

now proposed for Croydon will provide valuable guidelines for emulation in other areas of outer London, beyond the remit of the *London Squares Preservation Act*.

The garden which provided the initial concern and which led to the campaign is a plot surrounded on three sides by the highway of Mayfield Crescent and on the fourth by Mayfield Road. Originally reserved as a simple grassed plot surrounded by a post and single-rail fence when the private housing was first developed and occupied d.1930, the space has evolved over the years into a well-maintained, lawned enclave bordered by a privet hedge, with central shrub planting. (figs. 16 & 17) Over the past decade, flowering trees, including hawthorn and *prunus*, have been added in each corner and are complemented by naturalised daffodil bulbs. The site is rich in wildlife – songbirds, hedgehogs, foxes, owls – and is one of the sites illustrated in the Open Land and Outdoor Recreation section of the Issues document to demonstrate the motivation for proposed changes in policy.

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## SPAN HOUSING: POST-WAR LANDSCAPES at Risk?

By Barbara Simms

**G**o to any Span development and you will discover... what Span has to offer. Perfect settings, visually uncluttered; a sense of spaciousness and elegance totally unlike any modern speculative building you have ever seen... A genuine twentieth-century contribution to better living made for people who regard it as vitally important.<sup>1</sup>

Eric Lyons was the first architect in the post-war era to design speculative housing that was both aesthetically pleasing and economically viable. Working with architect-turned-developer Geoffrey Townsend under the name *Span Developments Ltd*,<sup>2</sup> he gave form to the concepts of functional design, communal facil-

ities, identity and responsible communities that were promoted by policy makers of the interwar and post-war period.<sup>3</sup> Their concept of providing private housing for 'ordinary people' (although in fact aimed at the middle-class professional) set them apart from their colleagues, who were primarily concerned with public housing demands. Between 1948 and 1984 Lyons designed nearly 60 housing schemes in Richmond, Blackheath, Wimbledon and other sites in the south of England (including a controversial village community at New Ash Green in Kent)<sup>4</sup> – a significant contribution from a small speculative developer to the twentieth-century housing landscape.

What is the essence of a Span estate? When this question was posed to architect / landscape architect Ivor Cunningham, who worked with Lyons from 1955, it elicited the unqualified response that it is the total design concept – the relationship of the built form to the spaces.<sup>5</sup> Reluctant to design to people's perceived needs for traditional houses with private gardens, Lyons' unique approach was to pursue the vision of open-plan flats and terraced housing with low-pitched (or flat) roofs, constructed in modern materials and set in a communal landscape. The Lyons-Townsend models were the Oxbridge quadrangles and Georgian squares with open space integral to the housing. They also used the device of leasehold tenure and communal maintenance of open spaces as a means of preventing changes affecting the character of the estates.<sup>6</sup>

Their first project in 1948 was a backland scheme of flats at Whitton in Middlesex, but when joined in 1953 by Leslie Bilsby, a building contractor with access to land for development in Blackheath, it was the start of

3 For example, see Elizabeth Denby, *Europe Rehousing*, 2nd ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1944), first printed 1938; Frederick Gibberd, 'The Design of residential Areas in Ministry of Housing and Local government', in *Design in Town and Village* (HMSO, 1953), Chapter 2.

4 See H. Sachs, *A Study of New Ash Green* (1971), Report of the Social Research Unit, Bedford College, London: Centre for Environmental Studies, and 'New hope for New Ash Green' in *Architects Journal* (8th December 1971).

5 The author in discussion with Ivor Cunningham, 6th April, 2001.  
6 With the introduction of the Leasehold and Enfranchisement Act 1967, land could no longer be held leasehold, so the land was invested in the residents association to sell plots freehold.

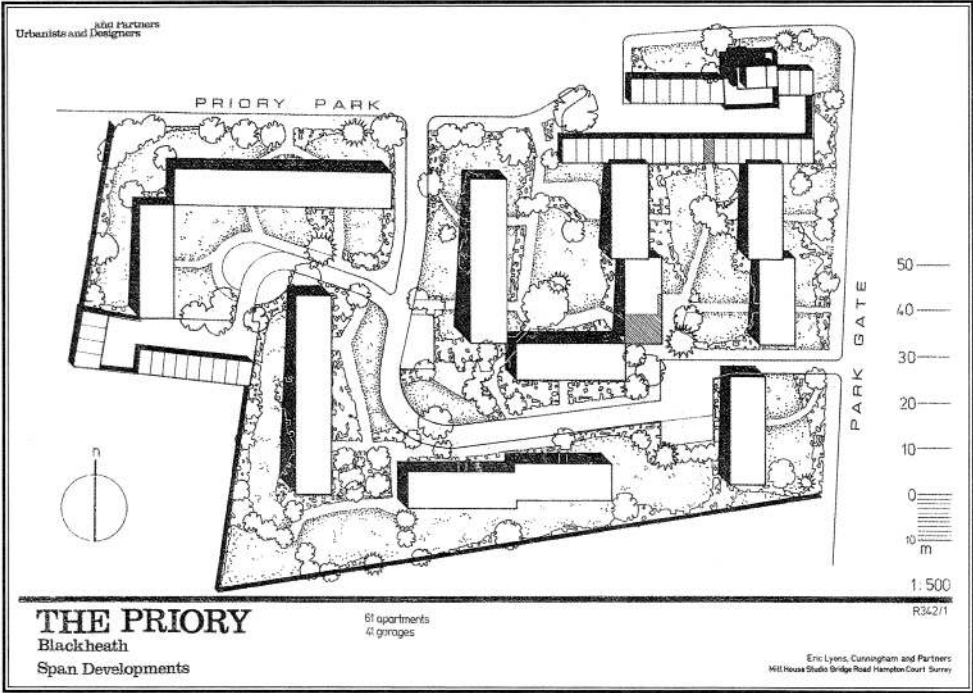
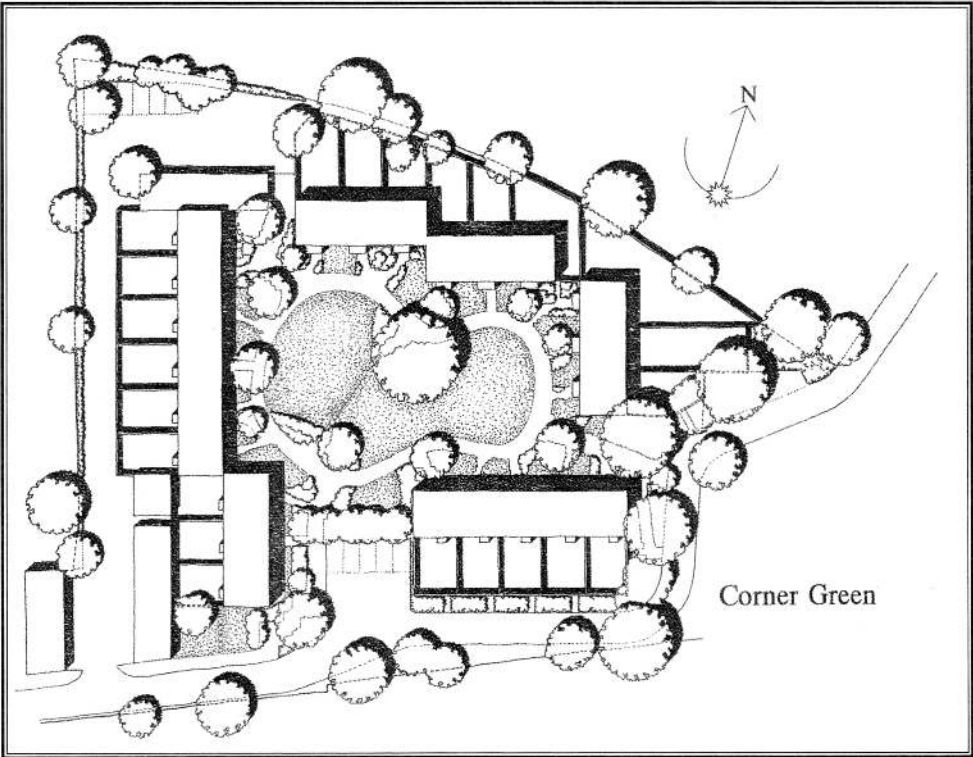
1 Undated Span Promotional Literature (c.1960s), RIBA Span Archive Box 3/1.

2 The name Span Developments Ltd was chosen in the late 1950s to reflect the innovative approach to housing by Lyons and his associates: 'Span is a bridgehead... It spans the gap between the suburban monotony of the typical spec. development and the architecturally designed, individually built residence that has become, for all but a few... financially unattainable.' RIBA Span Archive Box 3/1, *op. cit.*



16. Mayfield Square, Croydon (c.1930)  
(COURTESY CROYDON LOCAL STUDIES COLLECTION)

17. Mayfield Square, Croydon (1997)  
(PHOTOGRAPH: JOYCE BELLAMY)



18. Design for Corner Green, Blackheath (1959)  
(COPYRIGHT ERIC LYONS CUNNINGHAM METCALFE)

19. Design for The Priory, Blackheath (1956)  
(COPYRIGHT ERIC LYONS CUNNINGHAM METCALFE)

a unique collaboration between architect, developer and builder. Cunningham recalled that the breakthrough in landscaping for Span schemes came in 1957 with the design for a scheme in Coventry that incorporated a 'romantic layout of curved paths, free forming groups of plants and grass areas that overlapped and interlocked with each other; the whole composition being framed by the housing fronts and the screened parking areas'.<sup>7</sup> This scheme was never built, but the ideas bore fruit two years later at Corner Green, Blackheath, where the system of private roadways allowed unrestricted 'wall-to-wall landscape carpeting'.<sup>8</sup> (fig. 18) Promotional literature described the effect he set out to achieve:

It is very pleasant to live in an environment in which proportion and harmony are acknowledged to be relevant, in which the site and its trees and the architecture achieve unity and in which no detail fails to contribute happily to the total effect... Sites are not bulldozed into a drearily level conformity: established trees are retained, roads follow natural contours, lawns sweep naturally into vistas, planting enhances the spaces rather than merely fills them...<sup>9</sup>

By the early 1960s, Lyons' fundamental philosophy had been applied to larger schemes of courtyard flats, (fig. 19) as well as single family housing with private and communal gardens. (fig. 20) Sites were carefully selected, wherever possible using land that had been part of a large estate and on which mature trees still grew. Several Span schemes in Weybridge, Surrey, were built within Otlands Park, a landscape formed by Lord Lincoln in the eighteenth century. Here, the Cedars of Lebanon dominating the middle of the site were the inspiration for a free-form layout of pavilion houses, whilst a wooded area was left intact, a ride cut down the slope giving a glimpse of the Broad Water from the houses. (fig. 21)

Cunningham views plant material as a design element used to define space and encourage movement through the landscape, a traditional concept given contemporary form by post-war landscape architects. The words of Nan Fairbrother, writing in the late 1960s, echoed the Span ethos:

Such landscape is strongly three-dimensional, for in small areas the height of trees and buildings is as dominant as their extent on the ground, and the design is a fluid geometry of irregular volumes experienced from within. It is spaces flowing between masses whose density varies from architectural solids to the airy framework of leafless trees. The outdoor space of such living-areas is in fact as compartmented as the indoor space of houses, with private gardens and semi-private courts opening into more public spaces and roads – intercommunicating green enclosures with their own distinct identity as places.<sup>10</sup>

Fairbrother believed that design must 'start not from abstract aesthetics but from function, from the forms most appropriate for what the landscape will be used for'. She discussed the differences in the design and use of private and public landscape, taking into account not only the needs of the users but also maintenance regimes. In communal landscapes, she argued, the emphasis should be on 'indestructible effects – on broad massing and spacing, on clear planting of the right trees and robust shrubs, on ground-modelling, the use of light and shade, of enclosure, and open space, and vistas'. She recommended forsythias, flowering cherries, lilacs, laburnums, magnolias, rhododendrons and roses, small-scale effects and intimate details being provided by hard landscape, such as patterns of cobbles and setts, and by the 'self-renewing' patterns of plants rather than intensive maintenance, the successful Span formula.

But Span was more than an attractive housing scheme – it was a lifestyle – and unashamedly advertised as such. Advertising was directed at 'the younger professional man, company administrator or business executive seeking a home to reflect his good taste and judgement'.<sup>11</sup> Arthur Edwards was more pragmatic, describing a typical resident as 'a person of urban tastes... who prefers to buy roses from the florist rather than grow them himself, and who does not require a greenhouse, a workshop or an outdoor run for a boxer dog'.<sup>12</sup> Selling points reflected the desirability and financial astuteness of owning an architect-designed house in a 'good selling area... with

7 Ivor Cunningham, 'A Span site revisited, Corner Green, Blackheath, London', in *Landscape Design* (February 1982).

8 Ivor Cunningham, 'Spick and Span'. Paper presented at a seminar held on 7th March 1980 at the Jodrell Laboratory, Kew Gardens.

9 RIBA Span Archive Box 3/1, *op. cit.*

10 Nan Fairbrother, *New Lives! New Landscapes*, (London: The Architectural Press, 1970), p. 206.

11 Undated Span Promotional Literature, RIBA Span Archive Box 3/2.

12 Arthur M Edwards, *The Design of Suburbia. A Critical Study in Environmental History* (London: Pimbridge Press Ltd, 1981), pp. 178–9.

shopping facilities nearby' and the practical advantages of residents associations to maintain the open spaces.<sup>13</sup>

Many of the early Span residents were architects, comparable, it has been suggested, to those of Bedford Park and Hampstead Garden Suburb in their 'exclusivity and their dependence upon a shared sense of values and community'.<sup>14</sup> Formal community participation was (and is) demanded by compulsory purchase of one share in the residents association when a Span lease or freehold is bought. This confirms the resident's agreement to be bound by a set of covenants relating to obligations such as maintenance and repair of the buildings and gardens, insurance and subletting, as well as regulations to encourage 'neighbourly behaviour', enforceable by an elected committee of management. When initiated, the joint responsibilities inherent in the covenants were expected to form a social bond between residents, creating 'identity of place' and 'pride and interest in their place... real participation by the sharing of responsibilities'.<sup>15</sup>

Do these underlying concepts of 'sharing of responsibilities' and community identity have the same, or indeed any, meaning to Span residents today? In a recent study, it was found that the pioneering spirit of early Span residents has (not unexpectedly) vanished, social values have changed and the management scheme is often regarded as a disadvantage, imposing restrictions on personal freedom.<sup>16</sup> Only a minority are aware of Span's 'social' philosophy and few participate in the management committee, yielding the decision-making to a small core group.

On some developments there are occasional social events, and children (now mostly teenagers) use the communal areas, but discussions with residents indicated that the sense of community no longer exists, partly due to the changing nature of the resident group, with fewer families with children and an increasing number of retired or single people, who prefer privacy to communal living. Drawn curtains, blinds, shrubbery partitions and strategically placed plant pots, indicate that many residents

crave greater privacy than Span's open plan interiors with large windows, glazed porches and communal front gardens allow. Furthermore, although in theory all landscaping is communal, in practice residents tend to use gardens closest to their homes, many ground-floor residents appropriating the areas outside entrances, windows and patio doors for their exclusive use. (*fig. 22*)

What implications do these changes have for the conservation of Span landscapes as design icons of their time? Happily, the underlying design of most Span sites, in terms of the relationship of the buildings to the spaces, is still intact, as is the visual unity of the terraced houses and blocks of flats. However, changes in both the resident population and lifestyle preferences have had an effect on maintenance of the landscape design. The most dramatic changes result from unchecked tree growth, many original trees having outgrown their positions, reducing the light to flats, overhanging roofs and tiles and obscuring entrances. At Fieldend, Teddington, temporary 1960s plantings of birch trees (designed to be removed when the accompanying plane trees had matured) are still in position, their removal having been hampered by the Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) now in force! (*fig. 23*) On many developments, replacement flower and shrub plantings by a succession of management committees have also contributed to a shift from the original 'carefully selected flowers, shrubs and trees in abundance set off by trim lawns'<sup>17</sup> to more contemporary groupings, but with a continuing emphasis on hardy evergreen plants. The determination of others to replant appropriately has been shown by a continuing contact with Ivor Cunningham, particularly at Mallard Place, a valuable relationship, which it is hoped will lead to an understanding of future conservation needs.

Although residents schemes of management have proved useful in conserving the original design, covenants are not always strictly implemented because of cost implications or the undesirability of protracted disagreements with neighbours. Have statutory

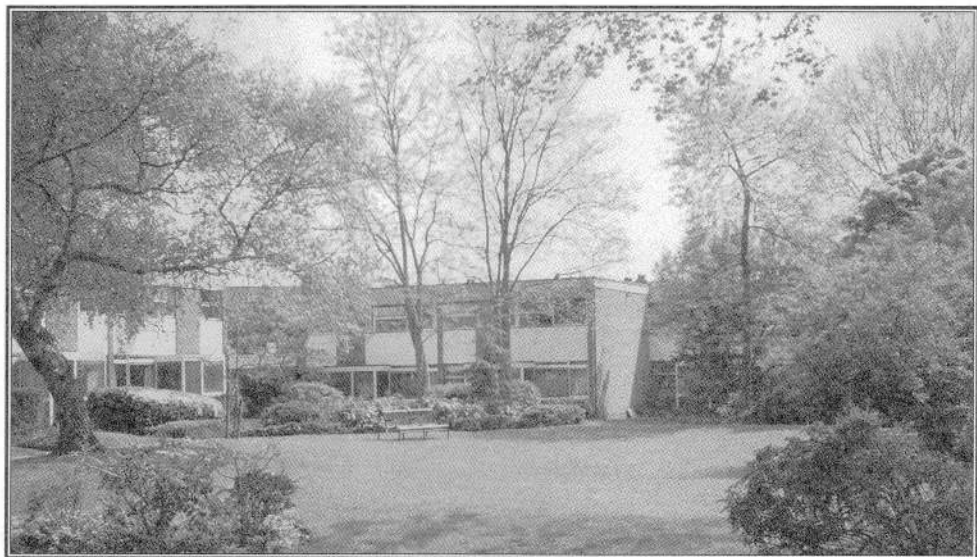
<sup>13</sup> RIBA Span Archive Box 3/1, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Gordon Millar, *Time Span: Eric Lyons and Span* (1992), p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> RIBA Span Archive Box 3/1, *op. cit.*

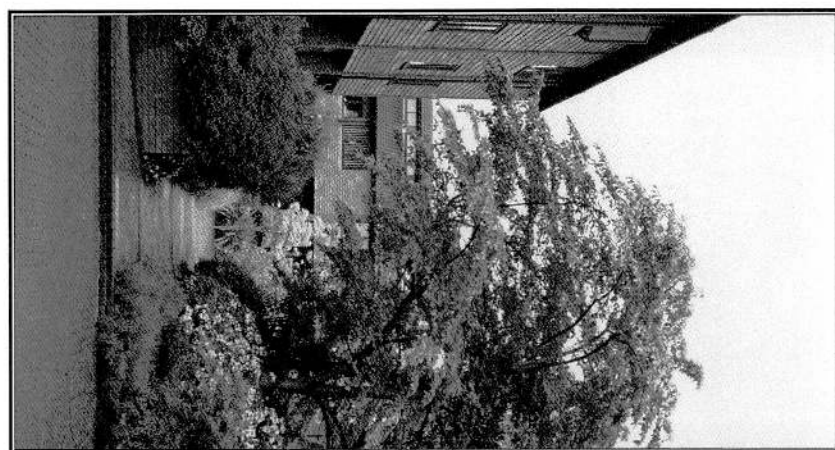
<sup>16</sup> Barbara Simms, 'Landscape Conservation on Span Estates'. Unpublished dissertation, Architectural Association, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Undated Parkleys Sales Brochure, Richmond Local History Centre, Ref LC10, 008.



20. Span terraced houses around the West Court, Fieldend, Teddington (2001)  
(PHOTOGRAPH: BARBARA SIMMS)

21. Templemere, Weybridge, 1965, was designed around existing mature cedar trees  
(COPYRIGHT ERIC LYONS CUNNINGHAM METCALFE)



22. An example of 'appropriation' of communal gardenland at Parkleys, Ham (2001)  
(PHOTOGRAPH: BARBARA SIMMS)

23. 1960s plantings of birch trees have outgrown their position in Fieldend's East Court (2001)  
(PHOTOGRAPH: BARBARA SIMMS)

24. Mallard Place, Twickenham, 1984, now designated a Conservation Area (2001)  
(PHOTOGRAPH: BARBARA SIMMS)

or non-statutory controls helped to prevent inappropriate landscape changes? Four 1950s courtyard developments of Span flats are listed buildings, but, despite nominal acknowledgement to 'setting', in practice listed building status gives inadequate protection to the total landscape design.<sup>18</sup> In recent years, broader-based criteria for the English Heritage Parks and Gardens Register has rightly increased the range of landscapes considered of historic significance, but none are housing developments.<sup>19</sup> There is an increasing consensus among amenity and heritage bodies that although the high profile of this non-statutory register in the local planning framework has ensured the protection of historic designed landscapes generally, statutory listing may be more effective. This is reflected in the recent recommendation to government that not only should a 'statutory duty of care' be introduced for owners of listed buildings, but also for owners of registered parks and gardens.<sup>20</sup>

Conservation Areas, designed to preserve local 'sense of place' rather than specific buildings or gardens, have been successfully established within the planning framework.<sup>21</sup> Recognition of the special nature of Span housing schemes in Blackheath has been given by the inclusion of the Cator Estate (the site of several schemes) in a Conservation Area. In the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames, Mallard Place, Lyons' last scheme, has been designated a separate Conservation Area. (fig. 24) Conservation Area statements include valuable specification, covering improvement and protection of landscape setting, preservation, enhancement and reinstatement of architectural quality and unity, coordination of design and improvement in quality of street furniture, improvement of highways condition and pedestrian convenience. Conservation Area status also gives additional protection for trees and could be useful in protecting those without existing TPOs, whilst their 'visual, historic and amenity contribution' is assessed.<sup>22</sup> Conservation Area designation might therefore be considered the most appropriate currently available form of protec-

tion for housing landscapes.

Participation and education as positive measures to prevent unwelcome changes in local character, and practical suggestions for character enhancement are strong themes in the English Heritage publication, *Power of Place*.<sup>23</sup> The long-term aim is for character appraisal and conservation plans 'to be integrated in planning legislation for managing change to the whole of the environment'.<sup>24</sup> To date, there seems to be little formal or informal communication between bodies responsible for statutory or non-statutory controls or other forms of local protection. Consequently, policies are implemented piecemeal and some parts of the landscape suffer at the expense of others. This is seen in Richmond, for example, where at Parkleys there is no protection for many mature trees, despite the site being a listed building, and at Fieldend where TPOs have been rigorously enforced but minor changes are beginning to be made to the houses.

Integration of conservation controls would also encourage communication within the authority and an improvement in repairs carried out in sensitive areas, such as public roads on Span estates. Furthermore, the hard landscaping within the courtyards and gardens of early developments is intact but sufficiently uneven and cracked in places to require repair or replacement in the near future. A handbook with suggestions on appropriate repair and replacement of hard landscaping materials, tree management and soft landscaping maintenance might usefully guide the decision-making of residents associations. Ideally, each scheme would benefit from a management plan to provide a statement of significance, a vision for the future and a planned scheme of conservation.

Span Developments Ltd was a successful venture - its intimate courtyard designs, stylish functional planting of communal spaces and hard landscaping detail were highly influential in the second part of the twentieth century. Lyons' innovative designs are now recognised by architectural historians, practitioners and those in related fields as worthy of protection

<sup>18</sup> See PPG 15 Part 1 Section 3 Listed Building Control and Annex C Guidance on Alterations to Listed Buildings.

<sup>19</sup> *The Register of Parks and Gardens*. An Introduction (London: English Heritage, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> English Heritage, *Power of Place. The future of the historic environment* (2000), p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> PPG 15 Part 1 section 2.24.

<sup>22</sup> PPG 15 Part 1 Section 4.40.

<sup>23</sup> *Power of Place*, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> *Power of Place*, *op. cit.* Recommendation 12.



25. Naumachia on the Serpentine, 1814  
(PRIVATE COLLECTION)

26. Memorial Plaques in Postman's Park  
(PHOTOGRAPH: HAZEL CONWAY)

as part of the historic environment. However, the most effective form of protection has yet to be found. In the meantime, Span housing developments are landscapes at risk.

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### COMMEMORATING ROYAL OCCASIONS in LONDON'S PARKS

By Hazel Conway

Since the beginning of the park movement there has been a close relationship between parks and the crown, and many of the parks named *Victoria Park* celebrated either a visit by the Queen, or her presence at their opening. Jubilees and coronations were celebrated by tree planting, seats, elaborate sculptural planting, statues and fountains, as well as by new parks and open spaces. The period between the Golden Jubilee of Victoria in 1887 and the Silver Jubilee of Elizabeth II in 1977 was one that saw a massive expansion in the area of London. When the County of London was formed in 1888 it covered 117 square miles; with the creation of Greater London in 1965 the area extended to 610 square miles.

Royal commemorations pre-date the Victorian era, an example to mark the jubilee of George III in 1810 being a spinney planted by the owner of Darlands in Barnet, which is now part of Darlands Nature Reserve. Four years later on August 1st 1814, two important events were celebrated: the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of the Nile and the centenary of the accession of the House of Hanover in 1714 when George I came to the throne.<sup>1</sup> The combined celebration took place in the royal parks. In Green Park a temple, decorated with allegorical paintings of the recent struggle, was erected and fireworks were launched from a safe distance away. In St James's Park the walks were lit by Chinese lanterns; there were balloon ascents and a Chinese bridge with a

seven-storey wooden *pagoda* was built over the canal. The pagoda was lit by gas and fireworks were set off from it. Unfortunately, at the end of the magnificent display, the pagoda caught fire and two workmen died. In Hyde Park there was a fair and the whole park was opened, but the highlight of the day was undoubtedly the *naumachia*, the re-enactment on the Serpentine of the Battle of the Nile. (fig. 25) For several days vessels 'of considerable size' had been arriving on carriages from Woolwich and other boatyards on the Thames.<sup>2</sup> The first action saw two frigates in full sail attacking the anchored French fleet. Then, at 8pm, the whole British fleet attacked, amid clouds of smoke from the gunfire. Finally, at 10pm, a blazing ship of the British fleet bore down upon the French, setting their fleet alight, and the conflagration was such that the whole water seemed to be on fire. Once the excitement had calmed down, more fireworks followed.

A range of features celebrating *Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee* in 1887 be found in London's parks. One of the most unusual is the memorial in *Postman's Park* in the City for its focus on ordinary people, rather than on the monarch. It was the painter G F Watts who suggested that the Golden Jubilee be marked by a national memorial commemorating heroic men and women who had lost their lives by saving others. The shelter with its very poignant plaques was completed in the early twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> (fig. 26) At the top of Richmond Terrace Gardens, hidden away in an alcove, a modest wall-mounted granite drinking fountain was installed in 1887, with the inscription:

Here quench your thirst and mark in me  
An emblem of true charity  
Who while my bounty I bestow  
Am neither seen nor heard to flow. (*Warton*)

Much of the emphasis of the new coronation and jubilee parks acquired during the twenty-five or so years from 1887 to the First World War was on preserving open space threatened by building development. Both

<sup>1</sup> E Orme, *An Historical Memento representing the Different Scenes of Public Rejoicing which took place the First of August in St James's and Hyde Parks, London in celebration of the Glorious Peace of 1814 and of The Centenary of the Accession of the Illustrious House of Brunswick to the Throne of these Kingdoms* (London, 1814).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> London County Council, *Return of Outdoor Memorials* (London, 1906), p. 10.