

Westminster Abbey on the same day, and the unveiling of the Cenotaph became a part of a larger funeral procession for the Unknown Warrior. If it was possible, the public response to the newly unveiled memorial exceeded even that to the temporary Cenotaph during the Peace Celebrations. Whitehall was closed for four days, and more than a million people visited the Cenotaph, and continued to file past for many days after, the pile of flowers and wreaths around the Cenotaph reaching enormous size. *The Times* wrote that, 'there has never before in this country been such a Pilgrimage to the grave of a hero or such a display of mourning around a memorial to the dead'.<sup>55</sup> It was an opportunity for the families of the fallen and returned servicemen to express feelings that they had felt compelled to suppress while the war was in progress. Indeed, such was the emotional impact, there was even the sense that the mourners could commune with the souls of the dead. The *Daily Express* wrote:

Britain's million dead lived again yesterday.  
They who went down to the grave that we  
might live were quick and beautiful, and they  
spoke to us from heart to heart and we were  
humbly conscious of our debt.<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

Many of the street shrines of the East End and their Rolls of Honour were retained at the end of the war; some were brought into the local church, but most eventually succumbed to decay, or were replaced with a more permanent memorial, listing only those who had died. One such Roll of Honour that has survived can now be found in St. Margaret's Church, Leytonstone. It lists the names of thirty-two men from Chichester Street, Leytonstone, five of whom died and twenty-seven of whom survived (*fig. 24*). A shrine can also be found at the corner of Mace and Tagg Street in Bethnal Green; the decaying wooden shrine was replaced by York stone tablets in 1936 (*fig. 25*). The modest shrines made from simple materials, decorated with flags and fresh flowers and tended mostly by women, brought a focus for the emotions of a neighbourhood.

They allowed small communities, often just one street, to share feelings of worry, grief and pride at a time of great peril for their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers. As the war continued, they also signified the need for more sacrifice.

Towards the end of the war, the Great Flower Shrine in Hyde Park allowed the coming together of people from all over London in solemn and mass mourning. Unable to visit the graves of their loved ones, this was the opportunity to pay tribute to the dead, and symbolically lay flowers on their grave. Such was the response that a call was raised to make a permanent flower shrine in Hyde Park. This was never realised and all traces of the Great Flower Shrine are now completely lost except for a few grainy photographs. However, clear parallels can be drawn with the temporary Cenotaph organised as a saluting point for the Victory Parade as part of the Peace Celebrations in 1919, as in turn it became the focal point for the bereaved to lay flowers. People responded quickly, for them it immediately became a sacred place, nothing less than a permanent memorial in the same location would be acceptable. David Lloyd in his book, *Battlefield Tourism*, describes the pilgrimage to the Cenotaph and the Unknown Warrior as one of the most extraordinary events in Britain during the interwar years. The response of people transformed them from observers at a public funeral to pilgrims at a ceremony of mourning.<sup>57</sup> From simple street shrine to the sublime beauty of the Cenotaph, bereaved relatives had sacrificed so much and they wanted it to be heard and they wanted it to count.

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ATTACKING THE LUNGS –  
COVID AND THE STATE OF PARKS  
By The Perambulator

**D**uring this impossible year, both alarming and miraculous, when the heat-engine of global consumerism was closed down in a matter of days and bird song rang down deserted city streets, public

<sup>55</sup> *The Times*, 16 November 1920.

<sup>56</sup> *Daily Express*, 12 November 1920.

<sup>57</sup> Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p.92.



26. Locked up in lockdown: public parks have been recognised as an essential service for millions of city-dwellers, but closed playgrounds, closed toilets and taped-up benches have been an unwelcome feature of the crisis  
(PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)

parks took centre stage in the story of lockdown. They regularly featured on the front pages with stories of the relief they offered to desperate city-dwellers, restricted for weeks during the early stages of the crisis to a single brief period of release from their homes. Countless thousands of vox pops and photos celebrated the importance of parks to mental and physical wellbeing.

When Brockwell Park and Victoria Park were closed in early April after crowds proved unmanageable, there was a widespread outcry and the decisions quickly reversed (*fig. 26*). The arguments reframed in contemporary language the plea of nineteenth-century campaigners like the MP Richard Slaney, who chaired the Select Committee Inquiry on Public Walks in 1833. In his report, he said that in the rapid urban expansion of the preceding decades there had been:

... 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 such provision of public walks or open spaces would much conduce to the comfort, health and content of the classes in question.<sup>1</sup>

Today, there is of course no mention of class, but the argument is the same; ‘if you’re stuck in inadequate accommodation, you’ve got no back garden, you’ve got nowhere to go and you’re all on top of each other,’ then parks have been a ‘lifeline’.<sup>2</sup> ‘Parks are keeping us sane right now,’ was one headline in early April, speaking out for people who had no garden other than the public park.

Parks have always been contested space, the locus for continuous negotiation, formal or informal, over what constitutes ‘correct leisure’ or what we would now call acceptable behaviour. People who have adapted to an increasingly atomised society have been asked by cynical politicians to dredge up folk memories of acting for the common good and it is wonderful what a reservoir of such common decency and kindness still remains. For many of us, in this time of social isolation, parks have seemed more sociable places than ever.

But parks have seen those negotiations reach boiling point in places, fuelled by the confusion sown by the wilful mismanagement of government, ideologically incapable of leadership. During the most extreme period of lockdown, sunbathing was classified as an antisocial activity, with the police seeking to move on people who were seen as lingering for too long on the grass, while the activities of people cycling, running and walking briskly were viewed as acceptable. In some of the commentary there was more than a whiff of Victorian morality about vice and virtue, idleness versus industry.

Open spaces are important in times of epidemics and disease: the history of parks is intertwined with sickness and death. In London, many open spaces today – Charterhouse Square, Golden Square, Vincent Square, parts of Blackheath – originated as mass graves developed during outbreaks of bubonic plague.<sup>3</sup> And we owe the development of public parks in large part to concerns over public health in the rapidly expanding industrial towns and cities, and in particular the cholera epidemics of the mid-nineteenth century. In Sheffield, the cholera burial ground created during the outbreak of 1832 was marked first by a monument and then by the development of a park adjacent, which subsequently incorporated the burial ground after it closed in 1883.

Until the later nineteenth century most understanding of how disease spread was based on the theory of miasma; bad air which arose from foul water, decomposing matter and human waste. The idea that bad air was the vector for disease led in turn to the metaphor of the modern city as a living organism, with parks and open spaces functioning as its lungs. It was first ascribed by William Windham to Pitt the Elder, during a parliamentary debate in 1808 over a proposed housing development which would encroach on Hyde Park. In 1839, G F Murray excoriated the London Commissioners over the lack of public parks in the city, saying that as soon as ‘pestilence completes its ravages...we are too happy to dismiss it from our thoughts and to forget all enquiries as to the means of prevention for the future’. (A scenario all too

1. Select Committee on Public Walks, 1833, report summarised in *The Westminster Review*, vol.XI, 1834, pp.496–514 (<https://tinyurl.com/ybqsffyw>), p.500.

2. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8188953/Labours-new-deputy-leader-Angela-Rayner-blasts-Matt-Hancock.html>.

3. <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryMagazine/DestinationsUK/LondonPlaguePits/>.

easily anticipated now.) Murray continued: in great cities there is 'an under-current of pestilence at all times':

bad drainage, bad air, bad water, and bad smells, perpetuate the epidemics they originate....every city has its public pulmonary organs – its instruments of popular respiration – as essential to the mass of the citizens as is to individuals the air they breathe.<sup>4</sup>

Dickens in *Sketches* (1843) remarked, 'If the parks be "the lungs of London" we wonder what Greenwich Fair is: a periodical breaking out, we suppose, a sort of spring rash.'<sup>5</sup>

The metaphorical resonance is as strong today as ever. London is choking. Air pollution levels have soared in recent years, with levels of toxic gases and particles way beyond the limits recommended by the World Health Authority. Levels of the ultra-fine PM<sub>2.5</sub> particles are at 15 MG/M<sub>3</sub> – 50% above the WHO-recommended limit. In April last year it was confirmed that two million Londoners are living with illegal levels of air pollution, with nearly 9,500 premature deaths each year ascribed to respiratory problems.<sup>6</sup>

The Mayor has called London's air 'lethal' and a public health crisis; children in Tower Hamlets were estimated to have a lung capacity 10% smaller than average.<sup>7</sup> People were wearing face masks long before the virus: we are living in our own era's version of the *Great Stink* of the nineteenth century or the pea-soupers of the twentieth. One of the miraculous blessings of the lockdown has been a 60% fall in levels of poisons in London's air,<sup>8</sup> but the correlation between vulnerability to covid and communities living in the poorer areas of the city, where air pollution is highest, is shocking.<sup>9</sup>

It is an irony that the vital importance of London's lungs is being rediscovered during the outbreak of a disease which attacks the

body's respiratory system; ironic because the city's respiratory system is also under attack.

In 1853 an article in the *New York Times* about the early arguments over Central Park, commented that 'if the Park be the lungs of the city, as the phrase goes, then the city has got the consumption, for its lungs are in bad case.'<sup>10</sup> The lungs of London may not be consumptive but they are showing signs of serious disease. Lottery-funded work from ten or twenty years ago is ageing. After ten years of austerity, during which core-funding for London councils has reduced in real terms by over 60%, the condition of parks is now in a rapid spiral of decline.<sup>11</sup> In 2016, the Heritage Lottery Fund's *State of UK Parks*, analysing trends in condition, reported that by 2020 the condition of parks would be worse than in 2001; any lasting benefit of the Lottery's £1BN investment has been negated by a deliberate starving of the lifeblood of public funding.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of June, it is sobering to see the financial chaos wrought by the lockdown. Eight out of ten local authorities, the key providers of public parks, are facing bankruptcy. The situation for charitable trusts managing parks is equally if not more dire. Wicksteed Park Trust in Northampton, funded by the Lottery in 2018 and hailed as a pioneer of the flawed *Rethinking Parks* agenda, has gone into administration; the leisure trusts set up to run leisure centres are handing back the keys to their local authority owners, after months of zero income made them untenable.

The lockdown has demonstrated in dramatic form just how important parks are. Free access to good quality parks and gardens is as fundamental to physical and mental health as free access to health care. That they provide not a discretionary but an essential service was recognised by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government when he insisted that parks remain open at the height of the lockdown.<sup>13</sup> Parks staff have made heroic efforts to

4. John L. Crompton, 'Evolution of the "parks as lungs" metaphor: is it still relevant?', *World Leisure Journal*, 59:2, 2017, pp.212-13.

5. Charles Dickens, *Sketches*, (Leipzig: Bernh Tauchnitz, 1843), p.107.

6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jul/15/nearly-9500-people-die-each-year-in-london-because-of-air-pollution-study>.

7. [https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ign/environment\\_and\\_waste/environmental\\_health/pollution/air\\_quality/Air\\_quality\\_information\\_and\\_campaigns/What\\_we\\_are\\_monitoring\\_and\\_why.aspx](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ign/environment_and_waste/environmental_health/pollution/air_quality/Air_quality_information_and_campaigns/What_we_are_monitoring_and_why.aspx).

8. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-8332273/Air-pollution-London-dropped-60-cent-coronavirus-lockdown.html>.

9. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/07/omission-of-air-pollution-from-report-on-covid-19-and-race-astonishing>.

10. *The New York Times*, 28 March 1853.

11. <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/local-government-finance/london%E2%80%99s-local-services-investing-future/decade-austerity>.

12. <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/state-uk-public-parks-2016>.

13. 'People need parks. That's why I have made it clear to councils that all parks must remain open.' (18 April, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/communities-secretary-robert-jenrick-on-covid-19-response-18-april-2020>).

accommodate unprecedented numbers of visitors.

But it has also brought into the sharpest possible relief the results of austerity. Instead of standing up for local authorities, parks 'experts' have played along with that disastrous project to reduce councils to mere commissioning bodies, siphoning public money into the private sector and selling off public assets. The warnings of history, which show indisputably that local authority management is the only option for the vast majority of public parks, have been ignored.<sup>14</sup> As the nation recovers from covid, parks must be nursed back to health too, as part of a similar national effort to make us more resilient to the shocks coming in the future. And that means public ownership and public funding for public goods.

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## CHARLOTTE GIRDLESTONE:

### PLEASURE AND PANORAMAS

By Todd Longstaffe-Gowan

Some cultural historians, and others with a lively interest in the development of London's Regent's Park, may know that the Outer Circle, or perimeter road, of this magnificent and novel early nineteenth-century picturesque *tour de force* was recorded in two near-contemporary panoramas.<sup>1</sup> What is thought to have been the earliest of the two is reputed to date from c.1828-29 and is now commonly referred to as the 'Mortimer' panorama in recognition of the bookseller and stationer that sold and published it.<sup>2</sup> The artist has hitherto been unknown. The second or 'Morris' panorama, which is better known than its predecessor, was engraved by S. H. Hughes

after drawings 'taken on the spot' by the surveyor and landscape gardener Richard Morris and published in 1831 by Rudolph Ackermann.<sup>3</sup>

The architectural historian Geoffrey Tyack examines these projects in *Two Early Panoramas of The Regent's Park: The Panoramas of Richard Morris and John Mortimer* (2015). He helpfully reproduces the two complementary views side-by-side and supplies an essay which describes the architecture and landscape features selected and portrayed. The aim of the present article is to reveal for the first time the name of the artist responsible for the so-called Mortimer panorama and to explore how this new attribution invites us to look with fresh eyes at what surely ranks among the more spirited and full-blooded early nineteenth-century representations of the metropolitan picturesque.

Although Charlotte Girdlestone has recently been described by one of her descendants as 'largely unknown outside art cognoscenti circles', she is in fact unknown even among the most ardent historians of British topographical art. Her panorama suggests, however, that she ought to be better known, and that her artistic legacy should be re-evaluated. Although she was clearly an able artist, it is remarkable that a young female amateur working in obscure circumstances should have been commissioned by a bookseller to produce a panorama of one of the most novel and fashionable districts of London. Although panoramas were by the mid-1830s a popular and well-established artform, the artists who produced them were almost exclusively male.<sup>4</sup> Girdlestone appears to be among the first Englishwomen to have produced a commercially published panorama of the metropolis.

3. The title of this panorama is 'Panoramic view round the Regent's park / from drawings taken on the spot by Richd. Morris'. Morris was Secretary to the Medico-Botanical Society, and the author of *Essays on Landscape Gardening and on Uniting Picturesque Effect with Rural Scenery: Containing Directions for Laying Out and Improving the Grounds Connected with a Country Residence* (1825), *Flora Conspicua: a selection of the most ornamental flowering, hardy, exotic and indigenous trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants, for embellishing flower-gardens and pleasure-grounds* (1826), and 'Observations on Water as regards Ornamental Scenery' (*Gardeners' Magazine*, vol.2, 1827, pp.286-90).

4. Among the more celebrated British panoramists were Robert Barker, Thomas Girtin, William Daniell, Edward Dayes, Joshua Cristall, William Mulready, Ramsay Richard Reinagle, David Roberts, Clarkson Stanfield. See Anne Bermingham, 'Landscape-O-Rama: The Exhibition Landscape at Somerset House and the Rise of Popular Landscape Entertainments' in David H. Solkin, ed., *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836* (2001), pp.129-30.

14. Katy Layton-Jones, *History of Public Park Funding and Management (1820 - 2010)*, Historic England Research Report 20/2016, <https://research.historicengland.org.uk/Report.aspx?i=15442>.

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1. Geoffrey Tyack, *Two Early Panoramas of The Regent's Park: The Panoramas of Richard Morris and John Mortimer*, London Topographical Society publication no.177 (2015), p.2. The park was developed from c.1816 to 1835.

2. Mortimer's premises were at No.2 Wigmore Street, next to Cavendish Square. His name first appears in London directories in 1834.