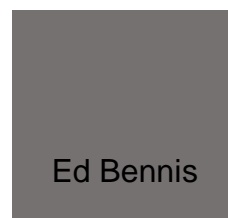
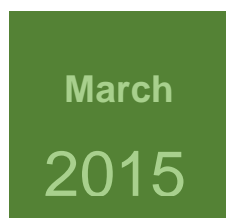
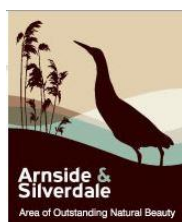


# Arnside & Silverdale AONB Historic Designed Landscapes Phase 2: **Bleasdale School** **Research Report**



Amended September 2015





Prepared for the  
**Arnside & Silverdale AONB Partnership  
and Lancashire County Council**

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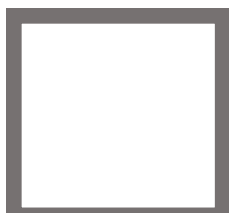
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## Contents

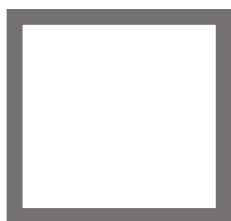
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Introduction	7
Project Aims	7
Project Objectives	7
Project Description	8
Research Methodology and Outputs	8
Bleasdale House/School	8
Bleasdale School: Name, Location, Address	9
Ownership	10
Planning	10
Historic Interest	10
The House	10
The Garden	11
Garden Development Phases	11
Description of the Gardens 1920	11
Description and Analysis of the Gardens	11
Features of Significance: Spatial Form, Planting, Structures	17
Historic Relevance	18
Threats of Loss	18
Referencing Sources	19

### **Illustrations and Maps:**

Current OS Map	9
Google Map with Site Outline	9
2 <sup>nd</sup> Edition OS Map	12
Estate Map N.D.	13
Photo 1: Entrance to Bleasdale School	13
Photo 2: Entrance to Bleasdale School-early 20 <sup>th</sup> C postcard	13
Photo 3: Coach House	14
Photo 4: Coach House-early 20 <sup>th</sup> C photo	14
Photo 5: Formal Garden- early 20 <sup>th</sup> C photo	14
Photo 6: Formal Garden	14
Photo 7: Therapy Garden	15
Photo 8: Therapy Garden-photo date 1919	15
Photo 9: Terrace and Balustrade	15
Photo 10: New ramps	15
Photo 11: Conservatory, Walks and House	15
Photo 12: Conservatory, Walks and House-early 20 <sup>th</sup> C photo	15
Photo 13: Ericaceous Planting and Retaining Wall	16
Photo 14: Pleasure Ground	16
Photo 15-16: Rustic Limestone Walls	16
Photo 17: Early 20 <sup>th</sup> century-Front Entrance and Aerial View	16





# Introduction

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The Arnside & Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership has extended the Research Project on the Historic Designed Landscapes (HDL) within the whole of the Arnside & Silverdale AONB carried out in 2013 (Phase 1). Additional work builds on the published 'Arnside & Silverdale AONB Historic Designed Landscape Research Report (Bennis and Thurnhill, 2013) and contributes to the understanding, conservation, restoration, enhancement and management of the area's historic designed landscapes and will be available for use by partners, stakeholders and communities. The study extension (Phase 2) is being funded by Lancashire County Council (LCC) and Arnside & Silverdale AONB Partnership and consists of a Research Report and accompanying Care and Management Guidelines.

With the exception of Dallam Tower, none of the AONB's historic designed landscapes are listed on English Heritage's National Register of Parks and Gardens (<http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/>) and some have not even been recorded on a local authority list of heritage assets. Aside from a general dearth of knowledge on these site's history, features, condition, etc. there is no formal recognition of their significance or value; consideration of impacts of change or development on these assets would generally not be a material consideration. As such, the AONB's Historic Designed Landscapes - an irreplaceable heritage asset - are at risk of being lost.

The Bennis/Thurnhill report of 2013 identified and categorised 63 sites (in accordance with the established Lancashire HDL methodology) within the AONB. A total of 28 forms were completed covering 63 sites. There are 11 sites in Level A (the highest level), 9 in Level B, and 7 in Level C; this includes the sites of group value. Within Level A, six sites are of exceptional interest and quality: Ashton, Bleasdale House, Hazelwood, The Hynning, Leighton Hall and Ridgeway Park. These sites compare favourably with those on the English Heritage National Register of Parks and Gardens.

## **Phase 2 Project Aims:**

Conserve and enhance AONB HDL assets

## **Project objectives:**

- Provide a resource for landowners and stakeholders to undertake informed conservation/restoration and ongoing management of the sites
- Provide an evidence base that can be used to determine the impact of future change, alteration, loss or development in terms of its impact on the historic designed landscape components
- Contribute to the continuing awareness raising and promotion of HDLs within the AONB and the contribution they make to the purposes of the AONB designation

## **Project description:**

Three sites were selected to be surveyed in detail. These have been chosen according to the following criteria:

- Importance and/or significance of a particular site based on the categorisation carried out in the initial study, factors include:
  - level of completeness
  - condition
  - period and quality of design
  - uniqueness to the area
  - horticultural quality
  - comparability
- Level of risk of loss they face. This is based on a number of factors:
  - property in multi-occupancy
  - changes in ownership
  - local Plan/land designation changes
  - planning applications for development or change of use within the site or on neighbouring land
  - evidence of neglect or poor management

## **Research methodology**

The Historic Designed Landscapes Phase 1 will be used as the basis for this stage. Information is current to the date of the report; however, new information may be found at later dates. Work included:

- on site investigation (walk over survey) of current conditions, vegetation, hard materials and structures, land form, spatial form
- assessment of current and historical maps, documents, publications and archival material
- interviews with owners, managers and gardeners where possible
- liaison with AONB and Lancashire County Council

## **Outputs**

### **– Research Report**

To include research relating to the importance and/or significance of a particular site based on the categorisation carried out in the initial Phase 1 study

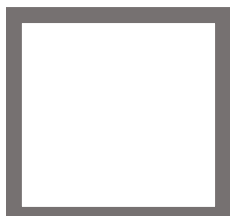
### **– Care and Management Guidelines**

- guidance for owners/land managers in terms of managing the gardens in the future in light of change, threats and risks the sites face
- areas will relate to map based documents provided by LCC
- identification of distinct garden/parkland/woodland areas and recommendations for management of those areas
- management Guidelines will include a description of each area, identify issues for immediate concern and recommended actions
- longer term strategies for the gardens as a whole as well as distinct areas will be produced



### **Bleasdale House/School:**

- The site has been identified as one of six sites within the AONB considered to be of national /international importance and equates to the quality of sites on Historic England's National Register of Parks and Gardens. It is currently run as a residential school for students with learning difficulties and owned by Lancashire County Council. Fortunately, Bleasdale has not suffered a loss of land to development and it is easily recoverable.



## **Bleasdale School**

### **Identification:**

#### **Site Name:**

Bleasdale School: aka Bleasdale House, De La Mere and Delamere House

01524 701 217 admin@bleasdaleschool.lancs.sch.uk

#### **District Authority:**

Lancaster City Council 0845 053 0000

#### **National Grid Reference:**

SD46144 75184

QR Code

Latitude: 54.169611 Longitude: -2.8264460



#### **Postal Address:**

27 Emesgate Lane  
Silverdale  
LA5 0RG

#### **Extent:**



© Lancashire County  
Council 2008:

From 1:12500



© Google Maps

**Ownership & Occupancy:**

Lancashire County Council

Used as a school. Bleasdale School, for special needs students

**Planning:**

At the time of writing, there were no current planning applications for this site

**Historic Interest:**

Bleasdale House (School) is one of the earliest and largest villa estates within the AONB and dates from 1860 when it was constructed for Nathaniel Wordsall of Crewe. As house and garden, Bleasdale is the best example of the period within the AONB and retains much of the fabric. At some point it was called De La Mere House and was sold in 1870 to W J Sharp. There were extensions to the house between 1903-1912. It was converted to a convalescent home during the First World War (1916). Shortly after the war in 1920, W J Sharp sold the property. Lancashire County Council acquired the house in 1948. The Sharp family owned three important properties in Silverdale (along with less imposing houses) including Hazelwood and Ridgeway Park, also known as Greywalls. The last being the only property that was purpose built by the Sharps with the house designed by the firm of Thomas Mawson.

**The House:**

Sale particulars of 28 September 1920 describe the house as 'of modern design and erected in 1909-10 regardless of expense...' Rooms are described in some detail including an outer hall panelled in oak with a parquet floor and an inner hall with a Jacobean staircase in oak. The music room (40' x 24') with a roof lantern is now used as a performance/exercise/assembly room and opens directly onto the terraces with views towards Morecambe Bay. The floor plans show a garden entrance between the library and the drawing room which led to a terrace overlooking a formal rose garden. The drawing room, now the school head's office, can be recognised from the exterior with the octagon shaped tower, the original roof structure has been lost. Principle rooms were designed to take advantage of views over the terraces, garden areas and the long distance views of the bay.

A large stable and coach block is located across the road from the main house and appears to have been constructed during the Sharp renovation period of 1909-10. The sale particulars describe this as 'an elaborately planned Range of Outbuildings with Clock Tower...Central Garage....Two Coach Houses...accommodation for seven cars; Four Horse Boxes...Power house (fitted with Gas Producing Plant) ...Laundry...'. This is part of the school's estate.

## **The Gardens:**

### **Garden Development Phases:**

The gardens could be described essentially as three periods in terms of their development. The first being of mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century, while the second stage is under the ownership of the Sharp family when the house was extended. The last stage is the modern garden of the current school. The second phase of garden development is the most comprehensive and complete, despite the loss of some fabric and current condition.

### **Description of the Garden from 1920 Sales Catalogue:**

The catalogue provides the most comprehensive description of the house and gardens under the ownership of W J Sharp.

Referred to as a 'Modern Mansion...standing in lovely Pleasure Grounds laid out in Terraces, ample Glass Houses, walled-in Fruit and Vegetable Gardens...the whole 8 ½ acres.'

With 'Beautiful Pleasure Grounds, tastefully laid out at great expense in Terraces, Rose Garden, Rock Garden, Herbaceous Borders, with Conservatory, and in the immediate vicinity is an extensive walled-in Fruit and Vegetable Garden, including Two Vineries, Peach House, Plant Houses, Fruit Rooms, and Potting Sheds...'.

### **Description & Analysis of the Gardens:**

Bleasdale is a 19<sup>th</sup> c villa comprising formal gardens, terraces and pleasure grounds. There is a formal car/carriage entrance with forecourt off the main road leading directly to the main house entrance. Formal raised terraces with balustrades and steps leading to lower levels and wrap around the northwest and southwest sides of the main house. The large lawn area to the NW elevation has been graded into grass terraces with grass slopes between levels with possible croquet lawn. There are excellent views of Morecambe Bay. There is a more informal area to the north of the house, a 'dog-leg', that has mixed tree and shrub planting, and a small orchard/vegetable patch. This area was likely to be part of the pleasure ground. There is a gated service entrance at the end of the area with views to Woodlands Hotel, now a pub.

The garden layout and tree structure are typical of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. with a formal layout of terraces providing views over the gardens and long distant views to the bay. Walkways are formal and geometric with stone steps, low side walls and plinths for urns that connect the modest changes in levels in the lawn areas. While many of the formal features have disappeared, evidence from earlier maps and photographs give a good indication of the scale and quality of the gardens.

From map evidence and early photos of the garden, there is a clear layout of paths, terraces and ornamental planting. (Photo 17) The formal terraces would likely have been in stone flags, currently concrete, while it appears from the photos that the walks were also in stone. Normally these were gravel walks.

There are two formal gardens below the main terrace; one shows a circular pond with water planting. The grass areas show cut out planting areas with rose beds when the house was used as a convalescent home in 1942. There is an earlier image showing the same pond from a different angle with the conservatory and beyond a hedge and rustic pergola. This is dated as 1919. (Photo 7)

The formal garden to the side of the house shows a formal arrangement with a rustic/picturesque wood pergola and gateway to the left side in the same fashion (Photo 5). However, there appears to be a different pergola in Photo 7 beyond the hedge, simpler and more modern and more in keeping with the date of 1919 on the photo.

Photos indicate that there were long walks and flower borders running across the lawn areas, as well as a stone rockery which seems to be opposite the conservatory. The low walls, bordering the steps in the lawn, have plinths which also have large pots on them in the period photos (Photo 10/11). There was a perimeter walk around the lawn (Photo 17, air photo) as well as the walks through the pleasure grounds which still exist.



**Map 1:** ©LCC 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. OS 1913

Bleasdale House can be clearly seen with a terrace to the northwest and southwest sides; formal gardens to the southwest side and a possible site of an orchard adjacent to those gardens. The plot marked 30? (1.808 ac) beyond the terrace and orchard shows the current position of the conservatory while plot 299 will be taken into the garden and become the pleasure ground. An access point to this plot or field can be seen in the top right and is a service access point to the site.

The smaller buildings to the south of the main house along Emesgate Lane appear to be service buildings and there is still an impressive entrance gate to the area. This has been recently replaced with a modern mild steel gate. Some structures have been lost due to building an indoor pool in the area. While there is a large building opposite the main entrance to the house, the current Coach House is not shown despite being believed to have been built in 1911.

Oak Lea house to the northeast of Bleasdale, owned by Sharp, was leased to a Mrs Champion in 1910.

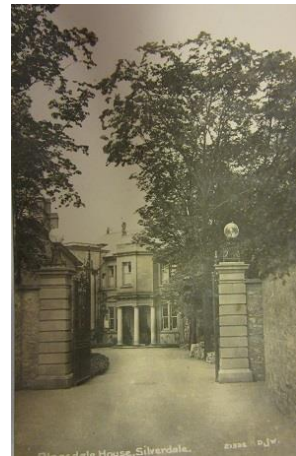


**Map 2: Estate Map** © Lancashire Records Office DDHH 1/530

This hand drawn map was included with the file for the sale particulars of 1920 and shows the land holdings of W J Sharp. There is no date on the map, nor is the Coach House shown which Sharp was selling at the same time as Bleasdale House. Other features stated in the sales catalogue such as the vineries, walled-in fruit and vegetable garden are not apparent in this map. It is likely that the map was included for information to identify the 8 ½ acres that were attached to the sale of the house.



**Photo 1:** Entrance to Bleasdale School from Emesgate Lane



**Photo 2:** Right: early 20<sup>th</sup> c postcard  
© Lancashire Record Office

The 1920 sales catalogue refers to a 'sweeping drive', however the forecourt is more in the scale of a town house. The entrance gate of wrought and cast iron is original (recently replaced). Most of the forecourt has been tarmacked for parking and to allow access for the disabled. There is additional parking to the right side of the entrance gate.

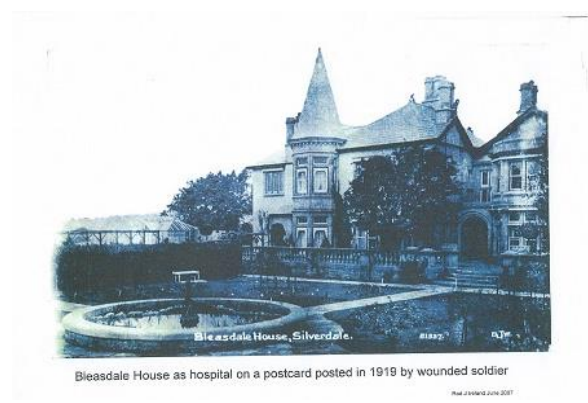




**Photo 3 & 4:** The Coach House is directly opposite the entrance of Bleasdale School. Photo 4 describes it as coach house, stables, garage and billiards room; 'built in 1911 by Riggs of Carnforth for Pearl & Toby Sharp' (from the school's archives). The glass canopy has been lost and garage doors replaced.



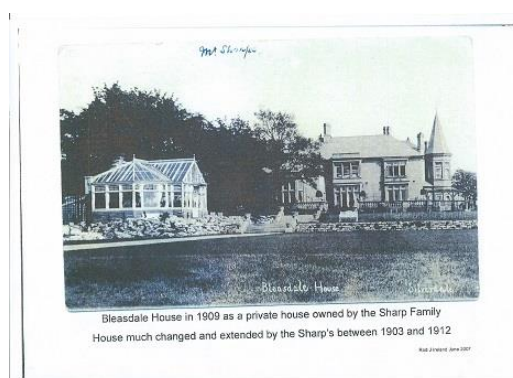
**Photo 5 & 6:** The formal garden area (Photo 5) has been replaced with a play area. Note that the building has been extended to the left side from Photo 4, and that the conical roof has been lost from the octagon tower. Additional remodelling has taken place with an extended bay on the southwest façade. Photo 5 (© Lancashire Record Office No 16018) shows a rustic pergola, rectangular rose beds, and hedge with a rustic arch. LRC dates the photo c1909; it is prior to the improvements and extensions made by Sharp. It is not clear from this photo if the terrace existed.



**Photo 7 & 8:** View of the Therapy Garden with a central vine covered pergola. The pergola is very close to the position of the pond/fountain in Photo 8. To the left is the swimming pool. Photo 8 shows a central pond/fountain, formal cross walks, and rose beds within the grass lawn. The terraces are clearly visible as is the rustic pergola, left/centre of the image. The photo is dated 1919 and clearly has all of the Sharp renovations and extensions as shown in the floor plan of the 1920 sale catalogue. Photo 6 is from Bleasdale School archives.



**Photo 9 & 10:** The terrace has been paved with tarmac and disabled access has been developed for access to the garden area. It is likely that the original stone paving is underneath the tarmac. It appears that there has been minor change, if any, to the terrace balustrade in creating the ramp access.



**Photo 11 & 12:** These photos show that the walks, grass terraces, steps (although covered in tarmac), rockeries and planting areas are nearly identical to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century photo. (Photo 12 from Bleasdale School archives). The conservatory has been recently restored.





**Photo 13 & 14:** Planting opposite the conservatory reflects the early 20<sup>th</sup> C period with heather beds and herbaceous borders. A narrow woodland edge separates Bleasdale from the adjoining property. These trees are generally mature to over mature with shrubberies beneath in various conditions of repair. Photo 14 shows a sinuous path leading from the vegetable/orchard area to the main lawn.



**Photo 15 & 16:** There are indigenous wall details using the local limestone which is a strong contrast to the nature of the garden and house. Photo 16 shows old walls which have been incorporated into later building work near the swimming pool.



Left is a picture of the entrance to Bleasdale house in 1930, as you can see the entrance has not changed in the 80+ years since this picture was taken.

Right is a picture of the house and the stables and garages, the picture was taken in 1930. The school is now situated where the stable and garages used to be.

Bleasdale (1930) House and Grounds in 1930

**Photo 17:** Upper photo shows the same view of the entrance as today.

The lower image shows clearly the relationship to the gardens and the paths, main lawns and the pleasure gardens. From Bleasdale School archives.



## Features of Significance:

Every garden needs to be considered as a whole, as well its component parts. Despite the loss or degradation of some components, a garden can retain its integrity. Bleasdale School represents a late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century gentleman's estate many of the important components intact. The identified features that follow are essentially a short list of the most distinctive character forming items. They have been listed in three categories which will be found in further detail in the Care & Management document for the garden.

**Spatial Form:** This is often the most difficult aspect of a garden to understand. The garden is formed by both separate and inter-connecting spaces.

- Main entrance allows a partial view to the façade of Bleasdale. Sense of security and privacy.
- Parking area links to the rear of property; this will have been part of the original ornamental gardens
- Rear terrace is a separate space that links the interior to exterior spaces. Important in terms of spatial division and visual links to other parts of the garden and views of Morecambe Bay
- Therapy garden area reflects the position and scale of earlier ornamental garden. Enclosed by walls, buildings and vegetation giving an intimate and secure scale to the space.
- Main lawn is of a grand scale and contrasts the smaller scale spaces adjacent to the main building; a simple and uncluttered open space. There is a subtle division of this space with the use of level changes.
- Pleasure ground contrasts the openness of the large lawn using vegetation to give an informal and casual atmosphere.
- Views are an integral part of the spatial composition, both internal and external

**Planting:** Vegetation provides a different atmosphere to sections of the garden, gives scale and control to the spatial form.

- Large Fagus (Beech) trees dominate the entrance. They provide enclosure as well as being visually important in framing the entrance and for the view from the street.
- Detail planting around the terrace, therapy garden, below the wall in the large lawn and around the conservatory give an intimate scale to those areas.
- Yew hedge dividing the therapy garden and the large lawn.
- Geometric planting beds of heather
- Structure planting to the edges, with mixed tree species and under-planted with shrubbery, are important in giving scale to the space, as well as providing wind breaks and controlling views.
- There are some mature specimens of Fagus (Beech) and Pinus (Pine)

**Structures:** These need to be understood as more than simply buildings, walls, steps, etc. Structures also include land forms and structural planting.

- Enclosing dressed stone walls at the entrance and feature rustic limestone walls.
- A cast and wrought iron entrance gate with stone piers and decorative iron work to the top of the piers.
- Terrace to the rear and side of the house with stone balustrade and steps.
- Remnant rustic limestone wall now incorporated into the pool building.
- Dressed stone abandoned in shrubbery adjacent to the pool building.
- Paved walks in the garden (originally gravel?).
- Retaining wall within the large lawn.
- Stone steps with low edging walls and piers for decorative urns.
- Sculpted land form providing shallow terraces in the large lawn

### **Historic Relevance:**

Bleasdale House, Stables/Coach House and Garden make a unique contribution to the AONB in terms of its architectural quality and the quality and uniqueness of the gardens. Few, if any, gardens are such excellent examples and so clearly of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries within the AONB, and none are as complete in terms of their fabric. The gardens offer a unique insight into the relationship between the floor plan, gardens and distant views as well as the taste of this period of time.

### **Threats of loss:**

There has been a gradual erosion over the past century of features to both house and garden. It would appear that Pearl and Toby Sharp incorporated much of the earlier garden within their expansion of the original house as well as expanding the garden into its near present day form.

While the structural and spatial form is intact, much of the detail has been either lost or degraded through slow change, loss of planting and planting details such as the rockeries. Steps leading from the house on the main path have been covered in tarmac to allow for disabled access, but as such they are still there. Similarly, the terrace has been covered in tarmac, presumably for the same reason. The terrace balustrade shows signs of erosion and shearing with some pieces missing. The earlier formal gardens have been lost to a playground but would be recoverable should the use of the building and gardens change at some point in the future.

Much of the narrow woodland belt is in poor condition and is in need of urgent management which would mean felling in some cases and replanting. The associated shrubberies are in mixed condition. The principle view to Morecambe Bay has some small trees interrupting the view; this would not have been part of the original concept.

The level of maintenance can be considered good in areas that are visually prominent and near the house. Areas that are more distant such as the pleasure

grounds and woodland belts are in need of improved management or substantial loss will result in the future. A management plan would help to address some of these problems, along with appropriate financial support.

### **Referencing Sources:**

Note: there are very few published sources for this or other sites within the AONB. Research is principally primary research going to original sources where available, interviews, and onsite investigation.

#### **Books:**

Peter, David *In and Around Silverdale* Lunsdale Pub. Group Ltd., Carnforth, 1984

#### **Archives:**

Holden & Wilson Solicitors: Sale Catalogue Bleasdale House 28 Sept 1920;  
Lancashire Record Office DDHH/530

Correspondence W J Sharp: Lancashire Record Office, DHH/2/55 (old No. 1079)  
Relates to adjoining Oak Lea House

#### **Maps:**

Lancashire (1:12500) Ordinance Survey, second edition 1913

Estate Plan: from 1920 Sale Catalogue; Lancashire Record Office

#### **Photos:**

Bleasdale House c 1909 southwest view of house and garden; Lancashire Record Office No. 16018

Bleasdale House; several photos from Bleasdale School Archives

#### **Interview:**

Thompson, Linda (staff, now retired); 20 August 2013. Mrs Thompson provided information on earlier ownership, name of Delamere House and photos from the schools archives. Original source not seen, but photocopies were given to the research team.

#### **Unpublished Sources:**

Notes by Peter Sharp, Linden Hall, Borwick 29 Oct. 1996. (author's collection)