

some privacy from the bustle beyond the walls.

However, by 1733 Bridgeman's dramatic transformation of the royal gardens at Kensington was largely implemented and his royal duties there presumably focused on their maintenance. Queen Caroline died in 1737 and although some of her garden ideas and rejection of formal style had some deriders, the gardens at Kensington were widely praised and became immensely popular with the public. From the 1730s onwards they had had a limited opening to the 'respectable public' but by 1820 Thomas Faulkner was writing that the gardens were 'now open every day, winter and summer ... the great south walk leading to the palace, is crowded on Sunday mornings in the spring and summer, with a display of all the beauty and fashion of the great metropolis'.³⁶

Charles Bridgeman died of dropsy on 19 July 1738 and was buried at St James's Church, Piccadilly. After his death, responsibility for the royal gardens was divided between a number of people – Samuel Milward at St James's and Kensington, George Lowe at Hampton Court, John Kent at Windsor and Newmarket, and the Greenings at Richmond.

What is quite extraordinary is that, of the great number of prestigious garden commissions undertaken by Bridgeman, the bones of one his most important royal landscapes should have survived so remarkably intact in central London, given the pressures of development and the changes that have taken place. Equally extraordinary, perhaps, is the fact that people are not generally aware of Bridgeman's powerful legacy in one of London's great royal parks. It is hoped that the planned re-presentation of the gardens, which should include the erection of interpretative panels, will enable the wider public to appreciate the extent and importance of these curious earthworks that the ingenious Mr Bridgeman created in order to provide Kensington Palace with its uninterrupted views over the developing landscape. (fig. 22)

36. Thomas Faulkner, *History and Antiquities of Kensington* (London, 1820).

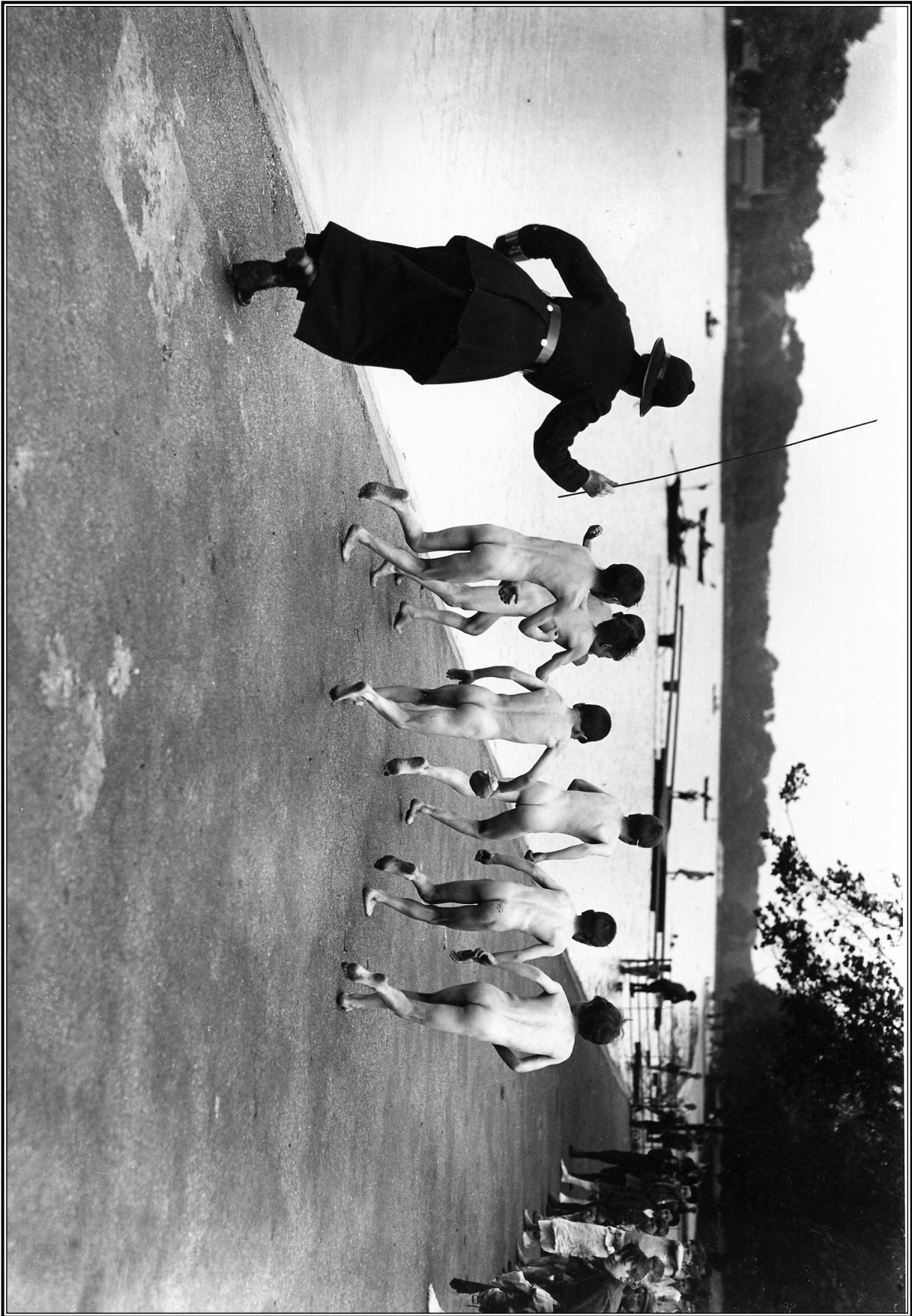
DON'T EAT THE DUCKS – TRANSGRESSION IN PUBLIC PARKS By The Perambulator

Don't Eat the Ducks' signs have recently gone up in an HLF-funded public park, in response to a wave of duck-losses caused apparently by East European workers in search of a cheap meal. The message is reproduced in several different languages, all on boards fixed to the railings by the park lodge. Bizarre though this might seem, it is a message that often had to be conveyed to the users of public parks on their opening – for example, signs saying 'Please Protect the Wildfowl' and 'No Guns or Sporting Dogs' were erected around the public walks at Durlston on the edge of Swanage when it was opened in the late nineteenth century.

The nineteenth-century drive to create public parks as lungs for a metropolis is well documented. But when the first public parks opened they were an entirely new kind of landscape. A public park was not a private garden in which the rights of an owner might be respected: they were purchased by the people and dedicated to the people. And it was not countryside of the kind workers had generally used for recreation where it was accessible. When the public first entered public parks, no one knew how to behave in them.

When Phillips Park in Manchester was opened in 1846, the first funded by public subscription, it opened without keepers or any signs. Within a week the Corporation hastened to address both, realising, for example, that the natural reaction of city-dwellers to the sight of flowers, which was to pick a posy to take home, had to be firmly discouraged. Rural Americans arriving for the first time in New York and making their way to Central Park had to be discouraged from a wide range of 'inappropriate' recreational pursuits, such as horseshoe-hurling, tomahawk-twirling and bullet-throwing.

Notoriously, the history of public parks is filled with *Do Not* signs, and correspondingly filled with transgression. In 1849, it was estimated that in three hours on one summer day, three thousand people bathed in the eastern lake of Victoria Park, Bow, a use condemned by the park's designer, James Pennethorne,



23. Reg Speller, *Children by the Serpentine in Hyde Park*, 1926
(FOX PHOTOS; COPYRIGHT GETTY IMAGES)

because bathing costumes were not used. Swimming was a popular pastime but illegal in the new landscape.

The famous Reg Speller photograph of skinny-dippers by the Serpentine, taken in 1926, (*fig. 23*) hints at the outlawed pleasures of public parks, outlawed for no good reason as far as those enjoying them are concerned. This was not transgression in the sense of being anti-social: it was on the contrary a highly social and in many ways valid engagement with the beauty of the place. Resistance to new rules was often strong, hence the familiar image of the authoritarian park-keeper.

The physical development of public parks was accompanied by a corresponding 'negotiation' over what behaviour was required between park-staff and users. Each park had to accommodate a complex array of uses and users in a limited space, and required a code of behaviour in order to function. This was maintained by the highly visible presence of uniformed staff.

Negotiation over the use of a new park was made more complicated because parks were often created on areas of open land which had been used for centuries for informal and largely lawless recreation. Battersea Fields prior to the creation of the Park was described by one visitor as 'a place out of hell that surpassed Sodom and Gomorrah in ungodliness and abomination ...horses and donkey racing, foot-racing, walking matches, flying boats, flying horses, roundabouts, theatres, comic actors, shameless dancers, conjurers, fortune-tellers, gamblers of every description, drinking-booths, stalls, hawkers, and vendors of all kinds of articles.' Improvement was thus often a means of introducing law and control into areas that threatened the status quo.

So, once the new park had been created, a new code of behaviour had to be formulated and then imposed, through by-laws and more or less peremptory instructions on signs, and through subtler means, such as engraved views in the local paper of people behaving decorously, or through the encouragement of certain types of activity considered acceptable – music but not dancing, strolling but not on the grass, archery but not football, drilling but not political meetings.

For some thirty or so years at the end of the twentieth century, funding for the main-

tenance and supervision of public parks was relentlessly cut. As a result, many parks slid into a new lawlessness. Now with HLF funding and a new political profile, parks are being regenerated. Most by-laws have not been updated since the early twentieth century, many users have never known supervised, high quality parks, and in seeking to bring people back, public parks are once again negotiated territory.

In some Lambeth parks, for example, the local authority attempts to accommodate the drinkers with their own dedicated area. 'Hanging out' is recognised as a valid form of use. Cycling, far from being banned, is now often actively encouraged, but requires new codes of conduct if it is to share space with walkers, children and dogs. Dog-walking itself is likewise hotly contested as a legitimate use. Camden famously became embroiled in articulate lobbying from the gay community over the legitimacy of the long-standing use of Russell Square after dark by homosexuals. The use of Clapham Common for barbeques, evidently abhorrent to many, is being fiercely debated at present.

We are becoming far more sophisticated in identifying the 'significance' of a public park. Significance used to be an expert appraisal of a place's historic interest in its national context. Later, its local context was given due weight. More recently, significance has come to be understood as the sum-total of a range of different 'values' of which historical value is only one among many – environmental, economic, cultural, community. This is refreshing, albeit making significance a rather more messy concept.

The *Conservation Management Plan for the City of London Cemetery in Manor Park*, 2004, includes a fascinating study by Leonie Kellaher of the way in which users of the cemetery view it. For most users, a map of the significance of the component areas would be precisely the inverse of that which a historian might propose. For them, the most sensitive areas were those with modern graves still being visited by the bereaved, not the mature Victorian landscape.

Rather like the Victorians, we are now having to decide what is and is not acceptable behaviour. Thirty years of official neglect and decline left these places approaching the

lawlessness of their origins. The withering of any consensus on what is acceptable has been an inevitable accompaniment to the withdrawal of maintenance, the decline in user numbers and the disappearance of staff, whether keepers or gardeners.

There is a wonderful story from the *Daily Chronicle* of how 'feeding the rats' became one of the attractions of Peckham Rye Park: 'The little park ...is one of the prettiest in London, and the rats have made it also one of the most popular. You can find peacocks and pigeons in the park. But if you discover a little group of children with paper bags in their hands, you may take it for granted that they are there not to feed the birds, but the rats.' Today, feeding the squirrels or the Canada geese is now an equally popular engagement with vermin. And yet, these are the memories of the park which will be deepest for many users.

Feeding the rats in Peckham is unusual in being documented: by their nature, most transgressive activities are not recorded, except in people's memories, but occasionally fugitive traces can be found: everyone in Corporation Park, Blackburn, staff and users alike, knows the Cigarette Tree, where children from the adjacent school have for generations smoked furtive cigarettes, to the point where nicotine poisoning through its roots is damaging the tree. Likewise, we can see a tradition of use in the sneakers invariably hanging from the Shoe Tree in South Marine Park, South Shields, where they are traditionally thrown, or the neatly inscribed bricks on the pavilion in Mesnes Park, Wigan, where the tags and messages never stray beyond the confines of a single brick.

As much as for their design, public parks are special because of their place in people's personal histories. They are places where rites of passage take place – childhood adventures away from the parental eye, the landmark events of courtship and parenthood. It is the venue too for other rites of passage – the first brush with authority, the first kiss, or the first illicit smoke or drink – which may actually find themselves outside the park's by-laws and the authorities' vision of 'correct leisure'. To recognise a wider range of uses and values than the Victorians as legitimate is not to recognise them all as equally acceptable. The challenge is

to establish new codes of behaviour which accommodate the widest range of use while protecting the park and ensuring the enjoyment of all.

(For a more detailed study of many of the themes in this article, see 'Rituals of Transgression in Public Parks in Britain, 1846 to the Present' in the forthcoming *Dumbarton Oaks volume, Lay Ritual Practices in Gardens and Landscapes*, 2006)

LT-COL. J.J. SEXBY – FATHER OF LONDON'S MUNICIPAL PARKS – AN APPRECIATION By Hazelle Jackson

Being an appreciation of Lt. Col. J.J. Sexby, the London County Council's first chief officer of Parks from 1892-1910

As the first chief officer of London County Council's Parks Department from 1892-1910, Lt-Col. John James Sexby had a profound influence on the style and quality of London's municipal parks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For nearly twenty years Sexby managed a vast estate covering thousands of acres and employed many hundreds of staff, all dedicated to making London's parks the best in the country, if not the world. (*fig. 24*)

Many of London's most distinctive and much loved municipal parks date from this period and the measure of his success must be that Sexby set standards in public park design and management worldwide that still prevail today. Yet he remains a shadowy figure in the annals of garden history. (He does not even rate a mention in *British Gardeners – A Biographical Dictionary*.)¹

I first encountered Sexby's work when Paula Johnston, Manager of Peckham Rye Park, invited me to document its restoration in 2004. I was fascinated by the park, designed

1. Hadfield and others *British Gardeners – A Biographical Dictionary* (London: Zwemmer, 1980).