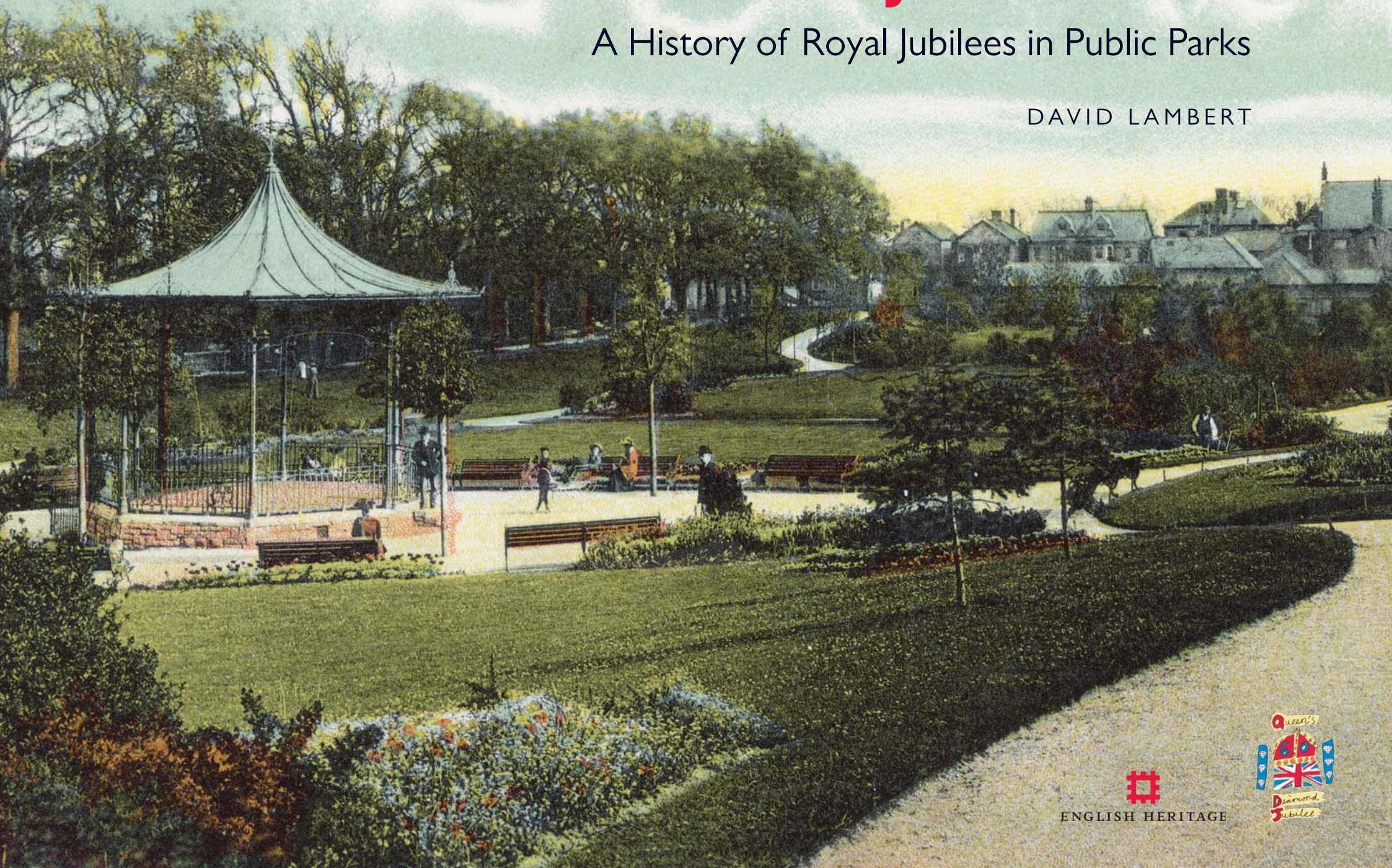


# Jubilee-ation!

A History of Royal Jubilees in Public Parks

DAVID LAMBERT



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Cover: The bandstand in Borough Gardens, Dorchester, donated as a memorial to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

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## Foreword

England's public parks and gardens have played a central role in the celebration and the commemoration of royal jubilees for more than two hundred years. The roll call of jubilee gardens, coronation parks, queen's parks and parks named after princes and princesses reflect these special associations from the Victorian era to modern times. Many of these parks and gardens are of special historic interest and protected by designations. Over the last 15 years, moreover, many of them have been beautifully restored with funding from the Lottery. They and other parks throughout the country will in turn be the focal points for numerous local 2012 Diamond Jubilee celebrations, which is why this seems a timely moment to look back at the long and fascinating story of parks and jubilees. This brief history has been commissioned as a contribution to Her Majesty the Queen's own Diamond Jubilee celebrations and we hope it stimulates a new appreciation of the very special contribution local parks make to the to the life of our towns and cities.

Baroness Andrews  
Chair, English Heritage

## Introduction

The celebration of royal jubilees has long played an important part in the forging of a national consensus. Such celebrations were genuine occasions of public enjoyment but also carefully managed endorsements of the monarchy.<sup>1</sup> While there is only limited evidence of commemoration of George III's Golden Jubilee in 1809 (I), the celebrations of Queen Victoria's Golden and Diamond Jubilees in 1887 and 1897 comprised grand displays of public, indeed international, support for the monarchy. Those of George V and Elizabeth II celebrated their reigns much more modestly.

Much of the celebration and memorialisation of jubilees was located in public places such as squares or other open spaces. The celebration of George III's 50th anniversary jubilee in Windsor was held on 25 October 1809 in Bachelors' Acre, and the monument erected in commemoration recorded the gratitude of the Bachelors of Windsor for the condescension of Queen Charlotte and her august family in honouring the celebrations of 'the joyful populace' with their presence. The festivities included fireworks and a feast of roasted ox and plum puddings, noted on the inscription as 'old English Fare', hinting at the political significance not just of the event but also even of the choice of food.

The Victorian jubilees came at the zenith of Britain's imperial power, but also at a time of growing social unrest, when the huge expansion of the industrial working population was exerting significant political pressure. That same expansion also lay behind the development of public parks,



I The Golden Jubilee statue of George III at Weymouth, restored to full glory for its bicentenary in 2010. © Jim Linwood (Flickr)

so it is perhaps not surprising to find that these new public spaces featured heavily in jubilee celebrations, either in being opened as part of the celebrations or as the location for commemorative events. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that public parks, one of the great developments of Victoria's era, were central to the celebration of her jubilees in 1887 and 1897.

They were used not only for processions, military tattoos, fireworks and feasts but also for more permanent monuments to the Queen, such as memorial statues, drinking fountains, gates and clock towers. The jubilees not only served as endorsements of the monarchy and the empire; they

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Elizabeth Hammerton and David Cannadine, 'Conflict and consensus on a ceremonial occasion: the Diamond Jubilee in Cambridge in 1897', *The Historical Journal*, **24**, 1981, 111–46

also were taken as the opportunity for a kind of reverse endorsement. Provincial centres such as Manchester, Birmingham or Newcastle took the opportunity for self-promotion in the form either of exhibitions or of major new building projects explicitly linked to the monarchy.<sup>2</sup>

The celebrations for George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935 were significantly different, divided as they were from the Victorian jubilees by the traumas of the First World War, the General Strike and the Depression. Self-aggrandisement was replaced deliberately by more modest commemorations. In response to the adulation of the crowd on jubilee day, the King is said to have responded privately, 'I cannot understand it, after all I am only a very ordinary sort of fellow'.<sup>3</sup> In a similarly democratic vein, the Prince of Wales's King George V Trust Fund aimed to provide 'more and better facilities for the recreation and guidance of the younger generation ... camp sites, playing fields, club premises ... workshops and gymnasia'. It was succeeded a year later by the George V Playing Fields scheme set up by a committee of the Lord Mayor of London to commemorate the King's death in 1936.

The Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in 1977 marked a still greater distance from Victoria's jubilees. Again, coming at a time of some social unrest, it was commemorated in the form of popular festivities and events, including the revival of street parties, and also in the form of statuary, new parks and new planting. The Golden Jubilee in 2002 was approached with some caution by a royal family still recovering from a serious dip in popular support after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. However, the celebrations often focused on parks and other open spaces that offered a locus over which there could be consensus rather than conflict.

The 2012 celebrations, although coming at a time of austerity, appear to be surfing a new wave of popularity after last year's royal wedding and benefiting from the heightened mood created by the London Olympics. Following in the tradition of previous jubilees of supporting open public spaces, Fields in Trust has launched the Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge to protect recreational spaces for the Diamond Jubilee.

## The Victoria jubilees

### The development of public parks

In many respects, the development of the public park mirrored the reign of Queen Victoria. The 1833 report of the Select Committee on Public Walks that heralded them dates from four years before her accession, and by the time of her death in 1901 the great period of park-building was complete. The interest of the ruling class in the conditions of the urban poor, which those parks reflect, was given notable expression by Prince Albert, the Queen's Consort. And while many parks were the inspiration of non-conformists or self-made and proudly provincial individuals and corporations, and while for much of her reign Victoria was seen as remote and disinterested, she was also the figurehead for much of the paternalism that inspired park-making.

Almost from the start, public parks were designed to accommodate not only promenades – or 'public walks' – but also large-scale events. Many absorbed open spaces that had traditionally but informally been used for gatherings such as fairs, sports, religious and political rallies. Conversion of this sort involved the introduction of bye-laws to regulate and control

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2 In 1887, Manchester's Exhibition of Art, Science and Industry was held at the Botanical Gardens in Trafford, and opened by the Prince of Wales, and in the same year Newcastle's Mining, Engineering and Industrial Exhibition was built on the Bull Park, part of the old

Town Moor. The Queen was invited to open Birmingham's new Victoria Law Courts.  
3 David Sinclair, *Two Georges: The Making of the Modern Monarchy*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, 1

these assemblies, and the promotion of what was viewed by the authorities as 'correct leisure'.

Parks were intended to improve not only the health but the morals of their working-class users, offering not only lungs for the over-crowded cities, but valves to release pressure which might otherwise lead to social unrest. Encomiums in sculptural inscriptions encouraged the civic virtues of temperance, obedience, duty and patriotism, while bye-laws prohibited behaviour considered vicious. That these rules outlawed such seemingly innocent activities as dancing, smoking, or eating may seem quaint now,



2 Statue of Queen Victoria, Peel Park, Salford, erected 1857.  
© Stephen Broadhurst (Flickr)



3 Statue of Prince Albert, Pearson Park, Hull, erected 1868.  
© English Heritage.NMR

but it is clear from historical evidence that even in the 19th century, they were contested and challenged.<sup>4</sup>

Within an orderly and beautiful environment, which in itself was expected to encourage good behaviour, parks contained a wealth of material designed to inculcate those virtues deemed desirable. Patriotism was encouraged by statuary commemorating military victories, or heroic lives, not only leaders, but also often local heroes. They were frequently the location for memorials to the dead of national conflicts or of local tragedies. Statues of local worthies often found homes in public parks and their memorial inscriptions drew attention to lives dedicated to the public good, to friendship to the poor or to works in the service of the town. Other civic virtues such as temperance were extolled in inscriptions on drinking fountains or other structures such as shelters and pavilions. And of course statues of the Queen and Prince Albert proliferated during her reign (2, 3).

### Victoria and Albert

One of Queen Victoria's early actions after her accession was to open the gardens at Hampton Court to the public in 1838. A year later, she granted the Botanic Society its Royal Charter, followed in 1840 by the transfer of the land at Kew to the Department of Woods and Forests on behalf of the nation to form a botanic garden. Also in 1840, the Queen received a petition containing the names of 30,000 signatories, headed by that of the Home Secretary, which led to the creation of Victoria Park in east London. This was prompted by the dire living conditions of the 400,000 inhabitants of the district, and the resulting park was funded by a Royal Grant (4). As her reign proceeded the Queen supported other park

4 See David Lambert, 'Rituals of transgression in public parks, 1846 to the present', in Michel Conan (ed), *Performance and Appropriation: Profane Rituals in Gardens and*

*Landscapes*, Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium Series in the History of Landscape Architecture, 27, Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 2007



4 The visit of Queen Victoria to Victoria Park, London, 1873.

Source: *Illustrated London News*

initiatives such as the Woollsorters' Garden in Bradford, to which she donated £100 in 1844 after receiving an appeal from a trade union, the Amicable Society of Woollsorters of Bradford.<sup>5</sup> A decade later, in 1854, she opened the new Crystal Palace park in south London, stating that its aims were 'to elevate and instruct' as well as 'to delight and amuse all classes'.<sup>6</sup>

From the time of their marriage in 1840 Prince Albert shared with the Queen a personal interest in horticulture. The London Horticultural Society was renamed the Royal Horticultural Society in 1861 after he was made its president and arranged a new royal charter. Nathan Cole, author of *The Royal Parks and Gardens of London* (1877), reported that Victoria was 'deeply interested in horticulture' and that Albert personally supervised the laying out of the grounds at Buckingham Palace, Osborne House and Balmoral.<sup>7</sup>

Prince Albert's concerns about social and economic conditions in Britain led him to become involved with various improvement programmes focused on the urban working class. He took an active interest in the development of working men's clubs, public libraries and reading rooms, and in the design of artisan housing, about which he corresponded with the social reformer, Sir Edwin Chadwick. When the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes was founded in 1844 he became its president, and in 1851 he contributed to the Great Exhibition a model dwelling for four families designed by the architect Henry Roberts. This building was later relocated to Kennington Park, where it was renamed Prince Consort's Lodge in deliberate response to the Chartist rally held there in 1848 that had briefly threatened to overthrow the government.

Until his death in 1861, Prince Albert was also a figurehead for an enlightened approach to the provision of healthy recreational spaces for the industrial working class. He was the champion of the 1851 Great Exhibition and of the Crystal Palace when it moved to Sydenham; there, its extensive grounds – laid out to a plan by Joseph Paxton – were immensely influential on public park design. The Crystal Palace combined a range of different landscapes – from its gigantic Italianate terraces and fountains to its informal English landscape – with an educational programme that promoted scientific rationalism, imperialism, loyalty and civic virtue.

Prince Albert was later commemorated in a number of parks named after him, including examples in Middlesborough, Scarborough, Abingdon and Salford. In Abingdon, where the park was laid out in 1861–2, there is a

5 Hazel Conway, *People's Parks: The Design and Development of Victorian Parks in Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 54

6 Quoted in Jan Piggott, 'Reflections of Empire', *History Today*, April 2011, 33

7 Nathan Cole, *The Royal Parks and Gardens of London*, London: Journal of Horticulture, 1877, 5



5 The memorial to Prince Albert in Abingdon Park, by John Gibbs, 1865. © David J Maisey, Images of England

particularly notable Albert memorial (5). After a visit to Pearson Park in Hull in 1854, the Queen and Prince Albert were both commemorated in statues.

After Albert's death, the Queen found new inspiration and support in Gladstone's successor as Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli. Disraeli was a radical Tory who had supported the Chartists' petition in the House of Commons and had studied working conditions in the north of England. In his novel *Sybil* (1845), he famously analysed Britain as 'two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws ... THE RICH

AND THE POOR.' He concluded that 'power has only one duty: to secure the social welfare of the PEOPLE'.<sup>8</sup> As late as 1877, he was arguing that 'The health of the people is really the foundation upon which all their happiness and all their powers as a state depend'.<sup>9</sup>

Between 1874 and 1876, Disraeli and his Home Secretary Richard Cross, who also became a personal friend of the Queen, saw through Parliament a number of new acts designed to improve the conditions of the urban working-class. The 1874 Factory Act reduced working hours and reduced child-labour; the 1875 Artisans' Dwelling Act gave local authorities the power to replace slums with modern housing; and most notably the 1875 Public Health Act, which addressed statutory duties to provide adequate water supply and sewage disposal as well as burial reform, and crucially introduced government loans for the acquisition and improvement of land for recreation. Other acts in this period addressed industrial relations and education.

Nathan Cole expressed the widely held view that public parks were a source of 'wholesome healthy pleasures to thousands of persons'. He then went on to declare that their 'value in a sanitary point cannot be over-estimated; and they cannot also fail in exerting a beneficial influence in promoting improved habits, awakening new thoughts, and suggesting fresh subjects for mental exercise of the millions, who might otherwise be employed in the study of less desirable objects'. He concludes with reference to the 1875 Public Health Act: 'It is meet that the Government should thus recognise the importance of Park and Garden embellishment, and aid in affording examples which it is highly desirable should be followed in the adornment of other cities, towns, and homes throughout the nation'.<sup>10</sup>

8 The Earl of Beaconsfield [Benjamin Disraeli], *Sybil, or the Two Nations*, London: Longman Green & Co, 1920, 76–7, 315

9 Speech, 24 June 1877: [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Benjamin\\_Disraeli](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Benjamin_Disraeli)

10 Nathan Cole, *The Royal Parks and Gardens of London*, London: Journal of Horticulture, 1877, ii



Prince Albert's interests had a lifelong hold over Queen Victoria, who as late as 1883 wrote, 'The Queen has been much distressed by all that she has heard and read lately of the houses of the poor in the great towns. The Queen will be glad to learn ... whether the Government contemplate the introduction of any measures, or propose to take any steps to obtain more precise information as the true state of affairs in these overcrowded, unhealthy and squalid houses'.<sup>11</sup>

Prince Albert's death largely put a stop to the Queen's public appearances, but until then she had travelled extensively throughout Britain. Her visits to towns and cities were commemorated in countless statues, many of them erected in public parks. She and Albert visited Salford no fewer than three times, and in 1851 their visit to the newly made Peel Park was said to have been greeted by more than 80,000 schoolchildren (6). Victoria described the welcome in her diary as 'a most extraordinary and I suppose totally unprecedented sight'.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the visit to



6 The visit of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert to Peel Park Salford, 1851, painted by George Haynes.  
Source: Salford Museum and Art Gallery

Woodhouse Moor in Leeds in 1858 was marked by 26,000 Sunday School children assembled to sing hymns, directed by placards containing commands such as 'Prepare to Cheer', 'Sing', 'Silence' and 'Dismiss'. *The Times* reported, with unintentional poignancy, that far from needing to be silenced, 'the children strained their throats and waved their hats and handkerchiefs with such vehemence as threatened to make them still more ragged than many were already'.<sup>13</sup>

Visits by royalty were often marked by the erection of statues and architectural features, or the planting of a commemorative tree. At Salford, a marble statue was erected to mark the 1851 visit; her next in 1857 resulted in the erection of the Victoria Arch, an extraordinary structure in a style 'copied from designs of Indian architecture', which was demolished in 1936 (7), and finally a statue of Albert was erected after his death in 1861.<sup>14</sup> At High Beach in Epping Forest, an oak was planted in 1882 on the occasion of the Queen's visit, when



7 The Victoria arch, Peel Park, Salford, erected 1857, demolished 1937.  
© English Heritage.NMR

11 Christopher Hibbert, *Queen Victoria*, London: Harper Collins, 2000, 201

12 [http://www.salford.gov.uk/d/lifetimes-issue\\_08.pdf](http://www.salford.gov.uk/d/lifetimes-issue_08.pdf)

13 <http://www.leodis.net/discovery>

14 *Manchester Guardian*, 9 December 1936

she declared that 'the forest be dedicated to the use and enjoyment of the public for all time'.<sup>15</sup>

The cult of Victoria was given an enormous boost in 1877 when the Queen was named Empress of India. Statuary such as the Doulton Fountain on Glasgow Green, restored with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant in 2005, epitomised the image of the monarch reigning over her empire in what was then the largest terracotta statue in the world. Alexandra, Princess of Wales, became a popular addition to the royal family on her marriage to the future Edward VII in 1863 and was quickly associated with social programmes and charities. She initiated Alexandra Rose Day for wounded war veterans and was patron of the Ragged School Union, and during the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1897 she organised celebratory feasts for some 5000 disabled children around the metropolis. A considerable number of local authorities chose to name their parks after her. One of these, Alexandra Park in Belfast, now divided by a steel 'peace wall', was created as an unemployment relief scheme, and opened in the Golden Jubilee year of 1887.

The Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1887 were what would now be called an opportunity for the monarchy. Queen Victoria had become remote after Albert's death, and there was significant republican sentiment, not helped by the Queen's alleged response when advised by Gladstone on the funding of the celebrations, 'The people must pay'.<sup>16</sup> For many working-class people living conditions were worsening. In 1886 one of the coldest winters on record had caused terrible hardship among the poor, there had been a stock market collapse, unemployment was high, and there had been starvation and rioting in the capital. The year 1887 witnessed what came to be known as 'Bloody Sunday' in Trafalgar Square,

when three people were killed during a mass rally against coercion in Ireland (8). William Morris wrote scathingly of the Golden Jubilee and the 'applause of those whose be-all and end-all is the continuance of respectable robbery ... now the monstrous stupidity is on us, one's indignation swells pretty much to the bursting-point'.<sup>17</sup> Documents expressing popular opposition are rare, but one survival reads:

Why waste we our means  
Over Kings and Queens  
Though ever so good they may be?  
Let the Duke and the Peer  
With their thousands a year  
Rejoice if they like, but Oh dear, Oh dear  
Save the poor from this Jubilee.

from *Jubilee* by Matty Tate, The Pitman Poet<sup>18</sup>

The Golden Jubilee heralded a public relations drive by members of the royal family: the Prince of Wales, for example, was dispatched to open the Grand Jubilee Exhibition in Manchester and the visit included a visit to Peel Park in Salford where his address stated, 'We sincerely and deeply regret the continued depression which prevails in the manufacturing districts ... and we fervently trust that ere long those who have borne



8 The violent suppression of the rally in Trafalgar Square, known as Bloody Sunday, 13 November 1887.

Source: *Illustrated London News*

15 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epping\\_Forest#.22The\\_People.27s\\_Forest.22](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epping_Forest#.22The_People.27s_Forest.22)

16 The phrase was used as the title for a musical play about the 1887 jubilee in Blyth, put on at the Phoenix Theatre, Blyth, in July 2004.

<http://www.thenorthumbrian.co.uk/features/80/what-price-a-royal-jubilee.html>

17 'An old superstition – a new disgrace', *The Commonwealth*, 4, no. 76, 25 June 1887, 204

18 <http://www.victorianblyth.co.uk/jubilee.html>

so nobly and patiently the hardships and distress attendant on the want of employment may experience a marked amelioration in their condition'.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, at the opening in 1888 of Queen's Park, Crewe, laid out by the London and North-Western Railway Company, the Duke of Cambridge set out the dangers that faced the empire and gave an encomium to the importance of the military volunteer force, invoking the spirit of Drake and Nelson and remarking that 'it was a pleasure to him not only to come and see the volunteer corps, which he thoroughly admired, but to find [the Company] did honour to themselves and the town to which they belonged by not forgetting the requirements of the humbler classes as regarded recreation'.<sup>20</sup>

Preparations for jubilee celebrations were not without controversy. A proposal in February 1887 to convert some of Northampton's common land into a jubilee park was rejected by Northampton Town Council, with the mayor, deputy mayor and radicals voting it down.<sup>21</sup> The committee set up to explore the possibility of establishing a new public park in Handsworth, then on the edge of Birmingham, was accused by rate-payers fearful of the cost, of 'erring through Jubilee zeal' in pursuing the project. A vehement public argument was carried on at meetings and in the local press, including an 'Anti-Parkite' candidate standing for the 1887 Local Board election. One correspondent to the *Daily Gazette* called upon the Conservative Association to stand up against the Liberals on the board with their 'excessive taxation, neglected thoroughfares, impure gas,

and radical nostrums' and their current plan to impose the 'perpetual burden of a park for the exclusive advantage of no other than the non-taxpaying classes'.<sup>22</sup>

Trades unions boycotted the Salford festivities in 1897,<sup>23</sup> while the Friendly Societies in Cambridge refused to join the city's Diamond Jubilee procession on the grounds that there would be two of these, 'one of working men and the other of would-be "toffs"'; it was 'class against class' and the societies concluded that 'they had better leave the whole thing alone, and enjoy themselves on Jubilee Day as best they could'.<sup>24</sup> In Manchester in 1897, the budget for the celebrations was, at £10,000, already less than the £12,000 allocated in 1887, but in the Council debate the figure was challenged with one member arguing that to allocate such a sum 'was not a matter for the representative of a working class ward to consent to'.<sup>25</sup>

## Children's events

The jubilee celebrations in both years took full advantage of public parks. Hyde Park was the location for one of the most prominent of the events in London, the Children's Jubilee in the afternoon of 23 June 1887, which was attended by some 30,000 schoolchildren (9). The function was arranged with military precision, with children organised into divisions, brigades and companies. The good order of the children was widely praised, as was the evidence of School Board education in 'softening the manners and not suffering folks to be wild'.<sup>26</sup> A large ellipse stretching

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19 *Manchester Guardian*, 5 May 1887

20 *Manchester Guardian*, 11 June 1888

21 *The Times*, 9 February 1887

22 Simon Baddeley, *The Founding of Handsworth Park, 1882–1898*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1997, 5

23 *Manchester Guardian*, 23 June 1897

24 *The Cambridge Independent Press*, 4 June 1897, quoted in Elizabeth Hammerton and David Cannadine, 'Conflict and consensus on a ceremonial occasion: the Diamond Jubilee in Cambridge in 1897', *The Historical Journal*, **24**, 1981, 135

25 *Manchester Guardian*, 8 April 1897

26 *Manchester Guardian*, 23 June 1887



9 The Children's Jubilee, Hyde Park, 1887.  
Source: *Illustrated London News*

from Marble Arch to Grosvenor Gate was enclosed with Venetian masts, streamers and flags. Ten large tents were erected, staffed with waiters to serve the celebratory tea – a paper bag containing a meat pie, a square of 'jubilee cake', a bun and an orange, washed down with iced lemonade. After the tea, the children were released to enjoy the entertainments:

There were twenty Punch shows, eight marionette theatres, eighty-six cosmoramic views and peep-shows, nine troupes of performing dogs and monkeys (the latter much distracted

by the innumerable bits of orange offered to them), several hundred Aunt Sallies and knock-'em-downs, and one thousand large lucky dip barrels, one thousand skipping ropes with Jubilee handles, ten thousand small balloons, and 40,000 prizes of the most popular kinds of toys.<sup>27</sup>

Six military bands and three private bands performed, and 'lastly there were the soldiers themselves. Who that has the slightest acquaintance of that familiar animal the boy cannot imagine the absorbed group round each Life Guardsman, sitting on a real horse, with a real gun (which might go off and kill) by his side, and a sword (which might cut off a head) in his hand?' The children were each presented with a Jubilee beaker made by Doulton, and one girl, Florence Dunn, was presented by the Prince of Wales to the Queen to receive hers personally: *The Times* reported, 'The child had never missed a single attendance during the seven years she had been at school'.<sup>28</sup>

The Queen's visit to Birmingham in March 1887 to lay the foundation stone of the new Victoria Law Courts included a route through Small Heath Park (10), where a mass gathering of some 17,000 children was assembled to greet her. The park had been laid out in 1878 by workers from the Birmingham Small Arms Company (BSA) during the slump in munitions production caused by the end of the Franco-Prussian War. Children from the far side of town were conveyed in coal merchants' and brewers' vans, and preparations included twenty parcels of clothing sent to the superintendent of the School Board 'for distribution amongst the children in need of better clothing'.<sup>29</sup> The Corporation put down boards for the waiting children to stand on, and there was enthusiastic cheering as the Queen's entourage passed through.

27 *Manchester Guardian*, 23 June 1887  
28 *The Times*, 24 June 1887

29 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 April 1887



10 The Queen's visit to Small Heath Park, Birmingham, 1887.

Source: *Illustrated London News*

Her Majesty, apparently to protect herself from the wind that was blowing strongly at the time she drove round the park, took shelter behind her 'sunshade', and as a consequence the children assembled on her right hand were unable to get a view of her features – a great disappointment to them.<sup>30</sup>

The park was renamed 'Victoria Park' in the Queen's honour (though the name fell out of use by the 1930s), Small Heath on its own sounding 'not very euphonious and a little too local ... On the other hand Victoria would to a certain extent indicate to future generations the age in which the park became the property of the Town'.<sup>31</sup> The visit was commemorated in one of the five stained-glass windows in the great hall of the Law Courts, which rather disingenuously depicts the Queen standing maternally among the children.

30 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 March 1887

31 Birmingham City Council, Baths & Parks Committee Minute Books, minute 9102,

Ten years later in Salford, a parade of some 8000 ragged school and mission-room children wearing paper sashes and commemorative medals marched to the racecourse, to enjoy an afternoon of 'horizontal bar performances, conjuring and ventriloquial entertainments, and the grotesque balloons which were sent up at frequent intervals during the afternoon and evening'.<sup>32</sup> In May of the same year, the Queen visited Sheffield and included Norfolk Park on her visit. Reports of the event refer to more than 50,000 children assembled in the park (11).



11 The Queen's visit to Norfolk Park, Sheffield, 1897.

Source: *Illustrated London News*

18 April 1887, Birmingham Archives

32 *Manchester Guardian*, 23 June 1897

## Fireworks and beacons

Jubilee beacons were lit on prominent locations, while in parks fireworks figured widely in the celebrations around the country. In Birmingham, the Diamond Jubilee celebrations culminated in displays in no fewer than three separate parks. *The Birmingham Daily Post* gave a breathless list of the display in Calthorpe Park, which featured ‘an aerial maroon, exploding at an immense height with a loud report, announcing the commencement of the display’. It was followed by ‘Crystal Palace’ coloured lights and stars representing ‘fiery scrolls, fiery snakes, silver streamers &c.’; a screen of diamond dust; the Star of India; a salvo of shells ‘emitting stars representing the will-o’-the-wisp, writhing cobras, jewel-headed tadpoles, &c.’; a shower of electric rain; the Girandola, ‘a revolving wheel of golden fire ... terminating with the explosion of fiery serpents, cobras, and scorpions’; a ‘glowing palm tree of the tropics, spreading golden branches springing from a stem with revolving centre of iridescent hues’; a ‘special national emblematical device, consisting of a group of flags having in the centre, “V.R. and I.”, surrounded by the dates “1837–1897” encircled by the words “God Bless Her”’; a Niagara of fire, 30 feet in length; ‘a colossal fire portrait’ of the Queen, and finally a hundred rockets forming ‘an aerial bouquet of various beautiful flowers’.<sup>33</sup>

## Celebrations and the military

The military took a key role in the celebrations, not only providing additional security, but also the focus of some of the entertainments. As part of jubilee day in Manchester in 1887, a review of regular and volunteer forces was held in Heaton Park. The troops marched through the town to Victoria station for transport to the park, and it was remarked without irony in a city that had witnessed the Peterloo Massacre

within living memory that, ‘The passage of so many troops through the streets added greatly to the animated spectacle which the city presented’. At the park, the troops formed into divisions and infantry and cavalry staged a mock battle ‘attacking an imaginary foe’.<sup>34</sup>

In Liverpool in 1897 a military review was held in Wavertree Playground (the 40-hectare park now known as ‘The Mystery’) featuring more than 7000 troops and watched by some 60,000 or more spectators, held back by a wooden fence. At some point, apparently encouraged by the movement of more privileged spectators closer to the demonstrations, the crowds broke through the fence.

The police, who were 160 strong, were swept away like cobwebs, and the stream of hurrying spectators spread all over the enclosure. The cordon of police on foot were utterly unable to do anything with such a mass of invaders, but the mounted officers ... considered it their duty to do something to stem the torrent and restore order, but the people had got out of hand, and a regiment of cavalry alone could have coped with them.

The people were seemingly not intent on trouble, but in the ‘scurry’ that then took place:

one or two mounted policemen charged through the flying crowd at full gallop, very recklessly it seemed to those who were watching ... One man was knocked down, while a horseman was proceeding at full tilt among the crowd, while another was more severely hurt, being also ridden down by another member of the mounted troops.<sup>35</sup>

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33 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 June 1897

34 *Manchester Guardian*, 22 June 1887

35 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 21 June 1897

The injuries were not life-threatening, but the account suggests a degree of nervousness on the part of the police faced with such a large crowd.

The Royal Salute was fired in many parks. In Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, ‘admiration of the eight heavy guns, forming with their gunners and escort two batteries, and of the artillery-men in their imposing uniform of scarlet-faced tunics and busbies, served to pleasantly while away the time of waiting for the Lord Mayor and his party’.<sup>36</sup> And military bands playing stirring music featured prominently in the entertainments.

### Park management for the celebrations

The celebrations made considerable demands on park staff. They certainly offered an opportunity to show off the park and their horticultural skills. For the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales to Salford’s Peel Park in June 1887, a platform was erected outside the Museum, draped with red cloth, and decorated with ‘Venetian masts, streamers, festoons of garlands and spiral wreathings of brightly tinted artificial flowers’.<sup>37</sup> The head gardener, Mr Moore, ‘naturally took charge of the floral decorations’ laying out pots by the stage including ‘*Thuja gigantea*, *Picea nobilis*, hemlock spruce, Weymouth pine and other coniferae’. The gravel path in front ‘was backed and fringed by Mr Moore with a prettily variegated assortment of flowers and plants. These comprised *Spiraea japonica*, different kinds of azaleas, *cystus*, *Aucuba japonica* and conifers’.

But the scale of the events also put parks under some strain. The sheer number of people attending the celebrations caused them problems.

At the fireworks display in Summerfield Park in Birmingham, it was noted laconically: ‘Every available inch of ground was occupied, and the police, of whom there were seventy ... had considerable difficulty in preventing the spoliation of the cultivated patches.’<sup>38</sup> One populist councillor in Manchester stated that ‘the object was to give pleasure to those who got the least enjoyment in this world ... and he would say for once, “If the people destroy all the grass, let them destroy it”’.<sup>39</sup>

In central London, the challenges were particularly acute. In Green Park in 1897, an enormous stand was erected at the end of Constitution Hill. This required pruning ‘the obtruding branches of the fine elm, lime and sycamore trees here abounding’,<sup>40</sup> and on 17 June, four days before jubilee day, ‘cartloads of leafy limbs were being carried out’. In St James’s Park, where vast crowds were expected, and ‘in order to prevent any climbing into the trees, the trunks of those which are anywhere near the railings [were] encircled some half-dozen feet up with rings of barbed wire’.<sup>41</sup>

The size of the crowds resulted in a familiar, although at the time a new problem. As the day’s celebrations in London drew to a close, the crowds drifted away from Buckingham Palace; ‘St James’s and the Green Park (12), however, became transformed into huge encampments of those who, wearied out with hours of standing, were glad to stretch themselves on the greensward and refresh the inner man’, and it was noted that ‘the Mall was strewn with the relics of these *al fresco* feasts, as, for instance, much sandwich paper, which ill accorded with the natural decorations of this favoured spot’.<sup>42</sup>

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36 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 23 June 1897

37 *Manchester Guardian*, 5 May 1887

38 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 June 1897

39 *Manchester Guardian*, 8 April 1897

40 *Manchester Guardian*, 17 June 1887

41 *Manchester Guardian*, 17 June 1897

42 *Manchester Guardian*, 23 June 1897



12 Crowds waiting for the 1897 Diamond Jubilee procession to pass the Wellington Arch, on the edge of Green Park, in London.  
© English Heritage.NMR

## Park openings and the jubilees

A number of authorities took the opportunity of a jubilee year to celebrate the opening of a new public park and to request permission to name it after the Queen. At St Helens in the old county of Lancashire, the Cowley Hill estate had been purchased and opened in 1886, and works to provide it with the amenities of a public park had been carried on subsequently by the borough surveyor, Mr Broom, and the park keeper, Mr Pye. On 21 June 1887, there was a naming ceremony to celebrate the Golden Jubilee, in front of a large crowd: 'We have met in such numbers today as the St Helen's public have never met before'. The speeches hailed the importance of the park – 'such a source of enjoyment

and healthful recreation to us all that we wonder how we ever got on without it' – and after their completion, a flag with the name 'Victoria Park' was hoisted to loud and prolonged cheering and the Rifle Volunteers drew up in double line and fired a *feu de joie*.<sup>43</sup>

Not all of them could quite make it: the ratepayer protests in the Birmingham suburb of Handsworth meant that the park was not opened until 20 June 1888, when it was named Victoria Park, a title which has now been dropped. At Bilston in the West Midlands, although negotiations for taking up an offer of land for a public park 'were pushed on with the utmost dispatch', time ran out – 'Notwithstanding that this important item in the programme was of necessity omitted, the celebration of the Jubilee was a complete success'.<sup>44</sup>

In Crewe, the hope that the park would be fully ready for the public in time for the 1887 jubilee, which would have neatly created a joint jubilee with the 50th anniversary of the Great Junction Railway's arrival in the town, was not fulfilled. Although the actual opening was delayed for a further twelve months, celebrations did go ahead with a dedication, as the company (now renamed as the London and North Western Railway) was keen to celebrate its own jubilee, especially as the year coincided with the production of its three-thousandth locomotive in Crewe. Venetian masts, streamers and flags lined Victoria Avenue and around the park, and a 'Grand Procession' led to the park, while the commemorative medal had the Queen on one side and an image of the new engine on the other.<sup>45</sup> A 'Fireman's Arch' was built by the Crewe Volunteer Fire Brigade at the entrance to Victoria Avenue, constructed from fire-escape ladders, decorated with bunting, shields, mottoes and the town council's coat of arms, and the celebrations climaxed in a cascade of balloons and a firework display.<sup>46</sup> When the park was formally opened the following year,

43 *St Helen's News*, 25 June 1887

44 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 June 1887

45 *Manchester Guardian*, 5 July 1887

46 <http://www.crewetown.co.uk/history.htm>



the memorial inscription on the drinking fountain recorded that it was unveiled by James Middleton, 'who completed his fiftieth year as engine driver for [the company] in the Jubilee year of Her Majesty's reign, 1887'.

Park construction was often slower than expected: William Barron's Victoria Park in Widnes was intended to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee in 1897 but did not open until 1900. Victoria Park in Finchley was originally planned to commemorate the Golden Jubilee in 1887, but only opened in 1902. At Victoria Park, Tunstall, the first sod was cut in 1897 with the intention of commemorating the Diamond Jubilee, but delays in planning and construction meant that by the time the commemorative foundation stone for the lodge was laid in 1903, it had to be inscribed instead to celebrate the coronation of Edward VII. And although access had been allowed throughout construction, the gates were only formally opened in 1908. Land on Windmill Hill, on the south side of Bristol, was earmarked by the council for a park in 1887 but not finally acquired until two years later. In the meantime the local ratepayers had successfully campaigned for it to be named after the Queen, a move that seems to have been inspired by a desire to rid it of its previous identity as a place of unpoliced public resort and public meetings.<sup>47</sup>

Some local authorities made a jubilee event of the purchase of land for recreation. Highgate Wood and Queen's Park in Kensal Rise were both acquired by the Corporation of the City of London to celebrate the 1887 jubilee. The construction of Victoria Park in Smethwick on former farmland was begun in 1887, and in 1897 the land for Pymmes Park, Edmonton, was acquired for the Diamond Jubilee.<sup>48</sup>

## Jubilee memorials

The jubilees of 1887 and 1897 were also celebrated with a range of built and planted features. New park gates were erected at Leazes Park in Newcastle upon Tyne to mark the Diamond Jubilee (**13**). At Borough Gardens in Dorchester, the bandstand was donated in 1897 as a memorial to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (**14**), as was the bandstand in Salford's recently restored Victoria Park. A red marble obelisk dated 1887 in St Paul's Recreation Ground in Hounslow was erected by public subscription to record the gift of the park. In Hereford's Castle Green, the memorial opened in 1898 to commemorate the jubilee of the previous year took the form of the Victoria footbridge, ornamented with the royal arms on both sides of the centre span and each of the steel arches. In many parks the 1897 jubilee was marked with a memorial drinking fountain, while more unusually in Bold Venture Park, on the edge of Darwen in Lancashire, the Gillibrand Meteorological Observatory was the gift of Councillor J W Gillibrand of Earlsfield (**15**).

13 The gates at Leazes Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, erected for the 1897 Diamond Jubilee. © Padraicyclops (Flickr)



47 David Lambert, *Historic Public Parks of Bristol*, Bristol: Avon Gardens Trust, 2000, 46

48 Hazel Conway, 'Commemorating royal occasions in London's parks', *The London Gardener*, 7, 2001–2, 35–42, *passim*



14 The Diamond Jubilee bandstand in Borough Gardens, Dorchester (see front cover), renovated in 2007 with the help of a grant from Heritage Lottery Fund.  
© Jim Linwood (Flickr)



15 The observatory, Bold Venture Park, Darwen, erected 1897, rebuilt 1952 and demolished in the 1970s.  
Mick Kelly © Darwen Days

In Windsor Great Park, the 1887 Women's Jubilee Offering comprised a statue of Prince Albert, for which the Queen laid the foundation stone.<sup>49</sup> In Manchester, the statue of Victoria in Piccadilly Gardens was commissioned by the corporation's Jubilee Commemoration Fund in 1897 but only completed in 1901 after the Queen's death. The opening ceremony was characterised by significant disorder with dignitaries using chairs and a ladder to climb the garden railings to escape the crowd. The statue was much criticised – 'as a work of art it is bad, and as a work of patriotism it is futile' was one verdict – and in later years it was frequently vandalised while its steps became a venue for informal public meetings and speeches.<sup>50</sup>

49 *The Times*, 15 July 1887

Not all the jubilee monuments now in public parks were first erected there. Parks have often been the repository for items of public art which have outlived their original location. At Endcliffe Park in Sheffield, the 1887 jubilee obelisk in the park originally stood in Fargate, and was moved to the park in 1905 to make way for the very fine statue of Victoria flanked by heroic figures of Labour and Maternity that was erected on her death (16). This in turn was also moved to the park, in 1930. The monument to the jubilee opening of the park is a more unconventional object, formed from rough stones to resemble a dolmen, inscribed and dated 1887.

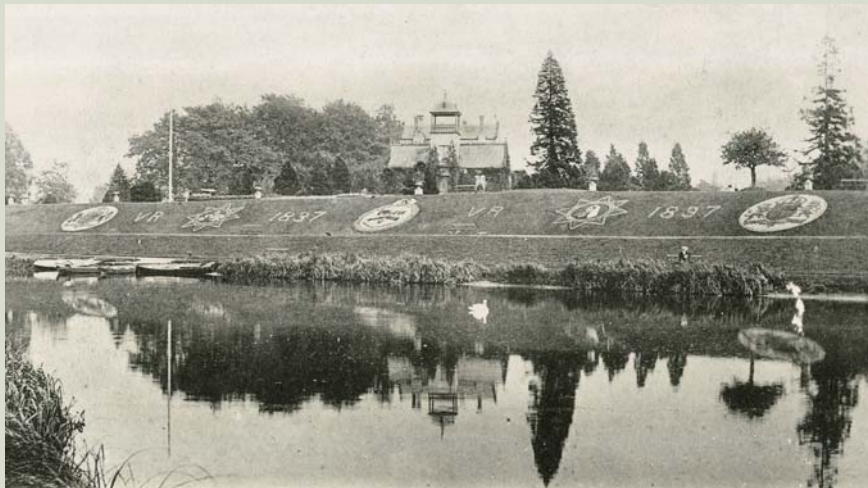


16 The obelisk, Endcliffe Park, Sheffield, originally erected in Fargate to commemorate the 1887 Golden Jubilee but relocated to the park in 1905.  
© Neil Theasby

50 <http://pmsa.cch.kcl.ac.uk/MR/MR-MCR03.htm>

## Celebratory planting

Memorial trees featured prominently. The gardens of the Middle Temple contain two mulberries planted in Fountain Court to commemorate the Golden Jubilee. In Wigan, in 1887, Mesnes Park was closed for the mayor's and mayoress's garden party, and four fine sycamores – the preferred choice for planting in poor atmospheric conditions – were planted, while a royal salute of twenty-one blasts of the foghorn was given by London and North-Western Railway engines from the nearby line. The mayor hoped that the trees would 'grow up and prosper for many hundreds of years, and not only be a shelter to the people of Wigan, but be an ornament to that beautiful park'.<sup>51</sup> Two of the trees have survived and the park is now being restored with the help of £6.5m of Heritage Lottery funding.



17 Commemorative bedding for the 1897 Diamond Jubilee, South Park, Darlington.  
© English Heritage.NMR

The jubilees were also an occasion for bedding displays (17). At Victoria Park in St Helens in 1897, the bed opposite the entrance, in which the name of the park was picked out in bedding, was supplemented with the words 'Diamond Jubilee', 'the letters being written in echeverias on a grounding of purple beet, bordered by pyrethrum'.<sup>52</sup> The crown planted at Cannon Hill Park in Birmingham is typical of the kind of displays that would have marked the jubilee celebrations (18). The Royal Horticultural Society established its Victoria Medal of Honour in 1897 'in perpetual remembrance of Her Majesty's glorious reign, and to enable the Council to confer honour on British horticulturists'. The award is restricted to 63 horticulturists at any one time, in commemoration of the 63 years of Queen Victoria's reign.



18 Floral crown, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham.  
© English Heritage.NMR

51 *Wigan Examiner*, 21 June 1887

52 *St Helen's News*, 4 September 1897

## An alternative memorial

While William Morris had nothing but scorn for the ‘monstrous stupidity’ of the 1887 jubilee, his fellow socialist George Frederick Watts came up with an alternative to monuments to the Queen herself – a memorial to the lives of ordinary people who had performed extraordinary acts of heroism. In a letter to *The Times* on 5 September 1887 entitled ‘Another Jubilee Suggestion’, Watts proposed a complete record of the ‘stories of heroism in every-day life’.

The character of a nation as a people of great deeds is one, it appears to me, that should not be lost sight of. It must surely be a matter of regret when names worthy to be remembered and stories stimulating and instructive are allowed to be forgotten.

It is not too much to say that the history of Her Majesty’s reign would gain a lustre were the nation to erect a monument, say, here in London, to record the names of these likely to be forgotten heroes. I cannot but believe a general response would be made to such a suggestion, and intelligent consideration and artistic power might combine to make London richer by a work that is beautiful, and our nation richer by a record that is infinitely honourable.

The material prosperity of a nation is not an abiding possession; the deeds of its people are.

George Frederick Watts, ‘Another Jubilee Suggestion’, *The Times*, 5 September 1887

Watts’s original idea was for a ‘kind of Campo Santo’ with a marble wall of inscriptions in Hyde Park. It was not taken up but in 1898 it was revived by the promoters of a new park beside St Botolph’s church in the City of London. The Metropolitan Public Gardens Association was struggling to save the former churchyard from development – Octavia Hill had donated £1000 – and the vicar approached Watts about his scheme. A reduced version of his proposal was agreed and work began in 1899, with the selection of the texts based on cuttings collected by Watts over many years. The work was delegated to a Heroic Self-Sacrifice Memorial Committee, employing William de Morgan, a friend of Watts, to design the tiles (19). After Watts’s death in 1904, the work continued under the leadership of his wife Mary but after her death in 1938 the project was left incomplete.<sup>53</sup>



19 The commemorative tiles in the loggia, Postman’s Park, London.  
© David Lambert

53 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmans\\_Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmans_Park)

## The 20th-century jubilees

The celebrations in 1935 to mark the 25th anniversary of George V's reign were very different in character from those of Victoria. It was an innovation: a royal Silver Jubilee had never been celebrated publicly before and it was probably designed to cheer up the population at a time of economic depression, the renewed threat of world war and high unemployment. It has been said that the King and his advisers cultivated a new image for the monarchy in response to what was seen as the rise of socialism and the labour movement.<sup>54</sup> He gradually garnered support among moderate Labour party politicians and was on friendly terms with Ramsay MacDonald, the first Labour prime minister.

As a result of this conscious change, the monarchy seems to have retained a good deal of popularity during both the First World War and the economic troubles of the 1920s and 1930s, with gestures such as a voluntary offer to reduce the civil list in 1931. In his jubilee broadcast, the King made particular mention of the unemployed: 'In the midst of this day's rejoicing I grieve to think of the numbers of my people who are still without work. We owe to them, and not least to those who are suffering from any form of disablement, all the sympathy and help that we can give.'

In 1926, the King had famously remarked, when it was suggested that the strikers were revolutionaries, 'Try living on their wages before you judge them'.<sup>55</sup> George Orwell remarked in 1943 that 'the affection shown for George V at the Silver Jubilee was obviously genuine, and it was even possible to see it in the survival, or recrudescence, of an idea almost as

old as history, the idea of the King and the common people being in a sort of alliance against the upper classes'. Graffiti in the streets said, 'Long live the King. Down with the landlords.'<sup>56</sup>

### King George V Fields

Although a number of initiatives marked the Silver Jubilee in the form of new parks or new structures, probably the most significant legacy was the King George's Fields Foundation. This was set up in commemoration of the King's death in 1936, but in the preceding year, the King George V Jubilee Trust had been formed to raise funds to support the establishment of 'more and better facilities for the recreation and guidance of the younger generation'. It captured the mood of the times and it raised more than a million pounds.

The Prince of Wales's speech on the BBC described the new Trust's aims as being 'to encourage the cultivation of abilities, craftsmanship and all those outdoor interests and activities that make for mental and physical fitness'. He continued:

I know the need for all this and I have seen with my own eyes the vast difference of outlook both in body and mind between the children who have enjoyed these advantages and those who have not. There are many admirable voluntary organisations in existence whose aim it is to promote the welfare of the girls and boys of this country and the Trust will assist, strengthen and extend their work. It will enable similar movements to be started in places at present untouched and pay special attention to areas rural and

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54 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_V#King\\_and\\_Emperor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_V#King_and_Emperor)

55 Kenneth Rose, *King George V*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, 340, quoted in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_V](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_V)

56 George Orwell, 'The English People', written 1943, published 1947, in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, 4 vols, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, vol 3, 33

industrial where this kind of work is held up through lack of resources and is crying out for help from some central source ... In addition to assisting organisations such as boys' and girls' clubs, brigades, scouts and guides, we have in mind an outdoor programme to help in providing camp sites, playing fields and for hiking etc, for all young people. Also an outdoor programme to help towards club premises, workshops and gymnasiums in areas where such facilities do not exist today.<sup>57</sup>

The George V Playing Fields were a separate initiative set up after the Lord Mayor of London established a National Memorial Fund to commemorate the King's death in 1936 by providing playing fields. A King George's Fields Foundation was created to implement the project and it offered grants towards land acquisition. The land was then to be passed to the National Playing Fields Association 'to preserve and safeguard the land for the public benefit'. By the time of the Foundation's dissolution in 1965, there were 471 King George V Playing Fields across the UK. The style was to be modest – ornamental gardens were not eligible and elaborate gateways were not encouraged. Pairs of lion and unicorn panels in stone, bronze or brass, as appropriate to the location, were issued to all fields for installation at the entrance (20). The emphasis was on urban sites but not exclusively so, and they varied in size from more than 100 acres (40 hectares) to less than a quarter.

The cultural emphasis of the era had shifted from the constraints of the ornamental park to the healthy exercise of playing fields and outdoor pursuits. The National Council of the Youth Hostels Association urged the Government to establish national parks to commemorate the jubilee.<sup>58</sup> The jubilee appeal was strongly focused on youth, and George's



20 The lion and unicorn panels, designed for George V Playing Fields.  
© The King George's Fields Foundation



21 Ilkley Lido, opened to commemorate George V's Silver Jubilee, 1935, in a painting by Frank Sherwin  
© NMR/ Science & Society Picture Library

reign had coincided with a golden age of outdoor pursuits such as rambling, rock-climbing, bicycling and swimming. The 1930s was the great decade of lido-building, at least two of which – at Penzance and Ilkley, both happily still thriving – were opened specifically as celebrations of the 1935 Jubilee (21).

### The 1935 celebrations

One commentator remarked that the London celebrations were markedly different in character from those of the 1887 and 1897 jubilees. In 1887, relaxed drinking hours had turned the West End into 'a perfect

57 [http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/edward\\_viii/12907.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/edward_viii/12907.shtml)

58 *Manchester Guardian*, 9 April 1935

Pandemonium'.<sup>59</sup> In 1935, by contrast, 'Never had one seen so much general unloosening of conventions and class decorum, and never had one seen in a season of rejoicings so little drunkenness, rowdiness or bad temper. Perhaps the novel beauty of the floodlighting on the public buildings and on the trees in the park, and other wonderful signs of the new era made us more conscious that week that our manners should be attuned to it.'<sup>60</sup> A sign of the times, perhaps, was that the London Vegetarian Society wrote to the Bishop of Manchester to protest about 'public ox-roasting for amusement'.<sup>61</sup> The mood is captured in press reports of the celebrations in Hyde Park:

The King last night initiated a spectacular act of celebration of his Jubilee Day by pressing an electric button at Buckingham Palace and lighting the huge beacon in Hyde Park, which was the signal for a chain of fires to sweep round the British Isles. When the time for the lighting of the beacon approached the crowd became so dense that it was impossible for traffic outside the Hyde Park to move. Inside the park Jubilee revellers who could not get near the beacon danced to the strains of all sorts of instruments – mouth-organs, accordions, portable gramophones, and bugles. Others joined in community singing. Rockets were fired from buildings gaily lighted with red, white and blue lights. As the first flames leapt from the beacon at 9.55 cheer upon cheer sounded through the park. Crowds of people ran towards the beacon from all parts of the park, and many people climbed the railings in order to obtain a view of the spectacle.<sup>62</sup>

Elsewhere, a crowd of between 100,000 and 150,000 gathered at the Princess Road Exhibition Ground in Manchester to hear a royal salute and watch a march past of the Territorial Army in front of the mayor and Lord Derby. Another took place at Buile Hill Park in Salford and when the battalions left the park to the accompaniment of stirring marches, 'the masses of townspeople who lined the footpaths hailed them heartily'.<sup>63</sup> The newspaper reports described 'Throngs in the Park – Music and Sunshine'. 'Men, women and children crowded by tens of thousands into the municipal parks. On no normal bank holiday that can readily be remembered was there anything comparable to this massing in the open air ... Wythenshawe, Heaton Park, Platt Fields and all the lesser public playgrounds presented the same happy picture of a people making common holiday.'

Platt Fields in the early afternoon was a good example of the general way of rejoicing. As in a dozen other parks, here was an excellent band playing. The sun shone hotly, the grass was new-cropped and sweet-smelling, the trees were in their cleanest clothing of varied greens. Families just trooped in by thousands, at all entrances and took possession, hearing the music and lying about in the warm sun upon the grass thought they were on Hampstead Heath or Blackpool sands. Every one of the scores of tennis courts and every bowling green was in play, all the little row-boats under many amateur oarsmen were out upon the lake, and the motor-launch Tom Fox, with flags dressed, popped among the smaller fry with continuous lucrative cargoes. A fresh breeze from the north-west extended all the flags and the sun touched upon the shallow green water with silvery ripples.

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59 *Manchester Guardian*, 23 June 1887

60 *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1936

61 *Manchester Guardian*, 13 March 1935

62 *Manchester Guardian*, 7 May 1935

63 *Manchester Guardian*, 7 May 1935

About tea-time some cloud blew up as though a storm threatened, but it was no more than a threat, and the evening remained fine for the later band concerts and so the people could stay in the parks until it was time to take to the trams and make a tour of the lighted and decorated streets.<sup>64</sup>

In Boggart Hole Clough, in the evening, the North Central Manchester Division of the Boy Scouts' Association marched in procession to the beacon in the park, each carrying a Chinese lantern. 'This little procession, with its coloured lamps bobbing above the heads of a host of spectators following in its wake, must surely have been one of the most charming of Manchester's list of celebrations.' They formed a circle around the bonfire, which was as high as a haystack. 'The crescent moon and one bright star hung over the crowd, and the sky darkened gradually to a deep blue and dun colour.' At ten o'clock, a rocket was fired and the beacon lit by the local MP: 'As the fire increased the sky and the sea of faces right away to the park gates glowed with a cheerful light.'<sup>65</sup>

The jubilee celebrations in Peel Park in Bradford were recorded in a delightful film.<sup>66</sup> They begin with a medieval battle re-enactment, complete with children in historic costume; there are knights on horseback and a parade of children in historic costume following a group of hooded monks; dancing follows; then a Civil War re-enactment in which the cavaliers are vanquished, after which there is a Royal Salute from the cannons. Boats and canoes are out on the lake, and a band is playing in the bandstand watched by a large audience. Finally, the 'Jubilee-ation' is completed by a firework display, headed 'Fairyland in Peel Park'.

## New parks and the 1935 jubilee

Jubilee Park at Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire exemplified the new Georgian aesthetic with its emphasis on healthy outdoor pursuits (22). It was made on part of the estate of Petwood House, which had been built around 1905 by the Baroness von Eckhardstein, who subsequently divorced the Baron and married Captain (later Sir) Archibald Weigall. In 1933 it was decided to turn the house into a hotel and to create a new public park and lido, which was opened in 1935 as the Royal Jubilee Park. After the war it was handed over to the village as a gift at a ceremony on the day of Queen Mary's 80th birthday. At the dedication, Sir Archibald recalled that his wife had envisaged the park as 'a centre for recreation and repose for the inhabitants of Woodhall Spa and the surrounding district', and he



22 Jubilee Park, Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire, opened in 1935, in a photograph taken c 1965. © Francis Frith

64 *Manchester Guardian*, 7 May 1935

65 *Manchester Guardian*, 7 May 1935

66 <http://www.yfaonline.com/node/4223>



expressed the hope that the local authority would not regard the park as income-earning primarily, but as a way of giving young and old the opportunity for real enjoyment.<sup>67</sup>

George V's jubilee was also taken as an opportunity for a number of more conventional public parks and features. In Woodhouse Moor Park in Leeds, a jubilee avenue was planted by children (**23**). In the London Borough of Ealing, the council bought some 12 acres (5 hectares) of farmland to lay out Jubilee Park and the more ornamental Jubilee Gardens, including an Arts and Crafts-style Library and Welfare Centre. Jubilee Park in Edmonton was planned for the 1935 jubilee but did not open until 1939, when its main entrance featured a spectacular Art Deco arch (**24**). The Jubilee Gates at the south entrance to Queen Mary's Gardens in Regent's Park are more conventional in style: they were donated by the artist Sigismund Goetze, and officially opened by the Queen on 6 May 1935 after the remodelling of the gardens. In Ward



23 Children planting a jubilee avenue at Woodhouse Moor, Leeds, in 1935.  
© British Pathe



24 The entrance arch to Jubilee Park, Edmonton, London.  
© Felix O (Flickr)

Jackson Park in Hartlepool a new shelter marked the 1935 jubilee, joining a bandstand and fountain that had been built to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Jubilee Gardens in Crewe were a modest but charming addition to the borough's parks and gardens (**25**). In 2011 they were the site of 'a guerilla knitting attack', when a lamp post was draped in brightly coloured scarves, to herald a Lottery-funded Diamond Jubilee event, the Tree Cozy project. This will see the gardens and other sites around the town get 'a wool makeover' with trees wrapped in specially made scarves and jumpers (**26**).<sup>68</sup>

67 [http://www.woodhallspa.org/leisure\\_jubilee\\_park.html](http://www.woodhallspa.org/leisure_jubilee_park.html)

68 <http://artyarn-jubileegardens.blogspot.com>  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-stoke-staffordshire-14032176>



25 Jubilee Gardens, Crewe, laid out to celebrate George V's 1935 silver jubilee.  
© Francis Frith



26 Jubilee Gardens, Crewe: volunteers knitting for the 2012 diamond jubilee 'Tree Cozy' community art project.  
© Artyarn

## 1977 jubilee exhibitions and events

The 1977 Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II continued many of the themes of her grandfather's 1935 celebrations. A Queen's Silver Jubilee Trust was established and its focus was similarly on the young. Again, it took place at a time of economic problems and prompted some protests – the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen' and 'Stuff the Jubilee' badges expressed a level of popular dissent – and celebrations were once more pitched to avoid controversy. An eloquent insight into the times is given by the photographer Vanley Burke, who commented on his own photograph of a boy in Handsworth Park around the time of the jubilee (27): 'With all the political connotations of the British Flag, especially in the late 1970s, it's interesting to see a child for whom it is merely something colourful to decorate his bike with.'<sup>69</sup>

Event-planning again took full advantage of public parks. There was a Silver Jubilee Exhibition in Hyde Park during July and August, while in Battersea Park a Silver Jubilee Exhibition of Contemporary Sculpture featured works by among others Elizabeth Frink, Kenneth Draper and Ian Hamilton Finlay. The Battersea exhibition prompted angry protests from residents at the sequestration and closure to the public of a favourite part of the park for the summer months.<sup>70</sup> More mundanely, Jubilee Gardens on the South Bank featured an exhibition of street furniture, 'litter bins, bus shelters, bollards and poster hoardings, allegedly chosen for their fine design'.<sup>71</sup> A strawberry tea-party was held at the Cakehouse in St James's Park, now demolished, 'held for people who could remember three jubilees, of whom there were about eighty-five'.<sup>72</sup>

69 See Vanley Burke Gallery Ten, on <http://www.digitalhandsworth.org.uk>

70 Caroline Tisdall, 'The jubilee exhibition in Battersea Park is an affront to the landscape and the public', *The Guardian*, 17 June 1977

71 Martin Wainwright, 'And so ... back to the old royal routine', *The Guardian*, 9 June 1977

72 *ibid*



27 A boy in Handsworth Park at the time of the 1977 Jubilee.  
© Vanley Burke

The Silver Jubilee Exhibition in Hyde Park, in a conscious echo of the 1851 Great Exhibition, was intended to demonstrate ‘the scope and achievement of British industry and commerce’, showcasing the work of thirty-one public and private sector companies selected for their significance in Britain’s social and economic life (28). It was held in a huge marquee supplied by British Petroleum, which had used it at the inauguration of the Forties Oil Field in Aberdeen in 1975. The National Coal Board created an exhibit showing working conditions down a mine, with apprentices on hand to give first-hand accounts of the work; British Petroleum featured an igloo in which visitors were subjected to the temperatures they would experience in Alaska, complete with wind sound-effects to show working conditions during drilling operations in

Prudhoe Bay. Leyland Cars displayed an old and a new Jaguar; Croft showed off its special Jubilee sherry. The organiser, Neville Labovitch, who received the MBE for his work on the Exhibition, was also Vice-Chairman, and later Chairman of the Jubilee Walkway Trust.<sup>73</sup>

Just across the park a more modest Silver Jubilee exhibition on the royal parks was being held at Kensington Palace.

The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors took charge of arrangements for a network of jubilee beacons, including one on Snow Hill in Windsor



28 Interior of the Hyde Park Silver Jubilee exhibition tent, 1977.  
© courtesy of the High Wycombe Furniture Archive

73 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1391141/Neville-Labovitch.html>

Great Park, surprisingly close to the equestrian statue of George III. The three-mile route from the town up the Long Walk was 'lined by thousands of children bearing flaming torches and by a great assembly of costumed members of the Sealed Knot'. On 6 June, the Queen lit the beacon by igniting a fuse with the torch used at the Melbourne and London Olympic games. There followed 'an extensive programme of activities and entertainments. There was an impressive display of fireworks and "set-pieces", a traditional roasting of oxen by the Army Catering Corps, and music provided by the Bands of the Royal Horse Guards and the Life Guards. The Guards organised a tent for the sale of jubilee souvenirs, in which a commemorative map of the beacons was also on sale; while the Windsor Boys Club did a roaring trade in the sale of first-day covers of jubilee stamps.' The crowd was estimated at between 250,000 and 300,000.<sup>74</sup> Windsor Great Park had also been the site in May of a parade of Rolls-Royce cars, in which every model ever made was represented in a cavalcade from the Home Park, through the castle grounds, down the Long Walk, to Ascot racecourse.

Built and planted memorials included trees, such as the Tree of Heaven planted for the Jubilee rededication of the Bromley College gardens or the grove of twelve silver birch trees planted in Queen's Gate Gardens in Kensington; and statuary, such as *View* by Naomi Blake in Fitzroy Square, Camden (**29**), and the bowl in Queen Square, also in Camden, donated by Faber & Faber with its inscriptions by Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes.

### **New parks and the 1977 jubilee**

A variety of new open spaces were created to celebrate the 1977 Silver Jubilee. Many were quite modest in size – Jubilee Gardens in Rugby, one of three open spaces created there to celebrate the jubilee, was only half an



29 *View*, by Naomi Blake, Fitzroy Square, London, commissioned to mark the 1977 Silver Jubilee. © Russ London (Wikimedia Commons)

acre – others were substantial, such as the Jubilee Country Park in Bromley in Kent, laid out in 1977 on a former industrial site. 'Country' was added to its name to avoid giving the impression that Jubilee Park was formally arranged in the manner of some other municipal parks.<sup>75</sup> The Silver Jubilee Walkway around the streets of London, with its directional discs set in the pavement, was inspired by Max Nicholson as a way not only to display the sights of the city but also to lure walkers to the new Jubilee Gardens on the South Bank; it proved a success with visitors and residents alike.

74 Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, *Silver Jubilee Beacons*, London: RICS, 1977

75 [http://jubileecountrypark.btck.co.uk/About%20us/The\\_Park](http://jubileecountrypark.btck.co.uk/About%20us/The_Park)

The 1970s saw the beginning of a disastrous spiral of decline in park maintenance and some jubilee parks and gardens have struggled, most notably Jubilee Gardens on the South Bank, which is now set for a major revamp in time for the Diamond Jubilee in 2012. It is thus not surprising that a number of the repairs or refurbishments to Victorian parks made for the 1977 jubilee celebrations are now showing their age. In Queen's Park, Crewe, a new Jubilee Cafeteria was opened by the Queen Mother, to replace the original pavilion which had been burnt down in 1972. At Victoria Park in Ashford, a group of local businessmen celebrated the 1977 jubilee by sponsoring the repair of the grand Hubert Fountain (30). In 1998, the fountain was restored with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and further conservation work followed in 2007.



30 The recently restored Hubert Fountain in Victoria Park, Ashford, Kent.  
© Ashford Borough Council

## The 21st-century jubilees

The Golden Jubilee celebrations in 2002 took place in slightly happier times for public parks and gardens. Many older parks had been restored by the Heritage Lottery Fund, or used Lottery funds to stage events, create memorials or even lay out new parks. The restoration of Central Parks in Southampton was crowned in 2002 by a new Queen's Peace Fountain as part of the jubilee celebrations (31), and a new Jubilee Garden was established at Mount Edgcumbe Country Park, Plymouth, in the same year. At Cedars Park, created in the early 19th century around the site of the former royal palace at Theobalds in Hertfordshire,



31 The Queen Elizabeth II Peace Fountain, Southampton Central Park, opened as part of the 2002 Golden Jubilee celebrations.  
© David Lambert

Broxbourne Borough Council commissioned new entrance gates, with a timeline for the park set out in bronze roundels.

A new Jubilee Park was laid out above Canary Wharf station for the 2002 celebrations. Designed by Wirtz International, with grass mounds, an almost Arts-and-Crafts water channel and bold planting of metasequoias, it has proved a popular oasis among the high-rise buildings of London's Docklands.

The celebrations were carefully calibrated, however, as it was felt that support for the monarchy was not as widespread as it had been in 1977. The Queen insisted there be no 'excessive' expenditure: support had been severely shaken by the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997 and been further eroded by the 'Sophiegate' scandal over royal expenses in 2001: one senior royal official spoke of concern that the event might be met with 'a wave of apathy'.<sup>76</sup> Proving that the spirit of William Morris was still alive and well, the Bedfordshire Socialist Alliance Democratic and Republican Platform held a 'Republican Jubilee' party in Luton's People's Park on 4 June.

The Diamond Jubilee will be celebrated in two forms familiar from previous jubilees – tree-planting and out-door recreation. The Woodland Trust is sponsoring the planting of six million trees in hundreds of new Jubilee Woods by communities and landowners. The sites will range in size from 3 acres (1.2 hectares) upwards, and it is planned to include sixty Diamond Woods of 60 acres (24 hectares) or more.

Fields in Trust, which as the National Playing Fields Association played a key role in the George V Fields, has launched a Queen Elizabeth II Fields programme. This aims to offer permanent protection and new funding to

recreational spaces 'from sports pitches to woodlands, children's play areas to gardens and bicycle trails to parks'.<sup>77</sup> Sites are being nominated as Queen Elizabeth II Fields through a public vote, and will be permanently protected via a deed of dedication between Fields in Trust and the owner. They are eligible for funding from Sport England's Protecting Playing Fields fund and from a dedicated programme supported by the Sita Trust.

And finally there is the Jubilee Greenway, a new 60km walking and cycling route – one kilometre for each year of Her Majesty's reign – linking many of London's Olympic Games venues and public green spaces. Along with registered historic parks like Hyde Park, Greenwich Park and Regent's Park the route includes Victoria Park (Grade II\*) in Hackney, in the creation of which the young Queen Victoria played such an important part. Currently being restored with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, its popularity demonstrates the continuing importance of public parks in this jubilee year (32).



32 Victoria Park, Hackney, a people's park first opened in 1845 and now part of the 2012 Diamond Jubilee Greenway.  
© Craig Boney (Flickr)

76 Ben Summerskill, 'Apathy threatens the royal jubilee', *The Guardian*, 29 July 2001

77 <http://www.qe2fields.com/QueenelizabethIIcharityfieldschallenge.aspx>

## Conclusion

Public parks are, as Ruskin said, the measure of a city's greatness and its cities are the measure of a civilisation's greatness. They remain, as they were designed, places where large numbers of people can come together on festive occasions. In this they play a unique part in the life of modern towns and cities, just as they did in previous centuries.

They are also a key locus for the commemoration of events and individuals, local and national. From the most modest bench to the grandest statue, a park is a repository of memory, both personal and public. As such, they display a large number and wide variety of memorials to the monarchy.

For these two simple reasons, around the country, public parks and gardens have played a central role in the celebration and the commemoration of royal jubilees throughout history. Let us hope that this year's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, which again will focus attention on public parks, will help to ensure that the importance of keeping them in good condition is properly recognised, and that they are properly maintained for future generations and future jubilees.

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