Shanklin & District History Society

Historic Footpaths in Danger







Foreword

This report records the loss and potential loss of historic public footpaths and steps in the Shanklin area.

The aim is to draw attention to the cumulative detrimental effect on parts of our public realm heritage which make an important contribution to local distinctiveness and which are experienced and appreciated by both residents and visitors.

Shanklin and District History Society (S&DHS) is non-profit organisation run entirely by volunteers and is a member of the British Association for Local History.

S&DHS maintain, as required by the Society's constitution, an archive of historical information which is used for educational purposes in the form of public exhibitions, published research, newsletters to members and answering queries from the public. This report incorporates the local knowledge of S&DHS members and historical information from the S&DHS archive.

Introduction

Shanklin retains much of the character of a Victorian seaside resort. The IW Council's Conservation Area Appraisal, adopted in 2011, notes the importance of the cliff to the character and identity of the town. This two tier coastline extends beyond the town to both north and south with historic designed routes linking the upper and lower levels of the landscape.

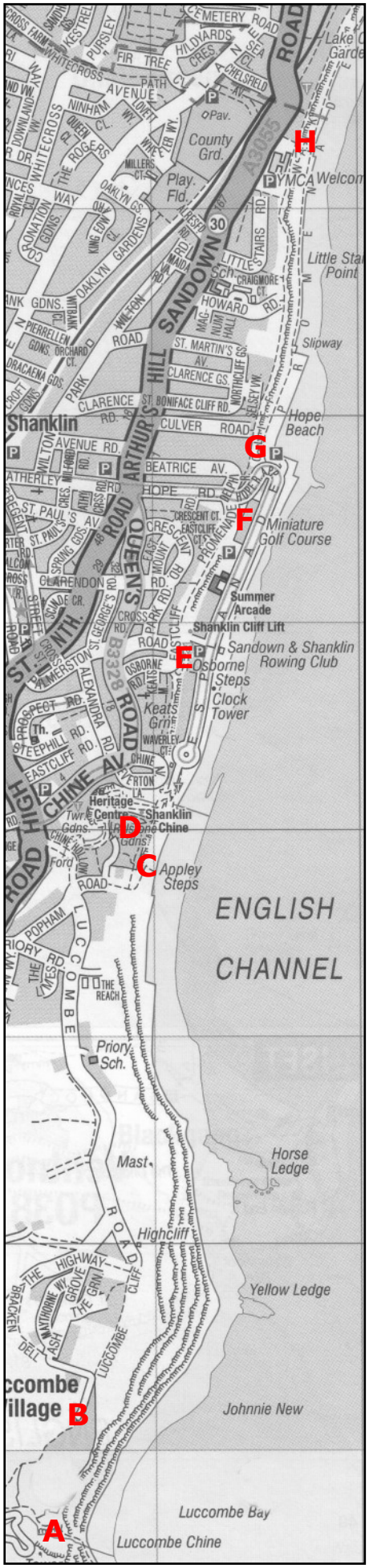
From Shanklin town the only vehicle route to the Esplanade is by Hope Road with the former vehicle route down Chine Hill now reduced to a footpath. Two important pedestrian routes, the Chine and the Lift, are only open on a seasonal basis and require a payment to be made, which adds import to maintaining other pedestrian routes linking the two tiers which are available all year and are free to access.

The area covered in this report includes over 2 miles of Section 4 of the Isle of Wight Coastal Path between Niton and Sandown and is therefore important not only to local residents and visitors but also as an Island tourism asset. Retaining and reinstating continuity of the cliff-top promenade sections of the Coastal Path is, therefore, also of import.

S&DHS have identified eight locations which give rise to concern. These are considered in the order given in the Coastal Path guide, leading northwards from Luccombe to Lake.

Contemporary photographs have been taken by Members of S&DHS and historic images are from the archives of S&DHS and W J Nigh & Sons Ltd.

Location Map



Location map base courtesy of W J Nigh & Sons Ltd

Legend

H Cliff Path south of Lake Cliff Gardens
long term closure

G Cliff Path south of Culver Road
in danger of closure

F Cliff Promenade off Hope Road
long term closure

E Osborne Steps
in danger of closure

D Rylstone Gardens
long term closure

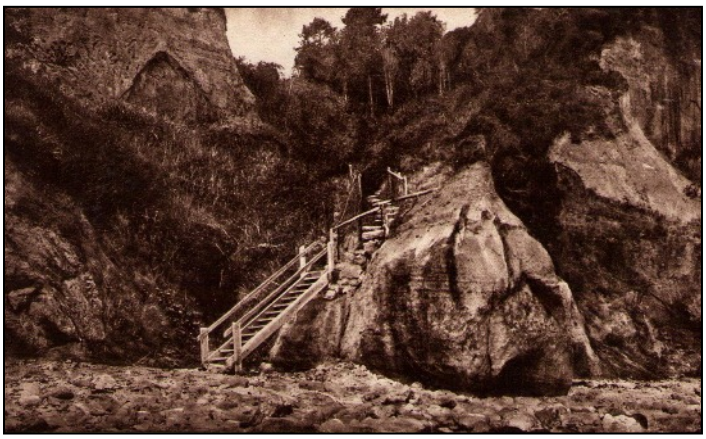
C Appley Steps
currently closed

B Landslip Pathway
in danger of closure

A Luccombe Chine
long term closure

A Luccombe Chine





The Coastal Path passes the top of Luccombe Chine. The historic path (Public Footpath SS3) down the Chine to the shore, at one time giving access to Bordwood Village, was maintained for centuries. At low tide it long enabled a circular walking route between Shanklin and Luccombe and was described in the mid twentieth century as a charming spot.

The path has always moved necessitating repair on many occasions, but has now been closed, it appears permanently, for some years. This is also a safety matter as anyone trapped on Luccombe Beach by the tide now needs to be rescued.

B Landslip Pathway

From the top of Luccombe Chine the Coastal Path is along Public Footpath SS2, emerging up out of the landslip at the end of Luccombe Road.

In late 2020 this path was still open but has slipped badly where there are steps close to the end of the road from Luccombe village. This historic route between Shanklin and Ventnor is one of the most used footpaths in the area and needs to be maintained for access for all ages.



View towards Dunnose Magna

December 2020

C Appley Steps

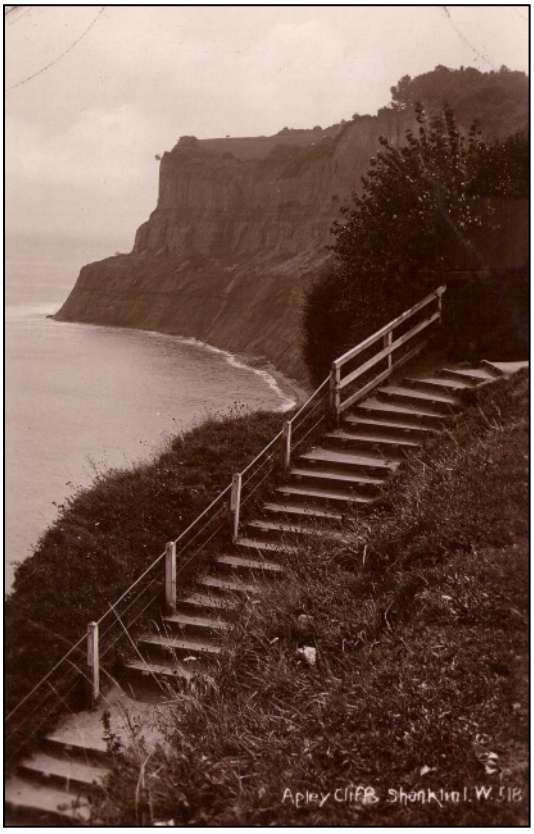
December 2020





These are within the Shanklin Conservation Area and are part of the Coastal Path route: 'Walk down the steps directly ahead to Appley Beach, pausing to admire the views to Culver Down to the north-east'. The steps provide the only access to and from the beach to the south of Shanklin Chine and have been closed since late 2020.

It appears that the closure is due to the railings falling over the cliff. It is understood from Island Roads that while the stepped footpath is their responsibility, the maintenance of the railings rests with the IW Council.





D Rylstone Gardens

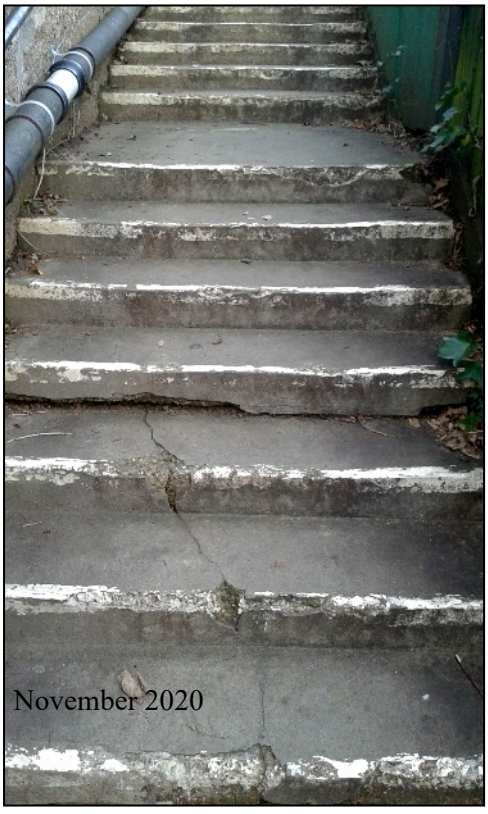




This public park, incorporating 19th century private designed grounds and within the Shanklin Conservation Area, is an historic asset unique within Shanklin. The footpath above the Chine has been closed for a long time. It is understood that there are drainage problems involving the Chine, but this is yet another closed footpath with resulting unsightly barriers which are detrimental to the historic designed landscape and popular tourist attraction.

E Osborne Steps

Constructed in about 1870, Osborne Steps were an important new feature linking the Victorian cliff-top public walks of the expanding resort town with the developing Esplanade below. The steps are also within the Conservation Area and remain a popular pedestrian access between the two levels. When the Lift is closed they are the only route to the centre of the Esplanade. While (in mid January 2021) the steps remain open they have been subject to a number of temporary closures and more are feared. The present condition of the steps is a cause for concern and it is feared that split responsibilities, as at Appley, may hinder long term maintenance.



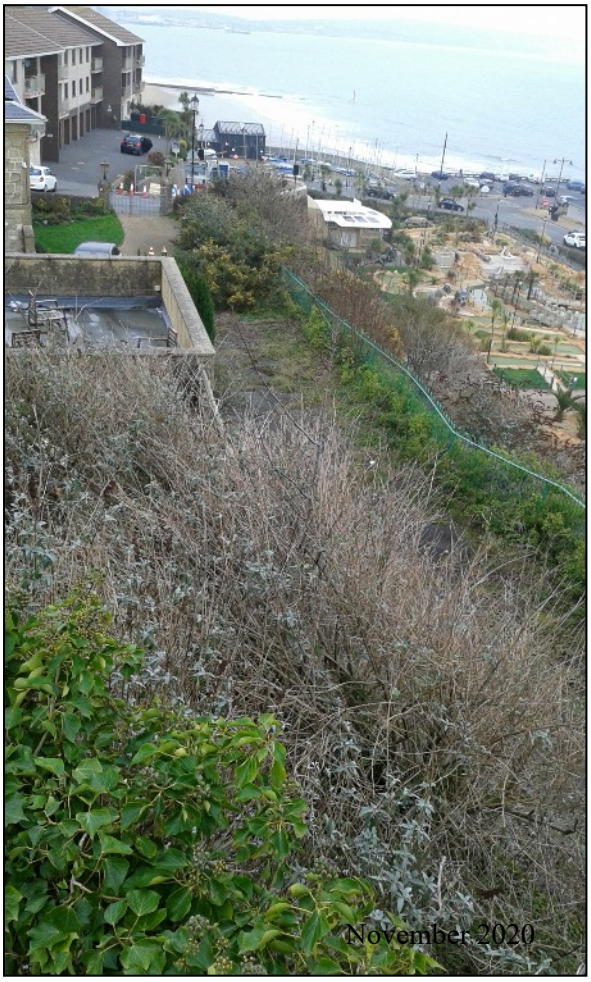






F Cliff Promenade off Hope Road

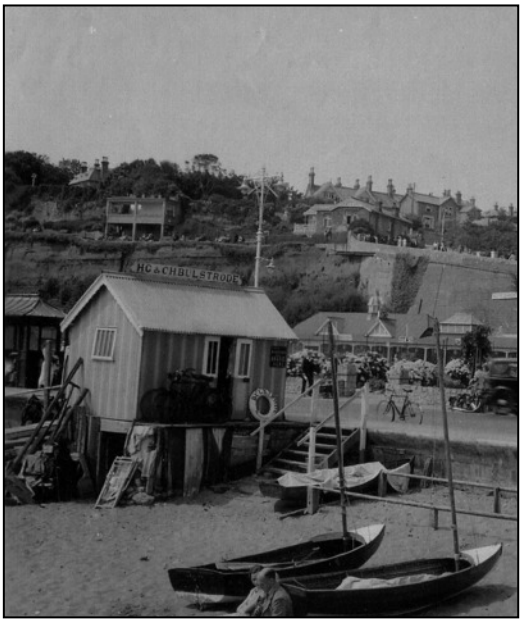
The section of the cliff-top path approached by steps from the northern end of Eastcliff Promenade and leading to Hope Road, on the seaward side of no 31 Hope Road, has been closed for some years. It is within the Shanklin Conservation Area. Permanent railings now block the entrances and S&DHS is not aware of any plans to reinstate this route. This was a popular path with seats and a large shelter. It is now overgrown and the unkempt appearance does not enhance this part of the Conservation Area.











G Cliff Path south of Culver Road

This is a short narrow section of the cliff path adjacent to the former St Anthony's Convent and above Shanklin Sailing Club. It is part of the undulating cliff-top walk which forms part of the Coastal Path leading towards Sandown. Cliff falls now extend to the railings on the seaward side of the path, with the precarious situation emphasised by the sandbags and freestanding hazard barriers which have now been in place for some months. It appears that any further cliff fall would result in closure of this part of the cliff path.

It is understood that the adjoining grounds of the former convent are in private ownership. The alternative most direct diversion route would be over a quarter of a mile via Culver Road, Arthurs Hill and Beatrice Avenue. The first and last of these are unadopted roads with pot holed and uneven surfaces with the seaward end of Culver Road diminishing to a narrow and very muddy footpath.







H Cliff Path south of Lake Cliff Gardens

Another section of the cliff path, forming part of the Coastal Path, between the steps down to Welcome Beach, known locally as Littlestairs Steps, and Lake Cliff Gardens has been closed since a cliff fall in 2014. It is understood that there have been a number of cliff falls since the closure. Permanent railings are now installed across the path with a diversion route inland along Sandown Road, a busy main road.





November 2020

Conclusion

Cliff falls in the area between Luccombe and Lake have a long history and S&DHS is well aware that some changes to the historic public realm are inevitable. Our concern is to how changes are managed, with an appropriate balance of priorities and an understanding of what has, or may be, lost to both local distinctiveness and the appeal of the area to residents and tourists. By cataloguing particular problem locations, S&DHS wish to draw attention to what might be regarded as creeping substantial harm to our historic environment.

It is understood that responsibility for these problems does not rest with one organisation and that there are many interested parties involved. Our aim in widely circulating this report is to draw attention to the problem. Our hope is that it will focus the minds of all those with responsibility and interest to act together to find solutions which will remove the current blight and enhance our historic seaside resort.

References

Isle of Wight Coastal Path: route and descriptions at visitisleofwight.co.uk

Shanklin Conservation Area Appraisal Adopted April 2011 at iow.gov.uk

Prepared on behalf of S&DHS Management Committee by Archivist Terry Nigh and Secretary Helen Thomas BA Hons, B Arch, MA (Architectural Cons) Dist, PG Cert (Garden Hist) Dist, PG Cert (Archaeol and Heritage Man) Dist.

January 2021