

Somerset. Benches replaced exotic wildlife, huts and ramps, and for the first time employees were encouraged to use the courtyards. Over the years piecemeal alterations did little to enhance the gardens. In 1995 Elizabeth Banks Associates was commissioned to undertake a study of the gardens and make proposals for their refurbishment, as part of a programme of repairs and improvements to the building. The Monolith Garden has been reinstated to its original design with some additional planting. There are no plans to reintroduce livestock.

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NEW LABOUR and OLD GARDENS

By The Perambulator

With the welcome dawn of the New Labour Government, now is an opportune time to remind ourselves of the social credentials of the conservation movement. Over the last thirty years, the historic environment, including historic parks and gardens, has been tarred with the now-discredited brush of *heritage*. Conservation has become associated with economic and social *status quo* and with the worst aspirations of the middle-class.

But it has not always been so. Conservation is fundamentally about the priority of public interest over private property rights, a socialist priority, as William Morris realised in founding the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings - along with six Liberal MPs on the original steering group. This (our conservation heritage) was deeply alien to the Conservative governments of the last eighteen years, with their ideology of 'lifting the burden' of public expectation on developers and owners, and indeed their scarcely disguised hostility to the notion of a public realm of debate at all. Too many conservation bodies have sought to minimise their differences with private owners, moved to the right and become too often the fawning lapdogs of privilege.

Perhaps this was shrewd political instinct, or perhaps it is an inevitable consequence of

being absorbed into the establishment; the inevitable progression from outsider to insider. Perhaps, too, there will always be new outsiders springing up - as the road lobby has done - to replace those whose success has been rewarded by such absorption.

We should recall that the foundations of the modern conservation movement were all laid by Labour governments. It was the Atlee government that was responsible for the 1947 *Town and Country Planning Act* which introduced listed building legislation and replaced a discretionary power to list, which derived from the 1944 *National Buildings Record*, with a statutory obligation. And it was the Wilson government which in 1968 introduced real teeth with *Lifted Building Consent* to replace the old *Building Preservation Orders*. In 1967 the same government was responsible for the *Civic Amenities Act* which introduced *Conservation Areas*.

Listed building and conservation area legislation remain fundamental to the conservation of the historic environment. They are based on the supposition that an owner's rights are subservient to the general good, in this case the preservation of historic buildings and areas. Such preservation was seen by those Labour governments as fundamentally of public benefit. I would guess that the 1947 *Planning Act* was born of the same spirit that envisaged the nationalisation of the land itself - an aspiration now so radical as to seem unthinkable. But that basically is where conservation is coming from.

It is deeply wrong, both of liberal critics of conservation and of right-wing conservationists, to conflate conservation of historic buildings or parks and gardens with the preservation of the unjust social conditions which produced them; wrong because it weakens and discredits conservation, cutting it off from the lifeblood of popular support and endorsement. There will always be a place for the scholarship of a minority to illuminate and guide conservation, but it has to be in the service of the public good. Understanding of those social conditions should widen, not narrow, public interest in these places and will do so if they are presented and seen as belonging to all of us. Conservation has in the past offered, and should again support, a fundamental shift from privacy to access, the throwing open of

places of privilege, constructed as they were by ordinary people, to the ordinary public. It is only in that sense that the notion that such places are 'our' or 'England's' heritage makes any sense.

Conservation is losing its way. Its amenity societies are often schizophrenic - torn between aristocratic patrons and a proper role as gadflies to the private owner; its quango, English Heritage, similarly in hock to private interest and pressed increasingly by government into acting as a commercial developer. Any conservation body worth its salt must sooner or later find itself on the other side of the fence from an angry private owner. Of course there is a place for organisations which will assist willing owners with advice and grant-aid, but in recent years this has gone too far. As a result, conservation is all too easily dismissed as a minority interest, or worse, a superficial one: Comedia's report, *Park Life* (1995), caricatured conservation of historic urban parks as no more than an unexamined interest in 'Victoriana'.

There is of course some political expediency in attempting to get conservation into the good books of New Labour. But it is also of much greater importance than that to do justice to the passionate convictions of the governments which gave us listed buildings and conservation areas in recognition of the common desire to preserve what is cherished, and to those of early conservationists such as Octavia Hill. Hill's beliefs in social justice permeated the founding of the National Trust, which later became such a bastion of aristocratic exclusivity, collecting country houses and parks (and often their occupants) rather than places of natural beauty with free access for the deserving poor. The National Trust is already making moves back towards its democratic roots, with its recent acquisition of buildings associated with the poor and middle-class - a workhouse, a suburban villa, a terraced cottage, and the council house where Paul McCartney was born - a welcome shift from a family-centred interpretation of country houses ('we had no idea that kitchens would prove so popular') and programmes such as *Operation Neptune*. But we are still waiting to see English Heritage follow suit.

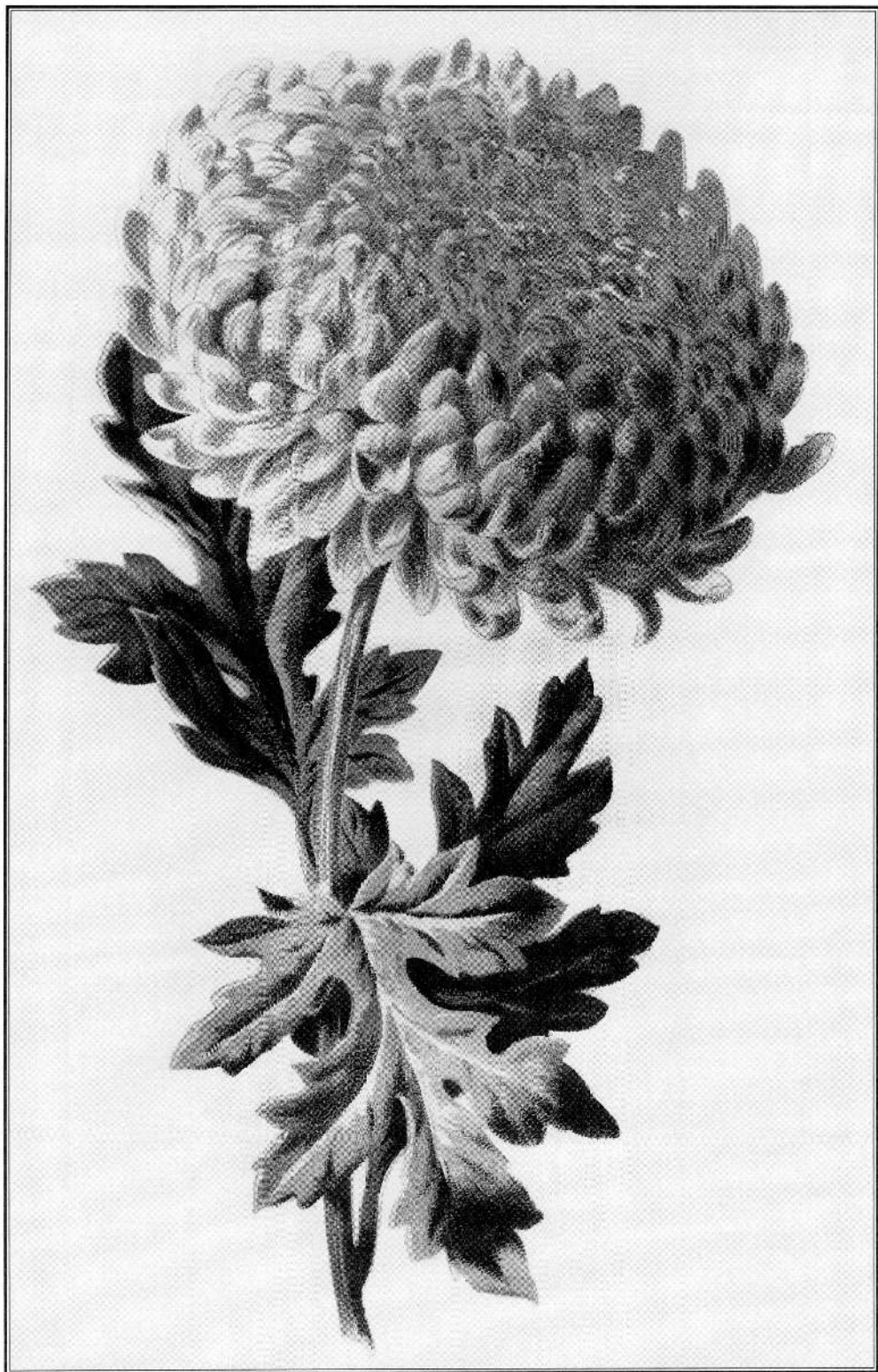
The Heritage Lottery Fund's *Urban Parks Programme* has been an enormous opportunity

to re-position an interest in conservation both as economic good sense and as populist. Park restoration schemes have a clear role in urban regeneration and tourism; good schemes are a restoration of security and beauty which the vast majority of users remember and long to see re-established.

The challenge for conservationists is to continue the HLF's reinvention of conservation as a popular cause. Not just in public parks, where free and massive access helps greatly to achieve this, but also in other, less popular, landscapes. The repair of Victorian cemeteries should, for example, command similar public support. The real achievement will be to re-establish the parks of the eighteenth-century aristocracy as genuinely national heritage, where the interpretation is justly all-inclusive rather than focused with blinding narrowness on landowners and big-name designers - and where access is cheap both in terms of tickets and public transport. Conservation of the historic environment and of open spaces should capitalise on the enormous public support for local campaigns. It should be stressing its excellent 'sustainability' credentials. It should be pushing out the envelope of what constitutes a 'historically interesting' park or garden, as the HLF has already done by grant-aiding non-registered but locally important parks and gardens - those which a London establishment might scarcely deign to recognise - as well as those safely on the *Register*. Chris Smith, in a recent speech, specifically praised this aspect of the *Urban Parks Programme's* work.

But the challenge actually should also be to New Labour - how far will you go in abandoning Tory free-market economics and towards state subsidy in order to achieve a genuine national heritage? Popularism should not lead to vulgarisation and capitalist fleecing of punters; people - think of the mass trespasses on Kinder Scout - need access to places that are special, uplifting, unique, not to a packaged heritage of shopping, glossy vacant booklets, car parks and over-priced food.

Conservation as part of the class struggle? New Labour and New Britain may not have much time for the class struggle, but conservation should at least assert its place in the camp of regeneration. Tim Smit makes an overwhelming case for the restoration of Heligan as an engine of economic renewal. But we



11. 'The Chrysanthemum' from Shirley Hibberd's *Familiar Garden Flowers* (c.1880).
(PRIVATE COLLECTION)

should go further and argue that regeneration means more than just economics: it means social regeneration, the re-establishing of a cohesive, coherent society, and conservation has a central role to play in achieving that goal.

BISMARCK in the STRAND

By Chris Sumner

Handel in the Strand we know about, and can even whistle after a fashion, but the King of Bohemia, the Winter Queen, and the Iron Chancellor in the Strand? Where can they be found together, and where in 1882 could Bismarck have been found in a marquee with Julie LaGravere and Mrs Dixon?

The answer to the second question is, at the *Temple Flower Show*, and to the first, in the Law Courts branch of *Lloyds Bank*, 222 Strand, WC2.

In 1883 the *Palsgrave Tavern*, named after the husband of Princess Elizabeth, daughter of James I, was replaced by the *Royal Courts of Justice Restaurant*, later *Lloyds Bank*, designed by Cuthbert and Wimble. The King and Queen of Bohemia are of interest to the garden historian because of their great formal garden at Heidelberg and because of the Winter Queen's protector, the Earl of Craven, creator of Hampstead Marshall, Ashdown, and Coombe Abbey. But it is not on their account that *The London Gardener* calls at the bank, nor is it on account of the bank's vestibule, a *tour-de-force* of glazed faience in sub-aqueous blues and greens, with two small wall fountains and of Persian opulence; it is to see *Bismarck* and *Mlle* (or is she *Mme*?) *LaGravere* and the no doubt very respectable *Mrs Dixon* - just three of dozens of named varieties of *Chrysanthemum* depicted on Doulton tiles around the walls and piers of the banking hall, the former restaurant dining room. Each panel of five painted and glazed tiles portrays, in natural colours against a bright blue background, a *Chrysanthemum* standing in a pot bearing the name.

The Chinese or Japanese *Chrysanthemum*, *C. indicum*, was in cultivation in Holland by the 1680s and known at the time as *Matricaria japonica maxima*. The first recorded plant in

England was, however, one with small yellow flowers grown at the Chelsea Physic Garden in 1764, which was subsequently preserved as a dried specimen by Philip Miller. A purple *Chrysanthemum*, acquired from a *M Blanchard*, a Marseilles merchant, was grown at Kew in 1790. The first public *Chrysanthemum Show* was held in Norwich in 1843, and in 1846 the *Stoke Newington Chrysanthemum Society* was founded, which in the words of Shirley Hibberd 'servedas the school of chrysanthemum culture for the whole world. During a run of about forty years the village that has become so identified with this flower was better known to the floral world than any other suburb of London.'¹ (fig. 11)

Hibberd, writing not long before his death in 1890, speaks of 'over two thousand varieties named and registered, and hundreds of societies' ...and the 1880s, the date of the *Royal Courts of Justice Restaurant* and the period of *Japonaiserie*, *Liberty's* and *Morris wallpapers*, was perhaps the decade of the *Chrysanthemum*, now, sadly, almost synonymous with floral tributes.

THE FOUNTAIN and GARDENS in NEW SQUARE, LINCOLN'S INN - A BRIEF HISTORY By Stephen Priestley

New Square, formerly known as *Serle's Court*, was laid out between 1682 and 1697. The building of the square was commenced by Henry Serle, a member of Lincoln's Inn, who entered into an agreement with the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn on 11 July 1682 to erect three ranges of buildings in Ficketts Fields (also known as Little Lincoln's Inn Fields) to be used as chambers solely for members of the Inn. The central 'waste ground' or 'open space' was to 'for ever lie open and unbuilt upon "for the prospect and recreation of the Society and members thereof"'.¹ Building work was delayed by a series of boundary disputes between Serle, the Society, and other neighbouring landowners,²

1. Shirley Hibberd, *Familiar Garden Flowers*, vol. v [u.d., c.1875], pp.105-6.

1. The agreement between Henry Serle and the Society is printed in *The Black Books of Lincoln's Inn*, vol. III, ed. W.F. Baildon (1899), pp.458-60.

2. Stone tablets commemorating the settlement of these boundaries are still affixed to several buildings in New Square.