

THE HISTORY OF RICHMOND PARK

Richmond Park has been in existence for nearly 400 years and this timeline features some of the key stories and images in its history. It has been compiled by Rachel Hirschler and Robert Wood, with design by Mary Pollard.



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To view the story of Richmond Park - from the 17th century to the present day - please scroll down...

WHY RICHMOND?

1610



This early 17th century map of Surrey by John Speed has an illustration of Richmond Palace and shows its location by the River Thames

Richmond Palace was a favourite home of Elizabeth I, who died there in 1603. Later, Charles I, King of England from 1625 to 1649, also favoured Richmond Palace as a royal residence and made it the home of the royal children (and sometimes used it as a sanctuary from the plague in central London). Charles was “excessively affected to Hunting, and the Sports of the Field” and so in time looked for suitable land nearby in which to create a deer park, much larger than the 350 acre deer park which was next to Richmond Palace and in which he would have hunted.

RICHMOND PARK CREATED

1637



Engraving from painting by Sir Anthony van Dyck entitled Charles I in the Hunting Field circa 1635

The wall enclosing Richmond Park was completed in 1637, creating a hunting ground for Charles I known then as 'Richmond New Parke' so as to distinguish it from the earlier park adjacent to the Palace. It was a costly and unpopular undertaking, but six gates gave access to commoners to gather firewood, and the roads across the Park remained open to pedestrians. The King's enjoyment of his playground was short-lived as by 1642 Civil War had broken out. He was, however, allowed to visit in August 1647 despite being imprisoned at Hampton Court Palace.

HUNTING IN THE PARK

1649



Oil painting by Joan Carlile showing a family hunting trip in Richmond Park © Trustees of Lamport Hall

Following the execution of Charles I in 1649, Parliament settled Richmond Park upon the City of London to be “preserved as a Park still, without Destruction; and to remain as an Ornament to the City”. Deer hunting continued, and the two Deputy Keepers of the Park were retained in office during this time. One of these was Ludowick Carlile, whose wife, Joan Carlile, is one of the first women in England recorded as a professional painter. This oil painting is entitled ‘The Carlile Family with Sir Justinian Isham in Richmond Park (1649-50)’, and includes the artist and her family. Richmond Park was handed back to the Crown on the restoration of Charles II in 1660.

ORIGIN OF PEMBROKE LODGE

Early
1700s



Part of 1754 Edward Eyre map showing a mole catcher's cottage. From this humble home, stately Pembroke Lodge was created

In 1702 William III's horse stumbled on a mole hill whilst out hunting and complications resulting from the fall led to his death. To avoid a similar fate for riders in Richmond Park, a royal mole catcher was appointed and housed in a newly built one bed roomed cottage. This lowly dwelling was later developed, first for a gamekeeper - when it was known as Hill Lodge - and again for the Countess of Pembroke in the 1780s and 90s. The house then bore her name and became known as Pembroke Lodge.

GRAND GARDEN DESIGNS

1708



Engraving by Johannes Kip (from a painting by Leonard Kniff) entitled 'New Park: at Richmond in Surrey, belonging to the Right Honourable the Earl of Rochester. It is a Park of a large Extent, well stored with Game and laid out in designs after the most elegant manner.'

Towards the end of the 17th century, the Earl of Rochester acquired a lease on land that included Petersham Lodge, which had existed prior to the Park's enclosure. He demolished the Lodge and built a new mansion, known as New Park, with extensive gardens. The gardens were formal in design and quite different in character to the rest of the Park. The house was destroyed by fire in 1721.

ROYAL HUNTING BOX

1727

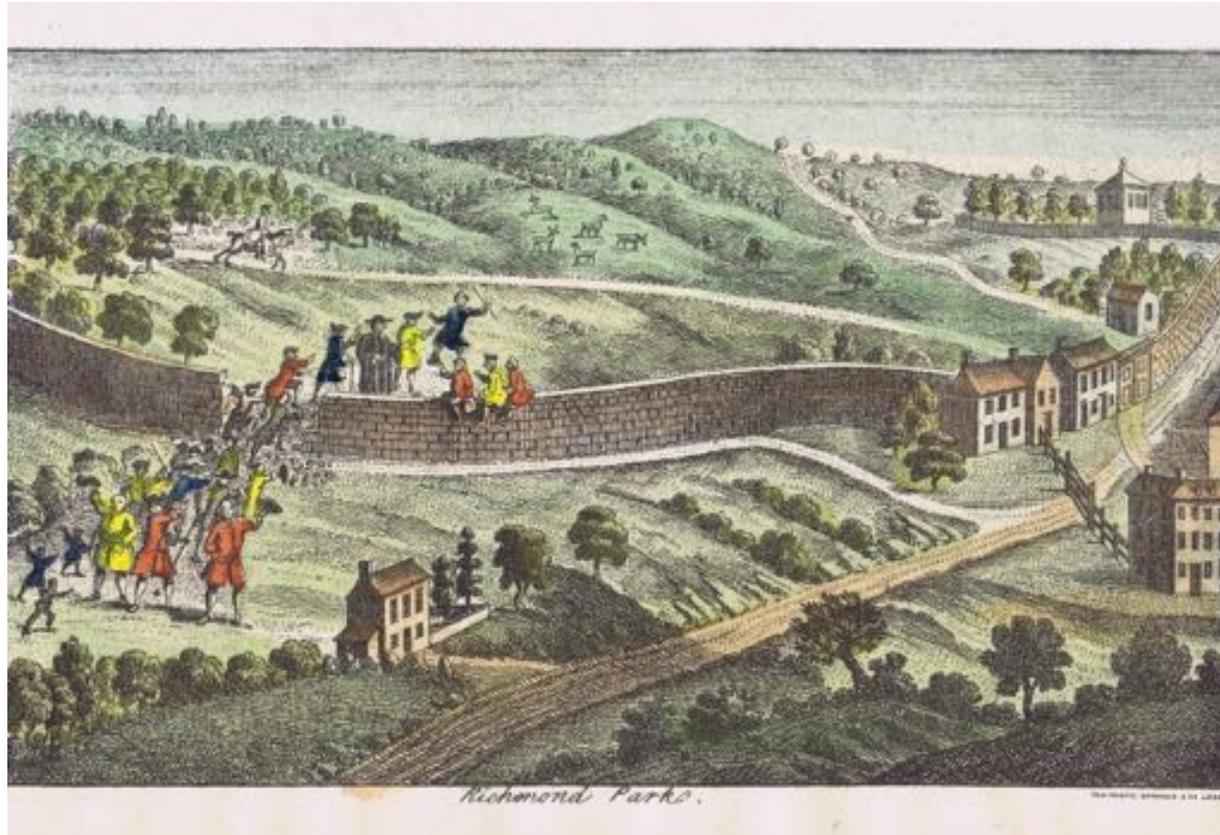


The hunting lodge built for King George ('Perspective View of the Entrance Front of the King's House, Richmond' by Augustus Heckel), © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

George I commissioned what is now known as White Lodge to be built in Richmond Park as a hunting lodge, but he died before construction was completed in 1729 so his son George II was the first to make use of it. His wife, Caroline, had the Queen's Ride cut through existing woodland to create an imposing approach to the Lodge; the Ride led to Queen's Gate (now Bog Gate), which was formed in 1736. Built in an English Palladian style and subsequently extended, the Lodge is the grandest building in the Park (Grade I listed), and over time has been known as Stone Lodge or New Lodge. It is currently the home of the Royal Ballet Lower School.

PUBLIC ACCESS DENIED

1751

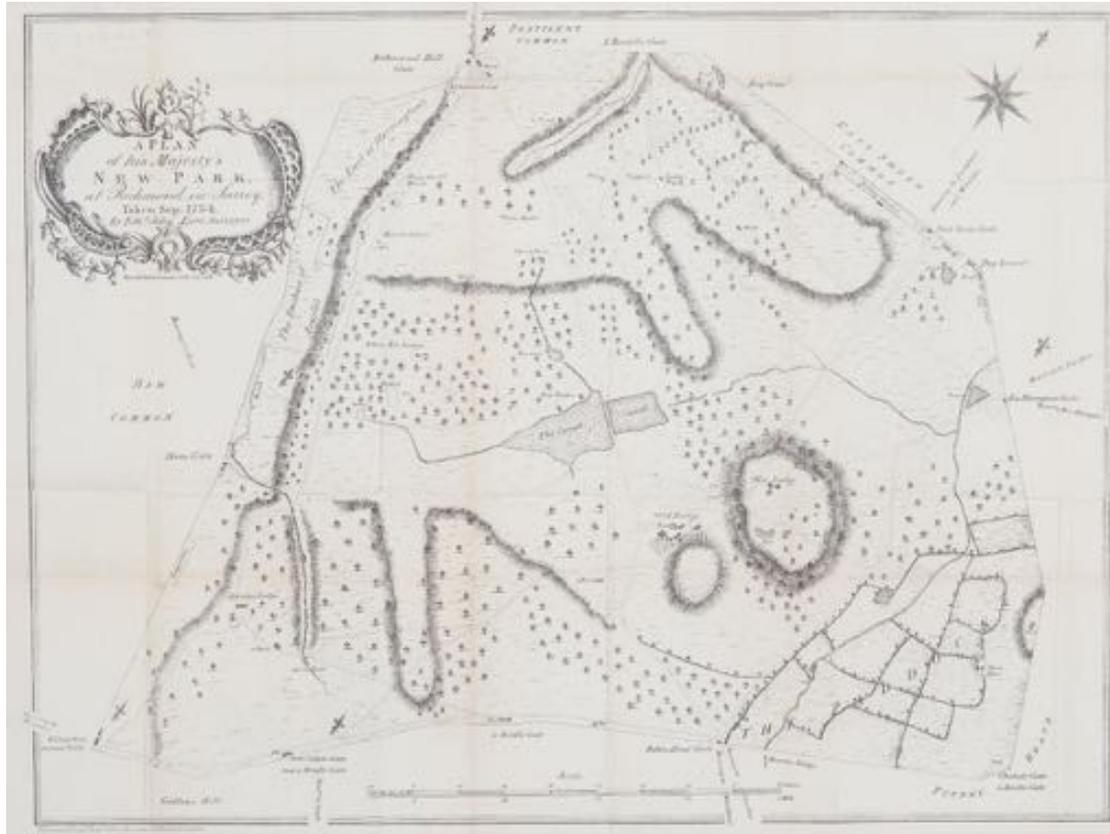


Richmond Parishioners, without permission, enter the Park through the wall to carry out the tradition of 'beating the bounds'

Princess Amelia, daughter of George II, became Ranger in 1751, and promptly restricted entry to everyone except those with a specially issued ticket. Her predecessor, Robert Walpole, under the influence of his father, the Prime Minister Robert Walpole, had already introduced entry tokens and removed the ladderstiles that were used by commoners to get over the wall. Only just over six weeks after Amelia's appointment, the Ascension Day ceremony of 'Beating of the Parish Bounds' took place. The vicar of Richmond Parish Church and his parishioners defiantly entered into the Park, probably by way of a damaged part of the wall that was easily knocked down.

HIS MAJESTY'S NEW PARK

1754



*'A Plan of His Majesty's New Park at Richmond in Surrey'
by Edward Eyre*

Over one hundred years after enclosure there were a number of buildings and developments in the Park which can be seen on this map. These include, clockwise from the top: the Dog Kennel by East Sheen Gate, probably where the master of hounds lived, along with his dogs; New Lodge with two flanking wing pavilions added (now known as White Lodge); Old Lodge, repaired and enlarged by Sir Robert Walpole, and finally demolished by 1841; the Canals (now known as Pen Ponds); and the Mole Catcher's cottage (later developed as Pembroke Lodge).

JOHN LEWIS VICTORY

1758



Engraving of John Lewis, a brewer from Richmond, who won his case for pedestrian access to the Park

John Lewis tried to enter the Park on foot at Sheen Gate in 1755 after a carriage had been admitted by gatekeeper Martha Gray. When Gray refused to let him pass without a ticket, he took the matter to court. In 1758, after some delays, The Surrey Assizes found in his favour, giving him the choice between pedestrian gates or ladderstiles. He considered the stiles to be the better option and two were placed at Sheen and Ham carriage Gates. They were opened to the public in May 1758, exactly seven years after the Beating of the Bounds incident in 1751.

KING GEORGE III AS RANGER

1792



*Oil painting by Allan Ramsay, circa 1762 of King George III
in Coronation robes*

George III reigned from 1760 to 1820. He was keenly interested in agriculture and estate management, and this may have been partly why in 1792 he became the first monarch to make himself Ranger of Richmond Park. There he was able to plan and implement a number of repairs and improvements, including relaxing restrictions on entry, and putting a stop to stag hunting. He was especially interested in White Lodge, which he enlarged and assigned to his Prime Minister, Henry Addington, later Viscount Sidmouth, as a 'grace and favour' residence.

RICHMOND GATE AND LODGE BUILT

1798



Aquatint entitled 'Richmond Park Entrance – As seen from inside the Park' etched by Thomas Sutherland from a drawing by John Gendall, published in 1819

Richmond Gate and Lodge were designed by John Soane to complement the Georgian additions he had made to Pembroke Lodge. The gate piers bear the date of their construction in roman numerals - MDCCXCVIII - namely 1798. The work was carried out by Kent, Claridge & Pierce and replaced a wooden gate and ladderstile entrance. The central entrance was widened in 1896 to create three carriageways and the height of the second set of gate piers was, probably at the same time, increased to match that of the central piers.

LORD NELSON VISITS

1805



Nicholas Pocock: "The Battle of Trafalgar", 1805

Lord Horatio Nelson visited White Lodge in Richmond Park on 10 September 1805, during the Napoleonic Wars. Whilst at dinner there he explained his proposed plan of attack for the forthcoming encounter with the French and Spanish navies, drawing out lines with a wine-moistened finger on a table top. Some six weeks later he was victorious at Trafalgar with this battle plan.

"DANGEROUS ANIMALS" AT WHITE LODGE

1816



'Before' and 'After' Garden Designs for White Lodge

Henry Addington, later Viscount Sidmouth, was Prime Minister from 1801 to 1804. He lived at White Lodge from 1802 until his death in 1844. In 1805 the Lodge was given its own private gardens, later to be landscaped by Humphry Repton, a leading landscape designer of the time. Repton sketched out 'Before' and 'After' images of the gardens, and advocated "a decided artificial Character...boldly reverting to the ancient formal style...[which is preferable to] the uncleanly, pathless grass of a forest, filled with troublesome animals of every kind, and some occasionally dangerous." Not all of his formal proposals appear to have been adopted.

CREATION OF NEW PLANTATIONS

1820-
1834



The view of St Paul's Cathedral through Sidmouth Wood
© Diana Loch

Extensive tree planting was carried out during Viscount Sidmouth's Deputy Rangership of the Park (1813-1844). Trees were selected which supplied shipbuilding timber or bore large seeds on which the deer could feed, but changes in their commercial viability saved these plantations from the axe. In addition, Isabella Plantation was enclosed as a game reserve in 1831. One of the new plantations was Sidmouth Wood, through which a line of trees was planted from King Henry's Mound in the gardens of Pembroke Lodge to lead the eye to a vista of the distant St Paul's Cathedral. This is now one of the eight protected views of the Cathedral from different locations in and around London.

PRIME MINISTER IN THE PARK

1847



1847 engraving of Pembroke Lodge printed in the Illustrated London News

Lord and Lady Russell first admired Pembroke Lodge in 1845 when they saw it from a bench beneath an oak tree, which still stands in the car park today. Lord John Russell became Prime Minister in 1846 and Queen Victoria granted the Lodge to him the following year. As well as serving as his country residence, it was used for Cabinet meetings and society gatherings - Queen Victoria, Dickens, Browning and Tennyson being among those who visited. It was a much loved home - Russell describing it as "an asset that could hardly be equalled, certainly not surpassed in England." He died at the Lodge in 1878, at the age of 85.

VICTORIAN LEISURE

Mid
19th C



William Frederick Witherington's 19th century painting of the Dysart family picnicking in Richmond Park

Picnics were a popular Victorian leisure activity and Witherington's oil painting captures the Dysart family, of neighbouring Ham House, enjoying this pastime in the Park. Deer hunting had died out in the latter half of the 18th century and new ways were found to enjoy the Park. The painting is not dated but Witherington was elected a member of the Royal Academy in 1840, and the style of dress and family members present suggest it is a mid-19th century work.

SPECIAL POLICE FORCE

1854



A Royal Parks 2002 Police helmet

In 1854, law enforcement in Richmond Park was bolstered by the establishment of a uniformed police force, after a guest of the Russell family at Pembroke Lodge had been the victim of a mugging at gunpoint. This constabulary was maintained as a separate unit in the Park until 2005 when it was subsumed within the Metropolitan Police.

SHREW ASH WITH HEALING POWERS

1856

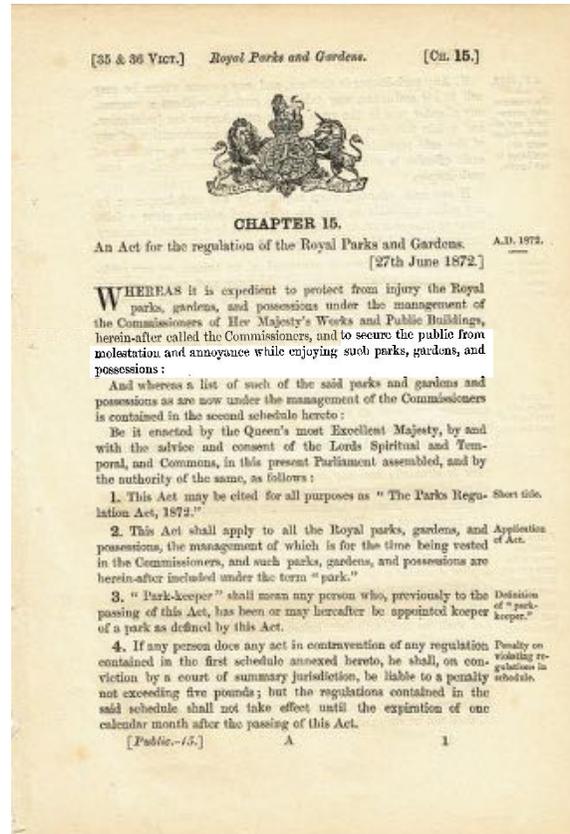


The Shrew Ash in 1856, showing the 'witch-bar' and, seated, a possible 'shrew mother' © Richmond upon Thames Local Studies collection

During the 19th century, a shrew ash tree, close to Sheen Gate, was reputed to cure sick children. A secret sunrise ritual was carried out by a 'shrew mother', who muttered or sang verses whilst passing the infant nine times around a 'witch bar' lodged in the tree. Ash trees had long been revered for their magical powers and medicinal qualities. The shrew ash was so called as it was believed that trapping a live shrew in its trunk was an antidote to sickness. The Great Storm of 1987 saw the final collapse of the already damaged tree.

PUBLIC ACCESS BY LAW

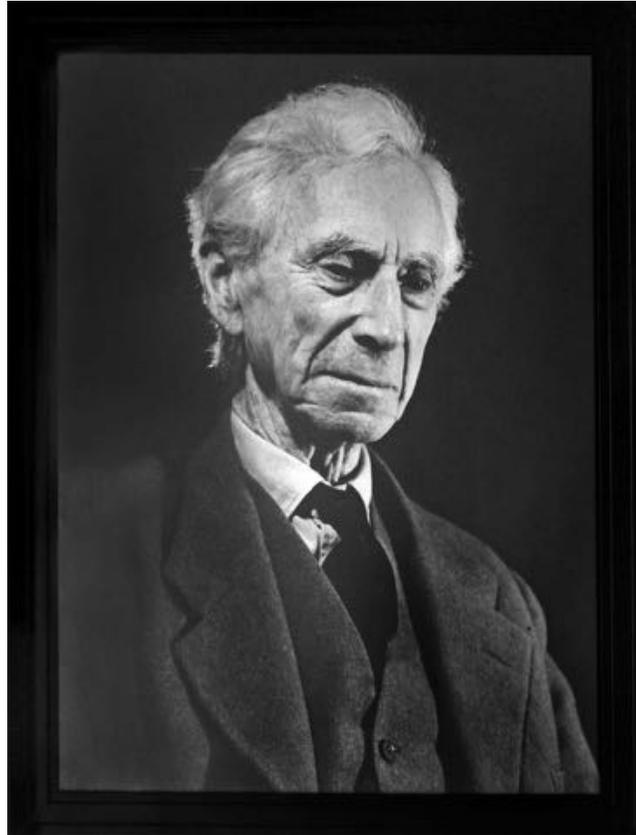
1872



The 1872 Act of Parliament which provided for the public 'enjoyment' of Richmond Park

Despite the success of John Lewis in 1758 in establishing in a court of law the right of public access to Richmond Park, the terms of that access remained constrained until the middle of the 19th century when restrictions were gradually lifted. The freedom to 'enjoy' the Park was formally enshrined in Parliamentary legislation in 1872. The Parks Regulations Act of that year doesn't sound very exciting, but it is the legislation which secured "the public from molestation and annoyance while enjoying [Royal] parks, gardens and possessions". Such access would be enjoyed by more and more people as only a year earlier the first legislation specifying bank holidays had been passed, allowing more leisure time for public recreation and visits to places such as Richmond Park.

BERTRAND RUSSELL'S CHILDHOOD



Bertrand Russell: mathematician, philosopher and political activist

Following the death of his parents, Bertrand Russell, at the age of four, came to live at Pembroke Lodge where he spent most of his childhood with his grandparents. Russell, a renowned mathematician, philosopher and political activist was born into one of Britain's leading Whig families and his paternal grandfather, Lord John Russell, was Prime Minister in the 1840s and 1860s. Queen Victoria had granted the Russells use of Pembroke Lodge as a residence and Bertrand wrote that, as a child, he "grew accustomed to wide horizons and an unimpeded view of the sunset" and remarked "I have never since been able to live happily without both."

1876-
1890

BIRTH OF EDWARD VIII

1894

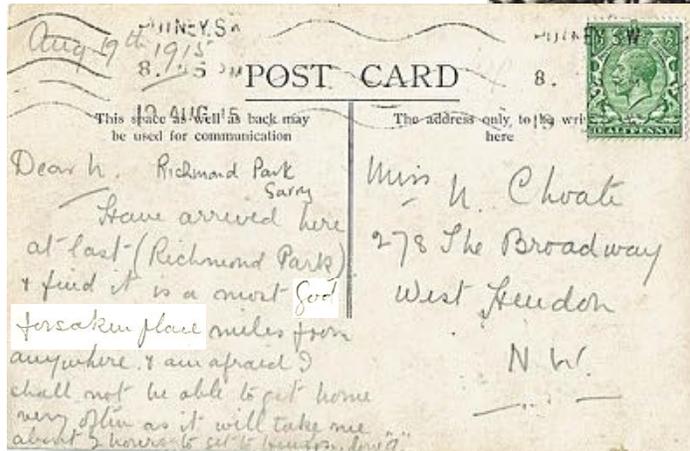
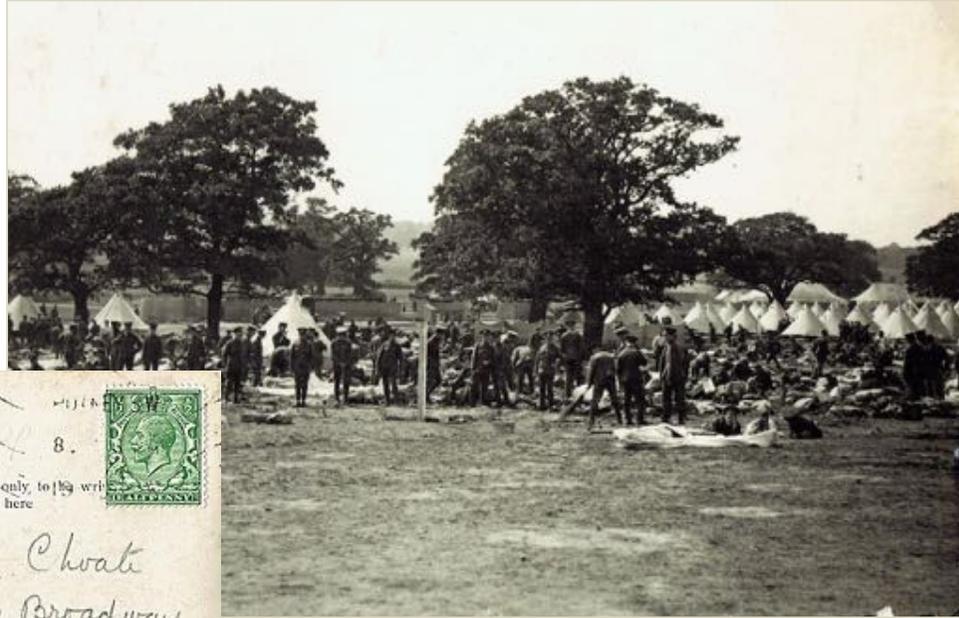


Four generations of monarch at the christening of Edward VIII at White Lodge: Queen Victoria, King Edward VII, George V and Edward VIII

On 23 June 1894, Edward VIII was born at White Lodge, the home of his maternal grandparents, the Duke and Duchess of Teck. Queen Victoria was on the throne and attended his christening together with her son, Edward VII and grandson, George V. Edward VIII, known as David to his family, became King in 1936 on the death of his father, George V, but within a year abdicated as he wished to marry the divorcee, Wallis Simpson. His brother created his new title, Duke of Windsor, shortly after succeeding him as King George VI.

FIRST WORLD WAR

1914-
1918



*First World War encampment in Richmond Park 1915
- a "God forsaken place"*

Richmond Park played its part in aiding the war effort in a number of ways. A large camp for various volunteer brigades was established in an area to the east of Beverley Brook, where Richmond Park Golf Course is now situated. The Royal Flying Corps also had a base close by, near Killcat Corner. In response to the country's need to increase food production, allotments were cultivated inside Richmond Gate and 100 acres near Sheen Gate were ploughed for growing oats and potatoes. Land was also provided for a hospital to treat wounded South African soldiers.

SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY HOSPITAL

1916

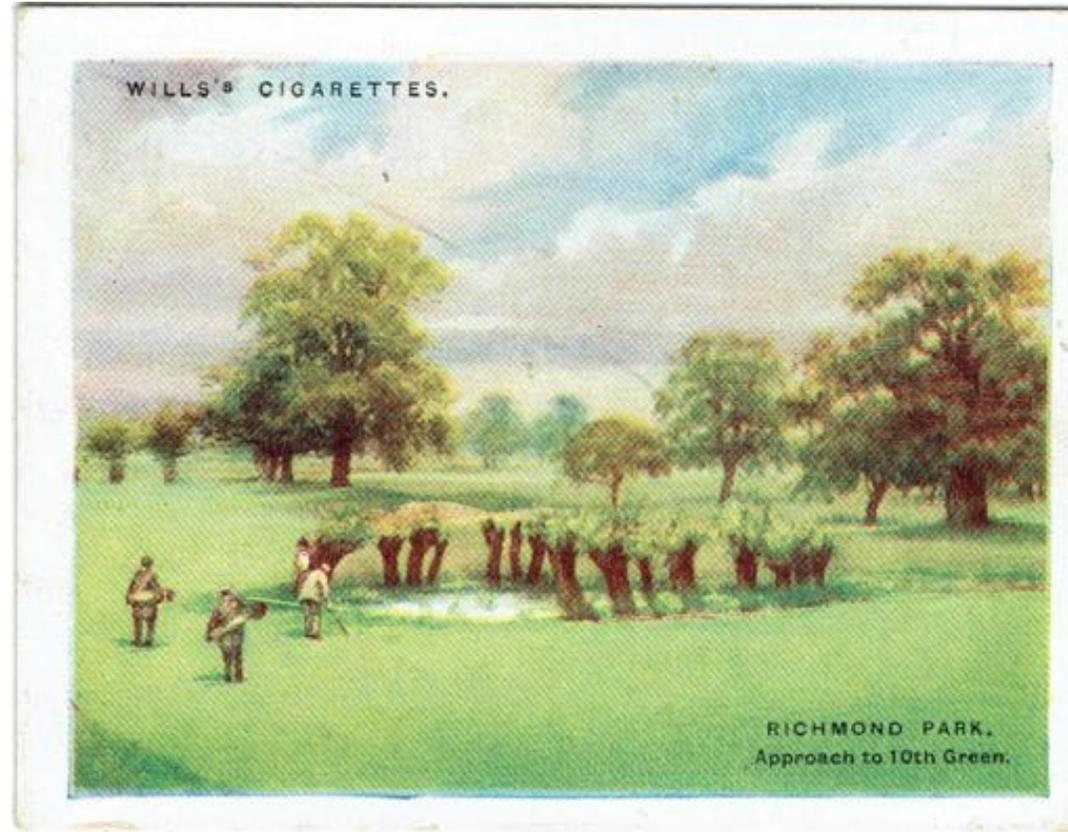


1919 Postcard of South African Military Hospital

In 1914, prominent South Africans living in London started a fund to build a hospital for their wounded countrymen. The King provided a site of 12 acres between Conduit Wood and Bishop's Pond, accessed by a new gate at Cambrian Road. It was opened in June 1916 with 300 beds, but an extension was added the following year, partly funded by sponsorship of named beds and corridors. After merging with neighbouring Richmond Military Hospital at the beginning of 1918, the hospital had over 1,000 beds. It remained open until 1921, performing over 2,000 operations and treating more than 9,500 patients.

GOLF COURSE FOR ALL

1923

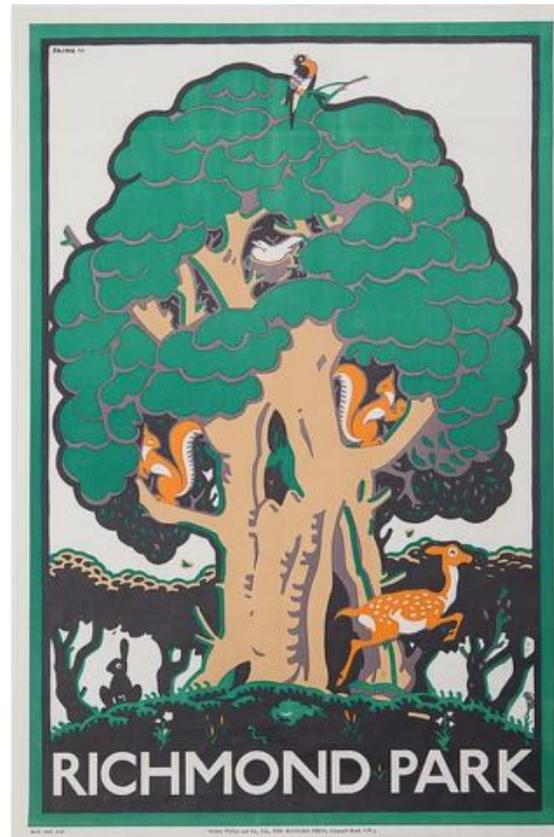


"Wills's Cigarettes" Card. Number 18 of a Golfing Series

Heralded as a place where "artisans and royalty are equally welcome", Richmond Park public golf course was opened in 1923 by the then Prince of Wales, who would later reign briefly as Edward VIII. The Park had started to become more accessible to the public, who were encouraged to play football and cricket on specially marked out pitches, and the golf course provided an opportunity for those who could not afford membership of a private club to enjoy this sport. Its popularity was such that a second course was added just two years later.

A SPECIAL PLACE

1925



A poster by Charles Paine celebrating the beauty of Richmond Park

The years after the First World War saw increasing public use of Richmond Park. As greater leisure time became available for working people they were urged to enjoy trips to historic houses, museums, local beauty spots and parks. A favourite location was of course the park at Richmond, with the natural beauty of its flora and fauna, especially the veteran oaks and wild deer.

PHANTOM SQUAD

1941



Phantom Squad training in Richmond Park in the Second World War

During the Second World War, Pembroke Lodge became the base for a military unit, the GHQ Liaison Regiment, known as 'Phantom Squad'. This was a special reconnaissance unit set up to report back information, using wireless communications and mobility, to provide real-time assessment from the front line in a range of battle scenes, including D-Day and Arnhem. Phantom Squad recruited men with various skill-sets - linguists, drivers and mechanics - and undertook rigorous training in wireless communication and cipher, often in Richmond Park.

AUSTERITY GAMES

1948



The Olympic Flag is raised in Richmond Park

The first summer Olympic Games after the end of the Second World War were held in London in 1948, 12 years after the previous games in Berlin. The London event became known as the 'Austerity Games' because of the prevailing economic climate and post-war rationing. In that spirit, an old army camp in Richmond Park was converted into an Olympic village to accommodate sports competitors from around the world.

ISABELLA PLANTATION

1953

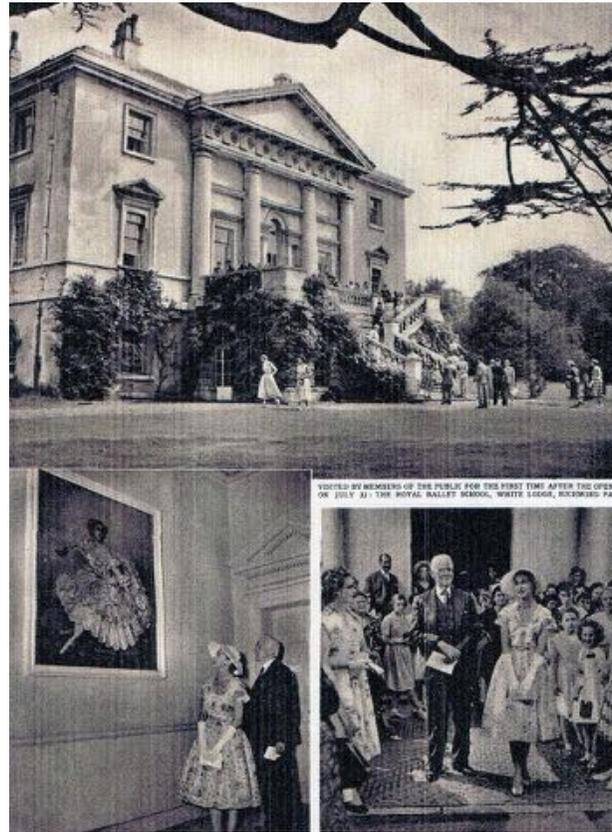


Still Pond, Isabella Plantation

Only opening to the public in 1953, the Isabella Plantation was first enclosed in 1831. Originally, it mostly comprised newly planted oak, beech and sweet chestnut but some older trees were incorporated, including a few ancient oak pollards pre-dating the Park's enclosure. The present garden, best known for its azaleas and rhododendrons, was established from the 1950s and is largely the work of George Thomson, Park Superintendent (1951-1971), alongside his head gardener, Wally Miller. The main stream that runs through the garden from Broomfield Gate was created in 1960 when the plantation was enlarged to include Peg's Pond.

NEW HOME OF ROYAL BALLET SCHOOL

1957

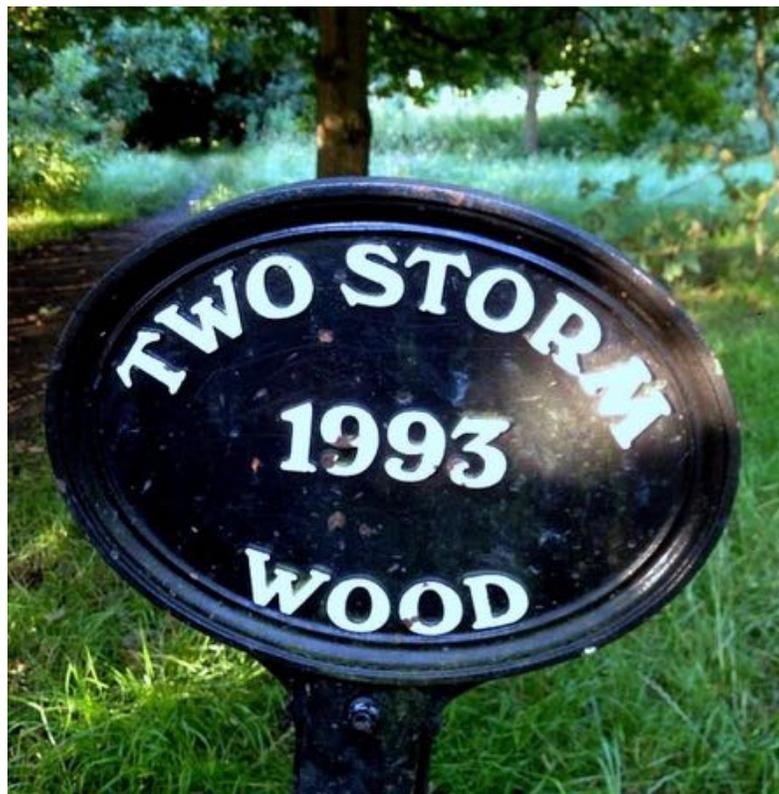


In July 1957 White Lodge, the new home to The Royal Ballet School, was opened to the public by Dame Margot Fonteyn

When the lease for White Lodge became available in 1955 it was granted to Sadler's Wells Ballet School, for 150 girls (and "a few boys") to board. A year later it became the Royal Ballet School, with Princess Margaret as President. A grand public opening at White Lodge took place on 31 July 1957, with a ceremony performed by Dame Margot Fonteyn and a temporary exhibition of ballet designs, including work by Picasso.

TWO STORM WOOD

1993



Two Storm Wood plaque. Photograph © Max Lankester

The hurricane-force winds of 'The Great Storm of 1987' swept across the Park on the night of 15-16 October, bringing down hundreds of trees. Just over a couple of years later further damage occurred in the January 1990 'Burns' Night Storm'. To recover some of the losses, an enclosed plantation, Two Storm Wood, was created. The new trees were largely placed in the eastern part of the wood, the western part containing many established trees. The plantings were funded by an appeal launched by Prince Charles, and the Prince of Wales feathers and 'Ich Dien' motto can be seen on the gates.

LONDON 2012 OLYMPICS

2012



Olympic Rings mown into the grass of Richmond Park

© The Royal Parks

Part of the 2012 London Olympics men's and women's cycling road race route was hosted by Richmond Park on 28 and 29 July. Many enthusiastic spectators lined the course where measures had been taken to minimise any damage to the Park's sensitive ecology. To mark the occasion the largest Olympic rings of the Games were mown into the grass by the Park's shire horses, Murdoch and Jim. The giant rings were 300 metres wide, over 135 metres tall and each ring was seven metres thick.

HM QUEEN ELIZABETH'S VISIT

2012



HM Queen Elizabeth II retires shire horse, Jed, at Holly Lodge

© The Royal Parks Guild

As part of her diamond jubilee celebrations, HM Queen Elizabeth II came to Richmond Park on 15 May 2012 to visit 'Wild London', a celebration of the conservational, recreational and inspirational roles played by London's woodlands, parks and gardens. The Hearsurn Collection and the Friends of Richmond Park had displays at this special exhibition erected on the sports fields near Roehampton Gate. The Queen was also received at Holly Lodge where she planted a holly tree in its garden, and officially retired shire horse, Jed. On the same day, Sir David Attenborough inaugurated the new Jubilee Pond, named in the Queen's honour.