Clifftown Conservation Area

Clifftown's Special Interest

The Conservation Area has five distinct sections. Each has its own particular character which together provide Clifftown's unique quality.

Georgian New South End

1-15 Royal Terrace and the Royal Hotel were built in the 1790's to be the nucleus of New South End, a fashionable seaside resort to rival Margate, Brighton and Weymouth. The Shrubbery fronting the houses was laid out as a private garden for residents and Royal Mews to the rear were their stables. The Terrace was named "Royal" following visits by Princess Caroline and for a short time attracted some of the fashionable society. But difficult access from London by road and river and other factors discouraged further development until construction of the railway in 1856. It was, therefore, the only Georgian terrace to be built in Southend.

The separation of Royal Terrace from Clifton Terrace reflects the original estate boundary and the exclusiveness of the Georgian development.

Cliff Town - A Planned Estate

The London-Tilbury-Southend railway was completed in 1856 and provided the impetus for the next major step in the town’s development. The railway developer leased 40 acres from Daniel Scratton for housing development between the new railway and the cliff top to be known as Cliff Town. This area extended from Royal Terrace westwards to Wilson Road and forms the remainder of the Conservation Area.

Scratton imposed strict design controls on the first phase of development which resulted in a unique example of mid-Victorian estate planning. Designed by Banks and Barry and built between 1859-1861, the estate provided five classes of terraced housing, including shops, with unified designs and materials. Its layout around open spaces, gardens and carefully aligned streets enabled estuary views from every house and many public parts of the estate. Despite later infill development and tree planting, these views remain an important component of the estate’s character.

The different classes of terrace have design variations, reflecting their status and position in the estate, but within a common design theme. Some are three storey plus basement; others are two storey plus basement. Most have canted bays and balconies. The estate, however, has a remarkable degree of design unity.

1-15 Nelson Street was designed as the estate’s terrace of shops. It echoes the residential terraces with its similar materials, detailing and ironwork but is given greater design emphasis in its detailing.

Clifftown Church is an important focal point for the estate with a typical gothic design and materials for a mid-Victorian non-conformist church.

Clifton Terrace, built to a different design shortly after the main estate, shows the importance of the cliff-top position with more imposing detailing. The wide roadway fronting the terrace provided a
turning circle for horse-drawn vehicles stopped from entering Royal Terrace. Its original stabling remains in Clifton Mews to the rear.

Cliff Town - Second Phase

The second phase of the Cliff Town Estate to the west of Prittlewell Square lacked the previous design control. The area was subdivided for piecemeal development on a grid street layout. A variety of Victorian and Edwardian residential architecture resulted which contrasts with the coherence of the planned estate.

The larger plots to Clifftown Parade originally extended to Alexandra Road. Buildings reflect their prime cliff-top position with relatively large detached and semi-detached houses, mostly finished by 1871. Their varied balcony and bay designs give a lively frontage to the promenade and contribute to its attractive seaside character.

Cliff Gardens & Promenade

As the resort began to grow in the late 19th century, the Gardens and promenade were laid out to provide recreational facilities for visitors and residents.

With its broad promenade, grass, planted open spaces and trees, this section has a relaxed character as part of the resort and is important in providing the setting for much of the Conservation Area. War Memorial by Lutyens.

Pier Hill Area

The overriding component of the townscape is the topography of the hill slope which acts as the resort’s hub connecting Old and New South End, the High Street and the Pier, and provides extensive views into and out of the area. This areas two major buildings (the Palace Hotel and the Pier Hill Lift) show contrasting landmark seaside architectural styles at the start of the 20th and 21st centuries.