

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

FINSBURY PARK

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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**FINSBURY PARK**

Name:	FINSBURY PARK
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Hackney (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Haringey (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.571109 Longitude: -0.10079266 National Grid Reference: TQ 31719 87513 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000804 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

## Details

London's second municipal park, laid out 1866-9 by Frederick Manable and Alexander Mackenzie, enlarged from mid C18 Tea and Pleasure Gardens.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The C17 manor house of Copt Hall was on the site of the largest demesne wood of the ancient forest of Middlesex, the hunting ground of the Bishops of London. In the mid C18 Copt Hall became known as Hornsey Wood House and became a popular Tea House and Pleasure Gardens, from the mid C18 to mid C19. In 1796 the house was enlarged and partly rebuilt and the wood was reduced to 27 acres (c 11ha) to make room for larger pleasure grounds, which included a lake. The wood and grounds were used for sports and recreation.

An 'out-county' park for Finsbury residents was first proposed in 1850 because of severe overcrowding and the Finsbury Park Act of 1857, the earliest act for a municipal park for London, set aside 250 acres (104ha) of land. The park that was finally started in 1866 was 115 acres (48ha) and incorporated the site of Hornsey Wood House (demolished in 1866), grounds and all the farmland enclosed by the railway and roads to the south, west and east. The structure of the park was designed by Frederick Manable, Superintending Architect to the Metropolitan Board of Works and Alexander Mackenzie, the landscape designer for the MBW, advised from 1868 on the 'ornamental portion of the park' (MBW Committee Minutes). The park opened in August 1869.

The park was enclosed on the north by Endymion Road (1874), and new features, such as a bandstand, chrysanthemum house, bowling green and cricket pavilion were added but the design remained largely unaltered until the 1930s. More substantial changes began in the 1930s and accelerated from the 1950s. The park was maintained by the Metropolitan Board of Works from

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1869 to 1889, London County Council from 1889 to 1965, the Greater London Council from 1965 to 1986, and the London Borough of Haringey since 1986.

**DESCRIPTION**

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Finsbury Park is in the London Borough of Haringey and is bounded by the Northern Railway to the west, Seven Sisters Road (A503) to the south-east, Green Lanes (A105) to the north-east and Endymion Road (B150) to the north. Finsbury Park station is at the southern tip and Manor House tube station at the eastern edge.

The 46ha park occupies a hilltop site on London Clay within the London Basin. The land immediately around the lake is level and is on the highest ground. The land falls away gradually to the south, north and east. There are limited views from the lake and higher ground, to the north-east and southwards over the Thames Valley. Views to the north towards Alexandra Palace were blocked in the 1870s when houses were built along Endymion Road.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The park is surrounded by perimeter fencing (originally open oak paling but now timber replacements) and there are five main entrances to the park. The main carriage entrances of Manor Gate and Lodge (unoccupied) to the east, Finsbury Gate to the south and Hornsey Gate to the north-west, all lead directly onto the perimeter drive. The smaller pedestrian gates, Endymion Gate to the north and River Gate to the north-east, connect onto the carriage drive along footpaths, that from Endymion Gate running alongside the New River and then crossing it before entering the main part of the park. These five gates, Manor Gate Lodge, the perimeter drive and main paths were designed by Manable. Alexander Mackenzie was responsible for the path network within the perimeter drive and American Gardens.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** The park includes the site of Copt Hall, the C17 manor house of Brownswood. From the mid C18 it was known as Hornsey Wood House and was a Tea House and by the 1840s a tavern. The house, which stood to the south of the lake, was demolished in 1866.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** Finsbury Park is laid out in a style typical of mid C19 urban parks, with railings encircling a relatively symmetrical composition, formal entrance gates, a perimeter carriage drive and several areas of formal planting within more open parkland. Curving paths cross the park, linking the entrances, drives and various features. The 1860s design divided the park into zones: horticultural features concentrated to the south-east and east of the lake and in the north-west corner of the park; the recreational features, including the lake and refreshment room, in the centre of the park; and the sporting features largely around the edge of the park. There are now sporting features throughout the park, including the centre, so that the zones are no longer distinct.

The approach from Manor Gate passes the lodge on the south side and connects onto the broad tarmac drive which runs around the inside perimeter of the park. This was originally a gravelled carriage drive but is now mostly pedestrianised. To the north and west of the Manor Gate entrance there are small areas of bedding, a reduction of the extensive carpet bedding which bordered the perimeter drive and paths immediately west of the Manor Gate in the late C19.

The approach to the lake and the centre of the park, from Manor Gate, is through an area of late C19 tree and shrub groups, formerly the horticultural centre of the park. The shrubberies contained various C19 features, which no longer survive, including a rosary, with beds of roses and herbaceous plants, a group of late C19 glasshouses, which lay to the north-east of these planted areas, and a late C19 conservatory, used for displaying chrysanthemums, to the south-east. The glasshouses were removed in the 1930s(1940s and the conservatory, a ruin by the late 1940s, was later demolished. The chrysanthemum displays were famous and attracted visitors from all areas of London.

To the west of these shrub and tree groups, and immediately south-east of the lake, is a rectangular flower garden, backed to the north and south by shrub planting. There are fewer beds now than the sixty referred to in the late C19 (GC 1889) and their shapes and sizes have changed since the 1860s, but they are still laid out with bedding plants. The areas of bedding and the flower gardens were surrounded by a low, hooped-wire fence, which has gone, but the paths and shrub groups are largely intact. To the south-east of the flower garden is an early underground reservoir, laid out in 1867 by the East London Water Company, and surrounded by C19 tree and shrub groups. The spoil from the construction was used to artificially build up the north-east section of the park. The surface of the reservoir was used for lawn tennis until the first half of the C20.

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The lake lies to the north-west of the flower garden, in the centre of the park. It has an irregular shape and a large island, centrally positioned. The lake has not been altered in extent or shape since the 1860s but most of the features on or around it have been lost. The octagonal pavilion on the island and the boathouse on the southern edge were removed in the mid C20. The lake is fenced and surrounded by a tarmac path or paving. There is now (1998) very little planting around the lake, in contrast to the 1860s layout which included extensive planting in this area: poplars, willow and birch, with brambles, furze and broom at the lake edge and spiraea, thorns, lilac, holly etc on the island. The 1860s layout of the lake and the surrounding area was developed from the remnants of Hornsey Wood (known as Brownswood until the second half of the C18) and the pleasure grounds attached to Hornsey Wood House. The house, kitchen garden and farm were demolished and the bowling green, shooting range and other sporting features were removed. Much of the planting in the Tea Gardens, the wood and the lake was retained. The lake island was altered in shape and the lake was enlarged but the earlier use for fishing and boating was retained.

To the south of the lake is an area of late C20 block paving, with shrub planting, laid out as a playground. The area is bordered to the north by the lake, to the west by the cafe, to the south by 'The Pit' ( an open-air theatre, and to the east by the flower garden. The cafe, to the south-west of the lake, is a late C20 replacement for the original Refreshment Room with its verandah. The Refreshment Room was built in 1869 on the southern edge of the lake, immediately north of the site of Hornsey Wood House. The open-air theatre is in a semicircular hollow, to the south of the lake, and south-east of the cafe. It was built in the mid C20 and replaced a bandstand on the same site. In the C19 the bandstand was located on the south-west edge of the park but was relocated to the more prominent site in the early C20.

To the north of the lake is the early C20 bowling green and pavilion, and a large complex of late C20 buildings. Immediately north-east of the lake there is a large, late C20 brick pavilion overlooking an athletics track, laid out in the first half of the C20 on land which had been open parkland.

The western edge of the lake adjoins the perimeter drive, which leads northwards to Hornsey Gate. To the north-east of Hornsey Gate are the American Gardens, between Endymion Road and the perimeter drive, in the north-west corner of the park. The American Gardens were laid out with trees and informal groups of American shrubs, predominantly rhododendrons and azaleas. Some of the 1860s trees and shrubs survive but the layout and disposition of the beds has been altered.

The American Gardens are separated from the cricket pitch, in the north-east of the park, by the New River; a canalised stretch of water, completed in 1613, which brought clean water in from Amwell in Hertfordshire to New River Head, in south Islington. The cricket pitch is bordered by the New River to the south and west and by a line of trees on the north and east sides, which border Endymion Road and Green Lanes. The pitch was reserved for Islington Albion Cricket Club in 1866 and the pavilion, on the south side of the pitch, was added in the late 1890s. A C20 pavilion is on the south side of the pitch, to the south of the path that enters from the park.

Within the perimeter path, to the north and south of the lake, are two large areas of open parkland. Some C19 and early C20 trees remain but most of the planting is of single trees planted in the mid to late C20. In the mid to late C20 the fencing (to contain sheep in the C19 and early C20) and shrub groups were removed and the effect is now of a general scattering of trees, rather than groups of trees and massed shrubs set within expanses of grazed lawn.

There are hard tennis courts along the western edge of the park, outside the perimeter drive, and to the south of the lake, on land which was open parkland in the 1860s. To the south of the tennis courts is an area of open ground, which was the site of the bandstand in the C19 and of tennis courts and a meeting place in the early to mid C20. In the south-west corner of the park is an adventure playground, which was the site of a 'Gymnasia' in the C19.

#### REFERENCES

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OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1864 2nd edition published 1894-6 Revised edition published 1912-15 1936 edition 1949 edition

Archival items MBW and LCC Minutes (LMA) Postcard, photographs, views and cuttings (Bruce Castle Museum)

Description written: January 1998 Register Inspector: CB Edited: May 2000

## Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.