estate to Wimbledon Corporation, who opened the grounds around the house to the public as Cannizaro Park in 1949. The house, initially leased to Surrey County Council as an old people's home, is now a hotel.

As for the Kent drawing that Walker had commissioned, it seems to have been just an idea - a suggested ideal landscape. There is something perhaps a bit too neat about the way the vistas are portrayed in the drawing, and in the event, nothing seems to have been done.

So we have all the pieces in the jigsaw fitted together, and if nothing else, this fascinating journey has put some background to a hitherto unknown landscape commission from William Kent.

Acknowledgements

I could not have compiled this note without the use of the researches of Richard Morris of Loughton, Essex. He has generously shared his work and provided me with a copy of his privately printed pamphlet on Thomas Walker (2006, revised 2009). This article is as much his work as mine. I am grateful to Mrs Graffety-Smith and Neil Hobhouse for permission to publish and to John Harris and Tim Knox for their support.

## 'To the Barricades!'

*By* The Perambulator

We have grown used in the past ten years to politicians' plaudits for parks – 'the social environmental and economic benefits' of good quality parks has entered the lexicon of policy-makers and speech-writers. Since 1996 we have seen an unimaginable sum spent on regenerating urban parks by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which has dragged them into official consciousness. In recognition of the enormous backlog that slashed maintenance budgets caused, this money has largely gone towards capital repairs. Over £450m has been spent in what can now be seen as a renaissance of public parks and, while no one should assume that the revival has lifted anything like all or even the majority of parks, we have got used to seeing new park buildings, stunning horticulture and enthusiastic staff back in parks.

The wider benefits of parks have been exhaustively researched. Government demanded evidence and bodies like CABE Space have provided it, demonstrating over and over again the bleeding obvious: that good parks contribute to the economy of a town or borough; that they are good for social cohesion and for health; that good maintenance reduces antisocial behaviour; or that communities value well-maintained parks.

In addition to grant aid towards repairs, good local authorities have taken the opportunity of the raised political profile, much helped by the Green Flag awards, to introduce other improvements, including parks strategies, additional staff and programmes of events and activities.

However, we have left one terrible gap in the barricades around our regenerated public parks. The one thing that has not been tackled is how to safeguard the revenue funding for day-to-day, year-on-year maintenance, which underpins good parks. Even at the height of the HLF munificence, Councils were requiring savings from parks and green space managers, cutting specifications and staff. That is all about to get very much worse. ***(fig. 8)***

There may be waving of tenners and talk about green shoots of recovery in the City, but the full impact of the credit crunch, or more specifically the bail-out, has yet to hit local authorities and public services. Next year it will, and parks are right in the firing line. The recent Renaissance is about to be succeeded by a dark age, with wars that will decimate park staff and leave scorched earth where flowers have once again begun to bloom, and in which vandals, both hooded and pin-striped, will run amok through our green and pleasant places.

As a non-statutory service, parks are inherently vulnerable to cuts. But that vulnerability is increased by the sector's chronic failure to gather basic data: the value of a park, the cost of running a park, or the number of people who visit a park. Without that basic information the case for preserving funding, not only against obviously needy services such as social care, but even against other leisure facilities, such as swimming pools, museums and libraries – all of which have that information at their finger-tips – starts at a serious disadvantage.


8. The park keeper - going for good this time?
Hampden Park, Eastbourne, 1937
(Courtesy Parks Agency)

It is shameful that there are still managers who will say, 'we can't gather visitor numbers because we have too many park entrances to monitor', and give up at the first hurdle. The failure to gather the visitor-figures just waiting to be collected – which invariably dwarf numbers for paying facilities such as leisure centres – is almost suicidally negligent.

This year, CABE Space published a methodology by which managers can calculate the asset value of a park, with astonishing results.[1] At present most parks are valued at a nominal £1, on the basis that, because they cannot be sold, their value cannot be realised. This means that in the modern world of 'asset management' parks simply do not figure: they are not assets, they are just liabilities.

But if the component parts are totted up this is clearly demonstrated to be absurd, and also very bad asset management. The value of the buildings, such as bandstands, walls, cafés, toilets, etc., and of the hard landscape of paths, lights, benches, play areas, bollards, railings, etc. is easy to tot up. In addition, the London Tree Officers' Association has devised a formula for calculating the cash value of mature trees, which can run into hundreds of thousands for a single mature tree.[2] This alone can demonstrate that, for example, Highbury Fields is actually worth not £1 but £49M (£53M if you include the swimming pool), or that Sefton Park in Liverpool is worth £105M.

This is before the secondary value is factored in, for example the contribution a park makes to surrounding property values (a premium of anywhere between 10 and 20% has been identified for properties adjacent to a park) and businesses, the value to schools of a free visit, let alone to the local primary care trust in terms of reduced demand for treatment resulting from the exercise and peace of mind a park provides. It is desperately important to translate 'of course it's valuable' wooliness into hard cash terms if the battles over budgets are not to be routs.

And similarly, because parks are so often bundled into a borough-wide maintenance contract, the other evidence that would assist in the defence of parks – that it costs *£x thousand* pounds to maintain this park in a decent condition and if you cut *£y thousand*, we will lose *a*, *b* and *c* features or services – is also neglected as too hard to extract. Vital ammunition is being left ungathered.

And parks in the UK are fatally weak too on promotion and marketing. Elsewhere around the world, parks managers understand PR and produce glossy annual reports packed with these kinds of statistics to keep up the political profile of parks, making it harder to slash budgets. The London boroughs need to take a look at the *Royal Parks Annual Report* and ponder the connection between funding and this kind of promotion. The Royal Parks know how to play the game: their Annual Report rolls up together in a slick and shiny production the good news about customer satisfaction, recorded data on numbers, projects and activities with the hard facts of the costs.

There are ominous signs over our Middle Earth already. The Big Lottery Fund has pulled out of the Parks for People programme, halving its annual budget drastically – there is now just £20M per annum ear-marked for park projects, which four or five big projects could devour at a stroke. At present the rate of over-subscription is around 6:1. 'Big' has also cut short its Access to Nature programme. The wonderful Gateway Gardens Trust has just folded due to the impossibility of raising funds; the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum is in difficulty for the same reason. The reliance of the Olympic Park's legacy on funding from the private development of its surroundings is looking over-optimistic after the private partnership to develop the Olympic village collapsed and Government had to take over.

The signs from Mordor, *aka* the Treasury, are grim, and many local authorities are responding by beginning the process of rationalisation ahead of the game. Westminster's Cabinet was told by its Chief Exec. in July this year that 'Strategic Commissioning' is the way forward:

> Strategic Commissioning changes the landscape of local public services by focusing on the delivery of community, customer and citizen-driven outcomes.

He defined it as 'the continuous process of assessing evidenced need, translating into priority outcomes and ensuring delivery'. Any

1. CABE Space, *Making the invisible visible: the real value of park assets* (2009).
2. See http://www.ltoa.org.uk/cavat.htm.

clearer? No mention of parks, environmental services, green space or play under the responsibilities of the new 'delivery units'. Instead, we are told that parks management will come under a Procurement and Contract Management Strategic Support Unit.

This will send shudders through anyone aware of the history of public parks. There are ominous signs that we are going to repeat the mistakes of the seventies and eighties when cutting parks maintenance was seen as an easy, or less difficult, option for local politicians than other cuts. Both the Council reorganisations in 1974, which saw parks departments dissolved into leisure services, and the vicious reductions that resulted from Compulsory Competitive Tendering in the 1980s seem to have vanished into the memory hole.

It may be that, finance aside, parks will be a casualty in an accelerating retreat from the communal, from the space which demands consideration and tolerance in return. The human need for communality is under attack from the commercial imperative of purveying fear and selfishness. We may have spent nearly half a billion on parks, but at the same time the Government has continued the Thatcherite atomisation of society in favour of the private, of choice and the market. Perhaps the last ten years of spending on parks was in some ways a freak of history, and, under the new Conservative government, the shredding of the public realm will just accelerate in a headlong tumble towards urban wastelands.

For those of you still with me, this is a gloomy sort of rant. You may think I exaggerate: perhaps. But it can take so little to undo what has been gained. The axing of the ranger who has become a familiar and reassuring presence; the tiny adjustment in a maintenance contract that shifts weed control or litter collection from manageable to impossible; the reduced budget that means the toilets will have to be closed rather than repaired. I think we are back to the barricades, and Friends groups, citizens' panels, park-user forums are going to be in the front-line of the battle, with the weapons at hand – petitions, letters, meetings, demonstrations – rallying around the fluttering Green Flag, to preserve the hard-won gains of the last twenty-five years.

## Highbury House and its Garden 1778-1938: From Pastoral Idyll to Urban Streets

*By* Michael Ann Mullen

Highbury House, a villa residence set in a park in the hamlet of Highbury, was built by John Dawes, a retired City stockbroker, between 1778 and 1781. The population of British cities was growing at this time and the quality of urban life deteriorating. Insufficient housing for working people was producing overcrowding and discontent, and inadequate sanitary infrastructure was causing pests and diseases to spread. Seeking more tranquil and healthier conditions for their families, members of the growing merchant classes, tied to the city by work, built villas set in estates – most less than a hundred acres – in rural settings within commuting distance.

In 1809 these were sufficiently numerous for the Edinburgh author and gardener Walter Nicol to publish *The Villa Garden Directory* to provide 'hints on the formation of their villa gardens, shrubberies, and parterres' 'to gentlemen whose business necessarily confines them to the Chamber and to the Counting-room, ... and to the ladies of their families ...'[1] Subtitled *Monthly Index of Work to be done in Town and Villa Gardens*, he associated the villa firmly with the town. As the villa residence was a relatively new phenomenon, Nicol felt it necessary to emphasise that 'the Villa is one thing; the Country Residence and the Palace are of another cast; so are their respective Gardens'.[2] Highbury House, situated less than three miles north of the City of London, was one such villa.

Near a main road leading to *The North*, at a hundred metres above sea level, Highbury was valued for its pure air[3] and panoramic views. Highbury House was one of the numerous villas built in the area during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries[4] *(fig. 9)* but its pastoral setting was short-lived.

1. Walter Nicol, *The Villa Garden Directory or Monthly Index of Work to be done in Town and Villa Gardens* (Edinburgh, 1809), Preface.
2. Nicol, *op. cit.*, p.1.
3. Patricia Croot, *Victoria County History, A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 8: Islington and Stoke Newington Parishes* (1985), pp.1-3.
4. Humphry Repton alluded to this trend when he wrote: 'in the neighbourhood of every city or manufacturing town, new places, as villas, are daily springing up'. (Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London, printed by T. Bensley & Son for J. Taylor, 1816), p.69.