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REGISTER ENTRY

PENARTH, ITALIAN GARDENS

Ref number	PWG (Gm) 35 (GLA)
OS Map	171
Grid ref	ST 188 712
Former county	South Glamorgan
Unitary authority	The Vale of Glamorgan
Community council	Penarth
Designations	Conservation Area: Penarth
Site evaluation	Grade II

Primary reasons for grading Despite modern additions a well preserved Edwardian-style public urban garden in a fine setting on the sea front. The garden was designed principally as a rock garden and retains its original layout and structural planting.

Type of site Urban public garden

Main phases of construction 1926

Site description

The Italian Gardens occupy a narrow strip of land on the landward side of the Esplanade in central Penarth. The Esplanade Shelter and pier lie just to the north. The garden, which is open to the public, lies on gently sloping ground that has been levelled into two terraces. Above, the ground rises steeply to Windsor Gardens at the top of the cliff.

The garden flanks the pavement on the west side of the Esplanade, and there are two pedestrian entrances, without gates, in the centre and at the south end. The central entrance is flanked by modern stone and concrete piers, with modern steps leading into the garden. The southern entrance is flanked by low modern stone and concrete piers, with a modern curving sloping path, flanked by low walls of similar construction, leading into the garden. A modern wishing well is built against the north wall flanking the path. The garden is bounded by undulating iron railings, painted aquamarine blue, erected in 1994. These replaced the original railings which were removed during the 2nd World War.

Immediately inside the garden is a sloping flowerbed used for bedding displays. Cordylines (*Cordyline australis*) are planted at intervals in the bed and are a feature of the garden and at the north end is a Chusan palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei*). At the upper end of the bed is the first terrace. This is laid with a walk of varying width running the full length of the garden. The walk, of tarmac, is bounded by the curving rockwork edges of the flowerbeds on either side. The rockwork in the garden is lias limestone. The bed on the upper side is also used for bedding displays and cordylines. In the centre is a wide flight of splayed stone steps leading to the upper terrace. These are flanked by two large Irish yews. A plaque below records the visit of the Princess of Wales on 3rd October 1991 to mark the refurbishment of the garden in 1989-90. Four cast iron and wooden benches are set on the terrace. At the north and south ends flights of stone steps lead to the upper terrace.

The upper terrace is a long straight walk of random paving stones. On the east it is backed by a roughly coursed dry-stone wall, above which is a steep, overgrown slope. Although this is not part of the garden some cordylines are planted just above the wall. At the south end, which is bounded by a brick wall, there is a small rockery bed. Modern concrete and artificial stone planters stand on the low piers flanking the steps and on low piers at intervals along the top of the parapet wall on the lower side of the terrace. Four benches similar to those on the lower terrace are set against the revetment wall. The terrace has a semi-circular projection in the middle, at the top of the steps, with a sundial base in the centre. At the north end is a corner raised bed edged with rockwork. The terrace continues along the north side of the garden, leading to a platform with a low parapet wall and bench. From the platform there is a fine view out to sea. Steps lead down to the lower terrace and a brick pergola, with a concrete top, leads from the terrace through to the Esplanade Shelter, which was built in 1885.

This public garden was laid out and opened in 1926. Until then the land had been used for boathouses. The initiative to develop the gardens came from Mrs Constance Maillard, of the Urban District Council, who consulted Ursula Thompson, the first woman to graduate from Kew Gardens. Mrs Maillard instigated a design for the garden by Wilfred Evans, who had made a rock garden at Llanishen. This design survives more or less intact. There were urns on the edge of the terrace and there were originally elaborate railings along the lower boundary. Palms were a feature from the beginning and the garden was always intended as a rock garden. Early photographs of the 1930s and 1950s show the layout of the garden to be unchanged since then, with the exception of the additions at the south end and the modern entrances and railings. The structural planting, too, remains very similar, with cordylines and Chusan palms. The original Irish yews in the centre remain. The early, varied planting of rock plants was changed to bedding in the 1950s.

Sources

Primary

'Plan of Lord Plymouth's estates in Penarth, Llandough, Cogan and Lavernock, 1768'. Glamorgan Record Office: D/D Pl 6.

Map of Windsor land in Penarth, 1820-40. Glamorgan Record Office: D/D Pl 7/3536.

Secondary

Postcards from the 1930s and 1950s.

Burrow, E.J., *A guide to Penarth* (Borough Guides no. 163, nd).

Moore, P., 'Penarth', in *South Glamorgan: a county history* (1975), pp. 116-38.

Hilling, J.B., 'The buildings of Llandaff, Penarth and outer Cardiff: an historical survey', *Glamorgan Historian* 17, pp 102-47.

Thomas, B. A., *Penarth the garden by the sea* (1997).