**Appuldurcombe: A Virtual Tour**

The Study Day started with a short visit to Appuldurcombe but there was time only to visit the house and inner park before we adjourned to Ventnor Botanic Gardens where our speakers gave their presentations. However, one of the study day talks, given by Vicky Basford, enabled delegates to experience a virtual tour around the entire circuit of the Appuldurcombe deer park, using slides taken by Vicky and by John Brownscombe.

Appuldurcombe is the only landscape park on the Island where Capability Brown contributed to the design. The tour concentrated on the late 18th century designed landscape and on early 19th century modifications by the Yarborough family. From about 1772 Sir Richard Worsley, newly returned from the Grand Tour, extended and refurbished the early 18th century Appuldurcombe House and started to transform the surrounding landscape which already contained an ornamental garden and parkland. Before 1779 he had constructed a monumental gateway (The Freemantle Gate), set up an obelisk on Appuldurcombe Down in memory of his ancestor Sir Robert Worsley and built a mock ruin called Cook’s Castle. Capability Brown visited Appuldurcombe in 1779. Following this visit an existing survey map of the Appuldurcombe estate made by William Watts in 1773 appears to have been annotated to show landscape features proposed by Capability Brown (although Steffie Shields has speculated that Brown may have made landscape suggestions before his 1779 visit). Brown’s proposals seem to have included extending the area of the deer park and enclosing it with a new wall, remodelling drives and earth forms within the park, additional tree planting and a narrow water feature.

Our imaginary tour did not follow the route of the carriage drive tour through the park planned by Sir Richard Worsley and Capability Brown. This carriage drive approached from Godshill and entered Appuldurcombe Park through the imposing Freemantle Gate at the northern edge of the park before following a serpentine course to the house and then climbing the down behind the house to the summit containing the obelisk. The virtual tour took a different route, following the course of the walk led by Vicky Basford on behalf of the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust during the Walking Festival in May. Our tour started at the eastern side of the former deer park where the present tarmac drive to Appuldurcombe House commences. From this point we headed in a north-westerly direction along Right of Way Godshill 44 to the Freemantle Gate. Much of this right of way (except at its south-east end) follows the route of the late 18th century carriage drive. To the right of the path the land rises steeply, possibly as a result of earth-moving designed to remodel the landscape. Along this path St Martin’s Down can be observed more than 1 kilometre to the east. St Martin’s Down formed part of Sir Richard Worsley’s extensive farm estate surrounding Appuldurcombe Park and on the lower slopes he built the folly of Cook’s Castle. This folly (demolished in the 20th century) would have formed a very distinctive eyecatcher – allowing visitors to appreciate the contribution of the wider landscape to the design of Appuldurcombe Park.

As the path approaches the Freemantle Gate walkers can appreciate the splendour of this classical ‘triumphal arch’. When built it would have formed a very clear statement about the wealth, importance and taste of Sir Richard Worsley. The Freemantle Gate has been attributed to the architect James Wyatt although this attribution is uncertain. Passing through one of the two pedestrian gates on either side of the main carriage entrance the route turns to the south-west along Right of Way Godshill 49 to follow the outside edge of the deer park wall along the northern edge of the park. At this point the wall appears to be on the same line as the boundary that existed before Capability Brown’s expansion of the park although the wall itself may have been rebuilt. The entire circuit of the deer park wall covers a long distance yet if building commenced after Brown’s visit in 1779 it must surely have been completed within a very few years since Sir Richard Worsley left England following his disastrous divorce in 1782 and one cannot imagine much work being carried out at Appuldurcombe after this date. The circumstances regarding the construction of the deer park wall and its relationship with the earlier park wall is just one of a number of unresolved research questions at Appuldurcombe.

Along the northern side of the deer park wall can be seen several muses – small holes at the base of the wall used to drive hares through the wall for hunting. It is not known whether these muses are connected with Appuldurcombe Park itself or with Godshill Park to the north. Godshill Park appears to have been created by the Worsley family, possibly in the late 17th or early 18th century. Also along the northern side of the wall walkers can see the village of Godshill with its medieval church tower and appreciate how the village formed an important focus of views out from the park on its north side.

Halfway along the course of the northern park wall walkers can cross back into the park and take a short but steep detour following Right of Way Godshill 63 to ascend Appuldurcombe Down and view the Obelisk. This Cornish granite stepped column was erected by Sir Richard Worsley in 1774 in memory of his ancestor Sir Robert Worsley (builder of Appuldurcombe House) and is a typical 18th century statement of ownership and status. The obelisk was damaged by lightening in 1831 and was partly restored in 1983. From the obelisk a panoramic view stretches from the western to the eastern tip of the Island and extends to the Dorset coast and the Solent shore of the mainland including the New Forest and Portsmouth. The landscape design of Appuldurcombe took full advantage of this grand vista which was accessed by means of the serpentine carriage drive which climbed from the house to the obelisk. The site of Cook’s Castle can be clearly seen, as can Appuldurcombe Wood – an area of ancient woodland which lay within the park. Today the view from the obelisk includes the Yarborough Monument at the east end of the Island. Erected in 1849, this monument honoured Charles Anderson Pelham, 1st Earl of Yarborough and First Commodore of the Royal Yacht Squadron who inherited Appuldurcombe through marriage to Sir Richard Worsley’s niece in 1806. The monument was originally built on the highest point of Bembridge Down but was moved eastward to Culver Down in the 1860s when a fort was built on Bembridge Down.

After descending to the base of the down the route continues along the north wall of the deer park. Just inside the park can be seen the steep slopes of Gat Cliff, a natural Greensand outcrop which was quarried in the medieval and post-medieval periods.

At the north-west corner of the deer park the route makes a 90 degree turn to the south and follows Rights of Way Godshill 49 and Godshill 51 which run along the western wall of the deer park on its outer side. The western side of Appuldurcombe Park was extended to the west in line with Capability Brown’s proposals. Earlier in the 18th century the deer park wall had run along the crest of Appuldurcombe Down, as shown on John Andrews map (1st edition 1769 and 2nd edition 1775). Moving the wall further west to the foot of Appuldurcombe Down appears to have been an integral part of Brown’s design, allowing unobstructed views to and from the ridge.

Along the western side of the deer park wall walkers can observe two blocked entrances into the park, one of which which does not appear to have been recorded in the 2005 Conservation Plan by Philip Masters.

Along Right of Way Godshill 51 the route climbs fairly steeply in places, passing an old quarry, before flattening out where the deer park wall abuts large fields. At this point there are excellent views towards the western end of the Island including Tennyson Down. After a short distance the right of way passes through a gate onto a wider track. At this point the deer park wall terminates although Right of Way Godshill 51 continues along the track, briefly following the former edge of the late 18th century park as extended to the design of Capability Brown. The walk then turns 90 degrees to the west to follow Right of Way Godshill 50 which runs outside the southern boundary of the park in an easterly direction. After a while this path joins a concrete track (Right of Way Godshill 48) which descends steeply to Rew Lane opposite the site of Great Span Farm. The route follows Rew Lane northward for a short distance before re-entering Appuldurcombe Park at its southern edge beside Span Lodge. This lodge of gothic design (currently unlisted) was built by the Yarborough family in the early 19th century and the doorway incorporates heraldic motifs.

From Span Lodge the tour proceeds northward through the former park along Right of Way Godshill 47. Approximately 300 metres to the east of the path a ‘reverse ha-ha’ (which still survives) prevented deer and other livestock from entering an area of land further to the east where a narrow water feature is shown as an annotation on the 1773 map by William Watts. This feature along the line of a stream appears to have been proposed by Capability Brown and would have visible from the upper floors of Appuldurcombe House. It has been identified on air photographs but existed for only a very short period.

Continuing northward, views of Appuldurcombe Wood and the Obelisk on Appuldurcombe Down can be seen to the west before the path passes the eastern side of the inner park. In the late 18th century there were no enclosed grounds surrounding Appuldurcombe House as the current fashion was for parkland which swept right up to the main house. In the early 19th century it once again became fashionable for landscape designs to include a separate area of enclosed garden around the house. The inner park surrounding Appuldurcombe house was laid out by the Yarborough family, almost certainly in the 1820s. It is bounded by railings along the east side but a ha-ha demarcates the south side of the inner park and part of the west side. It is possible that there was a ha-ha in this position in the late 18th century.

From the junction with Right of Way Godshill 45 there is a fine view of Appuldurcombe House. Walkers have the option to continue along Right of Way Godshill 47 and enter the inner park from its northern end (free entrance to Appuldurcombe House and inner park - in the care of English Heritage and open from May until September). However, the virtual tour now takes Right of Way Godshill 45, heading in a north-easterly direction towards the eastern side of the park where the tour began. At the end of this short section we pass out of the park into Appuldurcombe Road where Old Church Lodge stands beside the entrance to the park This lodge is an early 19th century building in gothic style constructed by the Yarborough family. A short distance to the east the walls of Appuldurcombe’s walled kitchen garden can be observed on the north side of the road. The walled kitchen garden (now a holiday park) is first shown as an annotation on the map by William Watts and appears to have constructed in this position following the proposals of Capability Brown. There is evidence that a walled garden existed closer to the house in the early 18th century but Brown and other landscape designers of the later 18th century removed kitchen gardens to positions some distance from the main house so that they did not intrude on views of the landscape park.

The virtual tour concludes beside the walled kitchen garden but the Study Day audience - unlike participants in the 5 mile walk which formed part of the Walking Festival – did not have to retrace their steps westward along the tarmac drive to the car park near Appuldurcombe House!

Having taken the virtual tour, why not experience this walk for real. The route can be checked on rights of way maps available on the Isle of Wight Council website. Don’t forget to wear strong shoes or boots and take some refreshements.