

Is it really too late for Ingress to rise from the ashes?

The author wishes to acknowledge the *Dartford & Gravesend Building Preservation Trust* and the *Kent Gardens Trust* for their commitment to gaining recognition for the site and for their invaluable assistance in the compilation of archival material.

TOP-DOWN, BOTTOM-UP?

By The Perambulator

As the London Historic Parks & Gardens Trust (LHPGT) starts to revise its ground-breaking Inventory of Parks, Gardens, Squares, Cemeteries and Churchyards it is a good time to reconsider the loaded question of criteria: who is to define our garden heritage? who is to define historic interest?

To date, the national heritage has been whatever English Heritage (EH), or the Secretary of State for what was until recently called National Heritage said it was. Their viewpoint has been emphatically a centralist one. Heritage is defined within a national context: the 'very best' of the past as perceived from the eyrie of Fortress House in London. And with the last word in listing going to the Secretary of State, the essentially political nature of listing was and is clear.

But can these terms be defined in another way - not 'of interest in a national context' but 'of interest to the nation', or rather, to people? Of course the central authorities like EH are and should be repositories of deep and extensive specialist knowledge, but is their definition of heritage the only valid one?

In London, there are hundreds of public parks, gardens and cemeteries which are not on the national *Register*. Take any one of them - Queen's Park in Kensal Rise for example - and compare and contrast with a registered site - Regent's Park for example. Doubtless, in terms of design-history and in terms of the social history of the ruling class, the latter is more important. Both these criteria can rightly be judged from the top. But for someone living in Kensal Rise, Queen's Park can in many legitimate ways be said to be more

important: as part of the historic environment of the city, as part of the urban fabric, or as a quality environment, well-maintained, well-used and with a host of historic features which enrich the lives of all those who pass by or through the landscape.

A bandstand, for example, may not be rare or special in a national context at all, but it may well be rare, and *special*, in a local context. (fig. 10) Of course the national listings can be supplemented with local lists but, critically, such local lists are afforded significantly less consideration, considerably less protection in the planning system, than national lists. Their sites are much more vulnerable to damage or destruction: both the national and local authorities regard them as - in the end - less than indispensable.

So is there another way to define what is after all termed the *national heritage*? A hint is afforded by the Government's own advice on the historic environment, PPG15. The first paragraph asserts the importance of 'the physical survivals of our past', first in predictable, opaque terms of 'our cultural heritage and our sense of national identity', but then in rather different language:

'Their presence adds to the quality of our lives, by enhancing the familiar and cherished local scene and sustaining the sense of local distinctiveness which is so important an aspect of the character and appearance of our towns, villages and countryside.'

Cherished is an odd, brave word to find so prominently used in Government advice. It is brave because it short-circuits objectivity and the occult art of assessing historic interest as practised by English Heritage. I would like to take the word as the basis for an alternative approach to defining heritage, a *bottom-up* approach instead of the *top-down* model followed by English Heritage.

This approach has been pioneered by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) which in its *Urban Parks Programme* deliberately eschewed the distinction offered by the English Heritage *Register*. By far and away the most progressive initiative of the HLF has been to do away with the distinction made by registering or listing in its grant-aid. Instead of a tick-box approach, the HLF invites applicants to make the case for the heritage merit of any site, putting the onus on them to define what they considered to be their heritage, rather than adopt existing definitions. Interestingly, it is an innovation



10. The bandstand at Queen's Park in c.1960.
(COURTESY LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)



11. Brent Lodge Park, Hanwell, in April 1995.
(THE PERAMBULATOR)

which the HLF is now sometimes reluctant to acknowledge; as it is forced by the demand on its funds to *prioritise*, it is drifting back towards an approach of grant-aiding only what is of national importance (i.e. as defined from the top).

The HLF has also insisted that 'heritage benefit' be matched by demonstrable 'public benefit'. This, too, offers a new perspective on conservation, despite a lacklustre commitment to public access from previous grant-givers. For the HLF, there must be public support for a conservation project; it must demonstrably be what the general public wants to see conserved, rather than anything which smacks of elitist pleasure to the *cognoscenti*. But this should not be regarded as a dumbing-down; on the contrary it is empowering. The HLF has galvanised a wonderful range of non-establishment heritage projects – urban parks, windmills, steam trains – what one member of the HLF termed 'the oily rag brigade'. These were newcomers at a feast where more established interests were already seated – museums, fine art, listed buildings and registered parks and gardens. But these are things and places to which people are passionately attached, which are cherished by people, and which people now think they can conserve.

Could this be a new definition of national heritage, that which people cherish and wish to see preserved? Why should not the national heritage be determined on a bottom-up basis, making it that which people value in what has been handed on by the past to them?

This is not for a moment to deny that, to return to the original examples, Regent's Park is more important than Queen's Park in many ways: but it should also be acknowledged that in other ways, equally valid, Queen's Park is the more important, the more interesting (literally interesting: the bandstand past which people pass in thousands every day).

I would go further, prompted by the current soul-searching by conservation bodies of every size over the politically marginal position in which the historic environment now finds itself. Could that marginalisation, and the top-down nature of heritage assessment, be in some way related?

In fact and in practice, the enjoyment of the older elements in our environment is integral to daily life: we should recognise that the his-

toric environment is not an arcane matter of assessment 'in a national context' and thus a minority interest of scholars and academics. If 'our' heritage means anything – a thesis could be written on the use of the first person plural in that context over the past fifty years – it means the often-barely distinguishable elements woven into daily life, enjoyed even unconsciously on the walk or bus-ride to work or to school, or simply on the aimless pleasurable stroll which is or should be an essential part of civilised urban life – the cobbles underfoot, the Edwardian shelter actually sat in, the railings along which fingers or a stick actually run, the allotments, the gate-piers, the lamp standard, the fanlight, the shopfront, the railway buildings, the overgrown headstones, the phone box or post-box. (fig. 11)

Of course, we make special visits to places outside our daily life, to Hampton Court or to Knole, but these places have yet to be reclaimed as 'our' heritage – they are still presented as the heritage of a privileged elite, even though in terms of their making and maintenance they could justifiably be presented as the heritage of a far wider social spectrum. But until such a change in presentation, *our* heritage is surely what we value in what we see around us.

To endorse a review of definitions of 'historic interest' it is necessary to ask, what is the role of historic places? They can be treated as historical objects, researched, photographed, put into books and journals, ranked and assessed against each other – a worthwhile activity which is ideally located centrally. But this valuable perspective is essentially a bird's eye view: detached and weighing up sites in the context of the country as a whole. It could on the other hand be argued that principally these places are situated in a local environment; that the principal contribution they make is to a pedestrian's, quotidian view. Perhaps we should consider the proposal that so long as it is believed that the principal function of these places is somehow outside, removed from, the local environment, they and their conservation will remain uninteresting to politicians and popularly perceived as an irrelevance.

Is it really so inconceivable that 'our' heritage could be defined, not by centralist authorities, but by local representatives, such

as the LHPGT, the capital's host of local amenity societies and the boroughs' conservation officers, on a local basis? The argument against would be the lack of specialist knowledge – but that knowledge is about rarity in a national context which I have already argued should not be the deciding factor – and that it would be open to local prejudice, but that – reflecting as it does local urgencies – is a legitimate element in the decision-making process.

And to put an opportunist slant on it, this would be one way, in which heritage could become something genuinely national and popular, in tune with regionalisation, with ideas on local distinctiveness and *Local Agenda 21* and thus of mainstream political interest. For there is a real danger that unless it reinvents itself, heritage will continue to be edged further and further into the political backwaters.

HUMPHRY REPTON and 'HOMES fit for HEROES'

By Joyce Bellamy

The name of Repton is more likely to conjure up visions of stately homes than of suburbia and local authority housing, yet one of his landscape schemes in South London has survived in identifiable form through having become adapted as the basis of a municipal housing project.

The purchase of the manor of Dulwich in 1605 by Edward Alleyn, the famous actor-manager – originally the property of the monks of Bermondsey until it passed to the family of Thomas Calton, a goldsmith, after the Dissolution of the Monasteries – paved the way for Alleyn's foundation of Dulwich College (*Alleyn's College of God's Gift*), for which the estates served as an endowment. Sited only an hour's drive by carriage from the Cities of London and Westminster, yet located in wooded countryside with attractive views of tree-clad skylines, Dulwich became a focus for the development of pocket-sized *country estates* – scarcely more than villas with large gardens and small *home farms* – where politicians, professional men and merchants created an agreeable lifestyle within easy reach of the capital, on leasehold tenures within the College estate.

John Nash and Humphry Repton were commissioned to create one such pocket paradise for Richard Shawe, the solicitor to Warren Hastings. Various known as *Casino* or *Casina*, the building was described as 'combining the advantages of an English arrangement with the beauty of a Palladian plan', and was set in grounds of some seventeen and a half acres, with the house at the highest point, close to the main highway of Herne Hill – Denmark Hill.¹ The grounds extended downhill in a south-easterly direction and were bordered by a belt of trees and shrubs containing a perimeter walk. Lawns immediately to the rear of the house merged into sloping meadowland, providing grazing for the household's horses and cattle, whilst Repton used the lowest-lying part of the plot to create a water feature, fed by springs forming part of the River Effra drainage system. It was a feature which he hoped to extend into the neighbouring properties – a proposal which failed to materialise. The site occupied the corner of the junction of Herne Hill and Red Post Lane (now Red Post Hill) which bounded the grounds to the north-east and gave easy access to Dulwich Village.

From the outset, a main object of the lake appears to have been to cater for a hobbyist's taste for angling – the lake is described as a 'fish pond' on subsequent maps and an early print shows it as being occupied by a boat containing a happy angler (and his bored but dutiful spouse?). (fig. 12)

Casina Lodge and its garden survived in private occupation for merely a century. Built in 1796-97 it functioned as an element of the *stockbroker belt* and *commuter belt* of its time. A subsequent owner, W.H. Stone, a former Member of Parliament for Portsmouth and a Justice of the Peace for Surrey and Hampshire, allowed the 'spacious grounds' to be used for the Surrey Floricultural Society's annual flower show over a period of years in the 1870s. (fig. 13)

The advent of the Peckham and Sutton line of the London Brighton and South Coast Railway stimulated ribbon development in the area in the form of substantial town houses on narrow plots with long rear gardens. (fig. 14) The cost of maintaining the original large villas and grounds in the area was becoming pro-

1. The house is situated about 125ft above sea level.