urban Council purchases walled gardens for use as market gardens.
- 1939-45** Walled garden used as piggeries.
- 1948** Purchase of Old Park by Mr William Thornton.
- 1948-62** Development of Old Park as a hotel by Mr William Thornton.
- 1953** Walled gardens purchased by Mr William Thornton.
- 1962-99** Old Park Hotel owned and run by Mr. & Mrs. Robin Thornton.
- 1972-99** Walled gardens used as Tropical Bird Park open to public, with woodland walk around adjacent lake.
- 1998** Planning permission obtained for holiday units in walled gardens but development only partially commenced.
- 1999** Old Park hotel sold by Mr Robin Thornton to new owners, but the Lake site and walled gardens are retained. Property continues to be run as a hotel.
- 2001** Walled gardens and lake unused.

Worsley Estate Map 1774

Drives and Tracks. One track leads to Old Park Farm from west side of estate at boundary with Mirables. One tracks leads from the farmhouse northeast to the junction with the public highway (later Undercliff Drive). No track is shown connecting with Wrongs Farm.

Buildings. Two plain rectangular buildings are shown.

N.B. Neither of the two lakes nor the walled gardens are shown on this map. The mill near the shore is definitely not on this map.

Ordnance Survey Unpublished Drawings of 1793/4

Drives and Tracks. The track from Mirables is shown but not the track leading northeast to the public highway. However, the track leading eastward to Wrongs Farm is shown on this map.

Whitwell Tithe Map 1838/39 and Apportionment Book (1840's)

Drives and Tracks. An approach to the house from the west is shown as on the 1774 and 1793/4 maps, this drive leaving Undercliff Drive beside the boundary with Mirables. From the western end of the pleasure grounds this drive continues around the western and southern boundary of these grounds, then enters the grounds and approaches the house from the south. A drive or track from the east side of the estate passes close to Wrongs Farm and approaches the house between the

two arms of the ornamental lake.

Pleasure Grounds. The grounds around the house are designated 'Plantation' in the tithe apportionment book.

Water Features. A serpentine lake is shown to the north and east of the house.

Walled Gardens. These are shown, as is an area of cultivated ground to the south east of the walled gardens.

Buildings. The main house is shown in red. Farm buildings (including a stable block and barn that still survive) are shown in black to the east of the main house. The position of these farm buildings is slightly to the south east of the larger of the two rectangular building shown on the 1774 map and it seems that this rectangular building had been demolished by the time of the tithe map. *The Old Cottage* is shown on the tithe map to the north of the stable block and is marked in red.

Names. The map shows the millponds and two buildings just above the shore, one on either side of the stream. The Tithe Apportionment Book lists 'Bath's Mill and Ground'.

Ordnance Survey 25 Inch to 1 Mile (1st Edition): Surveyed 1862

Drives and Tracks. An entrance drive to the estate from the west is still shown as on the tithe map but a new track is shown leading from the entrance drive on the west side of the pleasure grounds to connect with the

track from Wrongs immediately north of a bridge over the ornamental lakes. The bridge over the lake carries an approach drive to the house, entering the pleasure grounds from the east. A drive or track is also shown running around the southern perimeter of the pleasure grounds (plantation) to the farmyard. Approach drives to the house from this perimeter track enter the pleasure grounds from the west and the south. Another track leads south from the western edge of the pleasure grounds to the mill ruins and the shore.

Pleasure Grounds. A shelter belt of deciduous trees and shrubs defines the perimeter of these grounds to the west, south and east. Within the area of lawn to the south west of the house is an oval shrubbery and a short avenue of conifers running north-south.

Trees and Woodland. A mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees are planted to the north and west of the house and around the eastern pond and to the north of the walled gardens.

Water Features. One long serpentine lake with a west-east orientation is shown immediately north of the house with another arm of the lake to the east of the bridge. Both lakes seem to be in the same position as those shown on the tithe map. Two springs are marked to the north of the house. A chain of three millponds is shown to the north of the mill and the legend *Old Mill Dam* is printed between the two northernmost ponds.

Walled Gardens and Glasshouses.

Within the walled gardens a regular layout of paths is indicated. To the east of the walled gardens further cultivated beds seem to be edged by straight paths. Two glasshouses are shown to the north of these cultivated beds.

Buildings. A structure marked *Mill (Ruin)* is shown at the shore edge south of the millponds. A small building thought to be the dairy is shown to the east of the main house.

Ordnance Survey 25 Inch to 1 Mile: Surveyed 1907

Drives and Tracks. The original route from Wrongs, on the eastern side of the estate, has been replaced by a road on a slightly modified alignment connecting Old Park with Undercliff Drive and Woolverton Road. A new lower road leading from the farm buildings connects with the newly aligned eastern exit route from the estate, the two roads converging on the eastern side of *Charles Wood*. A new road is shown dotted in as if just laid out, diverging from Undercliff Drive and running to the south of it. (This road was later named Hunts Road.) Various new subsidiary estate roads and tracks are shown on the 1907 survey. Within the plantations to the west of the pleasure grounds a new serpentine drive running north south has been created. The original western entrance drive is still shown on this map but has been slightly re-routed at its western end because of coastal slumping.

Pleasure Grounds. These are more or less as shown on the 1862

survey with the coniferous avenue still depicted. A watercourse is shown running from the north west of the house to the southwestern corner of the pleasure grounds, where sluices are indicated.

Trees and Woodland. There is a marked change between the woodland planting shown on the 1862 survey and that shown on the 1907 survey. By the time of the 1862 survey a substantial amount of amenity planting had softened the environs of Old Park, which were treeless and windswept at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This planting had taken place in the pleasure grounds around the house, to the west and north of the house, and to the north of the walled gardens. In 1863 Brannon commented that the house at Old Park is '*hidden by the dense foliage by which it is surrounded*' although in the 1830's he had mentioned the immaturity of the plantings. The 1907 survey, however, shows much more intensive planting to the north and west of the house, covering the rocky, scrub covered outcrops shown on the 1862 survey. Much of this new planting seems to have been of coniferous species. In addition to general amenity planting, the 1907 survey shows numerous narrow rectangular windbreaks, all running north-south and containing a mixture of coniferous and deciduous trees. These windbreaks are planted both to the north and south of Undercliff Drive. An entirely new wood named *Charles Wood* has been planted since the 1862 survey. Another new area of tree planting is the *South Avenue* running across a field south of the

pleasure grounds towards the sea but stopping in the middle of the field, well short of the cliff.

Water Features. The lake to the north of the house is not shown on the 1907 survey, having been filled in by this time, but the eastern lake is shown and is labelled *fish pond*.

Walled Gardens and Glasshouses. The paths inside and to the east of the walled gardens are not shown on the 1907 map. Two large glasshouses are shown south of the two smaller glasshouses also shown on the 1862 survey. Smaller glazed structures shown to the south of the large glasshouses can also be seen on a photograph dating from the 1880's and are described in the 1906 sale catalogue as forcing and cold pits.

Buildings and Structures. The east wing of the main house, constructed by Sir John Cheape, is shown on this map. The dairy is shown in its new position to the north of the main house. A seawall and breakwaters are shown in Binnel Bay.

Ordnance Survey 25 Inch to 1 Mile: Surveyed 1939.

Drives and Tracks. The western end of the original western approach drive to Old Park is not shown, having been destroyed by coastal slumping by the time of the 1939 survey. Old Park could now be approached from Undercliff Drive only to the east of the house.

Trees and Woodland. *The South Avenue* is not shown on the 1939

6 Appendix 2 — Analysis of Map/Survey Book Evidence

map, nor is the smaller coniferous avenue within the pleasure grounds.

Walled Gardens and Glasshouses.

Shown as on 1907 map except that one set of frames has gone.

Ordnance Survey 1:2500: Surveyed 1970's

Water Features. Two fountains are indicated to the north of the house, one to the east and one within the lake. A channelled watercourse is clearly indicated running from the north west of the house to the south west corner of the pleasure grounds.

Walled Gardens and Glasshouses.

The larger walled garden is labelled *Aviary*. A dwelling named *Parkland* is shown on the site of the main glasshouse but the outline of the adjacent orchid house is still shown.

Buildings. A modern extension wing is shown to the east of the main house which is labelled *Old Park Hotel*.

Manuscript and Map Sources

Worsley Account Books. IW County Record Office JER/WA/33/6

A Plan of the Manor of St Lawrence with Old Park and Wrong in the Parish of Whitwell in the Isle of Wight belonging to Sir Rich. Worsley Bart. Taken Aug 29: 1774 by William Watts, Surveyor. IW County Record Office JER/WA/33/46

Survey Book to accompany above plan. IW County Record Office JER/WA/33/36

A Plan of the Parish of Whitwell in the Isle of Wight surveyed in 1838 & 39 by E. Smith & Son.
(Tithe Map) IW County Record Office JER/T/358

Tithe Apportionment Book to accompany above plan. IW County Record Office JER/T/357

The Old Park Estate. Sale Catalogue dated October 11th, 1906. Solicitors: Messrs James Eldridge & Sons. Auctioneers: Francis Pittis & Son. (Collection of Robin Thornton.)

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Record numbers 3426, 3427, 12220, 12221, 12222.

Ordnance Survey Maps

Unpublished Ordnance Survey of the Isle of Wight: Scale 6" to 1 mile. 1793/4 (Photostat Copy IW County Record Office.)

Ordnance Survey 25" to 1 mile 1st Edition surveyed 1862.

Ordnance Survey 25" to 1 mile 3rd Revision surveyed 1907

Ordnance Survey 25" to 1 mile 4th Revision surveyed 1939

Ordnance Survey 1:2500 surveyed 1970's.

(Maps: Reproduced with permission of Ordnance Survey)

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