

NEW FOREST
NATIONAL PARK

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

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Architecture and Historic Buildings



Palace House, Beaulieu

Architectural History

The architectural history of the New Forest reflects the locally available materials, such as the ready supply of timber, earth and gravel.

The absence of building stone, chalk and even sizeable flint stone within the National Park area has controlled the amount of development and influenced building techniques and architecture. Only with the development of the tile and brick industries from about the late 15th century onwards was it possible for the materials and design of buildings to change.

This factsheet examines the local architecture that has evolved through time and the challenges that lay ahead.

Introduction

The earliest surviving buildings, which are still standing, are the stone fragments of the former royal hunting lodges located deep in the Forest, such as Ironhill. Many village churches have medieval origins and Breamore church is substantially Saxon in origin. Some buildings around Beaulieu used limestone taken from monastic buildings demolished after their dissolution in the 1530s. This stone was also used in the construction of Hurst and Calshot Castles.

Social History

Because of the way the central part of the New Forest landscape was managed under Forest Law in the medieval period, there was no need for small farmhouses or yeoman cottages except in the larger villages. This changed when some areas became enclosed and ceased to be common land or woodland. This environmental and social history based on commoning, ensured the poverty of the local population and the humble nature of the domestic buildings that have survived.



Thatching the Old Farmhouse Tearooms at Burley

Growth

Within the historic enclosed areas of the National Park manor and gentry houses existed and central areas of the Forest became increasingly popular from the 18th century with wealthy landowners influencing the design and location of their houses. Slightly less affluent people also moved in to the Forest in the later 19th and 20th centuries, with easier transport, communications and greater leisure time.



The remains of St Leonards Grange, a huge Tithe barn reputed to have been one of the largest in the country

Everyday historic forest buildings

Almost all the earliest and simplest 'everyday' buildings are little cob cottages with thatched roofs, a building type described by English Heritage as a hovel.

Cob Cottages

Cob is, quite simply, earth used as a building material for thick walls that turn rock hard for as long as they are kept dry. Clay and its aggregate contents are puddled together on the ground with water, and various sorts of binding materials (straw, cow dung etc) are added. The resulting glutinous mix is used to raise the height of the walls one 'lift' at a time, the next lift being added only when the material in the earlier lift has hardened sufficiently.

Roof Structures

Roof structures were primitive, using timber and pole rafters obtained from the forest. Windows were small and few.



Traditional cob cottage

Foundations

Foundations - if there were any! - were shallow and inadequate, and prone to getting waterlogged.

Community help

Cob buildings were built with community effort, and were not expected to last for ever. The material could be broken down and reconstituted for use in a new building. How strange then that many are now listed, and that so much effort goes into preserving them indefinitely!

Outbuildings

Outbuildings might also be cob and were often small, because the scale of activity by commoners on the Forest required only seasonal shelter for relatively few animals.



The larger settlements

Lyndhurst

Lyndhurst has always been the Forest's centre, as the Queen's (or at times King's) House was the monarch's base in the middle of their royal hunting forest. The village expanded to serve the travelling royal court, and the 18th century smaller buildings in the High Street replaced even earlier houses. The village is really a tiny town, with an urban quality to the built-up frontages and the shaping of space in the main street. Queen's House contains medieval and Tudor material, but what is now seen is from the 1600s, though much altered and restored. The late 19th century saw taller and more prestigious buildings built, exploiting the popularity Lyndhurst had come to enjoy.



Example of thatched cottage, Lyndhurst

Other key settlements

Brockenhurst and Beaulieu are other significant centres. Beaulieu's densely packed but very small High Street contains mellow and quite sophisticated 17th and 18th century houses, testament to the Estate's longstanding prosperity. Brockenhurst still retains its village feel despite some 20th century expansion in its centre.

The later 20th century brought rural suburbia into many places - Sway, Cadnam and Ashurst are examples - and it is a planning challenge to halt the increasing suburbanisation of these larger villages.



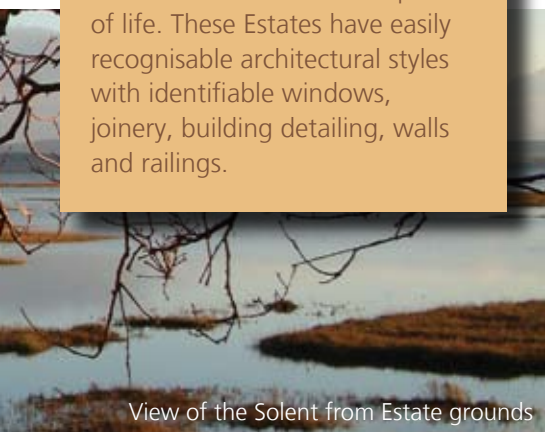


Landed estates

The 18th century saw important and prosperous families buying land and siting a suitably grand house on their new estate. Beaulieu is the oldest estate, transferring into secular control in 1540 after the dissolution of the monasteries. The other ancient estate is Newhouse (1619) near Redlynch, with one family line of inheritance from 1633 to the present. Starting in 1720 with Hinton Admiral, the 18th Century saw the building of Pylewell, Exbury and, further north, Hale, Warrens (at Bramshaw) and Hamptworth Estates.

Coastal Fringe

All the land behind the Solent shore up to the edge of the open forest, and between Lymington River and Calshot Spit, came under the control of estates with contiguous boundaries. This affected, not only the landscape, but also the buildings, with estate cottages, superior, well-organised farmbuilding groups, and maybe schools or other community buildings reflecting estate control over most aspects of life. These Estates have easily recognisable architectural styles with identifiable windows, joinery, building detailing, walls and railings.



View of the Solent from Estate grounds

Fashionable growth in the late 19th century

From about the 1850s onwards wealthy gentlemen started buying land in the central villages of the Forest, and building country residences, sited within landscaped grounds resembling miniature parklands. This pattern had started near Lyndhurst in the 18th century with country houses by major architectural 'names' like Sir John Soane and John Nash. Other popular villages included Brockenhurst, Burley, Minstead and Boldre. It was the distance from the new railway lines that made a place fashionable, as exclusivity was maintained if crowds found places hard to reach.

Church Architecture

Well-known and very influential national architects gained commissions to design local churches for growing populations, such as Butterfield at Emery Down, Romaine-Walker at Brockenhurst, and the exuberant and colourful parish church in Lyndhurst by William White (1860s).

Popular expansion in the early 20th century

Red Brick Villas

Elsewhere in the Forest, and especially in the north-east area near Southampton, smaller red-brick villas appeared in great numbers. The growing wealth amongst the middle class enabled them to have the freedom to move out of towns and live in the more healthy countryside. These villas are the traditional and simple houses such as a child might draw, although many have been altered or extended in damaging ways. Several near the open forest still operate as the centre of a commoner's way of life.



Shack built of makeshift materials

Shacks

Another building type with a longer history is the cabin or shack, built of makeshift materials, the best of which are charming and evocative. Several villages were first settled by squatters (i.e. Woodgreen), and that original flavour is still there in areas such as Blissford and Bull Hill at Pilley, where these timber or corrugated iron constructions remain.



Early bungalow

Bungalows

The earliest bungalows derive from the shacks but the Anglo-Indian colonial influence is also strong- in fact the word 'bungalow' is from the Hindi for 'belonging to Bengal'. Great variety is evident in many areas, but mostly nearer the eastern and northern edges of the Park.

Development since 1945 and the challenge ahead

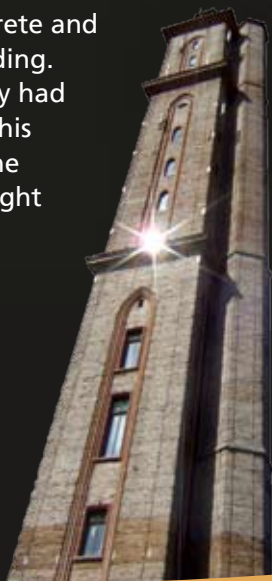
The post-War building boom added nothing to the stock of buildings that typify the New Forest. Only recently have some designers started to reconnect with styles and forms of building with a clear regional identity in their new buildings. There is pressure for ever larger buildings, in response to changing lifestyles and increasing aspirations, particularly around the edge of the open forest. There is also pressure to cram buildings onto ever smaller plots in the larger villages, which presents a challenge to make living environments look attractive and feel 'liveable'.

The Park Authority must offer guidance on the design of buildings to allow architecture to show in its new buildings that it understands the context provided by the long tradition of building up to World War 2. Nonetheless new buildings should also be recognisably of their day, and not just straight copies of what has been done before.

Sway Tower

Sway Tower is a landmark in the National Park that was built as a folly. The 66m (218ft) high tower was built in 1879 by Andrew Peterson, a retired Indian Judge, as a monument to himself. Indeed it is sometimes referred to as Peterson's folly.

The tower is made from un-reinforced concrete and is now a listed building. The tower originally had a light on top but this confused ships in the Solent as they thought it was a light house. The light was subsequently removed and the tower is now a used as a private house.



left: Sway Tower

above: View to the sea (The Needles, Isle of Wight) from Sway Tower

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Further reading/ useful information

Other New Forest National Park Authority fact files

Forestry Commission fact files

www.newforestcentre.org.uk/library : The New Forest Centre Library

The New Forest : Colin R. Tubbs, 2001

The New Forest its character and heritage : NFDC & Forestry Commission, 2005

The New Forest : Clive Chatters and Mike Reid, 2006

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk Factsheet available on CD, in large-print, or Braille on request

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