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**Planting peace: the Greater London Council and the community gardens of central London**

Abstract

'Peace' has not lent itself easily to emblematic or mnemonic forms of representation. In the furnished urban landscapes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century peace was often personified in female allegorical form. She can be seen in many of the sculpted memorials that commemorate distant battles fought on the edge of Empire. Invariably, however, the figure of 'Peace' had a more modest role in the allegory of commemoration than that of 'victory' or 'triumph'. As an ideal, peace and pacifism is more often regarded as a process, a long-term goal that cannot be captured in single static form. To this end, the promotion of peace has most often been realised through intervention, occupation, and fluid, temporal forms such as campaigns, marches, songs, dances and other extended programmes. Peace has also promoted through slow, evolutionary forms such as designed landscapes, parks and gardens. This paper examines in detail two community gardens in central London. Each owes its origins to the radical political agenda of the Greater London Council in the 1980s, but they were borne out of grander visions for world peace, multi-lateral disarmament, and global accord. Twenty years after their creation the author explores their current condition and examines their value as sites of political value and heritage.

## **Introduction: the problem of 'peace'**

Unlike 'Victory', 'Gallantry', and 'Honour' the idea of 'Peace' does not lend itself easily to sculptural or static form. Whereas the 'big words' that comprise the high diction (1) of commemoration (to borrow Hyne's memorable phrase) have been rendered a thousand times in statuesque stone and bronze, the representation of 'peace' is invariably a less confident motif. In the Classical idiom of figurative sculpture, 'Peace' was always a female form; an occasional figure tendering an olive branch, a palm frond, or, very occasionally, a dove. In those large Classical group compositions that adorn the metropolitan centres of the former British Empire, she is always a lesser partner to 'Victory', and usually to be found at a lower level in the arrangement. On the Colchester memorial to the First World War, for example, 'Peace' is rooted at the foot of the plinth, while the allegorical figure of 'Victory' hovers some six metres above, a dramatic winged figure clutching the 'Cross of Sacrifice and Sword of Devotion'. Similarly, on the original Leeds Memorial the bronze figure of 'Victory' surmounts the seven metre high pedestal of white Carrera marble while 'Peace' is on its lowest ledge, a female figure in long robes holding aloft a (somewhat discordant) bronze-black dove. (2) The pattern is repeated elsewhere, although there are exceptions. In Uxbridge, the war memorial designed by ex-cavalry officer Adrian Jones is a striding figure of Peace – sporting both palm frond and olive wreath - atop a twenty-six feet high granite column. Jones justified his choice with the rather radical view (for the time) that 'we had quite enough memorials that seemed to revive the war spirit rather than to consider peace, which is, after all, the aim and end of every great struggle.' (3)

'Peace' and its representation nearly always flirts with ambiguity. Often this takes the form of subtle distinctions in the iconography. Take for example at the figure of Peace that surmounts the Thornton Memorial, near Bradford. She holds a wreath in either hand, offering us an apparent choice between olive

leaves of peace or the laurels of victory. (4) Similarly, the female figure on the Keighley Memorial in Yorkshire sports a laurel wreath in one hand, a palm branch in another. To add to the confusion, she was described in the contemporary press as emblem of a 'Peace Victory won through Service and Sacrifice'. (5) Further evidence of this tension between terms is to be found in the inscribed words on many monuments. As King has suggested, the popular inscription *Invicta Pax* (peace to the undefeated) might also mean 'undefeated in war' or 'undefeated by death'. (6) At Lacock, in Wiltshire, the word 'Pax' is featured boldly on the village war memorial, but it is only inches removed from a panoply of spears, helmets, armour and other weapons of war. There are of course several interpretations of the word: in Christian terms 'pax' is the kiss or greeting given as a sign of peace during the ceremony of Communion. Alternatively, 'Pax' is the period of peace and stability that is achieved under the influence of a powerful country or Empire. When used on British war memorials, it must be regarded in the latter sense: a 'peace' rightfully regained by the triumphant Empire, under the watchful jurisdiction of the *Pax Britannica*.

Few, if any, memorials appear to celebrate peace in its own right. British memorial sculpture in the 1920s and 1930s implied that 'Peace' was the rightful consequence of 'Victory', not an ideal worth promoting or preserving as a global principle. Inevitably, the issue of political legitimacy is at the heart of any discussion of peace. The pursuit of peace has never served the state's monopoly on violence. Because they are associated with internationalism, such causes as pacifism and the peace movement (conducted through such groups as the Peace Pledge Union, the white poppy campaign, and other causes) represent a threat to the nation-state which regards an anti-war stance as anti-nation.

The essential attributes of peace - reflection, reverie, harmony, quietude, solace, remove, contemplation, and other shades of 'peacefulness' – cannot easily be conveyed in static sculptural form. Such temporal qualities require something other than the fixed language of allegorical figuration. It is, perhaps, better realised in fluid, open-ended and process-oriented environments, such as

walks, natural open spaces, songs and poetry, community festivals and the creation of gardens.

### **The mnemonic role of gardens**

Gardens have long been regarded as a 'palliative for melancholy' and a congenial environment for solitary contemplation. (7) In Christian teaching the garden is a place for spiritual reflection and, has been designed so as to provide a stimulus for meditation, introspection and the loosening of the imagination. (8) Gardens are liminal enclaves, withdrawn from the customary disruption of urbanization, where precious objects, memorials and other sculpted forms can be placed under the open sky 'in the eye of God'.

Gardens are closely associated with memory systems, whereby themes, ideas, and classical references can be located in statuary, fountains, and other formal props. These act as a series of codes that might be 'strung together into an iconographical programme or narrative.' (9) Here, however, the garden-as-mnemonic-text is at its most vulnerable, as over time many cultural references will be lost or displaced, and a 'proper' reading will be at the mercy of the linguistic sophistication and foreknowledge of subsequent generations.

As 'theatres of memory', the mnemonic structure of a designed garden is perfectly matched to the task of memorialisation. (10) As Doris Francis relates, the seasonal cycle of nature 'confronts men and women with their own changes and mortality' concentrating the mind on the brevity of life and swift passage of time. (11) As dramaturgical space, the staged setting of the garden can represent both physical vulnerability and transience, and is thus suggestive of both decay and renewal, an effect that is exactly matched to the effort of commemoration. Garden-memorials have perhaps the unique capacity – of all art forms - to evoke poignant analogies between human existence, the fragility of nature and 'consolations of cyclic regeneration. (12) These modes of signification are

emphasized by the knowledge that many gardens and arboreta will not achieve their intended design until long after their designers have passed away. Flowers are a pivotal trope in the design of gardens. Here, the role of the gardener is crucial: a skilful gardener can appear to deny death and disorder by, planting maintaining, and caring for plants within the walled domain. As Francis observes, a well-tended garden is a 'symbolic bulwark' against disorder, decay and the occasional randomness of death. (13) Miller draws important analogies between the natural cycle of plant life and the course of human development: in that they both put down roots, blossom, flower, come to fruition, and unfold. (14) Stressing the biological and cultural similarities between plants and humans, Goody, in *The Culture of Flowers*, explores issues of reproduction, generation, and development that are held in common and widely valued as indicators of optimism, health and vitality. (15)

In such complex spatio-temporal environments inscriptions are crucial in clarifying the many layers embedded in the narrative programme. In formal, memorial gardens such as that at Forest Lawn, USA or the National Memorial Arboretum in central England, it is understood that the iconic should complement the indexical. In both places there is an explicit didacticism to the scheme of planting and to the situating of sculpture and carved objects. In this arrangement, the experiential dialogue between nature and text allows the very words to 'speak' from beyond the grave. This dialogue is also important in secular spaces where the dialogue is endorsed by clear and unambiguous textual descriptors that declare its polemic tone. As Trieb points out, a sign, logo, or motif that is 'dedicated to someone or something' glosses the landscape with an unambiguous reading. It is intended to be indelible, just as 'a caption might a photograph.' (16) This polemic intent is essential to the iconography of those enclaves in urban environments that have been designated as 'peace gardens'.

### **London's peace gardens**

London has a number of established 'peace gardens' – some have been designed for that particular purpose, others are ancient burial sites that have been re-designed and re-designated. The burial ground of St Matthew's Church in Brixton, Lambeth, for example, has been grassed over and laid out as a 'peace park'. More recent gardens have been designed in nearby Southwark, namely the Sri Chinmoy Peace Gardens in the grounds of the Thomas Calton Adult Education Centre, and the Tibetan Peace Garden in Geraldine Mary Hamsworth Park outside the Imperial War Museum. The latter is a heavily ornamented scheme with impressive carved stonework and decorative walls, which was opened by the Dalai Lama in **May 1999**.

After the Second World War, and even more so at the height of the Cold War, such spaces were designed on a global, rather than local, scale. International peace gardens at Tashkent, at Hiroshima, and on the US-Canadian border were expressions of desired reconciliation or overt representations of a ideal state of harmony. A global network of international peace parks became a reality in the 1970s; they served various symbolic and actual functions. In Central America they were created as 'cordons sanitaire' to help promote trans-national co-operation, in the Middle East 'peace parks' were created as de-militarised buffer zones between warring factions. In central Africa they were created to erase recent military turmoil and to protect bio-diversity. (17) While many such parks have become 'de-politicised' over time, the Hiroshima site in Japan still serves as a reliquary, a funerary site, a civilian battlefield, and as a locus for political and social debate. The 'Peace Park' became the cornerstone for the movement against nuclear warfare, and satellite sites have appeared all over the world. Invariably, these have taken the form of city, state and trans-national peace gardens and parks whose overarching concept is that they should be both 'a commemoration and a warning'. (18)

It was this imperative that led in the 1980s to the creation of a number of lobby groups based in London. Under the enthusiastic sponsorship of the Greater London Council (GLC) such groups as 'Babies against the Bomb' thrived in a political regime that unilaterally declared the capital a nuclear-free zone and

earned the ire of the Conservative Government by such provocative acts as draping the logo of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) from its County Hall headquarters directly adjacent the Palace of Westminster, and displaying London's rising unemployment figures on its roof. In 1983, the GLC created a year of peace. Its first manifestation was six large street murals – on the theme of 'Peace through Nuclear Disarmament' – which were started in locations throughout London. In addition many London boroughs committed resources to creating public spaces dedicated to 'peace'. It was understood that these would take a little longer to design and realise than wall murals, but they were soon under way across the GLC domain.

The largest was Burgess Park in Southwark. By 1982, under the impetus of the GLC schemes to create open and communal green spaces, nearly half of its 56 hectares had been created as parkland. A corner of it was later set aside as an international memorial garden with a Mediterranean plot, a South East Asian Garden and an abundance of plants from all over the world that were capable of withstanding the British climate.

However, in north London two of the more radical Borough Councils – Camden and Islington – developed the idea of a Year of Peace so as to create more polemic statements about world peace and unilateral disarmament.

### **Maygrove Peace Park, London**

Maygrove Peace Park in north London occupies its own space on the former West End railway sidings in north Camden. Taking its lead from the GLC Year of Peace initiative, the first idea for a park was recorded in the Council minutes of April 1983 as a call for an open space, which 'would serve as a permanent reminder of the Council's commitment to peace and its support for the policies of the Peace Movement.' (19) Under Council instruction, both the Visual Arts Officer and the Director of Technical services were enlisted to explore the feasibility of creating open space and placing a sculpture that furthers the wider idea of peace. When, three months later, several sculptors had been invited to submit their proposals, many more Council officials and departments had been drawn

into the project – including the Director of Technical Services, Director of Planning and Communications - with a brief developed by the Director of Libraries and Arts, which had to be signed off by the Chair and Vice-Chair. It is clear from contemporary records that this was considered to be a major initiative by the Council.

Such mobilization of public resources soon earned the ire of the Conservative Opposition who roundly condemned the £20,000 budget for the sculpture, arguing that a Peace Park was ‘Soviet inspired’:

Peace Parks are typically Eastern European Government inventions which do not serve the interests of true peace. Transplanting such an expensive gimmick to this country is to introduce an entirely alien and unhelpful concept. (20)

A ‘Peace exhibition’ at St Pancras library, which depicted many of the core images of the global peace movement was ridiculed by another Councillor who regarded it as ‘ a display of one-sided disarmament propaganda ... peddling the discredited line advocated by communists, neutralists, pacifists and defeatists...’ (21)

Even at this stage in the commissioning process the iconography of the Park was clearly and readily articulated. Articles in the local press carried long lists of its proposed salient features: ‘poetry tablets set into paths with quotations of peace’, ‘a peace grove’ of silver birch, ‘stone slabs indicating the names of local councils who have declared themselves nuclear free zones’, ‘plants directly associated with peace’, ‘friendship seating at a gathering point called the Meeting of the Ways’, ‘entrance pergola with rambling peace roses’, ‘a sculptural feature representing a crane’, ‘the Cherry tree, which continued to bloom through the nuclear holocaust in Hiroshima’. (22) Many of these had been collated by the Council’s chosen architect Hugh Court, whose contributions to a booklet ‘Places of Peace’ served as the primer for this and subsequent north London peace gardens.



In addition to allocating £15,000 (plus £1,200 for fees and supervision) to achieve 'the very special quality' demanded of a Peace Park (23) the Council officers suggested there would be further additions as the park matured, including additional poetry slabs, a symbolic friendship garden, and a colony of white doves under the voluntary care of local residents. Opposition continued. Citing the recent destruction of a civilian plane in South Korea, Councillors ridiculed Conservative opponents who had argued that 'there had been 40 years of peace so far without a peace park'. (24)

By late autumn 1983, with funds committed and work proceeding on site, five sculptors were short-listed to provide a maquette for the peace sculpture. Pursuing a fee of £2,000 and a budget of £14,500 for materials, transport and installation the artists Hilary Cartmel, Judith Cowan, Stephen Cox, Anthony Gormley, and Keir Smith were reminded that although their theme was peace, the sculpture had to 'be large and to be of a size to make an impact'. It must also be 'robust, vandal-proof and be able to withstand the weather.' (25) A public meeting held in early 1984 allowed residents to view the winning entry – a life size bronze cast figure sat on a granite boulder, by the British sculptor Anthony Gormley. The Conservative opposition later claimed that the meeting was poorly attended, displayed a clear lack of public enthusiasm, and elicited 'remarks varying from "a load of rubbish" (all exhibits) to "like something off a tombstone." (winning entry).' (26) For his part, Gormley reflected on his understanding of the commission:

Peace is not a political strategy. It is a state of mind and can only grow through our experience of it as points of being. The rock is part of the old deep history of the planet and is sculpted by time ... The form of the mould is that of a listening man with a small hole that connects the inner space to the outer world.' (27)

By the time the second sculpture – 'Peace crane' by Hamish Black - was photographed it had already been defaced with an intrusive graffiti 'tag'. Set high

on a plinth with an inset script telling the story of the Japanese girl Sadako and the origins of the crane as the Japanese symbol of Peace, the sculpture created a striking silhouette in the sunken garden, which is set on sloping land reclaimed from the railway.

Timed to coincide with the 39<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Nagasaki Day, Maygrove Peace Park was formally opened on 9th August 1984. Accompanied by the release of a thousand white balloons, the Mayor of Camden read out a telegram from her counterpart in Nagasaki, Hitoshi Motoshima, which read: 'We hope your Peace Park, will be remembered long as a symbol of peace'. (28) Celebrating the official opening of the 'first Peace Park in the country' another newspaper welcomed the 'gentle mayhem [which] seemed to create the perfect atmosphere for the official opening'. Bruce Kent, general secretary of CND and guest of honour at the ceremony was quoted as saying:

I believe in this world it is quite possible to live peacefully and reasonably as human beings and enjoy all the things this world has by sharing them. You are showing the way by taking the first step.' (29)

Places of commemoration and remembrance, however, only become an integral part of the public sphere through regular re-inscription. With traditional reverential monuments, such as war memorials, this is most commonly achieved through routine celebration of annual events such as the Armistice (that marked the end of the First World War) or Remembrance Sunday. By contrast, 'remembrance' events at most British Peace Parks follow a calendar dictated by key events at the end of the Second World War – usually Hiroshima or Nagasaki Day. In north Camden, peace festivals – as distinct from 'ceremonies' – were held annually each August in the 1980s. Accompanied by Irish folk bands, jugglers, entertainers (and in 1985 by giant inflatable puppets of Mrs Thatcher and Ronald Reagan) the Peace Park became a focus for a cluster of causes of dissent and protest, espousing diverse campaigns from 'the scrapping of nuclear weapons to the scrapping of battery eggs'. (30) In Camden a balance had to be sought

between snake charmers and protesters, and solemn acts of commemoration. In 1985 a wreath-laying ceremony was held at Brent Town Hall to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bombs, the wreathes being laid by ex-servicemen's CND branches, not at the foot of a cenotaph or memorial tablet, but beside the Japanese cherry tree planted in 1982.

Following celebrations held in the park as part of the 1986 United Nations Year of Peace, the Maygrove fell into less frequent use; its playgrounds and a floodlit multi-use games area were used sporadically by local children and youths. Twenty years after its inaugural parade of musicians, jugglers and inflated politicians, the Park is rather down-at-heel. The pergola entrance is adorned with a splatter of graffiti, and the gates to the playgrounds are often locked. However, this small tract of green alongside the railways sidings does provide a welcome relief from the back-to-back late Victorian and post-war housing of north Camden. Not all of the original peace slabs are in place, though at least two remain. Similarly, the 'meeting of the way's' seating no longer exists, though its metaphorical sense – requiring the visitor to pause and decide which route to take – is still evident. The central plaque with a descriptive plan of the park's planting scheme is now gone; its absence denies the visitor a critical textual commentary.

Both Hamish Black's 'Crane sculpture' and Anthony Gormley's 'Listening' survive, though they have suffered from neglect and vandalism. Gormley's squatting figure is festooned in paint and graffiti 'tags'. Even the seven-ton boulder is liberally covered in felt pen and spray paint. Curiously this does not seem to diminish its intensity.

Here, as in Burgess Park, the *Groundwork Trust* have been involved in reviewing the future use of the park, which includes assessing its importance as a site of heritage. In February 2004 the Trust held a 'community fun day' for local residents to renew interest in the space and gauge public interest for future support. Activities on the day include art and gardening workshops, children's entertainers, games and refreshments, and was part of a broader review of the Park, backed up by 1,000 door to door surveys with local residents. Its future is

now under scrutiny and, with the active support of *Groundwork Trust*, it will be retained as a community park, though it is unclear whether its peace iconography will be restored or even recorded as being of historical interest. (31)

### **The Noel-Baker Peace Garden (N19)**

The Noel-Baker Peace Garden in the Borough of Islington has much in common with the Maygrove Peace Park.

Designed and laid between 1980 and 1984 at the height of the GLC peace campaign, it was named after Philip Noel-Baker, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1959. (32) Born into a Quaker family in 1889, Noel-Baker rose to become Foreign Minister in Atlee's Labour Government. He had a previous career as an academic, a soldier, and a high-ranking public servant, working as principal assistant to Lord Robert Cecil on the committee that drafted the League of Nations Covenant after the Great War. He was also a remarkable athlete, having been Captain of the British Team at the 1920 Olympic Games and winning a silver medal in the 1500 metres. His contribution to the United Nations and world disarmament won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1959 and the Albert Schweitzer book Prize two years later. He died in 1982, in the year when the GLC campaign was being formulated.

The garden, that eventually took his name, is a one acre formal walled plot, set within the six and a half acre Elthorne Park, Islington, north-east London. Stage I of its construction began in August 1980 and was completed in 1981; stage II was realised by spring 1984. Construction was carried out by M.J.Cagney (Civil Engineering) Ltd. under the supervision of Islington Council's Engineering and Surveying Department. Even before the garden was completed, symbolic planting had begun on site. In August 1983 five cherry trees were placed in the central lawn around a circular stone plaque (designed by Council's Borough Architect Alf Head and carved by Steve Probert of Thomas Judd and Co. Monumental Masons of Holloway Road). Like many other peace gardens, the text is key to understanding the polemic intention of the space. It is inscribed

'Hiroshima and Nagasaki were devastated by atomic bombs in August 1945. These cherry trees commemorate those who suffered and died there. People must unite to rid the world of nuclear weapons forever.'

Several years after it had been officially opened *The Garden* magazine looked back admiringly on the original planting regime:

Made to the timeless plan of a rectangle enclosed by brick walls, this garden came into being as the solution to a problem – how to provide a quiet place in a small new park which should also offer something to children, dogs and footballers. Once it had been decided to build a walled enclosure, new possibilities opened up. It became worth putting in plants of greater horticultural interest than is usual in unprotected places in Islington, and the garden could embody the message of peace....

The planting is the most delightful feature. In contrast to the openness at the centre, the mixed borders are dense and rich. When the designer, Steve Adams. Planned the planting he paid special attention to the corners. The two southern ones are particularly successful – one shady, one sunny. (33)

Adams had followed a basic planting principle: a backdrop of climbing plants, generous ground cover, an ample body of shrubs and small trees interspersed with herbaceous plants and a variety of bulbs. Colour combination had been considered important: for example, red cascades were mixed with dark green and white; elsewhere there were strong combinations of seasonal colour. At the north gate are two smaller plots – a white garden – made entirely of white and grey plants - and a scented planting garden for the blind, the latter's pungent aroma created through southernwood, rue and helichrysum. Besides the aesthetic considerations, there was a clear polemic intention to the planting of white flowers, with its ready associations of peace and pacifism.

Writing in *The Garden*, Pavey concluded that 'this is a comfortable garden, with an air of ordered informality. The theme of harmony runs throughout, from the cherry trees ...to the attitude taken to its wide variety of visitors'. Drawing comparisons between the image of paradise as an enclosed and magical space, she observed how many elements of the traditional paradise garden were evident: calm water at the centre, greenness and blossom in winter and summer

alike. However, it was the brief for the sculpture that set the political tenor of the garden. In 1984, Lesley Greene, then Director of the Public Art Development Trust, had drawn up a detailed brief:

In the context of the theme of peace the sculpture should be designed with a concern as to how it will reflect in the calm, still surface of the pool. No proposals for fountains or running water will therefore be eligible. The sculpture should respond imaginatively to the idea of peace, and the artist should take into consideration that there are, already, a number of overt references to peace in the garden, e.g. doves. Otherwise artists are free to propose what they wish. (34)

The total value of the commission was £7,000 (a fee of £2,500; materials etc £4,5000). The chair of the Islington Recreation Committee, Counciller Alex Farrell, reinforced Greene's view that there were already sufficient references to peace in the garden, adding, 'We are looking for something a little different'. (35)

From an application of over seventy, three artists were placed on the short-list – Kevin Atherton, Elena Gaputyte, Emmanuele Jegede. The winning design 'Upon Reflection' by Atherton (also known as 'Pond Reflection') is a cast bronze figure of the artist gazing into the still waters of the pond; his 'reflection' is a bronze shadow that lies at the bed of the pond. It was unveiled by Bruce Kent at 12 noon on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September 1985. In her book 'Art for Architecture' Deanna Petherbridge (36) stated that Atherton had taken great care to render the statue vandal-proof by firmly fixing it to the base. Yet, as she further relates, it was vandalised more quickly than any other public sculpture at the time. This may be in part because it was regarded as a 'real person' – as opposed to an ideal image, a trope, or an abstracted symbol – but also because of the overtly narcissistic connotations of a figure gazing in apparent rapture at his own reflection. Atherton had involved community groups in helping to create the sculpture but they had merely being involved in casting his three-dimensional portrait, and their ownership of the process was incomplete and unrequited. As

the other Atherton castings of the time - of two commuters on the platform of a South London railway station - did not suffer the same complete attack (they were mildly interfered with from time to time) Petherbridge and others drew several conclusions: the idea of 'peace' in a community park in an inner city site cannot be imposed upon the local population, and the idea of peace can only be re-created in affluent city areas, or those with a public or collective history. As Petherbridge neatly expresses it – such cultures will only thrive in 'spaces that belong to the "polis" but not the police.' (37) Atherton's sculpture failed to connect with the locale, and in so convincingly representing his appearance and vicarious presence it failed to connect with the concept of 'everyman', or the wider ideals of peace and pacifism.

Inevitably, the sculpture had to be removed. 'All that remains' wrote Julie Isherwood 'is the reflection – an eery (sic) reminder of the ill-fated statue.' (38) Despite assurances, the figure has yet to be re-united with its glowing submarine shadow.

A garden requiring such high maintenance inevitably suffers if not meticulously tended. By the Millennium it had fallen into disarray and was suffering from neglect. The pond had ceased to function and the original shrubs were overgrown. Islington Council employed a local garden designer, Marianne Park, to prepare the garden for the twentieth anniversary celebrations in 2004. The original beds of white roses that had been planted as an emblem of peace in memory of the victims of Hiroshima were replanted in a new bed to reinvigorate them and new white rose bushes were planted in the vacant beds to reinstate the original plan. A number of these have subsequently been dug up and destroyed. For the 20th anniversary in 2004, herbaceous beds with a proliferation of tactile plants were planted specifically for the disabled and unsighted.

As is typical of many inner city green spaces, vandalism thwarts not only the garden designers but also disturbs the tranquility of the space. The overgrown and neglected shrubbery offers refuge, concealment and hiding place, and permits the spread of graffiti on semi-hidden walls. In the Noel-Baker Garden the low brick walls that surround the garden are easily scaled and a steel trellis

has been ordered from Sweden to prevent unauthorized entry. Marianne Park will use this trellis to grow honeysuckle and climbing roses on the surrounding walls. This may prove a deterrent to those determined to plunder the herbaceous borders. (39)

In December 2004 to mark the end of the anniversary year, a Peace Festival of Light was held in the Garden. Floating candles were placed on the pond and carols were sung. This well attended event re-established the original aspirations of the garden, and brought together the community as had been the aspirations of the original planners. However, some ten months later (at the time of writing) the summer plant growth requires radical cutting and the pond has been altered in such a way that could prevent the lily pads from growing effectively.

The 2012 Olympics in London may provide a catalyst for Islington Council to review and improve the necessary ongoing maintenance that is required. Elthorne Park, in which the peace garden is situated, has within it a football pitch, a boxing club and a running trail. These are assets that could be featured and improved by the council during London's prelude to the Olympics. There is of course, an obvious overlap between the international spirit of the Olympics, the proliferation of peace gardens in the aftermath of the Second World War and Noel Baker's history as a politician of peace and an Olympic athlete.

### **Concluding remarks**

London's peace gardens were part of a radical agenda borne out of lengthy opposition and political difference. They were intended to be permanent markers, representing both a moment in history and a long-term ambition to achieve global peace and universal accord. However, their local roots were shallow. Community involvement and ownership was limited. Despite their location, gardens such as those in Islington and Camden took on the appearance of private spaces, unloved by the surrounding communities and soon divorced from their political origins. Initially the gardens provided a focus and platform for annual events, but these have not become enshrined in the national calendar. Days of global



remembrance - such as Hiroshima Day - have a tenuous purchase on the British public consciousness when compared with the heightened value now placed on both Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day. Not even the spontaneous outbreak of mass mourning that marked the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in August 1997 seemed to impact on the gardens. Elsewhere in the United Kingdom, parks, gardens, even individual trees became temporary shrines strewn with flowers, notes, cards, and candles, where effusive public statements were made by thousands of private individuals. Not so in the peace gardens studied here. By this date both Maygrove and Noel-Baker gardens had lost their specific historical origins, and were largely undifferentiated from the many other 'public' spaces of central London: unkempt, unpopular and disconnected from both community and their original political rationale. The damage and disregard is most evident in the treatment of the many artworks on each site. It is perhaps ironic that convincing arguments against public art works have been in currency since the 1980s, the very years when the GLC peace gardens were being promoted. Commenting on the undiscerning promotion and advocacy of 'public art' by activists, developers and planners, Miles offers a penetrating critique of the spurious claims for social benefit that accompanied many public art schemes, which often 'became a badge for speculative and often socially divisive redevelopment.' (40) Indelibly linked to radical Socialist agendas of the period before the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the 'end' of the Cold War, the fate of the two parks has echoes with the fate of the hundreds of Soviet statues that have been consigned to historic theme parks – such as that of Grutas, Lithuania - isolated on the fringes of the former Empire.

Despite the apparent 'failure' of the two gardens examined in this paper, recent developments may soon have an impact on their future, and on our understanding of their cultural and social value.

British archaeology has seen a new interest in the recent and contemporary past. In the past decade, the traditional boundaries of academic and professional archaeology have been extended and subject to critique. Organizations such as English Heritage have developed techniques to promote

our understanding of the time-depth of contemporary and late 20<sup>th</sup> century landscapes – its so-called ‘stratigraphy’ - and are now actively reviewing how we value the heritage of the recent past. (41) Military (and militarized) landscapes have freshly revealed through this process. Once hidden and secretive spaces (such as Greenham Common) are now subject to pioneering trans-disciplinary study that aims to understand the diversity and complexity of similar politicized domains. The GLC peace gardens lend themselves to this form of trans-disciplinary study, whereby archaeologists, artists, and cultural geographers work together to re-examine and re-invigorate the legacies of a contested space in the material city. As the recent past is re-visited (perhaps even re-activated) urban garden organizations such as the *Groundwork Trust* are working to replenish the green spaces of inner cities, through renewed community engagement and multifarious funding agencies. The future of such polemic landscapes as Maygrove and the Noel-Baker Garden may be more promising than it has been for three decades, but it is likely to be a future that strips the gardens of any political roots, rejects their mnemonic potential, and consigns their evocative and particular origins to little more than a footnote in English garden heritage.

#### Endnotes

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