

strength. In 1877 a 'lawn racket ground' was installed, then tennis courts, followed by croquet around 1900. As interest in polo escalated, Hurlingham needed more land for another pitch, and for this they leased Mulgrave House with its fifteen acres. Broom House, which marched with their eastern boundary, was acquired in 1912. Sir Edwin Lutyens, who had worked on various aspects of the club, advised on the layout of the grounds after Broom House was demolished. The standard wisterias of today on the site could 'well have started life on the walls of the old house and ancient lilacs, rare privets, and yew date from this time'.¹⁹

Repton's landscape was altered forever after the flood of 1928, when the Thames rose to the very doors of Hurlingham. As a result, an embankment was built along the entire length, which effectively blocked out the view of the river forever. Further dramatic changes came to Hurlingham after World War II when the two polo grounds were compulsorily purchased by the London County Council for housing and a school, followed by number 1 ground being made over to a public park.

Today, the gardening committee of the Hurlingham Club is sensitive to its historical legacy. Specimen trees, oaks, London planes, tulip trees, limes, plane and horse chestnut abound, much as in the past. They strive for the spirit of the country house garden, but are mindful of the social and sporting needs of its members. The bones of what 'Capability' Brown and Humphry Repton did to the original landscape can just be recognised today, and remain a fitting, and lasting legacy to the two great men.

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PARKS FOR PEOPLE: GONE FOR GOOD?

By The Perambulator

After twenty-two wonderful years, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has announced the closure of its Parks for People programme, the latest incarnation of a dedicated fund for public parks that began with the Urban Parks Programme (UPP) in 1996. It was a historic moment when Lord Rothschild stood on the steps of the Museum in Weston Park in Sheffield one snowy January morning and announced £50M for public parks. It was an unimaginable sum, at a time when the annual English Heritage budget for grade I and II* registered parks was £200,000. It transformed the situation not only for parks, but was a key part of transforming the whole funding landscape for heritage. Public benefit was as important as heritage benefit; the needs of children and young people needed to be addressed, along with economic and social deprivation, geographical equity, and sustainability. No longer did a site need to be on a national heritage list to merit funding, and grants embraced not only conservation and repair but new features; the toilets and cafés and play areas that were essential to the idea of not just restoring but *regenerating* - the term was coined in the HLF's annual report for 1996 - these places.

In the first year alone the HLF awarded £58M worth of grants to urban parks and over the years there have been some wonderful projects, and London has benefited hugely from schemes that range from tiny sites like Coram's Fields to the grandeur of Victoria Park (fig. 32). All the projects have been of direct benefit to the millions who access these parks every day freely, many as a matter of routine. They have been a celebration of all that is wonderful in human life - communal pleasure, tolerance and consideration, fresh air and flowers, King Lear's superfluity that makes us human. We should not forget that the HLF chose to fund parks as a way of diverting criticism that it was too concerned

19. Diana Lecron, *A Brief History of the [Hurlingham] Club*. n.d., n.p.

with elite heritage,¹ but whatever the background, the HLF was the inspiration and well-spring of this renaissance in public parks, with Lord R as a kind of benevolent Pope Julius II, the unlikeliest but most vigorous defender of the faith.

The UPP survived its first three years and got a renewal as the Public Parks Initiative, and then that too was renewed and parks were given core-business status within HLF, and so continued for those twenty-two years. But the end was brutal: no one foresaw it. It seems to have been the result of a financial crisis within the HLF, not helped by the downturn in income from Camelot, and also from a downturn in applications. That was not of course the result of 'the job being done' but rather of the hollowing out of local authority parks services. All over the UK, the capacity required to put together a bid to the HLF has almost entirely vanished as a result of eight years of austerity and the job-losses it caused.

The end could hardly have come at a worse time. The decision was made, without warning and with particularly crass timing, one year on from the House of Commons Select Committee inquiry. This had demonstrated the huge public concern over the future of parks, and its recognition, if no more, of the importance of parks to people's physical and mental well-being, to the social as well as the environmental ecology of towns and cities, and even to their economic growth. The HLF chose to celebrate that anniversary, and the faint signs of progress on the part of government, by pulling the plug on the one source of significant funding available to make parks fit for those purposes.

The HLF will continue to fund parks but in competition with other, better-established, forms of heritage – churches, museums, listed buildings – and that will mean less money available. But the money aside, the signal this decision gives that parks are marginal, or do

not matter, or have been 'done', could not be worse-timed or further from the truth. Austerity has left parks services worse than decimated – cuts not just of 10% but even of 90% have left them unable to function properly, scrambling for ill-conceived solutions put together with little regard for the long-term. There is a huge and shocking discrepancy in the level of cuts to parks services with the worse being in the north while the Home Counties have the least.

Perhaps most damning of all, research by the HLF has revealed that, such is the rate of decline resulting from austerity since 2010, by 2020 parks will be in a worse state than they were in the mid-1990s when HLF began its funding.² That means that despite over £900m invested by HLF, central government has effectively destroyed the long-term benefits of that investment.

So now that the dire warnings about austerity have been ignored, we are now well and truly on the helter-skelter spiral of decline, accelerating each year into the unknown. What do we see? We see Newcastle upon Tyne, having suffered 90% cuts to its parks budget in seven years seeking to transfer its parks to a new trust, unwisely encouraged by the National Trust and the HLF, on the basis of just a £9.8m subsidy to end after ten years, after which the Trust is expected to run the parks on an entirely self-financing basis. Without a substantial endowment of the kind that supports the two successful parks trusts which are regularly held up as exemplars – Nene Park and Milton Keynes – there will be an inordinate amount of pressure on the new trust to raise funds annually from events and commercial activities. The City has suggested more money could be made available for an endowment but that it would have to be repaid, which defeats the purpose. The Council has been seeking to appoint a chief executive since January and it is no surprise to find no takers as yet for what could be a poisoned chalice.

In Bristol, in 2017, the Council revealed plans to make parks 'cost-neutral' – i.e. reduce funding to zero – by 2019. They have now (April 2018) been forced to pull back from such a disastrous plan by the public outcry which

1. In an interview in 2002, quoted in The Parks Agency, 'Parks Reborn: a record of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Urban Parks Programme,' HLF internal report, 2002 (p.6), Anthea Case, then the Director of the HLF, said, 'There were two drivers. First, HLF put on a brave face but in 1996 it was still reeling from the controversy over its grant to the Churchill papers. In that context, urban parks, as a possibility raised by Lord Rothschild, looked democratic. Secondly, in those early days, Lord Rothschild and the Board of Trustees were conscious of being in a very crowded pool with a number of well-established sharks circling, and wanting the HLF's money. Parks, on the other hand, appeared to be a pool without such sharks.'

2. HLF, *The State of UK Parks*, 2016.



32. The restored Chinese Pavilion, Victoria Park, Hackney



33. Brockwell Park, Brixton, 'The Great Wall of Brockwell Park goes up ahead of Field Day 2018'
Brixton Buzz, 24 May 2018.

(PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BRIXTON BUZZ: [HTTP://WWW.BRIXTONBUZZ.COM/](http://www.brixtonbuzz.com/))

followed the announcement - proposals to close play areas and introduce advertising into parks were particularly egregious - but are still seeking cuts of 75% to be made up by an utterly unconvincing mix of increased commercial activity and more reliance on community volunteers.

In Knowsley, there were, until June this year, plans to sell off 10% of the borough's green spaces to create a £40M endowment for a new Knowsley Parks Trust. A new leader has now dropped the idea in the wake of public protests, but will still need to find funds to reverse the proposal to cut the entire £1.3M annual budget to zero. The message from the electorate was clear - whatever strategic analysis is adopted, every park is a local park about which people feel passionately protective. The decision represents a welcome resistance to what has been called "neoliberal doctrine's savage sorting of winners and losers".³

Elsewhere, local authorities are flogging their parks harder and harder to create revenue to replace core-funding. Londoners will be well aware of the outcry at Lambeth's proposal to host eight major events each summer in Brockwell Park.⁴ After eleven years of trashing Victoria Park, the Field Day festival has been given a new home in Brockwell, a park which is roughly half the size (*fig. 33*). In a horrible game of musical chairs, the Lovebox festival, against which Brockwell residents had long protested, has now moved to Gunnersbury Park, where similar local resistance might be anticipated.

In November, although the Friends of Finsbury Park lost their challenge against Haringey Council over the Wireless Festival, they did establish a) that unreasonable exclusion of the public from part of a park can be challenged; and b) that as a local authority holds a park on trust for the public, any money raised from events must be reserved for spending on the park and not go into general funds. They are currently pursuing the

Council over the use of those capital receipts.⁵

These London councils are however doing no more than following where the Royal Parks have led, with their enormous concerts and Winter Wonderland in Hyde Park, which for many years have effectively prohibited public access to the Parade Ground area for some twelve weeks each year. The Parade Ground has been repaired but we must wait to see the impact of the enormous Barclaycard British Summer Time festival, which will run over two weekends in July, and this year's Winter Wonderland, which runs for two months.

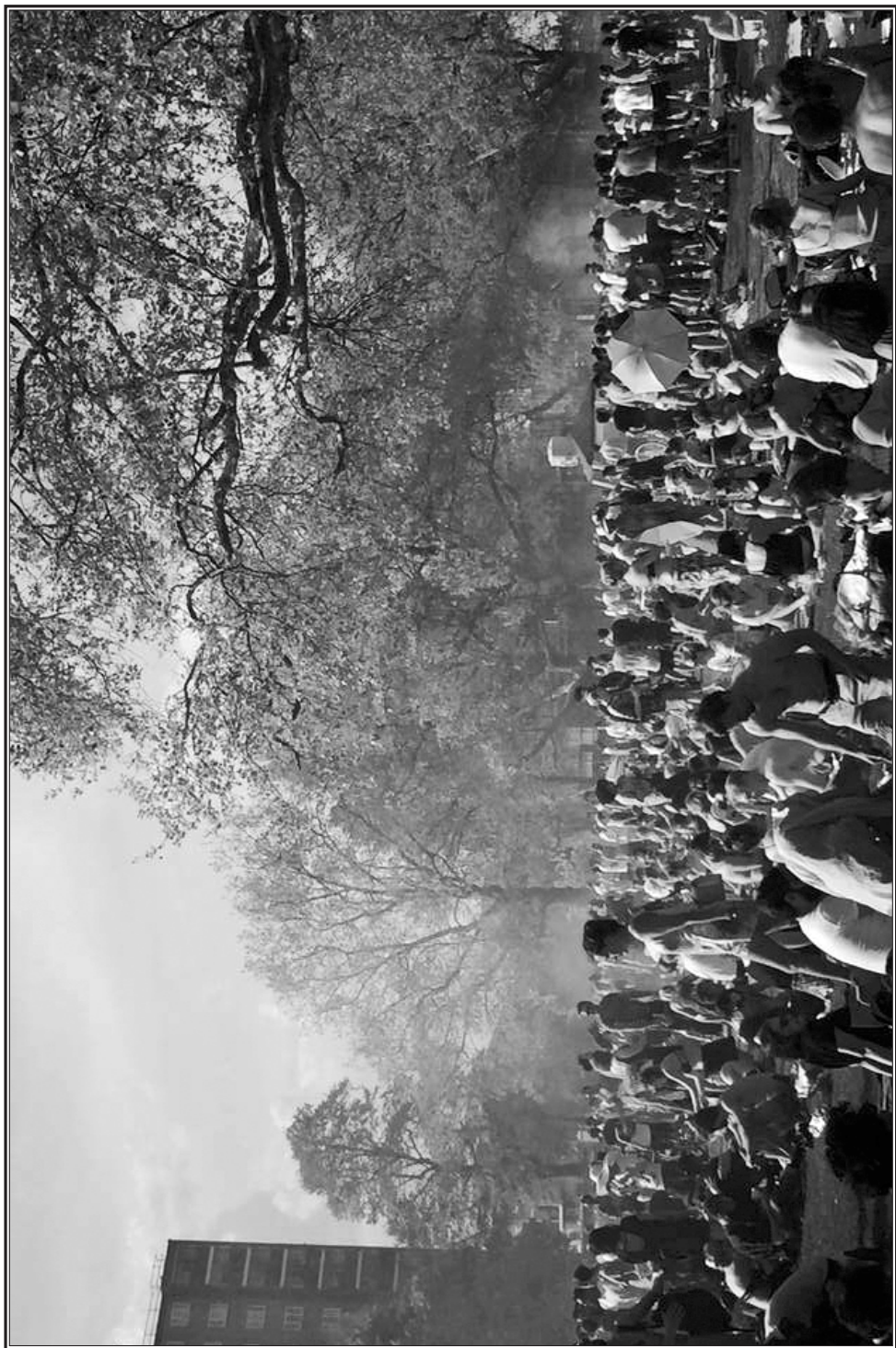
The heavy vehicles required by events organisers crush verges and path edges; they compact grass and tree roots creating problems that will take years to manifest themselves. Set-up and take-down periods mean areas are cordoned off for far longer than just the days of an event; and crowds of people leave litter, trample flower beds and make life difficult for local residents and park users (*fig. 34*). And to cap it all, the local authority, unless it is very savvy about its contracts, ends up with unforeseen costs of repair.

In one week alone I heard of three alarming threats to public parks around the country. In Porthkerry Country Park outside Barry, Vale of Glamorgan Council is proposing to lease a substantial part of the core to a private company to create a campsite, café and play area, involving, it is feared, car parking, a shower block, office and fencing. The modest but popular Westfield Park in Caversham near Reading is threatened by proposals to lease and fence off about a third of the park to a local academy school as a play area for its pupils. And in Stratford Park, Stroud, the Council is proposing to allow an enormous new building to be built as an indoor skate park, 'the Wembley of skateparks'. Bizarrely, it is offering the land on a pepper-corn rent so there is not even the prospect of income for the park, just evidence of poor decision-making.

3. Kevin Loughran, 'Parks for Profit: The High Line, Growth Machines, and the Uneven Development of Urban Public Spaces,' *City & Community* 13:1 March 2014, p.51.

4. <http://www.brixtonbuzz.com/2018/05/the-great-wall-of-brockwell-park-goes-up-ahead-of-field-day-2018>.

5. <https://www.thefriendsoffinsburypark.org.uk/finsbury-park/finsbury-park-events-haringey-council-in-breach-of-statutory-trust/>



34. 'London Fields: Council spends £140,000 a year to clear up park 'trashed by hipsters'
Evening Standard, 26 June 2016
(PHOTOGRAPH GARETH JONES)

Even these few examples illustrate a sector in chaos, the utterly predictable consequence of an ideological and catastrophic assault on public services. Everywhere, you see local authorities scrambling to make more money out of their parks, and while this is okay in principle – parks have always been places for events – the pressure to make ever-larger sums out of them is pushing the boundaries of environmental capacity. These events threaten the very *raison d'être* of parks, to offer tranquillity, beauty and sheer relief to town-dwellers.

This is about politics, about the kind of country we want to live in. Public parks embody free and equal access, the opposite of the free-market where everything has its price – in other words, territory ripe for invasion. The push to make parks pay for themselves, or to be “cost-neutral”, is a tenet of neo-liberalism and the small-state, low-tax economic model it promulgates. Parks, squares, even streets, become commodities, with all that that entails: discreet surveillance and privately framed and enforced by-laws, where increasingly the citizen is forced to become a consumer.

The University of Westminster academic Andrew Smith, in his study of the electric grand prix fiasco at Battersea Park a few years ago, remarks that ‘capitalism inherently involves closing down public space...the financialisation of the city [for which read ‘the park’] and its repositioning as a commodity.’ He writes of ‘eventification’ – an ugly word for an ugly process – as the ‘transformation of urban space into the staged experience aimed at wealthy white consumers’, and cites Bryant Park, New York, the hip down-town park which all too often is occupied by a gigantic marquee staging some corporate launch or show, as a place where ‘events erode the traditional role of parks as spaces for representation’ by re-purposing them as ‘spaces for consumption’.⁶

We are rushing into a dystopian future for parks, headlong, and heedless or uncaring of the consequences. Some, the larger, central ones, will become commodified and

commercialised; but the majority – the more modest local parks – will be increasingly neglected and threatened. We have had our renaissance, but in a reverse of history, our leaders are rejecting enlightenment in favour of a return to darkness.

AGOSTINO AGLIO AND EDWARDES SQUARE

By Julian Mitchell

Edwarde Square is now generally regarded as one of the most attractive garden squares in west London, though it took time for its pleasures to be appreciated. Leigh Hunt, who lived in the square in the 1840s, called it ‘a curious pretty little spot’ whose surprising largeness and cultivated look contrasted with the smallness of its houses. In 1862 Henry Mayhew and John Binny considered it pretentious, parvenu-like and suburban, and as late as 1991 Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner snootily called it ‘unambitious’.¹ But the garden, with its secrets deftly screened from public view, has always been admired, for its size, its attractive Greek temple/cottage for the beadle in charge of the gate (now for the gardener), and its unusual serpentine paths (*fig. 35*). Leigh Hunt seems alone in criticising these last for not being straight, as there was ‘no inequality of ground to render the wandering natural’. But there has been almost two hundred years of disagreement as to who laid the garden out.

The Survey of London and Cherry and Pevsner say it was the Italian artist Agostino Aglio, who lived in the square while it was still building, and was a trustee under the 1819 Act of Parliament which established its rules and regulations. Others, such as *Historic England* (2002), give it to an Englishman called Alexander Paul Sack, whom John Claudius Loudon called ‘a gardener of superior education, various talents and very great experience’. Little is known of Sack, though it has been suggested that he may have worked

6. Andrew Smith, ‘Justifying and resisting public park commercialisation: the battle for Battersea Park’, *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 2018, *passim*, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0969776418767731>.

1. Leigh Hunt, *The Old Court Suburb*, 1855, pp.232–237; Henry Mayhew and John Binny, *Criminal Prisons of London*, 1862, p.151; Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England, London 3*, 1991, pp.41 & 518.

2. *The Survey of London*, Vol 42, ed. Hermione Hobhouse, 1986, pp.249–263; Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, *op. cit.*