

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PECKHAM RYE PARK

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Name:	PECKHAM RYE PARK
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Southwark (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.456477 Longitude: -0.059910451 National Grid Reference: TQ 34890 74840 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000825 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

A late C19 public park which retains much of its original design details and plantings.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The crowded state of the adjacent open space, Peckham Rye Common, led to a committee of local people being formed in 1888 (Peckham Rye Extension Committee) with the intention of purchasing the adjoining Homestall Farm for the purpose of enlarging the common. After two years of negotiation and fund raising, 20ha of farmland was purchased in 1890, this including c 5ha that was leased back to the former owner of Homestall Farm. The leases of a number of houses along the west boundary and in the north-west corner of the site were purchased and when the leases expired in 1907 some of the houses were pulled down and the land incorporated into the park. By 1893 the decision had been made by the LCC to create a new park rather than extend the existing common and £882 was spent on iron railings to enclose the park. Old buildings including cottages, a pottery, and outbuildings were removed but care was taken to preserve the best of the existing trees and shrubs including an avenue of old elms which ran across part of the site.

The park's design was overseen by the Parks Committee of the newly created London County Council, under the guidance of Lieutenant-Colonel J J Sexby, its first chief officer, and was laid out in a grid-like pattern of compartments and paths following existing field boundaries and woodland belts. A major part of the site was set aside for sports. Features within the compartments included an American Garden, an Arboretum, and an Old English Garden. The park was officially opened to the public on Whit Monday, 14 May 1894.

By 1907 the leaseholder of the farm had died, and by 1914 the remaining farm buildings had been demolished and the land released into the park.

During the Second World War c 4ha of the park was used for food production, and the original railings were removed as part of the war effort. During the 1940s three whalebone arches were positioned to form an archway over the path between the northern end of the lake and the north entrance into the park; these had been removed by c 1950.

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In 1994 the park celebrated its centenary, the layout having changed very little in that time, and it continues (1998) to be maintained as a public open space. In 1998 a management plan was prepared for the owners, the London Borough of Southwark, setting out proposals for the restoration and enhancement of Peckham Rye Park (LUC 1998).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Peckham Rye Park is situated in south-east London, directly to the south of Peckham Rye Common. The town of Peckham lies 2km to the north, Nunhead Cemetery (qv) c 500m to the north-east, and Dulwich village and Dulwich Park (qv) 1.5km to the south-west.

The 20ha park is divided from Peckham Rye Common to the north by Strakers Road and is bounded to the north-east, east, and west by Peckham Rye (designated B238 to the west), to the south-east by Homestall Road, and to the south by Colyton Road. The site is enclosed by iron railings, replaced mid C20 after the originals were removed during the Second World War, and by belts of trees along the east, south, and west boundaries. The ground rises slightly from west to east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the park was created c 1950 when residential properties in the north-west corner were removed and an imposing entrance with stone piers and decorative iron gates was formed. A number of other gateways, most of which date from 1894, provide access around the site.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS. From the main entrance a tarmac path leads to the oval created c 1950 when the new entrance was made. The oval, a large elliptical lawn, is laid out in season with displays of carpet bedding. Included in the design are two raised crescent-shape flower beds, made to represent crowns and created to commemorate King George VI and the ascension of Queen Elizabeth II to the throne. To the north of the oval the path divides: one branch encircles the oval then continues south-east between open grass and woodland; the second path runs east, with the rockery to the north and the disused depot, the site of C20 greenhouses, to the south. The rockery follows the north boundary of the park and once provided visitors with a display of alpine plants. The rockery, which had become very overgrown, is now (1998) being partially restored. East of the rockery is the stream and pond garden, the source of water for the stream, which meanders through the grounds to the lake, being formerly a rockwork fountain. Plans are currently (1998) in hand to restore the fountain. After 100m the path curves to the south and divides to become a grid of paths leading to a variety of gardens. To the south is the Japanese Garden, thought to have been constructed between 1910 and 1914 (LUC 1998) as a result of numerous gifts presented to London by the Japanese city of Tokyo. The main feature is a water garden with an arched stone bridge. The wooden shelter, originally part of the British/Japanese Festival of 1910, which was added in 1914, survives, but much of the original planting of bamboo and other exotics has gone. To the east of the Japanese Garden is the Bowling Green, established in 1911, the early C19 wooden pavilion having been destroyed in the early 1990s. To the south of the Bowling Green is the Sexby Garden (formerly known as the Old English Garden). Separating the two is the Garden for the Blind, a small paved linear garden running east/west, made in the 1950s and planted with a variety of scented plants. The Sexby Garden was laid out as an original feature of the park and named after Lt Col J J Sexby, London County Council's first Chief Officer of Parks, who was responsible for its design. A pergola built of stone and wood runs the length (north/south) of the compartment, above paved paths which lead to a central pond. Radiating from the paved path encircling the pond, which at one time held goldfish and a fountain, are a number of stone-paved paths. The paths were originally decorated with arbours and other features but these have been removed and the garden presents a more open aspect than originally intended. To the south of the Sexby Garden is the Broad Walk and the Arboretum. The Broad Walk, which runs east/west for c 150m between the Sexby Garden and the Arboretum, was a public footpath before the park was created. An avenue of elms shown at the west end of the footpath on the OS 1st edition map of 1870 was described in 1907 as forming a delightful archway overhead (Cecil 1907). Only elm suckers remain of the avenue and a new line of trees has been planted down the central aisle. To the south of the Broad Walk is the Arboretum, a feature created with the park; much of the diverse collection of trees survives. A picnic area and 'Trim [fitness] Trail' are late C20 additions to the area.

To the east of the Sexby Garden lies the American Garden. An original feature of the park, the Garden consists of formally laid out rhododendron and azalea beds on a rectangular lawn with rose and other plant beds. Specimen trees are planted informally around the area. North-east of the American Garden is the lake. Enclosed by the original railings and fed by a small tributary of the River Peck, the oval lake (c 1ha) is set in a hollow and was constructed for the park. The lake is well screened by shrubs

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and trees and there is a small island near the centre. An asphalt path which runs around the lake divides in the middle of the north side. To the north the path continues for c 20m to a gate in the railings onto Peckham Rye Common; to the west the path leads to the pond and stream garden; and to the east it follows the northern boundary fence for c 150m along a woodland walk described by Sexby as 'a veritable lovers' walk' (Sexby 1898), to an entrance at the north end of Homestall Road. Between the woodland walk and the lake is a stream, the only open section of the River Peck which survives, although heavily silted.

PARK The pleasure grounds are surrounded to the east, south, and west by open grassland. Along the western boundary with Peckham Rye are the remnants of a lime avenue. The path which runs between the park and the west side of the pleasure grounds was once edged with an impressive bedding display, and what is now (1998) an overgrown ornamental shrubbery. The grassland to the east is used for sports, and the space between it and the woodland walk to the north is given over to a playground (c 1916), tennis courts, and an adventure play area (c 1960), the latter within a high wire fence.

REFERENCES

E Walford, *London Old and New* (nd), p 290 J J Sexby, *The Municipal Parks of London* (1898), pp 176-89 E Cecil, *London Parks and Gardens* (1907), pp 74-5 LCC, *London Parks and Open Spaces* (1923), pp 62-4 Peckham Rye Park, *Restoration and Management Plan*, (Land Use Consultants 1998)

Maps OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1873 2nd edition published 1896-7 3rd edition published 1916 1933 edition
Description written: September 1998 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: February 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.