

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

VICTORIA EMBANKMENT GARDENS

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

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**VICTORIA EMBANKMENT GARDENS**

Name:	VICTORIA EMBANKMENT GARDENS
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	City of Westminster (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.505620 Longitude: -0.12337354 National Grid Reference: TQ 30341 80190, TQ 30495 80542, TQ 31052 80830 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000844 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

## Details

A set of mid C19 public gardens made from land reclaimed from the River Thames as part of the development of the Victoria Embankment, considered at that time to be the finest thoroughfare in Europe.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The idea of the formation of a continuous embankment on the north shore of the Thames appears to have originated with Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723) who incorporated it as part of his scheme for rebuilding London after the Great Fire in 1666. The idea was raised again in 1766 when John Gwynn incorporated a 'Thames Quay' into his proposals entitled 'London and Westminster Improved'. In 1840 architect James Walker proposed a plan for the Corporation of London which involved forming a continuous embankment along the north side of the river. When the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW) was set up in 1855, London at last had an agency capable of carry out major improvements and under its Chief Engineer, Sir Joseph Bazalgette (181-91), the Victoria Embankment finally came to fruition. The plans included a new sewer system; a road system designed to relieve traffic from the Strand, Whitehall and Fleet Street; a route for the Underground Metropolitan Line; and improved river navigation by speeding the flow of the Thames. An Act for the formation of the Victoria Embankment was passed in 1862 and work began in 1864. The length of the roadway was to be c 2km and the total area of the land reclaimed from the river c 15ha, 7.5ha of which were occupied by the carriageway and footways. Some 2ha were conveyed to neighbouring landowners and the remainder was devoted to public gardens. Many difficulties were encountered during the programme of works, the longest delay being associated with the construction of the Metropolitan District Railway which was to run along the line of the roadway. The Embankment was laid out in the style of a Parisian Quay with a wide avenue of planes, landing places and piers built into the riverside, and broad pavements either side of the roadway. It was generally recognised as being one of the finest urban planning schemes in the world; a typical reaction to the completed development was printed in *The Gardener* in 1870, 'From Blackfriars to Westminster Bridge there now runs a line of magnificent roadway, of considerable width and admirably constructed, which was designated the finest thoroughfare in Europe'.

Designs for the gardens submitted by the landscape architect Alexander McKenzie and approved by the MBW in February 1870 were published in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* of 3 December 1870. The layout as implemented, slightly altered from McKenzie's

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**VICTORIA EMBANKMENT GARDENS**

proposals, was recorded on the OS 1st edition map (surveyed 1867-72). The works were to have been completed by July 1870, when the Embankment was opened by the Prince of Wales, but owing to delays with the railing installation the gardens, Temple Garden, Villiers Street Garden, and a small plot of land to the north end of what is now Whitehall Garden, did not open until 1872. The final stretch of the Whitehall Garden was not fully developed until the land dissected by Whitehall Court had, on the formation of Northumberland Avenue, been purchased by the MBW. New plans were prepared and those made by George Vulliamy, superintendent architect to the MBW from 1861 to 1886, were accepted. His designs (Vulliamy, July 1873) were slightly amended, the paths were altered to become more serpentine (OS 2nd edition surveyed 1894-7), and the construction of the enlarged gardens commenced in 1874. While carrying out the works, the small plot of land to the north which had already been laid out was broken up and the statue of Sir James Outram moved to its present (1999) position. The gardens were opened by W H Smith, MP, on Saturday 8 May 1875.

The Victoria Embankment gardens became a popular place for erecting memorial statues and over the years the number and positions of the monuments have changed. Whitehall Garden was renovated in 1994 and the Council are currently (1999) awaiting the results of an application for Heritage Lottery Funding in order to renovate the Temple Garden.

The Embankment Gardens remain a well-used public open space and are currently (1999) managed by Westminster City Council.

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The gardens occupy a series of three sites curving round a loop on the north side of the River Thames between Blackfriars Bridge to the east and Westminster Bridge to the south. All are bounded to either the south or east by Victoria Embankment. The easternmost section, Temple Garden, is bounded to the north and east by Temple Place and to the west by the entrance to the Temple Underground station. A small triangular portion is separated from the main Temple Garden by Temple station buildings, and is also bounded to the north and west by Temple Place. The main section of the Victoria Embankment Gardens, Villiers Street Garden, is c 500m south-west of Temple Garden and is bounded to the north and east by Savoy Place, and to the west by Villiers Street, with Embankment Place to the south-west. The third garden, Whitehall Garden, is 100m to the south, separated from Villiers Street Garden by Hungerford Bridge. Whitehall Garden is bounded to the north by Northumberland Avenue and Whitehall Place, the buildings in Whitehall Court provide the boundary to the west, and Horseguards Avenue the boundary to the south. Temple Garden is enclosed within chain-link fencing; the other two sections are enclosed within iron railings and have shrubberies growing along the boundaries.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Each of the three sites has a number of entrances from either the Embankment or the other streets bordering the gardens.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** The York Water Gate (listed grade I) is situated to the south-west corner of Villiers Street Garden. Formerly a Thameside watergate, the gate originally belonged to the Bishop of Norwich and was subsequently granted to George Villiers, Duke of Buckinghamshire (assassinated 1628) who rebuilt it in a princely style. It is thought to have been executed by Nicholas Stone (Cherry and Pevsner 1973), but the design can also be attributed to Sir Balthazar Gerbier who was the architect of Buckingham's new house (Sexby 1905). Made of Portland stone it is a tripartite monumental gateway in a bold Franco-Flemish Baroque style, similar in design to the Fontaine de Medicis. The principal, central archway contains a flight of river steps. The south, (former river) front is rusticated with central archway and smaller flanking arched loggias. The north front has three arches with carved keystones, pilasters supporting an entablature, and spiked ball finials on pedestals. The Metropolitan Board of Works made frequent attempts to add the watergate and terrace to the Embankment Gardens but it was not until 1893 that their successors the LCC acquired it under the London Open Spaces Act.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The Victoria Embankment Gardens are divided into three sections described here from north-east to south-west.

The Temple Garden is a rectangular area c 100m long by c 30m wide, currently (1999) enclosed within chain-link fencing largely concealed by shrubberies. The ornamental iron railings which caused the delay to the opening of the Embankment Gardens were removed for scrap during the Second World War. As early as 1895 (OS) the shrubberies had lost their intended serpentine outline and had become curvilinear. The garden is entered from the north-east end by two C20 iron gates, one from

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**VICTORIA EMBANKMENT GARDENS**

Temple Place, the second from the Embankment. Tarmac paths lead from the entrances and converge to the west of an oval shrubbery which provides the backdrop to the bronze statue of John Stuart Mill (economist and philosopher) erected in 1878 (listed grade II). The path continues west through the centre of the site, bordered on either side by lawns with cut beds, passing, to the south, the stone fountain (listed grade II) erected in 1897 as a memorial to the temperance worker Lady Henry Somerset. Behind the fountain is one of the many air vents for the Underground which are concealed in the shrubberies. The path continues and passes around a central rose bed made on the site of the bandstand. Both the design submitted by McKenzie in 1870 and that recorded on the OS 1st edition plan of 1874 show the central area as a rectangle, and the latter records the area marked out by shrubs. The first band concerts were played on the grass alongside the central area, the audience seated on the paths. The midday concerts proved so popular with the workers from the neighbouring printing works that in 1895 the layout was altered to provide space for an octagonal bandstand with an oval viewing area around it. The bandstand area had been enlarged again by 1902 and flower beds were introduced in the adjoining grassed areas (LCC, 1902). The bandstand was removed at the same time as the railings (c 1940) and was replaced with a central flower bed. The path continues west past narrow lawns with cut beds and mature plane trees backed by shrubberies. Some 30m west of the central rose bed the path divides and exits the garden. The north-west path passes, to the north, the bronze memorial statue to William Edward Forster, educationist and MP (1890, listed grade II), before exiting the garden by a C20 gate which leads onto Temple Place. The southern path exits onto the Embankment. A shrubbery at the west end of the garden screens it from Temple Underground station.

Some 100m south-west of Temple station is a small triangular shrubbery enclosed within late C20 iron railings. This piece of land was included as part of the Temple Garden by 1902 (LCC, 1902). The shrubs provide a backdrop to the statue of Isambard Kingdom Brunel (listed grade II) which is set outside the railings.

The main garden, Villiers Street Garden, which is c 300m long, widens out from a narrow strip of land to the north to give a triangular plot. The site is enclosed within late C20 iron railings screened by shrubberies which largely retain their late C19 form. From the northern entrance in Savoy Place a tarmac path curves south-west between shrubberies edged with stone curbs and continues for c 200m between the lawns and cut beds which front the shrubberies. The lawns are decorated with numerous statues and memorials (most listed grade II). An entrance from the Embankment halfway along the path gives a view to the south bank of the Thames and Hungerford Bridge. Some 15m to the south-west of the Embankment entrance is a Portland stone monument (listed grade II) designed by Edward Lutyens (1869-1944), erected to the memory of Major General Lord Cheylesmore, soldier, administrator, and philanthropist. The decorative screen wall includes stone benches and focuses on a small water garden. As the garden widens the shrubberies to the west are set further back from the path and the ground to the north-west rises slightly to the west. A number of mature plane trees survive around this area. Near the widest part of the garden, to the north-west of the tarmac path, is a small timber watchman's hut. Alongside the hut a stone-paved path leads north-west to an area to the rear of the shrubberies that has been set aside as a garden for the blind. On the Embankment side of the path is a C20 refreshment house with a paved seating area to the north-west. At this point the central path widens before branching in three directions. The division is marked to the north by a mature plane tree and a memorial erected in 1920 to the Imperial Camel Corps (listed grade II). This replaced a late C19 drinking fountain. The three paths are separated by triangular lawns with cut beds filled with annual bedding. The path furthest from the Embankment leads south-west for c 75m, passing the statue to Robert Burns (listed grade II) and the York Water Gate before leaving the garden by the Villiers Street entrance in the south-west corner. The path nearest to the Embankment curves towards the south-west end of the garden passing a paved late C20 sunken garden backed by small row of pleached trees which help to screen low brick service buildings. A secondary path, to the south-east of the service buildings, leads onto the Embankment. The central path divides the lawns and focuses on a mid C20 open-air theatre. Both of the major paths maintain routes shown on an original design (Illustrated London News 1872) curving around an area of segmented lawns decorated with cut beds, the main feature being a central bed with a radiating design of grass and bedding plants. The central bed was replaced with a bandstand by 1895 (OS), the bandstand, according to Sexby (1905), having been moved from the Naval exhibition held at Chelsea. The area was redesigned in the mid C20 after the bandstand was removed. To the north of the triangular lawns is the open-air theatre. The single-storey rectangular building, built on part of the late C19 shrubbery, is fronted by a brick-paved area and screened to the rear by the reduced shrubbery. An

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**VICTORIA EMBANKMENT GARDENS**

entrance in the south-east corner of the site leads up from Embankment Place onto a paved area to the south-east of the theatre. The garden contains a number of other memorials and statues (see Cooper 1928).

The Whitehall Garden, a rectangular area c 150m by c 50m, has recently (1997) been relaid in keeping with the design recorded on the OS 2nd edition map of 1895. The garden is entered from one of two entrances from Northumberland Avenue to the north; access from the southern end is through decorative iron gates and up a short flight of stone steps from Horseguards Avenue. An additional entrance from the Embankment gives access to the garden opposite the statue of Bartle Frere. The garden is enclosed within decorative iron railings, replicas of the originals designed by Sir Joseph Bazalgette and illustrated in a drawing by A Waterhouse of a neighbouring building, the National Liberal Club, in 1884 (Grant Applic 1994). The original railings were removed during the Second World War and replaced in the first instance with chain-link fencing. The ground immediately inside the railings is planted with shrubberies. Tarmac and gravel paths, backed by the shrubberies, extend the whole length of the garden on both the east and west sides. Some 50m to the south of the north-west entrance, set back against the boundary railings, is a small wooden watchman's hut, similar to the one which survives in Villiers Street Garden. The garden is laid out with three circular and two oblong lawns. The circular lawns provide the setting for statues, commemorating, from north to south: James Outram (soldier and administrator, listed grade II), Bartle Frere (administrator, listed grade II), and William Tyndale (translator of the Bible, listed grade II). These lawns are decorated with cut beds planted with annual bedding plants. The rectangular lawns are edged with low shrubs and decorated with cut beds and specimen trees. An ancient catalpa, its lower limbs supported (1999) by wooden props, provides a focus on the northern lawn.

#### REFERENCES

Gardeners' Chronicle, (3 December 1870) The Gardener, (December 1870), pp 530-2 Illustrated London News, (2 June 1872) [view of the Embankment] The Builder, (27 November 1886) [Women's Fawcett Memorial] The Graphic, (22 July 1893) [Press Band Playing in the Embankment Gardens] J J Sexby, The Municipal Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces of London (1905), pp 262-89 LCC, London Parks and Open Spaces (1906), pp 54, 76-7 E Cecil, London Parks and Gardens (1907), p 132 G S Cooper, The Outdoor Monuments of London (1928) B Cherry and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: The Cities of London and Westminster (1973), pp 388, 660 Victoria Embankment Gardens, Whitehall Court, (City of Westminster Grant Application 1994) Application for Heritage Lottery Funding, (City of Westminster July 1997)

Maps J Rocque, Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark and the country near ten miles around, surveyed 1741-5, published 1746 R Horwood, Map of London, 1792-9, 2nd edition 1813 by William Faden Vulliamy, Plan for Laying Out The Late Crown Lands on the Victoria Embankment, July 1873 (London Metropolitan Archives) Bacon, Map of London, 1888 LCC, Plan of Victoria Embankment, 1902 (London Metropolitan Archives)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1919 OS 60" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1867 2nd edition published 1894

Archival items Sir J Bazalgette, Pamphlet No 1, Volume Miscellanea, 1868 (Metropolitan Archives) Metropolitan Board of Works, Pamphlet No 15, Volume Miscellanea, 1870 (Metropolitan Archives)

Description written: February 1999 Amended: October 2001 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: January 2002

## 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.