



QUEEN'S PARK, VICTORIAN LEGACY IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT: 'A GREAT BOON AND A BLESSING TO THE INHABITANTS OF NORTH-WEST LONDON'¹

By Irina Porter

London has a good number of parks, gardens and green spaces named in commemoration of one Queen or another: there are Queen's Gardens in Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich and Westminster; Queen Square Gardens in Camden; linear stretches like The Queen's Walk in Lambeth and Queen's Promenade in Kingston; and woodland such as Queen's Wood in Haringey. But there is only one *Queen's Park*, which opened to the public in 1887, named in honour of Queen Victoria in the year of her Golden Jubilee. The park is located in the borough of Brent within an area known as Queen's Park after the nearby Queen's Park Estate, and is served by Queen's Park station on the Bakerloo line and London Overground. The name is of course well known in football circles for Queens Park Rangers although the club did not actually play in the park.²

Going back in history, this area was part of Middlesex and by the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066 it belonged to St. Paul's Cathedral, later forming their prebendary estates. Several hamlets, the names of which still exist today – Willesden, Harlesden, Neasden – were surrounded by woods, small

scale farmland, marsh and common land.³ By the eighteenth century the forests on these lands were replaced by pasture. The old oak tree in the middle of Queen's Park is likely to be a remnant of hedgerows that had formed boundaries between farms for centuries.

The fortunes of the area started to change with the Industrial Revolution, bringing the Grand Junction Canal in 1801 and the railways – the London and Birmingham Railway (1837) later subsumed into the London and North Western Railway; the Great Western Railway (1838) and the Hampstead Junction Railway (1860). The resulting house-building and rising population paved the way for the urbanisation of the area, with the provision of amenities such as the Kensal Green Cemetery (1833), Paddington Cemetery (1855) and St. John the Evangelist Church (1844).

The *Queen's Park Estate* came before the eponymous park.⁴ In 1874, 76 acres of land, by this time belonging to All Souls College, Oxford, were bought by the Artizans, Labourers, and General Dwellings Company, which had been founded in 1867 by William Austin, an illiterate builder. Austin had a vision to create good quality homes for the working classes, in the best philanthropic

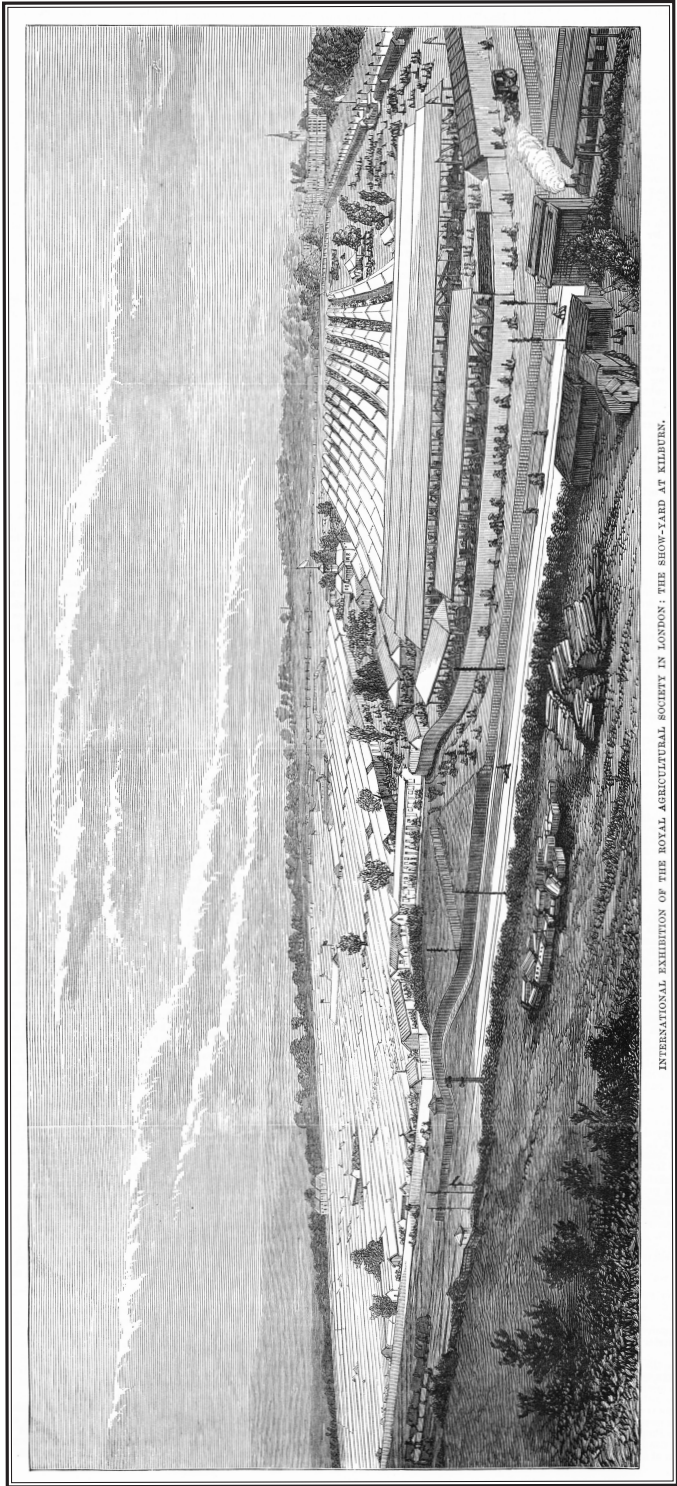
1. 'The Kilburn Park', *Saint John's Wood & South Hampstead Advertiser*, Thursday 8 September 1887.

2. Queens Park Rangers football club was so-named in 1886 following the merger of two football clubs: Christchurch Rangers founded in 1882 and St Jude's Institute founded in 1884. The name is said to have arisen because many of the players came from the Queen's Park area.

3. For further history of the area see Steve Crabb, *Queen's Park: A History*, (The History Press, 2022); *Uncovering Kilburn's History: Parts 1 – 6*, local history series by Irina Porter of Willesden Local History Society, written in 2020 for *Wembley Matters*.

<http://wembleymatters.blogspot.com>, also available at Brent Archives: www.brent.gov.uk/archives; Len Snow, *Queen's Park, Kensal, Brondesbury and Harlesden: A Pictorial History*, (Phillimore & Co., 2006); 'The History of Queen's Park', Willesden Local History Society (WLHS): <https://willesden-local-history.co.uk/queens-park/>. For a full list of articles published in the *WLHS Journals* see <https://willesden-local-history.co.uk/articles/>.

4. Following local authority boundary changes, the estate is now in the City of Westminster. For further information see Erica McDonald & David J Smith, *Artizans & Avenues, A history of the Queen's Park Estate*, (Westminster Libraries, 1990); and *The Queen's Park Estate Design Guide* (City of Westminster, Spring 1995).



1. 'International Exhibition of the Royal Horticultural Society in London: The Show-yard at Kilburn',
Illustrated London News, July 5, 1879, p.12
(© ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS/MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY)

traditions of Victorian England. Despite some embezzlement scandals, by 1882 around 2,000 houses were built, with little gardens and public facilities (but no pubs!), designed for the lower middle classes, who were of "good character" and expected to look after their properties. The name 'Queen's Park' was wishful thinking – the directors had hoped that Queen Victoria, or any member of the Royal family, would endorse the new estate, but this never happened.

Meanwhile, great plans were underway for the land nearby. The Royal Agricultural Society of England was considering staging its 1879 show in Kilburn. The Society had been formed in 1838 and received a Royal Charter from Queen Victoria in 1840. With the motto '*Practice with Science*', its purpose was to promote the potential of the latest scientific and industrial achievements for raising agricultural productivity. It held shows in different parts of the country, bringing new techniques, inventions and agricultural knowledge to farmers, who would not otherwise benefit from fast-developing industries and scientific knowledge.

The Committee was looking for a large plot of land, with good transport connections and not far from London, and what it found at Kilburn was just right – 100 acres of land, which it leased from the landowners, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. It was close to Kilburn High Road, which was part of the ancient Watling Street, and the nearby London and North Western Railway, which opened a new station on 2nd June 1879, in time for the preparations for the show that was to be held in early July 1879.

The Kilburn show was to be the largest of its kind up to that date: an 'agricultural carnival' with 650 exhibitors displaying implements and machinery in 3 miles of shedding, seedsmen and manure manufacturers, artificial food merchants, 2,879 livestock and much more (*fig. 1*). Prized animals were to be paraded daily in front of the Royal Box, and demonstrations of new technologies were to be presented, including a competition of refrigeration technique and an electric cheese cutter in action.

The summer of 1879 was one of the wettest in the nineteenth century. Heavy rains in June fell on the London clay, turning it to

liquid mud (*fig. 2*). The state of the ground at Kilburn was dismally commented upon in the press: 'The appearance of the fields has been compared to ploughed land, wild morasses, and Irish bogs [...] all low-lying lands, at least in the vicinity of London, have been little better than so many sloughs of despond.'⁵ Still, the organisers hoped that with a bit of good fortune the show would go on! It was opened on 30TH June 1879 by the Prince and Princess of Wales and was to run for a week. Preparations for the Royal Visitors were reported eloquently in *The Standard* on 28TH June:

... in anticipation of such visit a spacious pavilion has been erected, consisting of three reception-rooms and a banquet chamber. The reception-rooms are lined with lace paper, and the ceilings covered with white lace lined with blue, shaped tentwise, whilst the banquet chamber is hung with cretonne, beautifully embossed with the designs of birds, flowers, and fruits. The cost of this ornamental work alone is set down at 1200/. Here, in addition to their Royal Highnesses, the Society will entertain at lunch the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs of London, who will arrive in State.⁶

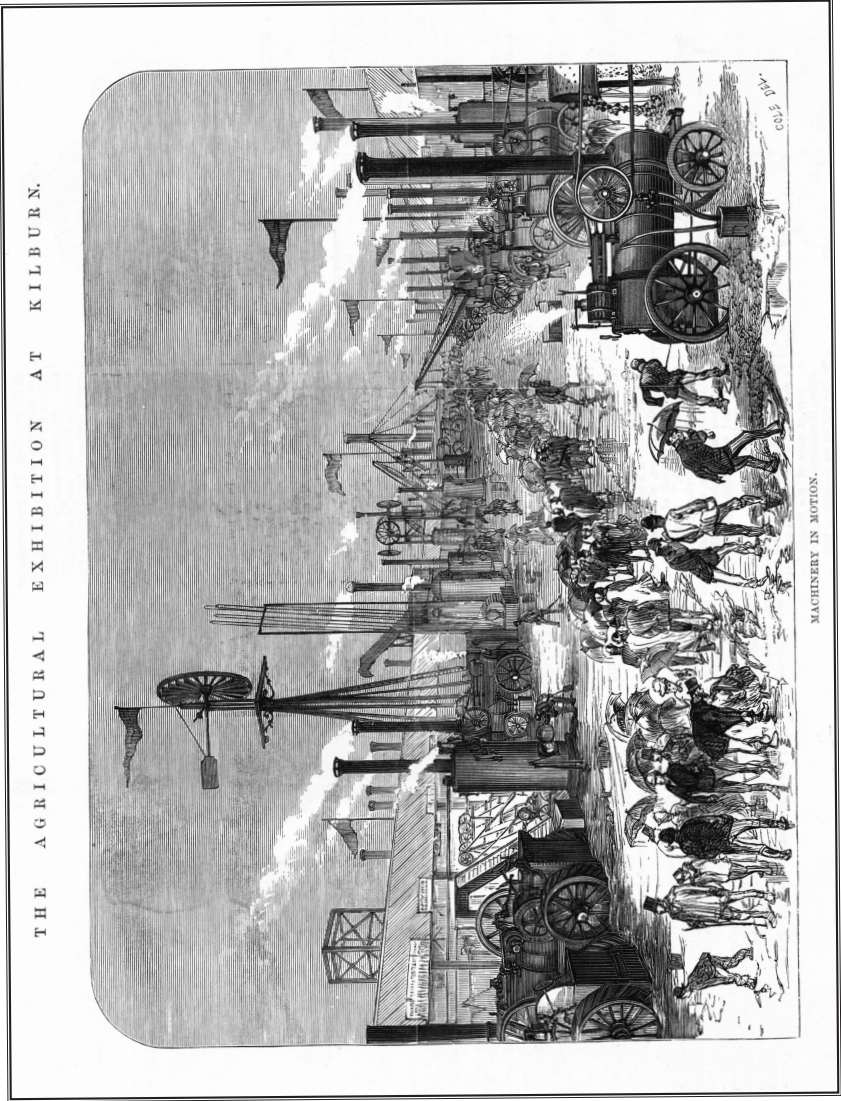
Any fervent hopes for better weather proved fruitless – the downpours continued all week, subsiding only on Saturday 5TH July, when the show was visited by Queen Victoria. A report in *The Illustrated London News* described the organisers' efforts to ameliorate the situation, which included 'sleepers and burnt earth', 'plank pathways' and 'wattle hurdles', but despite these measures 'the mud soon found its way through these, so that the only advantage which they afforded was that of preserving visitors from sinking more than a certain depth in the mire. The trustful pedestrian who ventured upon them was every now and then disgusted by the spurting up of the liquid mud through their interstices.'⁷

The Queen was driven on a specially constructed drive of ballast and brick from the new train station on Salusbury Road, her route lined with cheering crowds, to the centre of the great horse ring, where she remained in her carriage while the animals were paraded.

5. 'The Royal Agricultural Show at Kilburn', *The Standard*, Saturday June 28, 1879.

6. *Ibid*.

7. 'The Agricultural Show', *The Illustrated London News*, July 12, 1879, p.43.



2. 'Machinery in Motion', showing the mud enveloping the Royal Horticultural Society Exhibition,
Supplement to The Illustrated London News, July 12, 1879, p.41
(© ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS/MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY)

In her diary, Victoria noted:

The animals of all nations, cows, bulls, horses &c, were led up & down in succession, decked with ribbons, but they could hardly keep their footing, from the fearful deep mud! There were splendid horses of all kinds (magnificent French & English stallions), also mules & donkeys. It is such a pity, the weather was so unfavourable, as it would have been a beautiful sight, & brought in much money, instead of which I fear, they have lost a great deal.⁸

This was indeed the case – the Society made a substantial financial loss on the event ‘amounting, according to one estimate, to nearly £15,000’.⁹ Their only other venture near London was in 1903–1905, when they decided to open a permanent site near Twyford Abbey, which later became Park Royal. This was not a success either, and since then the shows were held in various locations around the country. The Royal Agricultural Society still exists as a charity, although the last show was held in 2009.

Today we are reminded of the agricultural beginnings of Queen’s Park by its small animal zoo, established here in 1990. Friendly chickens, ducks, turkeys, and geese enjoy a cosy enclosure, with a model tractor serving as a climbing frame for the goats.

After the Royal Agricultural Society Show, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners were considering selling the land for speculative building. With the arrival of the railways and the new Queen’s Park station this would be prime real estate, as was the case with many London suburbs developed in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, the rapid growth of the urban population created a highly polarised society. The Industrial Revolution, poor harvests, enclosures and mechanisation had driven villagers from rural areas into factories and big cities. Between 1801 and 1831, the population of London increased from 900,000 to 1.5 million, and by the mid-nineteenth century more people in Britain lived in towns and cities than in the countryside. With rapid urbanisation and poor provision for the destitute came slums

filled with crime and disease, with amenities hardly suitable to sustain a healthy human life, let alone access to green spaces.

Certain enlightened local authorities and philanthropists understood the importance of providing public parks, which were seen as a means of giving access to recreational activities, of promoting moral improvement, and of providing a source of fresh air – and serving as an alternative to the public house. As early as 1833, the *Select Committee on Public Walks*, which was set up with a remit to “consider the best means of securing open spaces in the immediate vicinity of populous towns, as public walks calculated to promote the health and comfort of the inhabitants”, presented a Report to Parliament, stating how parks would improve the problems of urban living. The Victorian parks movement promoted the establishment of parks and recreation grounds as a means of addressing these problems by diffusing social tensions, improving the moral and physical condition of town dwellers, and also offering opportunities for financial investment.

In 1884 the *North-West London Park League* was formed with the stated objective of securing the land of the former Royal Agricultural Society Show at Kilburn for the benefit of the people, and appealed to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to reserve the site for a public park.¹⁰ The League was led by George Higgs, the local man who campaigned for establishing a park for the people, and its committee was supported by politicians from opposing political parties.

The Commissioners were amenable to the idea, also recognising that housing with frontage onto the park would accrue a higher value, and the following year they offered a smaller portion of the site – 30 acres – to the Corporation of the City of London. This was part of a package between the parties that included Gravel Pit Wood in Highgate,¹¹ with

10. Information on the history of the park can be found in a number of sources, see: *Queen’s Park Centenary 1887 – 1987, Official Souvenir Brochure*, ed. Mark Cummins; Steve Crabb, *Queen’s Park*, *op.cit.*

11. In the 1880s the Commissioners planned to develop their land at Gravel Pit Wood for house building but public outcry was so great that they decided to give what became known as Highgate Wood to the public, offering the land to the Corporation of the City of London to accept and maintain the wood as public open space.

8. Queen Victoria’s Journal Entry, Saturday 5th July 1879, <http://queenvictoriasjournal.org>.

9. *Illustrated London News*, July 12, 1879, *op.cit.*

the same motivation. The Corporation agreed to accept Gravel Pit Wood, but initially not to take on Kilburn Recreation Ground, as the new park was originally known, considering it to be too costly to set up and maintain the park there.

However, the North-West London Park League persisted; they lobbied Parliament, various local authorities,¹² as well as the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and organised meetings to gain public support for the park.¹³ In June 1885 one such meeting was attended by 800-900 people.

Finally, the Corporation of the City of London found the means to finance the park. Coal and brick merchant and philanthropist William Ward left a large bequest to the City, the bulk of which went on setting up and maintaining the City of London Girls' School; the residuary bequest from this was to be 'to be applied and expended in the erection and maintenance of some institution and the creation of some fund for the benefit of the poorer classes'. Together with some income from grain duties from the Port of London, the Corporation thereby found sufficient resources to lay out and maintain the park, as it has been doing to this day.

The Highgate and Kilburn Open Spaces Act was passed in 1886, formalising the acquisition of land. The laying out of the park began with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners building two approach roads to the park, Chevening and Mortimer (now Harvist) Roads on the opposite sides of the ground.

The job of creating the park was given to landscape designer Major Alexander McKenzie (1830-1893) (*fig. 3*). Born in Scotland, McKenzie came to London in 1851 and in 1863 he was appointed Superintendent of Alexandra Palace and Park, later becoming Superintendent and landscape designer to the Metropolitan Board of Works, as well as working for several private clients. Among his designs are Alexandra Palace Park, Finsbury Park, Southwark Park and the Albert Embankment Gardens. In his role as

Superintendent for the Metropolitan Board of Works, he was in charge of all their open spaces, including Hampstead Heath, Blackheath and Epping Forest. He also found the time to write a pamphlet, *Parks, Open Spaces and Thoroughfares of London*, published in 1869.

In 1886 McKenzie designed the park at Kilburn and supervised its laying out in March – June 1887. The drainage, layout and planting cost £3,000. Extensive details of these operations are found in *The St John's Wood and South Hampstead Advertiser* in an article that appeared 2 months before the park opened:¹⁴

Entering by the principal gate, close to Queen's Park Station, only a few minutes' run from Euston or Broad-street, the ground is seen to slope upwards until the boundary is reached, and here an artificial embankment has been formed to put the park on a level with the roadway. Excellent paths have been made of tar paving all over the grounds. This will cost a little more than gravel, but it will have the advantage of being always dry, and will cost less in maintenance, as it will not need constant weeding and rolling. [...] Some five thousand young trees – oak, elm, beech, birch, larch, plane, &c. – have been closely planted, all of these having been brought from the Corporation nursery at Epping.

The author goes on to make a number of observations of a horticultural nature that are interesting to note, and which will resonate with park keepers and gardeners in today's climate:

Of course, after a few years the trees will need thinning out, but it is necessary with saplings to plant them pretty thick to make anything of a show. It may safely be conjectured that the forest trees ten or twenty years hence will do credit to their venerable ancestry. The evergreen shrubs – rhododendrons, gorse, cubas, arbor vitae, and many other sorts, form a deep fringe between the fence and the outermost path, but it must be confessed these do not, on the whole, present a very healthy appearance. At a rough guess, the intense heat of the last few months has burnt up one-tenth of the shrubs, and most of what remain have suffered from the long drought. It is, however, satisfactory to note that some of the shrubs which seem at the first glance to be "dead as a door nail," on closer inspection show signs of

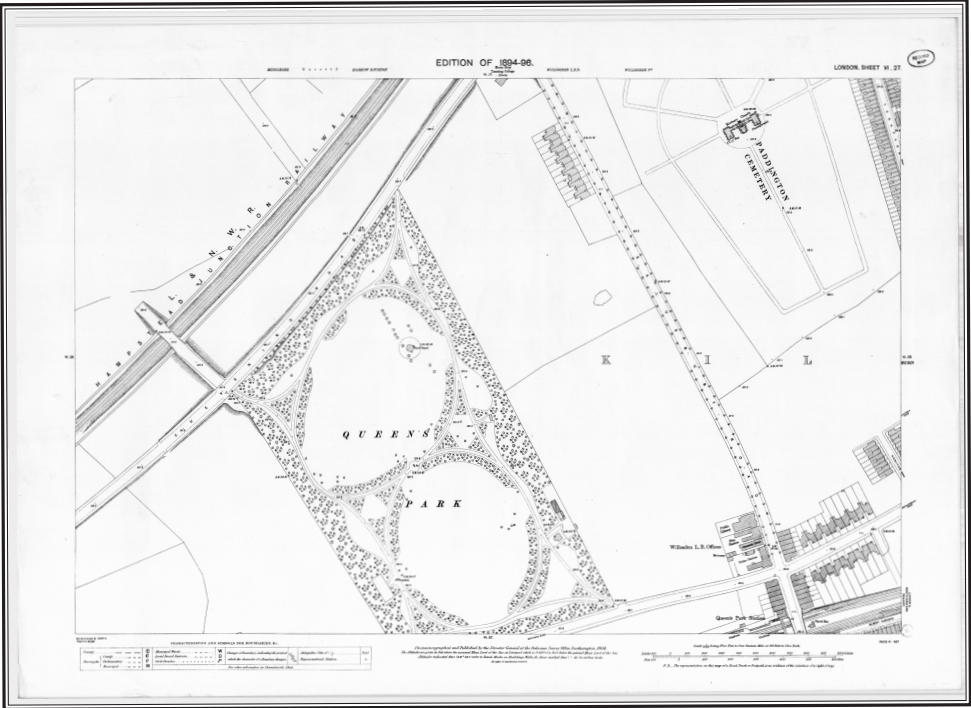
12. These included the Metropolitan Board of Works, City Corporation and Chelsea Vestry.

13. 'A Park for North-west London', *The Echo*, Monday 8 June 1885.

14. 'The Kilburn Park', *Saint John's Wood & South Hampstead Advertiser*, Thursday 8 September 1887.



3. Alexander McKenzie, from *Carte de visite Photographic Collection* at the RHS Lindley Library,
P/CDV/M/12, *Carte de visite Photographic Collection*
(COURTESY OF THE RHS LINDLEY COLLECTIONS)



4. Detail of OS Map, 2nd Edition of 1894, showing layout of Queen's Park, with Queens Park Station shown at lower right of the map, and the relatively open land of the surrounding area at that time
(REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION FROM NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND)
5. *Queen's Park, Kilburn*, postcard c.1900, showing junction of paths and shrubbery
(COURTESY IMAGES OF LONDON, WWW.IMAGES-OF-LONDON.CO.UK)

latent vitality, and probably the actual loss will not be nearly so great as appears on the surface. An unusually good soil will no doubt help many of the floral specimens to revive, and some of the more valuable kinds will be introduced in the autumn.

The article also looks to the future, and gives details of some of the proposed facilities to be provided in the new park:

A good deal of planting yet remains to be done, and the large open grass space in the centre will have to be levelled before it can be pronounced suitable for cricket and the other "lawful" games mentioned in the scheme. The lower part will be reserved for children and such as do not wish to come within reach of the cricket ball. A gymnasium will, no doubt, be added in due time. Although the grounds are not very extensive, some very pretty views are obtained, and in the distance – about three miles off – may be seen Hampstead Heath, a still more charming recreation ground. It is proposed to erect a lodge for the keeper close to the main entrance.

The initial name for the park was Kilburn Recreation Ground. A request had been sent to Queen Victoria to name the park in her honour, and just before the opening ceremony she granted her permission. A letter from the Home Office dated November 4TH 1887 informed the Town Clerk that 'Her Majesty was pleased to accede to the request, and to command that the said recreation ground shall be called the Queen's Park'.¹⁵ Queen's Park was officially opened on 5TH November 1887, with crowds of several thousands welcoming the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Reginald Hanson, City dignitaries and local officials, who gave speeches from a temporary platform set up in the middle of the park. The event was amply covered in the local press, with not a little initial trepidation:

For some time before the beginning of the formalities, the gates were thrown open, and the people streamed in, so that by 3 o'clock many thousands were present. As there had been rumours of a probable invasion of Kilburn by the cream of London ruffianism, it was satisfactory to find that a great majority of the vast crowd was composed evidently of the respectable class, working people and their children predominating. As it had been arranged that the civic procession should enter

the north-eastern gate, the platform and marquee were placed at the foot of the park's northern slope, the people made their way thitherward. Some idea of the crowd may be gathered from the fact that the people were massed not only immediately in front of the platform, but covered the rising ground alongside, this part having the appearance of a portion of a huge amphitheatre, thickly packed. The great body of the visitors thus formed two separate divisions, the one with the idea of hearing what was said, the other seeking to get a good view of the assemblage.¹⁶

After the speeches, the Lord Mayor and Mr. Stoneham, Chairman of the Coal and Corn and Finance Committee, each planted a small tree before the procession of dignitaries left the park. However, to entertain the large crowds who stayed behind as well as 'a goodly number of fresh comers, mostly parents with their children [...] the band of the Victoria and the Queen's-park band remained in the park, playing selections to pleased crowds.'¹⁷

In addition to the 'well-varied assortment of shrubs, flowers and blossoming trees with which the numerous beds are stocked', visitors to the new park could enjoy 'the provision for healthy exercise for the children who want to romp, and the elderly who like a quiet ramble'.¹⁸ The park featured two central circular areas for recreation and sport, surrounded by trees and shrubberies, with strategically placed openings to view vistas across the park, increasing its apparent size. The paths around them formed a figure of eight, intersecting in the middle, and in the corners there were six triangular areas for formal flower beds (*fig. 4*). Compared to early Victorian parterres and geometrical patterns, this was a more natural style of garden design, and typical for late nineteenth-century town parks (*fig. 5*).

An article in August 1904 is fulsome in its praise for the Corporation's park-keeper, Mr Hankins: 'a gardener of no mean repute, the flower-beds are well arranged and stocked with choice flowers. One charming and well-laid-out bed deserves special mention, it lies

15. 'Queen's Park, Kilburn', *The Kilburn Times and Western Post*, Friday 11 November 1887.

16. 'Queen's Park, Kilburn', *The Kilburn Times and Western Post*, *op.cit.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. 'Local Chit-Chat', *Kilburn Times, Willesden and Western Post*, Friday, November 11, 1887.



6. Queen's Park Lych Gate at the original entrance at the junction of Kingswood Avenue and Harvist Road, 2022
(PHOTOGRAPH JOHN HILL)



7. Queen's Park Lych Gate, viewed from inside the Quiet Garden, 2021
(PHOTOGRAPH IRINA PORTER)



8. 'Angel Wings' sculpture in the Quiet Garden, Queen's Park, 2021
(PHOTOGRAPH IRINA PORTER)

9. 'Noah' sculpture, in Queen's Park, 2021
(PHOTOGRAPH IRINA PORTER)



10. Queen's Park, showing floral beds and the original Keeper's Lodge, postcard c.1900
(COURTESY IMAGES OF LONDON, [WWW.IMAGES-OF-LONDON.CO.UK](http://www.images-of-london.co.uk))

11. Park Superintendent's Lodge in Queen's Park, 2021
(PHOTOGRAPH IRINA PORTER)

just at the entrance to the park from Salusbury-road, and represents the Prince of Wales' feathers and other Royal emblems, and without exaggeration, we can say it is the best of its kind we have ever seen.' ¹⁹ The author goes on to say:

The park is situated in the midst of a dense population of the artisan class, whom we are glad to hear take full advantage of the rest and pleasant change which it affords. There are plenty of lounge seats, and plenty of green sward for the youngsters to play cricket and other games. On Sunday evenings many thousands gather to listen to a good band. Small parks of this kind situate in the midst of dense populations is what London and every large town needs, and there is far more sense in providing such than in spending thousands to enlarge Hampstead Heath, which it is difficult for the poor with so little time at their disposal to reach. ²⁰

Most of the dense planting was removed in the 1970s to help with maintenance costs, as were the flower beds. The only area of formal planting left now is the *Quiet Garden*, which features spectacular seasonal planting, centered around a picturesque palm. Also in the 1970s the park entrance on the corner of Kingswood Avenue and Harvist Road, fronted by the 1936 Lych Gate (*figs. 6 & 7*), was blocked off, making the Quiet Garden a special place for quiet reflection in beautiful surroundings. The Quiet Garden is also home to *Angel Wings*, a sculpture by Fred Kormis (1894-1986). A Jewish refugee from Germany, Kormis came to London in the 1930s and lived and worked in Kilburn. In 2006, *Angel Wings* was donated to Queen's Park by his friend, local MP and Councillor Reg Freeson (*fig. 8*).²¹ A second sculpture in Queen's Park is *Noah*, a beautiful tall wooden carving by a local sculptor, which stands between the playground and the café. The Ark can be seen on his head and an owl on his shoulder (*fig. 9*).

The original design provided for a park superintendent's lodge in the south-eastern corner of the park (*fig. 10*). The current 1970s version stands in the same place as the original

building, at the entrance to the Quiet Garden, and is still used for this purpose (*fig. 11*).

Sport was an important feature of Victorian parks. Cricket and football were regarded as respectable team games (as opposed to bare knuckle fighting!) and were encouraged in the parks. As well as the playing fields, Queen's Park featured a gymnasium where the children's playground is now. Provision for such a facility was given in the scheme approved by the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice when the Highgate and Kilburn Open Spaces Act was passed in 1886: 'The Corporation might construct in the recreation ground a gymnasium or ground for cricket, or other lawful sports or pastimes, a swimming bath, a lake or pond, a band, pavilion, or museum, and arrange for artisans' flower shows and agricultural exhibitions.'²²

A refreshments chalet in a rustic style was located near the gymnasium from 1890, and from the early 1900s toilets were provided. The 1930s saw the coming of tennis to Queen's Park. Six tennis courts were built by Grassphalte Ltd, Hampton Hill, Middlesex, with a tennis pavilion and refreshments pavilion, the latter replacing the one near the gymnasium, and in the 1960s this was itself replaced by the present two-storey building. In 1966 a nine-hole *Pitch and Putt* course was constructed next to the tennis courts to the north of the park, covering an area of 7 acres.

In 1888 North Paddington MP Mr. John Aird had presented the City Corporation with a drinking fountain for the park, which stood at the intersection of the two circles where the present café is now (*fig. 12*). The formal opening of this 'handsome gift' at a ceremony attended by City dignitaries and 'a goodly group of people', was officiated by the Chairman of the Corn, Coal and Finance Committee and was widely reported in the press. In his speech, Mr Aird explained that 'it was his wish at the dedication of the park in November last to do something to aid the efforts which had given so much pleasure, and had done so much good for the residents of Paddington and the surrounding district.

19. 'Queen's Park, Kilburn', *The St John's Wood Kilburn, and Hampstead Advertiser*, Thursday 4 August 1904.

20. *Ibid.*

21. It appears that in 1945 Willesden Council commissioned this sculpture for the new Church End redevelopment.

22. 'The Kilburn Park', *Saint John's Wood & South Hampstead Advertiser*, *op.cit.*

It, therefore, gave him great pleasure to present the people using the park with a drinking fountain, and to place it where it would be under the care and guidance of the Corporation. Mr. Deputy Beck replied, and, having tasted the water, declared the fountain open to the public in perpetuity.²³ Sadly perpetuity has not prevailed. It is not known when the drinking fountain disappeared, probably sometime between 1935 and 1953,²⁴ but it was the centrepiece of at least one evocative postcard of the park, such as one dated c.1910 (*fig. 13*), and the following description has to suffice:

The fountain, standing on a two-step platform of Purbeck stone, is of iron, painted dark green, with gilt ornaments. The design is simple, but pleasing. The body of the fountain is supported by four figured pillars surrounding a central shaft, and is divided into four compartments, each with its water-knob and zinc cup, and separated from each other by figured screens. From the centre at the top rises a mouth from whence a stream of water can be thrown up at pleasure. At the bottom is a small overflow trough, which will be of service to dogs. The fountain is the work of George Smith and Co., the Sun Foundry, Glasgow. The water is supplied by the West Middlesex Water Company and has had to be carried by special pipe all the way from the keeper's cottage.²⁵

The crowning glory of Queen's Park is the Bandstand (*fig. 14*). The cast iron structure by Macfarlane and Co. of Glasgow was installed here in 1891. It was 'formally inaugurated by the City authorities' in early June 1892: 'a great boon will thus be supplied to this populous and increasing neighbourhood.'²⁶ Bandstands were an important focal point of just about every Victorian park, and were well used for regular entertainment, as music was seen as an important moral influence. The *Queen's Park Military Band*, whose members lived on the Queen's Park Estate, had played at the opening ceremony and continued to delight Sunday park goers for years to come.

However, the story of the band and its role in bringing the bandstand into being is not without interest. The band had been formed in c.1882 and by 1890 had played in Queen's Park 'almost gratuitously for the past three years', by which time it was in desperate need of funds. A public meeting was held on 5TH November 1890 for the purpose of forming an aid society to augment their funds. The chair of the meeting, Dr Danford Thomas, also took the opportunity to argue for a 'band-stand and enclosure' to be erected in Queen's Park. The following resolution was carried unanimously: "We, the inhabitants of Kilburn, desire to see formed an 'Aid Society', to assist the Queen's Park Band, and we pledge ourselves to use every endeavour to promote the same." A second resolution, proposed by Mr. Aird, aforementioned donor of the drinking fountain who had 'shewed his practical sympathy with the object by giving a donation of 20 guineas', was also carried: 'That a memorial be signed by all the inhabitants of Kilburn, and others who visit the park, urging the City authorities to erect a permanent band-stand, and we pledge ourselves to do our utmost, by a house-to-house canvass, to obtain signatures for this purpose.'²⁷

On 15TH May 1891, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that: 'What may be termed a monster petition, bearing many thousands of signatures from North-West London, was laid before the City Corporation praying that a band stand should be erected in the Queen's Park, Kilburn. It was incidentally stated that this would involve an outlay of some £500, but the court was in liberal mood. The prayer of the petition was granted, and the Corn and Finance Committee was ordered to proceed with the work.'²⁸

Throughout the next decades, the local press regularly contained notices of the Queen's Park Military Band activities. In May 1895 it was announced that the band 'will commence playing in the Queen's Park, Kilburn, on Whit Sunday at six p.m. (weather permitting). It will also play on Thursdays at

23. 'Mr Aird's Fountain in Queen's Park', *The Kilburn Times and Western Post*, Friday 12 October 1888.

24. It is shown on the OS 25 inch map, sheet London IV.7 revision of 1935/6, but on the OS 1:1250 map, TQ2483 SW, surveyed October 1953 the site is shown occupied by lavatories, although a drinking fountain is marked to the north-east of the original location on a new path.

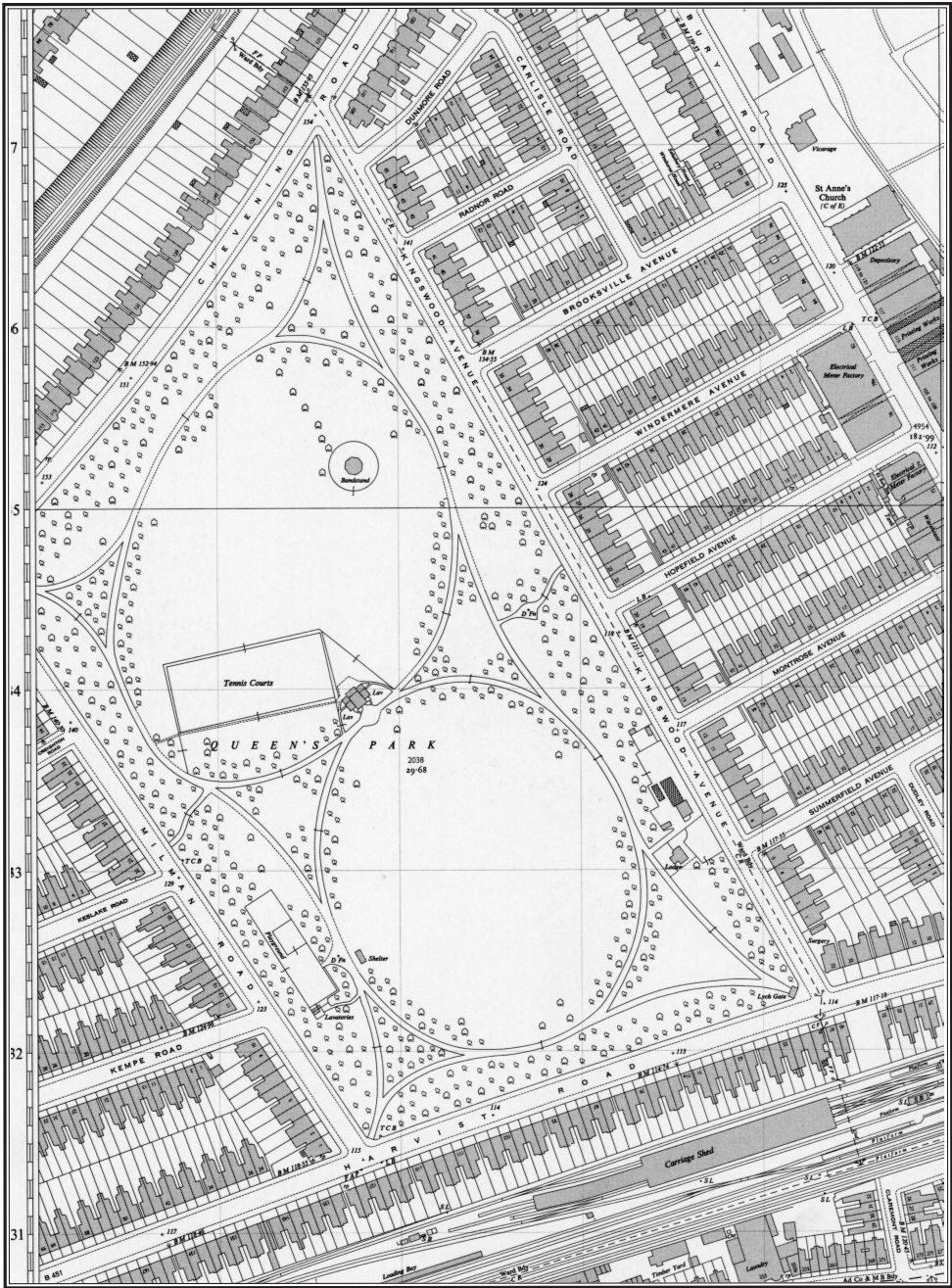
25. *Kilburn Times and Western Post*, Friday 12 October 1888, *op.cit.*

26. *The Monmouthshire Beacon*, Saturday 28 May 1892.

27. 'The Queen's Park Band', *The Kilburn Times and Western Post*, Friday 7 November 1890.

28. 'London Day by Day', *The Daily Telegraph*, Friday 15 May 1891.

QUEEN'S PARK, VICTORIAN LEGACY IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT



12. Detail from OS MAP 1:2500 Edition of 1955, Plan TQ2483.
The drinking fountain is no longer in place at the confluence of paths.
Note the Lych Gate is now marked in the south-east corner.
(REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION FROM NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND)



13. Queen's Park Drinking Fountain, postcard c.1900
(COURTESY IMAGES OF LONDON, WWW.IMAGES-OF-LONDON.CO.UK)

14. Restored Bandstand in Queen's Park, 2021
(PHOTOGRAPH IRINA PORTER)

the same hour, commencing on the 13TH June, and will continue every Sunday and Thursday up to the 1ST of September.²⁹ A notice in August of the same year appealed to the public 'to support them by purchasing programmes or chair tickets. The Band is not paid or supported by the London County Council for these performances in the Park.'³⁰ And the end of the 1906 season was announced on 24TH August, with details of the music on offer:

This band concluded their performances in Queen's Park, Kilburn, on Sunday last for the season, under their able conductor, Mr. James Hopkins. There have been large and appreciative audiences to listen to their programmes of music throughout the season. On Sunday the programme consisted of selections from Tschaiowsky [sic], Rossini, Mascagni, German, Godfrey, &c.³¹

Between the two world wars dancing was popular, and many bandstands, including this one, featured a paved area around them for this purpose. During the Second World War the bandstand lost its railings, melted for metal for the war effort, as were the railings around the park perimeter.

In 1979 rock band *The Jam* shot a video for their song 'When You're Young' in Queen's Park, which shows that the bandstand at that time was painted white.³² Another music video made in the park was 'Living Doll' by *Cliff Richard & The Young Ones* for a 1986 Comic Relief charity single. The film-makers, however, chose to feature more toilets than the bandstand! In 1992 the bandstand was restored to its original colours and is now Grade II listed. Another Grade II listed structure is nearby: the Type K6 telephone kiosk designed in 1935 by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, tucked away in a little alcove in Harvist Road by the entrance to the park. This particular kiosk was widely used by local people before telephones became a part of everyone's home life, and still inspires fond memories from the people of

that generation.

During the Second World War a few bombs landed in the area including Queen's Park. One destroyed the northern part of the path, and later this area became the Woodland Walk, which now offers the glimpse of a forest for local urban dwellers. Also during the Second World War, a barrage balloon station occupied part of the south field, and land was dug up for allotments. The attempt to build dugout shelters in the north field did not work out as they became waterlogged. The original creation of the park involved providing drainage, but with five natural springs rising within the park's territory, nature takes its course, and the park still gets flooded occasionally in spring.

The 1960s and '70s saw a time of great change for the park. A cost-cutting programme was carried out, and the Council proposed to create a *General Improvement Area* around the park. Local residents responded by creating the Queen's Park Area Residents Association (QPARA) in 1973, with the aim of protecting the interests of the community. Since then, the QPARA has played an active role in making the park a favourite place for the local community, with many large-scale events held throughout the year, such as outdoor film screenings, Christmas Gathering, Queen's Park Day (fig. 15) and Queen's Park Book Festival.

Trees are, of course, the main feature of the park (fig. 16). In the 1970s Dutch Elm Disease killed over 180 elms. Today Queen's Park maintains over 500 trees, including fine London planes and some old oaks. Until the 1970s most plants for the park were grown on site, in a greenhouse that was here from 1900, with a second one added in 1924. At some point park gardeners grew so many plants that they also supplied St. Paul's Cathedral. The park greenhouses were demolished in the 1970s, and in the 1990s an animal farm was set up in their location.

Most of the housing in the area around the park was built between 1897 and 1904, and this is now within a conservation area. This covers protection of all the street trees with a

29. 'The Queen's Park Military Band', *The Willesden Chronicle*, Friday 31 May 1895.

30. 'The Band in Queen's Park', *The Kilburn Times Hampstead and North-Western Press*, Friday 23 August 1895.

31. 'Queen's Park Military Band', *The Kilburn Times Hampstead and North-Western Press*, Friday 24 August 1906.

32. See music video by *The Jam* performing 'When You're Young' in Queen's Park in 1979: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Go-3oXkZwPg> (C) 2001 Polydor Ltd. (UK).



15. Queen's Park Day, 11 September 2022
(PHOTOGRAPH ANNE HILL)

16. Sunbathing in Queen's Park under the trees, 2019
(PHOTOGRAPH JOHN HILL)

trunk diameter of over 75MM and a height of 1.5M and above, requiring permission to carry out any tree works.³³

Amongst notable local residents of the area were Richard Baker OBE, BBC newsreader between 1954 and 1982, who lived in Kingswood Avenue and went to Kilburn Grammar School. Author Barbara Pym, also a local resident at one time, set her novel *Unsuitable Attachment* in the Queen's Park area. In recent years famous Kensal Rise/Queen's Park residents have included singer Lily Allen, designer Jade Jagger, model-turned-author Sophie Dahl and her fiancé Jamie Cullum, author Zadie Smith, numerous members of the acting profession including Daniel Craig and Rachel Weisz, Thandie Newton, Mark Strong, comedian Eddie Izzard, broadcasters Dermot O'Leary and Louis Theroux, designer Phoebe Philo – you never know who you may bump into in our lovely park these days!

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Irina Porter is a London Blue Badge guide and Chair and Journal Editor of the *Willesden Local History Society* (WLHS), which was set up in 1974 with the aim of fostering interest in the history of the local area, researching its heritage and promoting conservation.

For more information about the WLHS Journal, lectures, guided walks, outings and other activities see www.willesden-local-history.co.uk

THE BLACK BULL By Dr Nicholas Courtney

This is the story of a remarkable statue of a black bull and his creators. In his day, the bull was celebrated throughout the western world, a lure to tourists who flocked to Holborn in the City of London to see him in his full glory standing proud, attached to the façade of *The Black Bull*, a coaching inn immortalised (and frequented) by Charles Dickens. But those days are long gone and the bull is all but forgotten, obscure and banished to a cheerless quarter of Hammersmith. Notwithstanding his sorry state and lowly quarters, this bull is still a true and lasting testament to the work of the Pulham brothers, Obadiah (1803-80) who modelled him, and his older brother James (1794-1838), his fabricator.

The Black Bull Inn was legendary centuries before the arrival of its striking adornment. The tavern, standing beside the walls of the City of London, catered for travellers who were 'obliged to put up at one of the many hostelries that sprang up outside'¹ after the gates were closed at sundown – Henry Fielding had Tom Jones staying there 'after his exciting encounter with highwaymen between Barnet and the metropolis'.² During the tavern's long and diverse history, many a criminal had reason to thank the landlord for 'a last glass of ale supplied ... on their way to Tyburn'³ to be hanged. The inn continued to flourish, especially after it became the coach station for the daily stage connecting towns to the east to London. In 1825, the medieval structure was torn down and rebuilt with a large courtyard, galleries, many flights of stairs and an intricate system of passages snaking throughout the building.

It has always been assumed that the owners commissioned the Black Bull as the final embellishment of their new inn from the Pulham brothers, James and Obadiah, but although they did indeed create it, they were in fact then still employees of John and William Lockwood.

By the late 1700s, John Lockwood had

1. Charles G. Harper, *The Old Inns of Old England*, (Chapman & Hall, 1906), p.289.

2. B. W. Matz, *Dickensian Inns and Taverns*, (Cecil Palmer, 1922), p.130.

3. *St Austell Star*, 25 April 1901, p.6.

33. Details can be found in *Queens Park Conservation Area Design Guide* (2012) available from Brent Council: www.brent.gov.uk.