

Myatt's Fields Park, its design by Fanny Wilkinson for the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association and conveyance to the London County Council in 1889

Rebecca Preston, June 2022

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Postcard view from the south west, posted 1909 (author's collection)

Introduction

Myatt's Fields is a hidden gem tucked behind Camberwell New Road between Camberwell and Brixton. Opened in 1889, its landscaping incorporated space for recreation and play with lawns, walks, a tree-lined avenue, and other ornamental planting. While the park retains much of its original character, and its lodge, bandstand, shelter and playground areas survive, it has evolved over time to meet local needs. In addition to offering much needed space for relaxation and exercise, this oasis of green once housed makeshift hospital wards in First World War and air-raid shelters and a barrage balloon in the Second World War.

Later extended, Myatt's Fields Park was originally formed from 14½ acres belonging to the Minet Estate. Soon after he inherited the estate, William Minet donated this land to the London County Council, for use, for ever, as a public park and recreation ground. Since he wished to remain anonymous, the name Myatt's Fields was retained, after the market gardens cultivated there until about 1870 by Joseph Myatt and his family. The park was designed and laid out for the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association (MPGA) by the Association's landscape gardener, Fanny Wilkinson, who was most probably the first woman to practice professionally as a landscape gardener in Britain.

The Minet Estate

Myatt's Fields Park was one of several gifts to the neighbourhood by the public-spirited Minet family. Descended from Huguenot refugees, the Minets owned the estate from 1770 until it passed to the London Borough of Lambeth in 1970. The family's connections with France are commemorated in the names of several streets and blocks of flats in the area.¹

In the last third of the nineteenth century, the fifth and sixth generation descendants of Isaac Minet, who had fled France in 1695, developed the estate, with strict building controls, transforming it from market-garden ground into a Victorian suburb. James Lewis Minet (1807–1885) built the Church of St James the Apostle, while his son William Minet (1851–1933) formed a company run on cooperative lines to build the Minet Free Library. Myatt's Fields Park was also William's contribution to the area. Although undoubtedly a generous, philanthropic gesture, it was also an important asset for the estate, helping to attract middle-class tenants.² When the park opened in 1889, it formed the heart of the development, surrounded by the church, pretty houses for the middle classes, model flats and, later, Cormont Secondary School and St Gabriel's College.³ William Minet, who was called to the bar of the Inner Temple in 1876, was a founder member and vice-president of the Huguenot Society, honorary treasurer of the Society of Antiquaries, and later chairman of the Nightingale Fund Council of St Thomas's Hospital.

The Metropolitan Public Gardens Association

The Metropolitan Public Garden, Boulevard and Playground Association was founded in 1882 by Lord Reginald Brabazon (1841–1929), later the 12th Earl of Meath, in order to preserve open space in the capital for the benefit of the urban population. Lord Meath was particularly concerned about the physical condition of the urban poor and the role which parks and playgrounds could play in improving public health. A committed social imperialist, he proposed a programme of state-aided colonization to clear London of its redundant poor and to divert the rural poor away from London, before they could exacerbate existing urban overcrowding.⁴ His vision for London's open spaces, which included a 'Green Girdle' around the capital, played a key part in his conception of London as the home of empire and the benefits of this to Britain and the empire.⁵ Meath's many projects, including his work with the MPGA, were part of a sustained campaign to improve the environment of London and the health of its people. Parks and other open spots were to provide beauty, with facilities for rest, recreation and exercise, for everybody including the poorest in society.

The Minutes of the first meeting record the Association's primary object as 'giving to the people gardens, and to the children playgrounds'.⁶ Meath believed that there was plenty of land which might be 'gratuitously acquired' and laid out as gardens and playgrounds, particularly disused burial grounds and closed churchyards, which on completion could be handed over to the public body for maintenance.⁷

The Association (which abbreviated its title in 1885 to the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association or MPGA but which was often referred to simply as Meath's Association) was one of a several organisations campaigning for the protection of open space of all sorts for the benefit or improvement of the people. These included the Commons Preservation Society, the Kyrle Society, the National Health Society and later the National Trust.⁸ In urban contexts, their campaigns formed part of the wider social and sanitary reform movement. In an article in *The London Gardener* (2003–2004), the then Secretary of the MPGA, Joyce Bellamy, gave a survey of the Association and its work, including its relationship to the other environmental organisations in London.⁹

Initially, the MPGA focussed its attention upon relatively small areas of waste or underused land in the poorest, most densely populated districts of the capital – many of its projects were disused burial grounds – and laid them out as small gardens and playgrounds. With other organisations, the MPGA made a significant contribution to the passing of The Metropolitan Open Spaces Act of 1881 and The Disused Burial Grounds Act of 1884; together these led to the conversion of many burial grounds to gardens and prevented the erection of buildings on disused burial sites, which remained consecrated ground.¹⁰ These gardens were then handed over to local authorities to manage. Where local rates could not support such a venture, assistance was often requested of the London County Council.¹¹

The MPGA's tenth annual report gives an idea of the remarkable number and range of projects it had undertaken within the metropolitan police area by 1893, including '82 grounds opened under the Society's auspices, 116 playgrounds for children thrown open, 2,400 trees planted in 51 different metropolitan districts, 1,000 seats supplied, [and] 18 fountains erected'.¹² Myatt's Fields was unusual among the Association's projects in that it was one of their few ornamental parks with integral sports and recreation facilities to be designed from scratch. Meath believed it to be the first 'instance in London of land for a public park being presented by an individual as a free gift'.¹³

The MPGA would increasingly focus its attention on the recreational aspects of its public gardens and by 1910 was insisting that the public use of open space should not be dominated by aesthetic considerations and that playing fields for organised games should take precedence over horticultural displays.¹⁴ Ten years earlier, Myatt's Fields had already shown signs of adopting this policy, when the LCC Parks and Open Spaces Committee recommended that alterations should be made to the grass areas around the bandstand 'with a view to moving the tennis courts and providing additional playgrounds for children'.¹⁵ However, this and other changes to the park were often due to pressure from residents (their letters were minuted by the LCC), rather than to directives by the Council. For instance, in 1900, the Committee approved a proposal for removing two shrubberies on the understanding that the land recovered would be added to the 'playing ground'.¹⁶

Fanny Rollo Wilkinson (1855–1951), landscape gardener

Fanny Wilkinson was born in a suburb of Manchester, the daughter of the prominent local doctor and landowner, and one time President of the British Medical Association, Matthew Eason Wilkinson. She was educated privately in England and abroad. After Dr Wilkinson's death the family moved to Middlethorpe Hall, on one of the York estates inherited from his first wife and where he was Lord of the Manor. Here, in about 1880, aged around 24, Fanny began to devote herself to 'gardening in a practical way'.¹⁷ She then began to look for work and, hearing of the new School of Gardening at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham, applied to the landscape division and, after some difficulty on account of it being intended for professional (male) gardeners and nurserymen, persuaded them to take her on.¹⁸ By July 1881, due to numerous applications, 'special arrangements' had been made to admit 'lady students' and lectures to 'lady and gentleman students' began at the end of the month.¹⁹ Although Wilkinson said in 1890 that she was the 'only female pupil', this was presumably when she began the course. The principal was Edward Milner, a protégé of Sir Joseph Paxton, who had laid out the Palace grounds in the 1850s; classes were held in Paxton's former villa, Rockhills, on the north side of the park. There, under the 'kind and patient' watch of Milner and his son Henry, she learned how to take surveys and also levelling, staking out the ground, drawing plans to scale and making cost estimates.²⁰

By June 1883 Wilkinson had been appointed to the Council of the Kyrle Society, founded in 1877 by Miranda and Octavia Hill to bring 'beauty to the people', and on 5 February 1884 was elected as honorary landscape gardener to the MPGA, for whom she had already begun work on laying out the disused burial ground of St Luke's, Chelsea.²¹ She was closely associated with members of the reforming Garrett family, including Elizabeth Garrett

Anderson and Millicent Garrett Fawcett. In 1899 she became a founder member of the Women's Agricultural and Horticultural International Union (later the Women's Farm and Garden Union), and was Principal of Swanley Horticultural College for Women in 1902–1916 and 1921–22. Through her association with these organisations, and in her role as a professional landscape gardener, Wilkinson campaigned for the right of women to enter the professions and to earn equal respect and pay. During the laying-out of Myatt's Fields, in December 1888, she sat on the executive committee of the Central Committee of Women's Suffrage, led by Millicent Fawcett.²²

By 1886 Wilkinson had persuaded Meath to drop the 'honorary' title and to make a charge that would fully cover all expenses. As Crawford notes, 'barely two years after obtaining her professional qualification, Wilkinson was able to step from behind the shield of an "honorary" title, doubtless a factor of her class as much as her gender, and reveal herself a practical professional woman'.²³ Wilkinson continued to work for both organisations, designing Vauxhall Park (on land belonging to Henry and Millicent Garrett Fawcett) for the Kyrle Society, which was opened in July 1890 by the Prince of Wales.²⁴ The MPGA agreed to provide the benches – twelve initially and another twelve 'to follow as soon as it was seen how the first were appreciated'.²⁵

In a letter to the Acting Clerk of the LCC presented at the Parks Committee on 4 April 1889, the MPGA described Miss F. R. Wilkinson of 15 Bloomsbury Street as 'our landscape gardener', and as being 'in charge of the ground' at Myatt's Fields Park.²⁶ Wilkinson employed female assistants on her MPGA projects, women who were probably serving apprenticeships, or had already done so, in her office. Her assistant at Myatt's Fields was Emmeline Sieveking, one of the three daughters of Sir Edward Sieveking, physician-in-ordinary to Queen Victoria. Later assistants included Evelyn Alkey and Madeline Agar. Agar eventually succeeded Wilkinson on her resignation from the MPGA, in order to fully commit herself to the work at Swanley, in 1905.²⁷

Alongside parks, Wilkinson laid out London squares and created gardens and playgrounds from scores of disused burial grounds, and other small spaces in the poorest parts of London for the MPGA and the Kyrle Society. Yet although the MPGA left comprehensive records of all its business, there appear to be few surviving drawings through which to chart her working practice and development. We know even less about her private commissions. She was however responsible for the landscaping of the London School of Medicine for Women and

it seems likely that she would have been commissioned to design gardens for suffrage supporters and perhaps members of the MPGA, if not more widely.

When interviewed by the *Women's Penny Paper* in 1890, Wilkinson revealed that her training under Edward Milner had encompassed 'taking surveys, levelling, and staking out the ground, drawing plans to scale, and making estimates'.²⁸ These tasks would have been part of the process of laying out Myatt's Fields.

The park and its conveyance to the LCC

Myatt's Ground or Fields had ceased to be cultivated as market gardens by the time St James was consecrated in 1870.²⁹ The as yet undeveloped land was then used as a short-cut and for recreation. To the *South London Press* this was 'a territory flowing with liquid mud known to Camberwellians by the euphonious title of Myatt's Fields', which was dangerous to cross at night.³⁰ The fields appeared in reports of serious crime and disorder in the police courts and there were various plans to build on them. A plot of thirty acres of the Ground was one of the sites rejected for the relocation of St Thomas's Hospital in the early 1860s and in 1872 this site was among those considered for a new convict prison.³¹ Two years later, however, a 'well-supported' movement was under way to provide a public park and children's playground upon the fields, and a petition for this was presented to the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW). The promoters pointed out the 'utter absence of anything of the sort within a reachable distance, and the danger to life and the demoralising influences to which the children are exposed by being compelled to play in the streets'.³² By 1879 it was reported that a portion of the land had been selected for conversion into a public park and recreation ground, and was 'forthwith to be laid out to an ornamental design'.³³ But despite supportive letters to the newspapers from local residents, nothing further seems to have happened until, in January 1888, it was reported that 'an open space of some fourteen acres is being proceeded with at Myatt's Fields'.³⁴

The landscaping was undertaken by Fanny Wilkinson for the MPGA at a cost of some £10,000, with the help of a grant from the Lord Mayor of London's Fund for the Unemployed, and during the winter of 1888, Wilkinson and her assistant, Emmeline Sieveking, directed 220 jobless local men in preparing the ground.³⁵ The first payments to 'Miss Wilkinson' and the 'wages of the unemployed' were made in January 1888.³⁶

London County Council Minutes record that the name Myatt's Fields commemorated Joseph Myatt, the tenant (between 1818 and 1869), who was famed for his rhubarb and

strawberries and after whom 'Myatt's Offenham compacta' cabbage was named;³⁷ rows of cabbages can still be seen in photographs of the newly completed St James's Church in c.1869.³⁸ Even so, as Marie Draper suggested, the park might better have been named after the Minet family.³⁹ But MPGA Minutes of 10 April 1889 record that 'in deference to the wishes of the donor' (who is not mentioned by name), the park be called 'Myatt's Fields'.⁴⁰ Prior to this, the MPGA and the LCC referred to it simply as 'Camberwell Park', until the MPGA urged the Council to 'please call it Myatt's Fields and not Camberwell Park'.⁴¹

The local papers soon named him as the donor, but Minet maintained his wish for the work to proceed as quietly as possible.⁴²

In January 1888 the *Gardeners' Chronicle* reported on the 'various important works [...] under consideration by the earl of Meath's Association':

The laying out of a park at Camberwell is one of the chief works [of the MPGA]. Land to the extent of 14 acres has been presented by a gentleman who owns a large property at Camberwell, and his offer has been accepted by the Association. The donor desires to be anonymous. It is estimated that the cost of laying out this park will amount to nearly £8000, and it is hoped that a portion of the Gardens and Pleasure Ground (Mansion House) Fund for giving work to the unemployed will be available for the work. This new park will be near the Camberwell New Road railway station, in a populous district where there are no other public parks excepting the small Kennington Park, which has always been much too limited in area for the neighbourhood.⁴³

In June the *South London Mail* reported that the greater part of the ground had been drained and levelled, some of the paths were made, grass plots and flower beds formed, and the chief part of the boundary wall completed.⁴⁴

It seems that Meath was still hoping for some kind of event to mark the completion of the park in late April 1889, despite Minet's insistence on there being 'formal ceremony'. But plans for the Camberwell Police band to play at the opening were abandoned.⁴⁵

Behind the scenes William Minet followed progress and, as a barrister-at-law, was active in the discussions about transferring ownership to the MBW. He shared the results of his

preliminary research into the legality of conveying the land ‘for the use of recreation and to maintain the same’ with the MPGA solicitors, Horne & Birkett.⁴⁶ He also appears to have overridden the solicitors’ recommendation made on a rough draft of the conveyance that ‘it will be better to take this conveyance under the Open Spaces Acts rather than the Recreation Grounds Act 1859’. The draft, entitled Open Space for South London, stated simply that ‘a piece of land containing 14^a 2^r 0^p in the parishes of Lambeth and Camberwell known as “Myatt’s Fields”, which has recently been tastefully laid out as a garden or open space was today conveyed by the owner to the LCC as a free gift to the public’; ‘the owner’ replaces ‘the munificent gift of the owner’, which had been crossed through.⁴⁷

On Saturday 25 May the Camberwell notices of the *South London Press* reported that ‘Yesterday Myatt’s Fields was formally conveyed to London County Council by the owner’.⁴⁸ Signed on 23 May, the LCC undertook ‘to maintain the same for the perpetual use of the public for purposes of exercise and recreation’ and Minet agreed to pay all instalments of Succession Duty on the ‘fourteen acres and two roods of land in the parishes of Camberwell and Lambeth in the County of Surrey’.⁴⁹

The late signing of this conveyance, a change to the opening date (poor weather which held up the laying of a second coat of gravel), and William Minet’s desire for anonymity, means that there was little fanfare in the press when the park finally opened on 28 May 1889.⁵⁰ This does not seem to have dimmed its popularity, however, and very soon after opening it was said to be ‘daily thronged with visitors’.⁵¹

The design and progress and planting from 1889

During 1888 William Minet was communicating directly with Fanny Wilkinson. Shortly before 1 May 1888 he requested to see the final plan before making his agreement final.⁵² MPGA Minutes tell us that a plan of the park had been seen and signed by this date.⁵³ This or a later correction may be the plan attached to the agreement made between William Minet of 47 Albion Street, Hyde Park and two members of the MPGA on 16 May 1888.⁵⁴ This plan, or preliminary design, in ink and wash on linen, was drawn on and crossed through in pencil at a later date, possibly by Wilkinson or an assistant in response to Minet’s suggested alterations. The boundary and main internal paths seem uncontested, and the perimeter has been confirmed in pencil as ‘wall and iron railings’ but some of the structures were, as discussed below, crossed through. At this date Wilkinson was pressing repeatedly for the railings and walls to be erected before any further internal work was carried out by workmen.⁵⁵

This unsigned plan of Myatt's Fields, originally held at the Guildhall with the MPGA archives, appears to be the only surviving design. A framed plan exhibited by the MPGA at the 1893 Columbian Exposition, in the Health and Social and General Improvement division, has not been located.⁵⁶ However, the early working plan, with its looping paths, shows the layout almost exactly as executed. From this design, the planting and structures evolved once the park had been conveyed to the new London County Council, which succeeded the Metropolitan Board of Works in April 1889.

The Council's parks and open spaces were originally the responsibility of the Superintending Architect. In 1892, a separate Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Department was created and its title changed to Parks and Open Spaces Department in 1895. Lt.-Col. J. J. Sexby was the first Chief Surveyor and the first chairman was Lord Meath.

The Lodge (now Park Cottage) was in place by May 1889, when the Superintending Architect's Department noted that the scullery floor had not been cemented and the gas was not yet laid on. The LCC Superintendent of Myatt's Fields Park, Mr J. W. Moorman (1843–1920) had moved in by October 1889, though he was employed on site for some time before that.⁵⁷ In March 1888 the *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener* published a notice by Moorman on the work of the MPGA, including Myatt's Fields. He may have been involved with the works from the start as the journal later credited him with 'the immediate supervision of the laying out' of the park for the MPGA.⁵⁸ This would fit with Wilkinson's method of working, which, after surveying the grounds, was to 'draw up the plans, calculate the cost, and send in my estimate for the work as a whole. If it is accepted, I set the men to work, at first only going occasionally to see how they get on, and finally going every day as the work approaches completion'.⁵⁹

The erection of the other structures also took place after the formal opening. And, although the agreement stipulated that the land would be conveyed once it had been 'laid out and enclosed and planted',⁶⁰ much of the planting seems also to have been undertaken later on. A planting plan outlined in the minutes of November 1889 suggested that very little had been done beyond laying out the park's basic structure – the perimeter wall, railings and gates and its internal paths and lawns.⁶¹ Thus it seems that the LCC was principally responsible for the planting and evolving facilities, though as chairman of the LCC Parks and Open Spaces Committee Meath may well have kept an eye on progress. William Minet was kept up to date with 'procedures' and occasionally made interventions. For instance in the 1890s

Camberwell Vestry approved of his application to the Council for construction of a new entrance facing towards Lothian Road.⁶²

In May 1889, the Superintending Architect requested the purchase of 'bedding plants', '£5 worth of flower seeds' and '170 dozen herbaceous plants to fill the beds in the flower garden', at an average of 3s per dozen.⁶³ However in November, it was noted that 'Some planting is [still] very much required at this place which is at present very bare and in need of embellishment'. Mr Moorman recommended 30 large London planes, 25 Acacia Betsoniana, 100 rhododendrons, 50 aucuba, 50 roses, 50 strong privets, hollies, and a selection of weeping and flowering trees up to a sum of £35.⁶⁴ Photographs from the 1890s, showing clumps of shrubs and other planting, suggest that at least some of this planting was executed. Jacob Moorman moved on to Brockwell Park in 1891, to Dulwich Park in 1892, and from there to Victoria Park in or after 1893. As the *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener* summed up, his 'advancement, from the smallest garden (Myatt's Fields) to the largest park under the London County Council, within a period of five years, affords high testimony to his energy and ability'. Mr J. Pallett from Battersea Park succeeded Moorman as Superintendent in 1891 and a few years later the Propagator from Victoria Park became a superintendent at Myatt's Fields.⁶⁵

In the early 1890s, the Superintendent reported that there were in attendance two park keepers, one leading labourer, one carpenter and fifteen general garden-work labourers (one of whom, a Mr. H. Dockey, acted as a 'constable' during the summer months).⁶⁶ The park also maintained a donkey for pulling the Ransomes lawnmower (the donkey lasted until 1903 when it was recommended he be 'slaughtered and replaced with a pony') but contained 'no birds' (the LCC was keen on birds).⁶⁷

There was now also a 'brick shelter', presumably that mentioned as being required for the keepers in the children's playground, which was divided for separate use by girls and boys. Described as (outdoor) gymnasium, the boys' measured 270 x 210 feet and the girls', 180 x 155 feet. There was also a stable for the donkey, a potting shed, a tool shed, one house (conservatory) for the raising of bedding plants measuring 50 feet by 12 feet and 'about ten acres of gardens'.⁶⁸



Postcard view of the shelter with St James the Apostle beyond, posted 1906 (author's collection)

Lack of funds appears to have delayed the installation of the key structures (Meath's appeal in *The Times* had been unsuccessful).⁶⁹ In the preliminary design, a fountain was originally proposed for the spot where the present shelter or summer house stands, and the summer house (shown with a square plan), which first appears south of the path leading to the fountain, was crossed out. The position of the fountain is thus unresolved on this plan. A report on the supply of water to LCC parks noted that Myatt's Fields contained two drinking fountains in October 1891.⁷⁰ These seem to have been of the more functional kind, and one of them was moved into the playground during 1900.⁷¹ By 1893, the Parks and Open Spaces Committee had authorised £60 for the erection of an ornate drinking fountain.⁷² This appears to have been installed in 1894, selected from a range of designs presented by the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association during late 1889.⁷³

In October 1890, Mr Moorman told the *South London Press* that in addition to laying out the park and making 'upwards of a mile of spacious walks', the benefactor had provided 'shelters for sunshine and shower' and 'plentiful' seats for the aged and weary to rest.⁷⁴ The octagonal shelter was licensed to serve refreshments by 1899 and the bandstand was also installed in the 1890s. By 1895 a portion of the park had been set aside for a croquet lawn.⁷⁵ Internal fencing, railings and ground coverings were altered as circumstances directed, as for

instance, in 1898, when tarmac replaced gravel in response to Minet's concern about damage to property by stone-throwing youths. It was agreed in 1901 to enclose a portion of the park for a (new) children's playground, and new play equipment and surfacing was introduced periodically to the existing playground and gymnasium thereafter.⁷⁶

The MPGA continued to fund 'gymnastic instruction' for boys and girls in this and other open spaces during the 1890s. Early in 1891, the MPGA engaged the services of a Mr Astor, Gymnastic Instructor. During four Saturdays in February, a total of 55 girls and 187 boys had been under his instruction at three grounds including Myatt's Fields.⁷⁷

On Whit Monday in 1893, 8,546 people passed through the park gates.⁷⁸

Some ten years after it opened, Minet seems to have had a change of heart about guarding his anonymity. *The Municipal Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces of London* (1898) by the Superintendent of the LCC's Park's Department, Lt.-Col. J. J. Sexby, publicly acknowledged Minet as donor and thanked him 'for the particulars of the history of that place' and gave a history of the family and the Minet estate. Though brief, his account gives a good overview of how things were organised at the end of the nineteenth century:

The park lies a little below the level of Knatchbull Road, from which it is separated by an open wrought-iron railing, with massive and artistic gates, which are a decided ornament to the park. The principal entrance is through a porch attached to the superintendent's lodge, something after the style of a country lych-gate. The park is tastefully laid out with gravel walks, flower-beds, and grass enclosures, which are large enough to provide room for several tennis-courts. A portion of the ground is used as a gymnasium for boys and girls, the remainder of the buildings comprising a large circular shelter, a bandstand, and the necessary green-houses for the raising of the flowers for decoration.⁷⁹

Nearly ten years later, the garden historian Alicia Amherst (the Hon. Mrs. Evelyn Cecil) published *London Parks and Gardens*. She, too, named the donor, repeated the brief family history of the estate, the handing over of the Park to the LCC, and described how 'Myatt's Fields or Camberwell Park is but a short distance to the south-west of Kennington. This Park of 14½ acres was one of those princely gifts which have been showered on the inhabitants of London.'⁸⁰ Amherst thought Myatt's Fields 'one of the most tasteful of the new parks'

and was particularly impressed with the lime avenue which she expected would ‘some day be one of the great beauties of the neighbourhood, and which is in the meantime a pleasant shady walk’.⁸¹ She continued:

The small Park in Camberwell has a little avenue of limes running straight across, with a centre where seats can be put and paths diverge at right angles. It is quite small, and yet the Park would be exactly like every other piece of ground, with no particular design, without this. It gives a point and centre to the meandering paths, and comes as a distinct relief.⁸²

Limes were not included in the list made by Jacob Moorman in November 1889. Perhaps they were planted earlier in the process, under Fanny Wilkinson’s direction.

Myatt’s Fields remains a green and peaceful enclave in a busy part of south London. The combination of attractive landscape design and planting with facilities for rest and recreation for local people of all ages are as important today as when the park opened in May 1889.

Rebecca Preston, updated 2022

Outline chronology

1889: Myatt's Fields Park formally opened

1890: Bothy (later the One O'Clock Club)

1894: Drinking Fountain installed

1894: Bandstand erected

1895: Swings, portable parallel bars, giant slide and girls' swings added to the gymnasium (current children's playground)

1897: Shelter in place. Refreshments served here from 1899

1898: Gravel paths replaced with Tarmac

1899: More tennis courts added

1899: Fencing erected around 'band promenade and refreshment house' by Messrs. M. McVey

1909: New ornamental fencing around bandstand erected by McVey.

1914–1921: Park closed to the public and used as annex to military hospital

1922: Status raised from 'Fourth-class Park' (Open Spaces Act, 1881) to 'First Class Garden'

1934: Susan Minet presents a further quarter of an acre near junction of Knatchbull Road and Calais Street

1939–1945: Park dug with air raid shelters; railings removed for war effort

¹ *Survey of London*, Vol. 26, *Lambeth: Southern Area*, ed. F. H. W. Sheppard, London, 1956, Ch. 5.

² David Kroll, 'Urban Design in Victorian London: The Minet Estate in Lambeth c.1870–1910', in Peter Guillory and David Kroll, Eds, *Mobilising Housing Histories*, London, 2017, p. 31.

³ For the development of the Minet Estate and surrounding areas, see Kroll, and *The Diary of James Minet 1807–1885: A Huguenot of the Fifth Generation*, Frome, n.d., pp. 618–19; *Survey of London*, Vol. 26; H. J. Dyos, *Victorian Suburb: A Study of the Growth of Camberwell*, Leicester, 1961; and Mary Boast, *The Story of Camberwell*, London, 1979.

⁴ See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 308, 309, 312; F. H. A. Aalen, 'Lord Meath, City Improvement and Social Imperialism', *Planning Perspectives*, 4, 1989, pp. 127–52.

⁵ Earl of Meath, 'Heart of Empire', in Aston Webb, Ed., *London of the Future*, London, 1921.

⁶ Guildhall Library (GL), Ms 11097/1, *MPGA Minutes*, 20 Nov 1882, p. 3. The Minutes and other MPGA papers are now held by London Metropolitan Archives and have been re-catalogued.

⁷ GL, Ms 11097/1, pp. 3–4.

⁸ Elizabeth Crawford, *Enterprising Women: the Garretts and their circle*, London, 2002, pp. 220–1; Andrew Crowe, *The Parks and Woodlands of London*, London, 1987, pp. 13–15; Draper, *Lambeth's Open Spaces*, 1979, pp. 14–15; Merlin Waterson, *The National Trust*, London, 1994, pp. 32–4.

⁹ Joyce Bellamy, 'The Metropolitan Public Gardens Association', *The London Gardener*, 9, 2003–2004, pp. 29–35. For the broader picture of public and municipal park provision in Britain, including the role of the MPGA, see Hazel Conway, *People's Parks, the design and development of Victorian parks in Britain*, Cambridge, 1991.

¹⁰ See Marie Draper, *Lambeth's Open Spaces*, 1979, p. 32; Brent Elliott, 'Victorian Parks', in Mireille Galinou, Ed., *London's Pride, The glorious history of the capital's gardens*, London, 1990, pp. 164–5; and Clive Wainwright, 'Municipal Parks and Gardens', in *The Garden: A celebration of one thousand years of British gardening*, London, 1979, pp. 163–4.

¹¹ Harriet Jordan, 'Public Parks, 1885–1914', *Garden History*, 22(1), 1994, pp. 89–90.

¹² *Gardeners' Chronicle*, 4 Feb 1893, p. 138.

¹³ GL, Ms 11097/7, *MPGA Minutes*, 5 June 1888, p. 66.

¹⁴ Jordan, 'Public Parks, 1885–1914', p. 86.

¹⁵ London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), LCC/MIN/08705 (Parks Committee, Agenda Papers 1899–1900), 21 July 1889.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 Nov 1900.

¹⁷ 'Miss Wilkinson, Landscape Gardener', *Women's Penny Paper*, 8 November 1890.

¹⁸ *Women's Penny Paper*; Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, p. 219.

¹⁹ *Morning Post*, 6 July 1881, p. 3; *Norwood News*, 23 July 1881, p. 3.

²⁰ *Women's Penny Paper*, 1890.

²¹ LMA, MS11097/1, *MPGA Minutes*, 5 Feb 1885,

²² Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, p. 253.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

²⁴ Hazel Conway, *Public Parks*, Princes Risborough, 1996, p. 37; Draper, *Lambeth's Open Spaces*, p. 50.

²⁵ GL, 11097/9, *MPGA Minutes*, 1 May 1889 and 11097/10, *MPGA Minutes*, 1 October 1889. A payment listed under Vauxhall Park in the ledgers for December 1888 to Miss O. Hill for over £115 also indicates that the MPGA was continuing to work with the Kyrle Society. See GL, 11103/2 (MPGA Ledger, vol. 2, 1888–90), p. 159.

²⁶ LMA, LCC/MIN/08798 (Parks &c Committee Papers April–June 1889), Letter from Basil Holmes of the MPGA to the Acting Clerk of the LCC, 30 March 1889.

²⁷ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, pp. 228–9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

²⁹ For the Myatt family and their gardens, see

<https://josephmyatt.weebly.com/josephmyattbiography.html>.

³⁰ 'Pick-Up Notes', *South London Press*, 16 Feb 1884, p. 3.

³¹ 'St Thomas's Hospital', *The Sun*, 5 Dec 1862, p. 6; 'St Thomas's Hospital', *The Globe*, 17 Jan 1863, p. 2; *Morning Herald*, 20 Jan 1863, p. 4; 'The Proposed Convict Establishment at Herne Hill', *East London Observer*, 17 Feb 1872, p. 3.

³² 'Metropolitan Playgrounds', *Daily News*, 23 Oct 1874, p. 7.

³³ *The Sunday Times*, 5 Jan 1879, p. 5.

³⁴ *The Globe*, 30 Sept 1879, p. 2; *South London Press*, 26 May 1883, p. 10; *South London Press*, 7 Jan 1888, p. 9.

³⁵ Draper, *Lambeth's Open Spaces*, p. 50.

³⁶ GL, Ms 11100/1 (MPGA Journal, Vol. 1, 1886–1901), p. 19.

³⁷ LCC Minutes, quoted in *Survey of London*: Vol. 26, p. 144, note 29; Minet Conservation Association, *Proposal for a Conservation Area*, 1979, p. 14; Draper, *Lambeth's Open Spaces*, p. 50.

³⁸ LAD, LP 8/713, SP16/713/JAM.2.

³⁹ Draper, p. 50.

⁴⁰ GL, Ms 11097/9, *MPGA Minutes*, 10 April 1889, p. 8.

⁴¹ LMA, LCC/MIN/08798 (Parks &c. Committee Papers April–June 1889), Letter from MPGA to LCC, 3 April 1889.

⁴² GL, Ms 11097/7, *MPGA Minutes*, 3 Jan 1888, p. 8. See also LMA, LCC/MIN/08798 (Parks &c. Committee Papers April–June 1889), letter from MPGA to LCC 30 April 1889.

⁴³ *Gardeners' Chronicle*, 28 Jan 1888, p. 113.

⁴⁴ *South London Mail*, 30 June 1888, p. 5.

⁴⁵ GL, Ms 11097/9, 1 May 1882, p. 2, 10 April 1889.

⁴⁶ GL, Ms 21670/41 (Papers related to MPGA sites; Wyatts [sic] Fields), letter from W. Minet to P. Birkett, Esq., 13 March 1888.

⁴⁷ GL, Ms 21670/41, Draft Conveyance, 8 April 1889.

⁴⁸ *South London Press*, 25 May 1889.

⁴⁹ Lambeth Archives Department (LAD), LBL/DALS/15/24. Undertaking for payment of succession duty between William Minet and the LCC, 23 May 1889.

⁵⁰ GL, Ms 11097/9, *MPGA Minutes*, 1 May 1889, p. 2; LMA LCC/MIN/08798 (LCC Parks &c Committee Papers April–June 1889), Letter from the MPGA to the Acting Clerk of the LCC, 30 March 1889 (presented to the Parks Committee, 4 April 1889).

⁵¹ GL, Ms 10097/9, *MPGA Minutes*, 5 June 1889, p. 10.

⁵² GL, Ms 21670/10 (Papers related to MPGA sites; Knatchbull Road, Camberwell and Lambeth), Letter from W. Minet to Mr Birkett, May 1 1888.

⁵³ GL, Ms 11097/7 (MPGA Minutes, Book 7) May 1 1888, p. 52.

⁵⁴ GL, Ms 21670/10, Agreement between W. Minet and two members of the MPGA, 16 May 1888; plan stapled to Agreement.

⁵⁵ GL, Ms 11097, (MPGA Minutes Book 7, 6 March 1888), p. 27.

⁵⁶ *The Columbian Exposition: introduction to the English Exhibits*, London, 1893, p. 45.

⁵⁷ LMA LCC/MIN/08798 (LCC Parks &c Committee Papers, April–June 1889), 3 May 1889.

⁵⁸ *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener*, 15 March 1888, p. 215 and 7 May 1891, p. 365.

⁵⁹ *Women's Penny Paper*, 1890.

⁶⁰ GL, Ms 21670/10, Agreement between W. Minet and MPGA, 16 May 1888.

⁶¹ GL, Ms 11097/9, *MPGA Minutes*, 1 May 1889, p. 2; LMA, LCC/MIN/08798 (LCC Parks &c Committee Papers April–June 1889), Letter from the MPGA to the Acting Clerk of the LCC 30 March 1889 (presented to the Parks Committee, 4 April 1889); Metropolitan Archives, LCC MIN/8800

(Parks &c. Committee Papers Oct-Dec 1889), Letter from LCC Superintending Architect's Dept. to the Parks &c. South West District, November 25 1889.

⁶² *South London Press*, 14 May 1892, p. 2.

⁶³ LMA, LCC/MIN/08798 (LCC Parks &c Committee Papers April–June 1889), Letter from Superintending Architect's Dept to Parks Dept 3 May 1889.

⁶⁴ LMA, LCC MIN/08800 (Parks &c. Committee Papers Oct–Dec 1889), LCC Parks, Commons & Open Spaces Acts Special Report Myatt's Fields, Camberwell, 14 Nov 14 1889.

⁶⁵ *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener*, 7 May 1891, p. 365, 9 Jun 1892, p. 435, and 7 Dec 1893, p. 511.

⁶⁶ LMA, LCC/MIN/08702 (LCC Agenda Papers/ Parks Committee), Agenda for Parks and Open Spaces Committee, SW District, 17 Feb 1893, p. 2.

⁶⁷ LMA, LCC/MIN/08707 (Agenda Papers/Parks Committee), 13 Feb 1903, p. 6.

⁶⁸ LMA, LCC/CL/PK/01/104 (Parks Committee), Memorandum from LCC Architect's Dept to the Parks Committee, pp. 11, 15, 14.

⁶⁹ GL, Ms 11097/7, *MPGA Minutes*, 3 July 1888, p. 91.

⁷⁰ LMA, LCC/CL/PK/01/104 (Parks Committee; Parks (General)), LCC Report on Supply of Water to Parks under Control of the Council, 9 October 1891, p. 5.

⁷¹ LMA, LCC/MIN/08705 (LCC Agenda Papers; Parks Committee), 9 Nov 1900, p. 7.

⁷² LMA, LCC/MIN/08702 (LCC Agenda Papers; Parks Committee), 21 July 1893, p. 2.

⁷³ LMA, LCC MIN/08800 (Parks &c. Committee Papers Oct–Dec 1889), Letter from MDF&CTA to LCC, 10 September 1889 (two designs in grey granite enclosed), and 19 Oct 1889.

⁷⁴ *South London Press*, 18 Oct 1890, p. 113.

⁷⁵ 'The London County Council and the Recreation of the People', *The Leisure Hour*, London, 1895, p. 113.

⁷⁶ *South London Press*, 2 November 1901, p. 6.

⁷⁷ GL, Ms 11097/12, *MPGA Minutes*, 4 March 1891, p. 33; LMA, LCC/MIN/08702 (LCC Agenda Papers; Parks Committee), 23 June 1893, p. 2.

⁷⁸ 'Popularity of the Parks', *The Garden*, 10 June 1893, p. 494.

⁷⁹ J. J. Sexby, *The Municipal Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces of London*, London, 1898, pp. 172–3.

⁸⁰ Alicia Amherst, *London Parks and Gardens*, London, 1907, pp. 166–8.

⁸¹ Amherst, *London Parks and Gardens*, 1907, p. 168.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 126–7.