

CONSERVATION NOTES: A TOUR of LONDON'S
HISTORIC LANDSCAPE INITIATIVES

By Chris Sumner

Last Year's *Conservation Notes* highlighted several cases which, for whatever reason, need revisiting this year. The site that made the main headlines last year was *Kensington Gardens*, thrown into prominence by the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, and for a few months at least the *Evening Standard* kept her memory alive, paradoxically by campaigning *against* any extensive memorial garden at Kensington. The first anniversary of the fatal car crash was commemorated by the general public, if not by the residents of the Royal Borough, but the *floral tributes* were left in their hundreds rather than in their hundred-weights (fig. 27) and the earlier suggestions for re-landscaping Dial Walk and for constructing a *jet d'eau* at the centre of the Round Pond have been quietly dropped in favour of constructing a new children's playground to the north of the Orangery and of marking a commemorative walk linking Kensington Gardens with Hyde Park, Green Park, and St James's Park. The possibility of forming a pedestrian route to link the inner Royal Parks has been under discussion for a while, and was raised by the Royal Parks Review, but Hyde Park Corner remains a major impediment.

Progress on various schemes supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund continues more on paper than on the ground, and generally it is the park and garden *buildings* rather than the landscapes themselves that show the most startling transformations. The *Albert Memorial* in *Kensington Gardens* was unveiled in October by Her Majesty the Queen, following completion of restoration works supervised and partly funded by English Heritage, and Albert the Good as Gold is once more pavilioned in splendour. Less splendid, and somehow more lovable, *David Garrick's Temple to Shakespeare at Hampton* has now been repaired, redecorated, and hung with a wonderful display of pictures and prints commemorating the eighteenth-century actor-manager, including copies of the famous Zoffany portraits of Garrick and his family and dog. The paintings and the prints have been valuable evidence for the preparation of the restoration proposals for the riverside garden, which by

the middle of 1999 should resemble closely its 1750s state following the reinstatement of the gravelled serpentine path and replanting with shrubs, cypresses, willows, and a mulberry tree.

A couple of miles downstream at Twickenham, at *Orleans House Gallery*, home to the Ionides Collection of local topographical paintings, eight plump stone urns have been erected on the parapet of The Octagon to replace those removed when Orleans House was sold up and demolished in 1927. The Octagon, 'a small but sumptuous garden room, was built in about 1720 to designs by James Gibbs, and soon provided a suitable setting for the reception of the new queen, Caroline of Ansbach' (*The Buildings of England - London 2: South*); Queen Caroline is, of course, a major figure in the history of English gardening, not least on account of the landscaping of Kensington Gardens. The extensive and elaborate gardens at Orleans House shown in Batty Langley's *The New Principles of Gardening* (1728) are long-vanished, and a modern school occupies the northern part of the site, but the southern part and the area between the road and the River Thames survive as public open space. English Heritage and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames are to commission landscape architects to prepare proposals for enhancing the riverside at Orleans Park and Marble Hill.

The *Emslie Horniman Pleasance* in North Kensington, opened in 1914 and built to the designs of C.A. Voysey with planting designed by Madeline Agar, has been restored with support from the National Lottery as part of a larger park scheme that includes new formal and informal sports pitches and a colourful children's playground. The Pergola and Japanese Bridge, originally by J. P. White and Sons, have been recreated and a new superintendent's *eyrie* has been built. The new security fence is, to the writer's mind, unnecessarily obtrusive, but, that apart, the restoration is terrific and the park well worth visiting, perhaps as a *coda* to a pilgrimage to *Kensal Green Cemetery* nearby. Also in Kensington, the restoration of the garden to *Leighton House* has recently been completed and, I am told, looks very good.

Lottery money has been used too at *Gunnersbury Park* to revamp the Orchard



27. Floral tributes to the late Diana Princess of Wales, Kensington Gardens September 1998.
(PHOTO CHRIS SUMNER)

28. The source of the Serpentine, Hyde Park, 1998.
(PHOTO CHRIS SUMNER)

Playground, to restore the nineteenth-century lamps on the drive to the Large Mansion (with contributions also from English Heritage and the Heritage of London Trust). English Heritage has partly funded an archaeological survey of Princess Amelia's Bath House, preparatory to the drawing up of a detailed scheme for the restoration of this important garden structure with its rococo shell and rockwork interior and battlemented gothic exterior, for which Lottery funding has already been offered.

Restoration work is continuing at *Chiswick House*, where the grounds are owned by the London Borough of Hounslow, and the buildings and monuments by English Heritage, and where a Restoration Management Plan has been prepared by the two bodies. In October 1998 the Lottery offered £618,000 for works including the repair of the Deer House and provision of an interpretative display, and works to the Northern Wilderness, Italian Gardens, Walled Gardens, Western Wilderness, and artificial river.

The other river, the *River Thames*, continues to attract attention - not least from those who would *exploit* it rather than *enhance* it. A number of proposals for high-rise flats along its banks are causing concern, for instance at Battersea, where planning permission has been granted for flats now under construction which rise to twenty storeys. At Surbiton, the outcome of a public inquiry into proposals to erect blocks of flats on the site of disused waterworks filter beds on the riverside immediately opposite Hampton Court Home Park is still awaited. At a conference held in September 1998 entitled *River Calling - A Water Space Strategy for the River Thames*, promoted by the London Rivers Association, the idea of a *blue belt* was advanced for the Thames, by analogy with the *green belt*, which might be a continuous conservation area or linear park.

The Thames Landscape Strategy - Hampton to Kew has established a model for other planning studies for the Thames to follow. It is to be hoped that the new Mayor and Greater London Authority will play a part in co-ordinating planning issues connected with the Thames and with the capital's other open spaces, whether historic or not. One of the sites proposed for the new Authority's head-

quarters is by the River, the other in Bloomsbury Square, and schemes for both sites continue to be controversial.

English Heritage, which helps fund the *Thames Landscape Strategy*, has acquired and restored *Down House* in the London Borough of Bromley, and the public can visit the house where Charles Darwin lived and wrote *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and also see his garden. English Heritage has also acquired and restored *Eltham Palace* in the London Borough of Greenwich, and will open the Palace and grounds to the public in June 1999. The gardens, like those at Down House, are included in the *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest*. The Great Hall at Eltham Palace was begun in 1475 for Edward IV and restored in 1933 by Seely and Paget, who incorporated it into a new house for Sir Stephen Courtauld; the grounds include a moat and fragments of the mediaeval deer parks as well as the gardens laid out for Sir Stephen.

Greenwich Park is another royal deer park which, together with the buildings of the former Royal Observatory and of the Royal Naval College, is at the heart of the newly inscribed Greenwich World Heritage Site. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments has carried out a detailed archaeological survey of the park, which is celebrated for its formal avenues first planted in the 1660s and which contains monuments from the Roman and Saxon periods as well as from more recent times.

The Royal Commission has also published an archaeological field survey report on *Harefield Place* in the London Borough of Hillingdon, a privately owned garden that is not open to the public but which contains arcaded brick garden walls dating from the seventeenth century and is associated, tantalisingly, with John Milton's and Henry Lawes's masque *Arcades*, performed at Harefield for the Dowager Duchess of Derby in about 1632.

The walls are in poor condition, and join the register of *Buildings at Risk* published by English Heritage which, sadly, contains a number of decaying garden buildings, including bridges at Osterley by Robert Adam, at Syon by Charles Fowler, and at Corbets Tey, Upminster, attributed to James Paine.