

soothest...roses...pansies' and placed 'an arbor all of Eglantine'. Sadly, unlike Robert Cecil's grander works at Hatfield, the maze has left no trace.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while the estate remained in the Cecil family, the house was rebuilt, the walled garden constructed and pools were probably laid out to the north of the house. The first half of the nineteenth century, by which time the estate had changed hands, saw an active programme of planting, including cedars and other exotic trees, but after the mid-1850s the estate gradually declined.

Meanwhile the population of Edmonton was growing. There were demands for a public park and Pymmes seemed an ideal place. In 1897 the newly-formed Urban District Council was able to rent some acres and two years later to buy the whole estate (21ha.) 'for the benefit of schools, workhouse inmates and ratepayers'. There were to be facilities for sports and 'for open air concerts or any special purposes tending to promote health, amusement and enjoyment of the inhabitants'. Swings for the children, cricket and football pitches, bowling greens and tennis and croquet lawns were soon in place and, once it became clear that the southern pool was too small for boating, the brook to the north of the house was dammed to form a larger lake. By then a bandstand had been erected and 500 seats were provided for popular performances. The park's historic layout was adapted piecemeal to accommodate the needs of the public, apparently without any overall plan. A formal entrance with handsome gates was constructed, new paths and avenues of London plane trees were laid out and an Old English Garden was created in the walled garden. Most striking was the sinuous lake with its islands and bridges overhung by willow trees.

The park was much appreciated. In 1897 a haberdasher noted that 'the first public park has opened in our neighbourhood...As yet it lacks flower beds, paths, seats and maybe a sandpit for the children to play. But at least it's a start...Nice to think that the working man and his wife can bring the family here at the weekend'. (fig. 18) Nine years later a schoolgirl wrote: 'it's a splendid place. Everything is symmetrical and well ordered. Paths run in straight lines and ornamental flowerbeds are

quite precise. I love it, though I sometimes wish there were fewer signs *Do not* do this, and *Do not* walk there.'

By 1995 the park had become rather less splendid. Pymmes House had been burnt down, the lake has become so polluted that boating has been stopped, the bandstand, paths and shrubberies neglected. An HLF grant will make possible a full restoration of the grounds including the lake and the bandstand, and new planting may deaden the noise from the North Circular Road. One eyesore will remain: the single-storey prefabricated building which occupies the site of the handsome mansion as a focus for the park. It is unlikely that the local authority will be able to fund an equally handsome replacement. Will the lottery come to the rescue?

The injection of lottery funds will make these four parks once again attractive places to visit and to live or work nearby. But their long-term future will depend on high standards of maintenance and on new facilities being of rather better design and more sensitively sited than those provided during the last fifty years. Meanwhile the lottery will be able to rescue relatively few of the many London parks which continue to decay. Much attention has been directed to the way in which public parks have been used as a means of regeneration in Barcelona and other cities. Less attention has been directed to the opposite result that the neglect of public parks has had in this country. In a succeeding article I hope to look at this question and at what effect the restoration of historic parks and the creation of new parks has had on the surrounding neighbourhoods.

#### 'THESE TREES MUST DIE!'

By The Perambulator

**T**hese trees must die! So said Humphry Repton. Well, not in so many words, but he did say in his comments on Blaise Castle in 1796: '*This is the first instance in which I have been consulted where all the improvements must depend on the axe*'. He added, as if prescient of modern sensibilities, '*tho' fully aware of the common objection to cutting down trees, yet it is only by a bold use of that instrument that the wonders of Blaise Castle can be properly displayed*'. This is the kind of attitude which still incenses 'tree sentimentalists'

as Germaine Greer has termed them: what about the wonders of trees, they say? The symbolic value of trees has rocketed in a society searching for spiritual values and acutely aware of the loss of green space, as evinced by the near mythic status achieved by the much-lamented Swampy of the A30 and Manchester Airport protests.

Trees are defended behind the barricades of nature conservation, which have become well-established in planning and politics over the past twenty years. English Nature is the mightiest of the quangos, county wildlife trusts are effective local lobbyists, almost every local authority has a tree officer. Biodiversity action plans are being prepared under the terms of the Rio summit, SSSIs are now being strengthened, and local designations for sites of nature conservation interest abound in local plans and UDPs.<sup>1</sup>

Along with the well-considered defence of the natural environment, there is a kind of fervour for nature which manifests itself in an intolerance of non-native species of flora and fauna. Ruthless removal of trees judged to be foreign, of ethnically impure stock, is commonplace in nature conservation management regimes. Stephen Jay Gould has recently written a brilliant deconstruction of the concept of native plants, revealing its false romanticism, its misunderstanding of evolution, and its essentially fascist nature – in planting native species along the *autobahns*, Nazi architects sought 'to cleanse the German landscape of unharmonious foreign substance'.<sup>2</sup> That fervour also manifests itself in a knee-jerk, if sincere, public reaction to proposals like Repton's.

Parks and gardens are not the same as nature. (Even nature is not the same as the composed and benevolent goddess imagined by many: the natural '*larus*' of succession and distribution are in fact the product of arbitrary and chance forces and effects.) In a park or garden, a tree is – over and above its own inherent beauties – part of a greater order. For a gardener, trees are there to create effects, to humanise nature. They might merit removal when they grow too big for a particular effect,

or when they obscure a view they were designed to frame. For a tree-sentimentalist, they are valuable not for their contribution to a landscape, but in themselves, for quasi-spiritual reasons; indeed any human evaluation is seen as presumptuous.

Much has been made of the clash over tree-felling when it is proposed as part of repairing a designed landscape, the most infamous occasion probably being English Heritage's proposals for Kenwood in Greater London. What is generally being sought is not a '*restoration*' in a narrow academic sense, but the repair of a larger beauty – the beauty of nature improved by art, vistas flowing between trees and plantations, a three-dimensional landscape picture. At Kenwood, there was a disastrous failure of communication by English Heritage, but their objective was not mistaken. A park or garden left to itself, indeed a wood left to itself, becomes a jungle not a paradise, a jungle in which the trees are, as Thomas Hardy observed, '*Combatants all*'. No earnest talk from nature conservationists of needing to look at such territory with an understanding deeper than picturesque expectations can overcome the human frustration faced with such a jungle. In fact a visit to a nature reserve makes it obvious that nature conservation management is as much about ordering nature, controlling unwanted, naturally successful species, as is gardening.

In a garden or a park, trees are part of a bigger beauty. (fig. 19) A tree is beautiful in its own right, but so is a brick to anyone who has banged a bolster into a hand-made brick and seen that flame of pristine redness in the heart. So is the underneath of a flagstone, so is green oak timber in a roof. But these inherent beauties are all part of a larger beauty in which their own is subsumed.

With regard to Kenwood, it seems worth observing that views and vistas are fundamental to human experience of landscape, whether Jay Appleton's anthropological reading of cover and prospect, or the eighteenth-century park. The walled gardens of the seventeenth century depicted by Kip had their mounts and viewing terraces, and Grizedale Forest now has signs pointing, albeit in a post-modern sort of way, to '*Great View*'. The recent London Historic Parks and Gardens Trust conference on the subject recognised this fact.

1. An SSSI is a *Site of Special Scientific Interest*; a UDP is a *Unitary Development Plan*.

2. Stephen Jay Gould, 'An Evolutionary Perspective on Strengths, Fallacies and Confusions in the Concept of Native Plants', *Nature and Ideology*, Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium XVIII, 1997, pp. 11-19.



19. View of London from Greenwich Park by George Samuel (1816)  
(COURTESY YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY, NEW HAVEN)



699.G.

**KENSINGTON GARDENS, LONDON.**

BEAGLES' POSTCARDS.

A TYPICAL PASTORAL SCENE IN THIS LOVELY PARK, WHICH ABOUNDS IN VIEWS OF SYLVAN BEAUTY. IN THE DISTANCE IS THE 'ALBERT' MEMORIAL, (PRINCE CONSORT OF QUEEN VICTORIA), BEYOND WHICH IS SEEN THE WORLD-FAMED ALBERT HALL.



London under Fire

ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL FROM PATERNOSTER ROW

Passed by the Censor

20. 'Kensington Gardens, London: A typical pastoral scene in this lovely park, which abounds in views of sylvan beauty. In the distance is the 'Albert' Memorial (Prince Consort of Queen Victoria), beyond which is seen the world-famed Albert Hall' (c.1900)  
(COURTESY RON ELAM, TEL. 020 8874 8544)

21. St Paul's Cathedral from Paternoster Row (c.1945)  
(COURTESY RON ELAM, TEL. 020 8874 8544)

It can be argued that the logical endpoint of the insatiable consumerist demand for prospect represents the triumph of surface over content, the commodification of a working, living countryside. But the impulse to find order, to find shapes and patterns in what we see, is fundamental to human nature.

The experience of a garden is heightened by awareness of all that it is not, of which we can be reminded by looking out from within. That is why the setting of gardens is so important. In Cherwell District in Oxfordshire, there is a local plan policy, no less, for the protection of the view from the great terrace at Rousham. And there are skyline policies in Westminster for the protection of - *inter alia* - views from the Royal Parks. From the bridge over the ornamental water in St James's Park, we now have a binocular vista illustrating a radical contrast in effects. On the one hand, the view of Whitehall's domes and minarets reads as the perfect backdrop to the view, the culmination of the park's design. But move a few feet and you now have the London Eye looming above Horseguards, which reads much more as a looming, peering presence, threatening and, by virtue of its size, disturbing the park's tranquillity.

But it is not always a matter of protection. Gardens can be enhanced by awareness of the chaos outside - would Hyde Park really seem such a sanctuary if Park Lane were buried in a tunnel? (fig. 20) A strange argument is currently being put forward by the promoters of the proposed Pinnacle building at Chiswick Roundabout on the M4. This twenty-six-storey building would, they argue, 'provide a sense of order' to the park, 'enhancing rather than detracting from the view'. In this case one suspects an ingenious bit of special pleading, but it remains the fact that external, alien features viewed from within a park or garden, just as much as objects deliberately intended as focal points, can contribute to the special quality of the designed landscape within. The fringe of buildings seen through trees, which is how one experiences a city from the centre of a park, does indeed heighten the sense of seclusion, of *otherness*, on which a park depends.

So I make no apology for my enthusiasm for felling trees to restore vistas. The Heritage Lottery Fund last year reacted nervously to a particular protest about tree-felling in one of

the parks whose restoration it was funding, but the case was resolved once the overall intention behind the felling was explained and there has been no significant reaction to such fellings since. Parks are full of trees which have self-sown and obscured views or blurred the shapes of plantations, or which have been planted arbitrarily. Leftovers at the end of the planting season dumped in a spare corner of a park are familiar features of our run-down municipal parks: they are sometimes even christened 'an arboretum'. Alternatively, they are planted along the sides of paths to keep clear of the gang-mowers with the result that the park will eventually be compartmentalised along the lines of its paths.

Sometimes trees have simply grown too big for the design in which they were planted: it is doubtful that Charles Hamilton had any idea how enormous the Lebanon Cedars he planted at Painshill would become, but it is obvious that they came to dwarf the buildings at their feet. There must be thousands of Wellingtonias around the country, still shooting skyward, which have grown out of all proportion to the artistic creation in which they were originally set. In these cases, good management demands Repton's bold use of the axe, because the individual tree is rarely as important as the park or garden, or rather because the individual is now subtracting from the cumulative, communal beauty.

In many ways, London was particularly fortunate in the gales of 1987. Not only did the fallen trees make MPs keenly aware of the need for funds to repair the storm damage, but also the great gaps torn in the fabric of London's parks and gardens revealed two things: first, of course, that the tree stock was elderly and that a proper cycle of continual planting needed to be reinstated after decades in suspension; and second, after the shock subsided, that many parks had actually benefitted from being opened up, rather as the recent demolition of Paternoster Square has benefited St Paul's Cathedral. (fig. 21) Those rents and gaps are an inspiration to repair the views and spatial flows lost to random tree growth. So bring on the chainsaws; let the bonfires of arboreal vanity burn!