

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SOUTHWARK PARK

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

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Name:	SOUTHWARK PARK
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Southwark (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.493330 Longitude: -0.054009966 National Grid Reference: TQ 35191 78949 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000838 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

A C19 public park laid out between 1865 and 1869 for the Metropolitan Board of Works.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1856 a deputation from Rotherhithe Vestry called upon the Metropolitan Board of Works to establish a public park in the area, and the Board finally approved a proposal in 1863. The Southwark Park Bill was read in Parliament and received Royal Assent in 1864. A loan was arranged with the Bank of England in 1865 and, in the same year, land in the Borough of Rotherhithe previously used for market gardens was purchased from Sir William Gomm by the Metropolitan Board of Works for £56,200. Other land, previously factories and houses, was also purchased using compulsory powers. In 1867 work began on the formation and laying out of the park. A map (undated) prepared for the Metropolitan Board of Works by the superintendent architect, Mr Vulliamy, was the basis of the plan and report prepared in 1868 by Alexander McKenzie (designer of both Alexandra Park and Finsbury Park qqv). Southwark Park opened to the public on 9 June 1869. It had originally been intended that part of the site was to be designated as building plots, but this was opposed by the Vestry of Bermondsey who suggested that they would be better used as children's play areas. Opposition to building within the park continued until 1872 when the Metropolitan Board of Works finally voted not to allow any building or leasing of lands within Southwark Park.

By 1885 substantial changes to the layout of the park had been recorded (plan, LMA), the most notable being the construction of a new lake, the erection of the bandstand (purchased from the exhibition grounds at South Kensington), and the reduction in width of the redundant perimeter carriage drives which had been built to provide access to the proposed houses. Further facilities were added during the first half of the C20 including the swimming bath (Lido) in 1923 and the English Rose Garden in 1934. Changes continued after the Second World War; by 1947 the bandstand had been removed and by 1951 part of the lake had been annexed as a paddling pool. A sports complex with a synthetic running track was constructed to the south-east of the site c 1980. The Lido was closed in 1985 and in 1990 a small portion of the park was lost during the construction of a roundabout and road improvements to the north-east.

DESCRIPTION

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LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The c 26ha site of Southwark Park lies in the heavily populated London Borough of Southwark, close to the River Thames and what was once the busy dockland community of Rotherhithe and Surrey Docks. The park is bounded to the north by Jamaica Road, with the entrance to the Rotherhithe Tunnel 100m to the east; to the west and south by residential buildings on Southwark Park Road (formerly Jamaica Level) and Abbeyfield Road; to the south-east by Hawkstone Road (formerly New Road); to the east by Lower Road; and to the north-east by residential and commercial developments.

The site is divided from west to east by the one remaining carriage drive which links Southwark Park Road on the west to Gomm Road on the east. The area to the south is level ground sloping slightly down to the south; the ground to the north is undulating with low mounds to the north-west made from spoil removed during the construction of the nearby Rotherhithe Tunnel.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance is from Southwark Park Road through what was named on the OS map of 1913 as Jamaica Gate. The layout of the main entrance gates was altered in 1896 as a result of subsidence, and the new line of gates with iron railings and kerb is shown on Sexby's map of 1904. There are five subsidiary entrances: two, Christ Church Gate and Paradise Gate, from Jamaica Road to the north; Gomm Gate from Gomm Road to the east; China Hall Gate from Lower Road to the south-east; and Hawkstone Road Gate from Hawkstone Road in the south.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS It was originally intended that a wide carriage drive should encircle the entire park with a network of footpaths linking up with it. Blocks of land were to be left between the carriage drive and the site boundary for the purpose of building. By 1896 when the proposed plans for development had been shelved, the perimeter carriage drive had been reduced in width and only the stretch from Jamaica Gate retained the width illustrated on the OS 1st edition map of 1870. This carriage drive effectively divides the site into two, the drive being separated from the park by iron railings.

The northern, smaller part of the site is approached from the western perimeter path 100m north-east of Jamaica Gate. This path follows the route of the former perimeter carriage drive past, on the west side, the recreation ground made on land that was originally (c 1864) intended for building. Some 50m to the east a small path runs to the bowling green which is set within an original oval space, now surrounded by an hawthorn hedge. A pavilion for the bowling green was erected in 1906 but was destroyed and replaced in the late C20. The bowling club was established c 1913. The path encircles the bowling green, joining up with the east 'carriage drive' to the south and leading c 75m north past the drinking fountain to the site of the bandstand. The drinking fountain was erected by public subscription in 1884 and dedicated to the life and labours of Jabez West, an active member of the Temperance Society. In 1883, after receiving requests from local inhabitants, the Metropolitan Board of Works agreed to erect a bandstand in the park and one was moved to Southwark Park from the Great Exhibition in South Kensington. The line of the path that curved around the original oval space where the bandstand was erected was recorded on the OS map of 1870 and is still recognisable by regularly spaced plane trees. The 1913 OS map shows the area less regular in shape and without the perimeter path. The bandstand was removed during the Second World War but the tarmacked area retains the shape much as shown in 1913. A number of paths lead from the site of the bandstand. One to the west links up with the western perimeter path, the path to the north-west leads 100m to Christ Church Gate, the path to the north-east leads 150m to Paradise Gate which was resited a few metres to the south when Jamaica Road was widened in 1975, and two paths to the east link up with the eastern perimeter path.

The eastern perimeter path, like the other paths in the park, is lined with plane trees and from Paradise Gate follows the park boundary for c 100m before curving slightly to the south-west, eventually linking with the path to the north of the bowling green where it curves south-east to run parallel to the eastern boundary, alongside the children's playground which was formerly (1885) the site of the gymnasium. North of Gomm Gate, at the junction of the eastern perimeter path and the carriage drive is the Ranger Centre (formally opened July 1997) which houses an information service and toilet facilities.

Access to the southern parkland from Jamaica Gate is by the western perimeter path which continues south along the route of the redundant carriageway. After c 50m a path branches to the east and leads to the Ada Salter Garden. A rose garden, which replaced the original (1864) island bedding, was opened to the public in 1936 by a Dr Salter who wanted to create a garden where park users could sit in peace and quiet. It was later (1942) dedicated to the memory of his wife, Ada. A two-tier paved

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semicircle with pergolas, formal rose beds, and seats, it faces to the south, overlooking the northerly remains of the lake with additional access from a serpentine path which starts from the south side of the carriage drive to the west of Gomm Gate.

The Metropolitan Board of Works agreed to construct a lake within the park in 1884 and a detailed map made by them in 1885 shows the serpentine shape with three irregular-shaped islands. An article in *Gardeners' Chronicle* for 25 July 1885 describes the lake as having a concrete basin well puddled with clay and neatly finished around the margin with a coping of blue rounded bricks.

In 1908 the lake was extended to the south to allow room for boating, an additional island and a boathouse being included in the extension (OS 1913). By 1951 a small part of the lake on the south-east side had been annexed as a paddling pool, but by 1961 the boathouse had been removed and a large portion of the southern part of the lake, including the paddling pool, had been filled in and grassed over, reducing it to approximately one third of its former extent. The lake is currently (1997) enclosed within iron railings and the remaining island overgrown.

Between the lake and eastern perimeter path is the open-air swimming bath (Lido), built as an unemployment relief scheme and opened in 1923. The Lido was closed c 1985 and is now (1997) derelict. A gallery and tea room which was opened in a building at the southern end of the Lido is also closed.

The serpentine path to the west of the Lido and the eastern perimeter path link up with a path running from south-west to north-east to the north of the large expanse of grass known as The Oval. Originally 9 acres (3.75ha) in extent, The Oval, like its namesake at Kennington, was a popular place for cricket and also athletics training and football. It was encircled with a tarmacked path which was lined, on the outside, with trees. The Oval was reduced in size when a new sports ground was constructed to the south-east in 1980. This includes floodlights, an all-weather running track, and football pitches. To the east of the new sports ground the eastern perimeter path leads to China Hall Gate. The western perimeter path continues east, south of The Oval, and terminates at Hawkstone Gate.

REFERENCES

Gardeners' Chronicle, (25 July 1885) J J Sexby, *The Municipal Parks and Gardens of London* (1898), pp 190-7 E Cecil, *London Parks and Garden* (1907), pp 179-81 LCC, *London Parks and Open Spaces* (1924) B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 2 South* (1983), p 603 F Brockway, *Bermondsey Storey: the life of Alfred Salter* (1949)

Maps (?) Mr Vulliamy, Metropolitan Board of Works plan of Southwark Park (London Metropolitan Archives) Detailed plan of Southwark Park, 1885 (MBW2496), (London Metropolitan Archives) Plan of Southwark Park signed by J J Sexby, (LCC/MiscP/214), (London Metropolitan Archives)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1870 2nd edition published 1896 3rd edition published 1913

Archival items Minutes of Metropolitan Board of Works, 1856(85 (London Metropolitan Archives)

Description written: August 1997 Amended: October 2001 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: November 2001

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.