

The Wells as site of sexual transgression was also a feature of *A Sunday Ramble; or, Modern Sabbath Day Journey* (1774) and its various forms and editions. Drawing on a literary sub-genre in which a newcomer to London and a reliable guide surveyed scenes of high and low life, either in the early hours of the morning or, as in this case, on a Sunday, the narrative claims to reveal 'the Follies of the present Age'. After offering a general description of the Wells, including its 'genteel seats for the company' and the presence of 'several genteel females', the guide then offers the countryman a description of the several characters they pass as a means to illustrate the supposed range of people who visit Bagnigge Wells. In addition to a young Etonian who takes the waters as cure for his love-induced melancholy, the pair discuss an effeminate homosexual mixing with the company and a young woman who cuckolded an old cit. The last, at first described as the most 'exquisite beauty' of the group of 'genteel females', illustrates the extent to which appearances in these places of reputed social mixing could be deceiving. The guide reveals that she was actually the 'menial servant' of the old gentleman before tricking him (by claiming that she was pregnant and threatening her father's anger) into marrying her. As the newcomer and his guide depart, they are approached by 'two ladies of easy virtue' whose invitations they decline in pursuit of their plan to ramble about London.¹¹ The frontispiece to a later edition featured a couple engaged in an intrigue at Bagnigge Wells. As a waiter stumbles and falls, overturned dishes, a reference to sexual promiscuity, scatter nearby. The caption warns, 'as ye through the Garden rove, / Beware, fond Youths, the Darts of Love'.

While literary representations of Bagnigge Wells suggest it was a place of extensive social mixing, the types of publication which often made these claims – guidebooks aimed at a lower middle-class readership and pseudo-guidebooks aimed at both those who have never been to London and those eager to see familiar places represented – suggest a different story. While these descriptions often include figures like the Etonian or young lawyer, they never include truly fashionable

types. Instead, Bagnigge Wells is presented as full of men and women eager to *display* leisure and consumption on a Sunday, their one day free from work, at a modest cost. By 1786, John Trusler, in *The London Adviser and Guide*, included Bagnigge Wells under the description of 'tea-gardens in the out-skirts of the town, where the common people resort in crowds', noting it was in particular 'much resorted to by women of the town'.¹² The gardens' shift from fashionable site of entertainment to resort of the lower sorts was not unique: in towns and cities across Britain, the decline of 'polite' public space in the late eighteenth century resulted from the increasing number of tradesmen and middling sorts who could afford to participate in such entertainments.¹³ By the early nineteenth century, the Wells had fallen out of fashion as they became increasingly frequented by the 'lower sorts', in no small part due to the development of the surrounding area. By the time of its closure in the mid-nineteenth century, Bagnigge Wells was no longer a picturesque retreat from London but in the centre of a swiftly growing metropolitan area, and a popular place of entertainment for London's street-sellers.

THE METROPOLITAN PUBLIC GARDENS ASSOCIATION

By Joyce Bellamy

The Metropolitan Public Gardens Association (MPGA) was established in 1882 to publicise and remedy the perceived deficiencies in public open space provision in the inner city areas of London, particularly the East and South Bank areas. Whereas the mid-nineteenth century had seen the creation by central government intervention of major new parks utilising marginal land on the north-east, south and south-west extremities of the built-up area (Victoria, Kennington and Battersea Parks opened respectively in 1845, 1852 and 1858), (figs. 19 & 20) and the Metropolitan Board of Works similarly had created two more peripheral parks in the north (Finsbury Park) and the south-east

¹² John Trusler, *The London Adviser and Guide* (London, 1786), p. 164.

¹³ Peter Borsay, 'The Rise, Fall, and Rise of Polite Urban Space, 1700–2000'. Presented at the University of York's Centre for Eighteenth-Century Studies' Lecture Series, *Eighteenth-Century York: Culture, Space, Society*, 18th October 2001.

¹¹ *A Sunday Ramble; or, Modern Sabbath-Day Journey, in and about the Cities of London and Westminster* (London, [1774]), pp. 23–31.

(Southwark Park), both of which opened in 1869, thereby complementing the intensifying public use of the Royal Parks, the densely built-up heartlands of London remained lacking in amenities. Even the progressive safeguarding of the various Metropolitan Commons under the care of individual Boards of Conservators or the Board of Works over the last three decades of the century had only a marginal effect in terms of relative accessibility for such deprived communities.

Hence the group of like-minded volunteers who attended a meeting convened at the town house of Lord Brabazon on 20th November 1882 brought to the discussion their own detailed knowledge of the needs of various parts of London, in terms of public open space, townscape improvement and recreational facilities – particularly for children and young people. Initially the organisation was known as 'The Metropolitan Public Garden, Boulevard and Playground Association' to clarify this range of interest, only being shortened to the present wording in April 1885, mainly for reasons of convenience. The Association's driving motivation was one of compassion and a desire to alleviate the sufferings of the poor by utilising surviving scraps of open land – derelict burial grounds and squares, former private gardens and run-down marginal land – to create new amenity areas as a means of combating a range of evils such as overcrowding and air pollution, to provide play space and places of rest and relaxation, whilst adding elements of privacy and dignity for the inhabitants of the worst areas, and at the same time aiding the improvement of the Metropolis as a whole.

New open spaces thus created were transferred to relevant local authorities for ongoing maintenance and management once their new landscaping had become established. The MPGA's mode of operation was extremely flexible: it retained a small panel of skilled professionals (of which the earliest landscape gardener, Miss F. Wilkinson, achieved great renown). Within its first year, successful work had included the pioneering of street tree planting in Mile End; the creation of a playground gymnasium for a Board School in Drury Lane; the preservation of Little Wormwood Scrubs Common from enclosure; the protection of most of the site of St. Pancras

churchyard from railway development (whilst ensuring the conversion of the main part of the site into a public garden); the creation of a playground at St. John's Church at Waterloo; installation of seats in St. Margaret's Churchyard, Westminster; securing the opening of formerly private enclosures at Regent's Park to the public; and the creation of a public garden from the disused burial ground at St. Andrew's, Holborn, at the joint expense of the Vestry and the Metropolitan Board of Works. The work of the MPGA involved close liaison and co-operation with other bodies such as the Royal Society for Health and the Kyrle Society. With the passage of time, the MPGA also assisted in the formation of other organisations needing a wider geographical remit, notably the National Trust and the National Playing Fields Association, with which it has continued to co-operate.

The MPGA did not hesitate to adjust its activities to meet the challenge of changing circumstances. Victorian London was surrounded by a number of small towns – local centres in their own right – which for much of the nineteenth century remained separated from the main metropolis by intervening swatches of agricultural land. These small towns had their own miniature 'inner city' areas, industrial areas and Victorian suburbs, which expanded in concentric belts until – with the advent of the twentieth century – they began to converge with the outward expansion of London itself, whilst still remaining outside the London administrative area (for which the Metropolitan Board of Works, superimposed upon the original boundary structure of the Home Counties as a means of delivering improvements to the infrastructure of the metropolis, had been succeeded in 1889 by the London County Council, with a comprehensive range of local authority powers). The MPGA recognised that, in terms of patterns of habitation and social need, the legal boundaries of London were anomalous and, indeed, that there was a danger that new areas of open space deficiency were emerging along the 'no-man's-land' areas which remained spanning the London county boundary.

The MPGA met this challenge by including within its general membership and committee structure personalities prominent in civic life not only of the City of London and



19. Kennington Park, 25th July 1906
(COURTESY LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

20. The Old English Gardens at Kennington Park, May 1935
(COURTESY LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)



21. Telegraph Hill Park, 16th July 1954
(COURTESY LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

22. The shelter at Hilly Fields, August 1912
(COURTESY LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

the upper and lower-tier authorities of the County of London, but also of neighbouring counties, particularly Middlesex, and of key built-up areas such as Croydon and the major commercial and residential enclaves east of the River Lea. The MPGA chose to define its area of operation as being the territory of the Metropolitan Police District – an area even wider than the eventual boundary of Greater London when the Greater London Council (GLC) came into operation in 1965 over virtually the whole built-up area. The GLC itself was abolished in 1986 but the region continued to have a distinct identity as a grouping of unitary authorities and in 2000 it regained strategic authority status – albeit lacking in open space powers – under the Greater London Authority, at which time the Metropolitan Police District was trimmed back to correspond with the regional boundary. Hence it is arguable that the MPGA was one of the earliest voluntary organisations to anticipate the need for a regional approach in exercising its charitable work and to anticipate the eventual extent of London's administrative area.

Originally the MPGA applied a two-tier policy in allocating grant aid, giving proportionally larger grants to open space projects within the defined area of London all that time than to sites in the Home Counties, but this distinction disappeared long before the local government boundaries of London were adjusted to reflect the realities of the built-up area.

The interests of the MPGA soon extended beyond the rescue of inner-city squares, churchyards and wasteland to the preservation of (formerly private) parklands, meadowland and woodland in the path of building development, where it was judged that such sites were suited to meet the open space needs of the encroaching suburbs. Many such sites offered spectacular views across the Thames Valley – an added bonus; the MPGA was prominent in initiating campaigns for the preservation of key hilltops, such as Telegraph Hill at New Cross (fig. 21) and Hilly Fields near Catford (fig. 22), and of elements of the view from Richmond Hill. 'Chains' of open space along minor river valleys were another objective: the MPGA embraced Octavia Hill's last great campaign – the preservation of meadowland along the River Wandle – and served on the local

Committee convened for this purpose, contributing donations towards site purchase funds.

The MPGA supported the emergent allotment movement, both in terms of regular peacetime cultivation and the emergency use of amenity lands for food production in wartime. The MPGA's support for amenity horticulture also encouraged residents of deprived areas to develop an interest in the improvement of their front gardens and the creation of containerised floral displays – a sphere still encouraged through the MPGA's support for the *'London in Bloom'* campaign.

World War II saw the MPGA salvaging and recycling seats and paving from bomb-damaged gardens and other sites, and liaising to arrange gifts of plant material from private donors for community use. However supportive of the war effort the MPGA may have been, it was equally adamant that wartime uses, such as temporary buildings on public open spaces, must be removed once the state of emergency had passed, and that open spaces utilised for purposes such as prefabricated housing must be allowed to revert to amenity use as soon as practicable (the Metropolitan Commons in particular had been greatly affected by such development). The MPGA also actively supported the creation of new gardens as war memorials after both World Wars.

The MPGA pioneered the conversion of bomb sites in key areas into public gardens, a policy duly enshrined in the London County Council's plans for the post-war urban fabric of London, which relied greatly upon the use of war-devastated land (often in combination with slum clearance measures) to remedy major areas of open space deficiency.

A popular addition to the MPGA's programme in the latter part of the twentieth century was the innovation of the *'London Spade'* Award – an annual award of an engraved spade made variously to leading personalities in the London open space world, or to open space and garden projects showing a high degree of ingenuity or initiative with consequent benefit to public amenity.

The MPGA's interpretation of public benefit in this context extends not only to public parks and gardens but also to the gardens and amenity spaces at institutions serving the public – schools and colleges, hospitals,

hospices and day centres, nature reserves, museums, community gardens and city farms, and landscape elements within the townscape, such as roadside planting.

The attention to detail within the Minutes and Annual Reports of the MPGA throughout its existence has made the archives of the Association an invaluable resource for students of garden history, social history and local government, as well as providing background documentation for compilation of applications for grant aid by the current owners of parks, gardens and sports areas. In recent years, the MPGA has expended funds to ensure the continued availability of its archives for research by embarking on a programme of repair and conservation of these archives, which are housed in the City of London Guildhall Library. Also to this end, working parties promoting and overseeing projects for the renovation of sites in which the MPGA has a long-standing 'stakeholder' interest.

Royal, national and international events and anniversaries giving rise to programmes of new open space creation, such as the Millennium and the recent Golden Jubilee of Elizabeth II, see the MPGA closely involved in inspirational projects – a tradition established when the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria motivated the MPGA to combine with other like-minded amenity groups in setting up a celebratory campaign to create new public parks in honour of the occasion.

The advent of so many major sources of grant aid derived from Lottery funds and elsewhere, whether in a landscape regeneration context, the promotion of sport and play for young people, the restoration of historic parks and gardens, or the enhancement of community life in deprived areas, has in no way undermined or devalued the MPGA's own modest grant aid programme – quite the reverse. The MPGA's traditional funding for seats and trees fits very neatly within the requirement of 'matching funding' specified for such schemes as proof of wider community support, as was the case at Cleaver Square in Lambeth, where the MPGA's contribution towards the care and re-balancing of the existing tree canopy fitted into the pilot scheme for regeneration of the historic Square within the English Heritage-led London Squares programme. At Battersea Park, the MPGA's donation for an element of

the riverside seating not only contributed to the restoration of the historic park landscape for the London Borough of Wandsworth's Heritage Lottery funded scheme, but also provided a vantage point from which vistas identified in the *Thames Landscape Strategy* might be viewed, and in addition provides a resting point along the Countryside Agency's defined Thames Path National Trail, whilst the donation of a seat within the London Borough of Camden's Heritage Lottery scheme for the restoration of Brunswick Square also provided a resting place along the Jubilee Walkway route.

In an entirely different context, the community-led regeneration of Milkwood Road Open Space at Herne Hill in Lambeth (a run-down post-war open space), which centred upon Sport England-supported provision of play and sports facilities, also included a 'quiet garden' corner for use by older people, parents with young children, and local workers at lunch-time, to which the MPGA gift of a seat has been a useful complementary item.

The nature and scale of MPGA grant aid and the relative simplicity of access, together with the MPGA's reputation for giving encouragement and support, renders the MPGA's assistance of particular use in meeting the cost of modest items vital in enabling community groups to continue to benefit their localities. Within this context, recent examples have been the funding of steps within a community garden in Islington, and the funding of plant material for a hawthorn hedge dividing an allotment site from a public park on the inner edge of the Green Belt in Croydon (initially to improve site security but also bringing benefits to the visual appearance and ecology of the landscape, and facilitating project work by the local BTCV group).

Training in amenity horticulture for disadvantaged people creates important new career opportunities, especially when delivered within the setting of local city farms and community gardens. Practical assistance by the MPGA has provided funding for plant material, greenhouses and polytunnels for a number of sites, including Walworth Garden Farm, Vauxhall City Farm and Mudchute City Farm (the last-named being for use by the '*Trees for London*' training programme). Tenants' organisations working to improve the environment

of social housing estates by setting up gardening clubs have also received assistance in the London Boroughs of Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Camden and elsewhere, as have similar schemes at day centres, schools, hospices and community centres. Moreover, the MPGA still contributes to the acquisition of sites for new open spaces when such opportunities arise in London.

Joyce Bellamy is Secretary of the
Metropolitan Public Gardens Association

A WELCOME to our NEW CHAMPION

By The Perambulator

We have a new Minister for Parks, the Rt. Hon. Keith Hill MP. You lose track but I think that makes five since 2000. He spoke at this summer's *Great Parks Great Cities* conference in London. His opening gag was a swipe at 'the Victorians', and in particular at the nineteenth-century MP Richard Slaney, for arguing that the lack of decent recreational facilities for the urban poor might contribute not only to public health problems but also to political discontent. So Slaney got a cheap poke because he realised how important public parks were. Slaney in fact was a tireless campaigner for improvements to the conditions of the working-class, who, using a wide variety of arguments including topically the threat of political unrest, led the calls for Parliament to consider the scandalous lack of public open spaces in the new industrial towns and cities, and who in 1833 chaired the pioneering Select Committee Enquiry on Public Walks. He collected evidence on the lack of access to open space and the dire implications for public health, and wrote with passionate conviction:

During the last half century a very great increase has taken place in the population of large Towns, more especially as regards those classes who are, with many of their children, almost continually engaged in manufacturing and mechanical employments. During the same period, from the increased value of Property and extension of buildings many enclosures of open spaces in the vicinity of the Towns have taken place, and little or no provision made for Public Walks or Open Spaces, fitted to afford means of exercise or amusement to the middle

and humbler classes. ...Any provision of public walks or open spaces would much conduce to the comfort, health and content of the classes in question.

Hazel Conway remarks in *People's Parks* that Slaney's contribution to the promotion of public parks was 'probably the most sustained and effective of all those who were working in this area'. In addition to chairing the Select Committee he also promoted one of the key pieces of nineteenth-century legislation, the Recreation Grounds Act 1859, which encouraged the donation to local authorities of money or land for recreation. In short, he was the first and greatest Parliamentary champion for public parks and the needs of the working class, a cause he promoted for over a quarter of a century. And then in 2004, our new Minister of Parks, our new Parliamentary champion, has a go at him.

I wonder what Hill knows of all this? How long will he be tireless; how deeply will he delve into the issues? What will he be doing for parks in twenty-five years? Not a lot, not long and not much, judging by the tripe he spouted in July. Truly, without a knowledge of history, we are cabbages in this society.

After knocking Slaney, he proudly stated that his audience could tell that he was not 'one of those who hark back to a glorious past of the Victorian Park', going on to say, with dreary predictability that 'we need to ensure that parks and green spaces in today's cities meet today's needs'. How many of you have heard this before? What does Hill think those needs are, and how does he think they differ from those of people a hundred years ago? This trope serves merely to dress up a disingenuous hope that people might now "need" or make do with something cheaper.

Needs unfortunately have not changed that much. Of course nineteenth-century parks were created for a different society, but that does not mean they are no longer relevant. We know, from countless citizens' panels, quality of life questionnaires and community surveys, what people want from parks – fresh air, tranquillity, flowers, trees, lawns and water, a place to walk and sit, push a pram, meet their friends, a place for children to play free from fear and danger; a place of communal civil enjoyment, free to all. (*fig. 23*) People want clean public toilets and decent refreshment facilities; gardeners and wardens.