

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

GREENWICH PARK

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Name:	GREENWICH PARK
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Greenwich (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.477286 Longitude: 0.0010673966 National Grid Reference: TQ 39063 77268 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000174 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

A Royal park with its origins in the C15 and formally laid out in the 1660s. At least part of the mid C17 restoration scheme was associated with the French designer Andre le Nôtre. Home of the Royal Observatory from 1676 to 1953 the park, along with neighbouring properties and part of the town centre, is included on UNESCO's list of World Heritage sites.

NOTE This entry is a summary. Because of the complexity of this site, the standard Register entry format would convey neither an adequate description nor a satisfactory account of the development of the landscape. The user is advised to consult the references given below for more detailed accounts. Many Listed Buildings exist within the site, not all of which have been here referred to. Descriptions of these are to be found in the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT Roman and Anglo-Saxon occupation of the Greenwich Park area is evident from the important Roman road, Watling Street, which ran just to the south-west of the park, the site of a Roman temple within the park, and an Anglo-Saxon barrow cemetery along its western side. Grenevic or Gronovic manor is listed among the possessions of King Alfred (AD 871-900) but in AD 918 the manor passed to the Abbey of St Peter's at Ghent. The manor reverted to Crown lands in 1414. In 1433 Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester was granted a licence to empark 80ha of land to make a park at Greenwich. On the site later occupied by the Royal Observatory, he built a tower, known as Mirefleur and later as Greenwich Castle. Under the Tudors Greenwich was the pre-eminent Royal palace, having been rebuilt in the early C16 by Henry VII and later by Henry VIII, who was born there. James I gave Greenwich to his Queen, Anne of Denmark, in 1613 and in 1616 Inigo Jones was invited to build a new house for her. He chose the site of an existing 'Lodge Gate' in the wall running along the south side of the Deptford to Woolwich Road. Queen Anne died before the house (Queen's House) was completed. In 1629 Charles I gave Queen's House to his Queen, Henrietta Maria, and Inigo Jones resumed work. The 1660s saw the character of the park transformed from a medieval heath-land hunting park into a formal landscape with a grand garden and avenues. Charles II completed Queen's House and commissioned Sir William Boreman to supervise improvements to the park.

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The design reflected the French influence to which Charles II was exposed while in exile. Although others were largely responsible for the formal layout of Greenwich Park, at least part of the restoration scheme is associated with the French designer Andre le Nôtre (1613-1700) who worked on the gardens of Louis XIV at Versailles.

When Charles II lost interest in Greenwich and concentrated his attentions on Hampton Court, he appointed Britain's first Astronomer Royal and engaged Sir Christopher Wren to design an observatory. After this period of activity little royal interest was taken in the park but it became increasingly popular with the public and pensioners from the adjoining naval hospital.

In the C19 Greenwich Park experienced intensified public use, encroachments on its boundaries, enclosures within the park and other threats which prompted organised protests from local residents. A tree survey in 1812 found that of the 2,970 trees standing only twenty were considered to be in a growing state, with the remainder at maturity, decaying or decayed, and there were considerable tree losses in the later part of the century. Conversely, many of the open spaces were infilled with plantings and there was an increase in ornamental species. In 1853 paths were levelled and gravelled, and by the end of the century new features included a bandstand, a refreshment chalet, two drinking fountains, public lavatories, a lake, flower gardens, and shrubberies. Vehicular traffic was first admitted to the park in 1875, restricted to the Blackheath Avenue and The Avenue. The C20 saw a gradual improvement of facilities for the public and at the same time an increasing awareness of the historic importance of the site. In the 1930s Queen's House became the National Maritime Museum.

During the Second World War anti-aircraft defences were constructed in the park to combat aerial assault and at least three air-raid shelters were built, with barrage balloons moored nearby. Allotments established during the 1940s continued in use until at least 1949.

Since the Second World War the park has undergone further changes, including the loss in the 1970s of many trees due to Dutch Elm Disease. According to the 1812 tree survey, nearly half the trees were elm, but by 1976 only 44 remained and all of these had gone by 1999. In 1993 the Royal Parks Agency was established and given executive responsibility for managing and policing the Royal Parks, including Greenwich. In 1997 the whole park, along with neighbouring properties and part of the town centre, was inscribed onto UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites.

Greenwich Park is now a public open space and continues to be managed by the Royal Parks Agency.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION Greenwich Park is located in urban south-east London to the south of the River Thames, which at this point curves around the old dockland area of Millwall. Eltham Palace lies c 4.5km to the east, Blackheath c 1km to the south, and Deptford town c 1.5km to the west. The c 74ha site has a very distinct topography and is composed of two sharply contrasting sections. To the north is the low-lying flood plain, to the south, the harder Blackheath pebble beds, which are more resistant to erosion, form the higher ground. The two are separated by a 25m high ridge running from east to west across the park which marks the edge of the Blackheath pebble beds. The Prime Meridian bisects the site (north/south).

The park is bounded by the National Maritime Museum and Park Vista to the north-west, Maze Hill rising up steeply to the south-east which provides the north-east boundary, and Charlton Way (B210), which marks the boundary to the south-east. The south-west boundary is formed by Croom's Hill (to the north-west) and Chesterfield Walk (to the south-east). Much of the park is enclosed within a red-brick wall which James I had built to replace the park fence. Originally c 3.5m high and c 3km long, the wall, including piers with stone cappings and dressed and moulded angles, is listed Grade II. Parts have been repaired or rebuilt at various later dates and at least one quarter of the boundary is defined by iron railings.

The main entrance to Greenwich Park is to the south, from Charlton Way via Blackheath Gate. The plan made to accompany engravings by Francis Place to celebrate the opening of the Royal Observatory (Pepys' Plan, 1675-80) shows a gate in this position, and it appears to have been the main entrance since that time. Blackheath Gate leads north-west onto Blackheath Avenue, a wide (c 15m), 600m long asphalt drive lined with double rows of horse chestnut trees. That avenue, the main axis of the site, was set out in 1660 and is aligned directly on the Queen's House. Four of the original C17 sweet chestnut trees, part of the outer line of Blackheath Avenue, survive towards the north-west end. The present trees were partly planted in 1820, and supplemented from 1930 onwards. Blackheath Avenue terminates at the bronze statue of General Wolfe (listed Grade II) with the buildings of the Royal Observatory (listed Grade I and II) situated to the west of the statue. Numerous other gates provide

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entrances around the site, the most notable being the early C19 St Mary's Gate (listed Grade II) to the north-west. St Mary's Lodge (1807-8, listed Grade II), built in the style of a cottage orné, is c 25m to the south-west of the Gate.

The site consists mainly of open parkland, the primary focus of which is the south-east/north-west axis from the Blackheath Gate along Blackheath Avenue down to the buildings of the National Maritime Museum (most of which is listed Grade I). Situated on the north-west boundary of the park, the principal building of this complex is the Queen's House. The building, an Italianate villa, was begun by Inigo Jones in 1616 but was not completed until after the Restoration. A grand formal garden in the French style was laid out from the autumn of 1661 around the Queen's House, with a great parterre extending south from the House on level ground. The main axis south-east from the Queen's House was then carried up the escarpment onto the Blackheath plateau via terraces, the Giant Steps (see below), which joined the upper and lower parts of the park. On the upper, Blackheath plateau, were double avenues of elms radiating off a double half-circle of the same 'a great patte d'oie' (a goose's foot in French, the term meaning three or five avenues radiating from a single point).

The area of the parterre slopes gently up to the south-east and is framed on three sides by grassed banks with formal tree planting to the east and west. To the north it is open to the Queen's House. Around the east and west sides of the parterre, the banks formed raised or terrace walks originally lined by multiple rows of English elms. The terrace walks survive as broad, low, earthworks, with carefully-cut inner angles to the south-west and south-east. They contain the area of the levelled ground intended for the parterre, which is extensive: some 3.4ha. A plan in Andre le Nôtre's hand and dated by him to 1666 (Bold 2000, 13) shows his detailed proposals for basins, fountain, flower beds and an arcaded grotto which were probably never realised. The terrace at the south end would have supported an arcade shown in Le Nôtre's plan.

In the winter of 1661/2 Sir William Boreman had approval to form a flight of twelve 40-yard wide grass terraces or Ascents, later the Giant Steps, to be flanked by Scots pines brought from Scotland by the Duke of Albemarle. Each step of the ascents comprised a sloping riser and a very gently sloping tread; engravings by Francis Place of about 1676-80 show that each step had a narrow central ramp to ease pedestrian access. The original twelve ascents or steps have been considerably eroded or disturbed. Altogether only three treads and four risers remain as earthworks. The parterre and giant steps is an inter-related pair of garden earthworks forming the core of one of the earliest great formal gardens in the French style created at the Restoration for the Crown: landscaping used as affirmation of the Restoration of the monarchy, and of Charles's strong links with the supportive French court. As well as forming part of the necessary refurbishment of royal properties after the depredations of the Commonwealth, it represented, dramatically and in monumental form, the King's identification with the French court which had sheltered him. This is therefore a landscape feature of outstanding special interest.

The northern end of the Jubilee Avenue runs along the top of the western bank of the parterre. Subsequent additions of criss-cross paths intrude into what is essentially a formal area. During the mid 1940s, 'Dig for Victory' allotments were concentrated in this area.

The parkland is crossed by numerous paths many of which, like the Blackheath Avenue, originate from the C17 layout. Occasional veteran sweet chestnut trees survive from this period. These are especially noticeable to the south and include those along the south end of Bower Avenue, which runs north from Blackheath Gate, and the south-west end of Great Cross Avenue, which crosses Blackheath Avenue c 400m north-west of the Gate. Jubilee Avenue (2009) provides a direct link between the Royal Observatory and the National Maritime Museum.

Level ground which extends either side of Blackheath Avenue, and which is bordered to the north-west by the Great Cross Avenue, includes a number of separate areas which have been developed from the C19 onwards. They include to the east, set between the south-east boundary of the park and the C17 Bower Avenue, the C19 Flower Garden (c 6ha) with a small (c 0.5ha) serpentine lake, and the early C20 deer enclosure (c 3ha). These were made on the site of the C17 Great Wilderness, a formal, coppiced bosquet (that is, a grove cut through with walks). In the south-east corner of the park is a war memorial c 1920 (listed Grade II) which commemorates residents of the borough who lost their lives in both world wars.

To the south-west of Blackheath Avenue are, from south to north, the Ranger's Field (c 4ha), the Rose Garden (c 1ha), and the C20 reservoir (c 1ha). The Ranger's Field in the south corner of the park is now (2009) used for sports. Formerly (from 1660) the area was the site of the Little Wilderness with four bosquets and a diagonal avenue, matching Bower Avenue, leading

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to the north. Enclosed in 1806, the area was restored to public access in 1897 and since 1907 has been used as a sports field. The Ranger's Field retains as peripheral features the Dell and shrubberies from a C19 American Garden. To the north of the Ranger's Field and to the east of neighbouring Ranger's House (listed Grade I), is the Rose Garden. Initially planted in c 1960, this small garden was replanned, enlarged, and enclosed in c 1993. To the north-west of the Ranger's Field are tennis courts (c 1930), and a mid C19 reservoir (covered in by 1871). Land not taken up by these areas retains remnants of C17 plantings.

Below the escarpment, to the north of the Great Cross Avenue, the land levels out down to the low-lying flood plain. The scarps and coombs provide spectacular viewing points across the River Thames to the City of London (to the north-west), Canary Wharf (to the north-north-west), and the Millennium (O2) Dome (to the north).

To the north of the junction of Blackheath Avenue and the Great Cross Avenue is the early C20 hexagonal tea house, and c 200m to the east, on level ground between the Great Cross Avenue and Bower Avenue, is the open-sided bandstand (listed Grade II) cast by the Coalbrookdale Company in 1871. On the east side of the escarpment, between Lovers' Walk (a tarmac road which runs north-west down a coomb from the north end of Bower Avenue) and the north-east boundary wall, is the site of the Romano-British temple (scheduled monument). A nationally rare building type, the Romano-Celtic temple was sited in a prominent position near the edge of the escarpment. It has been found by excavations over a number of years to retain its main temple building, the cella with surrounding ambulatory, and its associated sacred precinct or temenos. It had tessellated flooring and painted plaster walls. It was re-built at least once, and was in use probably continuously from AD 100 to 400.

On the west side of the escarpment, at the north-west end of Blackheath Avenue, are the buildings of the Royal Observatory. Originally the site of Duke Humphrey's tower, the Observatory buildings stand on a commanding knoll. The complex includes the original observatory (Royal Observatory Flamsteed House, listed Grade I), built in 1675-6 for John Flamsteed, the first Astronomer Royal, and designed by Sir Christopher Wren. To the east a short section of wall holds a panel in which is set the 24-hour astronomical clock (listed Grade I). South of this is the Transit House (listed Grade I); the Prime Meridian (Longitude 0°) runs through the eastern part. The Great Equatorial Building (listed Grade I) was built in 1857 to house the Observatory's first large telescope. The Royal Observatory South Building (listed Grade II) was added in 1892-9, and the smaller Altazimuth Pavilion (listed Grade II) in 1898. In 1947-53 the Royal Observatory was moved to Herstmonceux in Sussex. The land around the Observatory buildings, including the steep slopes to the south-west, is enclosed by railings and planted with ornamental trees and shrubs; most of this landscaping dates from c1950. Below the escarpment to the north, the land levels out to the site of the C17 parterre and the National Maritime Museum complex. To the east of the Queen's House, in the north corner of the park is the c 2ha children's play area. Opened in 1930, the area contains a small (0.1ha) boating pool as well as play equipment. St Alfege's Vicarage (listed Grade II) with C16 origins is located to the north of the pool within the registered park.

From the Jubilee Avenue, parkland continues to the south-west boundary wall. Some 200m to the west of Jubilee Avenue the ground is bisected by the north-west end of the C17 Avenue, now (2009) a 550m long tarmac road which provides a vehicular route between St Mary's Gate to the north-west and Blackheath Avenue to the south-east. Beyond The Avenue, Croom's Hill rises to the south.

Within this area of open grassland is an Anglo-Saxon barrow cemetery of the C6-8 AD: 31 of an original 40-odd barrows remain visible as mounds (scheduled monument). The Anglo-Saxon barrow cemetery was located on high ground set back from the edge of the escarpment on a small natural rise, a typical choice of location. Some of the barrows were partially excavated in 1784 and were found to contain burials in wooden coffins. Other finds included an iron spearhead, a knife, a shield boss and evidence of textiles. There are some 1000 recorded sites of Anglo-Saxon inhumation burials in England, but only 40 or so are barrow cemeteries. Greenwich's is among the largest two or three of these and accordingly is of special significance. It may also evidence the emergence of the London region as an important one in the C6.

The area also contains post-medieval gravel workings and trackways. Henry Moore's bronze sculpture, Standing Figure (erected in 1979) which used to command a prominent place against the skyline, has since been removed. A path, the remains of a diagonal avenue which formed part of the 1660 design, crosses the area from Croom's Hill Gate on the south-west boundary, descending northwards to link up with The Avenue. Some 150m north-west of Croom's Hill Gate is the Standard Reservoir Conduit House (listed Grade II*), a small brick building of late C17 or early C18 date which provides access to part of the

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network of conduits that underlie the park. There are two other known conduit houses from this system: one outside the park, Hyde Vale Conduit House (listed Grade II and also a scheduled monument) located approximately 275m south-west of Croom's Hill Gate, and another stands in the north-east of the park at One Tree Hill (listed Grade II).

SOURCES Note: There is a wealth of published material about this site. The key references are cited below.

Aslet, C, *The Story of Greenwich* (1999) Bold, J, *Greenwich: An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital for Seamen and the Queen's House* (2000) Cherry, B and Pevsner, N, *The Buildings of England: London 2 South* (1983), pp 254-66 Rev A G L'Estrange, *The Palace and Hospital or Chronicles of Greenwich* (1886) *Gardening World*, (21 May 1898) *Gardeners' Chronicle*, (11 July 1925) Land Use Consultants, *Historical Survey of Greenwich Park*, (1986) Land Use Consultants, *Greenwich Park Management Plan prepared for the Royal Parks Agency* (1999) RCHME, *Greenwich Park, An Archaeological Survey* (1994) Struth, P and Eagles, B 'An Anglo-Saxon barrow cemetery in Greenwich Park' in Pattison, P, Field, D and Ainsworth, S (eds) *Patterns of the Past: Essays in Landscape Archaeology for Christopher Taylor*, (1999), 37-52 World Heritage Site Executive, *Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site Management Plan* (2004)

Maps Annotated by Le Nôtre, *La Regne d'Angleterre, c 1662 (MS 1605)*, (Bibliothèque de L'Institut de France, Paris) [reproduced in D Jacques and A J van der Horst, *The Gardens of William and Mary* (1988) p23] The Pepys Plan, thought to have been made to accompany the engravings by Francis Place to celebrate the opening of the Royal Observatory, 1675-80 (Greenwich Local History Library) [reproduced in D Jacques and A J van der Horst, *The Gardens of William and Mary* (1988) p22]

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

Greenwich Park is designated at Grade I for the following principal reasons: * as a Royal Park enjoyed and modified by kings, notably Henry VIII, James I and Charles II * it forms the setting for a large number of listed buildings, most importantly Inigo Jones's Queen's House (now part of the National Maritime Museum) and Christopher Wren's Flamsteed House, the original Royal Observatory * for the outstanding interest of some of its designed landscape elements such as the parterre and giant steps, an inter-related pair of garden earthworks, which form legible remains of the core of one of the earliest great formal gardens in the French style * as the setting of a scheduled Roman temple and a scheduled group of Anglo-Saxon barrows, on a ridge overlooking the River Thames * as part of the ensemble of historic features that contribute to the international significance of the maritime and royal heritage of the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site

Description written: July 1999 Amended: September 1999 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: June 2001 & March 2009 Amended: October 2009

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.