

ACCESS STATEMENT FOR PAINSWICK ROCOCO GARDEN TRUST

HISTORY

Painswick Rococo Garden is a 6 acre garden originally created in the 1740's in a hidden valley behind Painswick House. By the 1970's the garden had been totally abandoned and was covered in an un-maintained woodland. Since 1984 it has been subject to a major restoration plan to return it to its former glory as depicted in 1748 by local artist Thomas Robins.

Historically the Garden is extremely important being the only complete survivor from the brief period of Rococo Garden design. This period was characterised by the move towards the more natural design although depicted in a contrived manner. The gardens were flamboyant and reliant on the sense of place. Buildings were designed as eyecatchers at the end of unadulterated vistas and their settings were of as much importance as the structure itself. The essence of the garden was as place for the 'visitor' to relax and soak up the atmosphere detached from the realities of 18th century life. This detachment is as relevant in 21st century as it was in the 18th century.

OWNERSHIP

The Garden is operated by the Painswick Rococo Garden Trust. This Trust has a long lease over the area that is the historic Garden as well as two wooded sections increasing the whole to around 10 acres. The freehold is still in the hands of the original family, the House itself is now in quite separate ownership and totally unrelated.

The Trust as part of the lease agreement has shared use of the Car park area and a right of way by foot only from the car park to the Garden entrance. The landlord reserves the right to close off this pedestrian access and provide an alternative by no longer a path.

The shop and restaurant are under separate ownership and the Trust has no control of these facilities, although it liaises closely with respect to access.

THE TRUST AIMS

Painswick Rococo Garden Trust was first established in 1988 with the aim "to promote for the benefit of the public the preservation, maintenance and improvement of the Painswick Rococo Garden and any structures or buildings contained therein as a place of historic and ecological interest and beauty, and to advance the education of the public into the history of the Painswick Rococo Garden and natural history and into horticulture and other related fields".

BACKGROUND

The Trust aims to return existing features to their original design and setting. Whilst a faithful and historically correct restoration of the Garden is of paramount importance and indeed a requirement from bodies such as English Heritage and the Garden History Society, the Trustees are mindful of their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and are keen to make the Garden accessible to all wherever practically feasible.

CURRENT ACCESS SITUATION AND FUTURE PROPOSALS

The most obvious constraint to vastly improved disabled access is the topography of the Garden. It is situated in a small and steeply sided valley, and it is this topography that creates the character of 'A Secret Garden', with much of the Garden's appeal and special qualities relate to the drama created by this topography. In a faithful restoration of the Garden, a feeling of designed 'wilderness' will be maintained in some areas which has an effect, potentially, on the design of paths, steps, handrails, etc and limiting the use of signage. The Trustees' aim is to ensure that any future restoration work will be carried out in such a way as to enhance, wherever possible, all forms of access balanced with an accurate restoration of the Garden.

PRE-VISIT INFORMATION

Due to the physical constraints of the Garden all information published in guides, highlights the accessibility problems. Our own leaflet and website suggests that disabled visitors phone prior to making a visit to discuss the potential problems. The Trust has not taken the step of discouraging wheelchair users as we know from experience that many disabled visitors wish to visit and enjoy their visits even within the existing constraints. The Trust has considered the purchase of an electric buggy but feel that there would be serious Health and Safety issues to loaning a machine to an inexperienced user due to the terrain involved.

CAR PARKING

Currently two spaces are designated for blue badge holders in the general visitor car park. Disabled parking is not available nearer to the entrance as the Trust does not control the relevant areas and the drive is required for emergency access. However disabled passengers can be dropped off and collected by the restaurant if required, although this opportunity is not openly advertised as more intensive use and indeed abuse would lead to safety issues with pedestrians using the same access.

Whilst the main drive from the car park is loosely gravelled a central paved spine has been made from the car park to the entrance to the Garden.

INTERPRETATION & SIGNAGE

The Education Centre provides a permanent display of information on the history and restoration of the Garden. The converted Old Toolshed/Bothy building and adjoining terrace includes improved access arrangements, and it, like the Education Centre is accessible for all disabled visitors. This houses an Autumnal Harvest Festival and also a looped video of the Garden is screened here.

Signage in the Garden is kept to a minimum as historically the Garden was a relaxed pleasure ground, with the setting of buildings and structures being as important as the actual feature itself. Where signs are provided the style and size are set at a maximum for clarity without being intrusive.

Guides and brochures are available for purchase, along with French and German translations of the route around.

PATHS

Major paths in the Garden are hoggin, which once established usually create a packed and solid surface. The nature of the material can however lead to a fine layer of loose gravel on the surface. It has the advantage of reducing the build up of moss and lichen as many of these paths have overhanging trees. This traditional and historically approved material, if properly and regularly maintained, provides a well compacted surface with good gripping qualities.

Historically hand rails did not feature in this designed landscape, they are now provided on steep sections of paths wherever they can blend in with the landscape.

CIRCULATION ROUTES.

The majority of the paths in the Garden follow their original layout and are narrower than might be considered ideal for modern use. Visitors are recommended to walk the Garden on a prescribed route as described in the guide and brochure thereby minimising two way traffic. This one way route is not ideal for disabled as it results in a final steep climb at the end of a visit. For those with limited mobility it is recommended they back track before reaching this last climb. All disabled visitors are advised on arrival by admission staff of suitable routes based on individual abilities and are given a guide to highlight problem areas.

Our Conservation Plan proposes the restoration of a disused former path with an added new section incorporating steps and a chair lift to vastly improve disabled circulatory access. This new path would be heavily landscaped to be hidden from the main garden. However this is a very expensive project and an initial application was not supported by either English Heritage or Stroud District Planners.

KITCHEN GARDEN

Originally paths in this part of the Garden would have been of a very temporary nature, possibly sand. This would have allowed for changes of the path structure on an annual basis to ease crop rotation. The Trust have decided to keep the path layout as shown in the original painting and they have been laid out to turf. Access to the Kitchen Garden is allowed, one side one week and then one week the other to allow for a more tactile appreciation of this part of the Garden for the visually impaired.

TRAINING

The Trust has a policy of regular training for staff and volunteers in disability awareness thus facilitating the maximum enjoyment of the Garden by disabled groups and individuals.

PAUL MOIR

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