

'A Total Work of Architectural and Landscape Art'

A Vision for Regent's Park

February 2017

Todd Longstaffe-Gowan
& David Lambert



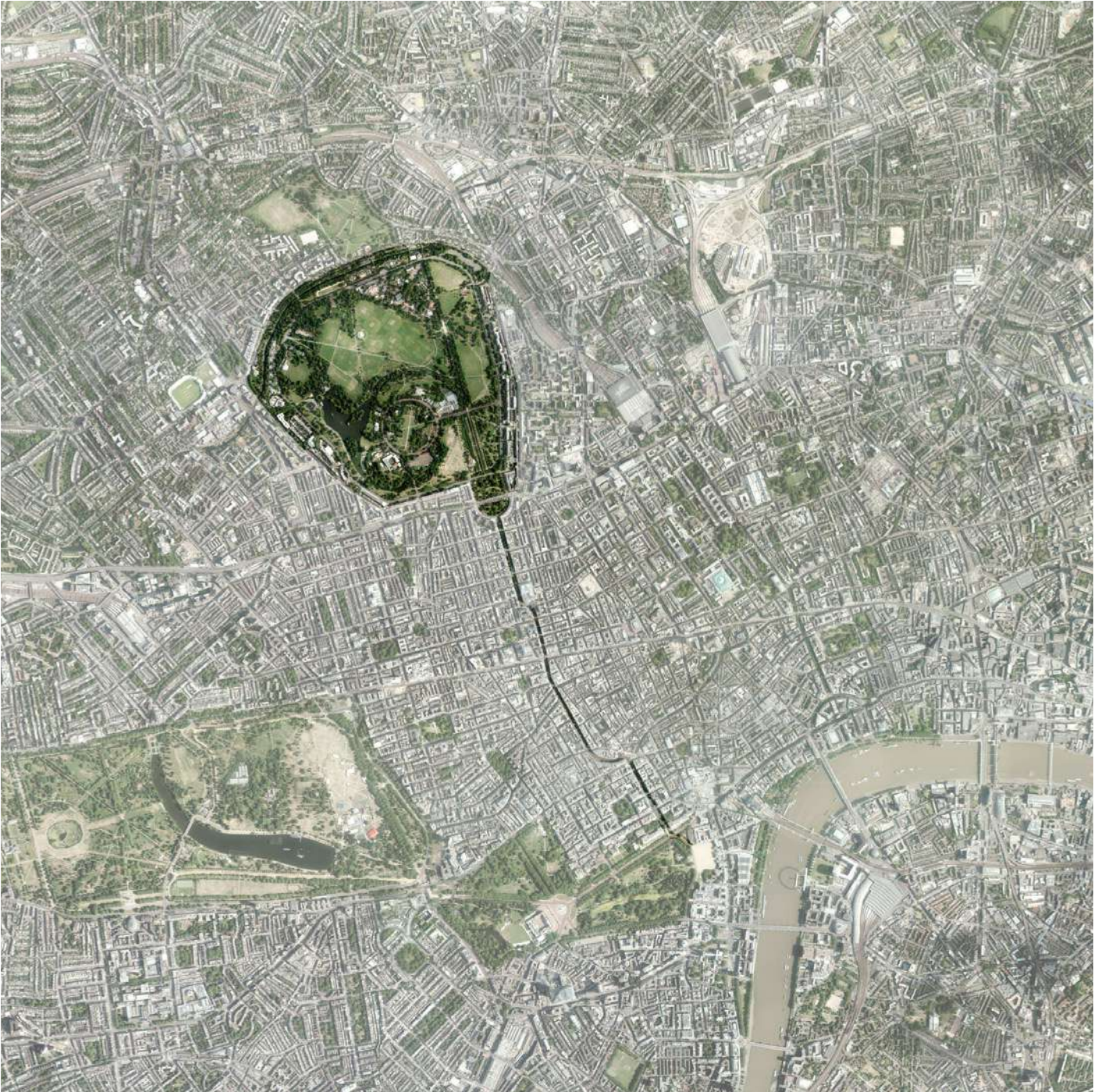
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Contents

'A Total Work of Architectural and Landscape Art' A Vision for Regent's Park

Introduction	1
1. Executive Summary: The Vision	3
2. The Making of Regent's Park	5
3. Nash's Vision	15
Regent's Park as a designed landscape	
The terraces as individual architectural compositions	
Framed views of the terraces from the parkland	
Views of the parkland from the terraces	
The Outer Circle as a promenade	
Communal gardens and design unity	
4. Themes	29
Views and vistas	
Planting	
Boundaries	

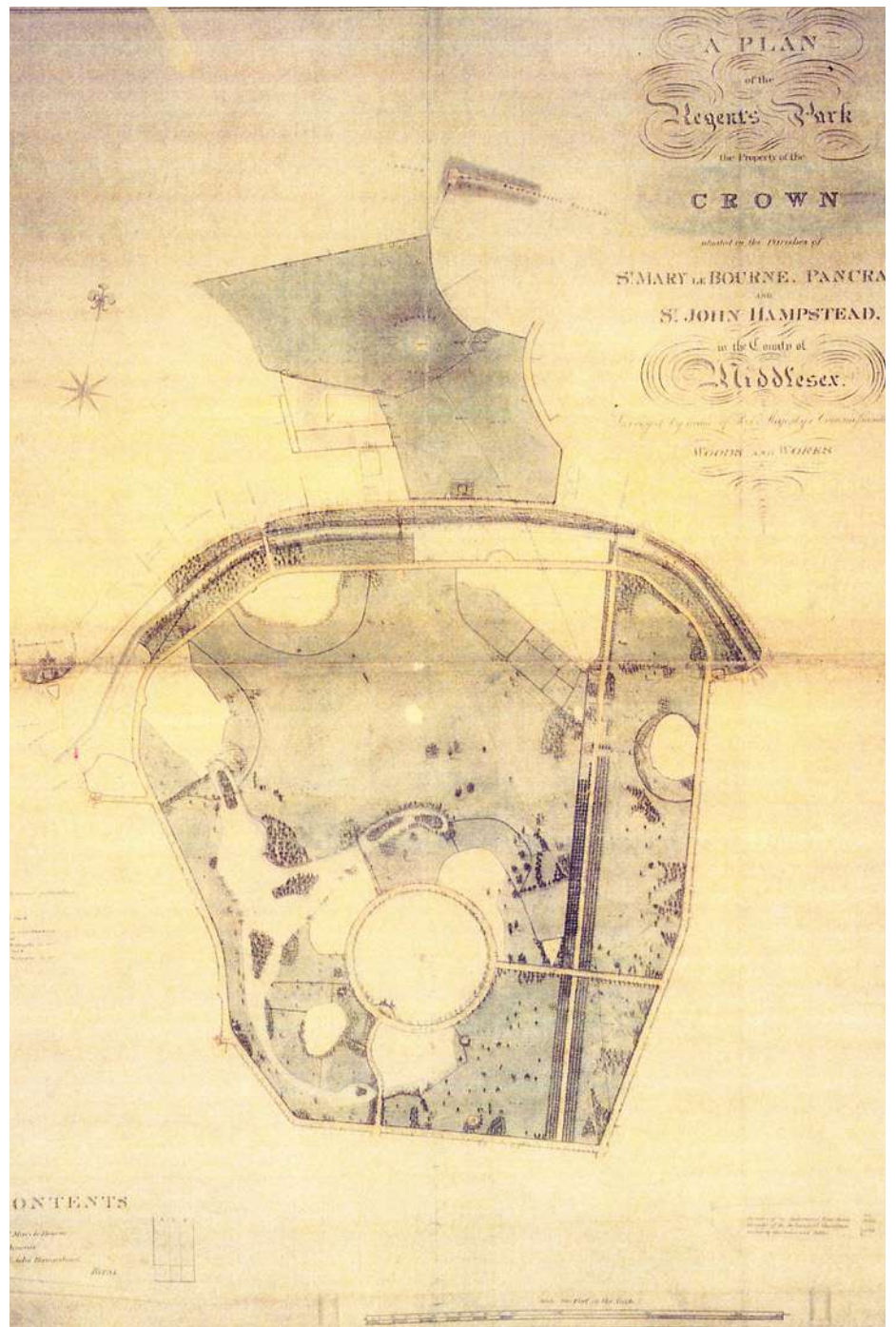
Cover Image: Charles Mayhew, *Plans of all the Ground, Houses and other Buildings within the Jurisdiction of the Commissioners for Paving the Regent's Park, Regent's Street, Whitehall, &c. from an actual survey made in the years 1834 and 1835*

Fig.1 Aerial view of Regent's Park, Portland Place, Regent Street and Waterloo Place (2012)

A Vision for Regent's Park

Introduction

Fig.2 Plan of Regent's Park (c.1813)



Introduction

Regent's Park is a special place, a planned urban enclave where buildings and landscape were conceived as a single entity, neither one before or without the other. The buildings were designed to benefit from their landscape setting, while the park was designed to benefit from the palace-like buildings around it; 'A total work of architectural and landscape art,' as John Summerson called it.¹

Responsibility for managing this total work of art is however split. The Royal Parks Agency has responsibility for the parkland, the lease-holders and The Crown Estate are responsible for the houses, and the Crown Estate Paving Commission is responsible for the roads and communal gardens. Other stakeholders, such as the London Borough of Camden, the City of Westminster and Historic England, also have significant roles in determining how the area works and appears.

As provider of cleaning and maintenance functions and as custodian of the circuit drive between the terraces and the parkland, the Crown Estate Paving Commission (CEPC) has a key role in the conservation of Nash's 'total work'. Likewise, the maintenance of the communal gardens in such a manner that they provide a setting for the terraces in long views across and from the landscape is also fundamental to the Nash vision and hence was enshrined in the remit of the CEPC. From its earliest days, the CEPC has had to balance the lease-holders' desire for privacy and the public role of those gardens in the overall design. With its secure and independent core-funding and wide remit, the CEPC has been in a position to establish and maintain consistent, high-quality design. The CEPC thus has a key role in the stewardship of Nash's legacy.

This report has been commissioned by the CEPC from Todd Longstaffe-Gowan Ltd. in collaboration with David Lambert of The Parks Agency to inform a new strategic approach to its work, and to encourage greater partnership with those other stakeholders. The exercise has made clear the importance of Nash's original unified scheme, and the desirability of learning from it, and allowing it to inspire the future.

¹ John Summerson, 'The beginnings of Regent's Park', *Architectural History*, 20, 1977, p.61.

Executive Summary:

The Vision

Nash's plans for Regent's Park embodied some simple design principles. In the early nineteenth century, his approach was pioneering in terms of town planning: at the time, upmarket urban development generally focussed on the tested formula of squares and terraces. But it was less so when viewed from the perspective of landscape-gardening, the design of settings and approaches for country houses, the principles of which had been refined over almost a century. As applied to this new urban estate, those principles can be summarised as follows:

- like a country house and its park, the interior parkland and the residential development were fundamentally related and connected;
- the Outer Circle, a carriage drive, far from being a dividing line, served to link the interior parkland and the surrounding terraces and articulate their relationship;
- and the planting should frame a series of deliberately composed views from the road, from the buildings and from the parkland.

Over the years, the management of the park as a whole, as a composition of interdependent parts, has been pragmatic, shared by different agencies with different agendas and different resources. While in many ways successful, this has failed to reflect the comprehensiveness of the original design.

Regent's Park today shows the evidence of that pragmatism and that lack of coordination. Its buildings and landscape (which includes roads, paving and lighting) are generally in good condition but it is clear that the unique relationship between them in too many places is broken.

So for example, the Outer Circle no longer functions as a circuit with views across the park. This is the result of changes in traffic and traffic management, which involve strategic planning beyond the perimeters of the park. It is also the result of an absence of strategic planning which has allowed the road to become a busy through-route de facto. And it is also the result of local decision-making about the planting of the hawthorn hedge along the inside edge of the road.

Similarly, the extent to which terraces have been allowed to withdraw visually from the communal landscape is a result partly of allowing trees to grow up by

accident, partly of deliberate decisions on planting new trees, and partly of the changing demands of lease-holders.

Nash's total work of landscape and architectural art has become fragmented, but the problems are in physical terms relatively minor; re-making those connections would not be difficult. The spatial flow and the dramatic web of views and vistas can be restored. Restoration will enable the visitor to make sense of Nash's original landscape vision and will safeguard it for the enjoyment of future generations.

However, the need to plan across administrative boundaries means that the many different agencies and stakeholders involved in Regent's Park need to

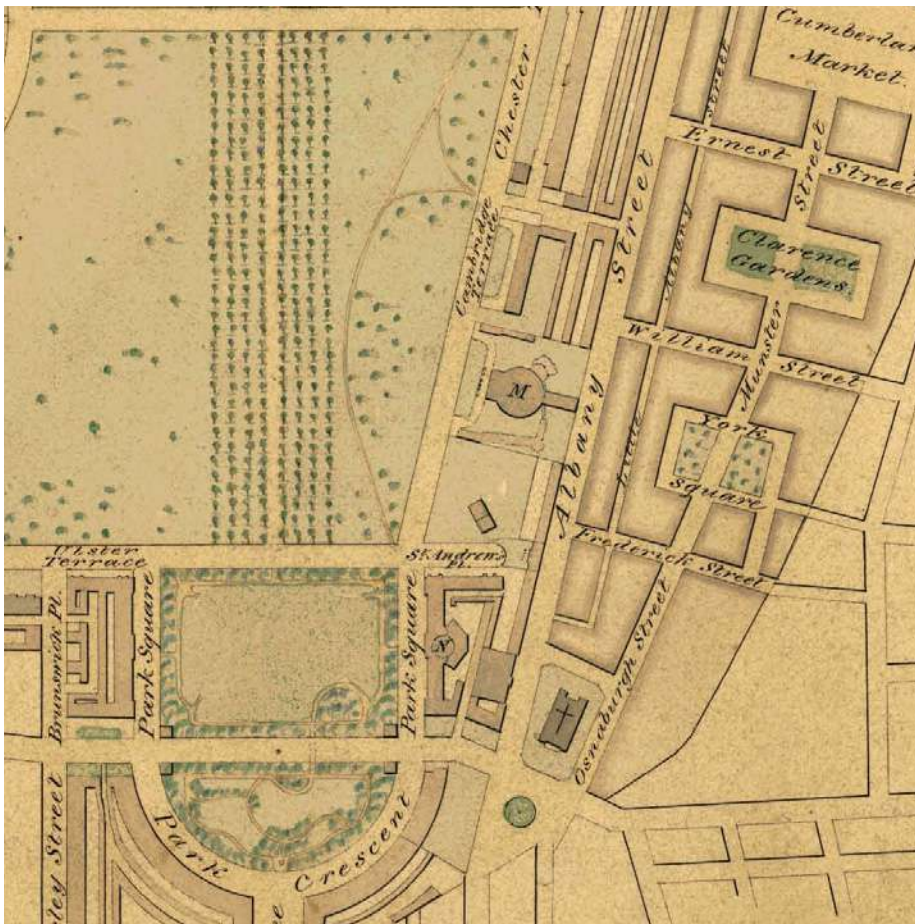


Fig.3 Detail of Charles Mayhew, *Plans of all the Ground, Houses and other Buildings within the Jurisdiction of the Commissioners for Paving the Regent's Park, Regent's Street, Whitehall, &c.* from an actual survey made in the years 1834 and 1835

The Making of Regent's Park

collaborate. What is required is coordinated strategic thinking, and agreed management policies based on the over-arching aim of restoring the unity of the landscape as described in this document.

The Marylebone Park estate, comprising some five hundred acres adjacent to the northern edge of the rapidly growing city, had enormous development potential for the Crown. By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, the agricultural leases were falling due and not being renewed, while the last lease, sold to the Duke of Portland in 1789, would expire in 1811. In 1793, the surveyor general of Land Revenues, John Fordyce, had a survey drawn up and announced a £1,000 prize for the best scheme for the laying out of the new area.

Nash's plans were submitted in July 1811 and were accompanied by a highly persuasive report. Nash envisaged far more than the redevelopment of the old park. It would be the crowning glory of a vast and ambitious urban development scheme which included the formation of Trafalgar Square, Waterloo Place, Portland Place and Regent Street – the latter a *via triumphalis*, leading from Charing Cross northwards, and culminating in a new summer palace for the Prince Regent located in the heart of the park. The new road would have the additional merit of connecting the development of the northern suburbs to the heart of the city.

In his report, Nash noted that 'the preferred parts of London were those near to the parks,' and predicted a substantial return on the Crown's investment. But while 'open Space, free air and the scenery of Nature' would be fundamental to the development, there was no sense in which they would be available to all: they were expressly 'allurements or motives for the wealthy part of the Public to establish themselves there'.²

Although we credit the existing concept to Nash, it should be noted that in some key respects his 1811 plan was modified significantly by the Commissioners. At the request of Spencer Perceval, the Prime Minister, the fifty-six detached villas Nash proposed were reduced to twenty-six in order to increase the amount of open space which could be of public benefit.

2. Ann Saunders, *Regent's Park, a Study of the Development of the Area from 1086 to the Present Day* (1969; revised 1981), p.69.

A Vision for Regent's Park

The Making of Regent's Park

Fig.6 (top) View of Regent's Park (1827)
Fig.7 (bottom) Cornwall Terrace (1825)



In addition, Nash's rather harsh alignment of roads to the front of the terraces was amended on the basis that 'a broad Drive or Road for exercise on horseback, in carriages, or on foot, should be immediately formed round the whole of the said property'.³ This circuit drive was to become a key part of the park's attraction, and for many years the only public route through it.

The detached villas however were still a dominant feature in the concept. Screen planting, to hide them from the road, was fundamental to the early works, designed to 'present from without one entire Park compleat in unity of character and not an assemblage of Villas and Shrubberies like Hampstead'.⁴ And conversely, from those aspects where they were designed to be seen, Nash took pains to prevent obstructions. His 1812 report to the Commissioners recommended conditions be imposed on the lease-holders of two of the new villas, that they 'shall engage not to build on any part of their garden, that they shall take down the brick walls which separate their gardens from the park, and substitute in their stead a new iron railing and stucco the fronts of their houses towards the park in the same manner as the other houses to be built in the park'.⁵

At no point did Nash confuse a communal private landscape with a public park. Cornwall Terrace, in 1821 the first terrace to be erected, was built without communal gardens, so Burton proposed enclosing an area of the park opposite for the residents. Nash strongly opposed the encroachment: he had taken trouble to disguise the gardens of the detached villas with forest trees, and was emphatic that the passenger in riding round the Park might recognize nothing but a park.

3. Saunders, 1981, p.75.

4. Nash, quoted in David Jacques, *The Reign of Nature* (1983), p.203.

5. CRES 2/1736. (all CRES references are from the National Archives, Kew)

The Making of Regent's Park

Nash went on to describe the inevitable result of weakening on this point of principle:

*a Public Garden...which might and probably would end in a Tea Garden - a subscription tea garden perhaps - but still as arrant a public garden as White Conduit House was and as Smiths and other tea gardens now are and when Mr Burton shall have filled his list with genteel subscribers he may let it or sell it and slip his shoulders out of the responsibility.*⁶

His mockery of ornamental pavilions 'serving the purpose of seats and gardeners' tool houses' was scathing and terminal as far as that proposal was concerned.⁷

It is interesting, by way of contrast, to note the comments of a continental visitor, who deplored the lack of public open space in London. The great German gardener and designer, Peter Josef Lenné remarked in 1826 that 'To enjoy [the public walks of London] it is necessary to be a man of fortune, and take exercise on horseback or in a carriage, for, excepting in St. James's Park and Kensington-gardens, there is neither a seat nor a shelter for the pedestrian'. He described the new Regent's Park as particularly deficient in these respects, and observed that in the distant parts of it 'there ought not only to be seats, arbours, and bowers of shelter, but places of refreshment and amusement'. He reflected on the much more generous amenities provided by German royalty, who 'generously throw open their gardens to the public at every hour of the day'.⁸

Clearly Nash's vision did not encompass such democratic pleasures. His conception was essentially an extension of the access arrangements established for London squares during the preceding century: as one observer noted during the campaign to open up the area in front of York Terrace and Hanover Terrace, 'that portion was, by understanding or contract with the proprietors of the houses of those terraces, to be made available to the inhabitants only, as if it were in front of houses in a square for the walks of the inmates'.⁹

6. CRES 2/771.

7. CRES 2/771, quoted in Saunders, 1981, pp.95-6.

8. Peter Josef Lenné, 'General Remarks on British Parks and Gardens', reviewed in *The Gardener's Magazine*, 1826, p.311.

9. *The Observer*, 15 April 1841.



Fig.8 (top) Hanover Terrace (1846)
Fig.9 (bottom) Miss S Rogers, View looking
south from Hanover Terrace (1835)



The Making of Regent's Park

Public access was in fact among the most contentious issues surrounding the new park. It was the park's pre-history as a public open space – the former royal hunting ground of Marylebone Park which by the eighteenth century had become a place of popular resort on the doorstep of the city – which made lack of public access to the new park a continual source of complaint throughout the first half of the nineteenth century; complaints which only ceased once access to the whole had been achieved in the 1840s. The estate was always regarded as a public amenity.¹⁰

Key to the management of the new estate was a new body, the Crown Estate Paving Commission. During the park's design and construction phases, responsibility for the layout and construction of the landscape and its buildings had lain with the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, by whom Nash was employed. However, in 1824, with the development complete, responsibility for the maintenance of the roads and sewers on the Crown Estate was transferred to the newly created Crown Estate Paving Commission, rather than to the parish as was customary.

This was due to the largely poor condition of London's streets at the time, and to the poor performance of the vestries in terms of maintenance.¹¹ The CEPC was one of a number of authorities that was established from the second half of the eighteenth century in Westminster and most of the great cities and towns in the kingdom with a view to ensuring uniformity in the production of the built environment, and to improving urban paving and lighting in particular. The CEPC's remit was similar to that set out in the *Westminster Paving Act* (1762) which empowered appointed 'Commissioners Paviour' to pave, repair, raise,

10. It is notable that when proposals for the estate's redevelopment were invited by the Crown Estate Commissioners in the late eighteenth century, John White, surveyor to the Portland estate, picked up on this heritage as a place of public recreation: 'When I have considered the advantages which the inhabitants of the metropolis derive from their free access to the Parks and Kensington Gardens, I could not but admire the wisdom and liberality of the age when they were so appropriated; and the reflection has induced me to hope that two years hence, when the lease of Mary-le-Bone Park expires, the officers of the Crown will be inclined to a similar appropriation of that beautiful and convenient portion of public property' (John White, *Some Account of the Proposed Improvements of the Western Part of London*... London, 1814, Appendix I). White was in tune with popular sentiment, as the later complaints over access confirm. Such sentiments are markedly absent from Nash's proposals, which saw the park being managed essentially as a giant town square, accessible only to residents and key-holders.

11. Vestries were the bodies of lay members elected by the congregation of a parish to run the secular business of a parish.



Fig.10 (top) William Harvey, Sussex Place and Hanover Terrace (1827)

Fig.11 (bottom) After Thomas Hosmer Shepherd, Regent Street from Piccadilly, looking south towards Carlton House (1822)



The Making of Regent's Park

alter, cleanse and light any street within its jurisdiction, and for nuisances and obstructions to be removed, and were authorised to contract for the work to be done. Whereas the Westminster Paving Commission declined in influence in the late eighteenth century as its powers were devolved to the vestries, the CEPC, which was established by Act of Parliament in its wake in 1824, appears to have flourished; its remit, moreover, was broader in scope, and the extent of its authority was considerably greater than the earlier Paving Commissioners. Under the 1824 Act the Crown Estate Paving Commissioners were 'appointed for paving, lighting, watching, cleansing and regulating the Streets, Squares, Roads etc in Regent's Park and for enclosing the centres of the squares and terraces and embellishing, planting, ornamenting, maintaining and supporting the same'.

Subsequent acts extended the CEPC's remit still further to include not only the cleaning but also the colouring of the houses because 'such an arrangement would greatly contribute to the beauty of the line of street and of the houses and buildings'. The setting up of the CEPC reflects the importance which the Crown placed on ensuring a coherent management for the Regent's Park; early minute books make clear that the Commissioners, who included Nash himself, were concerned with achieving or maintaining a uniform standard throughout all the areas under their control.

Fig.12 (right) Anon. engraving, 'La Paroisse de Ste Marylebone' from Charles Malo's *Londres: Les Capitales De L'Europe. Promenades Pittoresques* (c.1829)

Fig.13 (far right) William Westall, *View looking north down Regent Street towards All Souls Church* (1825)





Nash's Vision

Regent's Park as a designed landscape

What was important to Nash was the visual relationship between architecture and landscape. In 1827 James Elmes described his scheme as 'the enchanting *rural plan*': it 'embraced all those beauties of landscape gardening, which his friend, the late Humphry Repton, so successfully introduced, with the splendour of architectural decorations, in detached villas'.¹²

For Nash, 'Regent's Park' comprised the open space within its wooden fence or pale, the Outer Circle and the terraces; he never referred to them as anything other than a single entity. The road and the terraces were part of the park and the whole was a designed urban landscape on an unprecedented scale: any thought that Regent's Park was limited to the land inside the pale would have been absurd.

The terraces as individual architectural compositions

Nash had to exercise constant vigilance with his builders to ensure that land earmarked for planting between the terraces on the Outer Circle was retained as such and not taken for development. The terraces required intervening groups of planting to ensure they were read as individual buildings, rather than a street. So for example, in commenting on Burton's proposals for Cornwall Terrace, Nash wrote:

Magnificent as these ranges of buildings are in themselves that impression would be greatly diminished if the individuality of the design is not preserved by intermediate plantations - if they join they become a street surrounding a large plot of ground instead of spacious Palace like buildings embellishing a park.¹³

On the York Terrace designs, Nash was similarly insistent:

I think the magnificence of the effect of that range will depend on its being separate and distinct from any other...the small space [Mr Burton] has left at the east end of that range shall be planted as thickly as possible with high poplars clustered together & brought forward to the road...¹⁴

12. James Elmes, *Metropolitan Improvements* (1827), p.11.

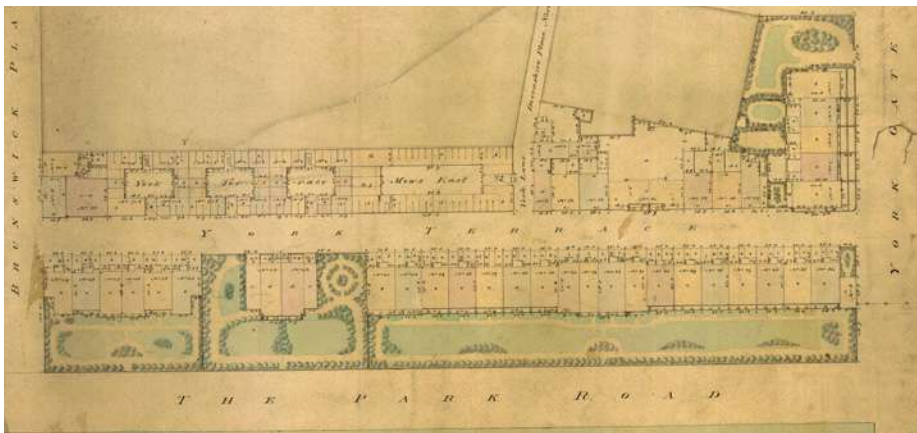
13. CRES 2/771.

14. *Ibid.*



Fig.14 (top) Thomas Doughty, Looking from the northwest to Regent's Park (1837/8)

Fig.15 (bottom) Detail from Charles Mayhew, Plan of York Terrace (1834-5)



A Vision for Regent's Park

Nash's Vision

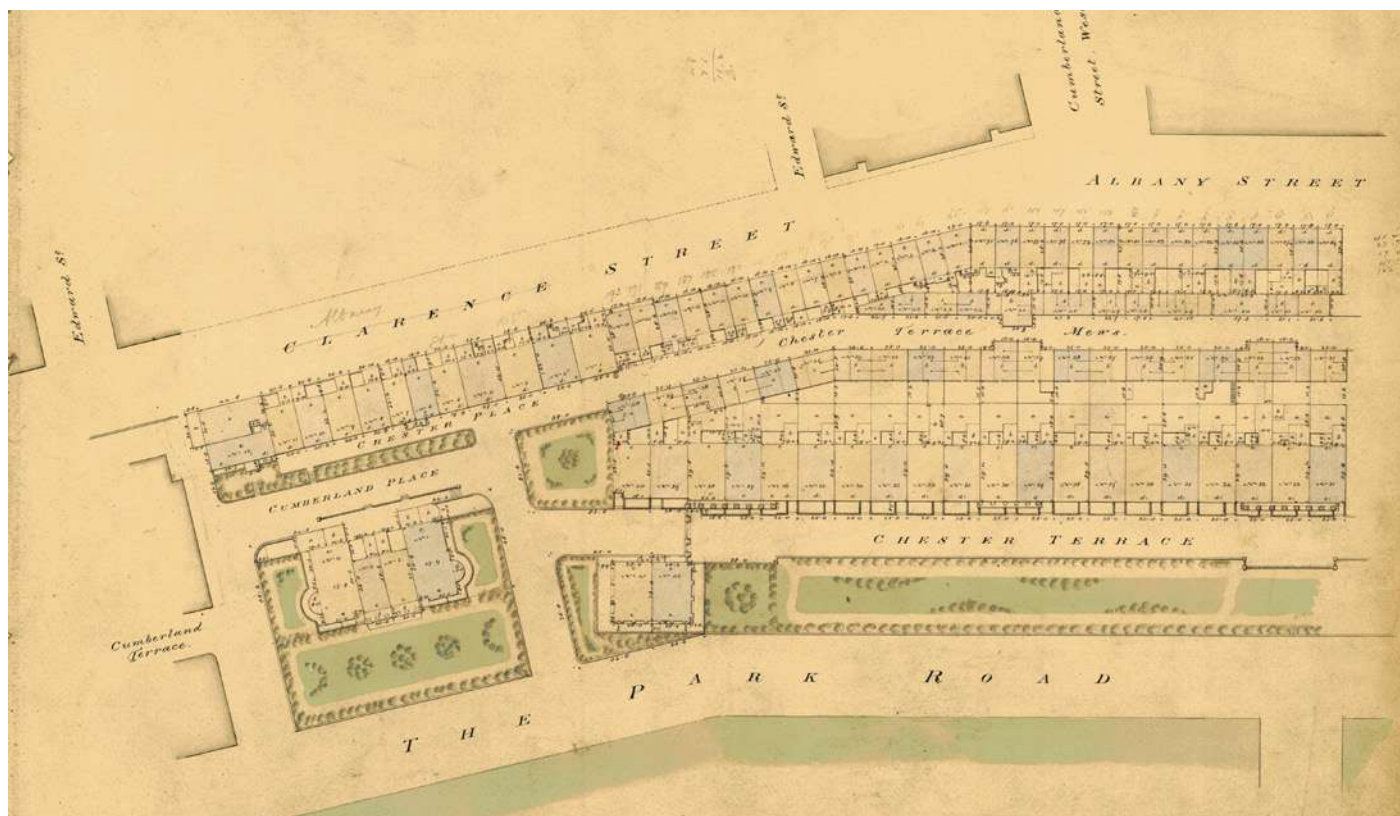


Fig.16 (top) Detail from Charles Mayhew, Plan of Chester Terrace and Chester Gate (north end of terrace) (1834-5)

Fig.17 (bottom) After Thomas Shepherd, Looking across the park to the Coliseum (1828)



And he railed against the density of the terrace layout:

... fewer houses should have been built in order that a considerable body of plantation might have distinguished and insulated the general range of buildings.¹⁵

Nash appears to have been in favour of the creation of private gardens at the ends of some of the terraces, and Chester Gate in particular. He presumably agreed to these gardens on the condition that they complemented the terrace and adhered to the planting principles.

Framed views of the terraces from the parkland

In a letter of 1832, Nash described how he wanted to articulate views of buildings from the Broad Walk. 'Seen together as [the terraces] now are,' he wrote, '[they] detract from the beauty and consequence of each'. By introducing plantations between them, 'no two masses of building shall be seen from any one point at the same time'. When the visitor, moving along the Walk, 'arrives opposite the middle of each range of buildings he will have a distinct view of its Architecture framed by the Plantations on either hand which Plantations will shut out every other building, creating so many distinct pictures'. Visitors 'will see a succession of views distinct from each other'.¹⁶ The buildings and the planting which framed them were designed to create the illusion of a sequence of individual palaces.

The importance of the views outwards to the surrounding buildings is noted in a number of accounts, such as that of Samuel Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary* in 1848:

The western side commands a fine view of the Colosseum, which has an imposing grandeur of effect; of the terraces on that side of the park which is without the parish; and of the Chapel of St. Katherine's Hospital, and other interesting objects.¹⁷

Similarly, Nathan Cole wrote in 1870, 'The margin of this Park is very much diversified - wood and dale, and at intervals noble mansions and picturesque villas are scattered about half hidden by trees and shrubs.'¹⁸

15. CRES 2/771.

16. The National Archive, CRES 2 742 (letter from John Nash; u.d.).

17. Samuel Lewis (editor) 'Mary-le-Bone', in *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (1848), pp. 271-277.

18. Nathan Cole, *The Royal Parks and Gardens of London* (1870), p.36.

Nash's Vision

Views of the parkland from the terraces

Nash took great pains to design Repton-like, framed views not only to the new terraces but also from them – and from the lofty vantage point of the first-floor apartments in particular. In *Metropolitan Improvements* (1827) James Elmes conducts the reader on a circuit of the park road and remarks on a number of these landscape pictures, for example the vignette view from Hanover Terrace across the arm of the lake, 'the islet which faces its northernmost wing sweetly diversifies the scene, and gives a charming sylvan character to the prospect from the houses'.¹⁹

Likewise, the *Picturesque Guide* notes for example how, 'The richness of the sylvan scenery of the Park before Cornwall Terrace harmonises most happily with the palace-like splendour of this range of mansions,' and how 'the basement storey of Clarence Terrace commands a "living picture" of extraordinary luxuriance; from its drawing-room balcony, the lake may be seen studded with little islands ...and environed with lawny slopes and flourishing park-like vegetation'.²⁰ From the carriage sweep in front of Cumberland Terrace 'may be enjoyed a highly picturesque view of the park, with the Crown of Primrose Hill in the distance'.²¹

In his circuit of the park, when describing Sussex Place, James Elmes refers to the views both to and from the new range:

The general effect is far from pleasing, but the eye of the landscape painter will probably enjoy an assemblage of picturesque outlines in grouping Sussex Place with its adjacent scenery and accessories. The gardens to this terrace are tastefully disposed, and the situation commands some of the most fascinating prospects of the Park. Before the façade the lake spreads its silvery sheet, and reflects the oriental cupolas with charming effect; and the varied plantations of the Park, especially on the opposite margin of the lake, group with peculiar felicity, and render Sussex Place one of the most delightful sites in this paradisiacal region.²²

19. Elmes, 1827, p.49.

20. Anon., *A Picturesque Guide to the Regent's Park* (1829), p.10-11.

21. *Ibid.* p.23.

22. Elmes, 1827, p.12.



Fig.18 (top) Thomas Doughty, Looking from the west over Regent's Park (1837/8)

Fig.19 (bottom) After Thomas Shepherd, View to Sussex Place from the park (1827)



The Outer Circle as a promenade

Despite the impression created by the present hedge planted on the inside edge of the Outer Circle, for Nash, the road took a circuit inside the park not outside it. Trees in the park were planted to frame views from the road. The communal gardens were created to form a setting to those palatial blocks when viewed from the Outer Circle. Even though it has become a through-route, the Outer Circle was designed as a circuit to take the visitor around a sequence of carefully constructed landscape pictures on both sides of the promenade.

The *Picturesque Guide* draws attention to the importance of the drive and picks out particular designed views to be enjoyed from it: 'through the whole place there is a winding road which commands at every turn some fresh features of an extensive country prospect'.²³ The road was closed at ten in the evening, except to residents, but during the day it formed a public promenade.²⁴ In Reptonian terms it led the viewer, whether in a carriage, on horseback or on foot, through an unfolding series of designed landscape scenes or pictures.

Despite the limited access, enjoyment of the public road around the circuit of the new park was considerable, and the estate rapidly became a place of public resort. Joseph Farington noted as early as 1814, when the park was still in a raw state:

The weather was remarkably fine today; the Thermometer at 73 degrees - ...multitudes of respectably dressed people, men with their wives and families ...walking in...the Regency Park, or quietly sitting with Pipes and Ale in the open air at the small taverns... almost all the men dressed in Black or Dark Blue Cloaths...Boots [have clearly] become an article of Sunday finery even among the lower order of tradesmen and mechanics.²⁵

23. *Picturesque Guide* (1829), p.5, quoting from a description of 1823 in *The Literary Pocket Book*.

24. *Ibid*, p.16: 'At the northern end of [Macclesfield Bridge] is a gate, which is closed nightly at ten o'clock to all except such as are going to the houses within the park.'

25. Joseph Farington, *The Farington Diary* (1927), vol.7, p.279, 18 September 1814.

Nash's Vision

A few years later, in 1818, Henry Crabb Robinson recorded a visit in his diary:

At two, I took a ride with Preston in his gig, into the Regent's Park, which I had never seen before. When the trees are grown this will be really an ornament to the capital; and not a mere ornament, but a healthful appendage. The Highgate and Hampstead Hill is a beautiful object, and within the Park the artificial water, the circular belt or coppice, the bridges, the few scattered villas, &c., are objects of taste. I really think this enclosure, with the new street leading to it from Carlton House, will give a sort of glory to the Regent's government, which will be more felt by remote posterity than the victories of Trafalgar and Waterloo, glorious as these are.²⁶

The young Princess Victoria was a regular visitor; from 1832 onwards her journals as princess and queen are full of references to driving in the park, her last recorded visit being in May 1900. On Sunday 20 April 1834, she notes, 'at 4 we went out driving. We drove through Regent's Park and Hyde Park which was very amusing, as they were both very full'.²⁷

It is the drive which, in the manner of the landscape designs of Nash's ex-partner Humphry Repton, was designed to take the viewer through an unfolding sequence of framed views and vistas, and it was from the drive that most visitors experienced the landscape. As nineteenth-century imagery makes clear, the pedestrians and traffic on the circuit drive were both consumers of and also constituents in the picturesque scenery. The drive is the mediating physical link between the terraces and the open space: it is fundamental to Nash's vision of a unity between landscape and architecture.

The surfacing of the Outer Circle was originally treated in two ways. York stone was laid circumjacent to the residential terraces to create a high-quality durable paved surface, while the entire Inner Circle, the inner, parkside perimeter of the Outer Circle and substantial sections of the outer edge of the Outer Circle from Hanover Gate to Gloucester Gate were finished more simply, probably originally with rammed earth or hoggins, and later covered with tarmac.

26. Henry Crabb Robinson, *The Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, 3 vols, London (1869), vol.2, p.87, 15 Feb 1818.

27. <http://www.queenvictoriajournals.org>.



Fig.21 (top) Skating in Regent's Park (c.1838)
Fig.22 (bottom) View of St Katharine's Hospital
from Regent's Park (c. 1820-59)



Nash's Vision

These sections connect seamlessly to the network of tarmac paths in the park, which are being resurfaced in planned phases in bound golden gravel. The carriageway of St Katharine's Precinct and some garden areas retain their original hoggin surfaces, which require careful sensitive repair.

This fabric is of great heritage significance and comprises some of the most important nineteenth-century streetscape in London. Footway paving forms the foreground setting to the listed buildings, boundary walls, railings and garden areas.

Visually it provides a plinth on which the buildings are set. It also accentuates the horizontal linear geometry and visual continuity of the street, often reinforced by kerbside channels laid with original granite setts. In addition, many mews retain their original carriageway surfaces of granite setts.

Communal gardens and design unity

For Nash the communal gardens of the surrounding terraces were fundamental to their integration with the central parkland. Over the previous half century, it had come to be expected throughout London that front gardens would be provided for new terraced housing, such as that along the New Road in the 1760s. They screened the residence from the noise and dust of the road, and provided a space for individual expression. Nash's insistence on communal gardens, rather than individual plots, was aimed at securing the illusion of a single palatial building, but also at ensuring a coherent landscape frame in which to view it. Nash's correspondence returns repeatedly to a defence of these communal planted areas: for Nash, it was this communal planting which made a feature of the terraces in views across and from the park.

The *Picturesque Guide* (1829) admired York Terrace for its illusory unity. Having all its entrances to the rear:

All the doors and windows in the lawn or principal front ...are uniform, and make the terrace appear like suites of princely apartments, somewhat in the style of a little Versailles. This idea is likewise assisted by the pleasing and judicious arrangement of the gardens, which have no divisions, but are laid out in a style truly palatial.²⁸

28. *A Picturesque Guide* (1829), p.8.

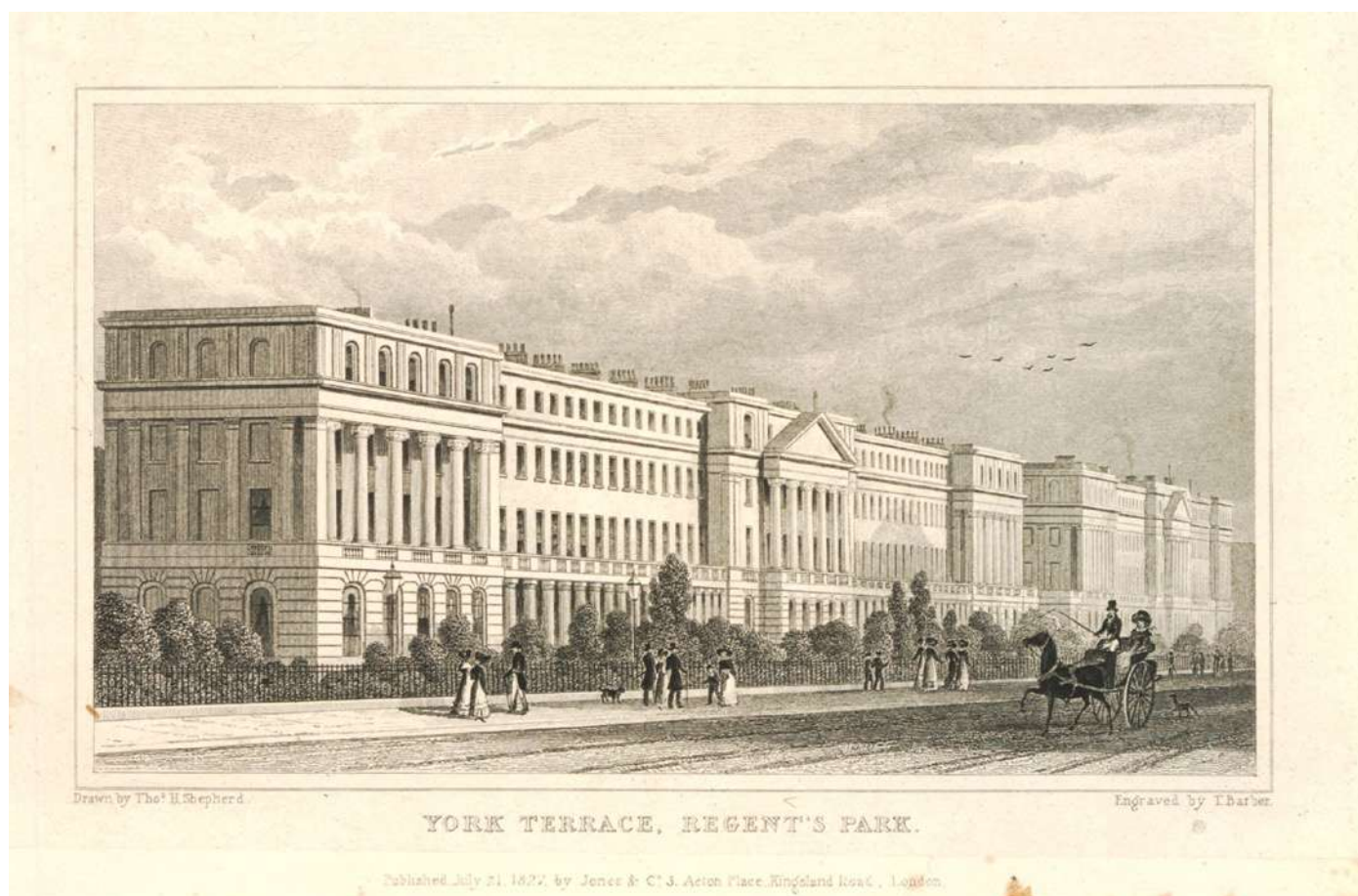


Fig.23 (top) Thomas Hosmer Shepherd, York Terrace (1827)

Fig.24 (bottom) Detail of Richard Morris, Panorama of Sussex Place (1831-2)

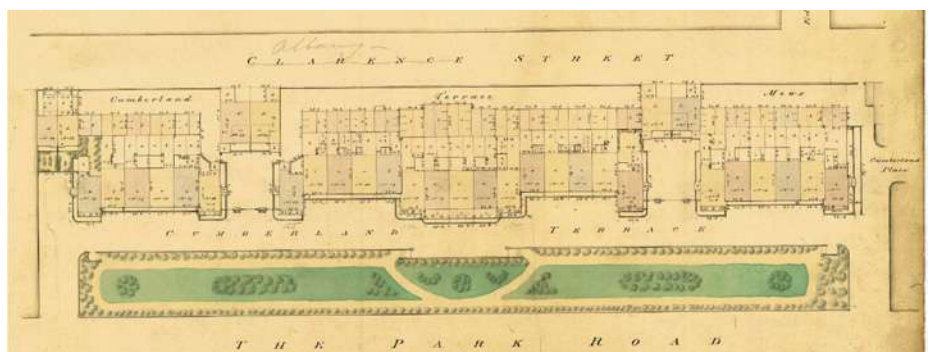
A Vision for Regent's Park

Nash's Vision

Fig.25 (top) Anon. Engraving, Cumberland Terrace (1837)

Fig.26 (middle) Richard Morris, Panorama of Cumberland Terrace (1831-2)

Fig.27 (bottom) Charles Mayhew, Plan of Cumberland Terrace (1834-5)



In 1826 the German traveller Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau admired the effect but remarked snobbishly, 'these apparent palaces, like that at Potsdam, have unity and grandeur in their façade alone. They are often in fact, only a conglomeration of small houses dedicated to the purposes of trade, manufacture or what not'.²⁹ Nash's architecture and his planting were designed to preserve that illusion of unity and grandeur.

Nash suggested that the planting of the periphery of the park, and along the outside of the Outer Circle in particular, was designed with a view to increasing the effect of architectural sublimity of the terraces by supplying what Uvedale Price termed the 'grandeur of intricacy'.

There were, moreover, in Nash's view, to be no divisions in the gardens of the houses to denote individuality but the whole should appear as one entire building. The communal gardens of the terraces were therefore generally laid out with uniform hedges abutting the Outer Circle, concealing the private gardens from the road and providing privacy for the residents of the terraces. To this end Nash endorsed the principle that the '*Picturesque Point* [of view] is always low in all prospects'; the spectator was intended to feel a sense of being enveloped, or absorbed by the landscape, and the gardens were perceived as extensions of the park scenery into which the palace facades were also submerged and absorbed.³⁰ This landscape treatment indulged the contemporary fashion for the prominence of a natural foreground in preference to distant scenery: the foreground being, as William Gilpin put it, the 'basis and foundation of the whole picture'.³¹

29. Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau, *A Tour of England, Ireland and France, in the years 1826, 1827, 1828 and 1829 ...by a German Prince* (1833), p.14.

30. William Mason, *The Works of Thomas Gray*, Vol. II, (1807), p. 267

31. William Gilpin, *Three essays: on picturesque beauty; on picturesque travel; and on sketching landscape...* (3rd. ed., 1808), p. 127.

Themes

Fig.28 (top) Looking east to St Katharine's from the interior of Regent's Park (2014)

Fig.29 (bottom) Looking southwest to Clarence Terrace from the Outer Circle (2014)



Views and vistas

Long views, carefully framed by planting, were fundamental to Nash's scheme for the park and buildings. Historical descriptions and visual representations show the location and alignment of many of these designed views; others can be identified from the siting of the original planting. Some of these designed views have been lost due to built development; others are currently compromised by traffic and parking, or by subsequent planting or tree growth. While some have been permanently damaged others can be restored: the view of St Katharine's church for example has been almost entirely lost but could be re-opened and its frame restored by some simple tree removals.

Elsewhere, the designed rhythm of planting and view has changed dramatically. At Clarence Terrace for example, instead of planting on either side of the building acting as a frame, as Nash intended, planting now occupies the centre, reducing the contribution the buildings make to the landscape as a whole, and blocking views outwards to the park.

While views back and forth across the park to and from the buildings were important, equally so were oblique views along the Outer Circle. Again, many of these, such as those of Chester Terrace, have been compromised by trees and shrubs in the communal gardens, which have in some cases almost completely hidden the buildings from view. Here, the planting has come to lack structure or form, comprising a rather haphazard sequence of plants.

Based on an analysis of Nash's picturesque design, stakeholders should seek out and agree opportunities to reinstate designed views and vistas. This can be achieved through a balance of tree and shrub removal and carefully considered and placed new planting.

Themes

Planting

Very few of Nash's original trees survive; only some 2% of the park's trees, and even fewer in the CEPC estate, appear to date from the early nineteenth century.³² Most of the existing trees were planted in the twentieth century, largely with little understanding of Nash's original intended effects.

Increasingly, with the rise in traffic on the Outer Circle, planting has been used to screen and insulate both the parkland and the communal gardens, rather than as a way to frame long views.

What might be called 'defensive planting' by both the Royal Parks Agency in the parkland, and the CEPC in the communal gardens, is understandable, but in practice is an almost complete reversal of Nash's aims. It detracts significantly from the perception of the total work of art. If the impact of traffic could be reduced, this insulation and screening could also be reduced.

Tree and shrub planting in the communal gardens has had a major impact on the character and appearance of the terraces. The originally open character of Chester Terrace, for example, has been transformed over the years into a shady retreat. Chester Terrace also illustrates the way in which the growth of trees and shrubs is causing significant horticultural challenges, as sunlight is increasingly excluded from ground-level. Unchecked growth and the build-up of soil over the decades is also causing structural problems for the retaining walls.

The street trees in Chester Terrace have emphasised the cross-route in a way that conflicts with Nash's vision of roads in a landscape setting; they accentuate the corridor-like streetscape, an effect greatly exacerbated by the hedge.

Tree planting around the boundary of the parkland by the Royal Parks Agency often ignores the principles of grouping and framing that were fundamental to Nash's picturesque. The same applies to the planting of the communal gardens where planting has often ignored the massing intended by Nash.

32. Sarah Couch Historic Landscapes and The Royal Parks, *The Regent's Park and Primrose Hill Tree and View Management Survey* (draft) March 2013, pp.15, 18. Veteran, old mature or over mature trees comprise only 11 or 2.1% of the 5,215 trees currently recorded in the park, and do not include many forest trees, except some *Fraxinus* and *Aesculus*.



Fig.30 (top) Chester Terrace from the interior of Regent's Park

Fig.31 (bottom) Looking northeast to Chester Terrace from the Outer Circle (2014)



Themes



Fig.32 (top) Charles Alston Collins, *May in the Regent's Park*: view from Hanover Terrace over Regent's Park (c. 1835)

Fig.33 (bottom) The hawthorn hedge which now follows the inside edge of the Outer Circle; the hedge replaced the earlier park pale (2014)



The planting in individual communal gardens is generally in need of refreshment. Plants have outgrown their situation or are overcrowded, or have been inserted into spaces which should have been kept clear. The full range of Nash's planting palette, including small as well as forest native trees, and exotics, needs to be replicated.

New planting should take account of arboricultural considerations, such as succession, tree health, biodiversity, but within a framework set by an understanding of the design principles which underlie the landscape and which give it its international significance.

Boundaries

Visual connections between the park and the terraces across the Outer Circle were fundamental to Nash's design. The complex network of views has been plotted elsewhere in this report but critical to them is the visual permeability of the boundaries between the landscape's constituent parts. The single greatest factor in a hardening of boundaries has been the growth of traffic on the Outer Circle with both agencies driven by a resistance to its visual and audial intrusiveness. Over the years, boundaries have become harder and thicker and now in many locations Nash's intended effects are hard to discern; as a result the landscape has lost much of its quality.

As in the parkland, so in the communal gardens, planting has tended to be designed to screen, and hence has reinforced boundaries which were intended to be visually permeable.

Boundaries remain critical to the management of the whole, but there is no need for them physically to divide up the space so intrusively.

The original boundary fence between the Outer Circle and the interior of the park was a timber pale. This survived in part into the twentieth century (see Fig. 35). This permeable boundary controlled public access but did not obscure views to and from the park. The wooden fence was replaced in some places by utilitarian post-war rails and elsewhere by steel mesh. The whole was rationalised in the late twentieth century with the introduction of a hawthorn hedge planted around most of the park boundary.

Themes

The boundary hedge is the single greatest detractor from the unity of the Regent's Park design. In creating an impermeable visual barrier, at a stroke it has destroyed the relationship between terrace, Outer Circle and parkland. While the desire to screen park users from the sight of traffic is understandable, the planting is symptomatic of the way in which the road has become a major intrusion in Regent's Park, instead of an integral part of it.

As traffic has increased, leaseholders have understandably become keener to protect their privacy and to reduce the impact of noise and dust. In many places, the boundary between the communal gardens and the Outer Circle has gradually become visually impermeable, in a way wholly alien to Nash's vision and his designed effects. While affording a measure of privacy, it has deprived leaseholders of some of the greatest designed views in the history of British landscape-gardening. It has also deprived pedestrians of visual interest and relief along the Outer Circle.

To restore Nash's vision of a unified landscape of parkland and buildings with a circuit road running through it, coordinated management needs to aim for a significant reduction in the visual impermeability of the boundaries around Regent's Park, both those of the communal gardens and those of the central parkland.

If the hedge were laid and maintained to a height of metre, this would at a stroke reduce its physical impact, make views of the parkland accessible to pedestrians and cyclists, and still screen a significant amount of the traffic in views outward from the parkland. It would also be of long-term benefit to the health of the hedge, and to its habitat value.



Fig.34 (top) Looking southeast to north end of Chester Terrace (2014)

Fig.35 (bottom) The former chestnut pale which enclosed the park and separated the interior from the Outer Circle. The Coliseum is visible in the background (c.1870).0



