
2 Belsay Hall and quarry garden

Theme: Ancient rivers, seas and life

Location

Belsay Hall and Castle are part of the English Heritage estate and close to Belsay village [NZ 085 784]. There is a bus service from Newcastle to Belsay.

Description

The rock gardens at Belsay Hall were created from an old quarry which was the source of the sandstone used to build the hall and nearby village. The scale of the garden is monumental and harks back to the 19th century fashion for classical romanticism and paying homage to “awesome nature”.

The sandstones are about 325 million years old from the Carboniferous period. The quarry was active between 1810 and 1817 when the hall was being built. The owner/designer of the hall and garden was Sir Charles Monck. The sandstone is more than 10 metres thick and shows “cross-bedding” really well — that’s where the layers in the sandstone are at different angles. That is evidence that it was formed by water, or wind; this sandstone was once sand in an ancient river channel flowing from the north.

The shelter of the high rock walls of the quarry and the damp location provide a perfect site for several plants, many of them alien species. Look for one in particular, called gunnera from Chile. On the rock faces grow broad-buckler fern, hart's-tongue, ivy-leaved toadflax, foxglove, wood-sorrel and wood speedwell. Elsewhere are golden-scaled male-fern, lady fern and pink purslane, with occasional royal fern (once native in Northumberland, this splendid fern has been re-introduced). In the damp grotto mosses and opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage thrive.

Photographs

(Photo 02-1) Belsay Hall and quarry garden.

(Photo 02-2) Sandstones in the quarry garden. Belsay Hall.



(Photo 02-1) Belsay Hall and quarry garden.



(Photo 02-2) Sandstones in the quarry garden. Belsay Hall.