

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BATTERSEA PARK

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Name:	BATTERSEA PARK
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Wandsworth (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
National park:	N/A
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.478949 Longitude: -0.15747607 National Grid Reference: TQ 28049 77164 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000283 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

One of the earliest mid C19 public parks, much developed in the mid C20

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The creation of Battersea Park was first mooted in 1843 when the property developer Thomas Cubitt, and the local vicar, the Honourable Reverend Robert Eden, reported to Queen Victoria's Commission for Improving the Metropolis. In 1846 an Act of Parliament was passed which authorised the formation of a park on a part of Battersea Common and Battersea Fields which included the pleasure grounds of the Red House inn

A preliminary layout plan was produced by James Pennethorne in 1845, the basic principles of the design including a perimeter carriage drive, an embanked river frontage, and perimeter housing. The main development of the park took place however after 1854 under the direction of Parks Superintendent John Gibson who had worked on Victoria Park, Hackney (qv) with James Pennethorne. The park opened to the public in 1854 and was formally opened along with neighbouring Chelsea Bridge by Queen Victoria in 1858. In 1889 management of the park became the responsibility of the newly formed London County Council and under their management there was a slow change away from a park noted for its horticultural displays to one that was increasingly managed for sport. By 1919 the once-famed shrubberies were described as 'undefined and straggling', forming the boundary of the 'long-grassed, windswept plain' (Amhurst 1919).

During the First World War allotments were laid out in the park, an anti-aircraft station was set up on the croquet field, and a clothing depot on one of the cricket fields. The gravel carriage drives were damaged by heavy vehicles and after the war all the drives and paths were tarmacked.

During the Second World War 13ha were laid out as allotments and a piggery, a barrage-balloon site and an experimental radio station were introduced into the park, and the running track became an anti-aircraft gun site. A children's day nursery was built near the south boundary. By 1950 the OS plan shows some of the large beds of mixed trees and shrubs as just trees in grass. In 1951 the Festival of Britain was based on the south bank of the Thames and a 15ha site which included a large

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part of the riverside was requisitioned from Battersea Park and laid out as the Festival Gardens. Whilst it was intended as a one-off, year-long exhibition, the funfair remained a permanent attraction until it was closed in 1974. In 1966 responsibility for the management of the park passed to the GLC; plans to rejuvenate the park were drawn up and consultations started in 1979. These were finally approved in 1984. Following the abolition of the GLC in 1986 responsibility for the management of the park passed to the London Borough of Wandsworth and a management plan was completed in 1987. This was updated in 1995 (Colson Stone) and a programme of restoration and upgrading is now (1998) in progress, aided by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Battersea Park is situated on the south bank of the River Thames which, with the embankment constructed by 1877, provides the northern boundary of the site. Queenstown Road provides the boundary to the east, Prince of Wales Drive to the south, and Albert Bridge Road to the west. Clapham Common lies c 1km to the south and the Royal Hospital Chelsea (qv) c 500m to the north, on the north bank of the Thames. The rectangular level site of c 80ha is enclosed within iron railings and is divided by the Central Avenue running from east to west, and by the carriage drives, completed in 1857, which encircle the park. Much of the site not used for sports was landscaped, and this is especially noticeable in the area between the boundary railings and the carriage drives where the undulating ground slopes gently down towards the drive. A c 10ha lake dominates the southern half of the site.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance is from Queen's Circus, a major intersection to the south-east of the site. The entrance and the intersection were shown, but not named, on Pennethorne's plan dated 1845 and on the OS 1st edition map of 1865. The entrance (listed grade II) has an outer pedestrian gateway of Portland stone in the Arts and Crafts style. The wrought-iron pedestrian gates and ramped carriage gates (c 1891) have upper panels of scrolled ironwork and spear finials. The flanking wrought-iron screen walls are ramped up to the pedestrian gates. A 50m drive, guarded to the south-west by the C19 Rosary Lodge, leads from the main entrance to the carriage drive. Three similar entrances (all listed grade II) are situated around the site, all made in 1891. That to the north of the main entrance and south of Chelsea Bridge leads onto the northern carriage drive; although a lodge (Ranelagh Lodge) was proposed for the entrance it is doubtful whether it was ever built (Colson Stone 1995). In the south-west corner, at the junction of Albert Bridge Road with Prince of Wales Drive, the entrance gates are guarded by Sungate Lodge (formerly Gymnasium Lodge), while at the northern end of Albert Bridge Road the entrance is marked by West Lodge (formerly Albert Lodge). In addition there are a number of pedestrian gateways around the boundary which connect to the carriage drive, and with paths which cross the site.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The Italianate pump house (listed grade II) designed by James and William Simpson is situated to the north of the lake. Built of brown bricks in English bond with rusticated quoin strips and stucco dressings, the front, north-facing bay has 'VR/1861' set in a stone roundel above the keystone of the semicircular arched doorway. The tall, one-storey elevation is topped by a hipped slate roof and was constructed in 1861 to house the pump and steam engine employed to pump water to the lake and cascade. The machinery was disposed of when the pump house was refurbished in 1992 and since then the building has housed an exhibition on the history of the park, the upper floors providing a classroom and art galleries.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS From the main gateway the entrance drive crosses the junction of the east and south carriage drives to approach the lake. The lake was the horticultural focus of the Victorian design and lies in the lowest part of the park, surrounded to the north and west by tree-clad earth mounds which enclose the Subtropical Garden (1863). Under Gibson these gardens had a reputation for horticultural excellence which rivalled Kew. To the south the lake is enclosed by the steep mounds of the deer enclosure. Originally a path led from the main gate through the Rosary, a small garden space with formal planting beds. The Rosary is now (1998) incorporated in the enlarged deer enclosure. The serpentine outline of the lake and the circuitous path system around it (OS 1865) survive, as does the artificial rockwork and cascade made by W Pulham (1866). The rockwork on the north side of the lake has basins and ledges for the growth of alpines and other suitable plants. Water continues (1998) to flow down the cascade (renovated c 1990) into the lake. To the north of the main lake is a smaller piece of water, named as the Reservoir on the 1865 plan but from 1897 (LCC plan) called the Ladies Pond. On the north bank of the Ladies Pool, c 50m south-west of the pump house, is a Henry Moore sculpture (listed grade II). The three standing

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figures (c 1948) were erected on the site chosen by Moore c 1950. The circuit path around the lake crosses the south end of the Ladies Pond via a small stone bridge and continues north along the lakeside to the landing stage for hired boats and the cafe by H A Rowbotham (c 1939). From the cafe the lakeside path continues south along the boundary of the deer enclosure before rejoining the South Carriage Drive. The drive continues c 900m west to the Sungate Lodge entrance, passing, to the north, the children's play area (constructed late C20 on the site of the mid C19 gymnasium) and all-weather sports pitches.

At the Sungate Lodge entrance the carriage drive turns north, passing to the east the level area of sports fields with views to the now-redundant Battersea Power Station. After c 300m the drive passes the western end of the Central Avenue. The Central Avenue was an integral feature of the original layout of the park and presented a formal feature in an otherwise informal layout. Originally lined with elms and fences, the elms were gradually replaced by plane trees (from 1909) and the iron fences removed, as was the surrounding broad belt of shrubberies which would have focused views along the Avenue. In the centre of the Avenue is a bandstand constructed in 1988 to replace the C19 one. Plane trees mark the original circle around the bandstand, which was enlarged by 9m c 1900. To the south is the Bowling Green (c 1880) with, to the north, a small brick pavilion added in 1930. To the west of the Bowling Green, partially screened by the remains of a C19 shrubbery, are the buildings which house the Park Police; these occupy the site of the refreshment house shown on the LCC survey of 1897. From the Bowling Green the path continues south to a network of paths which meander around the lake.

The West Carriage Drive continues north from the Central Avenue for c 200m where it divides. The western branch leads past West Lodge to Albert Bridge Road, while the eastern branch (the North Carriage Drive) runs east, past the maintenance yard to the north. This formed a component of the original layout and was hidden within a dense block of planting in the north-west corner of the park. It was in this area that Battersea's famous subtropical plants were grown in an extensive range of glasshouses. Today (1998) only one greenhouse survives and part of the yard has been developed as a herb garden. A lesser path leads south-east from the west end of the carriage drive to join up after 400m with the Central Avenue. A winding Woodland Walk formed c 1904 in one of the existing shrubberies leads north-east from the northern end of this path, turning north around the Old English Garden before rejoining the North Carriage Drive. The Old English Garden, laid out in 1912 on the site of late C19 botanical planting, was rebuilt in 1989. The original design was generally adhered to, with a pergola at the west end, wooden arbours with climbing roses to the north, and a central pond with apsidal ends and a small fountain in the centre. The brick-paved paths are laid around beds of herbaceous plants.

The North Carriage Drive continues east, separated on the north side from the riverside embankment by an informal arrangement of trees in grass. The riverside embankment and the esplanade with views to and from the north bank of the river was an important feature of the original design of the park. The centrally placed Peace Pagoda, constructed in 1985 by the Nipponzan Myohoji Order of Japanese Buddhist monks, now dominates the riverside walk. To the south of the carriage drive, in an area of open grass between the river and the Central Avenue, are the remains of the 15ha Pleasure Grounds which formed part of the Festival of Britain in 1951. To the west the Grand Vista comprises a large area of hard paving, the Upper and Lower Terrace. Wide flights of steps lead down from the Upper Terrace, restored c 1990, to the Lower Terrace which incorporates the Fountain Lake, a large basin of water flanked by willows which continues to be a major attraction in the summer when the fountains play. The concrete amphitheatre and the Russell Page garden, which largely survive, formed the central part of the Festival site. To the east is the aviary and the children's zoo, enlarged since 1951 and refurbished in the late 1980s. To the far east of the Festival Garden, on the site of the Festival Fun Fair, c 1ha of tarmac and grass is today (1998) used as the principal events area of the park.

The North Carriage Drive, lined with mature plane trees, continues east past the Festival Gardens where it divides. One branch continues east to Chelsea Bridge Gate while the second branch turns south to become the Eastern Carriage Drive which curves south-east past the Athletics Ground. The Athletics Ground, which lies towards the eastern boundary of the park, was, until the beginning of C20, part of the area of open grassed sports grounds. It is enclosed to the north and east by the American Ground. Originally part of Gibson's arrangement of shrubberies which bordered the carriage drive, the planting of predominantly North American plants enclosed the east side of the park and covered extensive earthworks associated with the construction of the road leading to the new Chelsea Bridge. Today (1998) much of the original planting has been lost and a large area has been

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fenced off and developed as a nature reserve. The East Carriage Drive curves round to the south-west before joining up with the South Carriage Drive north-west of the main entrance.

REFERENCES

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Maps [reproduced in Colson Stone 1995] J Pennethorne, *Plan of Battersea Park, 1845 Lithographic Plan of Battersea Park, pre-1863 London County Council, Plan of Battersea Park, 1897 London County Council, Plan of Battersea Park, 1932*

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1865 1950 edition

Description written: November 1998 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.