

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ISLAND GARDENS

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Name:	ISLAND GARDENS
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Tower Hamlets (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
National park:	N/A
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.487000 Longitude: -0.0080571495 National Grid Reference: TQ 38400 78331 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000815 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Public gardens, opened 1895, which commemorate the spot which Sir Christopher Wren chose in c 1680 as having the best view of Greenwich Hospital.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The communication point between Greenwich and the Isle of Dogs has been an important one for at least four hundred years. There was a ferry between these points throughout the C17 and C18, Pepys recording several trips on it in his diaries. The river wall, which existed when Island Gardens were laid out, was built after a great breach in the previous wall in 1660, which caused extensive flooding in the area.

Prior to 1830 the Isle of Dogs was sparsely inhabited, as shown on the plan of London by C & J Greenwood, published 1827, and by the mid C19 the Island Gardens site was a reed ground. By the late C19 most of the riverside areas of the Isle of Dogs had been developed for wharfage and commercial premises; the land on which Island Gardens was laid out was almost the only portion which was not developed. The freehold was owned by the trustees of Lady Margaret Charteris, let to the Admiralty, who had sub-let the land to the Cubitt trustees. The condition of the lease was that no building, except villa residences, could be built without consent. One villa (Osborne House) and the foundations for a second were prepared, but it was found that there was no market for such houses in the locality.

It had been proposed from the 1880s to acquire the ground as open space, which was much needed for the local population, and one of the early proposals involved a recreation ground (to be laid out by the Earl of Meath on behalf of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association) attached to the landing stage for a free ferry. This proposal never materialised but negotiations were reopened in 1889. It took four years to negotiate the purchase of the site with the three parties who had rights over it, but the freehold rights were finally bought for £8700, of which £3500 came from the Poplar District Board of Works.

The cost of laying out the gardens was £2000 and they were opened to the public on 3 August 1895. The Greenwich Footway Tunnel was opened in 1902 as an alternative to the free ferry proposal. Since the mid C20 there has been a general deterioration

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of the fabric and the loss of certain features. Island Gardens were refurbished in 1998 and are now maintained by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Island Gardens, c 1ha, is located at the southern tip of the Isle of Dogs, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The rectangular site is bounded by the River Thames to the south, by Saunders Ness Road to the north, by a housing development (Luralda Gardens) to the east, and by a community centre (Calders Wharf) to the west. The gardens are mostly bounded by metal park fencing, with some stretches of brick wall or wooden fencing. They are laid out on level ground, with a slight slope south towards the river.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are several entrances to the gardens from the north, off Saunders Ness Road, and a further entrance in the south-east corner from the riverside walkway adjacent to Luralda Gardens. These are all simple entrances through iron gates. The main entrance to the gardens is in the north-west corner, with a new (1998) entrance gate. A stable and outbuildings which were adjacent to the entrance in the north-east corner were demolished as part of the 1998 renewal works; these have been replaced by a walled parks yard.

The circular brick entrance (listed grade II) to the Greenwich Footway Tunnel, built in 1902, is located on the south-west edge of Island Gardens.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Walks, paved with golden macadam (originally gravel), run along the four sides of the gardens. The path along the south side is straight, the path to the north serpentine and those to the west and east curve gently. The 200m riverside walk to the south has mature plane trees lining its north side and the boundary fence on the south side. There are outstanding views from this walk up, down, and especially across the Thames to the Royal Naval College (Greenwich Hospital), the National Maritime Museum, the Queen's House, and the Cutty Sark. The walk on the north side of the gardens is lined by mature plane trees and backed to the south-east and north by a perimeter shrubbery.

The central areas of the gardens are lawn with scattered mature plane trees and other trees. A semicircular path formerly linked the two entrances on the north side and led to the centre of the gardens. This central path, and the two existing paths along the north and south sides, were all linked by a cross-path, running from the northern boundary down to the southern boundary. At the centre of the gardens, where the central path joined the cross-path there was a circular paved area, on which stood a late C19 bandstand, surrounded by a rockery. The cross-path, central path, bandstand, and rockery no longer exist and the area was grassed over in the late C20.

On the east side of the gardens there are bedding displays on the lawns, on the site of a bowling green (removed late C20), and in the south-east corner is the site of a gymnasium which stood in the corner of the park in the late C19. In the north-west corner there is a late C20 brick building, Island Gardens Cafe, with an adjacent paved terrace.

REFERENCES

J J Sexby, *The Municipal Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces of London* (1898), pp 447-55 E Cecil, *London Parks and Gardens* (1907), pp 133-4 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London except Westminster* (1952), p 320

Maps John Rocque, *Plan of London, 1762-6* C & J Greenwood, *Map of London from an Actual Survey, 1827* B R Davies, *London and its Environs, 1841* Stanford's Library Map of London and its Suburbs, 1862 Stanford's Library Map of London and its Suburbs, 1877

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1868 2nd edition published 1894 3rd edition published 1913

Description written: March 1998 Amended: February 2000 Register Inspector: CB Edited: November 2003

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.