

something of a secluded retreat, with seats sheltered by the shrubby plantations and the paths free from animal droppings. Thomas Fairchild remarked in 1722 that 'the Park at St. James's is of a large Extent, and disposed in handsome Walks of Lime-Trees and Elms, a large regular Canal, a Decoy for Ducks. And altho' it is much oppress'd with the London Smoke, as almost any of our great Squares; yet the wild Fowl, such as Ducks and Geese, are conformable to it, and breed there; and there is an agreeable Beauty in the Whole, which is wanting in many Country Places.'³

The END of the BEGINNING

By Patrick James

It was always going to be too good to last. Sooner or later the lottery dream was bound to turn sour: the pity is that it had to be quite so soon. The sub-human denizens of the Treasury and the Civil Service just couldn't resist it any longer and gradually over the next few years it would appear that the lottery millions will be channelled into Government-led schemes. This should not really come as a surprise. J.M. Keynes once noted in the 1940s 'the Treasury view has prevailed, we have persuaded ourselves that it is positively wicked for the State to spend a half-penny on non-economic purposes'.

For the small and heroic band that crusades to protect, restore and rejuvenate the capital's parks, gardens and open spaces the timing could not be more agonising. Less than three years ago bodies such as the Victorian Society and the Garden History Society were pleased that the public expressed a budding interest in these spaces. At that time many parks were considered by local authorities as at best a nuisance to be tolerated, at worst a profligate waste of land that could be better put to much better use. Suddenly amid great fanfares the *Urban Parks Programme* was launched - a massive grant programme aimed specifically at urban open space. People talked of a three-year programme and more, millions would be set aside for the people's parks paid for by the people. The politicians loved it and the media raved. The *Daily Telegraph* noted 'this is such

a creative and people-friendly initiative that conservationists might find the Urban Parks Programme too revolutionary to praise - places for people that will alter and improve the lives of those who use parks. If the idea of heritage has begun occasionally to seem stuffy and exclusive, this imaginative and worthy use of lottery funds should do an enormous amount to change that impression.'

The first announcements were made in May 1997 and there have been several since. So far more than £80 million has gone to 128 parks across the country. London has fared well, with projects in Russell Square, Gunnersbury Park, cemeteries in Kensal Rise, Highgate and Hampstead, as well as Emslie Horniman Pleasance Park in North Kensington, Well Hall Pleasance in Greenwich and St Pancras Gardens in Camden. As *The Times* said 'in its attempt to pour bounty on popular causes that benefit ordinary people the National Lottery has made a magnificent choice'.

Now just as the cause of the park and other open spaces is beginning to gain momentum that has been so desperately lacking in the past twenty years, we hear that the Heritage Lottery Fund's share of the lottery proceeds is to fall. As this article is being written there is still no guarantee that the Urban Parks Programme will run until the expiry of the Camelot licence in 2001. But if parks and open spaces now fall back to the position they held a few years ago is it fair to lay the blame at the lottery's door? I am not so sure. The lottery cannot be expected to act as fairy godmother to every deserving cause. Its resources, while large, must be put in context. HLF's annual income would fund the bureaucracy of Government for seven hours. No, the lottery's role should be seen more as a catalyst in lifting ideas off the ground and offer capital investment when no one else will. It is for others to maintain the momentum and develop and take forward the ideas. Three years ago an offer of £80 million for urban open spaces (about £10 million of which has gone to London) could not have been contemplated. The lottery should not be viewed as the saviour with a bottomless pocket that will help every historic open space in the country.

For those of us who care passionately about parks and gardens in London I believe that the hard work lies in sustaining and stimulating

3. Thomas Fairchild, *The City Gardener* (London 1722), p.11.

the interest that has been so brilliantly built up. The challenge is now to restore in people's minds the position that parks once held at the end of the nineteenth century. Parks, like the science and art museums, were intended to instruct and delight and they remain the perfect example of Victorian philanthropy at its most beneficent and least preachy. We should all be doing what we can to keep people talking about parks, and stimulate their interest.

For inspiration one should look first across the ocean at the remarkable success story of Central Park in New York, modelled on Birkenhead Park near Liverpool, the great nineteenth-century creation of Joseph Paxton. A decade ago Central Park was a den of crime and drug dealing, but it has been transformed back into what it was, one of the greatest urban open spaces in the world. Much of the praise for this transformation must go to one lady, Betsy Rogers, whose powers of persistent persuasion soon ensured that, among New Yorkers, the planting of a tree, shrub or plant in Central Park became as significant and as important as the donation of an old Master drawing to the neighbouring Metropolitan Museum of Art.

It is this sort of effort and attitude which we must all try to instil at our own local parks. Betsy Rogers was a great advocate of events in parks, making sure people feel involved, and I am certain that one way of building on the lottery's support must be to make more effort in tempting people back into their park.

One way of keeping the park in everyone's minds is to continue to celebrate it with exhibitions of all kinds, flower shows, sports and games, balloons, concerts of music, conjuring, miniature yacht races on the lake, etc. Take bedding-plants for example. These must have been the most glamorous and theatrical feature of all parks when they first appeared in the 1840s. Victorian gardens were illuminated with a dazzling array of colour and pattern, as half-hardy plants by the thousand entered the stage and were spread about in extravagant display. Much of this has gone but why could it not make a comeback?

It would not be difficult, for example, to hold a design competition for an abandoned bed or series of beds each year, perhaps one year for local schools, then art colleges, etc. The important thing would be to have a great

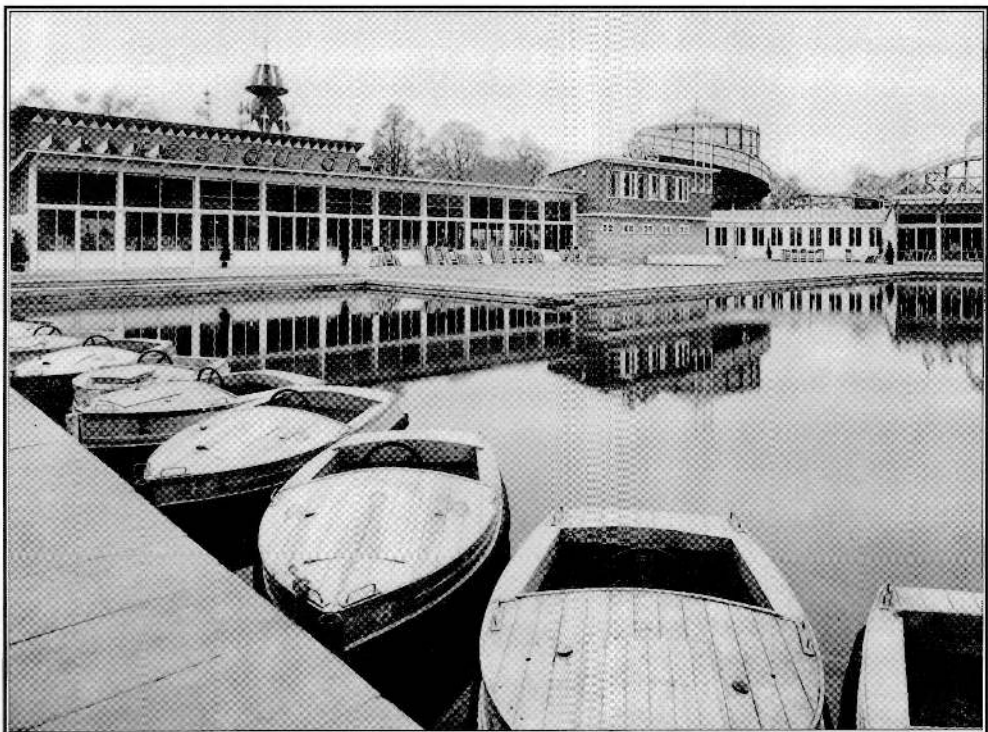
unveiling to which everyone were invited to view the new art event of the year. The gaudy colours may not appeal to everyone's taste but it could be turned into a hugely popular event.

There has got to be a more modern balance. It has been suggested that the giant screen of today is the equivalent of the bandstand one hundred years ago. Look at how many people flocked to see the *Last Night of the Proms* screened out live in Hyde Park. Why couldn't there have also been a screen in Crystal Palace, Victoria Park, Greenwich Park, and Peckham Rye? There will be much interest generated by next year's *World Cup*, and only a few people will be able to go to France to see the games. Why not beam them into the parks? The Poetry Society has recently been awarded £450,000 specifically to bring poetry to open spaces and in particular parks. I wonder how many local authorities will take an interest in this scheme or care to participate?

There is now a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for those people who really care about open spaces to seize the moment as the emphasis moves away from the car and shopping centres to the pedestrian and open spaces and parks. Take a look at a few new initiatives in London. Horse Guards Parade, facing St James's Park is now a car-free zone, what better place to put on concerts and shows right in the centre of London? Cars will soon be banished from the Great Quadrangle of Somerset House, one of the most exciting but forgotten open spaces in the capital; a similar fate awaits the cars strewn in the courtyard of the Royal Academy. The most ambitious scheme is the ridiculously-named *World Squares for All Masterplan*, Sir Norman Foster's ambitious plan to pedestrianise Trafalgar Square and Parliament Square. And this could all happen by 2000.

We must begin to think more imaginatively about events. What a pity that the *Millennium Experience* is not taking place in an existing public park. Previous exhibitions of this scale have all been tremendously successful. More than six million streamed into Kensington Gardens in 1851, and in 1951 the *Festival of Britain* received massive public appreciation from more than eight million people who visited Battersea Park and the South Bank.

The promotion of public parks and public space as Arcadias for all fits so neatly with the



3. Play equipment at Normand Park, Fulham, 1952.
(LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)
4. Restaurant and Pool at Battersea Park, 1954.
(LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)



5. A lunch-hour netball match in Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1965.
(LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

6. Horticultural classes at Battersea Park, June 1959.
(LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

communitarian ideas beloved of this Government. But it is still too early to tell whether this new drive will have gained enough impetus to make parks a public policy priority. Those of us who love the green Arcadias of London must seize this opportunity and push their value for all their worth and put into place plans to ensure their future. Britain is guilty of having abandoned its public parks in the past twenty years, now the mood is ripe for those with a reforming zeal and imaginative vision to help, in the words of Matthew Arnold, 'rekindle the warm glow of national life'. What better place to start than in the parks and gardens of the capital.

MODERNIST MENAGERIE: BIRDS EYE at WALTON-ON-THAMES

By Tess Canfield

In the summer of 1962, the famous frozen food firm of *Birds Eye Foods Ltd.* (now *Birds Eye Wall's Ltd.*) occupied one of the earliest examples of a recent innovation - the prestige head office building in a landscaped suburban setting. The post-war British frozen food industry began in 1945, in Unilever House on the Thames in London. Based on an American method of quick freezing, *Birds Eye Foods* met with rapid success, requiring a head office staff of 600 by the early 1960s.¹ In 1958 the decision was made to abandon Central London for a suburban location with excellent transportation connections. The 'sweat and turmoil of the London Underground' was particularly noted as 'an unsuitable prelude to a day of rational thought and decision'. Soon thereafter the Government began to encourage firms to relocate in order to reduce overcrowding in Central London.

Birds Eye decided to move to Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, a pleasant part of suburban London on the Southern Railway about twenty miles south-west of Waterloo Station, convenient to airports and well served by buses. The chosen site is less than five minutes' walk from the station. It had been occupied by allotment gardens.

Sir John Burnet of Burnet Tait & Partners

1. Clarence Birdseye (1898-1966), the American naturalist and founder of the frozen food industry, invented the Birdseye plate-froster in the 1920s. His innovation was inspired by a visit to the frozen wastes of Labrador where he observed Eskimos preserving their fresh meat and fish in the ice.

produced a modern building of the highest quality on a landscaped site of a little over four acres (fig. 7). Five hundred and fifty staff were accommodated in the new building, which included test kitchens for new products as well as head office functions. Clad in anodised aluminium curtain walling with fixed plate glass windows and bands of hexagonal panels in relief over a blue enamel background, the three-storey building was intended to remain *modern* when twenty years had passed. Completed in only fifteen months, it was a modular design, based on a 63 inch grid with movable partitions to allow internal flexibility of layout. Organised around two internal courtyards, it boasted air conditioning, staff restaurants, and specially designed office furniture, as well as parking for 250 cars. It is entered from the rear, leaving the street frontage uninterrupted.

The landscaped grounds and two internal courtyards were designed in collaboration with the landscape designer Philip Hicks, ARIBA. *Birds Eye* had been concerned that the large new building (318 feet long by 170 feet deep) should be considerate of its site on one of Walton's most pleasant residential streets. The major Station Road façade meets the ground in a long rectilinear pool, or 'moat', overlooked by the directors' offices (fig. 8). Tall perspex tubes filled with colourless anti-freeze - lit from below - made columnar bubble fountains which stood in the water among groups of boulders.² A tall sculpture of rising birds by John H. McCarthy terminates the north end of the pool, accented by boulders, reeds, rushes and water lilies.

Existing oaks and Scots pines to the south of the building were embellished with daffodils, bluebells, azaleas and rhododendrons. Three twenty-five foot copper beeches were planted to the west of the building. Parking areas were located beside and underneath the main entrance façade, away from the street. Covered parking spaces were separated from the internal courtyards by perforated glazed tile screens, allowing for ventilation and a filtered view into the courtyards.

Great care was taken with the design of the courtyard gardens. The east courtyard, known

2. The bubble fountains did not survive past the mid-1960s at *Birds Eye*, but similar ones exist at the Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen, standing in the pool in front of the Moorish Bazaar.