



Changing London

AN HISTORIC CITY FOR A MODERN WORLD

'Many London squares are neglected, undervalued, hidden... or simply forgotten'

Drew Bernellick
Landscape Architect, English Heritage.

London is a uniquely green city.

An aerial view of the metropolis reveals an extraordinary quilt of open spaces – great inner city parks, outer London woodlands, private gardens large and small, formal squares, sports fields, cemeteries, tiny corners of grass, trees and flowers...

London's green patchwork is an integral part of the home, the workplace and playground of one of the world's greatest historic cities.

Together with its waterways and varied and sophisticated network of streetscapes, London presents a diverse and ever-changing urban environment that is unequalled elsewhere in the world.

But is this diversity in harmony?

This second issue of *Changing London* suggests there's much going on to keep the balance right – but still a great deal more to do.

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'MANY SQUARES
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Drew Bernellick,
English Heritage Landscape Architect.

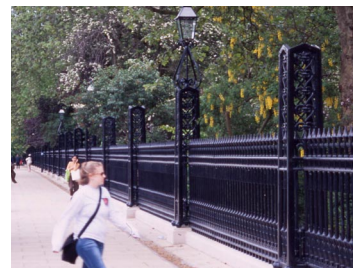


FORGOTTEN OASES?

LONDON GARDEN SQUARES



Brunswick Square: before restoration.



Park Square: reinstated railings.

WITH OVER 600 SQUARES, THESE URBAN GREEN SPACES PROVIDE A CRUCIAL LINK BETWEEN PRIVATE DOMESTIC GARDENS AND LARGE URBAN PARKS

The London square is one of the capital's greatest green assets and yet often the most taken for granted. With over 600 squares, these urban green spaces provide a crucial link between private domestic gardens and large urban parks. But many are neglected, undervalued, hidden or simply forgotten. These oases provide crucial wild life havens, safe play spaces, tranquil gardens and the setting for thousands of listed buildings. Although over 400 are protected by the London Squares Preservation Act of 1931, a unique piece of legislation designed to prevent their loss to development, many are uncared for and actually detract from their surroundings.

English Heritage is working hard to promote the importance of the urban garden square. Our brochure, *A Campaign for London Squares*, sets out our mission to encourage investment in their care and management, to raise their profile and to ensure their conservation. The campaign

has created great interest. Technical advice has been offered to many garden managers on planting, design, garden archaeology, suitable path surfaces, railing repair or reinstatement. We also advise on ways to reduce vandalism.

The last year has seen some impressive improvement projects to some of London's most important squares. The restoration of Russell Square, by Camden Council with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, included the redevelopment of the café, the replacement of the perimeter planting, the provision of new furniture and most notably the reinstatement of the perimeter railings, which were removed during the Second World War.

Many London squares were stripped of their historic railings in 1941 and are still enclosed by ugly chain link fencing. The Crown Estate's superb reinstatement of the railings to Park Square East and West, plus the new gates to Regent's Park

(following the original designs), has transformed one of London's greatest architectural set-pieces.

Later this year will see the completion of works to restore Brunswick and Bloomsbury Squares. Both are included within the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest and both have been awarded grants. The works will include new planting, path repairs, new furniture and at Brunswick Square, the reinstatement of the impressive perimeter railings and gates. The works will complement the landscape works recently completed at the adjoining Coram's Fields to restore elements of the historic landscape and provide new play facilities.

John Ruskin wrote, 'The measure of a city's greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and squares.' We are working in partnership to restore that quality throughout the capital.

INFORMATION POINT

A Campaign for London Squares (product code XH 20153) can be obtained from English Heritage Customer Services on 0870 333 1181

London Garden Squares Day

For the fifth year running, on Sunday 8th June the London Historic Parks and Gardens Trust with support from English Heritage presents London Garden Squares Day.

This is a unique opportunity to explore many of the capitals most hidden squares with over 70 private and public squares and gardens taking part this year.

Details and ticket information from www.opensquares.org.uk



Chris Sumner, Regional Parks
& Gardens Adviser.

DOWN IN THE URBAN FOREST

'LONDON IS ONE OF THE GREENEST
CITIES IN THE WORLD'

The Forestry Commission calls London "the largest urban forest in the world" – about one twentieth of its surface is covered by trees. When the royal and public parks, public and private gardens, playing fields, squares and cemeteries are added, the statistics start to bear out what the Londoner knows and the visitor rapidly perceives: London is one of the greenest cities in the world.



'Green all over': Cricklewood typifies London's suburban landscape.

The West End benefits from the generous open spaces of the inner Royal Parks. Richmond, Bushy and Greenwich Parks add greatly to the amenities of south London. The Royal Parks were originally enclosed for hunting and later embellished and gradually made accessible to the public. In Bushy Park and Richmond Park field boundaries and ridge-and-furrow ploughing patterns survive as evidence of the earlier agricultural landscapes.

Epping Forest is a fragment of the mediaeval royal hunting forest, and Trent Park, planted as a landscape park around a grand house, was once part of Enfield Chase. Other mansions and great houses survive as the centrepieces of parks, notably Osterley, Syon, Ham, Kenwood and Chiswick. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the Chelsea Physic Garden combine pleasure gardens with scientific institutions.

Cattle still graze at Osterley and Syon and on Petersham Meadows, whilst farmland survives around the fringes of London as part of the Green Belt. At Totteridge and at Harefield the historic pattern of small hedged fields remains essentially unchanged.

Land that was too poor to be cultivated economically formed the basis of the metropolitan commons and heaths, such as Hampstead Heath, which were the subjects of some of the earliest campaigns to protect London's open spaces from development. London's expansion was accompanied by the creation in the mid C19 of a number of large public parks, such as Battersea, Victoria and Finsbury, intended to provide physical and spiritual recreation and moral improvement for Londoners, especially those who did not have easy access to the Royal Parks or to private gardens and squares.

The construction of Victoria Embankment in the 1860s by Bazalgette led to the formation of Embankment Gardens, stretching for more than a kilometre along the Thames. Some thirty years earlier, the scandal of overcrowded and insanitary churchyards led to the creation of large cemeteries on cheap land away from the city centre. Kensal Green (1833), West Norwood (1838), and Highgate (1839), are the earliest of the large metropolitan cemeteries, laid out as privately financed burial grounds adorned with public walks, park planting and fine buildings and monuments. At much the same period, the inner city churchyards were closed for burials, and with support from organizations such as the

Metropolitan Public Gardens Association many were laid out as public gardens.

Formal urbanity gave way in the C19 and early C20 to more picturesque residential developments with both private gardens and shared open space for informal recreation and organized sports, as exemplified by Hampstead Garden Suburb and the "cottage estates" built by the London County Council. Post-World War II redevelopment included the formation of Burgess Park in south London and Mile End Park in east London, and the creation of the Alton Estates at Roehampton, where blocks of flats of modern design were built by the LCC in a landscaped setting provided by the grounds of a number of large C18 villas that were retained.

In the City of London an area largely destroyed by bombing was rebuilt by the Corporation of London as The Barbican, a development of medium- and high-rise flats, a school and Arts Centre with lakes, fountains, lawns and trees which incorporates remains of the City's Roman wall.

The last few years have seen the restoration of a number of public parks in London using Heritage Lottery Fund money and at least one important new public park has been created – Barrier Park at the north end of the Thames Barrier.

Our aim is to help tend the diverse 'urban forest' that is London so that future generations can enjoy what our forebears have bequeathed us.

INFORMATION POINT

English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens includes descriptions of over 140 sites considered to be of special historic interest. It can be obtained from Customer Services (T: 0870 333 1181)

The Inventory of Parks and Gardens, prepared by the London Parks and Gardens Trust with financial assistance from English Heritage and others was launched at the Trust's Spring Conference in April 2003. It describes sites across London, most of which are accessible to the public and all of which contribute to London's greenery. Details from the London Parks and Gardens Trust (T: 020 7839 3969)

'Integrated townscape management will bring order and clarity to London's streets



REVIVING THE STREETS



Charles Wagner, Historic Areas Adviser.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the historic environment is the gradual degradation of the public realm – the public spaces and streets between the buildings. Once renowned for their visual order, today they are often a chaotic jumble of traffic signs, bins, bollards, guard rails and street furniture set in a confused mess of garish paving.

In response to this, in 2000 English Heritage published *Streets for All: A guide to the management of London's streets*. This advocates integrated townscape management, encouraging local authorities to think about the whole space of the street, to systematically clear clutter and consider the implications of any new additions. London's streets, public places and parks must be managed and presented to the same standards as its rivals, like New York or Paris. Streets should be uncluttered with an uninterrupted unified paving surface of traditional sized paving slabs, behind properly sized kerbs with signposts kept

to a minimum and signs preferably located at the back edge of the pavement, ideally mounted on the buildings.

We have found that *Streets for All* is echoed by popular opinion. The poor state of public spaces and the negative effects they have on communities was highlighted by the Prime Minister in his "Liveability" speech in April 2001. This led to the production of *Paving the Way* produced by CABE and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in July 2002.

To maintain the momentum, English Heritage organised a series of seminars for Council staff involved in traffic and highways engineering and urban design, as well as presentations to councillors and lectures to local groups and public bodies.

For the last three years we have been working with the boroughs to promote exemplary schemes around London. We highlighted the improvements on The Strand carried out by Westminster City Council in *Streets for All*, which complements the nearly completed scheme for Trafalgar Square, implemented by Transport for London.

At Tower Hill, the whole of the area is being replanned to create a new public space, free of traffic so that the historic setting of the Tower and the river can be better appreciated. This will link to Tower Hill Gardens which have been restored by Tower Hamlets Council with Heritage

Lottery funding and also to Trinity House Square which Tower Hamlets and the Corporation of London have been repaving. The Corporation has a reputation for high standard schemes, and recently they have started working with adjacent boroughs to extend their high quality public realm outwards.

The completion of the extensive scheme of enhancement along Kensington High Street is eagerly awaited. A simple pattern of large paving slabs is being laid; all the guardrail that penned in pedestrians has been removed, while traffic lights have been incorporated onto streetlights and other signs reduced to a minimum.

Camden Council have taken the bold decision to invest £25m between 2000 and 2005 on improving the pavements in the borough as part of its 'Boulevard Project'. As large areas of Camden are designated as conservation areas, we have been keen to ensure that where historic paving and street furniture survive, these are recognised and reinstated as parts of the works. We are also hoping that as part of the project, important historic squares such as Bedford Square can be reinstated more closely to their original form with York stone pavements and a bound gravel carriageway.

Another example of a major initiative with implications for the London streetscape has been the introduction of the Congestion Charge. Zone entry

treatments on streets, cameras, cabinets and signs have all required English Heritage to work closely with Transport for London to minimise clutter. We have had limited success and hope in due course to review jointly the siting of all signs and cameras further.

During the rest of 2003 as a number of exemplary *petits projets* are completed, we will have more good practice in place to encourage others to do better. Perhaps the corner has been turned and the streets of London are due for a renaissance. But we must be constantly vigilant and campaign tirelessly to create clutter-free streets for people. After all, streets are places in their own right, not just routes from A to B.

INFORMATION POINT

***Streets for All* can be obtained from English Heritage Customer Services (product code XH 20137).**

***Paving the Way* is available on www.cabe.org.uk or from Thomas Telford Ltd, Units 1/K, Paddock Wood Distribution Centre, Paddock Wood, Tonbridge, Kent, TN12 6UU
Tel: 020 7665 2464
Fax: 020 7665 2245**

'SWEET THAMES, RUN SOFTLY....'

PLANNING THE FUTURE OF LONDON'S RIVER AND OTHER WATERWAYS



View of the Thames from Richmond Hill.

'LANDSCAPE IS NOT ONLY SEEN WITH THE EYE, IT IS FELT IN THE HEART'

Jason Debney
Thames Landscape Strategy Co-ordinator.



LONDON'S ARCADIA – LANDSCAPING THE THAMES

The river Thames lies at the physical and spiritual heart of the capital, uniting different communities, cultures and commerce, inspiring a special sense of identity. It has shaped the way the modern metropolis has evolved and been essential to London's economic growth symbolising both London's ancestry and its capacity for change.

Between Hampton and Kew, the Thames meanders through one of the world's finest urban landscapes. Centuries of royal, aristocratic and artistic patronage have left a legacy of architecture, parks, palaces, wildlife and working communities that today forms an area of open space unparalleled in the rest of the capital. Celebrated as 'London's Arcadia', this area offers unique recreational opportunities for all Londoners to enjoy and forms a major tourist magnet.

The Thames Landscape Strategy evolved from the growing awareness of the need for integrated policies for the Thames in order to understand this special landscape and to respect its natural and manmade heritage in future policy and design. An analysis of the character of the river between Hampton and Kew led to the publication of the *Thames Landscape Strategy* in 1994. Written by Kim Wilkie, the Strategy proposed 180 different projects and pioneered the principle that

strategic planning policy can be both written and realised on the ground through partnerships of communities and statutory bodies. Besides being a technical document incorporated in planning legislation, the Strategy has acted as a handbook to help local people protect and understand their river on a day-to-day basis. It is a notable milestone in the journey towards integrated environmental planning and has provided a model that has inspired subsequent planning policy and guidance including the emerging London Plan and the Thames Strategy Kew to Chelsea. The Thames landscape is remarkable for its wealth of historic and natural heritage, but the Strategy does not overlook the ordinary things that are most cherished by the public and that give us a sense of place, pride and security. The Strategy's work is about people, and the day-to-day ways they connect with their landscape and those organisations that manage these places. At the core of the Strategy is the acknowledgement that landscape assessment is based on more than aesthetic or heritage interest alone. Landscape is not only seen with the eye, it is felt in the heart. This approach sits comfortably with regional and national policy. Time after time this proves to be the most effective way to raise funds and engage local people in the regeneration of the historic environment.

THE BLUE RIBBON NETWORK

London is acknowledged as a "green city" with a high proportion of man-made, natural and semi-natural open space providing relief from the dense urban form – opportunities for relaxation, leisure and communing with nature. But there is also another network of open spaces providing equal, and sometimes greater, opportunity to retreat from the pressures of urban living – an historic system of rivers, canals, docks and other water spaces.

It still surprises many that London is a water city. But in its genesis this is essentially what it is. Pre-historic communities sprang up along the Thames' banks, living off the river and using it as a primary means of transport, even before the Romans established their provincial capital in the 1st Century. It was at this time that London began its evolution into a major metropolis of global significance built on its maritime power. England's first navy was built on the Thames, at

Deptford, and for many years the Port of London was the biggest and busiest in the world, at the heart of a world-wide trading empire. The Thames was an international highway linking London to rest of the world. The great enclosed docks of the East End are a major legacy of this.

But London also embraced the Thames for its potential to give pleasure. Throughout history the river has been central to London life – for national ceremony and state occasions and for popular leisure pursuits. In the minds of Londoners and visitors alike, the Thames is central to the identity of the city. It both united and divided the city, – at various times a binding and a barrier.

The Thames is also at the centre of a major hydrological ecosystem that drains much of South East England. Its tributaries, some of them major industrial and trading rivers themselves (such as the Lea, the Brent and the Wandle) feed the Thames and define the topographical

form the capital. Such watercourses connected the Thames and the docks to the wider hinterland. In providing access to the national canal system, they created a navigable water network that linked the capital directly with the industrial and agricultural areas of the country and supported the sustained growth of the city.

Decline set in in the 19th century and the city increasingly turned away from its rivers, canals and docks relegating them, in the latter part of the 20th century, to mere backdrops to development. Then, in the 1990s a number of events led to a new focus on the Thames and waterways of London. Planning and design studies were initiated by the government, culminating in Regional Planning Guidance for the River Thames. The London Rivers Association published, *Rivers of Meaning*, a seminal work on the significance of the river in contemporary life. Kim Wilkie's *Thames Landscape Strategy* brought vision to a historically rich part of the river valley. And, in 2000, the conference

Putting Rivers on the Map, coined the term "Blue Belt" to describe the Thames's central role and the need to protect it. The concept of a "Blue Ribbon Network" was born. This recognises that all London's waterways and waterspaces are largely physically linked as a continuous system. More importantly, they provide a chain of spaces and corridors, freely accessible and allowing a different perspective on the city through the distinctive and unique views and vistas they afford. They also offer an alternative transport route away from congested road and rail modes. Like other open spaces, they provide scope for contact with nature, with the added frisson of elemental forces of tides and currents, and unique habitats for wildlife. Importantly for us, London's waterspaces encompass a huge amount of the cultural heritage that defines London as an outstanding historic city.

The Blue Ribbon Network concept is set to become a model for environmental policy-making elsewhere.

'THE THAMES AND ITS TRIBUTARIES SUSTAINED THE GROWTH OF THE CITY'

Alan Byrne
Regional Planner, London Region.



INFORMATION POINT 1

The full *Thames Landscape Strategy* document is available on CD-ROM at £30 (inc. P&P) from Jason Debney at Holly Lodge, Richmond Park, Richmond TW10 5HS

Other available resources from the TLS include:

Accessible Thames Walking Guide (Hampton to Kew). Free but please send an A4 SAE including 54p stamps.

Also published by Barne Elms Publishing:

Mavis Batey, David Lambert & Kim Wilkie, *Arcadian Thames*, £9.99 plus P&P

INFORMATION POINT 2

London Rivers Association, *Putting Rivers on the Map: Blue Belt & the Future of Urban Rivers*, LRA, 2000

London Rivers Association, *Rivers of Meaning: Getting in Touch with the Thames*, LRA, 1996

London Canals Committee, *Guidelines for Canalside Development*, LCC, 2000

See also Annex 2 of the Mayor of London's Draft Plan, *The Blue Ribbon Network*.

LONDON: THE GREEN CITY

London's historic streetscapes and landscapes, its parks and gardens, rivers and waterways are amongst its greatest assets. They are London's most precious, yet vulnerable, open spaces; open to all, yet so often taken for granted. By working in partnership with other stakeholders, English Heritage will seek to ensure that they are properly protected,

proactively managed and positively enhanced as an integral part of London's attraction as a world city.

Our key partners include the Royal Parks, the Mayor, the London Boroughs, CABE Space, Groundwork, the Heritage Lottery Fund, British Waterways, the London Rivers Association, the Thames Landscape Strategy and the London Parks & Green Spaces Forum.



We will:

- Promote Streets for All and the principles of integrated townscape management to create streets for people and liveable neighbourhoods.
- Support environmental improvements which set new standards of best practice in the public realm.
- Provide advice and training on best practice for local authority staff working in the public realm.
- Continue our Campaign for London Squares to direct resources to high-priority projects to enhance their appearance, management and biodiversity.

– Tackle the problem of redundant historic buildings at risk in public parks and direct resources towards their sustainable reuse.

– Enhance our own public parks and landscapes.

– Play a major role in delivering 122 environmental projects by 2007 for Arcadia in the City – a part of the Thames Landscape Strategy from Hampton to Kew.

– Develop and co-ordinate a series of exemplary area improvement projects including Blackheath, St George's Circus, Hyde Park Corner, the garden squares of Bloomsbury, and the Thames Landscape Strategy from Kew to Chelsea.

– Work with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, to prepare a long-term conservation and landscape management plan for the proposed World Heritage Site.

– Contribute to the work of the Mayor, British Waterways and the London Rivers Association to enhance London's Blue Ribbon network.

London's historic streetscapes, waterways and open spaces are vital to its economy and the quality of life of all who live and work here. Opinion surveys repeatedly demonstrate that one of the main reasons visitors and businesses come to London is the quality of its historic environment – its atmospheric streetscapes, its parks, garden squares and open spaces. Improving the public realm is not an optional extra, it is a direct investment in the capital's continued prosperity. We need to do better.

Work with us in partnership and help us to release this potential for the benefit of all.

Philip Davies, London Region Director.



NEXT ISSUE

Buildings At Risk

All over London, historic buildings such as these in Union Street, Southwark are at risk.

In the next issue, find out how we are working to bring such buildings back from the brink and give them new life.

CONTACT DETAILS

We would welcome comments and suggestions on this edition. These should be sent to

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