

A photograph of a park with a large gazebo in the center, surrounded by trees and a paved path leading towards it. The gazebo has a dark, domed roof and is decorated with hanging flower baskets. The path is paved and leads from the foreground towards the gazebo. The background is filled with lush green trees.

OUR PARK

Pat
Kingwell

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The Friends of Southwark Park

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The Friends of Southwark Park

Introduction

In 1999 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded Southwark Council a very large grant to carry out badly-needed restoration and improvement works to Southwark Park.

It was a major moment in the life of one of London's oldest parks, so we held a party, sung some songs, had a drink or two, and published a small booklet to mark the occasion. In summer 2009 we had some more drinks, sung some more songs, and published another, slightly larger booklet, this time to herald the park's 140th anniversary.

Curiously, in looking back through the archives, we could find no record of any previous anniversary celebrations; the usual silver, gold and diamond milestones had seemingly passed by without any recognition, as did the centenary in 1969. We couldn't help wonder why the first municipal public park in London had been so little commemorated or written about. Was it simply an oversight, or the old case of familiarity and contempt? Anyway, we thought the story of Southwark Park should be better known, so we asked the Heritage Lottery Fund to support a reminiscence project called "Our Park." We were successful with our application, and one of the results is this book you are currently reading.

The key aims of "Our Park" were to show the importance of Southwark Park to the local heritage of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe and the regional heritage of London; to help people to learn about their own heritage in an

enjoyable and fun way; to involve local people of all ages; to recount the history of Southwark Park, not only in the written word, but also through oral reminiscences, visual and aural recordings, an exhibition and a website.

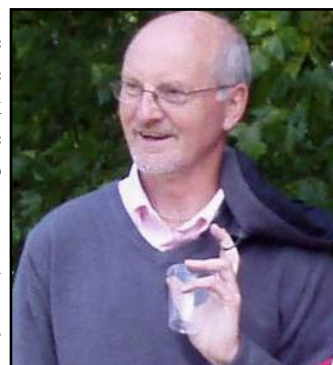
A number of activities have taken place, such as

guided walks, talks, oral history training and school-based projects. On the way we have developed partnerships with several local organisations and community groups.

As you can see we have drawn heavily upon the memories and opinions of people in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe to make the book as rich as possible.

We thank everybody who agreed to take part, and also the Heritage Lottery Fund and Southwark Council's Parks Service for their help and encouragement.

Particular thanks to Gary Magold for allowing us to use his unrivalled collection of photographs and ephemera; Debra Gosling for her design skills; David Toogood for his 'photography-on-demand' and Marjorie Hill for generally keeping us on the straight and narrow.



Pat Kingwell
Volunteer Project Co-ordinator
The Friends of Southwark Park

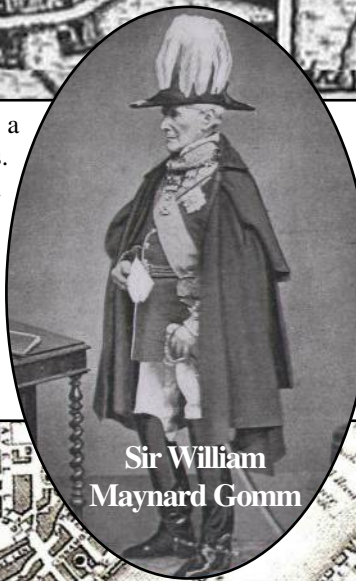


Before The Park

Can you imagine that not so long ago Southwark Park, and most of the surrounding area, was open countryside? It is true. No rushing traffic or flight paths, no factory chimneys spewing out toxic smoke; just trees, shrubs and animals. Total peace and quiet!

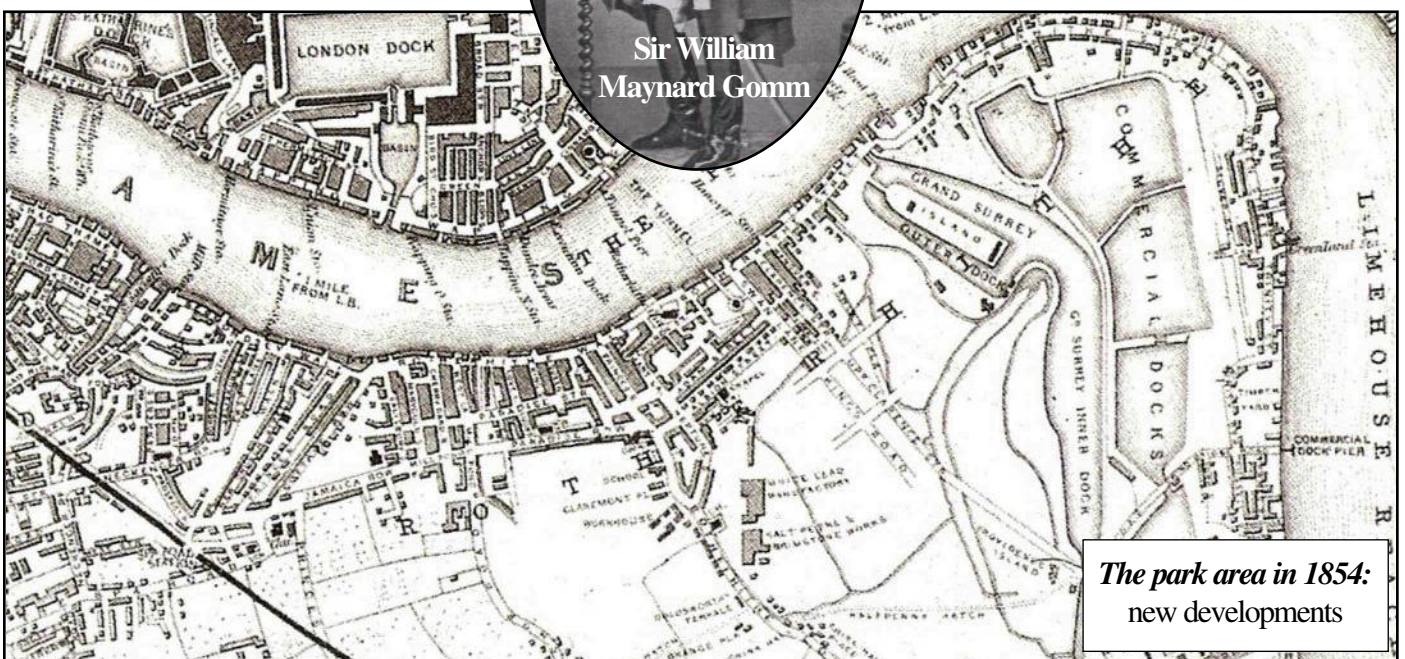


What we see now as an urban park was once a patchwork of fields, ditches and watercourses. Eels, carp and salmon could be found, and many varieties of water birds, including moorhens, kingfishers, ducks and snipe. In medieval times the ancient settlement of Bermondsey had an important abbey, and it is likely the land was part of its domain. In the fifteenth century royalty used to come here to



Sir William
Maynard Gomm

hunt the birds and catch the fish. By the sixteenth century the expanding City of London needed feeding, and so the site began to be used for market gardening. By the 1850s the owner was Sir William Maynard Gomm, Lord of the Manor of Rotherhithe, who let out his land for the growing of crops. Principal tenants included Samuel and Richard Brandon, William James Blake and Patrick Hayes.



The Early Years

The idea of Southwark Park first began to be seriously considered in the 1850s, because the area rapidly changed from a rural to an industrial one. Bermondsey was soon to be full of smelly factories and other polluting industries, and Rotherhithe was dominated by the docks and the wharves.

By the 1850s there was a huge growth in population and poor living conditions. By the time of the first Ordnance Survey map of 1870 it is evident how things had changed.

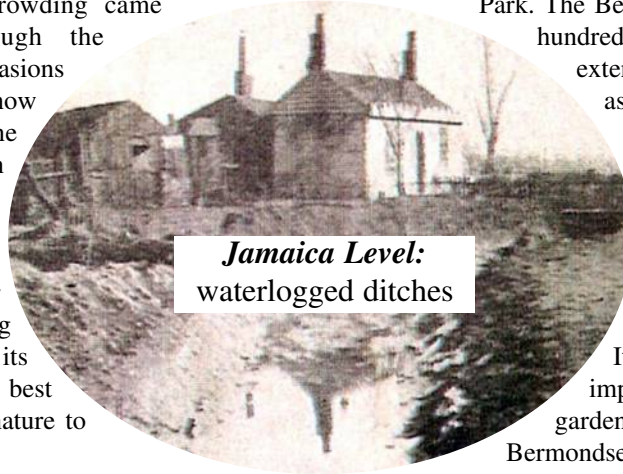
There was little open space for the people to take their recreation, and with the overcrowding came disease. Cholera swept through the community on at least three occasions between 1830 and 1864. We now know that cholera is a water-borne disease, but back in mid-Victorian times, it was believed that it was transported through the air. The remedy was to get out into open spaces and take as much fresh air as possible to prevent becoming infected. The public park, with its trees and plants, was seen as the best way of bringing the benefits of nature to the ever more crowded city.

It is not totally clear who started the campaign for a park, but we know that in 1856 two-hundred and fifty local people signed a petition calling on the Metropolitan Board of Works to provide one. Between 1856 and 1864, when the Southwark Park Act was finally agreed by Parliament, many

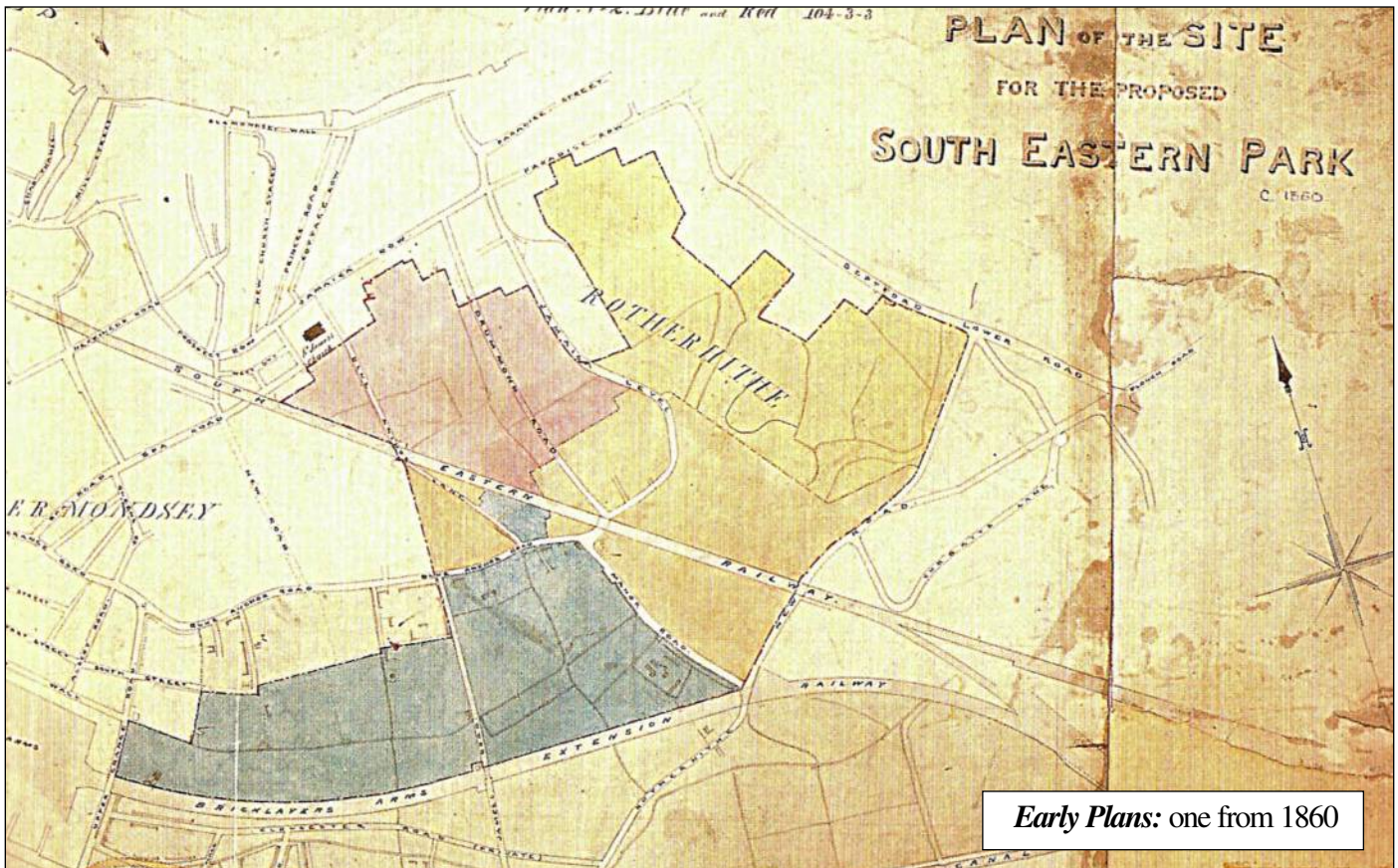
people had made their voices known. Worth mentioning are some long-forgotten locals, without whose efforts we would not have our park today. George Elkington, the Bermondsey Vestry surveyor who produced the first ever plan for Southwark

Park. The Bermondsey plan was for a park one-hundred and six acres in size which would extend right up to St. James' Church and as far as the Old Kent Road. His idea was more of a plan for south-east London and was never fully implemented. George Legg, the Rotherhithe Vestry surveyor, also produced a plan on a more modest scale to serve the local area of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe.

It was this plan that was more or less implemented, using the former market garden site. Various representatives from Bermondsey and Rotherhithe took petitions to the authorities and attended many meetings, such as William Miskin, Edward Lawson, Joseph Goddard, Beriah Drew, Cyrus Legg, Lewis Wilcher, Thomas Evans, George Redgrave, and Messrs. Darnell, Stratford, Blackford, Judkins, Perks, Turner and Harris.



Jamaica Level:
waterlogged ditches



Early Plans: one from 1860

1869: The Opening



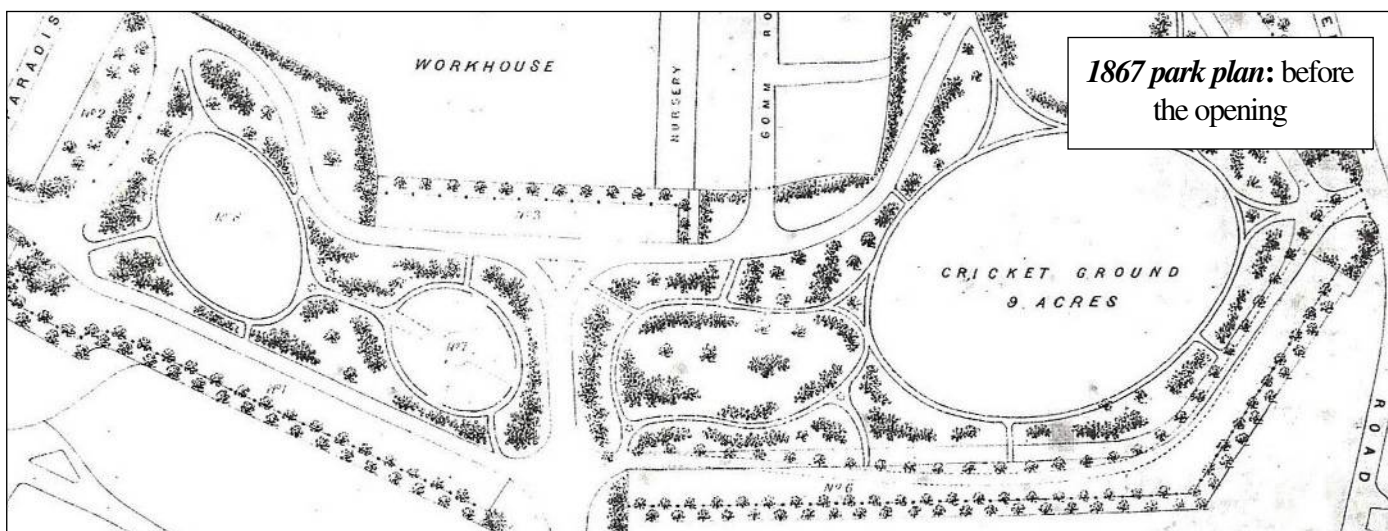
The Southwark Park Act was passed by Parliament on 28th April 1864, but for five years there was so much delay and complications that one local newspaper warned "if some effort be not made by the locality to bring that unwieldy Board to their senses the present generation will pass away without it seeing the flowers and shrubs so long promised."

Eventually, on a wet Saturday 19th June 1869 the park was opened to the public. It cost almost a hundred-thousand pounds, most of which was compensation to landowners and tenants, including Sir William Maynard Gomm who received fifty-six thousand pounds for his property.

If we could travel back in time what sort of park would we find in 1869? As now, it was about 25 hectares (63 acres) in size. We would find all the key entrances in place, including the main one in Southwark Park Road (known then as Jamaica Level). The gates were probably metal, but the boundary fencing mainly

wood. Just to the north of Gomm Road was a nursery for growing plants, the remains of which survive today. Generally it was a very plain park, with none of the attractions we are used to nowadays. There was no lake, bandstand, art gallery or play equipment in the children's playgrounds. Apart from a large cricket ground, there were no other sports facilities. The planting was very simple and natural, with few ornamental beds and no rockeries or water features.

It is clear from the park plan of 1867 that the joint landscape architects, George Vulliamy and Alexander McKenzie, favoured large swathes of grass and open views, with long gravel paths on which people could take their exercise. Over six hectares (fifteen acres) of land on the perimeter was left vacant for building private villas, and there was a wide driveway that went all the way around the park, designed for horse and carriages.



The Landscape

Today the main thing that strikes you when walking around the park is its flatness; there are very few mounded areas, so all ages and abilities can enjoy its delights.

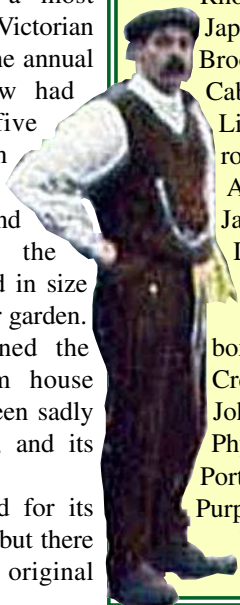


However the landscape is not without variety. There is a lot of close-mown open grassland; mature broadleaf and coniferous trees; ornamental shrubberies and bedding; some small areas of 'woodland'; a wildlife area; and some spring and summer meadows. The lake is a beautiful central feature. Despite the opposition of Alexander McKenzie, who considered it bad taste and "cockney gardening," in 1870 the park also began to have its first bedding plants. Local people have always loved flowers: there were a number of flourishing horticultural and floricultural societies in the area at the time; and their demand for more decoration and colour in the park was somewhat reluctantly accepted by the authorities. In 1870 it was agreed to form a nursery near Gomm Road to provide plants for Southwark; it operated successfully for over a hundred years. In 1887 approval was given for the addition of a chrysanthemum house, which became a most popular attraction. In its Victorian and Edwardian heyday the annual four-week autumn show had over two-thousand five hundred varieties on display and regularly drew over thirty-thousand visitors. In 1892 the greenhouse was extended in size and was used for a winter garden. The site which contained the nursery, chrysanthemum house and winter garden has been sadly derelict for many years, and its future is uncertain. Southwark Park is noted for its fine London Plane trees, but there were very few in the original

design. We have to thank Charles Dennis, the second Park Superintendent, for what we see today. In 1872 after the Metropolitan Board of Works decided against house building in the park, Dennis had to find uses for the land on the perimeter. His plan put in place much of the layout which survived for over a century, such as grassed recreation and sports areas, adult and children's gymnasias, a place for bands to play and the familiar

Planting in 1869

Common Laurels	Double Cherry
Rhododendrons	Lawson's Cypress
Japanese privets	Cedrus Deodora
Broom	Alies Albertus
Cabbages & roses	Purple Beech
Lilacs & moss roses	Chinese Juniper
Aucuba	Box
Japonica	Copper Beech
Laurestinus	Scarlet Horse Chestnuts
Almonds	Large lilacs
Variegated boxelder	Magnolia
Creeping St. John's Wort	Loulageana
Phyllisea	Horse Chestnuts
Portugal Laurels	Planes
Purple Filberts	Sycamores
Weeping Birch	Laburnums
Mountain Ash	Weeping Elm
	Weeping Lime
	Wooly Lime



plane trees on either side of wide tar paths. Under Dennis' management several hundred plane trees were planted, most of which remained until a major thinning programme began in the late 1950s. For most of its life Southwark Park was surrounded by industries which polluted the atmosphere, and today it is perhaps difficult to appreciate just how bad things were. Some comments from the past give us a glimpse of why the park was seen as such an oasis.

The Landscape

Our Park



Gary Magold:

"I remember the Great Storm of 1987: The wood was taken up to the bandstand area and they had a big bonfire lasting several days."

Grace Beesley:

"My mum took me to the Nursery and Chrysanthemum House before the war. It seemed a big place as a child."

Len Hatch:

"I can recall the nursery and the big glasshouses. When the LCC had it they used to cultivate their own plants and some of the flower beds were lovely."

Tom Ash:

"At the park gates just inside of Gomm Road were the hothouses. These were opened to the public on Sundays and I passed many a pleasant hour or two just walking around several greenhouses that housed the exotic plants with all the fantasies of the tropics we could imagine."

Matt Preece:

"Many a time we've met people who moved away nearly fifty years ago and they've come back just for the day and they've called in to the park and they've told you what was planted where or remembering an event... yet perhaps the most exciting bit of the planting is what's to come."

In 1896 a letter to the Southwark Recorder complained of the state of Bermondsey's streets:

"I am not, Sir, an inhabitant of Bermondsey, but am compelled through the caprices of fate and fortune to spend the day in this delightful retreat. While slowly and sadly wending my way along, I am struck in more senses than one, by the dirtiness of your streets. Mud and filth abound

everywhere.

Should the day be dry, then one is blinded by the dust, and should the gentle raindrops fall, the whole district is converted into a mud

pond. The side walks, to as large an extent as the roads, are covered with this glutinous substance, and what with the slipping and sliding, shower baths from the road etc., I often present a sorry spectacle by the time I have arrived at my destination...Why should your streets be so dirty?"

A letter to the Southwark Recorder in 1874 asked: "Can any of your readers inform me what is the cause of the most unpleasant smell

which is frequently complained of in Southwark Park? It must be some neighbouring bone boiling or fat melting business, which a little investigation would surely drive away."

In 1893 Park Superintendent Bailey asked that something be done about the smoke nuisance from the nearby infirmary. He reported:

"Thick volumes of black smoke are drawn down on wind upon the park."

By 1911 Rev. Bryce of Clare College

Mission could write: "Our

corner of Rotherhithe

has long since lost the

springing freshness of

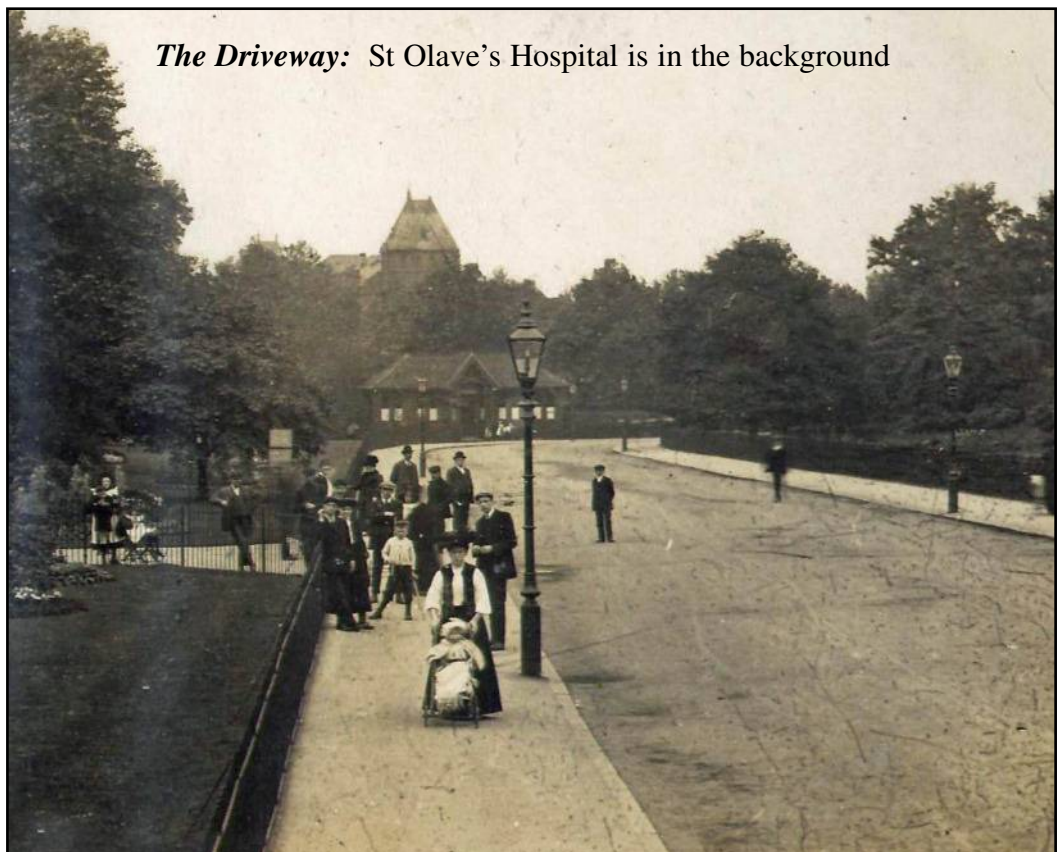
the suburb; on the other hand it has

no courts and alleys

such as are to be found in the

inner South London slum.

"The district to the casual eye is neither picturesque or tragic: it is simply monotonous, dingy and deadly dull. But the people are not: with the bright alertness of most South Londoners they combine a sturdy independence and clinging to respectability; they are much absorbed in the cares of the world..."



The Driveway: St Olave's Hospital is in the background

The Landscape

This view was echoed by Alfred Salter: "Bermondsey is not a nice place to live in. The air is thick and sooty. The smells are - well, they are. The streets are dingy and grey. The houses are small, pokey and inconvenient. There are no noble buildings or fine monuments. The people are herded and huddled together - overcrowded per room, overcrowded per acre. They have no space to move, no room to store their clothes or their food and there is little chance of privacy or quiet."

A report in the South London Press from 1934 claimed: "Bermondsey is a borough of nerve wracking noises. Motor horns are now forbidden after 11.30, but what about the sirens on the river? And the screeches from the railway? And wedding parties that thud-thud till 6a.m.? And the gramophones? And the loudspeakers? And the brigade boys who practise bugle calls? And the greyhounds that howl all night? And the little darlings who begin to let off fireworks in honour of Guy Fawkes two months before the day arrives? And the jovial parties who sing on their way home? And the ladies with ear-splitting voices who relate at great length 'what I said to 'er.' In an area with high dock walls, miles of tarmac and plain brick, the tranquil landscape

of Southwark Park must have been a welcome relief. However, as can be expected with such challenging conditions, it was hard for trees and plants to survive.

In 1875 Park Superintendent Dennis reported: "In consequence of the unfavourable position of Southwark Park ...a very large portion of the better trees and shrubs have died...the whole of the conifers, the greater portion of

THE Southwark Park show of chrysanthemums at this place began on Saturday last, and is expected to remain open about four weeks. The collection this year is the largest and best that has ever been grown here; there are upwards of 2,600 plants of the very best varieties, some of the Japanese kinds are truly remarkable in form and colour. During the past summer a large new wing has been added to the glass house, which gives much more space. The plants are arranged in a very artistic manner, which adds greatly to the beauty of the show, reflecting much credit to the superintendent, Mr. W. Bailey, who has been ably assisted by his foreman, Mr. D. Carson, and assistant propagator, R. Taylor. The people are visiting the show in large numbers.

the acers, horse chestnuts, beeches, almonds, tulip trees, mountain ashes, oaks, elms, berberis, box, Portugal laurel, hazel, hibiscus, hydrangeas, magnolias etc." Sometimes

bad weather wreaked havoc. In 1881 powerful gales destroyed four-hundred trees. Six years later during heavy snowstorms great branches of trees were hurled to the ground, and in 1904 dense fogs killed the wallflowers.

More recently the Great Storm of October 1987 led the Bermondsey News to report:

"the park looks like a war zone with the remains of magnificent trees uprooted throughout the area." It took a long time to clear the wreckage of the mini-hurricane, which left a very upsetting sight in its wake. However, the park has since recovered its tranquil majesty and happily most of the plane trees survived the tempest.

Our Park



David Toogood:

"I remember one tree on the lake island that had a knothole in it where we hid our fags. It was a packet of Weights; but by the time we returned to retrieve our booty it had rained and they were just a soggy mess."

Nick Lane: "My favourite tree is probably the Caucasian Wingnut. I loved the way the seed pods dangled over the lake...it's the one on the corner, near to where the old entrance of the lido used to be. I also think the carpet bedding is a really wonderful thing."

Lyn Olding: "We want more colour and brightness, that's what we're trying to do... The Crocoosmia tree is just the best plant in the world, I just love it."

Dave Fisher: "There was a place for burning leaves and this was near the Jabez West memorial. It was partially hidden from view by trees and shrubs. There was always a very strong smell of burning leaves when entering the park. This was later taken away and the ground was levelled off....In 1960 a friend of mine was in the park at a time when they were felling some of the older trees.

The trees were cut up which left the stumps on the edge of the hole they came out of. My friend decided to get into the hole to play; unfortunately the stump fell back into the hole crushing him with fatal injuries."



Southwark Park, The Conservatory.

Copyright

The Fairy Tree

Who would have thought that Our Park held tales of myth and legend? The trees have their own mysterious folklore surrounding them but a fairy tree? In Bermondsey? This is Michael Holland's story...

My Nan Bridget Donovan was the parkie in Southwark Park swing park for many years, so was always on hand as a babysitter for her brood of five girls and a son, then for all their children and even for her great-grandchildren. Many a time a cousin of mine would drop off their baby and pram with Nan in the park while they went shopping down The Blue. The whole family have spent a big proportion of their life in Southwark Park while being cared for by Bridget Donovan. Even after she had retired she would still babysit all the kids and in clement weather would always take her charge over to feed the ducks and take a walk through the Rose Garden. Nanny Bridge was a great storyteller so three generations of kids



Above: Is this the fairy tree..?

have grown up with the tale of the Fairy Tree in Southwark Park. When she died in 1993 at the age of 87 nobody could decide what to do with her ashes and they stayed in Albin's for quite a few years, before we all got together to spread her remains in the place we all associated with her: Southwark Park. We met up in The Boatman and after a few drinks took the urn to the park where we were going to spread the ashes around where the swing park used to be and around the Fairy Tree. We were about twenty-five handed and made quite a

Right: Bridget Donovan in 1993, captured in an oil painting by her grandson Michael Holland



©Michael Holland 1993

procession as we entered the Jamaica Road gate. Just a few yards in young Georgie pointed to a tree. 'That's the Fairy Tree,' he said.

'Don't be stupid,' declaimed his big brother Ben, 'it's further on.'

'Yeh, by the duck pond,' added Charlie.

'No, it ain't,' said Joanne, 'its opposite where the putting green used to be.'

'I always thought it was by the swings,' declared Rachel. 'Ain't it that one over there? That looks like a Fairy Tree,' offered Aunt Janet.

'Mother!' cried Lisa, 'how can it look like a Fairy Tree if there's no such thing as fairies?'

I stayed out of it having forgot any fairy stories. My mum said that we should scatter ash by every tree that people remember as a Fairy Tree, which seemed to be an idea we could all agree on. So there we were, zigzagging through Southwark Park scattering Nanny Bridge's remains around the trees that each person was told was the Fairy Tree.

I scattered a little handful of ash just by where the entrance to the long gone swing park would have been as that is the place I associate mostly with my Nan.

We reminisced as we went on our way from tree to tree, laughing at the good times we had had with Nanny

Bridge. After a while we all had dust-covered hands and as we headed through the gate to the lake and another tree, Ben shouted: 'Stop biting your nails, Sam, you're eating nanny!' My Nan was a great storyteller.

The Lake

When our park opened in 1869 there was no lake. The plan put forward by George Legg of Rotherhithe Vestry in 1856 had included one, but probably because of the expense, it was omitted from the final scheme. However the simple layout of the park needed an attractive focal point: a serene and sparkling lake.



In July 1869 the Southwark Recorder called for a link to the Surrey Canal, but that innovative idea was not taken up. In 1873 the Board did agree to look at Superintendent Dennis' suggestion of a pond on the west side of the park near Dilston Grove, but once again nothing came of it. Three years later the matter was raised again at the Board by local representative E. Dresser Rogers, but to no avail. In 1883 the Rotherhithe Vestry began a campaign which was to prove successful. Vestrymen John Bulmer and L.H. Bartlett, supported by local Board representatives J. Tolhurst and William Shepherd, finally managed to get agreement to an ornamental pond. It was designed by Board architect George Vulliamy; constructed by George Bell of Tottenham for £2,665 (about (£129,000 today)); was just over one hectare (2.75 acres) in size with three islands; and consisted of a concrete basin, well puddled with clay as a foundation, and neatly finished around the margins with a coping of blue rounded bricks.

The formal opening was on 18th July 1885, and the Southwark Recorder reported:

"The most gratified creatures were the birds, who as soon as a few gallons lay at the bottom of the lake, sipped the water and sprinkled their plumage with the welcome liquid...The outline both of the mainland and the islands consists of a succession of graceful curves, so arranged as to give the appearance of continuity, and we could find no point of view from which the whole extent of the lake could be seen...The islands have been thickly planted with suitable trees and shrubs, and are already commencing to render their verdant tribute to the landscape."



However there were a few early problems. The water supply was so slow it took six weeks to fill the pond.

Then a local workingman's committee had arranged to get two swans from Queen Victoria, and organised a big ceremony, but Her Majesty's swan-keeper did not provide the birds in time.



Our Park



Tim Helps: "Yeh, I used to like sitting out round the pond. Feed the ducks, throw a bit of bread out."

Michael Holland: "Get those boats out on the lake!"

Mary Gosling: "It's lovely. It takes some beating. I think I might like to do a painting of the lake one day."

The Lake

Our Park



Debra Gosling: "We were walking round by the lake and we saw a dog swimming across from the other side and he gets to our side and he couldn't get out. He just could not get out. I started panicking, as I thought he would drown. So I had to jump over the fence and pull him out by his collar, at which point he shook the water all over me, made me soaking wet, jumped over the fence and legged it. I think he must live in the houses across the way. He probably does it all the time!"

Gary Magold: "At one time it was fairly grotty and tiny, just an enlarged pond. My family used to talk about boating, but when I was growing up in the 70s there was almost nothing there."

Len Hatch: "Yes, going on the lake in a lovely big boat, twice round the lake for a penny. There were also wooden sculling boats."

The disappointment of the huge crowd gathered to witness the swans on 22nd August 1885 was partly overcome by the placing of many ducks and waterfowl on the lake, all gifts from local people. Better late than never, the royal swans did come, and the Southwark Recorder reported their arrival a few weeks later:

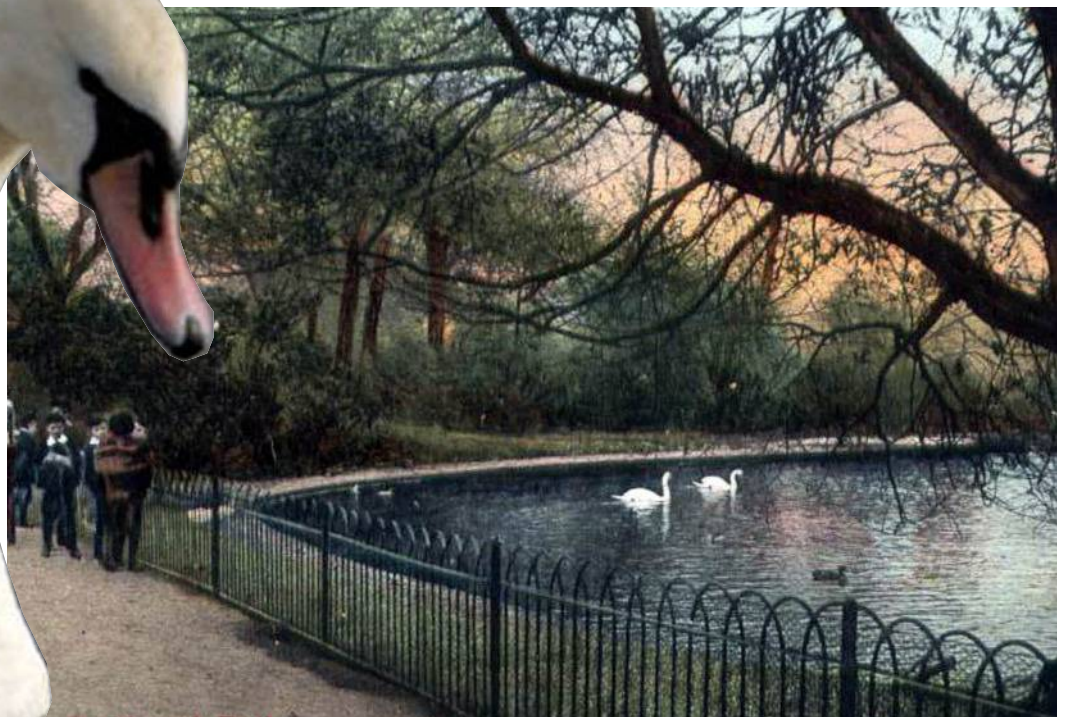
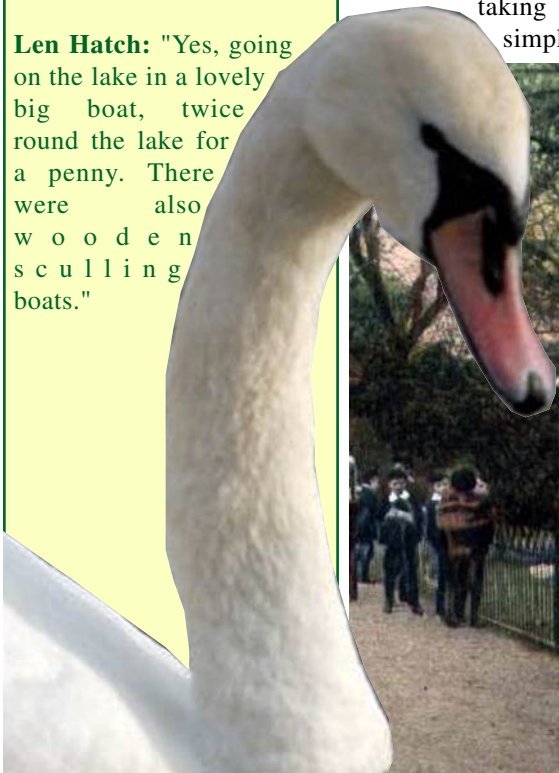
"At about six o'clock in the evening there might have been observed a crowd of children and adults hurrying along the path around the cricket ground, the presence of which indicated an abnormal condition of things. Around the lake were also crowded a large number of persons, anticipating the arrival of the swans, and true enough, there they were, as large as life undoubtedly, quiet as swans could be, but possessed, one would imagine, of a longing to be freed from the bonds which compelled them to remain encased in the baskets which enveloped their bodies. Presently a party comprising of Mr. Fairbairn, jun., Mr. Coppin, Mr. J. Watson (of the Southwark Recorder), were seen standing at the northern end of the lake. Very speedily they proceeded to unloosen the imprisoned birds, which having been accomplished, Mr. Fairbairn, senr. took charge of one and Mr. Coppin of the other, and placed them in the water. In another minute both swans were seen swimming majestically, taking an easterly course...The simple task accomplished the

principal actors retired, the crowd expressing entire satisfaction at the appearance of the birds by ejaculations of a most satisfying nature. The birds soon made themselves quite at home, stretching their wings, diving and swimming at their ease, each floating as a 'thing of beauty' and we hope to prove a joy for many years to Southwark Park visitors." The lake added some badly needed distinction to the park, and was enhanced when Colonel Munro of Whitechapel donated six-hundred fish in 1887.

In the same year a rat catcher, Mr. Waring, was employed to keep the islands free of vermin, and by 1889 a member of staff, J. Stanner, was responsible for waterfowl and gardening work on the lake bank. The lake would continue to have a member of staff dedicated to its upkeep for over fifty years. For about a quarter of a century the small lake remained at the same size. The demands placed upon it must have been great for the records show the LCC regularly refused requests for it to be used for bathing and boating. As time went by more ducks were added, often gifts from local supporters of the park. In 1895 the cold winter saw hundreds ice skating, a scene to be repeated in February 1929, when at night the lake was illuminated with storm lamps. In 1891 an aviary was located nearby and in 1901 a dovecote was placed on one of the islands.



© D. Gosling 2010



The Lake

Not everything was pleasant though. In 1892 an unnamed vagrant woman was found drowned. By 1900 leaks on the banks had developed which, despite repairs, were to be a recurring problem. Even worse was the condition of the water. In 1901 it was so bad that a public meeting was held to call upon the LCC to do

something about "the obnoxious and dangerous stench which arises from the lake in this park owing to its filthy condition..." The Southwark Recorder wrote: "It is four or five years since this piece of mud and water received any attention from the Council and upon a close day the stench is vile." The Bermondsey Borough Council Medical Officer's report described it as having "the very unpleasant odour of stagnant water. It was full of both living and dead animal and vegetable matter. The water is perfectly green, has a filthy scum on the surface, and looks as if it had not been changed for years." Thankfully remedial action was taken and soon another issue became more prominent, namely the campaign to extend the lake for boating. The Southwark Park Improvement Committee

was formed in 1906 and consisted of working men, many of whom were employed on the river or in the docks. They lobbied, petitioned and called many meetings to achieve their aim. The main promoter was William Smith of Paradise Street. His sister "Sissie" organised petitions at the park gates and was key to the campaign's success.

On 29 August 1908 a new boating lake and boathouse was opened to public. There were about three-thousand people present, and the main entrance in Southwark Park Road was adorned with flags and banners. A band provided music.

The new lake added about one hectare to the existing pond, could take up to twenty boats and cost over one-thousand and seven hundred pounds. It was constructed by Bermondsey men as an unemployment relief project. The lake was situated south of the central carriageway drive, and was from an original design by William Smith, which was adapted by Colonel Sexby of the LCC. After the opening speeches the dignitaries were rowed around the lake. William Smith should have been the rower but he did not reach the starting place in time.



David Toogood: "I used to go out onto the lake in the boats that were for hire. This would have been in the fifties. You had to pay for a boat which had a number on it and when your hour was up the attendant would shout out at you; you know the kind of thing: 'come in number five your time is up!' I lost my watch in the lake and I cried all the way home. I thought my dad would be angry but he just laughed!"

Our Park



Nick Lane: "We got a much better range of wildlife; we replanted reed beds so there were opportunities for dragon fly nymphs, damsel fly, that sort of thing."

David Clark: "I remember the turnstile still standing, be it alone, as a reminder of the lake which used to have pleasure boats there."

The Lake

Boats were also taken out by councillors, the press and others. However, "several immersions took place, partly owing to the crowds which thronged the margins of the lake, and which threatened from mere force of numbers to break down all ruled

order and cause more disasters." The boating lake proved to be very popular, and was reasonably priced, with a boat for up to four persons costing just sixpence an hour. The accounts generally showed a good profit.

The use of boats on Sundays was often banned or restricted; quite a deprivation for the working people, and even more galling when it was allowed in Battersea and Victoria Parks. Not until 1922 was Sunday boating fully established in Southwark Park. The

next development of the lake was when a children's paddling pool and a fishing area were added. In 1927 the paddling pool was physically separated from the boating lake and given an independent water supply. The Second World War was to prove a major turning point for the lake. Prior to the war there were leakage problems, but these were greatly worsened by bomb damage. Repairs were carried out in 1942, and the lake used as an emergency water supply, but despite further repairs in 1944 and again in 1946, serious loss of water persisted. It may well be the lack of proper maintenance and the vibrations from local

bombing and gunfire from the anti-aircraft battery adjoining the lake also had an adverse effect. The boating house was destroyed and the paddling pool damaged too. In the post-war years the Labour Party, through Bob Mellish and Eileen

Greenwood, made repeated requests for the restoration of the lake, but due to expense and other priorities were denied.

In 1953 as an experiment a small portion of the lake adjoining the Ada Salter Garden was clay puddled over the existing floor. This was partially successful, but to extend over the rest of the lake was considered impracticable. In 1958, fifty years after it first opened, the decision to fill in the boating lake was taken by the LCC. The paddling

pool was also lost. There was a lot of disappointment at the loss of the lake, and for many people the grassed areas and the small ornamental pond were scant compensation for what had once been the best feature in the park.

And then a generation later came the National Lottery. In March 1999 Southwark Council was given a major grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund to extensively restore our park. The existing small pond was repaired, but most importantly extended to once again give us a substantial and beautiful lake. Whether boating will ever return remains to be seen.



© D.Gosling 2010

Bill Killick: "I can remember my father taking us to the park before the Second World War. They had rowing boats on the lake, and a large motor boat that you could get a tour of the lake for 2d."

Kathleen Metcalfe: "I used to visit Southwark Park a lot as a child. I lived off the Old Kent Road in Earls Road. We used to walk to the park via Rolls Road and it was quite a long walk but it was usually in the summer holidays. We used to ask all the neighbours if we could take their babies there and we used to take younger children who lived in the road with us. I can remember one of the younger ones falling, getting her dress wet in the lake and we hoped her dress would be dry by the time we walked home so her mother didn't find out."

Richard Stevens: "The boating lake had twenty rowing boats and one large motor-boat which could take about twenty children. To go to the park and have a trip on the motor-boat

Our Park



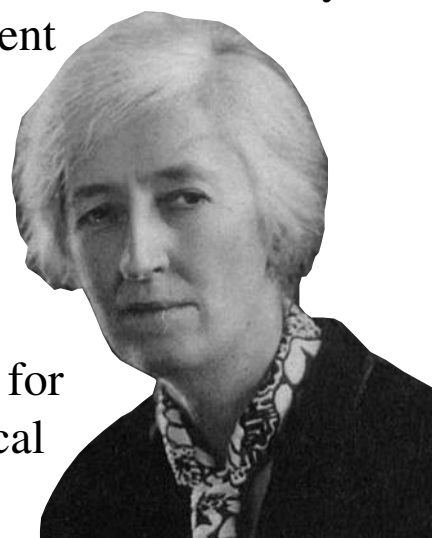
(1d a trip) was great fun and to have dad take you on a rowing boat (8d for half-an-hour) was the highlight of a visit to the park." (from 'Below Tower Bridge')

Matt Preece: "There's about a thousand native plants on the islands, we rode across with them in boats, across, back and forth, back and forth. We planted all that. Now the marginal planting's come in it's starting to get a lot more wildlife, it's starting to get a lot cleaner."

Rosie Thornton: "I think it's got less problems with Canada geese than some of our other parks, it's got some swans on it which is nice....so it's quite diverse...I think we could do more wildlife orientating round the lake...As far as boats go we might be able to bring them out for events, but maybe in more modern times we should be managing the lake for a more ecological point of view".

Ada Salter's Rose Garden

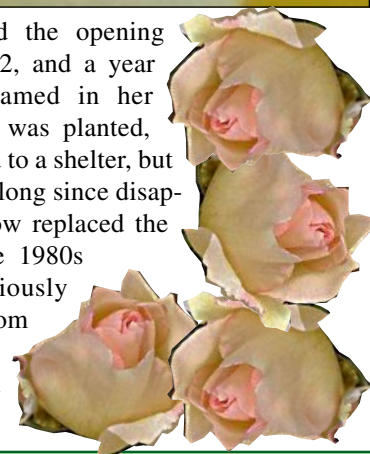
Ada Salter is a highly regarded figure in the history of Bermondsey. Born in Northamptonshire in 1868, as a young woman Ada Brown came to The Bermondsey Settlement where she ran clubs and Sunday schools for poor local girls.



© D.Toogood 2010

In 1900 she married Dr. Alfred Salter, and together they helped found the Bermondsey Independent Labour Party. In 1909 she became the first Labour member of the Bermondsey Borough Council and in 1922 the first woman mayor in London. Three years after she was elected member for Bermondsey on the London County Council, a position she held until 1941. She was a strong pacifist, a trade unionist, and a temperance advocate. In Bermondsey she was much loved for her great efforts to beautify the borough, especially through the planting of street trees and the improvement of small parks. At the LCC she came up with the idea of an English Rose Garden for Southwark Park, which was opened in July 1936 at a cost of some fifteen-hundred pounds. Sadly

Ada was too ill to attend the opening ceremony. She died in 1942, and a year later the garden was renamed in her honour. A Tree of Heaven was planted, and a bronze plaque attached to a shelter, but the latter, like the roses, has long since disappeared. A new stone has now replaced the missing plaque. During the 1980s the garden was seriously vandalised but with help from the Heritage Lottery Fund is now seen as a horticultural highlight of the park.



Lyn Olding: "It embraces Bermondsey"

Bill Killick: "In those days children were not allowed into the "Rose Garden" without an adult. I can remember trying to find out the time from the sun dial that used to stand in the centre of the walk through...Everyone wanted to be Robin Hood in the bushes next to the Rose Garden."

David Clark: "We would eat our lunch in the Rose Garden where I saw my first Sun Dial."

Our Park



David Toogood: "That is my favourite place in the park and I always make a point of going there."

Grace Beesley: "The Rose Garden never looks the same as it did in those days, when it was a mass of roses. I was quite sad when I saw them digging it up and doing something different. Somehow to me it didn't look the same, but there you go, it's marching on, a different way of doing things...Even now though you get people dashing about, it is still a peaceful place to sit."

Ada Salter's Rose Garden



Len Hatch: "During the summer, when the docks closed, the dockers would go round there, sit and have a chat."

Dave Fisher: "The Rose Garden as I remember was out of bounds to children unless accompanied by parents, but there were many times we would use it has a short

cut and the exciting thing was being chased out by the park keepers...

One day I was meaning to go to school, I decided to take a detour through the park, walking through the hard surface football pitch but it was covered in puddles. I happened to trip over, in doing so fell into a puddle resulting in a dirty shirt. So I didn't want to go

Our Park

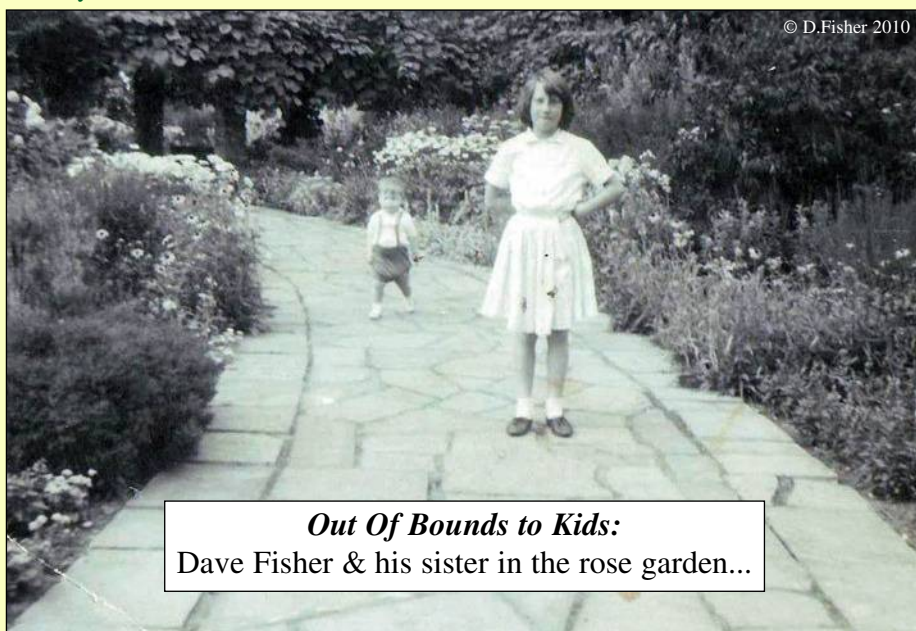


back home as mum would tell me off and I didn't want to go to school with a dirty shirt, so I stayed in the park for many hours thinking what should I do.

At one point I decided to go through the Rose Garden, but who did I bump into? The headmaster! I

can assure you he wasn't very pleased and I had to face him the next day."

Matt Preece: "Colour, that's something everybody says when they go in to the Ada Salter Garden, a huge amount of work has gone on in there. If you go to the Ada Salter garden in May to July it's magical, absolutely brilliant, it looks great".



Out Of Bounds to Kids:
Dave Fisher & his sister in the rose garden...

A Hundred Years Ago

POST CARD

This space may be used for Inland correspondence.
(Post office Regulation.)

The address to be written here.

INLAND 1/4 d.
FOREIGN 1 d.
with nothing
but address on
this side.
Printed abroad.

Photographers
abounded in
Bermondsey and
our park was shot
from every
possible angle.

Postcard
collecting became
a great craze and a
good means of
efficient
communication.





The Oval

The large open space at the southern end of the park is one of the key landscape features, and was once mostly used for cricket, but other activities have occurred on this green space.

At first, public meetings were prohibited in the park, but in July 1883 an organisation called the Rotherhithe Ratepayers Association deliberately gathered at the Hawkstone Road entrance in order to force the issue in the courts. The names of Richard Fairbairn, a lighterman, William Foreman and H.T. Hill were taken and the Board of Works began legal proceedings against them. After six months agitation, including questions in the House of Commons and the intervention of the Home Secretary, Sir Vernon William Harcourt, the right to meet was secured. The first officially recognised public meeting came on 10th February 1884 with W. Allen in the chair and speakers including J. Falvey, Fairbairn, S. Stuchbury and A.E. Payne. From then on meetings were common place near The Oval. The most notable were those connected with major industrial disputes when thousands would come together. The Great Dock Strike of 1889 saw massive crowds, as did the wave of strikes in 1911/12, when the government was worried enough about public order to station soldiers in the park.

The General Strike of 1926 and the unemployment campaigns of the 1930s also drew vast support. Between the First and Second World



Wars there were at least three aircraft crashes on The Oval. On 9th September 1919 the engine of a plane flying from Hounslow to Southend exploded and a forced landing was made. Pilot and passengers were safe. In 1924 an RAF aeroplane crashed on a small three-cornered piece of fenced turfed ground called "The Triangle", adjoining the Oval. The pilot escaped with nothing more than a severe shaking, but several youths had been playing football not a hundred yards from the scene. On 24th April 1931 Pilot-Officer J.N. Baxter, aged 20, had to crash land his craft after a bird flew into his engine. Park-keeper Benny ran to the machine and found the pilot hanging upside down, with his head touching the ground. The pilot's first words were, 'OK help me out of this strap.' 'I did so,' Mr. Benny said, 'and out he tumbled. He threw out his parachute, asked for the nearest telephone, and off he went to ring up the aerodrome. He was cool!'



RIVAL MEETING UNDER

"REFORMERS' TREE."

There was an opposition meeting under the Reformers' Tree, Southwark Park, on Sunday afternoon, when Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Labour and Co-operative men and women held their annual "May Day" demonstration. The organisers of the opposition meeting were Messrs. Tapner, Harwood, J. Selvidge, and others of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. The Labour and Co-operative speakers used a waggon as a platform, the unemployed speakers had a portable rostrum, and the two platforms were in rather close proximity to each other, one result being that by standing midway between them it was easily possible to hear both sides at once, though not, of course, to follow the conflicting arguments uttered simultaneously by the rival orators. The bulk of the demonstrators gathered round the Labour Co-operative waggon, with its Railwaymen's Union and Co-operative Guild banners, but the unemployed platform had at times a goodly muster round it. Some of the spectators seemed to be spending their time in going from one meeting to the other, enjoying a mixed diet.

"Red Flag."

When the Labour-Co-operative speakers ascended to their platform the band, which had led them in their march from Bermondsey Town Hall, played the "Red Flag," a verse of which was sung by the major crowd.



Flora & Fauna

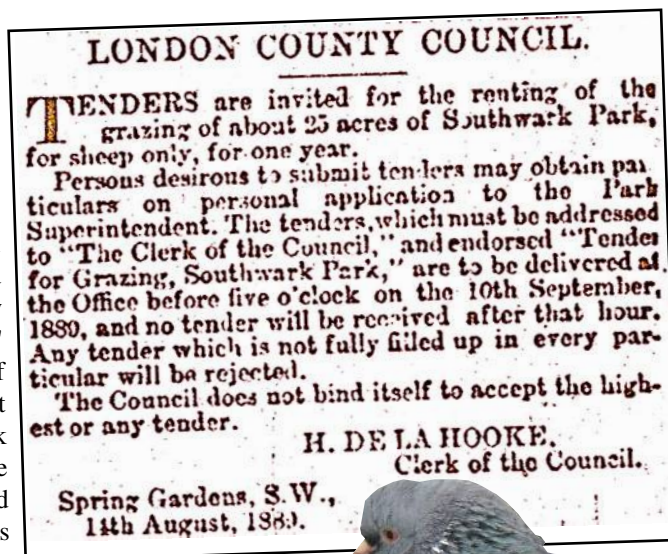


What is a park without its trees, flowers and birds? There is plenty of wildlife to behold, but over the years all sorts of wondrous creatures have visited its green and pleasant acres; from lions to parrots!



© D.Gosling 2010

The first animals to be seen as a park attraction in their own right were birds, but it was not until 1883 that simple iron water basins were provided for their use. After the first ornamental lake was opened in 1885 more birds came into the park. At first two white swans were provided by Queen Victoria, and the Southwark Recorder noted: "The birds soon made themselves quite at home, stretching their wings, diving and swimming at their ease, each floating as a 'thing of beauty' and we hope to prove a joy for many years to Southwark Park visitors." Soon the lake had a variety of ducks and geese, so many in fact that in 1889 Mr. Bush, the Park Superintendent, commented: "We have too many and should be glad to dispose of some of the old ones and drakes. They wander all over the park." In 1891 an aviary was added, and several pairs of birds bought, such as wrens; common and yellow buntings; chaffinches; greenfinches; goldfinches; linnets; redpolls; grey and blue long-tailed cole and marsh tits; red backed shrikes; jays and magpies. Such was the interest in the birds that a waterfowl attendant was employed to look after them. Mr. F. Featherstone did the job from 1895 to 1912, earning about 27 shillings a week (today about £77). Now we might think twice about having an aviary, but in its day it was enjoyed by a community who didn't often get out to the countryside. Despite the harsh environment, birds could be found elsewhere in the park. In 1904, Mr. Aggett, the Bermondsey Council gardener, reported on



Southwark Park's thrush, blackbird and Robin Redbreast, the latter: "returning with unfailing regularity in the chilly October days, when its plaintive note can be heard as if mourning the decay of summer. Later, it takes a more cheerful view of things, and carols merrily..." People often have strong opinions about dogs in parks, and in the early days bye-laws were put in place to control them. Dogs had to be muzzled at all times, and it wasn't until 1896 that they were allowed to be exercised off the lead, and then only on the edges of the park. By 1908 dogs could roam

free in any un-enclosed area, and gradually became the common sight we are familiar with today. However in 1930 the authorities were unimpressed by Elizabeth Lee of Southwark Park Road, who was arrested for washing her dog in the paddling pool at the lake. She appeared before Tower Bridge Police Court, denied the charge, and said the dog jumped from her arms into the water. Children paddling there took a fancy to the dog and enticed it in to the water, as they liked to see it swim. At court she said that due to illness she was unable to wash herself, much less her dog, nor would she degrade herself by washing a dog in public.

The case was dismissed.



Flora & Fauna

**Richard Stevens:**

"Around the sides of the lake were railings and you could fish, through or over them, for tiddlers. The fishing rod was a small net bag fixed on the end of a cane and to finish your fishing equipment you had a jam-jar with a string around the neck of it for carrying."

Lyn Olding:

"Give the old nursery back to the people, but have it controlled. Perhaps allotments?"

Matt Preece:

"I used to go in to the old nursery on my lunch times for some peace and quiet, and there's more wildlife in there than there is in the nature garden. It's an absolute haven, it is so quiet, it backs on to all the houses so it's hemmed in on all sides."

Gary Magold:

"The GLC travelling zoo in the late 60s early 70s was hooked up to the back of a jeep or a small van.

It was a long blue thing. You stepped up to it and it had small animals - monkeys, parrots - you walked up a couple of steps and peered in. What a thing, to have a travelling zoo!...Dog walkers can be a mainstay of the park, regularly looking out for the park... I recall a blackbird with a white head, looked like a little bald eagle, and there is a woodpecker near wildlife area, with an echoey tap. And there are parrots."

Over the years dogs have taken part in celebrations in the park. In Queen Elizabeth's Coronation of 1953, there was a novelty dog show, an attraction repeated since during the many Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Carnivals. The formation of the lake in 1885, and its expansion in 1908, saw fish become part of Southwark Park's wildlife. While mostly hidden from the eyes of the public occasionally we could get a glimpse of them. In January 1976 Southwark Civic News reported on 'Jaws the Super Pike of Southwark Park': "A dozen men from the Thames Angling Preservation Society and Southwark Parks department set out to catch him. They started with nets. Then they used electrode to pass an electric current through the water to stun any stragglers. At one point Jaws leapt from the water, apparently hurt by the electric shock treatment. As his four foot silvery body flashed from the lake, fishermen charged to the spot. But Jaws had returned to the depths and escaped. Some of the experts thought that Jaws could be lying dead on the bottom of the lake. But not park keeper Bob Taylor: "I bet the old fella is just waiting for us to go away," he said. "We'll put some fish in and if they disappear, we'll know Jaws is still alive in there somewhere."

In September 1996, the Park Rangers moved over two-thousand fish to Greenland Dock as part of a lake cleaning operation.

In 1964 the Greater London Council planned

to create a children's zoo and animal enclosure in the park, but it was never implemented. For some time mobile zoos visited during the school holidays, giving children the chance to see and touch farm and other animals, but this enlightened service was discontinued a generation ago.

Circuses came to Southwark Park, most notably in 1976 when the Gomm Road entrance was badly damaged after the elephant trailer bent the gates and cracked the two brick pillars clean through.

The mature trees in the park provide important wildlife habitats. Dead branches, tree holes, heart rotten trunks, standing and falling deadwood are important features of old trees and have been retained in a number of places. Bats have been sighted in the park, as has the greater spotted woodpecker and stag beetles. A grant from the Lottery enabled the creation of a wildlife area on the site of the former children's playground. This protected landscape gives a valuable and diverse habitat for a number of species and provides opportunities for volunteers and youth groups to get involved.

It contains a pond, meadows and a woodland path. Another important site is the former nursery which runs the length of Gomm Road and has been a haven for wildlife for a long, long time. Although part of the historic park, housing developers have had their eye on the land and its future is uncertain.



© D.Gosling 2010

Flora & Fauna

Grace Beesley: "There was once a circus with lions. That was lovely in the middle of the night hearing the lions roaring. I didn't go much on that!..."

I don't mind dogs in parks, but they should always be on a lead. It is a public place, not a heath. They should be under control a bit better..."I hate the crows. They are vicious to other birds."

Matt Preece: "Me and Nick Lane were in the park ranger base, and an old lady came in and said that we had an injured kestrel sitting in one of the trees. So we went across to see what it was, and upon approaching the tree we noticed a bird that was about five times bigger than a kestrel. It turns out it was a Harris Hawk which stands about two feet high... So, loads of phone calls later we managed to find the owner and he said 'Oh yeah, I do have Harris Hawks, mine are all in the garden. Oh, oh, one's missing' and he was down in Surrey. So this thing has come all the way north, up to the park, and we watched it taking ducklings off the lake. Because it was early spring, there were lots of screaming kids and distressed people!"

Michael Holland: "I got chased by a dog across the oval so I climbed up a fence, where there used to be like an asphalt part, like a football pitch, think it's a bit of a stadium now init? I run up the wire fence with the dog barking at me from down the bottom."

My first memory of the park is feeding the ducks when I was little, being taken over there by my Nan and I can remember, kind of, sitting in the pram doing it so I must have been very young. And when I could walk I was never taller than those railings that used to go round the duck pond".

Our Park



Len Hatch: "When they had the smaller lake there was fish in there and the kids used to go fishing, line on their finger. There was a bloke used to be regular. He'd sit on the Rose Garden steps. He'd climb over the fence, and I said to him 'There's nothing in there is there?'"

"Yeh, there's lovely roach in there."

Nick Lane: "We started to drain the lake, if I remember rightly in November and didn't finish until about February, through the coldest months, to the point where we pretty much got it drained, it was coated in ice...We got people in from the fishery department to stun the fish in the lake and then they were hauled off to Greenland Dock. Some very humorous stories with tipper trucks being driven through the streets of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe with fish kind of going everywhere... Due to better water quality we got a much better range of wildlife, we replanted reed beds so there were opportunities for dragon fly nymphs, damsel fly, that sort of thing."

Debra Gosling: "I love the crows; there's something ancient and pagan about them. They are such intelligent birds. There's also a rookery in the trees around the lake and the noise is amazing. And the duck pond is a joy to behold; all that quacking and splashing about! You can sometimes see a heron or a cormorant milling about in the water. And if you're really lucky a sparkly blue damselfly".



© D.Toogood 2010

An Idyllic Childhood

Mrs Maud (known as Gwen) Smith, a 92 year old lady who grew up in Bermondsey, remembers Southwark Park as her favourite childhood playground. Here she tells her story.

As a child, I lived in Lynton Road, in one of the newer houses which was divided into two - four rooms upstairs and four down. The upstairs family had a daughter, Ivy, who was only six months different to me in age, so we grew up together and were like sisters.

As a very young child, about three, I think I can remember being taken to Southwark Park by my mother and father, but mainly I remember going there with Ivy and her little sister, Grace, from the age of about eight. It must have taken us about 20 or 25 minutes to walk there. In the summer, we'd sometimes spend the whole day in the park. We were allowed to use a bassinet pram owned by Ivy's parents, which wasn't needed since Grace (then 4) was their last child. We'd pile everything we wanted into this, especially bottles of lemonade, and push it down to the park. There was a paddling pool in the park, though we were told not to go into this because sometimes rough boys would throw glass lemonade bottles in there, and children often cut their feet on broken glass. But we went paddling anyway. We were also not supposed to play in the sandpit, because we were told you could pick up fleas from that; I'm not sure how you could, but we did play there, and sometimes we itched!

I was never afraid of being molested, that just didn't seem to happen in those days, and most of the grown-ups were helpful and kind to us children, so long as we behaved ourselves. There were also always park keepers around, who'd keep an eye on things and tell you off if you got up to mischief. There were some rough children, especially boys, who you had to watch out for. I had a brown jug which I loved and took with me, to fill with water, and one day I was sitting on a park bench with this jug and two boys came along and one of them stole it from me. I chased them, but couldn't catch them, and so I lost my beloved jug.

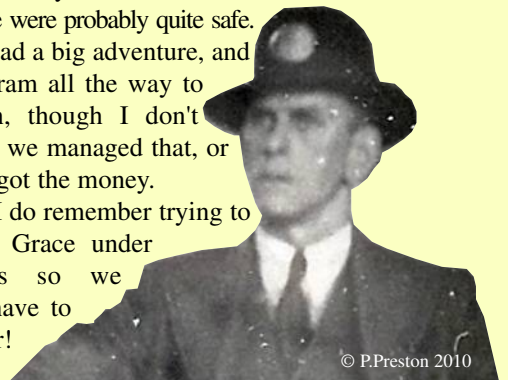
I remember there were swings and a slide, but the slide there wasn't my favourite. There was a better one, quite near the park, I don't remember exactly where but it was close to a church. It was made of wood that always looked polished, and you went down it on a mat.

I remember there being a lake, or a very big pond, though I'm not sure if there were any boats on it when I was growing up. If there were, they were only for grown-ups. I do remember that, on Sundays, it was the done thing to walk sedately round the lake in your Sunday best. But the best time was one winter, when I was about eight or nine - the lake completely froze over and practically everyone in Bermondsey was out on the ice!

There was also an open air swimming pool in the park, open in the summer, and I loved swimming, so when I was a bit older, I practically lived there; I was even given a free pass. Our school didn't go there, though, we went to the indoor Rotherhithe Baths on the other side of the park.

Ivy and I were always told we must stay on 'our side' of the park, but there was a road running right through it, and sometimes we'd disobey and walk right over to the Rotherhithe side, where we discovered the Rotherhithe Tunnel. Luckily there wasn't much traffic about in those days so we were probably quite safe.

Once we had a big adventure, and caught a tram all the way to Greenwich, though I don't know how we managed that, or where we got the money. Although I do remember trying to hide poor Grace under our coats so we wouldn't have to pay for her!



© P.Preston 2010



Keeping Order:
Rough kids were no match
for the Park keepers

The Lido

How many of the children and their parents who enjoy themselves on the swings and slide in Our Park realise that not too far beneath their feet there is an old swimming pool?

If they look towards the art gallery they will see the blue fountain, which is all that remains of the 'The Lido' which was on the site of the playground from 1923 until 2002. It was filled in and replaced by the playground as part of major park restoration works.

As far back as 1875 having swimming baths in all parks free of charge was suggested at the Metropolitan Board of Works by a Mr. Walker, but he got little support for his idea. In 1880 the Board set itself against forming a "bathing lake" in Southwark Park, but when in 1889 the London County Council came into being, a campaign for an open-air swimming pool began.

In June of that year County Councillor Joseph Thornton presented a memorial from local residents, asking for permission to use the existing small lake for bathing, but the Council refused due to the shallowness of the water, and the impossibility of increasing it, except at considerable cost. Instead, the Council's Parks

Committee looked at the feasibility of a proper swimming pool, and concluded one could be built at an estimated cost of £1700 (about £101,000 today) on the edge of the park near Slipper's Place.

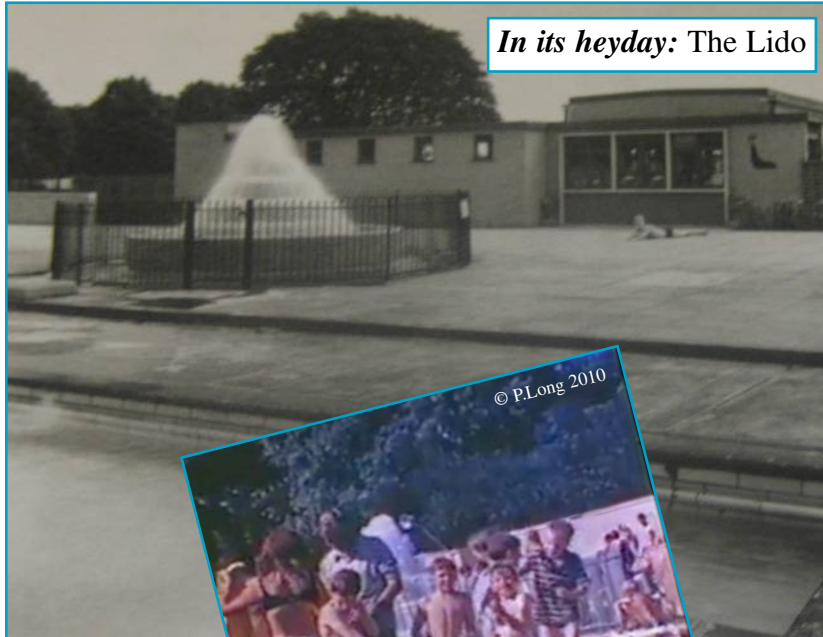
Unfortunately the scheme went no further.

In 1908 a swimming pool came back on to the political agenda when the Southwark Park Improvement Committee and the Bermondsey Borough Council urged the LCC to build one as an unemployment relief project. They believed that work could be provided for about two-hundred men. In 1909 the LCC agreed to put money towards a pool so long as the national government paid the labour costs. Negotiations ran into the sand and once again nothing happened.

In 1920 Bermondsey Borough Council took up the case again, even offering money. At first, the LCC was reluctant to move forward, citing both costs and unsuitability of the ground in the park as reasons for not proceeding. There was such desperate unemployment in the area that the Bermondsey Council and the Bermondsey Guardians formed a committee of twelve to press the

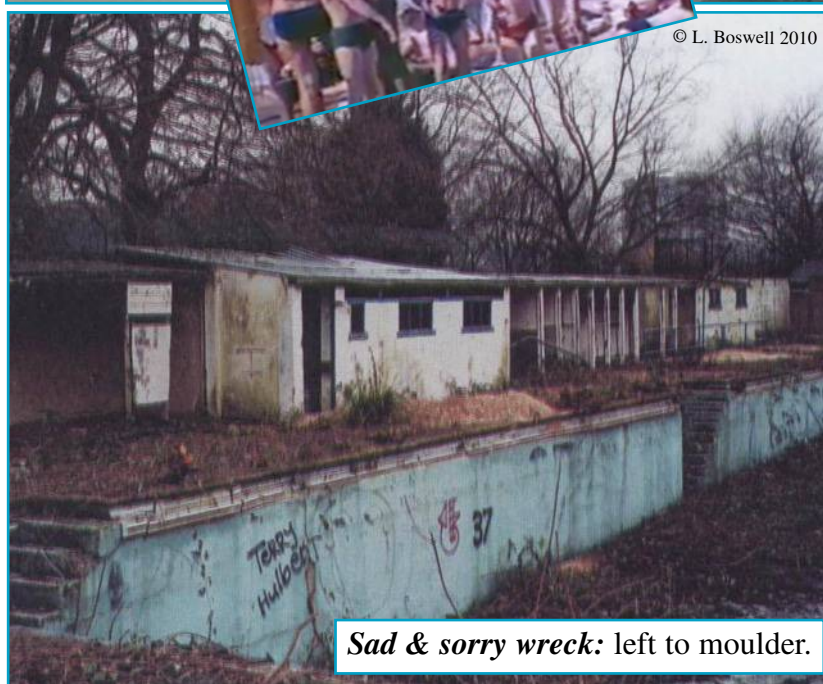
LCC and Alfred Salter was a spokesman for the cause. In late 1922 the LCC agreed to build a lido, and it was opened without ceremony on 15th September 1923.

In its heyday: The Lido



© P.Long 2010

© L. Boswell 2010



Sad & sorry wreck: left to moulder.

The Lido

The contractor was John Garrett & Son of Balham Hill, and the cost was five-thousand pounds. Design and construction was typical of the time: about fifty-five metres long and eighteen metres wide, made of reinforced concrete and surrounded by a path four metres wide. The whole structure was screened by a grass bank formed of the excavated material. There were benches on the outer edge of the path, just ten individual changing rooms and two communal dressing sheds each holding thirty-six people.

Some improvements were made over time, but for all of its life the lido was a rather basic and uncomplicated attraction. This did not prevent it from being extremely

popular. A report from 1926 showed that about five-thousand people visited each week in the summer; levels

of use encouraged by free entrance and relatively cheap hire of costumes and towels.

The number of users was large enough to lead to the introduction of an admission fee of sixpence in 1929.

Back in the 1920s the authorities were concerned about the potential for "undesirable" behaviour in the lido, so there was a good deal of debate and discussion about regulations concerning "mixed bathing."



© PLong 2010

Happy Days: The Lido in the late 1960s. The aerator now stands as a piece of sculpture by the gallery.

From our perspective things were really quite restrictive; for instance, at first men and women were not allowed in the pool together and had different time slots or days allocated to them.

Bill Killick: "I went to school at St James, in the old Riverside School. Once a week we had swimming at Southwark Park. Mr Welch used to take us there, first Lesson.....The water was absolutely freezing, and everyone had to swim, or dog paddle, one width at least. The water was so cold, that it would literally take your breath away...Very few of us had cozzies, and even less had towels. If you were lucky, you could use a half wet one, and stuff your pants in your pocket. It wasn't an event to look forward to..."

David Fisher: "The lido nearby was a place I always used, and even in mid winter my friends and I would take to the pool and we had some great times. On some occasions we would climb the fence and get in for free when we had no money."

Lesley Kingwell: "I remember going swimming with my friend Rita at the end of the season in September. We were the only two in there. It was so cold we had blue legs. I have never seen anything like it before. It was a bit frightening. When I think of the lido I remember the smell of it. That smell of chlorine on the swimsuit. And the shape of the fountain, the way it stepped up. It used to be heaving with people."

Jean Murray: "It was very popular when it was closed! I knew a lot of people who used the lido after midnight, especially the boys. I would say there was a lot of romances that started there. That was very well-known."

Our Park



David Toogood: "The Lido was great in the summer. It had a diving board and that was the first time I used one. You always had to wait to get a changing room because it was so packed. There was no security there so you had to watch your stuff. I don't remember the attendants. However I do remember the café,

as we got our ice creams there. I think we should have another Lido but these days it would have to be well policed. Of course, it would only be used in the warm weather so what would you do with it in the winter? "

David Clark: "When I was around nine years old I used to spend most of my summer holidays all day long in the lido after my mother gave me a packed lunch. There were many kids who also did this as we had no money."

George Dalton: "During the summers of the 1950s my mother would often take me swimming, after work, to the open-air swimming baths in Gomm Rd. I can still vividly remember that the queue to get in sometimes stretched around the baths past the boating pond. It was always very noisy with the screams of delighted children. The water always seemed to be freezing cold."

Malcolm Taylor: "The water was always freezing. When you jumped in everything disappeared."

The Lido

Even when mixed bathing was allowed, men were banned from landing on the side of the baths where the women's cubicles were located. In 1924, after pressure from Bermondsey Borough Council, it was agreed to have Wednesdays as a women and girls only day, but this did not please everybody. In the summer of 1933 the South London Press commented upon the very hot weather and the "Ladies Only" Day at Southwark Park:

"At Southwark Park during the lunch hour a crowd of males stood

listening with envious ears to the sounds of happy laughter within. Inside, Eve, free from male presence and attired in the flimsiest of costume, gambolled and sported like mermaids in

a summer sea. A sylph-like creature in a brilliant green costume poised for a moment silhouetted against the sky and cut the

water like a rapier. The men mopped their brows and tried to get into the indoor baths, whose opening times are not easily ascertained."

In time, the lido came to be a place where women and girls could come and go at the times that suited them, and for many years it was extremely well-used. However by the 1980s Southwark Council was finding it hard to finance, and after years

of intermittent closures, it was closed for good in 1992, and soon fell into disrepair. The much-loved old lido was quietly buried beneath the children's playground.



Florrie Weller: "When we were kids we used to have sandwiches and a bottle of lemonade...and go there for a day out...The swimming pool used to be an area where you could meet anybody, especially boys."

'Jan': "I remember the dishy lifeguard at the Lido, he was the original hunk, and he used a mixture of iodine, vinegar and oil to give him a tan! All the girls loved him..."

'Tattie': "Jan - you made me laugh! I suggest to bring back the Lido (but only if we also get the dishy lifeguard!)"

'Dee Dee': "I loved the lido as a kid and it is such a shame it went (although I think the big blue fountain is still there hid behind the big slide)."

Tom Ash: "We all went swimming in Southwark Park Open Air Baths one day, and my mate Georgie said for a dare in front of the other boys, "I bet you would not dive off the top board", or the high diver as we called it.

"No bloody fear" I replied.

"Chicken" called the others.

"OK" I said climbing up the ladder steps to the high board. I heard myself saying "Tommy Ash, you fool, you can't swim and you suffer from vertigo, what are you doing up here?" I edged to the end of the board and with my young life flashing before my eyes I half dived and half belly flopped to the water. The backs of my legs hurt like hell. They dragged me out half-drowned. Never, no matter how like a chicken I seemed, would I go through that performance again."

Gary Magold: "The changing huts on the side had different coloured doors. If you left your bag in the hut you would keep one eye on it while you were swimming to

Our Park



make sure nobody stole it...the water was very cold. The worst thing to do was ease yourself in at the shallow end. Best to go to the middle and jump in."

Len Hatch: "People used to use it when it was closed. Get a few beers down them and they would go in over the fence and swim in there...Several blokes I know were in there and

got caught... Up before Mother Campbell, the local judge at Tower Bridge Court...The water was nice and clean, but cold. My nephew and me went in there one lovely hot summer's day, we jumped in the water and we went across the thing, up, out and dressed. Cor, he said 'It's freezing' and it was. Gawd knows it must have been about 60 degrees, like, you know."

Lyn Olding: "I'd get everything done in doors, get the kids ready, over the lido and you'd be there 'til it was, (gasp) 'I've got to go and do the old man's tea! Again, that was a totally family group thing. You'd meet your friends down there and you look after the kids while she nips somewhere and it was a sort of day out and it's in your own park'.

Gary Glover: "From the age of about five or six right through primary school the lido was part of my life. My mum would pick us up after school in an old Volkswagen camper van, about eight of us, and we'd stay in there 'til eight o'clock, 'til we got chased out. In the six week holiday we were there every day. There was a lifeguard called Bob, he was there all of my childhood in the 70s...As we got older, fifteen, sixteen, we used to slip in there of a night time, after it had all been locked up...it was a laugh. I met my wife over there. I met some good friends who now live in America. We still keep in touch."

The Parkie

Remember the Parkie? If you misbehaved he (or, later, she) would be there to admonish; if you fell over and cut your knee he was there with a bandage; if the big kids were running amok in the playground he would be there to chase them out of the park. Sadly the park keeper is now only to be found in dusty old LCC history books...

The current manager is Rosie Thornton, who took up the post in June 2009 from Paul Highman. We are not sure of all those who preceded Rosie and Paul, but we know that both George Virtue and Bob Tremayne were in post in the 1980s and 1990s.

John W. McKenzie was the brother of landscape architect Alexander McKenzie. He had been a gardener for about ten years before his appointment at Southwark Park. He had worked at Alexandra Palace; in France; at Arundel Castle, and for the Duke of Hamilton. On appointment at Southwark Park he was paid 30s a week and had free residence in the lodge. He left to manage the ornamental gardens at Victoria Embankment.

Charles Dennis served his apprenticeship under Mr Stevens at Cobham Park and his practical experience as a gardener extended over fourteen years.

Dennis made a most significant contribution by planning and overseeing the layout of the various margins of the park, in particular making provision for children. He was

also responsible for planting the emblematic plane trees. A strong-minded man, he was not afraid to give his views to authority. His time in Southwark Park ended under a cloud when an investigation into his management found him guilty of giving away trees to St. Mary's Church, using park labour to maintain the churchyard and also allowing unpermitted use of cricket pitches by local clubs. After his resignation local people bought him a silver tea service. Frederick Coppin was described as having had great experience in the management of trees and garden work in general. He was for six years assistant to the Head Gardener of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and before coming to Southwark he had been foreman in the gardens of Crystal Palace. His biggest contribution to our park was the encouragement of tennis and general good care of the

landscape. He repaired the Lodge in his own time and was in post during the construction of the first lake in 1885. Like Dennis he superintended various other parks and open spaces. In 1887 he was given a black marble clock paid for from a public subscription.

G. Bush came to our park from a private landscaping practice, and had previously been at Leeds Horticultural Gardens. In 1889 the Daily News described him as "a clever landscape artist, and some of the specimens of "carpet-bedding", especially the two large beds near the superintendent's house, are very clever in their way, and the whole ground is evidently managed with skill and care."

W. Bailey was aged forty-four when he came to Southwark Park. When he was transferred to Dulwich Park his fellow employees presented him with "a very handsome set of electroplated cruets." R. Curle came to Southwark Park from Waterlow Park.; before that he was at Sefton Park, Liverpool.

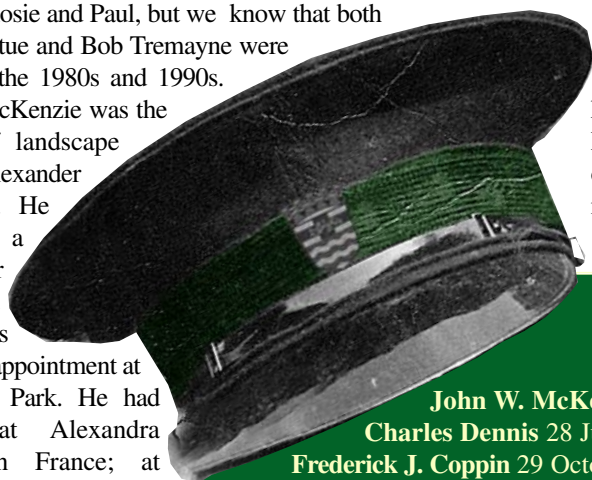
J. Rogers had been a foreman at Our Park earlier in his career. His was the first case of a former employee getting the top job.

In November 1869 Superintendent McKenzie submitted a list of men

employed under him: Samuel Chapel, James Wooll, John Fysh, Levi Parish, Thomas Steer and Andrew Combes.

The first LCC return of staff for 1889 showed twenty in total, a figure that almost doubled by 1897. Just before the First World War Superintendent Dodson had over forty members of staff, including gardeners, waterfowl and boating officers, gym and lavatory attendants of both genders.

Between the two world wars a complement of over forty staff was retained. The biggest change in the workforce came from the 1950s onwards when women were recruited as keepers, gardeners and summer workers; by 1961 twenty-one women were employed. Big developments also came in the 1980s, which saw staff reductions and the tendering out of ground maintenance to external contractors.



Park Superintendents

John W. McKenzie 9 June 1869 - 19th May 1871
Charles Dennis 28 July 1871 - 29 May 1880
Frederick J. Coppin 29 October 1880 - 9 March 1888
G. Bush 4 May 1888 - 13 October 1891
W Bailey 13 October 1891 - 5 December 1893
R Curle 5 December 1893 - 17 July 1900
J. Rogers 17 July 1900 - 25 April 1902
Mr. White 9 May 1902 - possibly 1908
D. Carson February 1908 - 3 June 1910
F.W. Wright 1 July 1910 - c1911/1912
G.T. Dodson c1911 - 30 April 1915
C.J. Warren 5 June 1915 - 17 December 1915
R.J. Giles 22 March 1916 - not known
W.A. Hodge In post 1921
C.G. Groom In post 1928
A. Blain In post June 1930 - 13 February 1931
A. Dexter 25th June 1931 - 16 July 1931
W.S. Palmer 17 July 1931 - 17 June 1932
V. Cockram 2 December 1932 - 11 May 1934
R.A. White 11 May 1934 - April 1936
H.N.M. Carter November 1944 - January 1946
J. Taylor In post 1949

Our Park



Jean Murray:

"Brown uniforms. Always looked so well dressed. They reminded me of the Mounties."

Florrie Weller:

"If you misbehaved they were after you."

The Parkie

Today, services in the park are all the responsibility of different managers; add the contracted maintenance and cafe services, and the independent Bermondsey Artists Group's role and we can see how far we have come since John McKenzie and his original six men. The male LCC park keepers were known for their brown suits and trilby hats. The distinctive uniform was introduced in 1907, and the men were issued annually with a tweed coat and vest; a velveteen vest; velvet cord breeches; pigskin leggings; two pair of boots and two felt hats. Every two years they would get one overcoat; one velveteen jacket; and one white working jacket. In the early days of the park under the Metropolitan Board of Works the Park Superintendent was distinguishable by his hat, which had a gold band. His assistants wore a commoner variety. Superintendent McKenzie commented:

"I scarcely think the caps which we have now got will be sufficient to suggest to the public on a crowded Sunday that we are placed here to keep the peace and to protect the property of the Board, although I consider the caps quite sufficient during other days of the week." In 1874 Superintendent Charles Dennis reiterated the importance of being dressed appropriately enough to command respect from the public:

"Two years experience has proved that men without uniform are comparatively speaking useless in keeping order, which is so necessary in a place almost entirely surrounded with houses and frequented at times with people of the lowest class."

The Board responded to his comments by approving a Metropolitan Police-style uniform for park keepers in 1889.

For many years, apart from felt hats, the gardeners and labourers had to provide their own clothing. Certain jobs required special garments;

in 1875 Dennis asked for an oilskin coat, leggings and sou'wester for John Honey the toilet cleaner, "as the closets require a great deal of attention and he is very much exposed to the weather." Not until after the Second World War were women employed as anything other than lavatory or playground attendants. We know in 1891 they wore blue serge jackets and bonnets. In 1895 Mrs. Victoria Parsons requested boots for gym and lavatory attendants but was declined: "Sir, I hope you will pardon the liberty I am taking, but will you kindly allow me to ask on behalf of myself, and the majority, if not all, of the Gymnasium Attendants if the 'Council' will allow us boots in addition to our dress for the wear and tear of boot leather in the gymnasiums is almost incredible."

A week's work a century ago was hard: the hours were much longer and in summer most employees worked up to seventy hours a week. The pay was small and sick pay was not allowed unless certified by Dr. O'Reilly of Grange Road.

How to maintain public order has always been a challenge for the park management.

When the park was opened in 1869 the authorities relied on the police to supplement the regular park staff, and right from the start the large number of users led to an increase from two to six men on Sundays. Soon, due to the costs of using the police, it was decided the park should

have its own constables. In 1872 Thomas Steer of Keeton's Road and John Holley of Lucas Street were the first to be employed in the role. By 1876 the number of constables had risen to six, a complement which remained in place until the First World War. The men employed were mature former soldiers working shifts. In 1907 the ranks of sergeant and constable were abolished and the men became known as park keepers, or the "parkie".



LCC Uniform Button



Kathleen Donovan: "My family all worked as park keepers. My mum, Aunt Ginny, Aunt Rachel, Aunt Franny, Nora Williams and Lil Lambert. If it wasn't them it was their friends. They helped each other get in. It was a good job with a uniform. There wasn't a pension but they got a little bit when they retired. My mum wouldn't retire. She went from Southwark Park to Tabard, and when it was time for her to retire all the kids had a march: 'We want Bridget!' Placards and everything, so she stayed until she was sixty-seven or sixty-eight."

Bill Killick: "I can still remember the "parkie" ringing the bell that heralded "Alley Out (pronounced awli-out)."

David Clark: "Park keepers used to go around on a bicycle with a long pole to turn on the lamps on the columns."

Phil Burkett: "I was terrified of the parkies. There was a great big bloke, brown or green uniform. I remember a brown trilby hat. Big Ted he was known as. He used to give chase if any trouble was caused, give you one round the ear hole, get you round scruff of the neck and chuck you out the park. You could never out run them. Today, I think the people who work on the flowers and the flower beds and grass cutting are phenomenal."

Len Hatch: "I remember the brown coated LCC park keeper.

Our Park



He had a bike and he used to walk it through and if he saw you on your bike he used to say 'What am I doing?' 'Walking your bike Mr. Park keeper.' 'Exactly. Do the same with yours!'

'Phoney': "I remember the Duke of Suffolk on Hawkstone Rd. All the park keepers used to drink there. Turned into flats now."

Michael Holland: "My nan Bridget Donovan was the parkie in the swing park. On the days that it rained and the rides were too wet to sit on, we would be corralled in nan's little wooden hut where she would warm up meat and fruit pies in her Baby Belling. On the top of her mini stove she would boil water for tea. I was amazed at how much she could do with it. She would invite friends in for a cuppa and a chat while their own children played; there would be a steady stream of mums to natter with my nan. I was also amazed at how she would keep control of her domain with a firm word to anyone getting out of order or putting themselves in danger. She would come down fast and hard on any form of bullying. I remember many times when she would chuck gangs of boys out for either not using the equipment correctly or for being too old to use the rides. The power of the brown uniform was astounding."

The Parkie

The main concerns in the early years were not simply the control of large numbers of visitors, but also frequent damage to urinals, gates, trees, the dumping of waste and the letting loose of fowls and pigs from nearby properties. Games could also be dangerous, especially cricket with its flying balls, or, as in the case of rounders, disorderly; in 1875 Superintendent Dennis called for a ban because "it is played only by the lowest blackguards and the language at times is most abominable."

A persistent problem was the threat of sexual abuse of children during the summer months and many offenders were brought to book in the Victorian and Edwardian era. In 1951 the LCC used park-keepers dressed in plain clothes to stamp out immorality and misconduct by men.

In over one-hundred and forty years it would be astonishing if our park had not had some bad staff. In the early years incidents of drunkenness, absenteeism and misconduct would happen on a regular basis.

More serious crimes were rare, but ironically often involved the constables. In 1877 William Lowe was discharged for indecency with young girls. In 1878 Charles Jackson was cautioned to keep his temper when dealing with the public, and

two years later dismissed. In 1892 Campbell Bell was sacked for misconduct and Sergeant Willford and labourer Dyke admonished for "indiscreet behaviour". In 1901 Hadley was dismissed after striking a fellow constable. In contrast, in 1880 Constable Beezley received a testimonial declaring "the open use of bad language has much decreased since he has been here." In 1889 some members of the public organised a 'bean feast' in gratitude for the parkies. In 1905 the prompt action of Constable, J.E. Jeffrey saved a suicidal man from drowning in the lake; and three years later the Commissioner of Police presented 7s 6d each to constables W. McCansh and J. Pepper for arresting a man and recovering stolen property. In 1913 the L.C.C. recorded their appreciation of the conduct of J.E. Blake, underkeeper, in connection with the capture and conviction of certain disorderly persons in Southwark Park. 1914 F.W.G. Sirrett, gardener, was commended for rescuing a drowning boy from lake. George Manning, the foreman lifeguard at the lido saved a boy from drowning in 1956. In recent times the collective efforts of the staff has been recognised by the park being awarded Green Flag status on several occasions.

Gary Glover: "If we mucked about in the lido we would get chased out by a lifeguard called Bob. When I think of the park keepers a big green coat comes to mind. I think there was a woman called Mary in the children's playground."

Grace Beesley: "I recall a man with a dog who was always at the bowls club. He used to come and sit and we got to know him really well. Then there was Ada after him who also used to look after the playground and keep the toilets clean as well as the bowls club. I can visualize her now. She was a little bit taller than me. She was a very chatty lady. She was soon after the kids in the playground if they were mucking about. She didn't just come to the bowls and sit down and have a nice afternoon, she was in and out of the playground, and kept everything looking nice."

Rosie Thornton: "I think the key responsibility of my job is probably health and safety, and the visitor experience. When people arrive at the park it's very important they feel it is welcoming. Pretty much everything we do is based on the Green Flag criteria, because it's about the park being a welcoming, safe, secure and healthy environment."

David Toogood: "The parkies had a little hut and we would always run when we saw them coming! They had a khaki uniform with a peaked cap. We used to go on the putting green which was near the bowling green. There was a parkie in another little hut there who took your money and gave you your clubs."

Christine Savory: "I remember Jackie and Josie. They always used to make sure everyone was alright, and give us cups of feed for the ducks and swans."

June Savory: "They were firm, but friendly. Jackie and Josie wouldn't take any nonsense off the kids. They had a rapport with the children and teenagers in that area so that no trouble went on. Today I don't think there's enough wardens to cover

Our Park



that big park. It's a big space. While they're walking round the oval, the people are causing trouble at the bandstand, and as soon as they see them heading to the bandstand, they're running to the oval. They're just dodging the wardens. It's not that they're not trying to stop it, it's just that there's not enough to stop it."

Marjorie Hill: "Jackie and Josie, they were both local ladies, so they knew all the youths round there, but it wasn't them and us. It was talking to defuse situations. There was the odd gang, but Josie used to sort it out, she knew how to handle them."

Matt Preece: "The head gardener sort of rotates around the park, developing each area that needs it, there's no staff responsibility apart from an apprentice. The awkward thing about the head gardener position is although you're kind of responsible for the horticultural standard of the park; you're not responsible for other members of staff that have to carry out that work so it is a difficult thing."

Lyn Olding: "Our old work base was a prefab, really a shed, and it was disgusting. There was mould growing through the floor and the ceiling, actually it was condemned three times and we were still in it for nine months. It had been there for twenty five years!"

Nick Lane: "I generally felt very safe and incidents were few and far between, but there were some pretty nasty situations. You learn not to take everything people say on face value. I had a couple of death threats whilst I was working there."

Paul Highman: "There is no typical day as a manager of the park. It is a very reactionary job, based on what happened on the previous night to what happens on the day when you arrive. One thing I tried to encourage when I was the manager was an open door policy, where people knew they could come in and drop in any time. Often my day would be based on any concerns that arose from these meetings."



Josie & Jackie

Tea Time

After a pleasant walk through the greenery there is nothing better than a nice cup of tea. In its lifetime Our park has had at least three different refreshment facilities...



The first was a wooden structure, built by contractor C.N. Forster, at a cost of £520 (about £24,000 today), which was opened to the public in May 1870.

Originally it was intended to be positioned on a triangular piece of land in front of the main entrance in Southwark Park Road, but the rather pretty building was finally located at the bend near the eastern end of the central carriageway drive, where it remained for over seventy years.

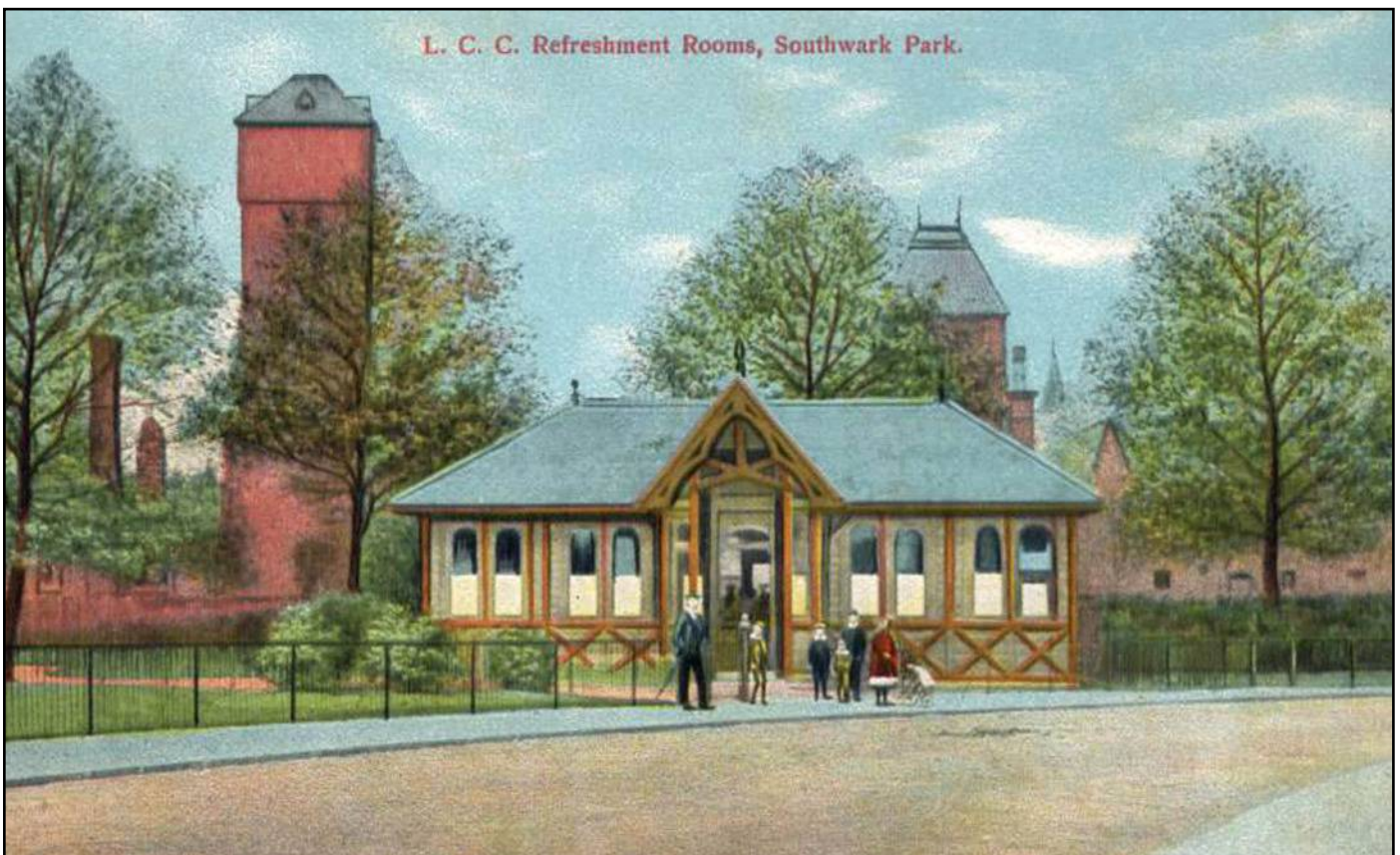
John McKenzie, the first Park Superintendent, wanted a site nearby the cricket pitches on The Oval, because the cricketers and their many supporters represented a ready market for refreshments. It was also a fact that the location decided upon was close to a small pox hospital (later St. Olave's Hospital), which was not to everybody's liking. A partial solution was found by at first allowing the caterers to put up marquees on Sundays, and then later in 1876, by providing a permanent open pavilion on the east side of the oval. This functional shelter was walled in with canvas during the busy summer, and left open in winter; it served the people well until being removed due to poor condition in 1916. When the boating lake was opened in 1908 the caterer complained of loss of trade and asked for the open pavilion to be moved closer to the lake, but the authorities did not agree. Instead a barrow was allowed on the lake landing stage. As far as the main refreshment room

was concerned it was a very popular place in summer and for a few years after 1934 was even used during winter as football dressing rooms.

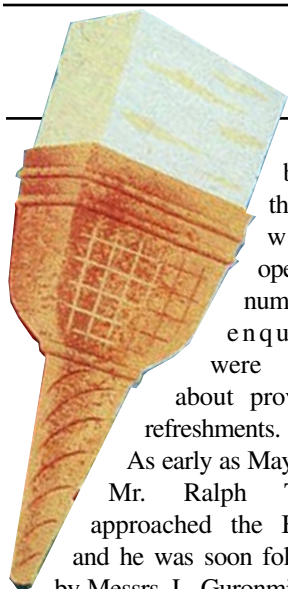
Second World War bombing finally did for the first refreshment house, and for several years there was no place to get a cup of tea in the park. In 1945 the London County Council published a five-year improvement programme which included a new cafe to be linked to the lido. However it took until 1953 to become a reality.

The eventual building was put up by Cobby and May Ltd of Thornton Heath. The design allowed the cafe to be used by people in and outside the lido, and like its predecessor it was well-used, until closure in the early 1980s. It subsequently became an art gallery, but all external traces of the building, and its former purpose, disappeared when the gallery was expanded and modernised in 2001.

For over twenty years, the longest period since 1870 and two world wars included, there was nowhere to get refreshments in the park. However, in 2005 the former park ranger base near the Gomm Road entrance was converted into the cafe, and is in operation today. It is tiny and by no means perfect for the customers or those who run it, but at least it is there. With ever increasing community use surely Southwark Park deserves a much bigger and more comfortable place?



Tea Time



Even before the park was opened a number of enquiries were made about providing refreshments.

As early as May 1869 Mr. Ralph Taylor approached the Board, and he was soon followed by Messrs. L. Guronmiere, J. Mense, John Myers and Joseph Gatti. As it turned out, in August 1870 Alexander Biucchi, the caterer in Battersea Park, was given a three-year lease at a rental of £52 per annum (today about £2400) to run Southwark Park's new facility. The conditions of the lease insisted on a publicly displayed price list; prohibition on the sale of alcohol; responsibility for fixtures and fittings; and no sleeping overnight. His time in the park seems to have been without great event, but in August 1871 he found it necessary to write to the Board saying that while he had been permitted to "sell malt liquors three times a week to the cricketers" local publicans were selling beer without authority or cost. Two months later John Lugg of Jamaica Road wrote to the Board about the sale of refreshments on Sunday afternoons. "I saw the room filled with young of both sexes and some of the boys were smoking and all seemingly supplied with drinks." He was concerned about "the flagrant injury to their morals." Biucchi ran the business until the autumn of 1873, when it appears he left for Switzerland. His successor was Giovanni Pelli of Silver Street, Greenwich, who must have become a very familiar figure in the

NOTICE!
SOUTHWARK PARK REFRESHMENT ROOMS.
G. PELLI,
Begg to inform Visitors to this park, and the public generally that he is prepared to supply
Tea and Light Refreshments,
To Schools or Private Parties in large or small numbers with economy.
Large numbers contracted for at special rates
PASTRY OF SUPERIOR KIND,
Coffee and Chocolate in the French and Italian style always ready.
ICES OF THE BEST QUALITY.
MARQUEES AND TENTS SUPPLIED.
Military Tents for Cricket Clubs always in stock
Accommodation provided for Parties and Schools.

*So what was available to the thirsty customer?
A tariff from 1896 gives a good indication:*

Hot water, which must be consumed within the refreshment enclosure, per quart **1d**
Share of a table, or use of a chair, teapot, teacup, saucer, spoon, knife and plate - for any one of these articles, or the whole, inclusive per person **5d**
Tea, in half pint cups with milk and sugar if required, and use of spoon and saucer (two pieces of sugar and milk must be supplied separately, not ready mixed) **1d**
Tea, fresh made, per 3 gill pot, with use of spoon, cup and saucer, and with sugar and milk for one person **2d**
Tea, fresh made, per pint pot, with use of spoon, cup and saucer, and with sugar and milk for two people **3d**
Coffee half pint cup, with milk and sugar **1d**
Cocoa half pint cup, with milk and sugar **1d**

of rough gangs bringing in large cans of beer simply for the purpose of what is termed boozing, and we have always turned them out, but amongst the cricketers I have never yet seen any indecency."

park. His first lease was agreed in December 1873, and it was continually renewed until he decided to give up the business in December 1910, concluding a remarkable thirty-seven years service.

The records give limited personal information about Pelli, but we know by 1879 he had moved locally to Deptford Lower Road, and then by 1888 to Edale Road, Rotherhithe.

By 1895 he was living in Bromley. From the length of his time there we can only assume Pelli found the park a good place in which to ply his trade, but like his predecessor he had to contend with the matter of illegal use of alcohol by the cricketers. In 1877 he made a formal complaint to the Board:

"I could go so far as demanding to see what they have in their bags, a responsibility I beg to assure you I do not envy. There is a large number of persons who play cricket in the park comprising all shades of ratepayers within a circuit of some four miles, and public houses are so near that to my mind the matter is somewhat difficult to deal with. One or two instances have occurred

Len Hatch:

"I remember a lovely large wooden tea room. It sold lemonades, ice creams - Walls's Triangle sticks."

Grace Beesley:

"I can see that as plain as anything. It was all painted green. Wooden. As a kid I remember they used to make lemonade in a big flask thing. I can't remember if you could sit down inside the building. I don't think it was that large. You just stood outside and had whatever you were having."

Our Park



Gary Glover:

"I remember Rose who worked behind the counter in the lido cafe. She had very thick permed hair, and reminded me of my great Nan."

Debra Gosling:

"The present cafe does great ice cream. You've got to have a cornet in the park haven't you? It's only right."



At Play

The early campaigners for Southwark Park recognised the need to provide for the local children. In 1857 a crowded public meeting at the Dun Cow Tavern heard local manufacturer Mr Young say that Bermondsey was becoming so full of bricks and mortar that a man could not take his children into the fields.



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Our Park



Florrie Weller: "There was a maypole thing, you hung on to the ropes and went for a swing, and there was also another swing where all the children sat on it together and the whole structure swung around. I remember the see-saw, as you jumped off the other person went on the floor".

Gary Glover: "There was a swing, a sort of cart with two ropes and a spider climbing frame. The adventure playground was great too. I used to play in there with my mates Nicky Arnell, Danny Riley and John Putt."

Tom Ash: "As a kid I went to the park two or three times a week and enjoyed it: It was nice because it got you a bit of fresh air. We would play as a gang with my friends Terry Hill, Billy Goodwin and the Sanders family."



The proposed park was a place for the poor man to take his exercise in, and for his children to see those beautiful flowers which otherwise would be a closed book to them.

On 19th June 1869 at the opening of the park Sir John Thwaites of the MBW said the design of the park was calculated not only to improve physical well-being, but also, to raise the standard of moral sensibility. He said when the workman retired to his ill-ventilated home he had nowhere to go to, excepting either the taproom or the skittle ground. The new park would enable him to come with his wife and children, and breathe the fresh air. Dr. Dixon of Bermondsey Vestry saw that more was possible. In 1869 he argued that the park should have playgrounds laid out especially for children, and by 1870 a portion of the park, somewhere on the western side, was set aside for that purpose. It was small, and Superintendent MacKenzie reported in 1872 that "it was so overrun with children that in summer there is scarcely

a blade of grass left, while in autumn and winter it is almost impassable." He recommended tar paving, which was not carried out for another three years.

In 1873 Supt. Dennis suggested creating a gymnasium on land near the Rotherhithe Infirmary and ten years later it happened, but the equipment could only be used by men and boys.

In 1889 a children's playground was provided, and as the Daily News reported:

"After speeches congratulating the children and their parents on the latest improvements in the park, a bell was rung and the gymnasium declared open. Thousands of little boys and girls who were watching the proceedings outside the gates then rushed in."

At the same time as opening the new playground the rules of use of the existing gym were changed to allow women and girls access, though not at the same time as men or boys.

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Our Park



Jean Murray: "Do you remember when the umbrella first came in? Ohhh! Me and my Rene we couldn't get over it. It was so different. It was shaped like an umbrella, with spikes going down, and seats in between the spikes. As it went round it dipped, and went up and down, and the thrill of it was you had to hold on and run and jump on it."

Patricia Preston:

"I remember going to the park with my sisters and cousins from 1947-1952. We had great times in the summer when there were activities put on, including games, sing-alongs and Punch and Judy shows."

Christine Savory: "I went there with my aunt and my cousin, and we had a picnic, and we went in the old playground with the big shoe and the swings. I remember it used to really smell inside the shoe."



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At Play

This eastern edge site was to remain the prime location for children's play until 1999, being adapted occasionally. In 1899 a new girl's gymnasium and sandpit were added. It was tar-paved throughout, with wood paving under each apparatus; the swings were fenced off to prevent accidents. Superintendent Curle reported; "The new girl's gymnasium is very much appreciated by them, as they can go in any time during the day to enjoy themselves, where before they only had a few hours three days a week. The sandpit is also a great attraction. At times it is overcrowded. I am afraid it will soon require to be made larger. On one occasion, at closing time, over eight-hundred children were turned out of the gymnasium."

In 1901 the sandpit was doubled in size, its value being described by the Southwark Recorder: "How much of a joy has been incited by the existence of the sand pit in Southwark Park cannot be computed! The children delight in it. Such an attraction to the park is not without its advantages, for the children are looked after by a woman officially placed in charge, and as they play with their spades and pails building castles almost as substantial as though in air, paterfamilias may be assured of their safety. Juveniles come from considerable distances to take part in the fun, and especially on Saturday the sand pit becomes a veritable hive of industry."

In 1914 the children's gymnasium was enlarged. This entailed an

additional six bays of swings, two more giant strides and doubling the size of sandpit. Ten years later a shelter was added to what was by then a hugely popular part of the park. Sadly the Second World War led to a decline, and it wasn't until 1986 that the playground was significantly upgraded again. Unfortunately

the it began to be misused, and its unstaffed, secluded location made it unsafe. In the early 2000s, as part of a major restoration of the park, the site was converted into a nature and wildlife area, and a new playground built on the site of the former lido.

In the early days the gymnasium and playgrounds had very simple, rigid structures; swings did not feature until 1889.

By 1939 the playground and gymnasium had four giant strides; two slides; a seesaw; two plank swings; two rocking horses; two Merry-go-Rounds; an Ocean Wave; three American swings; forty-two swings; fourteen baby swings and a sandpit. In the mid 1960s Southwark Park was considered to be one of the best equipped of London's open spaces and the playground had 'commando' scrambling nets. In 1986 the traditional equipment was replaced by a brightly coloured helter-skelter, based on the old fairground model, which stood near a space age 'sputnik' roundabout. The swings had a cushion surface and a big fort stood on one of the landscaped mounds. There were several fibreglass models, including a massive giant's head and boots and hands.



© L.Boswell 2010

Our Park



David Toogood: "I remember the kids' playground very well; the sandpit, the swings, the see-saw and the umbrella. There was nothing else quite like it in the area until Shuttleworth Park opened and that wasn't much. I remember taking my younger cousins to the park in the late

sixties when they came up from Brighton. You'd think that living by the sea they'd be unimpressed with a London park but they had a high old time running about and playing in the kids' park. I've got an old piece of cine film of the day. Even my Aunt Ethel enjoyed herself going down the slide!"



© D.Toogood 2010



© D.Toogood 2010



© D.Toogood 2010

At Play

Play parks with trained leaders was an idea taken up by the LCC and by the late 1960s one was well-established in the northern end of the park. Adventure structures were added later, as was a skateboard facility in 1979. We believe the play park and adventure playground were removed some time in the 1980s.

Nurseries in parks were first introduced as an experiment in 1937 in an attempt to give temporary relief to hard-pressed mothers during the summer school holidays. A supervised enclosed area was set up in Our Park and for just one penny an hour a child was left with a nurse; and with milk and biscuits thrown in! The Second World War put paid to the service, but by the 1970s a modern version, the One O'Clock Club was operating in the northern end of the park. In 1977 the building was fire damaged and subsequently relocated to the edge of The Oval where it has been ever since.

In the mid-1930s the LCC began summer holiday programmes for children. Before then occasional "treats" might be arranged by Sunday schools or charities, together with school sports days. The LCC provided a service which became part of the park calendar.

In 1939 The Times described a typical scene:

"Southwark Park is in Bermondsey and the sun shone brightly over its pleasant spaces on Tuesday. The afternoon indeed was very hot and there could have been no better place than the bandstand in the park for giving an open-air entertainment to the children of Bermondsey. They came in their thousands. Now the bandstand in Southwark Park does not hold within its enclosure any thing like so many children as that. The enclosure seats went therefore to the first arrivals and the front row was a prize in the survival of the fittest. Beyond the railings gathered still greater numbers of children, some of them held aloft by mothers or children bigger than themselves and others just making the best of it on tip-toe. It must be pleasant for an entertainer to see such a tightly packed and expectant audience, and it must be pleasant, too, for the LCC, sponsors of these summer entertainments in the London parks, to see how successful is their plan of a holiday treat at home for London's schoolchildren. The children yelled at the conjurer when he lured them into thinking he was cheating, they shouted to the ventriloquist when his little companion was making faces, and they answered in a shrill chorus all the questions in the Punch and Judy show." The LCC also put on cinema shows, music, fairs, puppets, theatre and mobile zoos. After the park became the responsibility of Southwark Council these types of entertainments continued for awhile but today are rare. However young people are finding their own ways of enjoying the park. In 2006 the Young Friends of Southwark Park organised their own festival and currently Community Space Challenge is running an allotment project near the cafe.



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Our Park



Phil Burkett: "The American swing was boat shaped that had a curve on it so it was almost a smile shaped boat. You had this little seat at either end and you had two ropes. Your mate sat opposite you and the two of you in a boat rocked back and forward. The five seat rocking horse, most of us got scars under our chins using that. Health and safety would have a field day now. I remember the adventure playground in late 60s and early 70s, a great big jungle of wood and climbing frames. I remember climbing about fifteen, twenty foot.'

Dave Fisher: "On one visit to the park with my mum I had an accident in the swings section near to the sand pit. I was about nine or ten. I walked into the area where what we called the "American swings" and didn't realise I was about to be hit by one of the moving heavy swings. It hit me straight in the chin and knocked me to the floor. I was picked up by somebody and taken straight to St. Olave's hospital through a side door. Mum was in a real panic. My injuries were no less than loose or broken teeth. Me and my friends used to play on the air raid shelters and always wondered what was inside but they were sealed off. One day we found that one of the doors was forced open so we ventured down the steps into the darkness, at the same time trying to frighten each other by saying there's a ghost down there, but near the bottom there was too much rubbish and water so up we came."

Kathleen Moss: "I remember all the mums in St. Olave's waving to the kids in the swing park."

At Play

Bill Killick: "Southwark Park was a source of adventure for youngsters, with plenty of space for ball games, such as "It with the Ball", "Headers" and "Dribble with the Hands". A safe place to be able to go for the day, without your Mum having to worry, as you always came home, usually tired out and ready for bed."

Gary Magold: "In the early 1970s I went to the park as a kid with my parents, and I would play on the same equipment that my mum had used. She told stories about the American swings or falling off the slide. This was the same equipment from the 40s still in there in the early 70s. I wasn't allowed to play in the huge sandpit in case I caught fleas. I remember games too. Lolly sticks and picksie-up-dropsy. Hanging on for grim death.

The big slide and the umbrella, a long triangular roundy thing that spun and went from side to side. A cone that wobbled. The long horses with a dozen saddles which went backwards and forwards. Smaller swings at the northern end and the older kids swings at the other end. The ship that was made out of scaffolding poles with a scrambling net up the side of it. If a kid fell off it the first thing he'd hit would be a load of bars before you hit the sand at the bottom. Health and Safety would be having kittens today."

David Clark: "My mother used to take me to the Paddling Pool at the rear of the old Lido and it was always well supported especially as it was not long after the war and money was very tight with rationing still in."

Len Hatch: "I remember the paddling pond and the swing park. It was a nice paddling pond. More often than not you got your feet cut, but it was nice for the kids. Quite a large one. I mainly went with my mates - Georgie Beech, Georgie Boyce and Charlie Spicknall. We were close; we played together all the time. We were one little clique. The park was a big thing in our lives because for most of the kids in this area it was open, a bit of green space. Today kids can go all over the park but back then all the fields were fenced off and you could only play in certain ones. They closed one, and opened up another one. They used to do it in rotation."

Mary Gosling: "I remember going with my friend Maureen Thorpe and her mum to the paddling pool after the war. I was about eight years old and Maureen's mum gave me a banana. I'd never had a banana before - ooh it was beautiful."

Michael Holland: "Picksie up dropsie. We used to get the roundabout going, really really fast. This was the old wooden one where you used to get a section each and lay down in it. You'd have a match box or a lolly stick, and someone used to drop it and shout out dropsie and then someone's tries to pick it up. When they pick it up they shout out picksie up and it would start again. You used to scrape your knuckles a bit or your fingers trying to pick it up. When the roundabout slowed down you'd have to make it fast again."

Kathleen Metcalfe: "For us children being born in the war there wasn't a lot of nice places as most were bomb sites. However, Southwark Park was somewhere to go and see nice trees, flowers

Our Park



and grass and obviously the pond there. It was freedom for us. Always there were water fountains so we could have a drink if we were thirsty. The ice cream man was also there and hopefully we could afford a cornet with monies from our parents. There were also swings etc which we loved to play on."

'Dee Dee': "My son likes the kids play area as it is a vast improvement on the old one. The only problem being it gets really crowded in the summer and should have been bigger given the size of the park."

Vi Redmond: "I worked in the One O'clock Club for twenty-one years. I was in the park everyday. I love Southwark Park, and I think we are so lucky to have such a lovely park right on top of us, I really do...Before I worked there I used to take my son to the One O'clock club when it was at the Jamaica Road end of the park. Then it got burnt down. Chrissie Benson worked there, and then they moved it to the other end."

Beryl Donovan: "The old playground was so long. It used to run the length of St. Olave's Hospital. The American swings, which you'd put your arm through, and you run round and kick yourself up. That was so good. There was always a nice community feel about the One O'clock club and the adventure playground. There was always a nice feel about that, a place where the kids could go for the summer holidays. Now there's not a lot for boys of a certain age to do."

Ron Johnson: "I remember us boys walking to Southwark Park to play games, have a play in the Lido, pick the itchy balls from the trees and putting it down some poor girl's neck or even our mates' neck. Great times. We had quite a bit to do with St Olave's as my sister was born there. I remember going to see my Mum there after the birth of my sister but we were not allowed in the Hospital, so we used to go to the playground in Southwark Park and she would come out on the back stairs so that we could see her and the baby."

'Jan': "Years ago in the summer holidays, children's entertainers would put a small stage up and sing, act and have talent shows for the children. The prize was normally sweets."

D.J. Mills: "Does any one remember the mobile cinema that used to come to Southwark Park, in the summer hols? The magic of Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy and many other wonderful films."

Lesley Kingwell: "We used to say 'Shall we go up Southwark?' We would go as a group of girls and sometimes take other peoples children or their dogs. The playground had a sandpit with a climbing frame I've never seen anywhere else. There was a maypole thing which took your feet right off the ground. You held onto a rope. It was great but ripped the skin off your fingers."

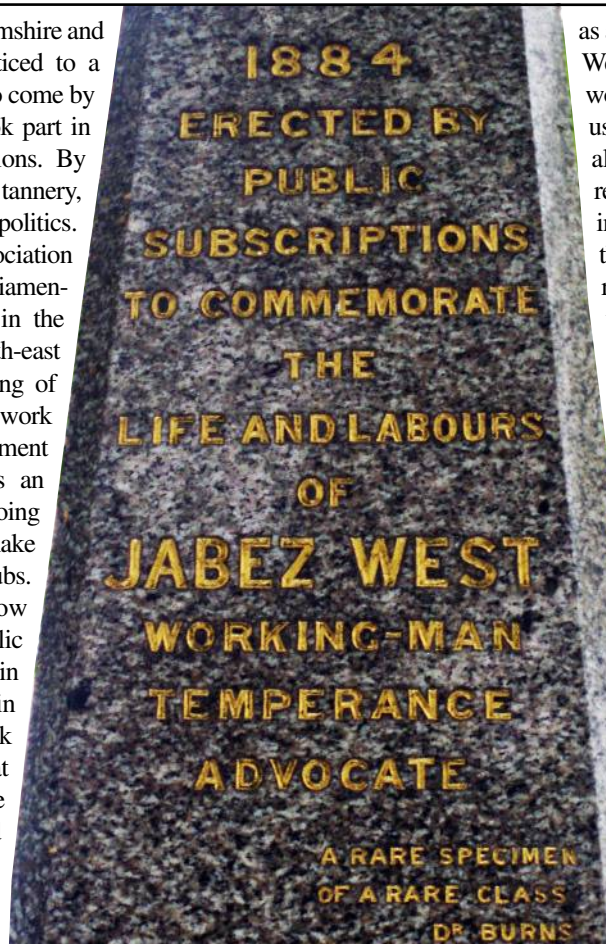
Janet Donovan: "I loved the paddling pool. We could just take our shoes and socks off and have a paddle."



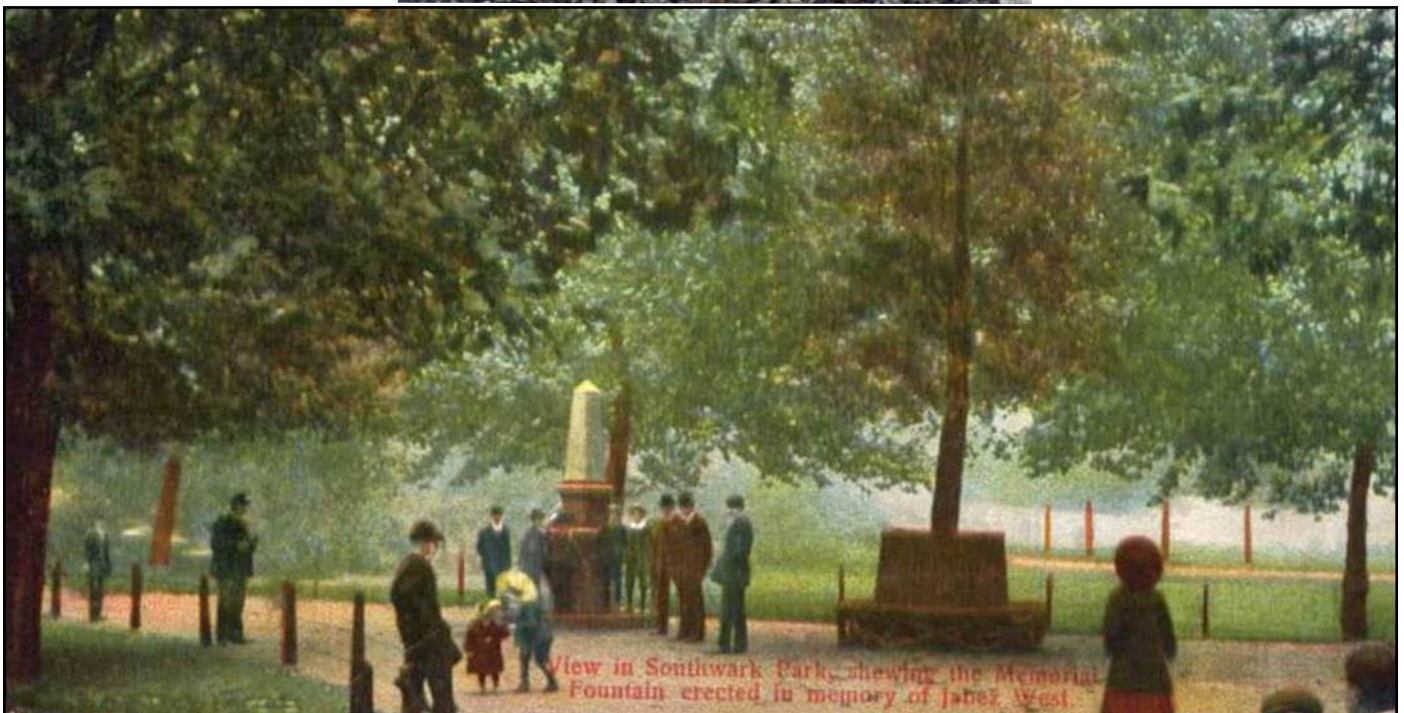
Jabez West

On the path between the bandstand and the bowling green stands a simple, but unique memorial. The Jabez West water fountain is a tribute to a man who at one time was a very well-known figure in Bermondsey. Who was he? And why a memorial to him?

Jabez was born in 1810 in Buckinghamshire and at the age of fourteen was apprenticed to a fellmonger. Employment was hard to come by so he moved up north where he took part in several political reform demonstrations. By 1836 he was working in a Southwark tannery, but he also continued with his radical politics. He joined the Southwark Liberal Association and was prominent in local and parliamentary elections. He was also active in the campaigns to secure a park for south-east London and later against the building of houses in Our Park. However, it his work on behalf of the temperance movement that earned the memorial. He was an advocate of teetotalism, regularly going from his home in Frean Street to make open-air speeches outside local pubs. When he died in 1884 his fellow temperance believers launched a public subscription to provide a memorial in his honour, which was to be located in Southwark Park. The Southwark Recorder noted: "It has been urged that our public parks ought not to be made receptacles for every deceased person's monument whose friends may be able to pay to erect one. We quite admit the force of the argument



as applied to "private" individuals, but Mr. West was, in the strictest sense of the word, a "public" man, and the case before us is altogether exceptional - singular in almost every respect. We doubt if a more remarkable career than this can be found in the social history of London during the present century. It is exceptional in respect of his being a "bona fide" working man, who toiled at the bench till the day of his death; and we doubt if it is possible to find another who has devoted more hours to the elevation of his class. He gave every leisure hour in the evening, he lost many a day's work, he devoted almost every Sunday to the one great work of his life without the smallest fee, and with the only reward of seeing his cause advance - a reward, however, sufficiently gratifying to himself. The case is altogether exceptional; the suggested monument will be useful as well as ornamental..." The polished grey granite memorial was formally unveiled on Good Friday, 3rd April 1885, before a vast crowd drawn from all over London.



Jabez West

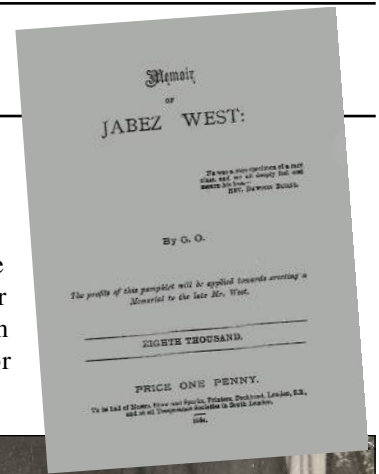
George Oliver of Yalding Road had organised the funding of the fountain and in 1915 he recalled how the idea came about: "One evening, perhaps a year or more before the death of the old veteran, he, my dear old friend, Enoch Benson, and myself, were returning from a meeting of the Southwark Temperance Union in The Borough, and when passing Old Bermondsey Church, he pointed to the drinking fountain built in the wall of the churchyard lodge, remarking that he thought 'those things

Temperance Queen of 1951: Patricia Preston



© P.Preston 2010

had done more for the temperance cause than all the talking done by the advocates'. Benson said, "When you die, Jabez, we will erect one to your memory". I added, "Yes, in Bermondsey Square or Southwark Park".



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Above: Temperance processions were a regular and popular event in the park for many decades.

Patricia Preston (nee Carey): "I am sure the year was 1951 that I was crowned Temperance Queen. I belonged to Bermondsey Gospel Mission (I think it was also known as The London Mission) where I attended Band of Hope. The Temperance Queen was replaced each year; the person in the photo I took over from was Maureen Deacon. There was a procession which started in Jamaica Road (the corner of Paradise Street) it went along the road until it got to Southwark Park, where there were several events and activities taking place. One of the photos shows The St John Ambulance Boys applying First Aid. I was crowned by Margaret L Brown who held a position in the Temperance movement. Also on the Platform was Cyril Bustin the Superintendant of the Mission."

Our Park



Jean Murray: "We used to fill our lemonade bottles up there with water and sherbet."

Matt Preece: "People just pass it by and just see it as a fountain, it's not seen as a memorial"

Gary Magold: "It was a discovery to find out it was the first memorial to an ordinary working man."

Although we used the park we never really knew who Jabez West was. It was just a water fountain with a drinking bowl for a dog at the bottom. As a kid you would climb up and hang on the side of the bowl to drink. Years later we find out its importance."

Nick Lane: "It was incredibly sad the time it was filled with petrol and had an arson attack, but I think it's a wonderful feature, I'm really glad it was renovated because of its connections, something put in for the working man, at a time where things weren't commemorated that way."

Jabez West

After his death the work of Jabez West was honoured by an annual Temperance Demonstration, a tradition that lived on into the 1950s. Often held on a Good Friday by the bandstand, the demonstrations became an event in the park's calendar, though not always peaceful. According to the Southwark Recorder in 1893 a gang of opponents of temperance "succeeded to a great extent in marring the harmony of the proceedings. Just as the Rev. J. Scott Lidgett was beginning to speak, they started singing 'Pour out the Rhine Wine.' This was too exasperating for the temperance people, who had been very patient for hearing, but now their blood was up and they made a terrific onslaught on the offending fifteen 'rushing' them several hundred feet from the vicinity of the platform. Three times did they return, and thrice were they gallantly repelled, and such was the severity with which they were treated on the last occasion that they thought discretion the better part of valour, and kept clear of the crowd."

A more typical scene was found in 1901 when over five-thousand children representing forty-six Bands of Hope from Bermondsey and Rotherhithe gathered in the park, watched by a large crowd.

"It would be impossible to describe the get-up of all the Bands of Hope; suffice it to say, that there were some very pretty combinations of colour, but the style was general, the majority presenting floral canopies and chains, in some cases the latter being hung in festoons from

poles, and in other forming a girdle round all the members of the respective band. St. Crispin's, St. Winifred's, Manor and Rouel Road showed up conspicuously, whilst a distinct novelty was introduced by the children of the Bermondsey Ragged School Band of Hope. Some half-dozen boys appeared in the procession attired in very tattered garments and old silk hats, with

painted noses and blackened eyes, looking the very picture of abject misery and poverty. They bore such inscriptions as 'Heaven Lost,' 'Home Lost,' 'Character Lost,' 'Wife Lost,' and 'Work Lost.' Following were youths made up with garments to represent spirit bottles, and twelve young Amazon girls, armed with axes and ready to wage war against and destroy the drink curse..."

In 1925 the Grand March Past near the bandstand contained a banner with the following advice:

"6d a day spent on beer and you have nothing to show at the end of the year. If you become a T.T., for 6d a day you can spend a holiday down at Herne Bay.

Take our advice, give up the beer, and go for a holiday every year.

Result: Better health and a holiday."

In 1941, despite war-time evacuation over a hundred children were present, and individual prizes for fancy dress were given to Eileen Taylor, Marie Watts, Eva Matthews, Queenie Emery, Lily Patrick, Gladys Tizzard, Iris Taylor and John Howes. A popular feature of the demonstrations was the crowning of the Temperance May Queen.



Our Park



Bill Killick: "I remember the large fountain with the pewter cup on a chain that we all used to drink out of. And the part at the bottom for the dogs."

Jim Allen from 'So You May Know' (1986) recounting his time as a butcher's boy in Albion Street and delivering orders on his bike: "...the front wheel of my bike caught in the tram lines...I went into a skid and turned arse over head, the contents of my basket spilling out onto the dirty road. I had among my orders a joint for Dr. Salter who lived off Jamaica Road.

He was a character, involved in local politics, as well as being a medical man. Not the sort to deliver dirty meat to! I picked myself up, surveyed the damage, and decided on a course of action. Into Southwark Park, I washed the meat under the drinking fountain, scrounged some fresh greaseproof paper from another shop, and carried on with the delivery. Dr. Salter never knew about the dirt or the horse dung..."

Debra Gosling: "It's nice to have someone's name on it, a working man, that's good, a memorial to a working man, I like that. It's lovely 'cos the dogs can get a drink there at the bottom too, so that's quite sweet. It's not just the dogs that drink out of that fountain. I've sat there and watched the crows drinking from the same bit as the dogs."

Grace Beesley: "My mum told us not to drink out of the cups. They were metal and attached to a chain. We all used them. When you think about it now!"



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The Park's Many Friends

We don't have space to write about all of the many people who have been a friend to the park during its long life, but four important campaigns, and the names of those involved, should be mentioned, so that we can place our thanks on record.

First there was the building question and the Southwark Park Protection Committee that ran from the park's opening to 1872. To help meet some of the costs of building the park the Metropolitan Board of Works wanted to sell off portions of the land for private house building.

Local people joined together, petitioned the authorities, and eventually won the fight to reverse the unpopular policy. Without their efforts our park would much smaller than it is today.

The most prominent names in the early days of the campaign were the Bermondsey vestrymen Barrow, Bradford, Darnell, Ecroyd, Leake, Priter, Sharpe, Suffield and Sutton; working men, Thomas Ellis, Mr. Marsh and W. Jones of Fort Road; and Rev. Gilbert McCall. Then Rotherhithe vestrymen, such as Joseph Blake, Capt. N.D. Bower; Messrs. J Allen, Chambers, T.W. Clarke, G.J. Judge, J Lewis, and G.F. Merrels made their voices known. In October 1869 they presented an important petition signed by J. Ross and seven-hundred other local people.

We know Messrs. Thomas Beardsall, George Odger and Thomas Wills attended meetings for the cause, as did Messrs. Brooks, Brown, Chinnery, Dakin, Day, C.J. Evans, R. Evans, Fielding, Garnar, B. Glover, Holmes, Horton, Huntley, T. Manning, J. Medland, Nowells, Pridmore, A. Smith, L. Smith, A.D. Steel, T. Thomas, Tracey, Trant, Warne, and Wells. The local clergy also rallied round, including Revs. J. Brown; John Farren, G. M. Munns and G. M. Murphy, as did Dr. John Dixon.

A Committee was formed to direct things and the chairman was Samuel Bourne Bevington, tannery owner and future Bermondsey Mayor. The Secretary was Rev. John Sinclair, member of the Southwark Radical Club in Keeton's Road, and one-time editor of the South London Press. Other members included the Liberal Ebenezer John Bishop; Reuben Harris, the mast and block maker and Sunday School teacher; Rev. R. M. Martin, curate of Christ Church, Bermondsey; Frederick Shaw, owner and editor of the Southwark and Bermondsey Recorder; William Stafford, businessman and secretary of the Southwark Radical Association; James Wallace and John Locke M.P.



Forever Friends:

Top with Danny Baker (L-R) Pat Kingwell, Russell Dryden, Marjorie Hill, Gary Magold, Grace Beesley & Phil Burkett.

Middle: (L-R) Rear Nick Burton, Pat Kingwell, flagholder Gary Magold, Terry Graham, flagholder Marjorie & Gary Glover.

Bottom: Nick Lane with the late Anne Yates.

Left: Marjorie with park helpers Christine & June Savory

The Park's Many Friends

By the 1880s it was 'Access for All' at the park with new entrances and a Carriageway Drive.

Originally the park had six entrances, but as time went on people campaigned for better access. When the park was made the neighbourhood on the west side was thinly inhabited, but by the 1880s the population had largely increased. The residents first called for a new entrance at Dilston Grove in 1881, which was eventually opened on 5th September 1885. The key campaigners included Messrs. W.H. Way, T. Aubrey, T. Holdsworth and Richard Fairbairn, with a special mention to

J. Southgate, who organised a petition of over a thousand signatures. On the same side of the

park a new Moreton Gate was first agreed in 1890, but not opened until 13th April 1901. Again local inhabitants had to press for improved access, with John Porter and Rev. J. Wallace, the vicar of St. Crispin's, Bermondsey, notably active campaigners.

Access to the main carriageway drive was also a major issue during the 1890s. As early as 1875 the Bermondsey Vestry had asked for it to be opened as a central thoroughfare, but without success. However by 1891 the restricted opening hours was having an impact on the working population. A letter from A.G. Clayton to The Southwark Recorder commented:

"In the morning especially, when workmen have to be at their various destinations by 6 a.m. punctually, a few minutes is of the greatest consequence, for many have to take the workmen's trains, and to miss them not only entails loss of time, but extra expense, involving serious pecuniary affliction upon those least able to afford it. If the same conditions existed at the West End of the Metropolis I believe it would have been remedied before this...Last winter during the frost the park was open till ten

o'clock at night for skating, and therefore I cannot conceive why the two main entrances to our park should not be lighted and opened till ten o'clock for the benefit of the labouring man, who would feel this a great boon when travelling from Spa Road and Southwark Park Road to the Surrey Commercial Docks and Lower Road..."

Many agreed with this, and a number of public meetings were held to make the case. Rev. W. Daniel, was prominent in the campaign, as were Bermondsey vestrymen Pomeroy, McCarthy, Soutter, Ellis, Dumphreys and Glanville. Rotherhithe vestrymen too - Bulmer, Stuart, Pridmore and

Walker. The Rotherhithe Ratepayers Association and the Labour Protection League held supportive meetings in the park. As ever things did not move quickly, and more campaigners came forward, such as W.A. Israel, A.J. Kirk, A. Brown, F.R. Owen, Messrs. Lacey, Fitzgerald, Tyler, Paddon and Mitcham, and Rev. W J Stobart of St. Augustine's Vicarage. Finally in 1899 it was agreed to keep the central drive open all

night, and to provide appropriate lighting.

In 1906 there was The Southwark Park Improvement Committee, which lasted up to 1913.

By the early years of the twentieth century the voices of working men (and some women) became more prominent in the development of services within the park. The combination of increased leisure time and the growing strength of the local labour movement led to a demand for improvements. In early 1906 a committee of local men was formed to push for a boating lake. The idea reflected the traditions of riverside and maritime Bermondsey and Rotherhithe, but it was also an attempt to create work for the unemployed men of the area.



Opening Ceremony



The Park's Many Friends

It seems the Improvements Committee lasted for about seven years, and its biggest achievement was the opening of the boating lake in 1908. After that it also sought a range of other measures, some of which happened, the bowling green and upgrading of bandstand for instance, but many of which did not, such as a model yachting lake, roller skating on the bandstand, a cycling track and cheaper restaurants for children. However, their progressive ideas of an open-air swimming pool and an athletics track would be implemented in time.

Many people were involved in the work of the group, but the key activists were J. Bell of Alderminster Street, the chairman and William Smith of Paradise Street who was the architect of the lake, both spiritually and practically (his plans were used by the LCC.)

Executive members included W. Arms, W. Briggs, A. Dawes, H.

Goodwin, W. Guerin, Arthur Harris, D. Jupp, R. Martin, G. Murray, W. Murray, C. Pirsell, A. Preston, A. Smith, William Shearring, D. Sullivan, C. Taylor, J. Taylor, G. Timms, J. Wills and H. Woodruff. A most important member was Elizabeth 'Sissie' Smith, sister of William, who organised and gathered thousands of signatures for the lake petition.

Sad to say that by the mid 1990s the park had fallen into decline, and was badly in need of some tender loving care. In 1996 a public meeting was held in Southwark Park School to call the Council to account, and shortly afterwards a Friends group was set up. Since then much has been achieved, including from 1997-2002 the HLF restoration scheme; 130th and 140th anniversary celebrations; involvement in the annual Bermondsey Carnival and Event Southwark Park; fundraising to improve the One O'clock Club; the children's playground; the Ada Salter Garden balustrade and a borehole to provide water for lake and flowerbeds. The Friends established a Young Friends Group, the first in Southwark, and ran summer bandstand seasons over a number of years. In 2003 the Friends received Southwark Council's Civic Award as Environment Group of the Year.



Vandals: Daubed notices

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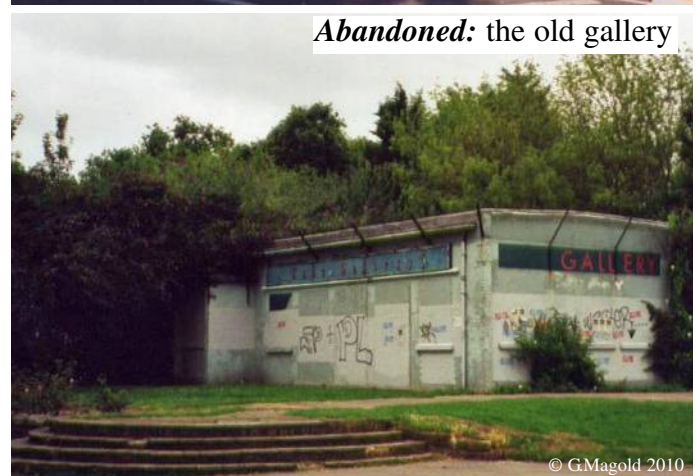


Before: Hawkstone Gate



After: Hawkstone Gate

© G.Magold 2010



Abandoned: the old gallery

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Beauty restored once again

© D. Gossling 2010



Unfit to sit on: benches

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The Dark Side



As lovely as a park may be, it can also be a place of danger. In its time our park has witnessed a good number of accidents, some deaths and its fair share of crime.

In April 1869 the first person to officially befall adversity was Miss Holmes of nearby fifteen Paradise Row. During the construction of the park she claimed that the works had damaged her property, including a broken garden fence and ruined shrubs; destruction of a large greenhouse and "vines of many years standing;" and a pianoforte spoiled by damp. Her claim for 500 guineas compensation was denied by the Board, who refused to accept liability.

In March 1870 a drinking fountain was broken to pieces when Henry King of Queen Street, Rotherhithe drove a horse and van into it. The Board resolved to replace the fountain, but called upon King, who was in the employ of Cresswell's the butchers, to pay the cost, or risk a summons. In March 1886 the main gates at the Jamaica Level were damaged by a vehicle, and some ninety years later, the Gomm entrance was badly disrupted when a circus elephant trailer made a double hit, leaving two brick pillars cracked clean through and the gates bent. Fences may be there to climb, but beware those who are not careful. In May 1930, Dennis Stevens, a boy visiting relatives in Alexis Street, was impaled on a fence while trying to retrieve a lost ball. In August 1931 Charles William Nelson, aged ten, of Ridsen Street, came in contact with a sharp, spiked railing and sustained a severe wound to his neck.

Sometimes the fates smiled on those in peril. On 11th December 1908 J. Marks, of Peabody Buildings, East Lane, rescued a boy from drowning in the lake.

Sadly there were deaths. On 7th April 1881, Joseph Clarke, aged 66, an ex-constable of the Metropolitan Police, and resident of Abbeyfield Road, was blown over by very strong winds. His fall caused a fracture to his right arm.

Although he had his bone set at Guys Hospital, he died shortly afterwards. In 1886 John Bertram Rendle, aged twelve, of Fort Road, misjudged a catch while playing

cricket and suffered a mortal injury to his head. Just a few days later ten year-old John Holbird, died from a violent blow to the head by a cricket ball. In March 1887 Edward Boland, an eighteen year-old labourer of Ainstey Street, died as a result of a bad fall in the gymnasium the previous July. In 1896 Sidney Collins, aged 39, fell while climbing the fence near Paradise Gate and fractured his spine.

On 18th July 1928 eight-year-old Dorothy Ada Conoley of Union Road died by drowning in lido. At the inquest the coroner criticised the actions of the mother for allowing the child, a non-swimmer, to go to the lido unattended by any family. It was Dorothy's first visit to the lido. In evidence Florence Eyre, a bath attendant, said that there were over two-hundred children and women using the lido at the time of the girl's drowning, but she was censured by the jury for not causing a proper search for the girl to be made.

During the making of the park in 1866, complaints were made about disturbances on the site by children and "disorderly characters." Shortly after, an additional policeman was employed to help security, but by 1870 it was reported that nearly sixty cases of lawlessness had been brought before the courts. The men's public toilets were a nuisance. In 1870 a Gomm Road resident wrote of "men and boys frequenting them not for the purpose for which they are built but merely as a playground and place of amusement. The nuisance is at its height on Sundays when a gang of men and boys visit the place, and not making enough noise by shouting and singing the most obscene songs, they all commence jigging and kicking the seats of the closets, in fact making a general storm which attracts the attention of everyone near. People are continually insulted by the stones which are thrown by boys onto those in the closets."

The new park did not always please its neighbours; in 1871 residents of nearby Union Road (today Jamaica Road) complained of children climbing the pear trees "and the swearing and cussing used by them is something shocking".

Len Hatch: "The most tragic thing I can say about Southwark Park...I came through there one morning and the poor old bloke who used to look after the bowling green was in tears, literally, I mean that, and I said to him 'Whoa, what's up mate?' And then I looked at the bowling green and everything was hacked up. Someone had gone round with their heels and cut it all up. All the tubs were pushed onto the green.

I used to go through there every morning and during the winter he would have the big sticks sweeping the dew off, it used to be a picture. Generally though the park was respected. There

Our Park



was park keepers walking about keeping an eye on you. Mind I wouldn't say we was all angels...It was a different attitude. It was a different attitude that was taught to you in school. It's not yours. You can use it, but respect it. And that was hammered home to you as a kid. You couldn't pick the flowers. They were there for you to look at and admire, but don't touch. That was emphasized on to you. Even your parents emphasized it on to you. (Sighs) I shouldn't condemn this young generation because they've got more pluck than what some of us did. Probably we were too much under the thumb..."

The Dark Side

Damage to park property was taken very seriously indeed. Children were not treated at all leniently, and it became a common practice for parents to appear before the Parks Committee to apologise for the behaviour of their sons and daughters. A letter from a father from Storks Road in 1881 is typical:

"Dear Sir, This is the humble apology of George Rose father of Frederick Rose aged 10 years who it appears was in Southwark Park last week with several small boys, they being on their holidays from school. They were detected by the Park Keeper taking some roots. The Park Keeper called on me and told me of it. I gave him a good sound thrashing for it which I hope you will take as sufficient punishment. I will also use my best endeavours to prevent my son repeating the like offence again. As I follow the occupation of mariner he only comes under my notice occasionally. Hoping you will take a lenient view of the case and take no further proceedings. I shall be much grateful to you for your kindness as I am a sailor before the mast and nine children depending on me for support."

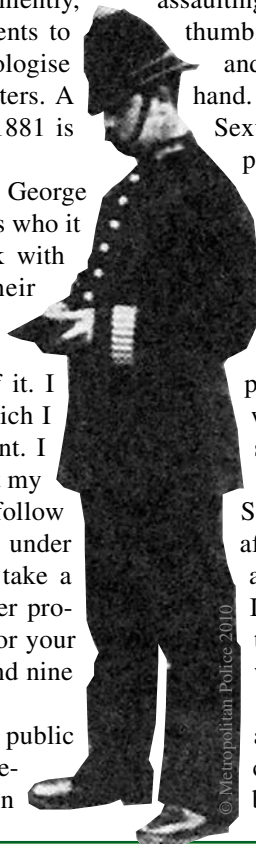
Assaults on staff are inevitable in any public occupation, but few can have offered as unrealistic a defence as Archibald Forrester did in

1924. Charged with using indecent language and assaulting Park-keeper Martin by biting him on the thumb, the defendant claimed that he had stumbled, and in doing so, his teeth struck the keeper's hand. He was found guilty.

Sexual crimes were a regular occurrence in the park, especially up until the First World War where it seems that every summer resulted in at least one notable case. There were numerous incidents of indecent conduct and exposure towards young girls, and also serious sexual assaults, even as early as 1871. The Board agreed to post a notice at park gates giving the initials of the offender, which hardly seems to be naming and shaming!

In 1907 the headmistress of Southwark Park School appealed for more effective supervision after a number of her girls had been victim of attacks.

In the same year G. Dyer notified the LCC that two men had tried to kidnap his daughter while she was in the park. More positively by 1908 Mr. Carson the Park Superintendent's annual report claimed that due to the conviction of many offenders cases had become rare.



© Metropolitan Police 2010

Gary Magold:

"As a kid I got mugged and lost some money, but I have never felt a sense of danger in the park. No, I just went and used it. I've probably no sense of fear because I am part of Bermondsey, it is home.

I remember in the mid 1980s, when the park was on its knees, somebody poured petrol in the Jabez West water fountain bowl and set light to it, causing cracking and damage to the obelisk. But there is still a sense of community in Bermondsey. Scratch the surface and its there."

Grace Beesley:

"In the summer months we have the bikes which tear down the paths. It's only a matter of time before some little kiddie is knocked flying, because a lot of mums come in with their small children."

Our Park



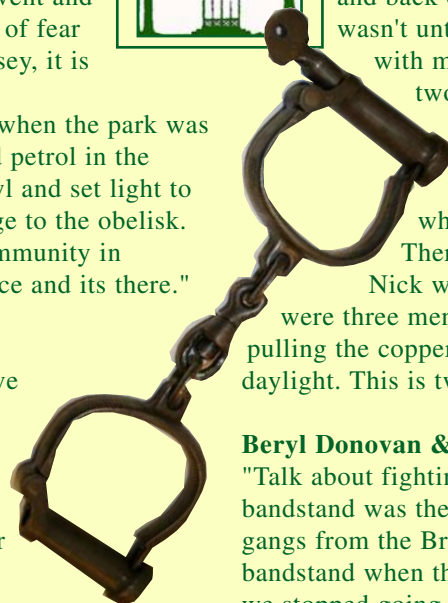
Matt Preece:

"On the south side of the park on the right hand side, and there's four, five foot railings that go between the park and back of peoples gardens, and it wasn't until a Green Flag inspection with me and Paul that we noticed two of the neighbours had cut gates in to the railings so they could come and go to the park as they pleased which is obviously an issue.

There was another time me and Nick were doing a patrol and there were three men on the bowls pavilion roof pulling the copper off with crowbars, in broad daylight. This is two o'clock in the afternoon!"

Beryl Donovan & Jean Murray:

"Talk about fighting in the park, when the bandstand was there were gang fights. Different gangs from the Brick, from the Elephant at the bandstand when the dancing was on. That's why we stopped going and why they stopped the dancing."



The Dark Side

Even so the problem never went away, and in May 1914 Bermondsey Borough Council complained about children having been assaulted and asking for secluded portions of the park to be better patrolled. In 1933 the issue must have raised its head again because a petition signed by 41 members of the Bermondsey Townswomen's Guild was presented by Ada Salter to the LCC asking for employment of non-uniformed women patrols for the protection of young girls in the park.

There have been murders in Our Park, though thankfully not many. The first recorded was in May 1879 when the dead body of an infant boy was found in a toilet by labourer, George

Edmonds. At the inquest the coroner said there were traces of a violent blow on the head which had evidently

depressed the skull. In 1903 Florence Britt of Clements Road was found guilty of murdering her five week old son Sidney by drowning in the lake. In 1985 two young girls were found dead in the park and the mother of one of them was subsequently given two life sentences. From time to

time gang fights have been part of park life. In 1936 after fining two men, O'Brien and Allen, the magistrate said these gang fights "was becoming a regular institution." In 1948 park-keepers from North London had to be drafted in to deal with hundreds of youths who were going to the park at night after official closing time.

In July 1950 major disturbances happened at the funfair involving many youths. It is

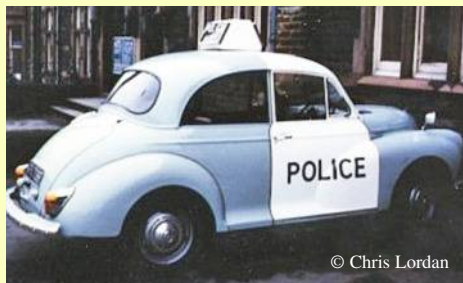
said the police commandeered a number 68 tram and took several offenders straight to Tower Bridge Police Station.



Rowdy Bus: With inadequate room in a black Maria, police conveyed park yobs to Tower Bridge police station in a number 68 tram!

David Wearnes: "The main problems with most events, be it Southwark Park or anywhere, is the yobbos...the little kids trying to get your goat, trying to get you to chase them, doing all kinds of things...Southwark Park, little Millwall lads, a couple of them I recognised, and they managed to get a couple of the security guards chasing them. I got on the radio and said, 'You're doing exactly what they want you to do. Let 'em be. Let 'em stand there. Make reports, put the word about, when the kids are in range lets not do the running around they want us to do. Let's catch them, give 'em a little talking to, get their parents involved...I am happy to say crime doesn't happen in Southwark Park as much as other parks around London...For a park in London it doesn't get the high levels of stuff that happens. The worst thing I can recall in recent times is somebody getting into a fight. Fights happen everywhere, especially if it's an event and people have gone out and had a bit of sauce. You get a bit of

Our Park



© Chris Lordan

vandalism, but you don't get the high levels of crime, and that is a lot to do with the community that we live in."

Nick Lane: "With every park you have situations occur and there are some very sad memories of people who died in the park. I remember a case of some people who were camping and their tent caught on fire and they were burnt inside the tent which is an awful situation. I recall people sawing down small trees as well. Somebody got hold of a bow saw obviously and they sawed about three or four twenty year old ash trees down. We had visions of the park being decimated."

D.J. Mills: "I remember one fight where the police raided the park, and we all done a runner, ending with me up a ruddy great tree, until the early hours of the morning, waiting for the bobbies to leave. I recall there being two dance nights, Monday and Friday. Friday night, usually had a band, Johnny and the Pirates was one of them."

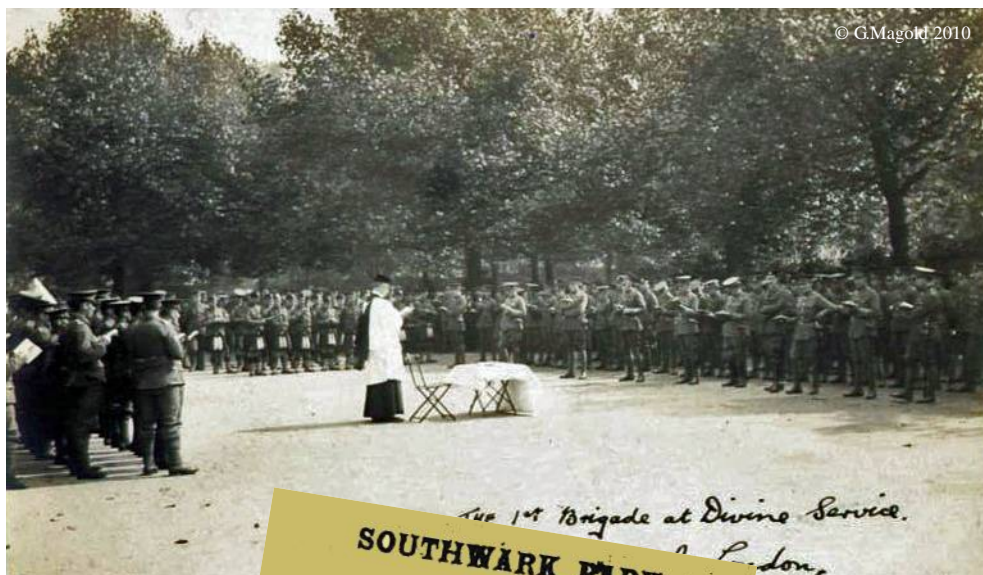


War

Today we see the park in all its glory. It is now a pleasant place to relax in the sun, play sport or chill out to a concert; a place of safety. However, not that long ago it was caught up in the chaos of war, when it was given over to defence, drill and domesticity.

During the First World War the LCC agreed to savings for the war effort which had an immediate impact upon the park. No floral displays; no bulbs or plants to be purchased; less maintenance; reduction of staff; deferring of all painting and tar paving works; marking out only the corners of football pitches; bands not to involve a charge on the rates; and increased charges for use of bowls and tennis lawns.

Military activity was soon visible in the park. In September 1914 Lord Kitchener launched an appeal for men to join army, and new recruits began to train and drill in the park. Recruitment posters appeared on notice boards, and patriotic speeches were made at band performances. In May 1915 a speaker addressed the public about 'Britain's Position in the War.' Rifle ranges were approved, and a Southwark Park Rifle Club set up in Bombay Street. The park was used for recruiting rallies. On 11th September 1915 the south-east column of a London-wide rally assembled at the Hawkstone Road entrance and over twelve-hundred men marched ten miles through the district accompanied by recruiting officers and a regimental band, halting at various places to hear speeches. Recruits who responded to the appeal fell in and marched with the column and afterwards went to be medically examined and attested. "Wake Up, London!" "Wake up, London!" was the motto of the rally. In May 1916 to help encourage recruits a German gun captured by London Territorials at the battle of Loos was placed on display for one month in park. The war brought certain restrictions to park users. In 1916 the sale of literature at public meetings was



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banned, presumably to quell any anti-war feeling. Kite flying was suspended, as was lighting on the lake when ice-skating. Sports and entertainments were regarded as frivolous and the playing of organised games and bandstand concerts declined while the war

was in progress. Events and activities supportive of the war effort were encouraged.

A Southwark Park Eleven played benefit cricket matches for the Princess Club Hospital for Wounded Soldiers in Jamaica Road. Local cricketers such as William Matthes, E.W. Cox, J.J. Hughes and J. Burgess played a prominent role in organising the games. In 1916 a match was attended by wounded soldiers and Princess Marie Louise, and in 1917 Len Braund, the Surrey, Somerset and England cricketer played. In 1917 the Bermondsey Bowling Club, based in the park, held a concert for wounded soldiers.

Official attitudes towards drink changed during the war to ensure maximum work attendance and production. Opening hours were greatly reduced and temperance processions through the park were seen as helpful to the campaign. In 1917

starvation was a real threat because Britain was heavily dependent upon food imports and the German U-Boats were sinking many supply ships. The parks played a part in increased food production. Bermondsey Borough Council took a lead in encouraging allotments, but the LCC-controlled Southwark Park had not been used, causing some local resentment.

In February 1918 Bermondsey's Head Gardener, called for portions of Southwark Park to be devoted to allotments. Later that summer, as the war was drawing to a close, the LCC. complied with his suggestion.

The 1st Brigade at Divine Service.
SOUTHWARK PARK.
The captured German gun has at last arrived. Drawn by four horses this war trophy reached Southwark Park on Wednesday morning last, and was received by the Mayor. The gun was captured by London Territorials at the battle of Loos, and will be on view for one month. Accompanying the Mayor were the Town Clerk and several Aldermen and Councilors, amongst them being Alderman Squires Councillors Angle, Lunn, Grant, etc. A large number of local residents also welcomed this novel trophy, the arrival of which is due in no small measure to the Mayor's persistency.
The ten ambulances which were purchased with the amount collected in Bermondsey on St. George's Day (reported in our last issue) have not yet been dispatched to the front, owing to labour difficulties, but the Mayor is assured that they will be on their way to France to-day (Friday).

War

If the First World War had disrupted the park, things had quickly returned to normal after ceasefire. During the Second World War most of the park was commandeered by the government as an anti-aircraft site. Defending the City and the Docks led to extensive damage to the park. Militarisation brought considerable upheaval. Over one-hundred and fifty trees were removed to make space for the guns and huts. Trenches were dug to shelter people from bombs, but these proved unpopular, so concrete shelters were built along the northern edge of the park near Jamaica Road. The Blitz was causing so much devastation that a large dump was created in the park for local debris. Later the railings were taken for scrap. The lake and lido were used as emergency water supplies for the fire brigade, and the bandstand as a base for barrage balloons.

The park again was used for food production but on a larger scale than before. The need for allotments got Bermondsey Borough Council to push the LCC to make provision. By 1945 there were over ninety allotments and post-war food shortages ensured they remained in service. In 1947 the government ordered a further four acres be given over to potato and oat growing. The park was not returned to recreational use until 1950. Another complication came when homeless people squatted in the military huts; in 1946 families moved into the disused army huts, including 21-year-old ex-sailor



Our Park



Inset:
Lou & Stanley's children today

Dave Fisher: "There is a picture of a couple dancing in the bandstand area during the war years. It has been in the local newspaper on a number of occasions and more recently in some other publications. These two people are my mum and dad, Lou and Stanley Fisher. At the time their picture dancing in the park was taken it must have been shortly after dad joined the RAF. They were both single back then."

R.W. Jackson and Mr and Mrs Cain with their two daughters. Mr Cain reported as the organiser of "the colony" of eleven families, and a local out-of-work slater, Fred Livett, came from his home in Rotherhithe New Road to help those moving in. The people formed a Southwark Park Squatters Committee which was unofficially recognised by Bermondsey Borough Council. They stayed in the park for several years.

By far the greatest damage was caused by The Blitz. The first recorded bomb in the park was an unexploded one which fell at the rear of Hawkstone Road on the night of 8th September. The following night a high explosive bomb fell at the Gomm entrance. A night later the paddling pond was hit causing a large crater. Thereafter the park was regularly hit. The air raid shelters; the China Hall entrance; the bandstand; the Hawkstone Road gates; a

football pitch; the hard tennis courts near the Swedish Church; the Oval; the nursery; the lido; all came under fire. In spring 1941 more damage was caused to the Superintendent's lodge; a depot; a watchman's hut; and the Jamaica, Gomm and China Hall entrances.

Florrie Weller: "There used to be allotments in there during the war. They used to grow a lot of potatoes in those days. I can remember my father selling them".

Grace Beesley: "All I can remember my mum saying to me is 'Don't you speak to any of those men in uniform. Don't you speak to any of those soldiers!'"

Len Hatch: "The Oval, oh, oh, that was sacred turf, you could not go on that. That was hallowed ground. And then they ploughed it all up and grew wheat on it when the war broke out. They flattened it out and had guns on it and everything else..."

George Dalton: "After the Second World War, I remember that in the large grassed area adjacent to Jamaica road in between park entrances were three large wedge-shaped brick structures, each about 10ft high. These structures were the entrances to the

Our Park

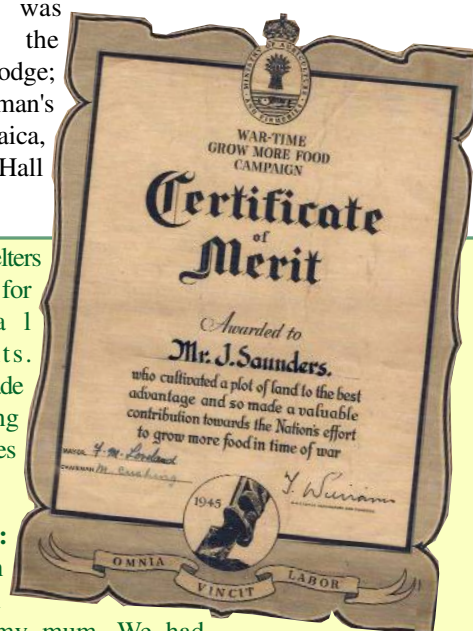


bomb shelters built for local residents. They made interesting

climbing features when I was a child."

Beryl Donovan:

"In my mind I can remember being in the shelter with my mum. We had been round The Blue, and she left my push chair at the top of the shelter. When we came out the push chair was missing. We had to walk home down Brunel Road, and when we got to the bottom of Brunel Road our house was bombed out. My dad was in the house."



War

The "Little Blitz" of winter 1944 brought more terror. On 20th February a H.E. bomb fell near the Hawkstone Gates killing one person and injuring nine others. On 18th July flying bombs landed in Henwood Street off Gomm Road and practically obliterated the street. Two people were killed: Fire Guard Frederick Charles Mason aged 52 of 11 Henwood Street and Catherine Shelford, aged 65, of 9 Henwood Street. Another 24 were injured. On 4th March 1945 a high explosive bomb fell at the boundary of the park and St. Olave's Hospital causing damage to the nurses' quarters. On 25th March 1945 the last V2 rocket bombs to hit Bermondsey landed in the park, near the already devastated Henwood Street. Houses in Gomm Road were damaged badly, as was Rebecca Terrace. For most of the war the southern end of the park was practically closed to the public, but some activities in the park were encouraged as a morale boost to the hard-pressed population. War did not stop the annual chrysanthemum show in 1939, and for the summer of 1940 the lido

was opened, as it was intermittently throughout the war. The Bermondsey Shelter Council arranged several events in the park in 1941. On 3rd June it was community singing led by the then well-known broadcaster, David Davies. On 9th June a "Fitness for Service" evening with free games for over 16's took place at Christchurch Gate entrance. A day later the Kennington Police provided an open-air concert. Most unexpected of all were ten performances of 'The Taming of the Shrew', starring Hollywood actress, and Fred Astaire's former dancing partner, Claire Luce, on a specially prepared Elizabethan stage. The show was the brainchild of Dulwich-born actor and director, Robert Atkins, known for his 'Shakespeare in the Park' productions. It was followed by Twelfth Night.

The Times concluded: "This may not be a perfect production of Twelfth Night, but it is one which triumphed, over many of the difficulties inseparable from open-air performances and which gave delight and the sense of living in a happier, more spacious world to the audience under the trees".



Bill Killick: "During the 2nd World War, a barrage balloon was sited in the bandstand area, after they removed the spike from the top. It was manned by Women's Air Force Service, with some help from RAF personnel, and anyone else that was available.

'We used to watch them trying to get it airborne. It was a bit hectic, more so if it was a bit windy. They used to have to hang on the guide ropes, whilst the winch unwound the cable to get it airborne...It was always watched by groups of youngsters, shouting encouragement, or chiding them when it wouldn't deploy....There were some anti aircraft batteries mounted on the Oval, these were later changed for rocket batteries, that had everyone diving for the shelter every time they were fired. You weren't quite sure whether it was something going up, or coming down."

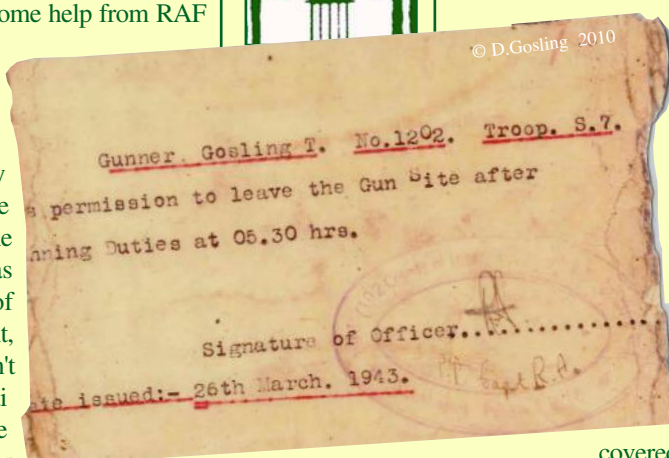
David Clark: "I remember my father having an allotment and grew his vegetables without any ever being stolen...On the field just

Our Park



behind the Jamaica Road entrance there were some air raid shelters still there from the second world war. We did go down these, although only with the help of a candle, but it was very dark and we were unable to see hardly anything."

© D.Gosling 2010

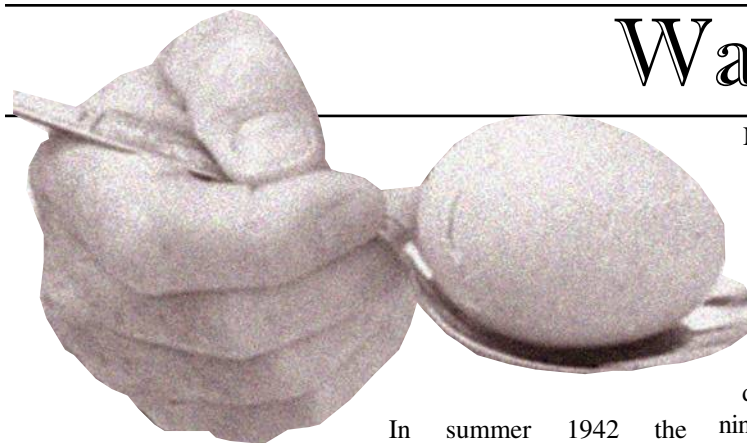


Reg Gosling: "My Dad was a Home Guard in Southwark Park. By day he would be repairing people's shoes and by night he was out there shooting down enemy aircraft! He was on the rockets. He'd get the 188 bus from his shop in Balfour Street (Walworth) in the evening and come home in the morning

covered in dirt. He'd go home, wash off all the soot and set to work on customer's shoes again."

Richard Stevens: "During the Second World War the oval contained an anti-aircraft battery manned by both regulars and Home Guard and armed with both guns and massed AA rockets which were designed to explode in a box at the set height."

War



Not until 1950 did our park come back to full public use, partly because of the slow military decommissioning and food shortages, but also because Bermondsey had bigger problems to face. Practically all nineteen-thousand dwellings in the borough had been war damaged and over four-thousand had vanished completely or were unusable. Nearly three-hundred warehouses had been obliterated; half the schools gone; the Town Hall and other public buildings mostly destroyed or damaged. More than half of Bermondsey's pre-war population of ninety-thousand had gone for one reason or another. In 1947 the LCC defined Bermondsey as a Reconstruction Area, and housing was number one priority.

In June 1945 the LCC's five year plan for parks included several improvement schemes for Southwark Park such as a lido café; a new 'shell' bandstand equipped with dressing rooms and modern lighting; a glass constructed solaria for older people; a cricket pavilion; resurfacing of hard tennis courts and children's playground; better toilets and floodlighting of play areas. However six months later it was made clear that there was little prospect of such major investment. By 1950 the works achieved were the rebuilding of the toilets at Gomm Road Gate; resurfacing of the playground; some curtaining for the bandstand; new wire boundary fencing and concrete posts rather than railings; repairs to the Superintendent's lodge; and the reinstatement of grass on the land used for crop growing.

In 1950 while local people would have been glad to have fully access to their park again, it was a pale shadow of the place they had known little more than a decade before.

The quality and beauty had been diminished. There were no sports facilities to speak of. The lake was cracked and leaking, the boathouse gone, and the paddling pool dry.

That the lido was functioning, and an entertainments programme with the odd circus and fair was in place during the summer, could not hide the fact that the physical impact of war had been so heavy it was to take fifty years to put right.

In summer 1942 the government introduced a 'Holiday at Home' initiative. The LCC and local councils organised attractions to encourage people to spend their holidays at home and thereby free up transport for military use. The policy was also driven by the need to ensure workers recuperated sufficiently for the war effort. The Bermondsey Holidays at Home Council programme for Whit-Monday promised sports and entertainment for all in the park. The afternoon consisted of running races for men and women, tugs of war between the services, sack races, egg and spoon races, three legged races, and pillow fights for boys, followed by open-air dancing, including a foxtrot competition. The Picture Post has a photograph of people dancing in the park - "South London Swings it in Southwark Park. Some of us have men partners. Some of us haven't - but we dance. There's an excellent band, and nothing to pay." The summer of 1943 saw several Wednesday evening dancing concerts, with music from long-forgotten bands led by Fred Hedley, Percy Bush and Cyril Green. Friday afternoon children's shows were popular, as was an open-air boxing tourney which attracted fifteen-hundred people, to see the feature bout between Terry McGovern (RAF Fitzroy and Lynn) and Sapper H. Watson. In 1945 both VE and VJ Days were celebrated with music and fireworks in many London parks, but not in Southwark. Given the huge impact of the war on Bermondsey and Rotherhithe it seems a rather large oversight on behalf of the authorities.

Our Park's Role of Honour

John Vince AMOS (1876-1917) a probationary under keeper. He was taken ill near Bethune and died on **13th February 1917**.

John Edward BLAKE (1885-1914) an underkeeper. He was commended for meritorious conduct in arresting a man on 9th June 1913 for disorderly conduct and assault in Southwark Park. He received an award. An able-bodied seaman, he died when his ship H.M.S. Good Hope was sunk on **1st November 1914** off the coast of Chile.

Cecil Tom HARRIS (1895-1917) had worked in Southwark Park since July 1915. On **22nd February 1917** he was caught by shrapnel at Combles and died at once.

E. HILTON Second keeper and a private in the Black Watch who died of his wounds on **4th April 1944**

R.H.TACON Second keeper and a gunner in the Royal Artillery who was killed in a motor cycle accident on **2nd March 1944**

E.C. TRICE Second keeper and a Lance Sergeant in the Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery, whose death as a prisoner of war was notified on **14th August 1943**.



The Carnival



A bright, cheery, noisy, colourful procession winding its way through the streets, culminating in a jolly extravaganza in Our Park. Who would have thought such jollity originated in war?

The Carnival began in 1900 as an initiative to raise money for widows and orphans of the Boer War. It was connected with the Daily Telegraph and the first Mayor of Bermondsey, Samuel Bevington and his family were involved in organizing a procession through the streets to raise money. One night it toured the west of the borough, the next the east. There was a parade of a couple of hundred floats, including bicycles depicting the four seasons and wagons with scenes of the war, such as the Relief of Mafeking or people on horseback portraying the generals of the day, including Kitchener. All of the big local businesses took part and the streets were bedecked with bunting and decorations. Programmes were sold to raise money for the cause. There was also an album of carnival photos made up and sold after the big event. A local photographer by the name of Angle took pictures of all those taking part, along with the floats. He himself processed in the streets, along with



his family on their own float. The album is now a rare collector's item that reveals just how important an event the Carnival was and gives an insight into the origins of the celebration we see today.

The annual event seems to have vanished from the calendar until the 1970s when it was revived again as a two-week event, called the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Carnival. Based on

The Oval there were all sorts of entertainments, such as motor cycle display teams; the Dagenham Girl Pipers; dog shows; wrestling; parachutes; Morris dancing; donkey derbies; vintage cars; It's a Knockout; a model of Concorde; baby shows; Western Cowboy displays; and in 1978 even a recreation of the Battle of New Orleans. All proceeds went to local charities.

By the late 1990s the event had once again gone quiet until Mac Clague and others breathed life back into it again, since when it has been a much loved part of the Bermondsey summer.



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Music

What could be nicer than music in the park on a summer's day? Or singing a few carols around the bandstand on a cold December afternoon? Music, both traditional and modern has served to make our park a melodic place to chill out and relax.

Before it was built a bewildering number of plans were advanced for Our Park, but none of them made mention of music. When it finally became a reality it did not contain a bandstand or any other facility for music. Happily, it did play a part in the opening ceremony of 1869. The bands of the Bermondsey & Rotherhithe Surrey Rifle Volunteers did the honours as they led a procession around the park. The first attempt to provide public music was made by J. Smith, of Deptford, a local band conductor. He wrote to the MBW asking to be allowed to provide a band for the park on Saturday afternoons and also "a temporary stage or enclosure for the furtherance of public pleasure."

The Board declined his proposal, as they did all others until 1871, when they relented and allowed the 10th Surrey (Bermondsey) Rifle Volunteers



band to perform on Tuesday summer evenings. Later that summer the formal opening of the cricket ground was enlivened by an operatic performance by the Metropolitan Police band. In 1873 Supt. Dennis suggested a gravel area in the north of the park should be laid out for bands. Five years later the Board gave the Crown Brass Band permission to play in the park on Saturdays. The Band was made up of men from Hammer's factory and throughout the 1880s they provided free music. Hammers supplied a small portable stage for the band to perform on, but the demand for a more permanent bandstand was soon made. A Mr W. Luff and others petitioned the Board and by 1884 a new bandstand was in place. It was constructed by J. J Greenwood at a cost of £130.

Richard Stevens:

"During the months from May to September a first class military band or light orchestra played every Sunday evening. The pleasure of these Sunday evenings in the Park around the bandstand could never be appreciated nowadays. The mums and dads would sit around the bandstand and on the large asphalt surround, the youngsters would parade around and around, girls to the left, boys to the right; this way they met face to face. The teenage boys would go hoping to find a girlfriend and the girls would pretend they did not want to be 'picked up'; many a courtship started on this 'monkey parade'.

Len Hatch:

"I remember the original bandstand and it was still there in the 1950s. I can't recall when it was taken away, but they built a little stage thing on the side and had occasional dances on it. By taking the bandstand away then I think they took something out of the park."

Our Park



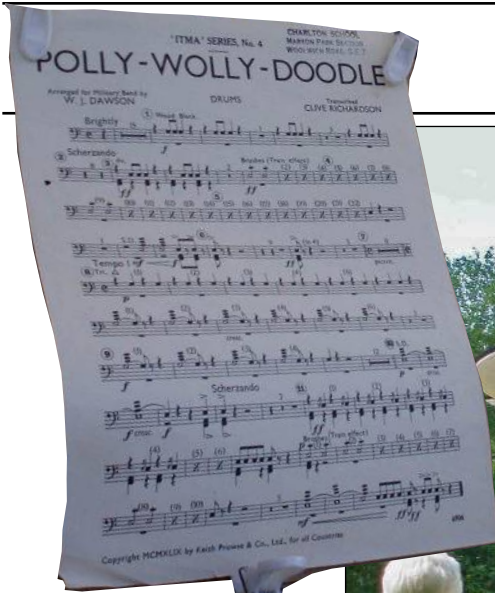
Marjorie Hill:

"When it was being built the Mayor, Hilary Wines put the top on that bandstand. I can remember her getting up the step ladder, but she couldn't get up because the hole was too small! We had a great deal of fun that day."



© G.Magold 2010

Music



This wooden bandstand was used for five years before being replaced in 1889 by a much finer metal structure. It was one of two designed by Captain Francis Fowke, and when they both became available local County Councillor, Lawrence Stevens obtained one for Southwark Park. The wooden bandstand was transferred to Plumstead Common.

Fowke's bandstand gave great service and remained in place until after the Second World War. In Victorian London, recreation in parks on Sundays was controversial.



The churches and various religious bodies were largely opposed to the idea, representing as it did a challenge to the sanctity of the Sabbath and an alternative to worship. On the other hand, secular bodies, trade unions and social reformers argued that the working classes were so busy working that Sunday was their only opportunity to take much needed pleasure. In 1882 the Board approved Sunday music in Southwark Park, and despite the fears of some, it was reported that "there has been no suggestion of disorderly or indecorous behaviour." In 1883 the Board agreed the Park Band Society could play regularly on Sundays. For all the strong opinions expressed, it was the people themselves who decided if Sunday

music was relevant. By 1886 it was clear that they were not supporting in large enough numbers, and the Park Band Society ceased performing in the Park.



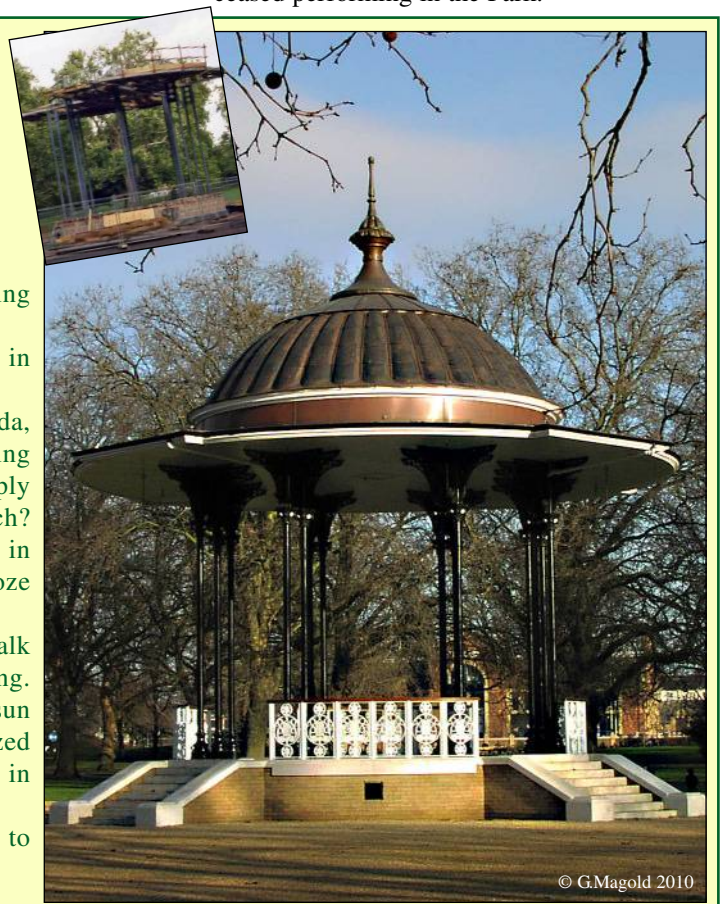
Gary Magold:

"One of the joys of organising concerts was just getting people along for a couple of hours on a Sunday afternoon. Very old-fashioned. Nothing more to it than getting people in the park. Just putting on concert bands.

Yet some people thought there was more behind it, an agenda, like a Council might have an initiative to promote something to get people involved. There was none of that. It was simply that we have a fantastic bandstand, so why go to Greenwich? Come out. Don't sit in front of the telly. Come out and sit in the park, a bit of fresh air, sit in the sun, read the paper, doze and listen to some live music.

There are times when you pinch yourself when you walk through there, especially if it's a nice cold winter morning. You are glad you have a camera with you to catch the sun coming up behind the bandstand. It's glorious. I am amazed that people walk past it and don't give it a second look in some cases.

You think, look what you're passing! And you think to yourself did we really do that, get that back?"



Music

However, the Sunday concerts were persisted with, and in 1887 the National Sunday League took up the challenge, provided there was sufficient local support. A Southwark Park Sunday Band Committee was established. Richard Fairbairn, a lighterman, was involved; the president was a man named Howe; Beasley was secretary and another man called Allen was its treasurer.

By 1889 Sunday music was a regular feature in Southwark Park, but finances remained precarious. The financial difficulties experienced by the Sunday band did not curb the ambitions of other music enthusiasts. In 1889 the park saw the first performance of the Monday Popular Band, organised by local Liberal, H. Bond, who was described as "a very energetic and enthusiastic gentleman, of the Primrosean persuasion, who is always willing to cast politics to the four winds, when social matters are under consideration." From 1889 to 1965 the London County Council became the major provider of music in the park. The period up to the First World War could be seen as a golden age for music. A regular summer programme was established which ran from May to September, with concerts on Thursdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. A typical summer would see over thirty performances. Many different bands

played for anything up to eight pounds for a performance. Local bands were also engaged, such as the Borough of Bermondsey Military Band under bandmaster Henry J. Jeffrey of Dockhead and the Southwark Brass Band under bandmaster E. Roch, of Blue Anchor Lane. The

LCC's own band regularly played in the park and it must have been quite an impressive sight with up to thirty instrumentalists.

All this effort was rewarded by large audiences. In

1906 a total of a hundred-thousand people watched performances in the park, with Sunday crowds sometimes as high as

nine-thousand. By 1909 these

figures had been exceeded, with Sundays several times drawing over ten-thousand listeners. The First World War economies led to the breaking up of the LCC Band and in the first years of the war Southwark Park had only a few musical performances, while the Thursday shows were dropped completely. As the war progressed all forms of organised recreation and entertainments in parks diminished being considered inappropriate while so many soldiers were dying abroad. By 1917 there were no shows in the park. After the war the LCC brought music programmes back to the park where it continued twice a week up to the Second World War.



Our Park



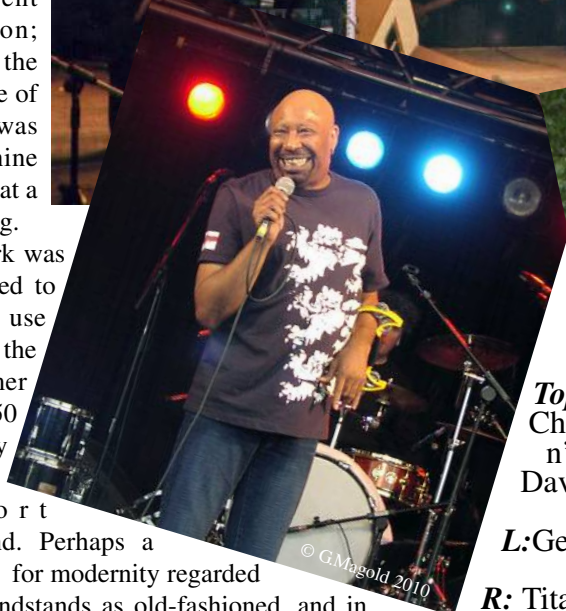
Debra Gosling: "Glen Tilbrook from Squeeze played an acoustic set on the bandstand and it began to rain. Instead of us all packing up and going home he called us up onto the bandstand with him. You had about sixty people up there singing away while it was raining all around us. It was absolutely wonderful. One of my best days".

Music

Music was often part of the many Labour meetings in the park in the inter-war years. In 1919 the Co-op held an evening concert on the bandstand; in 1920 brass bands supported the Discharged Soldiers and Sailors Unemployment demonstration; and during the General Strike of 1926 it was reported nine bands played at a huge gathering. When the park was finally returned to full public use after the war, the first summer concert in 1950 was given by the London Transport Military Band. Perhaps a natural desire for modernity regarded traditional bandstands as old-fashioned, and in the 1950s Fowke's structure was replaced by a functional, rectangular "shell" bandstand, which became more noted for children's entertainments. By the mid 1960s there was little organised summer music or dance for adults. In 1971 Southwark Council took over responsibility for the park, and for a few years put together summer programmes with a diversity



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Top:
Chas
n'
Dave,

L:Geno,

R: Titanics



© D.Gosling 2010

of music, including jazz, but in the 1980s this bandstand was removed to leave a sad tarmac area where there had once been life. With no dedicated facility music became more associated with annual events such as the Bermondsey & Rotherhithe Carnival during the 1970s and 1980s. The Heritage Lottery restoration project of the early 2000s stimulated the return of regular music, principally due to the funding of a replica Fowke bandstand. In 1999 at the

park's 130th anniversary event when the Aylwin Girls School Band, the Bromley Concert band and the Dave Kent Quartet played, it was the first time in ages that the former bandstand area had been used. From 2002 the replica bandstand was in place and Gary Magold and Marjorie Hill of The Friends of Southwark Park organised a series of successful summer concert shows until 2008.

Tom Ash: "Another cure for whooping cough was to take the children to the bandstand which was central in Southwark Park. Here every Sunday there would be a band performance. It could be quite crowded. If you could afford it you could go inside the circled bandstand and sit on the folding chairs for a penny. Most people would stand against the railings and listen to the band. Marches, waltzes, and when they played popular tunes you could hear them singing. It was an outing that we looked forward to. It was said that around the bandstand was four different types of air suitable for many chest complaints."

Christine Savory: "We'd all gather, Marjorie, Me, June and Gary. Clean it down and sweep it all off, so there was no gravel on the steps or the stage, get the chairs ready, decorate the Band Stand with bunting, flags and posters. Set out the catering table of cakes and refreshments. Set out deck chairs for the public. Take care of the band; show them to the toilets etc.

Our Park



I just enjoy being out in the community and seeing things happen. I hate it when people complain when there's nothing to do in this area. I went out and helped make it happen."

June Savory: "There's no point in the bandstand being there if it's not going to be used. At first it was just a few people who came to the shows, and now there are hundreds of people coming on a nice day. Not just the elderly, but some from Westminster, and the younger age group and people bring children with autism and in wheelchairs. It's really brought people together. Helping with the concerts it started out as something to do, for school it looked good on my portfolio because I was doing something for the community. I thought I'd only be doing it for a few months. But I started to really enjoy it so I never stopped. The music wasn't what I expected. They actually played music I recognised."

Music



Bermondsey Beat



Phil Burkett and Russell Dryden, known as Bermondsey Beat, also made use of the new facility by bringing Chas 'n Dave, Chris Difford, Geno Washington and Glenn Tilbrook to the park. So popular were these acts that they have made return visits to keep us all happy! The most significant commitment to music over the last decade was the Council's annual summer Event. Thousands regularly flocked to the family day out, the highlight of which was a large stage on The Oval.

From 2002 onwards Bermondsey Beat brought many great artists for the people to enjoy. In the last eight years the park has rocked to the sounds of such greats as Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings, The Proclaimers, Paul Carrack, Joe Brown, Darts, The Blockheads, Dave Edmunds, Gwen Dickey and The Real Thing. The Proclaimers brought possibly the largest crowd ever seen in the park for music. In recent times there have been other musical events, such as the Carnaval de Cuba and the Norwegian National Day.



© GMagold 2010

Pat Kingwell: "I love guitarists and Phil and Russell booked some of the best in the world - Albert Lee, Glenn Tilbrook, Dave Edmunds and Martin Taylor - amazing to think the crowd paid nothing to see these guys play in Southwark Park!"

David Toogood: "I think the bandstand is underused; it needs more concerts on there. I've seen Chas & Dave there a couple of summers ago and I liked the Norwegian Festival. I also saw a skiffle group on there with Chas McDevitt; he had a hit single in the late 1950s with Nancy Whiskey called Freight Train. I didn't know there were brass bands that used to play on there; I've never seen them advertised. They should make it more widely known. Those sort of bands appeal to the older

Our Park



community and it's somewhere for people to go for a couple of hours in the fresh air. It would be great to get Tommy Steele back to sing on there; and maybe have some sort of pie and mash event as well?"

Michael Holland: "I remember the stage, a corrugated iron affair. When I was very young there was some kind of talent competition; I was persuaded to go up and sing Baa Baa Black Sheep, and come back with a prize. They gave me a book I wasn't able to read! It was nice seeing the new bandstand built 'cos my mum always used to say she went over there for dancing on weekends and summer evenings. It's where she met my dad and they used to go there dancing, jiving and jitterbugging in the 50s."

Music



Carnival artistes © G.Magold 2010

Phil Burkett: "Bermondsey Beat was started by my good friends Russell Dryden and Eddie Webber who set out to promote Bermondsey bands. They put local bands in clubs and pubs round South East London and helped kick start the revival of the Bermondsey Carnival. After Eddie left I joined and it was to do with giving something back to Bermondsey which I'd never had the chance to do previously. With The Event it wasn't immediate success. Our budget got a bit bigger and I think the first main show was when Southwark and the Friends of Southwark Park received the lottery grant. I've had lots of highlights but my favourite was bringing Darts back together again, a nine piece doo- wop band. It took me seven years to get Darts back together. What do I get out of it? Sometimes I don't know what I get out of it. Every year I think 'why do I do this

Our Park



bloody thing' but there's this certain buzz and when it's done and dusted, and I sit back and there's warmth. It's not the back slapping - you hardly get that. You put your head down and get the job done. The best thing about The Event is you'll have grandad and grandma, mum and dad, the daughters and maybe the daughter's kids all sitting down together on the blanket having a picnic in the park. Seeing all these thousands and thousands of people in the park. That's what it's there for. To enjoy it, to embrace it."



More Than Tea



A WRVS Emergency Services Co-ordinator shares her park recollections. Jean has fond memories of Our Park, including the talent contests, but also recalls how the days before the Bermondsey Carnival of 2005 turned out like no other.

My memories of the park represent every stage of my life. As a child in the warm summer evenings I remember that Mum and Dad would make me and my little brother wash and dress tidy so we could go to the park and watch the cricket. There were always other families there whose dads were stevedores in the docks, and when the attraction of the cricket wore off all of us kids used to roll down the slope which was outside the cafe. Eventually we were given money to get a cornet and then peace was restored. When we were older we were allowed to go on our scooters to the park on our own for the day. We had a jam sandwich and a bottle of orange quash. So large was the children's play area that you could quite happily spend the whole day making sure you played on everything, including the sandpit. It needed careful scrutiny of your feet afterwards, to be sure that all traces of the sand had been removed before you put your shoes and socks back on. Experience soon taught you that a few grains of overlooked sand made for an uncomfortable journey home. Alma School only had a small tarmac playground so once a year we were marched down The Blue to the park for our school sports day. It was a disappointment if it was cancelled by rain. We spent our lives in the park, rain or snow, but the teachers were not as hardy! It was during the long summer breaks that we realised the merits of talent shows. The entertainments programme was published and displayed in the Spa Road library and once a day during the holiday there was a free show. The programme included cowboys who had guns and ropes and they lasso'd anyone who volunteered. There was a dog act; a chap spinning plates on poles; clowns; a magician and a singer. These shows started in Southwark Park and were then repeated in Tanner and Paterson Park and in a school playground off the Tower Bridge Road, all in the same week. We used to move around Bermondsey following them, taking advantage of bags of sweets they would give out at the end

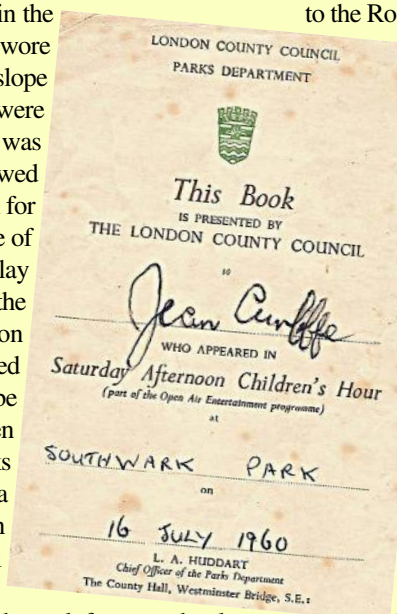
of the performances. It was always worth doing something on stage as everyone got a packet of sweets as a reward. I sang 'Around the World I Searched for You' and was given a packet of Spangles as a prize. When I had to find peace and quiet to study for exams I went to the Rose Garden, hidden by cascades of roses in the summer

and out of the wind in winter. As a teenager and having become more sophisticated I left the scooter behind and walked with friends to the park where we would moan about everything and decide how much better things would be when we were at work earning our own money. How foolish we were! When I found the man of my dreams, he too was taken to the park on many occasions to share my memories, and to make new ones.

I became a WRVS Emergency Services Co-ordinator and was pleased to be asked to help provide refreshments for visitors to the Bermondsey Festival which was held during the park in July. We did this for several years and it was always a pleasure. We were located in a tent by the bandstand, which replaced the one we knew as kids.

When I woke up on the 7th July 2005, just two days before the Bermondsey Festival, I had no idea like

everyone else that I would turn on my television to see the news of the London bombings. We were called to help and the food for the Festival was used to feed survivors. We had just one day to restock and reorganise to cover for the festival. We set up early in the park in the sun and the people of Bermondsey came to us for tea, cakes and to make donations to our funds. In just a few weeks there was another attempt to bomb our city and thanks to the donations from the people of Bermondsey we were able to send more teams to help. I will never forget that Festival in 2005. There is a spirit in Bermondsey which is often overlooked but never forgotten. We care about our country and our people and anyone in Southwark Park that day would have known that. Another memory to add to a lifetime of living in and around the greatest park in the world.



One Minute: To lose a life, to remember the dead. The 7th July bombing of London



Women

The part women have played in our park's history may never be fully told because so often in the past women's involvement in local and national affairs was either underplayed, or worse, not even recorded in the official reports or newspapers of the time.

As far as we can tell the first women to appear in the official records of the park were **Elizabeth Clack** and **Sophia Slipper**. They were either landowners or lessees who were both compensated when the Metropolitan Board of Works bought the land which was eventually to become the park. Elizabeth Clack received £250.0.0 (about £11,000 today) and Sophia Slipper a sum of £362.11.11 (about £16,000 today). Many women must have made their mark in the story of the park, but of course we do not know them all. With respect and apologies to anybody we will have certainly overlooked we mention:

Julie Barleycorn: athlete who won the 1984 Southwark Five Mile Road Race which started in the park.

Jane Barnes: Bermondsey Artists Group member who campaigned for the setting up of an art gallery in the park.

Anne Bean: Bermondsey Artists Group member who campaigned for the setting up of an art gallery in the park.

Grace Beesley: founder member of The Friends of Southwark Park and leading light in establishment of Southwark Park Ladies Bowls team. Grace also oversaw for the club the design and construction of the new pavilion in 2002, and during that year she became as yet the only woman President of the club.

Ada Broughton: secretary of the children's Sports and Gala Days organised by Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Trades Council and Labour Party between the two World Wars.

Elizabeth Miriam Burgwin: (1850-1940) nee Canham, the child welfare pioneer and union activist was also head teacher of Orange Street School, Southwark. In 1902 she spoke about the importance of sport at the first ever Bermondsey and Southwark School Sports Festival.

Mary Chambers: of Rosewell Tennis Club, who successfully petitioned for improved tennis facilities in 1891.

Frances Coleman: artist and member of the Bermondsey Artists Group who campaigned for the setting

up of an art gallery in the park.

Jane Colling: Bermondsey Artists Group member who campaigned for the setting up of an art gallery in the park.

Jessie Craigen: of the London Society for the Abolition of Compulsory Vaccination seems to have been the first recorded women to speak at a public meeting in the park in 1883.

Jane Deakin: Bermondsey Artists Group member who campaigned for the setting up of an art gallery in the park.

Jenny Demont: athlete who won Southwark's first ever women's 10k race in 1986.

Mary Gosling: local artist who has produced a number of paintings of the park under commission.

Marjorie Hill: founder member and treasurer of The Friends of Southwark Park. Marjorie has campaigned tirelessly for improvements to the park and was a major contributor to the success of the bandstand concerts over the last decade.

Connie Hockley: organiser of the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Carnival in the 1970s/80s which was held in the park.

Deana Khodja: ran a campaign in 2001 to have the lido reopened, but was unsuccessful in her efforts.

Dame Grace Kimmins: (1871-1954), the child welfare reformer and member of the Bermondsey Settlement. The first woman we have found to have a connection with sport on The Oval when in 1902 she wrote to the L.C.C. on behalf of disabled children from The Guild of Brave Poor Things, and gained permission for them to play cricket in the park.

Susan Lawrence (1871-1947), a Londoner, was a labour Party politician and one of its first women MPs. She spoke at a May Day demonstration in the park.



Above: (L-R): Anne Bean, Louise Michel, Coral Newell, Marjorie Hill, Grace Beesley

Women

Eveline Lowe: the Bermondsey politician who served on the Board of Guardians; the LCC Education Committee and then as a London County Councillor. In 1932 she spoke at a May Day demonstration in the park. In 1891 she petitioned for better tennis facilities.

Edith Lupton: the artist and designer who worked for Doulton's pottery in Lambeth. A suffragette and anarchist, she came to the park in 1889 and spoke in support of the Great Dock Strike.

Mary MacArthur: the Scottish socialist and trade unionist, and founder of the National Federation of Women Workers. In 1911 she organised the Bermondsey women's strike and spoke at meetings in the park.

Eleanor Marx: the socialist activist and sometimes literary translator and actress was the youngest daughter of Karl Marx. She is believed to have come to the park to support the dockers during the Great Dock Strike of 1889.

Louise Michel: the French socialist heroine of the 1871 Paris Commune, who in 1897 spoke at a Labour Protection League meeting protesting against the inhuman treatment of Spanish anarchists.

Coral Newell: one-time local Councillor who fought against cuts which threatened the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Carnival in the late 1980s.

Lyn Olding: a local woman who has worked in the park for over twenty years. She is currently Head Gardener and is responsible for many of the beautiful floral displays.

Mrs V. Parsons: one of the earliest recorded women park staff. In 1894 she was the female gym attendant, and was paid about 3s (£9) a day for a 54 hour working week!

Lil Patrick: a well-known community activist who in 1963 suggested an adventure playground for the park.

Dr Marian Phillips: the Australian-born

academic, women's rights campaigner and one-time Labour Party MP for Sunderland. She addressed a meeting of the Bermondsey women who were on strike in 1911.

Ebony Rainford-Brent: Surrey and England women's international cricketer, who opened the new cricket strip in 2008.

Joan Regan: popular singer who has appeared many times at the annual music Event in the park.

June & Christine Savory: local women and major contributors to the success of the bandstand concerts over the last decade.

Mrs Elizabeth Search: one of the earliest recorded women park staff. In the 1890s she was the female lavatory attendant and was paid about 3s (£9) a day for a 54 hour working week!

Louise Sheridan: Bermondsey Artists Group member who campaigned for the setting up of an art gallery in the park.

Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington: the Irish author, feminist and republican, who spoke at a "Hands off Ireland" Demonstration in the park in 1920.

Elizabeth "Sissie" Smith: campaigned and organised petitions for a boating lake in the park which was achieved in 1908.

Nellie Stockwell: Albion Street School, who won the championship medal five years in succession from 1908-1912 at the annual Southwark Schools Sports Day in the park.

Mrs. J. Stothard: a gym attendant at the park from September 1918 until her medical retirement on 15 May 1935. On her retirement the LCC agreed a special gratuity of £40 in recognition of her services - about £1500 in today's value.

Rosie Thornton: current Park Manager, and the first woman to hold that position in the history of the park.



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© D.Gosling 2010



© J.Colling 2010

Above: (L-R): Joan Regan, Mary Gosling, Eleanor Marx, Ebony Rainford-Brent, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, Jane Colling

The Arts



For much of its life Our Park was not especially geared up for the arts. The original landscape was not designed to be overly decorative, and it has taken generations to achieve.

Our Park



Matt Preece:

"We had a Japanese artist who did a big abstract sculpture which I took a bit of a shine to and she donated it to the park, so we put that on to two boats and shipped it across to one of the islands and it now stands on the northern most island, the circular one.... I think there should be more outdoor exhibition space."

Gary Magold:

The Bubble Theatre's Alice in Wonderland used the whole of the park and it was superb! Absolutely superb!"

Grace Beesley:

"The gallery is very interesting and I have visited several times. Sometimes I feel the pictures are above me, but there are lots of talented artists."

Debra Gosling:

"I particularly remember the Bubble Theatre's Alice Through the Looking Glass. It was a magical production that really involved the audience. To see the Lion and the Unicorn having a scrap beneath the canopy of trees was totally surreal. And the gallery always has something abstract to contemplate. Fab."

Lyn Olding:

"Going round just sticking kites up a tree and calling it art? I dunno."

As far as the buildings, structures and furniture go, they were, and have generally always been, functional rather than blessed with any significant artistry. Photographs suggest the original Park Superintendent's Lodge had some charm, before it sunk into the ground and was replaced by the present one in 1933. It seems too that the first refreshment house and aviary were pleasing to look at, but they have long gone. The entrances, gates and boundary railings have always been sturdily attractive rather than ornamental, and until recent restoration, were in truth, drab.

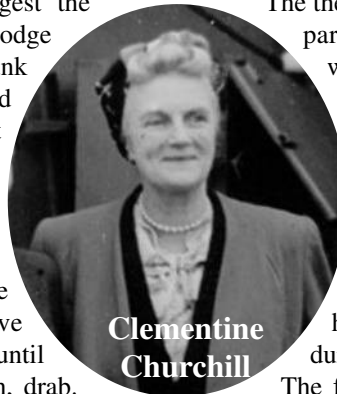
As for literature, to the best of our knowledge the park is not widely represented in novels or plays, although it is briefly mentioned in David Jones' epic war poem, 'In Parenthesis', and also in Moniza Alvi's poem, 'Meeting An Ex-Pupil On a Spring Morning.'

Unless we are mistaken, the park has not

featured in films, but it has lately been discovered by television as a location for dramas and advertisements.

The theatre has made some mark on the park, most intriguingly in 1941, when the Bermondsey Shelter Council organised open-air performances of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night* on a specially prepared Elizabethan stage. The noted Hollywood actress Claire Luce starred in both productions, which were held to boost public morale during the war.

The first night was attended by Mrs. Clementine Churchill, who it was reported, "wore a navy dress with white polka dots and an inch-pleated elbow-length cape and a velvet snood in her hair." From the 1970's the Bubble Theatre has regularly performed with great success in the park, bringing memorable performances to a delighted audience.



Clementine Churchill



Bubbling with talent:
the fabulous
Bubble outdoor
productions are
magical

The Arts



The visual arts made little impact until the emergence of the Bermondsey Artists Group in the 1980s. Prior to that the nearest the park came to embracing the arts was in the early 1950s, when it was suggested that Henry Moore's sculpture, "Three Standing Figures", be located here. However, stern opposition from local representatives meant the idea went no further. As Alf Kemp, Bermondsey dock and chairman of the London County Council Parks Committee memorably put it, "I am all in favour of having sculpture exhibitions in parks, but if I could have my way I would not have included in them these monstrosities of unrecognisable lumps of stone, with holes through them and various odd pieces clustering them which are supposed to represent human bodies. The members of the County Council are the elected representatives of the people of London, and while we may have some intellectuals most of us are

average working folk. I am still of the opinion that this so-called modern sculpture is a grotesque, fantastic and absurd creation which eventually sane people will cast out as a myth."

However, sculpture will soon be represented by Henry Poole's graceful caryatids. Salvaged from the bombed Rotherhithe Library, they will be re-located to the park to lend an air of gentility amid the greenery. Half a century after Mr Kemp's protestations we do actually now have modern art in the form of the flourishing Cafe Gallery, which is the result of an enduring commitment from the Bermondsey Artists Group.

In 1985 they took over the old lido cafe building and turned it into a remarkable place which has hosted hundreds of varied exhibitions and events. Against the odds they raised money to build a new gallery in 2001, and this year saw the opening of the former Clare College Chapel in Dilston Grove; an annexe to this major venue for contemporary art. Each year there is also an open exhibition enabling all to exhibit their work in any medium.

Our Park



Nick Lane: "We worked on a project with the gallery to decorate the visitor centre, and there's a tile mosaic which I'm pleased to see years after is still in good condition. I remember when we first put it up we were worried that it would get bashed or trashed within a short time so its great to see it there. Another project with the gallery, Young Friends, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and a refugee group was linked to trees that had been chopped down around the world and to think about trees as our future. And so we all wrote our wish for the future, attached those to a string which was eventually buried under the roots of an oak tree which was planted in the park."



GALLERY

Sleek & Modern:
The Cafe Gallery

The Arts

The work of Mary Gosling, who grew up in Brunswick Court, off Tower Bridge Road, is also worth particular mention.

Mary is a local artist with a large portfolio depicting local street scenes and characters. She has produced a number of oil paintings under commission based on

Southwark Park, including one of the bandstand, one about the summer music event and one to celebrate the park's 140th anniversary.

The park pictures feature people who have contributed to the its culture and entertainment over the years.

The 140th picture includes all the major events that have occurred in the park since its inception, along with all the human aspects that tag along with it. A newspaper clipping describing how a policeman injured himself on a scrap of orange peel led to him being included in the picture. An old-fashioned cheque blowing in the wind

above the park opening ceremony symbolises the money that changed hands to secure the land to build the park. Cycling down from the Refreshments Room is local hero Dr Alfred Salter. At the front of the painting can be seen the

wartime changes to the park, along with David

Fisher's parents dancing around the bandstand. Look hard

enough and you will see the three crashed aircraft

that have descended from the skies. Ada Salter is

reunited in her rose garden with daughter Joyce who

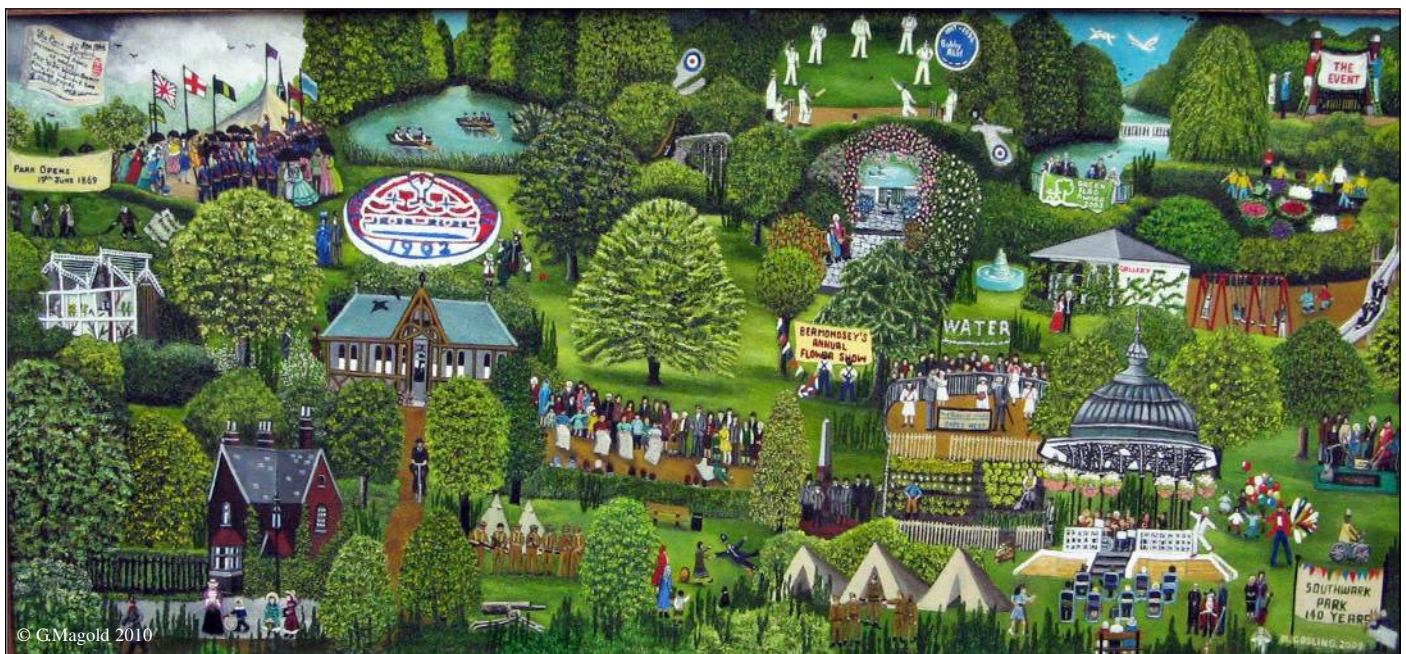
succumbed to scarlet fever at the very young age of eight.

Outside the Cafe Gallery owner Ron Henoq is chatting to

an artist as the Lido Aerator sculpture bubbles away. At the

bottom right hand corner late Mayor Anne Yates and dearly departed Father Nick Richards appear in spirit.

The painting is now in a private collection.



Our Park



Mary Gosling:

"I like a rough idea of what I'm doing. A lot of artists sketch it all out fully first, but I don't. I draw it straight onto my board. And then I take it from there. As I'm going along I draw it. If I don't like it, I rub that piece out and put another piece in. And that's how I work. I work like that right the way through. Always in oils; I like oils best. And I just love blending all the colours in, and the shadows, and the expressions on people's faces. What I call a busy picture, when you get a lot of people in it, mingling around....Its all in the bandstand picture, what I am trying to say, everything....I loved putting details in. All the details must go in, because to me it's not a proper

picture unless you can see what is going on in the picture. Colour, I love colour. Plenty of colour, and lots of it for me!

To do that bandstand, I did enjoy it a lot. And when it was finished they stood it on the easel in front of the bandstand and people were mingling, coming round, looking at the painting, and generally talking amongst themselves. They got the chairs out, they sat there and the music started.

And I stood back and I had a lump in my throat because that was my picture. It had all come to life. Everybody was moving; my picture was moving."

Politicians: An AtoZ

Over the years a number of interesting people from all walks of society have done their bit to shape Our Park. Some were heads of local factories, others distinguished orators. They are all here...

Reuben Barrow, M.P. (1838-1918)

Vestryman and Liberal M.P. for Bermondsey from 1892-1895. In 1869/70 he campaigned against building houses on the park

L. H. Bartlett, (1880s)

Rotherhithe Vestryman who called for the formation of a lake and an entrance at Dilston Grove.

Colonel Francis Marcus Beresford M.P. (1818 - 1890)

Conservative M.P. for Southwark from 1870 -1880 who worked in Parliament in 1870 to prevent house building in the park.

John H. Bulmer (1880-90s)

Rotherhithe Conservative vestryman and Mayor of Bermondsey, who was against house building in the park. He campaigned for the formation of a lake, Dilston Grove entrance and longer opening hours to the central drive.

John Burns, (1858-1943)

Socialist politician, who famously described the Thames as 'liquid history', spoke at public meetings in the park, and in 1908 as President of the Board of Trade ensured the formation of the boating lake.

Arthur Cohen, M.P. (1829-1914)

Distinguished lawyer and Liberal M.P. for Southwark from 1880 - 1888, he campaigned for better cricket facilities in the park and spoke at the unveiling of the Jabez West memorial in 1885.

Dr. George Cooper, M.P. (1844-1909)

Progressive London County Councillor and Liberal M.P. for Southwark from 1906-1909. Chairman of the South East Parks Sub-Committee in 1898 he opened a large children's playground in the park.

John Molesworth Thomas Dumphreys, M.P. (1844-1925)

Bermondsey Borough and London County Councillor and Conservative M.P. from 1909-1910. In 1901 he unsuccessfully tried to rename the park as Bermondsey Park.

Harold J. Glanville, M.P. (1854-1930)

Bermondsey Vestryman, London County Councillor and

Liberal M.P. from 1910-1922, he spoke at public meetings in the park and was in favour of longer opening hours for the central drive.

Eileen Frances Greenwood (1940s-1950s)

Labour councillor and Mayor in post-Second World war Bermondsey who campaigned for the park to be decommissioned for military use and improved.

Sir William George Granville Venables Vernon Harcourt, (1827-1904)

Liberal Home Secretary who in 1883 supported the right to hold public meetings in Southwark Park.

Simon Hughes, M.P. (1951-)

Liberal M.P. for Bermondsey since 1983, who has supported many park improvement campaigns, and is patron of The Friends of Southwark Park.

Alf Kemp (1950s)

Labour councillor and Mayor in post-Second World war Bermondsey and also London County Councillor. As Chairman of the Parks Committee he opened new sports facilities in 1952, but would not allow modern sculptures in the park.

Alfred Lafone, M. P. (1821-1911)

Twice Conservative M.P. for Bermondsey during 1886-1900. In 1888 he was President of Southwark Park Cricket Association and a supporter of more football in the park.

George Lansbury (1859-1940)

Socialist and Leader of Labour Party from 1932-1935. He spoke at a public meeting in the park in 1894, and in 1907, as a Poor Law Commissioner, supported the formation of the boating lake.

Sir Austen Henry Layard , M.P. (1817-1894)

Noted archaeologist and Liberal politician. He was MP for Southwark from 1860-1870 and was present at the opening of Southwark Park in 1869.

Ken Livingstone (1945-)

The first elected mayor of London visited the park in 2003 and planted a hornbeam tree.



Left to Right: George Lansbury, Austen Layard, Bob Mellish, Dr Alfred Salter & William Harcourt

Politicians: An AtoZ

John Locke, M.P. (1805-1880)

Liberal M.P. for Southwark from 1857-1880. In 1857 he was a powerful voice within the South Eastern Park Association, and in 1864 oversaw the passing of The Southwark Park Act. From 1869-1872 he was a member of the Southwark Park Protection Committee which successfully campaigned against house building in the park.

John Rolleston Lort-Williams, M.P. (1881-1966)

Coalition Conservative M.P. for Rotherhithe from 1918-1923, who tried unsuccessfully

to change the name of the park to Rotherhithe or Redriff Park.

Robert Mellish, M.P. (1913-1998)

Labour MP for Bermondsey and Rotherhithe from 1946-1983. In the post-Second World War years he campaigned for the park to be decommissioned for military use. From the 1950s until the 1980s he also supported an extension of the park, which became King's Stairs Gardens.

Admiral Sir Charles Napier, M.P. (1786-1860)

Liberal M.P. for Southwark from 1855-1860. In 1857 he was the patron of the South Eastern Park Association and he attended public meetings in favour of a park. Of his portrait in the Painted Hall at Greenwich it has been written: "it is an admirable likeness, though, as has been frequently pointed out, it makes him look too clean and too well dressed, points on which Napier was notoriously negligent."

W.H.C. Payne (1890s)

Moderate London County Councillor for Rotherhithe 1894-1898. He supported the extension of central drive opening hours in October 1894, and for an entrance at Moreton Terrace in 1897.

Derek Partridge (1990s)

Southwark Councillor who strongly supported the National Lottery Urban Parks application in 1998.

Ambrose Pomeroy (1890s-1900s)

Bermondsey Vestryman and Progressive London County Councillor for Rotherhithe from 1898-1910. He became Chairman of the Parks Committee and worked for the formation of the original lake in 1885; longer opening hours on the central drive; better children's play facilities ; the

Moreton Terrace entrance; swans for the lake; the boating lake in 1908; and the bowling green in 1912.

Ada Salter (1866-1942)

Bermondsey Labour Councillor during 1909-1941 and London County Councillor from 1925-1941. Her enduring contribution to Southwark Park is the garden named after her, which was opened in 1936.

Alfred Salter, M.P. (1873-1945)

Socialist who represented Bermondsey variously at Council,

County and Parliamentary levels for over forty years from 1903 onwards. His main involvement in Southwark Park was as an organiser or speaker at mass political meetings, including during the General Strike of 1926, and as a supporter of the annual temperance demonstrations.

William Shepherd (1880s)

Representative on the Metropolitan



In the footsteps of Drake: Ken Livingstone, Simon Hughes and local councillors test out the bowling green in 2003.

Board of Works he was involved in the ensuring the first lake in the park in 1885 and also the Jabez West Memorial in 1885. He also supported football facilities

Lawrence Stevens (1823-1894)

As a Rotherhithe Vestryman he spoke in favour of public meetings in the park; supported the idea of an Abbeyfield Road entrance and the playing of football and cycling. As a Liberal London County Councillor he secured the Fowke bandstand for the park in 1889.

Joseph Thornton (1880s-1890s)

Progressive London County Councillor for Bermondsey from 1889-1899 who campaigned for a swimming bath in the park in the 1890s.

J. Tolhurst (1860s-1880s)

Rotherhithe representative on the Metropolitan Board of Works, who in 1870 spoke against the building of houses in the park. In 1881 he supported a new entrance in Abbeyfield Road; in 1883 he was for the right to hold public meetings; and in 1885 played an important part in securing a lake.

Anne Yates (1939-2008)

Liberal Southwark Councillor from 1998-2008, and Mayor, she was a founder member of The Friends of Southwark Park.



Bobby Abel

Bobby Abel was an opening batsman for Surrey and England. Known as the 'Guv'nor' he came from Rotherhithe and crafted his famous style on rough wickets in Our Park

batting. When the match was over Tom sat Bobby down and gave him some advice on how he should get well to the pitch of the ball when he was batting. Years later Bobby stated it was this advice that had helped him on his way to the Oval.

Young Abel's first serious match was played on Peckham Rye when he was fifteen. Local leather firm Bevington's had their own cricket team and it was a Mr Peters from the firm that talent-spotted Bobby. Within two years Bobby was elected as a member of the Southwark Park Cricket Club; a position usually reserved for more mature and experienced players.

In 1881 Bobby married a ropemaker's daughter and at twenty-three he made his debut at the Oval after Southwark Park club had recommended him for the Colts. The happy couple moved out of Bermondsey and into Kennington. Bobby stayed true to Bermondsey, as at the end of the season he would bring his team to Southwark Park for a match. As there were other Surrey professionals in the team the match always attracted a large crowd and a collection was made for charity, the proceeds going to Charlie Farr, a retired groundsman who had given Bobby some early tuition and encouragement. When Bobby came out to bat he was always cheered heartily and on two occasions obliged his fans with centuries.

Bobby was just five-foot five; small compared to the towering ex-military men that he was so often up against. He became known as 'The Gov'ner' by cricket crowds who loved to watch his individuality and style. As he left the pavilion he'd pull at the knee flaps of his pads and pull his cap over his left eye. He played with a cross bat and wasn't partial to fast bowling but he could jolly well score those runs!

In the 1880's Bobby became a major batsman. Previously Surrey had been riding on a wave of success but by 1881 they had won only two matches against other counties. Their demise was due to the lack of professional batsman and so were relieved when Bobby joined them. In 1882 he was picked for the first match of the season against the Australians. In May 1899 at the Oval he got his record score against Somerset, achieving a triple century. He was a consistent opening bat for Surrey for twenty seasons, scoring no fewer than 32,670 runs, only being beaten by WG Grace, with 74 centuries, twelve being struck in the 1900 season alone. He took his first test century against South Africa.

His one weakness was his eyes. In the spring of 1893 he'd contacted a rheumatic infection after a nasty bout of diphtheria and was blind for five days. In 1903 Bobby's career was coming to a speedy close as his eyes started to fail him. A testimonial match was played for him with his fund amounting to £464. Half of it was invested on his behalf by the club.

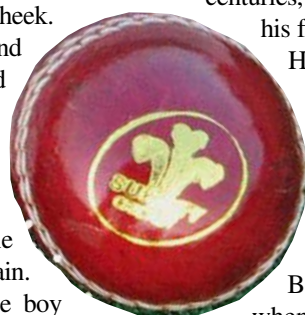
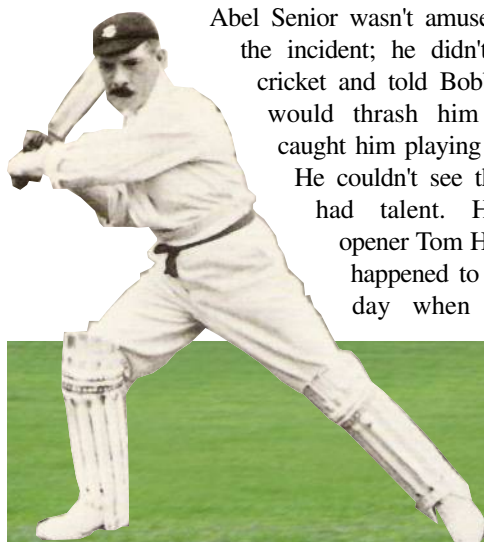
Bobby Abel was finally bowled out in December 1936 when, aged seventy-nine, he joined his wife and three of his children in Nunhead Cemetery.

Born in 1857, young Bobby Abel was a working class boy who grew up in Commercial Street, Rotherhithe. Like most in the area, his family was of modest means. His father was a lamplighter, but Bobby did not want to follow in his footsteps. Bobby's great passion was cricket, and for a twelve-year-old the opening of Southwark Park was the best thing that ever happened. He played on the small, uneven cricket pitch there at every opportunity. Standing in to bat one day the ball rebounded off the pitch at an angle and caught him full in the face. As he went to speak he found he couldn't move his mouth; he'd fractured his jaw and broken his nose so badly that it had twisted round to his right cheek.

He went to St Olave's Hospital, got it straightened and plastered in position and returned back to the pitch, bandages and all.

Abel Senior wasn't amused by the incident; he didn't like cricket and told Bobby he would thrash him if he caught him playing it again.

He couldn't see that the boy had talent. However, Surrey opener Tom Humphrey could. He happened to be in the park one day when he saw Bobby's



*The past meets the future:
two local lads with the same aim in life.*

Sports Round Up

Our Park has always been a favourite place for sporting locals. Athletics, cricket and football have dominated but *croquet*? Of course!

Believe it or not we've had American Football in the park. The London O's, the U.K.'s most successful amateur American Football club, played in the park during the late 1990s and early 2000's.

Organised athletics was first introduced to the park by Cambridge Harriers on 28th March 1891. A thousand people attended their first annual sports day on the edge of the Oval, and the club continued to use the park up to the First World War. Originating from the Clare College Mission in Dilston Grove, the main instigators were Messrs Sayers and Russell, and the first Secretary was J. Cottrell of Rotherhithe New Road. Cottrell did much to promote athletics, and in 1892 asked for a dedicated athletics area. He was refused, but through persistent campaigning was able to use the Oval from 1895 onwards. The club grew and frequently attracted large crowds to their meetings. Other important clubs in the Edwardian era were St. Katherine's Harriers and the Southwark Park Club and Institute.

For all their fine work the athletics clubs of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe were limited in that they catered for male adults from the better off working-class community. Children and women appear to have had no place in their story. This was to change to some degree with the emergence of the school sports festivals held from 1902 until the Second World War. The festivals were the result of the influence of the Southwark

Association of the National Union of Teachers backed by the School Board of London. Another factor was the post-Boer War call for a nation of youths strong and fit enough to defend the Empire. The first Bermondsey and Southwark School Sports Festival was held on 11 July 1902, involved thirty-seven schools, two-thousand competitors and several thousand spectators. During the first half of the twentieth century the local labour movement also played its part in advancing athletics. The first intervention was through the Southwark Park Improvement Committee, especially trade unionist William Smith, his daughter "Sissie" and Arthur Harris, secretary of the South Side Labour Protection League. In October 1910 the Committee took a deputation to the L.C.C. calling for the provision of an athletics track. The L.C.C. prevaricated, and with the advent of war, the suggestion was shelved and not raised again for another seventy

years! Throughout the inter-war years the Co-op, the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Trades Council and the Bermondsey Labour Party organised an annual Children's Sports and Gala Day. The activities took place on the open land alongside Abbeyfield Road. The annual Gala and prize-giving in the Town Hall became established and well loved events, but the Second World War put paid to them. In the post-1945 park reconstruction athletics was not given much consideration. Schools still used the park for their sports days, but regular organised athletics had not been seen for years. Not until the

1970s when the park responsibility had transferred to Southwark Council did the local authority begin to look seriously at sports provision. In 1979 the Council endorsed the construction of a new sports complex with an all-weather athletics track near the Hawkstone Road boundary. The project was completed in 1980 and proved to be worthwhile. The complex became the venue for the annual Southwark Sport and Fun weekend, and in October 1986 the first ever Southwark Park Athletics Club was set up. Major events such as the Women's 5k race and the London Run were regular dates on Southwark's sporting calendar. For over twenty years thousands of children enjoyed themselves on what was once a state-of-the-art facility, but today it stands idle with an extremely unclear future. What would Mr. Cottrell and Mr.

Smith say about that? Southwark Park Bowls Club celebrated its centenary in the summer of 2008, and has been based in the park for over a century. It all began in 1906 when B. Titheridge of Southwark Park Road wrote to the L.C.C. asking for a bowling green, but his request was refused. As was so often the case in the history of Southwark Park, the local people were unwilling to take no for an answer, and continued to press for their sport. In 1908, following letters from T.H. Benson, of Lower Road and Thomas Hansom of Henwood Road, the Chief Parks Officer was instructed to look into the possibility of providing a green. The campaign for a bowling green was also supported by the Southwark Park Improvement Committee, and their backing was important because they had the ear of Bermondsey's L.C.C. representative, Ambrose Pomeroy, who was also Chairman of the Parks Committee.



Then: state of the art



Now: full of weeds

Sports Round Up

On 10th July 1908 the LCC approved the playing of bowls in the park, but "under the distinct understanding that no bowling green will be formed at the park at a later date." This rather curious decision was down to the unwillingness to pay for a groundsmen! However, it was a step in the right direction. Hansom was the first secretary and Penfold the first captain. An informal grassed area on the west side of The Oval was allocated for the playing of the game. Over the next four years the club set about convincing the L.C.C. it should provide a proper green and a pavilion. The informal bowling green was moved in 1909 to a spot between The Oval and Lower Road, and in 1911 it was agreed to install a new green, on the present site. The first ever match on the new green was held on 3rd May 1913 against Finsbury Park. The next major development of the club was the merger with the Bermondsey Borough club in 1925. Sometime between 1935-1939 a wooden pavilion was put in place. The investment in better facilities was well deserved for during the inter-war years the Southwark Park Club was a thriving organisation, thanks largely to the organisational skill of two secretaries: Charles Stewart Maffey and H.H. Jones. During this period the club had some notable players such as

F. Walker, J.W. Jackson, F.E. Justice and Bernard Dibsedale. In 1926 E.E. Moore, President of the English Bowling Association, visited. What a privilege for the club; an old Bermondsey boy and an England international! In 1997 the club lost a chunk of its records when the pavilion was vandalised. However, we do know that in the 1940s and 1950s the secretaries at various times were T.C. Smith; R.E. Brewster; D.P. O'Brien; G.H. Phillips; R.C. Henry and A.S. Easton. In 1956 the L.C.C. agreed to use the bowling green pavilion during the winter as a shelter for older people, probably as a replacement for the popular pre-war Winter Garden which had been destroyed by bombs. For the most part of the 1960s the Secretary was Albert Thrussell; in the 1970s George Aldridge; and in the 1980s Tom Beesley did the job. During this period the following players are known to have represented the club: Ernest Roberts, Ernest Cunningham, Robert Fenson, Thomas Shrewsbury, Joe Martin, George Jones, Charles Magill and William Kemp. At one point Jack Clements was President and John Whipps the captain.

The 1970s brought the establishment of the Southwark Park Ladies Team. Grace Beesley was a leading light in developing the women's game and was affiliated to the Surrey County and South London Women's Bowls Association. For much of the 1990s and 2000s the secretary was Pat Sullivan, an almost unparalleled period of service in the club's history. Pat died in 2009, but during his time there were some important moments, not least the opening of a new

pavilion in 2002. In 2010 a synthetic practice rink was installed to give greater access and opportunity for more people to enjoy bowls. For the first seventy years of the park's existence cricket was King and more or less had The Oval to itself. On 28th August 1869 the first reported match in the park was an unofficial one contested by Albert and Britannia, possibly two local pub teams, or even temperance lodges. It was a six-a-side, two-innings affair, which Albert easily won by 62 runs. In 1870 the MBW fenced The Oval and cricket began to be played on a more controlled

basis. Around this time Southwark Park Cricket Club came into being, and on 12th July 1871 the formal opening of the cricket ground was celebrated by a match between the club and the Metropolitan Police; the boys in blue lost! Thereafter the park saw increasingly intense cricket activity - the Neckinger; Star; Perseverance, Nelson, Invicta, Carlton and Harcourt clubs all played there regularly.

Inevitably the pitches deteriorated, the crux of the problem being the huge demand on the only open space in the district. In 1897 Park Superintendent Curle's half-year report noted: "The greatest drawback is the enormous amount of cricket practice which destroys the turf. I have counted as many as 75 clubs playing at the same time with an average of three bowlers to

each club. I maintain that no ground the same size would be much better under the circumstances." In 1888 the Southwark Park Cricket Association was founded, which ran an annual cup competition among all the park clubs. Key enthusiasts included Ernest Holland and H.J. Mogridge. Alfred Lafone M.P. was the president.

In the early 1900s the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Cricket League was established, along with a Challenge Cup. The President, Lovell Dixon, was proprietor of the Jamaica Tavern. Rotherhithe Reds, Rotherhithe Employees, Millwall Athletic, Woodman and Grange Comet were all successful teams. By far the biggest star in Bermondsey cricket was Surrey & England's Bobby Abel. He held benefit cricket matches in the park for over twenty-five years and in doing so brought famous cricketers to the park, such as Tom Hayward, Bill Lockwood, Tom Richardson, George Lohmann and Jack Hobbs. From the First World War onwards cricket began to waver, and the Second World War almost put paid to it entirely. Briefly in the 1950's a Bermondsey Cricket Club existed, only to disappear. On a more positive note in June 2008 a new synthetic cricket strip was installed, and used for the first time in a special match for the Bobby Abel Cup contested between Riverside and St. Josephs Primary schools.

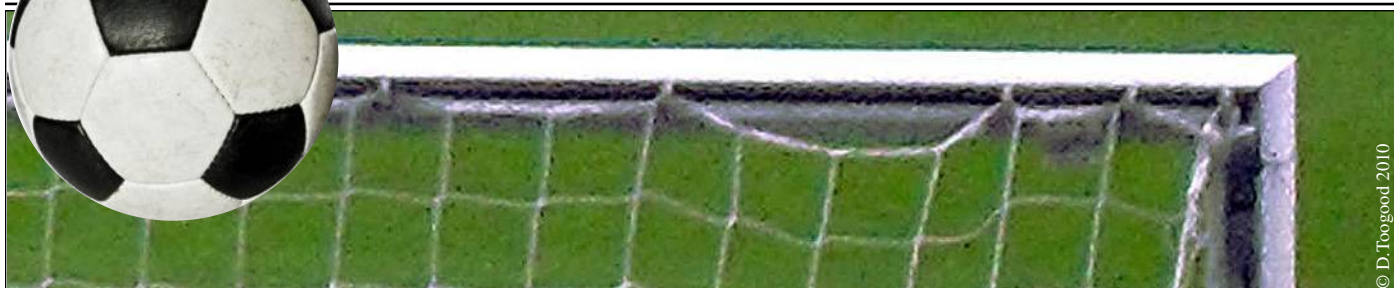
Believe it or not in 1910 there was a Southwark Park Croquet club which played on the grass tennis courts. Sadly, it is no more!



© D.Gosling 2010



Sports Round Up



© D. Toogood 2010

The park was built before football became the national sport it is today, and for many years proper facilities were not provided. Indeed the game was not even officially allowed in the park until 1890. The Metropolitan Board of Works consistently refused requests to play, the first on record being that from Revd. William Donne, curate of Rotherhithe, in 1875, on behalf of the boys of St. Mary's School. Numerous clubs were similarly frustrated by the Board, as was Guy's Hospital, Clare College Mission and deputations from both Bermondsey and Rotherhithe vestries. The Board was not only concerned that football would destroy the turf in the park, but also that it would attract "roughs and disorderly persons."

From 1889 the London County Council became responsible for the park and was more supportive of football. In 1890 boys aged under 14 were allowed to play on the margins of the park along Slippers Place. Four pitches were marked out and by 1891 two more were added. They were not grass, but a mixture of gravel and coal breeze. Adult footballers also took to using the pitches, but often complained about their narrowness. In 1894 a letter to the Southwark Recorder from Walter Thurston of St. Winifred's FC summed up the problems: "Nowhere in our park can a football ground of the requisite dimensions be obtained. The ground (such as it is) allotted to footballers is little over half the

proper minimum width, and although I admit it is possible to have the requisite length, this is more than counteracted by the fact that on one side of the ground there is a row of spiked iron railings and on the other side a row of trees. The people, there being no rope or barrier to prevent them, assemble on each side of the ground in such fashion that the boundary is often a yard behind the spectators. As most of the clubs do not always play on the same portion, could not the London County Council provide fixed receptacles in the ground for the goal posts. Several good grounds could be made; that portion upon which public speaking is allowed would make a suitable ground if the trees were removed, also that circular piece of ground near the large fountain together with an adjacent small piece would make a decent ground, to say nothing of the oval, which could accommodate two if not three matches. If the manly game of football were catered for as much as that flirting affair, lawn tennis is, then there would be no cause to grumble."

In 1902 additional gravel and breeze football pitches were created on the public meeting area near the China Hall entrance, and in his 1903 annual report Superintendent Rogers concluded, "right well it has been used by youths and adults."

Crowd control was a big problem for the footballers. The pitches were unenclosed and games often disrupted by spectators.

Phil Burkett: "I loved playing football in the park in the 70s and used to play for the 20th Bermondsey Scout group on the cinders pitch at the side of Slippers Place. One game we got beat 26-1! But we did win the Bermondsey Cup... In the early 80s I used to play cricket when Southwark Council would cut out two pitches on The Oval. It was that lovely gentleman Georgie Virtue. A few years ago it was Bobby Abel's 150th so I spoke to a few people and they said they could finance a bit of a celebration. Leading up to it I had to ask why we had this fantastic cricket legend that played in the park as a kid, but now there was no cricket in the

park? I remembered in the '80s we used to have a synthetic surface and the concrete base was still there. I got in touch with the Council and they found a little bit of money to resurface it. They installed a new synthetic strip and now we have cricket again."



© P. Burkett 2010

Our Park



David Toogood: "I played football for Galleywall Road School. We had our own little leagues with other schools. I was in two Saturday teams; one of them was coached by a man called John who worked in Piddock's, the sweet shop round by Lynton Road. The other was run by the Manor Methodist Mission and we had a strip of gold and black. We used to collect the goal

posts from round by the park's dressing rooms. Our school sports day was held there too. I never used the changing rooms because I only lived round the corner and just walked home in my kit. We also played cricket there; the pitch was in the form of a long synthetic 'mat' that got laid out for us."



© D. Toogood 2010

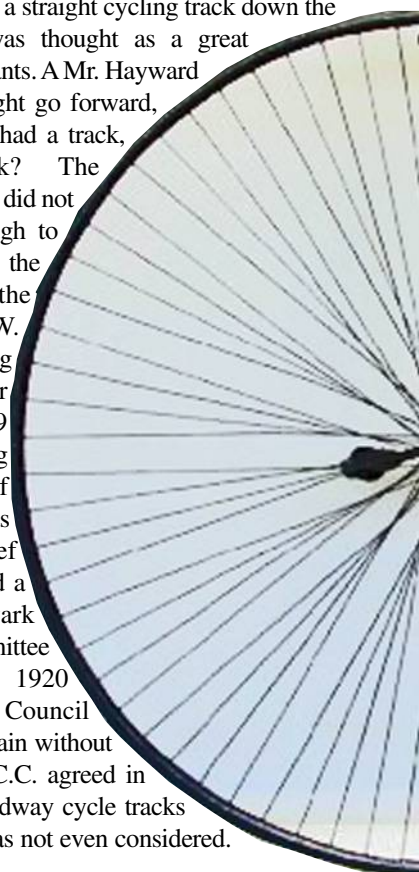
Sports Round Up

W.J. Delderfield painted a vivid scene in his letter to the Southwark Recorder in 1908: "The cricket pitches are protected, lawn tennis players have an enclosure where they can play the sets, and yet the football pitches have no protection whatsoever, so that last Saturday, while a match was in progress, I saw five or six different footballs being kicked about, by different gangs of youths, sometimes in the field of play and sometimes out of it, while a great number of onlookers gathered round the playing pitch, with the result that players and spectators often got mixed up, and some small boys were knocked down and badly bruised, while others ran helter-skelter away. I saw one policeman to keep guard over a large space of ground, where there were three matches in progress, and his time was occupied trying to induce a youth to come from the top of a tree where he had perched himself. Why can't the Council put railings or some other guard along each side, with a small gate for the players and officials to get to the pitch?...Why can't the dressing room around the Oval, which is so little used at present, be placed at the service of footballers, and so prevent heaps of clothing lying on the wet ground and visiting teams having to seek the hospitality of one of the surrounding public houses to change their clothes?"

In 1913 rather than accede to the footballer's request for fencing and other improvements, the L.C.C. moved all organised games to Deptford Park! The stumbling block for football development was the lack of grass pitches, and crucially the unwillingness of the authorities to allow footballers on The Oval. Apart from a brief few months in 1891, the largest open space in the park was out of bounds to footballers. However, in 1951 the borders of The Oval were extended, and new sports pitches and changing rooms planned. In 1952 when Labour councillor Alf Kemp, officially opened the five senior and two junior football pitches, it could finally be said that the game had been given its rightful position in the park. By 1958 there were areas at Slippers Place and Hawkstone Road for school use and more casual play. The last major football development came in 1980 when the Southwark Park Sports Complex was built at the southern end of the park. A synthetic pitch replaced the old-fashioned red gra, and in 1983 new changing rooms were added. The facility was hugely but Southwark Council allowed it to fall into disrepair in the late

1990s. Today it is largely unused, and organised football is concentrated on the poorly drained grass pitches on The Oval. However local footballers will not be deterred from enjoying the "beautiful game"; the South Bermondsey Partnership and Millwall F.C. are about to host the Bermondsey & Rotherhithe Mini World Cup 2010.

Today cyclists are a common sight in the park, but cycling was not always a welcome activity. In 1885 the authorities denied a request from J. H. Hughes of Rotherhithe Street, to ride "a dwarf safety bicycle" there. Eventually in 1898 cycling on the footpath around The Oval up to 9.00am was allowed, but not generally throughout the park. In 1887 a resolution was passed at the Rotherhithe Vestry to urge the Board to form a straight cycling track down the edge of the park. It was thought as a great advantage for the inhabitants. A Mr. Hayward thought the proposal might go forward, saying if Finsbury Park had a track, why not Southwark? The resolution was passed but did not impress the Board enough to take any action. In 1890 the L.C.C. refused the suggestion of C.E.W. Talbot of Redriff Cycling Club, to provide a cinder track for cyclists. In 1909 Marlborough Cycling Club's idea 1909 of building a cycling track as an unemployment relief scheme was ignored, and a year later the Southwark Park Improvement Committee fared no better. In 1920 Bermondsey Borough Council took up the cause, but again without success! In 1949 the L.C.C. agreed in principle to provide speedway cycle tracks in parks, but Our Park was not even considered.



Grace Beesley: - "I used to go round there and watch my husband Tom, bowling. I didn't really know anybody, so I used to sit outside, but one day they said, 'Why don't you come inside?', and so I did eventually, and they got me onto the green, and I was hooked then, wasn't I! There were just two ladies there for quite a while, me and Maud Evans. She was a very good player. We used to do the tea, but if the men's team were short they would ask us to make up the team. We were never dressed for it, but we enjoyed it. So I said to some other wives, why don't you come and try, and eventually there were fifteen ladies. We used to make our own fixtures on the green when the men were playing away games."

June Savory: "I used to join in with the Red Lions, the boys football club. They still use that football pitch on The Oval. "

George Dalton: "My old primary school, the original Albion St Junior, used the green near the tennis courts in the park for

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football and for games and for our annual school sports day. Pupils would walk two abreast, led by their class teacher, from Albion St."

Bill Killick: "We used to play football and cricket on the red gravel pitches at the Jamaica Road end. Nobody ever had any skin on their knees or elbows, and heading the ball always left gravel imprints on your forehead".

Kathleen Metcalfe: "I used to go to Southwark Park for our sports day. I went to Walworth Comprehensive and we used the park each year for this event. I can remember being in the long jump and also running on the race track. It was a very nice park and had good sports facilities."

Tony Young: "As a kid I saw Russian sailors playing a football match near The Oval, still dressed in their uniforms. They must have come from the ships in the docks."

Sports Round Up

Cycling began to feature in the summer sports and entertainments festivals from the 1970s onwards, including TV's Junior Superstars in 1983. The 1986 Sports and Fun Weekend had cycle speedway and cycles regularly feature in the Bermondsey Carnival processions. In 2007 the Tour de France riders cycled past the park witnessed by huge crowds.

From 1990-1992 Gaelic Football appeared in the park during the Irish Festival, where hurling and camogie competitions were held. The L.C.C. first allowed hockey in its parks in 1902, but there is little official record of the game having been played in Our Park. In 1907 it was agreed the pupils of Southwark Park Secondary School could play on the margins of the park. In 1935 when footballers were seeking more space, a report to the Parks Committee referred to the possibility of taking over the "little used" hockey pitch near China Hall Gate. In 1952 as part of the post-war sports programme a hockey pitch was provided, and anecdotal evidence suggests there was use by girls' schools up to the early 1960s.

In 1937 the park had four netball pitches, which in the immediate post-war period was halved. In 1952 four hard and three grass pitches were provided. By 1962 there was one court in the playground near St. Olave's hospital and two near the Dilston entrances. Today there are none.

In 1937 the park had a putting green, which was only available for play on Sunday afternoons. The 1951 Bermondsey Official Guide described the putting green as "a very popular feature," and in 1964 the London Evening News reported it as "a popular feature with the local dockers." By the late 1970s it was closed.

The first tennis courts in the park were established in 1884 following a suggestion from Mr. L. Lowndes of Spa Road. He wrote to the L.C.C.: "there is abundant space for a number of courts without in any way interfering with the flowers or shrubs and it would be a pleasant amusement for spectators unaccompanied by the dangers attendant on watching cricket in confined spaces." Park Superintendent Coppin advised that an enclosure

in the centre of the park could be set apart "on which a dozen clubs could play." Six grass courts were located near the refreshment pavilion. In 1887 Miss E.M. Elder wrote suggesting additional courts, and it seems the number was increased by two. In 1891 local tennis clubs petitioned for yet more courts. Later there was an increase to eleven, and more near the Jabez West fountain. By 1895 some 3 acres of the park had been allocated to tennis.

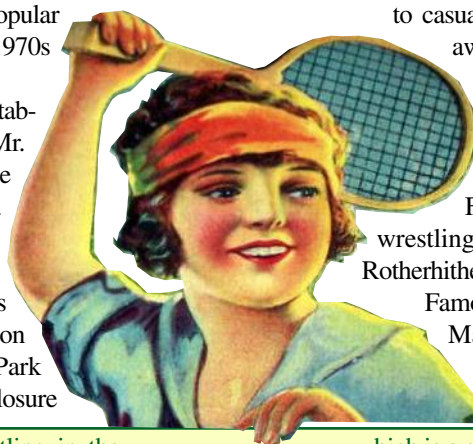
A men's tournament was held in 1896, and E. Morgan beat F. Hill 6-3, 6-1, 6-0 in the final. Three years later Superintendent Curle reported there had been over two-thousand games in the past season. By 1904 the courts were moved and took up most of the land alongside Dilston Grove. The Southwark Recorder in a review of local sports in 1907 commented: "Lawn tennis still has plenty of devotees and the courts in Southwark Park, though none too well kept are always in strong request."

The game continued to be played during the inter-war years and there was concern when the condition of the courts declined in 1939. The local doctor and County Councillor, J.A. Gillison took a petition of complaint from one-hundred and forty local residents to the L.C.C. War then broke out and tennis became irrelevant to the people of Bermondsey. The grass courts disappeared with military use and in 1940 bombs fell on the hard courts located near the Swedish Seaman's Church in Lower Road. After the war tennis was no longer a priority. Although in 1951 it was planned to create four new courts at the southern end of the park, the space was given over to casual football, which was popular with dockers

awaiting the call. Eventually in 1957 two hard courts were set up south of the Moreton gate, most probably those that we see today. The London Marathon Trust funded improvements to the courts in the 1990s.

From the late 1970s up to the mid 1980s wrestling bouts were a regular feature of the Rotherhithe and Bermondsey Carnival held in park.

Famous names abounded, such as Steve Gray; Mal Sanders; Sid 'Cry Baby' Cooper; Catweazle; Johnny Kwango; Steve Logan and Ricky Starr.



Gary Magold: "They used to have wrestling in the Bermondsey Carnival. A wrestling ring. Superb, when you think about it. It would attract the old grannies who had been watching World of Sport on Saturday afternoon. Years later the photographer of the Southwark Sparrow had an exhibition at the Café Gallery, and I saw a photograph my Nan, right up the front, watching the wrestling."

Len Hatch: "I played for St. Mary's School team in the park. Regularly we used to beat Southwark Park Road School. Rubbish they were at football, but they used to hold their own with us at cricket because they had a good teacher who was a professional cricketer in his younger days...Before the war as a kid we used to stand on the railings and there would be men playing cricket."

Mary Gosling: "I played hockey in the park with Bermondsey Central School. I was quite proud walking along there getting off the bus with the hockey sticks. Felt like St. Trinians. The pitch might have been in a cage in the park."

Rosie Thornton: "I don't feel that sport dominates this park,

which is a good thing. It fits in really well, although I do feel the sports side of things is a male domain."

Christine Savory: "I can remember in 1997, it was my last year of primary school; and we had our sports days over there. And the whole school went over to the Oval."

Paul Highman: "The new sports facility has been a long time coming. It's been deteriorating year on year and it is one thing that lets the park down. It is something that is being mentioned by members of the public."

David Clark: "I played my school football matches on The Oval for Credon Road Secondary School. Every Sunday when I was about 10-14 I used to play football matches on a cinder surfaced pitch; it was very competitive and greatly supported. I also played for my cub team on the cinder pitch which were only seven a side for some reason, think we were called 30th Rotherhithe troop."

Patricia Preston: "I used to watch my elder brother play football on the pitch which was fenced off, we also had the school sports there. As I got older I was allowed to use the putting green."

Our Park



Education

The connection between the park and schools goes back over one-hundred and fifty years. In 1857 a meeting was held at Mr. Callaghan's school rooms, 46 Cherry Garden Street for the purpose of securing a park for Southwark.



A month later another campaign meeting was held at Marlborough House Grammar School, Spa Road. Soon after the park was opened, working men convened at the Star Corner School Room to protest about plans to build houses on park land. In 1885 the dignitaries involved in the formal unveiling of the Jabez West memorial waited before the ceremony in nearby Southwark Park School. It was Keeton's Road Board School's efforts which led to the Moreton Terrace entrance in 1901. When the park was at a low ebb in 1996, local people gathered in nearby Southwark Park Primary School to protest and seek improvements.

Two unusual educational activities from the 1920s are worth mentioning. First the bandstand was used for open-

air classes by local schools. The Southwark Recorder described the scene in 1923: "The open-air class has again made its appearance in Southwark Park, where advantage is taken of fine weather to give a number of delicate boys the benefit of fresh air. The school is held on the bandstand, where, on fine days, the teacher may be seen instructing his class, who sit at tables on the bandstand, with the blackboard in front of them. Freehand drawing and nature study are among the subjects in which the class receives instruction, and the children find plenty of specimens for study in their sur-

roundings. On Monday afternoon a drawing lesson was in progress, and the children could be seen drawing such things as snails, centipedes and fishes. The boys appreciate the open-air class, and work with renewed interest and vigour, while their health is being built up." In the same era there was also an



open-air classroom located on the north-eastern side of the park which served child patients at St. Olave's Hospital.

For most of its life the park has been a practical educational resource for schools. It has been used extensively for physical education. Countless thousands of children have played sports and games there, and at its peak the lido was used for swimming instruction.

Sometimes it has simply been used as a place to visit, a "treat," and an opportunity for pupils to

A Breath Of Fresh Air: patients from nearby St Olave's Hospital benefited from the park's greenery.

get out of the crowded classroom. In more recent times schools increasingly come to the park for environmental studies. The creation of a Park Rangers service in the 1990s was a noteworthy initiative by Southwark Council. It did not last long, but for a short while education was put at the heart of park management, and the Rangers made links with many schools.

The success of the Rangers led to the post of Young Friends of Parks Co-ordinator in the early 2000s, the aim being to generate interest in the park amongst our young community.

Richard Stevens: "Also in the Park was an open-air school, this was for children with respiratory troubles and similar illnesses who needed constant fresh air and were unable to stay in the sometimes stuffy atmosphere of a crowded classroom which had on average forty to a class."



Len Hatch: "There was an open-air classroom for child patients in St. Olave's Hospital. It was at the back where Freddie Albin's place is. It was built of wood and had canvas sides. They used to roll the sides up and it would be open to the sunshine. It was a permanent building. The canvas sides rolled down in winter. There was a gate leading into the hospital grounds."

Education



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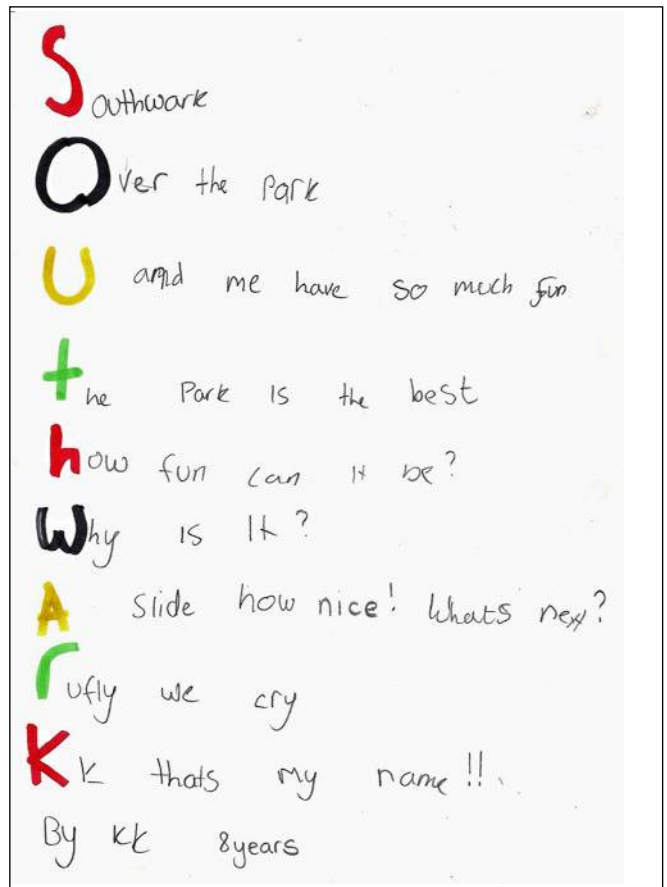
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As part of the "Our Park" project it has been a privilege to work with two primary schools, Rotherhithe and St. Joseph's, both

located right next to the park. They have been on guided walks; taken photographs; and produced some written work.

Our Park



Nick Lane: "I was Young Friends of Parks co-ordinator for about three years. The project was set up to recognise the fact that many 'friends groups' across the country are of a relatively limited range of people. They tend to be people who have more time to spare, who can dedicate their time to fighting the cause of a local park and therefore by default, those people are retired, unemployed or of an older age. I think there was a big group of young people whose views weren't being recognised and who were probably being spoken on behalf of by adults, by parents,

carers or just people who thought they knew what children wanted, or what was good for children. So this project recognised that and aimed to engage with those young people. I spent two years working with two groups of young people, and one was associated with Southwark Park. One of the challenges was where does a group of 7-13 year olds meet? We ended up at Southwark Park Primary School. We did a project with the Friends of Southwark Park where they were entered for the Bermondsey carnival. We involved artists and created these amazing carnival masks, and I'm proud to say they won an award. They won a certificate for that which meant so much to them. Another project was with 'Art in the Park' involving a lantern parade, through Southwark Park on Guy Fawkes Night. We led through the northern half of the park ending at the bandstand with a whole array of these amazing paper lanterns."

Education

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Rotherhithe School were let loose in the park with a camera each. The results of their adventure in photography are displayed on this and the next page. Bermondsey and Rotherhithe was once full of photographers' studios. If the high quality of these photos are anything to go by it could be that Our Park area will be once more a centre for photography studios. Congratulations and well done to all the children who took part in the project!



Deniza



Peter



Demi



Alfie



Christiana



Sakariya

Education



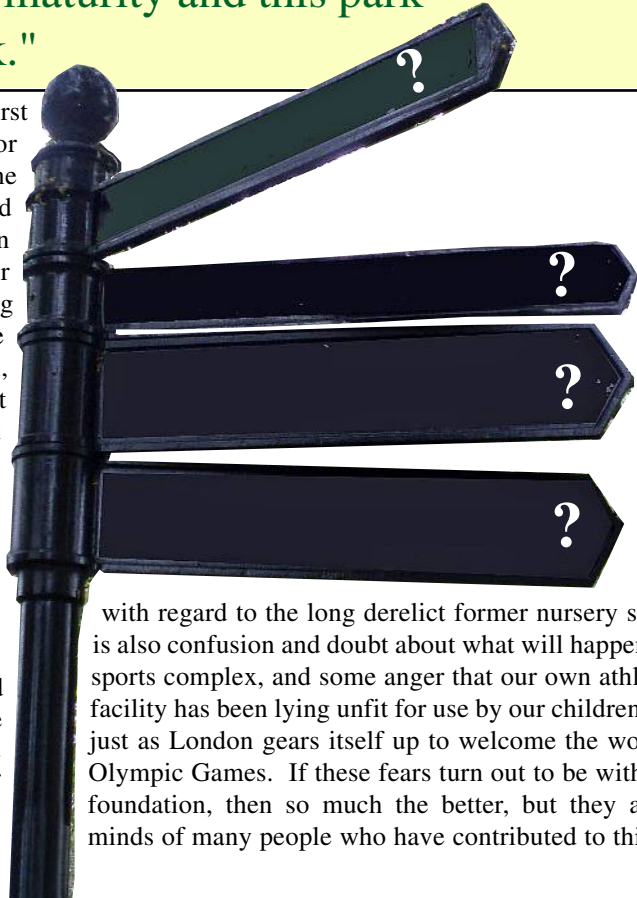
The Future

"We now see the park at its worst. But the time will come when our children are become men and women, that these trees which have been planted today will have grown to maturity and this park will then be a glory to Southwark."

On that rainy day in June 1869 when the park was first opened Austen Layard, Member of Parliament for Southwark famously proclaimed those words. It was a fine prediction, but all these years on what does the future hold for our park? Of course we don't know, but what is certain is that nothing can be taken for granted. In 1869 a quarter of the land was going to be dedicated to private housing until local people forced a change in policy. In 1939 the park was at a high point under the London County Council, only to be so dramatically bruised and battered by war that it took a generation to recover. In 1971, just when it seemed to be on its feet again, the Greater London Council with all of its expertise and resources, decided to transfer the park to a reluctant Southwark Council. Since then it has been a story of ups and downs, a sad low point being reached in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by a great revival of fortunes over the first decade of the new millennium.

Once again though the financial clouds are looming and there is a genuine concern amongst local supporters of the park that another decline in services and standards may be coming. People are asking why there seem to be less staff around compared to the past? They are worried that land may be sold off for unsuitable developments, especially

with regard to the long derelict former nursery site. There is also confusion and doubt about what will happen with the sports complex, and some anger that our own athletics facility has been lying unfit for use by our children for years just as London gears itself up to welcome the world to the Olympic Games. If these fears turn out to be without foundation, then so much the better, but they are in the minds of many people who have contributed to this project.



Debra Gosling: "In this day and age it's very important to have a green space, very important to have somewhere you can go to sit down and contemplate life without being bothered by traffic and God knows what. It's a very important piece of land and it should be cherished."

Jean Murray: "It was put there for the people of Bermondsey so they could get into the fresh air and enjoy the trees and grass."

Marjorie Hill: "I am not confident about the future of my park, at all. In eighty years time, there will not be a Southwark Park. It'll be masses and masses of houses. It is soul destroying. Southwark Park is a great asset for Bermondsey and they've just got to learn to appreciate it and do a bit more to keep it up to scratch. The old Bermondsey people would get together in groups because they've lived all their lives in these streets. But we don't have that now, all those moving into Canada Water, are from miles outside, and they don't have that community spirit."

Michael Holland: "It's definitely got to be kept, in all its size and improvements made where necessary. Bring the putting green back, and get those boats out on the lake."



Christine Savory: "I think it'll still be there. But we'll need a group like The Friends to carry on down through generations to keep it going. Lack of housing is the biggest threat. If the council runs out of space to build on, like old factories or pubs, I think the parks will be next. I think it gives hope that children are taught how important the environment is now, and there's an emphasis on growing things. They're being taught that how to look after nature. People have got to be prepared to have a bit more community spirit. And get involved in their community. Instead of expecting it to be there on tap, like it's owed to them, to be prepared to get out and help keep it going and help keep it alive."

June Savory: "I don't think they'll take away that park. It's the main park in this area. They'll take away the smaller parks first and build on them. They won't want to lose Southwark Park. It might go downhill in the future, and people might stop using it, especially the children's play park. That's the only issue really, the park being less used, not losing it."

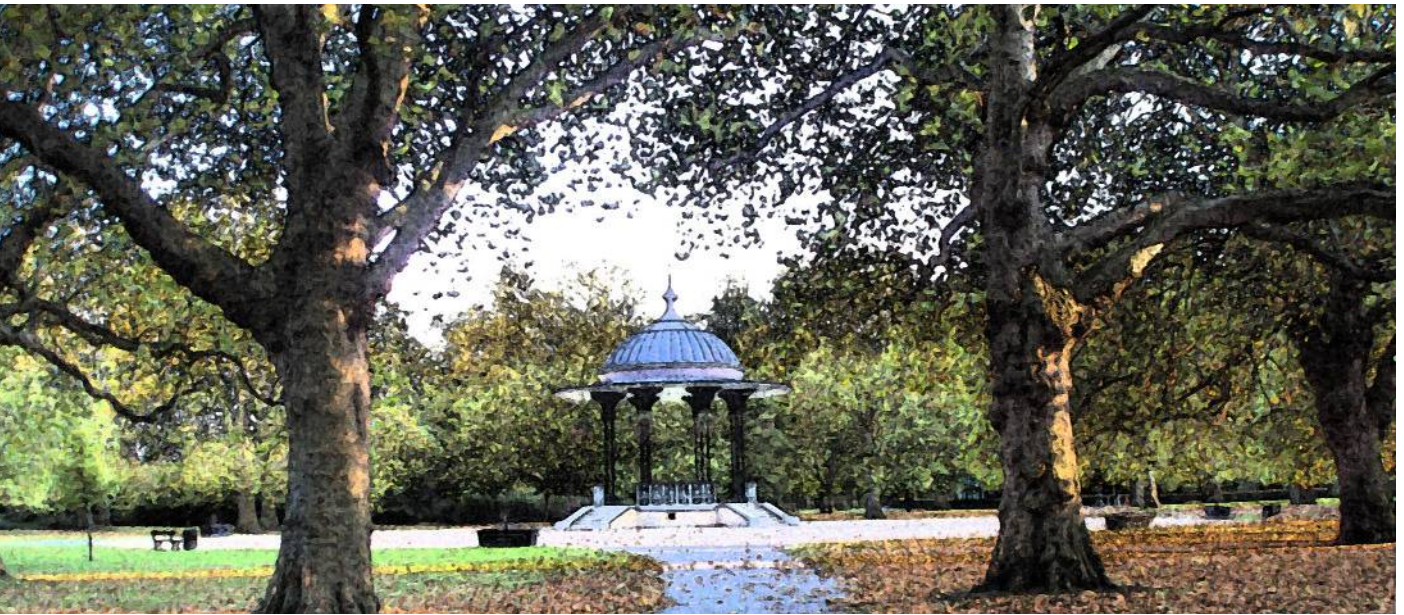
Phil Burkett: "I was always concerned when they were considering turning the fish farm in to flats and knocking down Rotherhithe swimming baths. The park shouldn't be touched, it should be sacred. It's not for sale. The park should never ever be on sale to anyone because it belongs to the people."

The Future

There are of course plenty of positives. Bermondsey and Rotherhithe's changing and younger population will be a strength for Our Park. Care and understanding for the environment seems to be high on young people's agendas, so the involvement of youth through school and out-of-school park activities must be good for the future. There are also local groups, such as Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Green Enthusiasts, Southwark Cyclists and Bermondsey Beat, who watch out for the park and look to encourage more recreation. And hats off to Ron Henocq, Dave Allen and all connected with the Bermondsey Artists Group for achieving something that few could ever have predicted: a second gallery in the park!

At the 2010 Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Carnival suggestions for park improvements were canvassed by The Friends of Southwark Park, and much was made of the athletics track, a new lido and a bigger cafe.

It is well understood that solutions to these issues are not simple. However the public also want to see some much simpler changes in the near future. Better toilet facilities; boats on the lake for young children during school holidays and summer weekends; a revival of the bandstand concerts; more seating; more waste bins; and better information about the trees and wildlife. These achievable short-term demands are surely not too hard to implement for our park?



Gary Magold: "I don't want the park to become 21st century with modern buildings. The best thing about Southwark Park is that you walk out of the 21st century into an area where you are not bombarded by the 21st century."



Grace Beesley: "I have been worried about what was going to happen to the athletics area. I was afraid we were going to lose some of The Oval, after all that money that was spent to make it such a nice area. What bothers me more than anything is building on The Oval. We don't seem to hear too much about it at the moment, and I always feel that when everything goes quiet, what is going on?"

Len Hatch: "It is good to have the green space and fresh air, but there are an awful lot of people who would be willing to tread on that. You've got that element. It might not start as prime areas, but the fringes along the park. Facing Southwark Park Road, they've already fringed right up there with housing. What's to stop 'em coming that bit more? And the Council would let 'em. I am afraid the Council would let 'em."

Lyn Olding: "I think it's going in the right direction, but just improve, improve, improve, wherever we can."

Vi Redmond: "I worry if the developers get their hands on it."

Beryl Donovan: "Because London is so vastly populated and flats and things like that, every little bit of green is desperately needed."

Nick Lane: "There are constant challenges, and that is one of the reasons it's important to have a friends group to represent it. I think it's important a friends group isn't just standing against all change, because parks do evolve and I think that's what makes Southwark Park interesting. "If you always stood against change you wouldn't have the lake in the first place, it wouldn't have been enlarged, you wouldn't have the lido, and you wouldn't have the bandstand. Change happens but it's important that it is open for debate."

Mary Gosling: "These days you get just a little bit of land, you go there next day and they're drilling, it's a block of flats. If we can manage to keep that park it will be such an achievement when you see what's going on all around it. That park is steeped in history. Nothing else has stood there, so if they start building flats and bits and pieces it will ruin it. They should leave well alone. Let's enjoy the trees. It's a bit of a sanctuary, so leave things just as they are, don't touch it. And if they did I think I'd chain myself to one of those trees. I'd say right you touch the park you can touch me at the same time."

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Interviewees

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Writers

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Rotherhithe Primary School

Galiema Amien, Jennifer O'Coafaigh, Alfie, Blaine, Brusk, Christiana, Cyril, Daniel, Deniza, Eda, Jemimah, Julie, KK, Nkechi, Paige, Peter, Sakariya, Sima, Temi, Tia, Tyreke.

St. Joseph's R.C. Primary School

Children of Year Five, Serifat Agebunde, Richard Preston, Chris Willcocks.

Interviewers

Celia Cronin, Debra Gosling, Michael Holland, Dorothy Oxley, Malcolm Taylor.

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Claire Malone, Hannah Taylor.

The Talks

A. Aylott, Eunice Adams, Janet Bryant, Patrick Burke, G. Collier, B. Davies, Pat Dunne, L. Fleetwood, Elaine Griffin, Patricia Holland, Terry Holland, S. Honeyman, Janette Kirk-Willis, Vera Law, M.J. Lawrie, Kathleen Martin, Ravra Mottram, Pauline Mounsey, A. Newman, G. Norton, M. Shanahan, Athena Lee Smith, Margaret Sparks, I. Sumner, L. Wardle. Anne Wayte.

The Walks

Carole Baker, Joy Beaumont, D. Copley, Nick Dunne, Andy Egan, Nikki Hatton, Phoebe Hatton, Klair Hobdell, Vicki Howlett, Grace Kobbe, Geoffrey Lewis, Jeanne Lewis, David Linfoot, Irene Magold, Andrea Mason, Margaret Mason, Gustav Milne, Dave Nicholls, Diane Nicholls, Williams Omekwu, Irene Pooley, Ken Pooley, Arlene Powell, Hugh Roper, Yvonne Shapcott, Neea Strangeway, Susan Vaughan, Joanne Wainewright, Almaz Waktola, M. Wanzalam, Chris Ward.

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