

Case Name: THE SCENIC RAILWAY AT DREAMLAND

Case Number: 463302

Background

A request has been received to upgrade the Scenic Railway at Dreamland to Grade II*.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	EH Recommendation
1	1359602	THE SCENIC RAILWAY AT DREAMLAND	Listing	Amend List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
none	No Visit / Data from other sources

Context

English Heritage has been asked to consider upgrading the scenic railway at Dreamland, Margate. The structure was listed at Grade II in 2002 and was damaged by a major fire in 2008. Dreamland, a noted entertainment complex at Margate, has been closed for some time. Plans are ongoing for its regeneration with possible development. The Scenic Railway is not in a conservation area but is grouped with the Grade II* Dreamland Cinema and Grade II remains of the menagerie enclosure. A report on the context to the history of roller coasters was commissioned from the architectural investigation team at English Heritage to inform this assessment.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

The owners and Local Planning Authority were consulted on the Initial Report. The Prince's Regeneration Trust, who are involved in the regeneration of the Dreamland site, responded on 24 January 2011 supporting the proposed upgrading. The response noted the rarity of the structure as the fourth oldest roller coaster in the world, that it remains in its original configuration and that no scenic railways survive in the USA where they originated.

DISCUSSION

The Selection Guide for Cultural and Entertainment buildings acknowledges that this type of building takes diverse forms and emphasises the often strong attachment of the local community to buildings and structures designed for pleasure and escapism. In the section devoted to outdoor entertainment it is noted that detailed criteria are hard to set down given the diversity of structural types and structures will have to be judged on their individual merits. It continues that seaside structures need to be judged 'by their rarity, date, design or structural interest, the degree of alteration, group value with related items and light they shed on the development of a particular structure'. It is also noted that some structures are not intended to last and that 'rarity is thus important, as are issues of replacement of fabric. Whilst a degree of replacement is sometimes to be expected complete renewal may render a structure unsuitable for listing'. According to the 2010 Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings a building needs to be a particularly important building of more than special interest to qualify for Grade II*.

The Scenic Railway at Dreamland is one of only two amusement rides included on the statutory list for England; the other is the water chute on the boating lake at East Park, Hull, a rather different type of attraction and context, being located in a municipal park. However, the only other surviving scenic railway in the country, that at Great Yarmouth dating from 1932, is currently being recommended for listing at Grade II. The Dreamland Scenic Railway is the oldest surviving roller coaster in Britain, the second oldest in Europe and the fourth or fifth oldest in the world in its original location. In terms of rarity, therefore, its more than special interest is clear and its survival is remarkable (especially given the several fires that have beset this timber structure). Of the approximately 111 roller coasters of various types erected in Britain between the first example at Skegness (1885) and the outbreak of World War II; only six survive (Margate, Great Yarmouth and the four under-friction examples at Blackpool Pleasure Beach). Many did not stand for very long, particularly those erected as temporary attractions at exhibitions, or were moved and rebuilt elsewhere; changing entertainment fashions and fires have accounted for the loss of the rest. Figures taken from roller coasters whose period of operation is recorded (omitting those built for temporary exhibitions and the six survivors) show that average life expectancy for roller coasters was about thirty-two years whilst for scenic railways it was about 20 years.

The degree of surviving original fabric is clearly an issue that needs to be addressed in any consideration of these structures for designation. The Scenic Railway at Margate has survived three major fires, yet importantly its original configuration remains. Constructed of timber and requiring a high degree of maintenance for safety reasons very little original fabric would have been expected to survive nearly a century of use, even without the fire damage. In the case of Margate, during the period of operation by Benbon Brothers between 1981 and 1996, the fabric was replaced on a seven year rolling programme with one seventh being replaced each year. Thus it is unrealistic to use the extent of surviving original fabric as a criterion in assessing the structure's importance unlike with other more permanent types of building. This is similar to the situation with seaside piers which also require regular structural replacement, at least of the timber elements.

A further factor in the consideration of a higher grade is the Scenic Railway's location at Margate. Margate is one of the oldest seaside resorts in England (along with Scarborough, Whitby and Brighton) being at the forefront of the discovery of the seaside from the mid-C18 as a destination for tourism. In the earlier part of the C20 the town continued to grow and in the inter-war years offered a range of modern facilities including the Winter Gardens, Marine Terrace Bathing Pavilion and Margate Lido, during which Margate was arguably at its peak of popularity as a holiday destination. Its prosperity was interrupted by World War II during which it was badly damaged and access to the public restricted until August 1944. Although it recovered much of its popularity during the 1950s and 1960s, by the end of the century, in common with many of England's seaside towns, it was in decline as an entertainment centre and holiday resort. Buildings quintessentially associated with its development as a major seaside resort have an added significance.

The Scenic Railway at Dreamland has several claims to more than special interest. Most importantly, in terms of rarity it is the oldest surviving roller coaster in Britain (one of only six pre-1939 wooden roller coasters) and has claims to international importance being amongst the five oldest of this prominent and evocative C20 entertainment structure in the world. Roller coasters are particularly redolent of twentieth century seaside holidays and were once an essential attraction for any major resort during most of the last century. As a scenic railway it is of special interest as an early development of roller coaster design, especially since none of the earliest design, the Switchback, survive anywhere. Its location in a particularly important town in the development of the seaside gives it added interest; as does its location in Dreamland amusement park which has its antecedents in The Hall by the Sea dating from 1867 and was hugely popular in the inter-war period. The Scenic Railway groups strongly with the evocative Dreamland cinema (listed at Grade II*) and associated menagerie (Grade II). Its current sad state of repair does not detract from its historic importance and nor is its more than special interest compromised with the degree of rebuilding, since the first generation roller coaster design and characteristics remain legible and potent.

CONCLUSION

The Scenic Railway at Dreamland, Margate is recommended for upgrading to Grade II* in view of its more than special historic importance.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

The Scenic Railway at Dreamland, Margate, built in 1920 by JH Iles for his new American-style amusement park, is recommended for upgrading to II* for the following principal reasons:

* Rarity: it is the oldest surviving roller coaster in Britain and is of international significance as the second oldest in Europe and amongst the five oldest in the world of this prominent C20 entertainment structure;

- * Design: scenic railways are amongst the earlier types of roller coaster design and it is an internationally important surviving example of this first generation of moving amusement technology;
- * Historic interest: as an important and evocative aspect of the seaside heritage of Margate, one of the earliest and foremost English seaside resorts, and Dreamland, its principal amusement park;
- * Group value: it groups with Dreamland's other listed buildings the Grade II* cinema and Grade II menagerie.

Countersigning comments:

Agreed, also. Great care has been taken with this unusual recommendation. Listing in a higher grade is reserved for a small proportion of designated assets. In spite of alteration and replacement, we feel that the importance of what remains here is such that listing in Grade II* is fully warranted. Margate is an exceptional resort, and the Scenic Railway enjoys strong Group Value with the II*-listed Dreamland cinema complex, and its early date and rarity (in an international context) justify this raising of the grade.

RHB
16 June 2011

Agreed, also. This case has had much thought and our recommendation is additionally informed by contextual in house research. The special heritage context of this roller coaster in Margate is remarkable and along with its intrinsic value on age and technological design grounds, it merits upgrading to Grade II*.
Emily Gee
20 June 2011

Annex 1

Proposed List Entry

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: THE SCENIC RAILWAY AT DREAMLAND

List Entry Number: 1359602

Location

THE SCENIC RAILWAY AT DREAMLAND, BELGRAVE ROAD,

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
Kent	Thanet	District Authority	Non Civil Parish

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 01 March 2002

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

Legacy Number: 488465

Asset Groupings

This List entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List Entry Description

Summary of Building

Rollercoaster. 1919-1920, restored after fires in 1949 and 1957. As of 2010, awaiting restoration following a further fire in 2008.

Reasons for Designation

The Scenic Railway at Dreamland, Margate, built in 1920 by JH Iles for his new American-style amusement park is recommended for listing at Grade II* for the following principal reasons:

- * **Rarity:** it is the oldest surviving roller coaster in Britain and is of international importance as the second oldest in Europe and amongst the five oldest in the world of this prominent C20 entertainment structure;
- * **Design:** Scenic railways are amongst the earlier types of roller coaster design and it is an internationally important surviving example of this technology;
- * **Townscape value:** as an important and evocative aspect of the seaside heritage of Margate, one of the earliest and foremost English seaside resorts, and Dreamland, its principal amusement park ;
- * **Group value:** it groups with Dreamland's other listed buildings the Grade II* cinema and Grade II menagerie.

History

Dreamland amusement park was opened in 1920 by the promoter John Henry Iles (1871-1951). It was constructed on the site of the pleasure grounds known as 'The Hall by the Sea' that had been developed on Margate's seafront from 1867, notably by the circus proprietor 'Lord' George Sanger (1825?-1911). Iles marketed roller coasters in Britain and Europe for the American pioneer of roller coaster development, La Marcus Adna Thompson (1848-1919). He thus named the attraction to reflect the glamour of Coney Island, New York, the home of the world's leading amusement parks and fairground rides, which between 1904 and 1911 included a park named Dreamland. The Scenic Railway opened on 3 July 1920, two months after the park, and was advertised as being the largest roller coaster in Europe. In its first full season in 1921, nearly one million people took the ride. Dreamland was closed during World War II and the Scenic Railway escaped major damage from the war, but at least half the structure was destroyed by a fire in 1949. The structure was rebuilt with timber intended for the repair of Lowestoft pier, but it was again damaged by fire in 1957. The later twentieth century saw declining attendance and changed ownership of the park, and the Scenic Railway last ran in 2006. The railway was the backdrop for the burning of an Anthony Gormley sculpture *The Waste Man* in 2006, used in the television film *The Margate Exodus*. In 2008 a major fire, believed to have been caused by arson, destroyed about a quarter of the timber superstructure, including much of the two hill-lift inclines and also the workshop containing the cars.

Scenic Railways were a technological advance from the earlier Switchblade type of roller coaster. Switchblades were patented in 1884 and operated by a lift at the end of each run of linear track to complete the return journey. Scenic Railways were normally on a looped track with the cars inclined by electrically powered endless cables that ran beneath the cars. Another innovation was the introduction of 'side-friction' guide wheels which projected from the undercarriage of the cars to make contact with wooden boards at the side of the track. This development allowed for steeper inclines and tighter, faster curves providing a more exciting ride, but it still required a brakeman to slow cars down on steep descents. At Margate the brakeman stood on a platform between the first and second cars of the three-car train which together carried a maximum of 28 passengers. The first Scenic Railway in the USA appeared in 1887 in Atlantic City and this type of ride was often provided with scenic dioramas along the track, but not always, as was the case at Dreamland, although at one time there was a tunnel. Thirty one Scenic Railways were built in Britain between the first example (the Velvet Coaster at Blackpool in 1907) and the last, in 1938. Dreamland's Scenic Railway is the oldest of only two remaining in Britain, the other, at Great Yarmouth, dates from 1932 and is currently under consideration for listing. It is the fourth or fifth (depending on the date in 1920 when *The Jack Rabbit*, Rochester, New York opened) oldest roller coaster in the world in its original location (and the third or fourth oldest scenic railway) and the second oldest in Europe after the Rutschebanen of 1914 in the Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen.

Details

Orientated north-west to south-east, and located just to the south of the cinema, the Scenic Railway comprises a timber lattice structure providing support for an undulating, elongated tight double loop of iron tracks which have a total length of approximately 1.2 km. The superstructure comprises non-standard upright timbers approximately 15cm square braced by similarly non-standard bracing struts. The metal rails are laid on a timber bed with side panels for the 'side-friction' mechanism that helps keep the cars on the rails. In the centre of the track at its north end is the engine house with the electrically-operated machinery and pulleys operating the continuous steel rope used to pull the cars up the inclines. As of 2010 a section of the superstructure towards the south-east end of the railway is missing following serious damage in a fire in 2008 which also destroyed the train shed in the centre of the track where the cars were previously stored.

Selected Sources

Barker, Nigel et al, Margate's Seaside Heritage, 2007

Brodie, Allan & Winter, Gary, England's Seaside Resorts, 2007

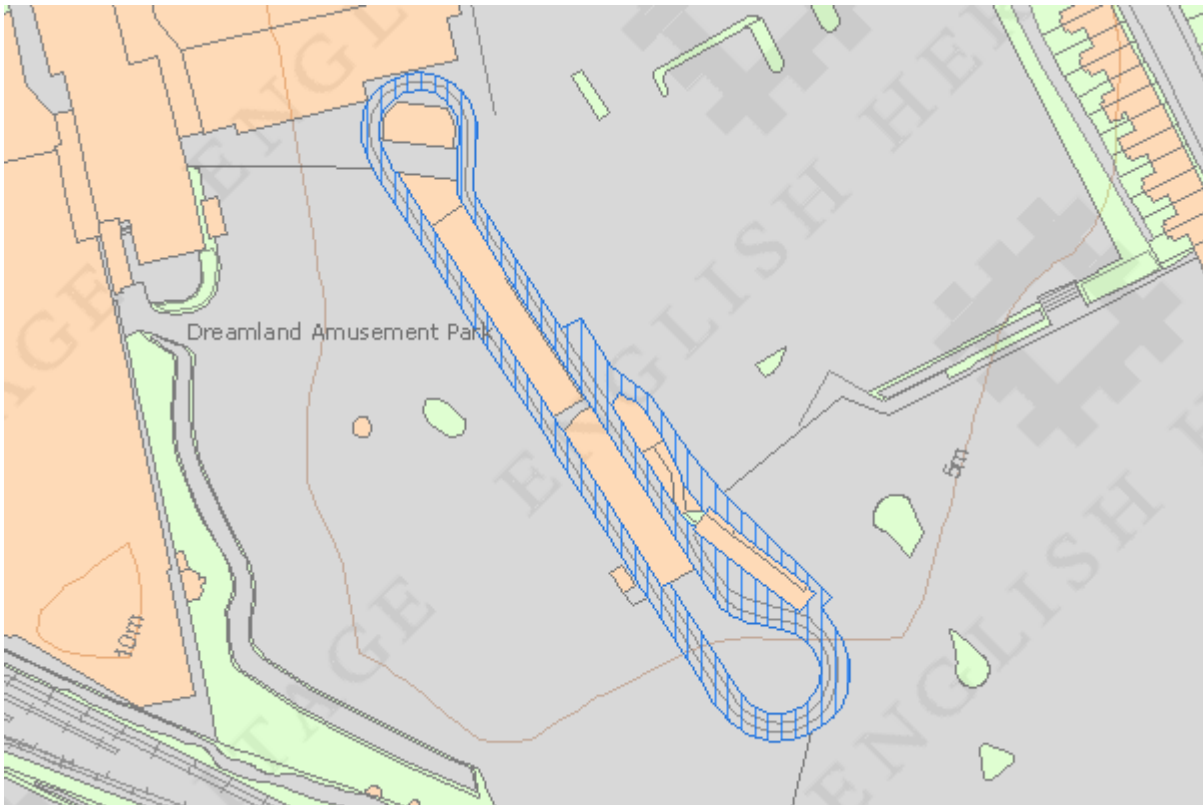
Evans, Nick, Dreamland Remembered, 2005

Brodie, Allan, Scenic Railway at Dreamland, Margate - Background Research , unpublished report, 2010,
English Heritage

<http://www.rollercoastermayhem.com>, 18 October 2010

Map

National Grid Reference: TR 35101 70538



© Crown Copyright and database right 2011. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100019088.

The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF - 1359602_2.pdf

Current List Entry

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: THE SCENIC RAILWAY DREAMLAND

List Entry Number: 1359602

Location

THE SCENIC RAILWAY DREAMLAND, BELGRAVE ROAD,

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 01 March 2002

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

Legacy Number: 488465

Asset Groupings

This List entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List Entry Description

Summary of Building

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Reasons for Designation

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Details

TR3570NW
878/1/10021
01-MAR-02

BELGRAVE ROAD
(West,off)
The Scenic Railway, Dreamland

GV

II

Rollercoaster. 1919-1920, restored after fires in 1949 and 1957. Developed by John Henry Iles, who bought the European rights for the Scenic Railway from Coney Island, New York, whence he imported some of the moving parts. Timber lattice structure supporting double loop of iron tracks, with pulleys and endless steel rope to two haulage slopes; the trackway sunk between railed walkways for a stable ride and sharper bends. Two trains, each of three permanently linked cars with brakeman, one of only two rides in England with a train controlled by a brakeman riding on the vehicle (the other is that of 1932 at Great Yarmouth).

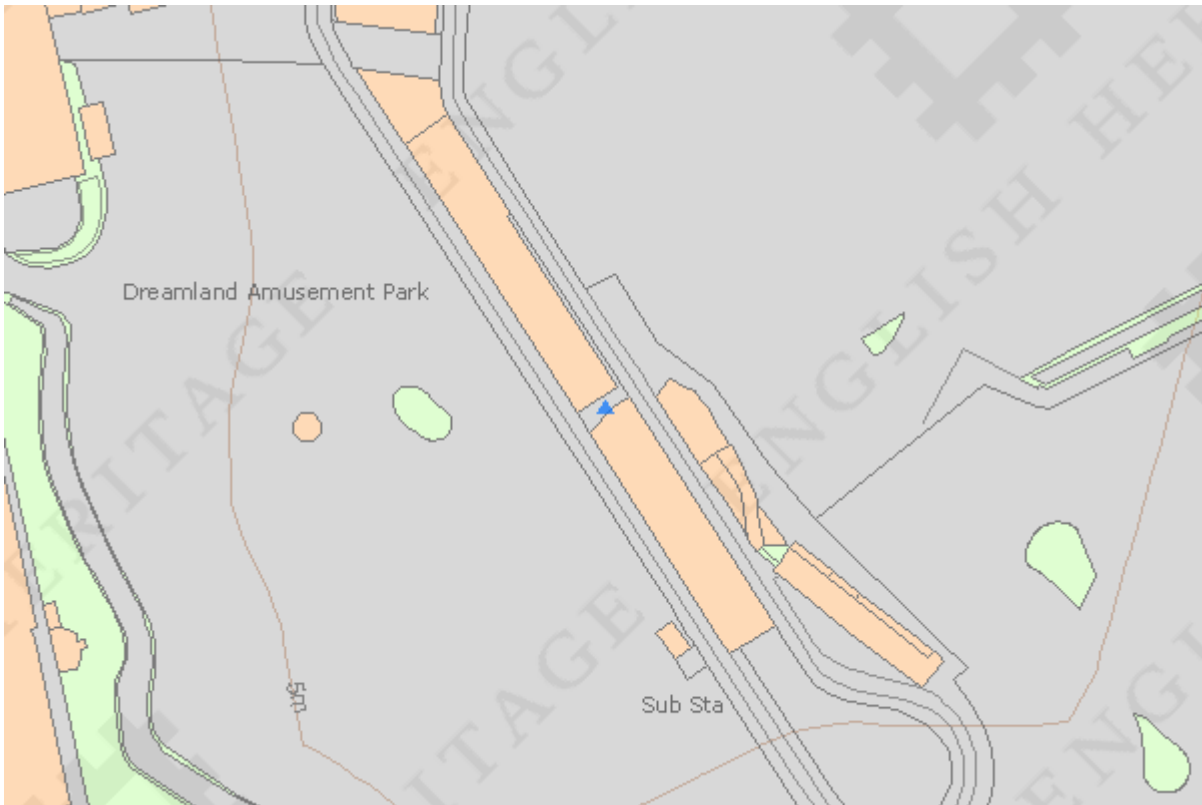
This is the oldest surviving rollercoaster in Great Britain, and one of just two examples of a surviving Scenic Railway. Although repaired after fires and regularly maintained, with a repair programme of new planking each spring, the form of the ride is the original. The only rollercoaster in Europe known to be older is that at the Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen, of c.1914, which this closely resembles.

Source

Kent Journal of the County Society, no.235, Spring 1986

Selected Sources

Kent Journal of the County Society, Vol. 235, 1986

Map**National Grid Reference:** TR 35101 70538

© Crown Copyright and database right 2011. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100019088.

The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF - 1359602_1.pdf