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The Genesis of the Proximate Principle in the Development of Urban Parks in England

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ABSTRACT • There is a willingness by many people to pay more for property located close to parks and open space than for property that does not offer this amenity. This process of 'capitalisation' of park land into increased property values is termed the 'proximate principle'. The paper traces the central role of the proximate principle in persuading local governments to invest resources into England's early urban parks. The first purpose-built urban parks in England were conceived as private enclaves for the wealthy. Their primary purpose was to create premium values for properties around them and, hence, enhance the profitability of residential dwellings to the developer. The earliest forms of these private enclaves were 'squares'. The evolution of the principle to larger park areas occurred in 1811 with John Nash and the commitment to develop Regent's Park in London and its adjacent Nash terraces that were targeted at the wealthy. In 1841, Richard Yates developed Prince's Park in Liverpool, using the proximate principle which had resulted in the highly profitable real estate development at Regent's Park. He hired Joseph Paxton to design it. Its success resulted in a decision by the commissioners of the nearby new city of Birkenhead to hire Paxton and incorporate the financing principle in the construction of Birkenhead Park, which was the world's first municipal park to be funded with local taxpayers' resources. Birkenhead Park was the landmark project at which the proximate principle was transitioned from the private to the public sector.

Prologue

The importance of the economic justification in encouraging government investment in the early urban parks movement in the UK and subsequently elsewhere in the world, has not been widely recognised. The goal of this paper is to offer an explication of its role. The purpose, however, is not merely to chronicle historical events, but rather to use historical precedent to inform contemporary actions. The paper demonstrates that the proximate

principle was a central feature of justifications for many urban parks in their formative years. However, in contemporary times, it has rarely been part of the political debate. Advocates of parks and open spaces have either been unaware of this history, or have failed to recognise its extraordinary potential power in the political arena.

There is a willingness by many people to pay more for property located close to parks and open space than for a home that does not offer this amenity. This process of ‘capitalisation’ of parkland into increased property values is termed the ‘proximate principle’ (Crompton, 2004). It has two financial implications which were central to the justification for public investment in early urban parks. First, the premiums on house sites attributable to parks were often sufficient to pay for the cost of acquisition and development of the parks. Second, those premiums resulted in higher property taxes (rates) which provided an ongoing source of revenue for maintenance of the parks. In the contemporary era, the proximate principle is perhaps most obviously manifested in the private sector context of golf courses which are often incorporated as central features of real estate developments.

It is recognised that forces other than economics contributed to the emergence of urban parks as a public amenity. Indeed, it has been suggested that the launching of urban parks was underpinned by four social ideals: democratic equality, social coherence, economic value, and public health (Young, 2004: 3). There was a conviction that *democratic equality* would be fostered by providing opportunities to engage in ‘healthful’ recreations such as strolling, picnicking and croquet playing. Since these activities were enjoyed by all classes, the various groups would come to appreciate each other’s recreations, take part in them, become better acquainted by mingling with each other and grow socially homogeneous and thus parks would promote greater democratic equality (Young, 2004: 4). This exemplified a belief that class barriers could be eradicated through the creation of a ‘common weal’ — places designed to foster public interaction and well-being, and that ‘beautiful places would produce a harmonious social order’ (Cocks, 2001: 35).

Social coherence referred to ‘morality’ and sprang from concern with rising levels of crime and the potential of parks for ‘civilizing’ the working class:

A man out with his family among his neighbours of different rank, will naturally be desirous to be properly clothed, and that his wife and children should be so also . . . few persons can fail to have remarked the difference usually observant in the general character and conduct of those among the Working Classes who are careful of personal neatness, as contrasted with the habits of

others who are negligent or indifferent on this point. (Select Committee on Public Walks, 1833: 9)

Thus, it was argued that parks augmented social cohesion by strengthening ‘the local pride and affection of the inhabitants’ (Young, 2004: 8).

Whereas the first two social ideals addressed behavioural concerns, the second two related to the material well-being of society. The *economic value* of urban parks had three facets. First was the notion that working people needed places to recuperate and regenerate from the exhausting factory work which occupied most of their lives. Parks were seen as potential rejuvenators of enervated workers. A ‘recharging of their batteries’ would enable them to be more productive in the work milieu. A second economic facet was that major parks attracted tourists who spent money in the local economy from which many local residents benefited. The third economic facet — and the focus of this paper — was that its advocates argued that parks raised the value of properties around them. Thus, landowners and developers, who tended to have strong political connections, sought public investment in parks because they recognised that it would increase the value of their private properties. Park advocates without such a vested interest reinforced the case by pointing out that property taxes collected from these incremental increases in private property values, were often sufficient to pay annual debt charges associated with creating a park and for its annual maintenance.

The fourth social ideal providing impetus for parks was *public health*. Parks were thought to provide fresh air which counteracted ‘miasmas’. The theory of miasma, or the pythogenic theory, evolved in the late eighteenth century. It held that all disease was due to bad air (Patmore, 1983). The putrefaction, waste material, sewage and filth which characterised conditions in the new rapidly growing industrial cities of the nineteenth century were believed to create diseases, which were then transmitted by noxious, invisible gasses called ‘miasmas’. Hence, there was a belief that access to fresh air could reduce the incidence of disease:

The belief gave rise to the maxim, ‘Cleanliness is next to godliness’. Parks were open, green and clean spaces where spontaneous generation of disease did not occur because purifying vegetation and the site’s openness broke up miasmas. Like lungs, a park brought in fresh, healthful air and expelled tainted, dangerous gases. (Young, 2004: 32)

In 1808, Lord Chatham (the former prime minister, William Pitt) had railed against a proposal to convert part of Hyde Park in London to other uses by

saying ‘the parks were the lungs of London’ (Dobkin, 1979). Long after the myth of miasmas had been exposed as the nature of germs and disease transmission was better understood, the cliché that parks were ‘the lungs of a city’ remained. The case for parks as an antidote for miasmas was made by reputable medical authorities. For example, John H. Rauch, M.D. in his *Report on Public Parks*, which was prepared at the behest of the Chicago Academy of Sciences, noted ‘a series of facts . . . clearly proving that the infection and diffusion of malaria or noxious emanations are arrested by trees, whose structure and canopy of foliage act in a threefold capacity — first as a barrier to break the flow, second as an absorbent of those emanations, and third as eliminators of oxygen’ (Rauch, 1869: 38).

The public health social force contributed to the raised value of properties proximate to parks. In contemporary times, the proximate value derives from both convenient access to a park and the views of it enjoyed by adjacent owners, but in the formative years of urban park development some of the proximate added value likely emanated from the belief that a park could protect local residents from miasmas.

The English genesis

There was a long tradition of English gentry investing in private parks, often deer parks, at their country estates. Indeed, in 1783 when ‘Capability’ Brown died, it is reported that there were more than 4000 such parks (Jones & Wills, 2005). This prelude to public urban parks in the UK was complemented by an early movement among municipalities to establish ‘garden cemeteries’, which preceded public commitment to parks, and these served also as recreational spaces that appealed to the public for their peaceful qualities: ‘Winding walks, tree clumps, and rolling lawns lent burial places a picturesque quality not dissimilar to the English landscape park’ (Jones & Wills, 2005: 43).

Before the advocacy movement for municipal parks began to emerge in England in the late 1820s and 30s, private landscaped urban parks were developed and owned by nobility or royalty. The public were permitted to walk in them only when the park owners’ sense of *noblesse oblige* invited them to do so. By the early nineteenth century such access had been granted by the Crown in some of its London parks, in response to pressures exercised by the city’s large rapidly growing population: ‘The public usage of a royal park was at first a rather limited, privileged activity, confined by dictate of royalty to a select class of socially acceptable people who held keys to the locked park gates’ (Henneberger, 2002: 15). Thus, by the 1820s and 30s the ‘public’ were permitted to walk in Richmond Great Park, St James Park,

Green Park, Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens (Olmsted & Kimball, 1970), and 'to have a residence overlooking one of these parks became the preferred way to live' (Henneberger, 2002: 15). However, the term 'public' was used selectively since, as late as 1868, entry fees and selective opening hours were used to filter out the lower echelons of society (Lasdun, 1992).

Aside from the royal parks and large estates of the nobility, the principle of private parks had emerged in London in the form of private squares. One of the features of prestigious neighbourhoods in London in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a park or plaza surrounded on all four sides by elite residences. These areas became known as 'squares'. These central park squares were intended to be amenities that increased the value of property surrounding them in speculative construction projects which provided housing for the growing upper-class population of London (Lawrence, 1993). The squares had both economic and social roles and, thus, were precursors of urban public parks: 'They were seen as economic assets to the ground landlords who owned them, by raising the value of surrounding property, and as social assets by the leasehold tenants who had sole access to them' (Lawrence, 1993: 99).

The squares model subsequently was disseminated to the new industrial cities as they emerged in the nineteenth century. For example, the park and gardens which constituted the focus of Abercrombie Square in Liverpool were effective in encouraging the city's rich merchants to locate there. In 1824, the owner of every house in the square and the owners of 30 other houses in the neighbourhood were entitled to a key to the gates of the garden, and 'have liberty for themselves and the family occupying such house to walk in the garden upon payment of one guinea annually' (Allan, 1986: 27). Thus, later in the century The *Liverpool Citizen* commented that 'Liverpool's proudest square' had 'long been a noted residential place for great local swells' (Allan, 1986: 22).

There were a few examples of more extensive private enclaves developed around a park focus in London. An outstanding example was the 112-acre Bedford estate in Bloomsbury (Ashworth, 1954). This was begun in 1774 and construction continued intermittently for more than half a century. At the outset, 20 acres (5 ha) were laid out as gardens for the use of lessees. Tight planning controls were imposed on lessees to ensure the elegance of the area was retained and the entrances to the estate were closed by gates so persons with no business in Bloomsbury were not admitted.

Sydney Gardens in Bath offered a rare example of this model being followed outside London. The 16 acres (4 ha) were laid out in 1795 in the naturalistic picturesque landscape mode. They embraced Humphry Repton's

design principles that were subsequently featured by Nash and Paxton in their pioneering urban parks. The intent was that they would be surrounded with residential terraces and the garden views were clearly meant to make the terraces desirable. Owing to a building slump in the 1790s, few of the terrace dwellings were built, 'But this combination of pleasure gardens and terraces anticipated the residential parks of the early nineteenth century. Here the landscaped park and leisure grounds which had originated as a country home amenity were attached to a group of town houses' (Girouard, 1990: 270).

John Nash and Regent's Park

The natural evolution from the square and gardens in small private estates was to develop larger park areas using the same principles of having the surrounding property generate the revenue to pay for them. This emerged in the early nineteenth century when Regent's Park in London was transformed from a royal park into a real estate development targeted at the wealthy. The land had originally been claimed by the Crown in the sixteenth century as a hunting preserve, but by the early nineteenth century the forests had been cleared and it was leased as agricultural grazing land.

The park venture was initiated in 1811 by advisors to the Prince Regent, after whom the park was named (Chadwick, 1966). The British Parliament had bestowed the regent title ('regent' means acting on behalf of the sovereign) on the prince and given him increasing powers, since George III had become mentally incapacitated. Thus, by 1811, the Prince Regent was king in all but name. At this time the population of London was growing rapidly and had expanded out to Marylebone, the population of which had increased from 63 000 in 1801 to 158 000 in 1851. The Prince's advisors realised that considerably more income could be generated if this land were developed for housing than if it remained grazing land.

Design proposals were solicited from several prominent architects and that of John Nash was preferred. At that time, Nash held the title Architect of the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, was 59 years of age and had had a colourful career. He had learned his trade as an architect by being indentured for seven years in the office of Sir Robert Taylor, who was the most consequential architect of the late eighteenth century in London (Summerton, 1980). However, Nash was somewhat of a 'playboy' in his early years and was officially declared bankrupt in 1783.

Nash possessed unusual resilience. He resurrected his architectural career by moving to his family's ancestral roots in Wales, built his reputation there, and with some successes behind him moved back to London in 1796. Here

he teamed with Humphry Repton, who was the most respected horticulturist/gardener in the country. Repton continued and further developed the Picturesque school of landscaping developed by Capability Brown, which focused on making 'natural,' man-made improvements to the landscape. Repton was 'the great "improver" of his day, the new "Capability" Brown' (Summerton, 1980: 34), and was the first person to describe what he did as 'landscape gardening'. In his 1806 book, *An Inquiry Into The Changes of Taste in Landscape Gardening*, Repton laid out his principles for improving the natural landscape of a park. One of them, which Nash and subsequent urban park advocates embraced, was 'appropriation', which was defined as 'that command over the landscape visible from the windows, which denotes it to be private property belonging to the place' (George, 2000: 6).

The talents of architect, Nash, and landscape architect, Repton, were complementary and they formed a partnership from 1796 to 1803. During this period they worked together on many country estates and, through these projects, Nash learned much from Repton about landscaping. Although Nash had built over 40 country homes before starting Regent's Park and had been involved with Repton in designing their landscaping (Davis, 1973), Regent's Park was an entirely different kind of project.

The Prince had a passionate personal interest in architecture and planning, and his brief to Nash was that the 464 acre site should be transformed into a residential development which would be the finest in London. When the Prince was shown Nash's proposed plan he was 'enchanted' (Summerton, 1980: 71). There emerged an unusually positive chemistry between the two men so, by 1812, Nash had become a confidant of the prince. He was 'not merely a favoured architect but a servant of the Prince who could be relied upon to act in any sphere where the latter's interests might benefit through his agency' (Summerton, 1980: 90). The closeness of their relationship was critical in safeguarding Nash's plans from the persistent criticism levelled at them over the 15-year period during which the project came to fruition.

Nash's original plan for the site drew attention to 'the fact that wealthy landowners infinitely prefer living near an open space . . . a park where there were opportunities for riding, driving and walking was an irresistible magnet' (Saunders, 1969: 87). Consequently, Nash established as the central principle of his plan 'that the attraction of open Space, free air and scenery of Nature, with the means and invitation of exercise on horseback, on foot and in Carriages, shall be preserved in Marylebone Park, as allurements or motives for the wealthy part of the public to establish themselves' (Saunders, 1969: 83). Thus, Regent's Park was revolutionary because it brought 'picturesque country scenery in the Capability Brown/Repton tradition, to the

urban context to be enjoyed by detached villas in the centre and by great terraces of houses round the periphery' (Davis, 1973: 64).

Regent's Park was intended to be an exclusive self-contained residential area, with no means of entrance from the poorer estates around it. To ensure exclusiveness, there were only three entrances into the area, all located in wealthy enclaves and each guarded by a lodge. There were no entrances where the development bordered on poorer neighbourhoods. It was a radical departure from the gridiron housing estates surrounding it which followed the standard development pattern of the day. Nash's plan is shown in Figure 1. He employed Repton's principle of 'appropriation' in developing the park by designing classical residential terraces on its periphery which encircled and framed it, and which had magnificent views across the park. 'His scheme was for two eccentric circles of terraced houses with their backs turned on the outside world, while their palatial facades looked out onto the romantic and picturesque landscapes of the park they surrounded' (Lasdun, 1992: 130). His original design was modified to that shown in Figure 1, but the intent remained that it should be designed as a 'garden suburb for the aristocracy'. Thus, eight villas were placed within the park as miniature country houses while others were clustered into two picturesque groupings adjacent to the park.

By the time the project was completed it was widely recognised as the most beautiful estate in London (Saunders, 1969). However, 'the profitability of the development was as important as beauty, health and convenience' (Conway, 1991: 12). Although the King was enamoured with the design concept, his advisors were probably supportive primarily because Nash's estimate of the net income from the project was more than double that of any competing proposal. Nash projected the park would cost £12 115 and that annual income accruing from 2500 ground rents received from the terraces would be £45 269. This excluded costs associated with the canal which was funded independently by the sale of shares to investors. Ground rents were the preferred income stream for landowners. Landowners did not like to incur the financial risk involved in building dwellings, so they tended to lease the ground to builders and let them carry the risk. Further, by leasing rather than selling the land, landowners were able to preserve their estates for the future benefit of their descendants. To guarantee the builder and dwelling owner security on their investment, leases were usually for a 75- or 99-year period.

The cost projection of £12 115 proved to be a substantial underestimate and subsequently rose to over £53 000 (Summerton, 1980). At the same time, by 1826 when the park was completed, the income was far below

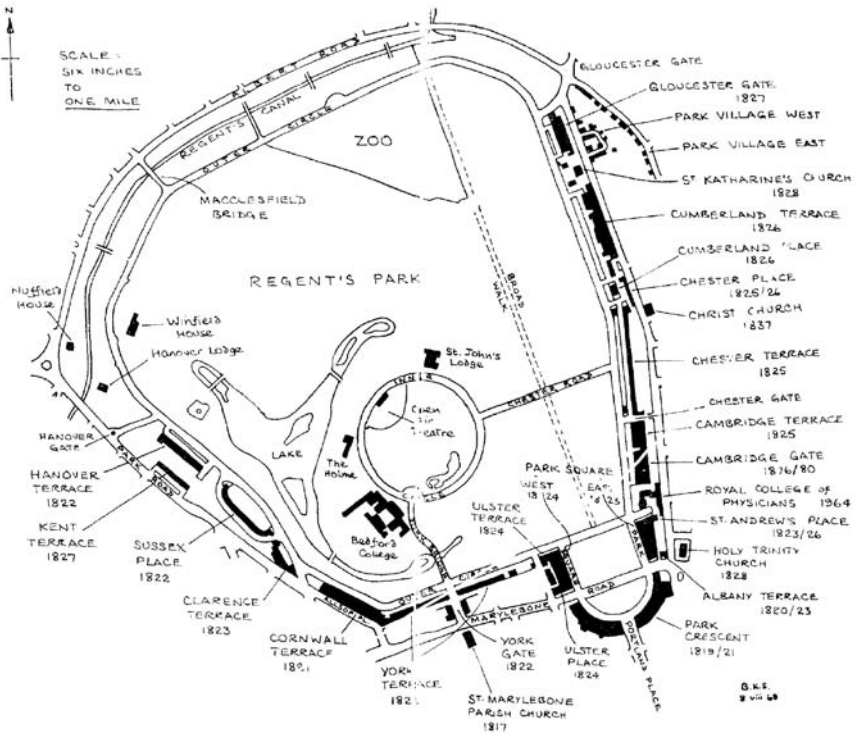


Figure 1. Regent's Park plan (Each Terrace is marked with its Date of Building; the Villas are also shown) Source: Saunders (1969)

Nash's estimate. In response to pressure from his critics Nash urged they 'restrain the anxiety for *immediate* revenue, to give opportunity of selecting a higher class of tenants, remembering, that as the Park increases in beauty it will increase in value, and that the first occupiers will stamp the character of the neighbourhood' (Summerton, 1980: 116).

Nash's chief assistant during the Regent's Park project was James Pennethorne who was responsible for designing several of the buildings. Pennethorne became a renowned architect in his own right; inherited Nash's practice when he retired, became the salaried architect to Queen Victoria, and was subsequently knighted (Davis, 1973). In the context of this paper, he was a key link in the next stage of urban park development which occurred on Merseyside.

Regent's Park was completed in 1826. People who had houses around or adjoining the park were provided with keys for a fee of two pounds per year (Lasdun, 1992). It was not initially conceived as a public park. In reference to Regent's Park, the 1833 Select Committee on Public Walks commented:

It must be acknowledged that this Park is a most inestimable advantage to all those who reside near it. Your Committee, however, venture to express their hope that . . . [nothing] will prevent a larger portion of this Park being soon thrown open to the Public under proper regulations. (Select Committee on Public Walks, 1833: 6).

As with earlier parks owned and developed by the Crown, London's population explosion created pressures which led to the Select Committee's wish being realised as Regent's Park was opened to the public in incremental stages commencing in 1835. By 1841 there was substantial access to selective sections of the public. The project took 15 years to complete, and despite the early setbacks of higher costs and lower incomes than projected, over the next decade it proved to be a highly profitable real estate venture, with the value of the housing and ground rents being derived in large part from the amenity value of the park (Chadwick, 1966).

The Select Committee on Public Walks

During the 1830s, the British government was increasingly concerned about medical and social problems in the densely populated industrial cities. In 1833, a Parliamentary Select Committee on Public Walks was appointed 'to consider the best means of securing Open Spaces in the Vicinity of populous Towns, as PUBLIC WALKS and PLACES of EXERCISE calculated to promote the Health and Comfort of the Inhabitants' (Select Committee on Public Walks, 1833: 3). Before the industrial revolution, towns had been small enough that most residents had easy access to open country and most small towns had areas of common land which served as open space. The industrial revolution led to the rapid growth of large cities, the removal of common land, and no access to open space for large numbers of people. Thus, the Committee reported: 'many open spaces have been inclosed, and every day the increasing multitude become more and more restricted in their means of reaching any open and healthy place to walk in' (p. 5). The Select Committee report stressed the health and moral benefits that would accrue from creating public walks and parks, and urged cities to develop them. The prevailing sentiment was that providing walks and parks was primarily the responsibility of the private sector. The Select Committee for the first time raised the

possibility of committing public resources to this cause. Their approach was tentative, perhaps even apprehensive, befitting such a relatively radical idea:

A certain Fund (however obtained) in many cases may be necessary, and it must arise either from Public Grant [i.e., central government], or from Voluntary Subscription, or by a low Rate [i.e., local government]: in some cases these may all be combined. When no Subscription or Donation can be raised, it seems the duty of the Government to assist in providing for the Health of the People by whose efforts they are supported. (P. 10).

Some urban parks did emerge which were paid for by the voluntary contributions of benefactors, most notably Victoria Park in Bath and the Derby Arboretum. This was consistent with the prevailing political philosophy of the dominant Liberal Party in this era, which was that 'expenditure by public authorities must always be kept to a minimum so that as large a proportion of income as possible should be left in the hands of those to whom it originally accrued and who knew best how to use it' (Ashworth, 1954: 65). In this political climate advocates of public improvements such as parks were acutely conscious of the need to demonstrate that their projects were financially viable.

The Select Committee's aspiration was a 'hope that Public Walks may be gradually established in the neighbourhood of every populous Town in the Kingdom' (p. 11). Testimony before the committee showed widespread support for the concept of public open space as a means of alleviating health problems, attracting men away from bars and other iniquitous temptations, raising standards of civic behaviour, and reducing crime. All witnesses appeared to see the need, but most were looking for others to provide the money! Repeatedly, the committee asked its witnesses: 'Do you think that the inhabitants of the town of [say] Leeds would be willing to agree a small rate for the purpose of carrying into effect any such improvement of the town?' (p. 50). Occasionally the response was: 'I think they would' (e.g., in Bury, Lancashire), but the dominant response they heard was: 'I fear not' (e.g., in Leeds).

Thus, the response from cities to the Select Committee's exhortations was underwhelming and consistent with that which often confronts contemporary park advocates. Indeed, during the decade after the committee's report was published, no city attempted to develop public parks with public funds (Thornton, 1984). Liverpool City Council's comment in response to the Select Committee's report was typical: 'The council is well disposed to provide a public park and the subject has been discussed, but the value of the

land is so great in the vicinity of Liverpool and the council have had so many demands upon it that they do not consider justified in incurring such an expense' (Thornton, 1984: 3). This response came from a city which the Select Committee wryly observed was 'one of the richest corporations in the Kingdom' (p. 42).

Given this mindset, a model had to be introduced which demonstrated that allocating funds for a park would 'not incur an expense' but, rather, would yield a return on the investment. The Select Committee were cognisant of the proximate principle even though it was in its early gestation stage. For example, they asked one witness in Sheffield:

Are there any proprietors of large tracts of property in the immediate vicinity of Sheffield who would be likely, either for the sake of benefit to the town or for the sake of increasing the value of the circumjacent property, to dedicate a portion of land? (P. 68)

Regent's Park provided the model because it had demonstrated that 'there was advantage to be gained by the creation of parks and gardens in connection with land speculations' (Olmsted & Kimball, 1970: 6). Indeed, in 1841 Parliament offered to loan up to £10 000 for the development of an urban park to local communities provided they matched it with a similar amount. The loan was to be repaid from the sale of adjacent lots. Thus: 'It became government policy to require the local municipal body to purchase the residential strip [adjacent to the park] to be let out as building plots. The income from the plots, and the increased value of the property adjacent to the public park would pay the cost of the park' (Henneberger, 2002: 17). This policy was embraced in the early 1840s when the government used Crown resources to acquire 244 acres to establish the new Victoria Park in London. Thirty-two acres on the perimeter was appropriated for new villas, the leases for which were sold to defray the cost of developing the land into a park. Victoria Park was opened in 1846 (Lasdun, 1992).

Prince's Park and Joseph Paxton

One of those testifying to the Select Committee was John Ashton Yates, who was the son of a distinguished Liverpool Unitarian Minister and a member of a civically prominent and wealthy Liverpool family. His family had permitted the public to have access to their land for over 20 years:

The public came out to the walks which my brother and I have on our own lands, which is two miles and a half from the centre of the town, and a mile from

the outskirts, and they came out in large numbers in those days when we opened our walks to the public'. (Select Committee on Public Walks, 1833: 42)

This experience caused him to become an advocate for open space and his frustration with the Liverpool City Council's lack of responsiveness was evident in his testimony:

In my opinion public walks or open spaces for exercising are much wanting: many of the gentlemen of Liverpool a few years ago sent a memorial to the Common-council of the Corporation to represent the extreme importance of having such accommodation, and in this memorial they stated the evils which they conceived existed owing to the want of some place of resort for the common people, and pointed out what they conceived would be a remedy which the corporation might apply without injuring their corporate estate. This memorial was signed by many hundreds of the most respectable inhabitants, and by many physicians and clergy, but the only answer which they got to the memorial was that the corporation did not think they had it in their power to do anything, meaning, I believe, that their trust did not allow them to apply it in that manner. (Select Committee on Public Walks, 1833: 42).

The Yates' family's advocacy for open space appears to have led them to a decision to emulate the principles of Regent's Park in Liverpool. The project was headed by John Ashton Yates's brother, Richard Vaughn Yates, who was a deeply religious man, a prominent industrialist engaged in the iron trade, a magistrate, a property developer and a philanthropist. He purchased 97 acres of land for £50 325, for a speculative development located about a mile and a half from Liverpool city centre, close to his home at Dingle. He set aside 40 acres for a park — to be known as Prince's Park in honour of the birth of the Prince of Wales in 1841 — and planned to develop the remainder as exclusive housing in the form of terraces and substantial single villas, following the Regent's Park principle (Saunders, 1969). Given the intransigence of the city council, parts of the park were designed to be private space. However, Yates's vision was a park in which the general public would have access to the broad central areas as had occurred by this time in Regent's Park. Nevertheless, parts of it, especially the more ornamental gardens around the lake, would be closed to all but the privileged key-holders who would inhabit the new houses built on the periphery (Colquhoun, 2003).

The naming of the park after the Prince of Wales suggests that Yates had aspirations that some of the status connotations of London's royal parks might be conferred upon his Liverpool venture. Indeed, in the prospectus

document forming a trust company on the principle of a tontine, Yates concedes that Regent's Park is bigger, but argues that Prince's Park is superior in every other way!

The Park has been laid out with great taste by gentlemen of the highest eminence in their profession, and, though much inferior in point of size to the Regent's Park in London, possesses greater variety of surface, and commands, from the elevated portions of it, views of the River Mersey, of the Welsh Mountains, and of the Scenes of the Cheshire and Lancashire Coasts, with which no view in the Regent's Park can be compared. (Tatterdill, 1961, n.p.)

Developers of contemporary residential communities, which are built around golf courses for the most part, have no interest in operating a golf course because they are often not financially viable operations and are a distraction to the core business of building homes. Hence, contemporary developers frequently seek to transfer title of the course either to golfers to operate as a non-profit organisation or to a specialist golf company. Yates appears to have had similar thoughts for the proposed public area of Prince's Park, inviting the Liverpool City Council to purchase and operate it. When the city council refused, Yates established a trust in 1843 which was to be responsible for maintaining the park for the following 75 years. The trust was funded by an annual ground rent 'not less than a halfpenny, and not exceeding three pence per square yard' levied on residents of the adjacent houses, which generated a total of £1150 per year (Allan, 1988: 17). In 1884, at the instigation of Yates's widow, the city finally agreed to pay to the trust a bargain sale price of £11 000 for the park, but it was contingent on the city not taking possession of it until the trust expired in 1918. If the city had not taken possession of it in 1918, then the property could have been sold and the proceeds distributed to Yates's heirs. Thus, the city and Liverpool public had continued use of the park in the interim period, but the trust paid for its upkeep. In the early years, the annual amount in the trust fund was sufficient to maintain the park at a high level, but as the century progressed it became inadequate and the city refused to supplement it. Thus, by the time the city took possession of the park in 1918, it was shabby and dilapidated.

There was a curious postscript to the establishment of Prince's Park. In 1856 Yates created a new legal trust in which he conveyed the whole of the central park area of the site for the specific purpose of building a college or university in Liverpool. The reason for the proposed change in mission is unknown, but it seems reasonable to postulate that, in part, it may reflect the council's unwillingness to take responsibility for the park. This trust deed

was never executed and it is not clear why. However, Yates died six months after preparing it and he left an estate burdened with liabilities of £51 200. His personal estate was valued at £28 360 and his real estate holding assets were valued at £79 000. The latter were sold over the next four years to pay the estate's debts (Allan, 1988).

Insights into Yates's plans for financing the park can be gleaned from articles which appeared in the local press (Hilary Taylor Landscape Associates Ltd, 2004). The *Liverpool Mercury* in 1843 reported that Yates was seeking to attract other investors into the project. The article noted that Yates was offering: 'An opportunity of aiding the founder of Prince's Park in the accomplishment of his design. We know not, indeed, that it holds out the inducement of an immense profit . . . but it seems to offer the more substantial, and to prudent men, the more tempting bait of a fair return' (*Liverpool Mercury*, 20 October 1843: 4).

It has been noted that, 'These were the years when the taking of a risk on the chance of making a bumper profit tempted many ambitious men to invest; dramatic gains and losses were the stuff of commercial life' (Hilary Taylor Landscape Associates Ltd, 2004: 4). The *Liverpool Mercury* article (20 October 1843: 4) revealed that Yates hoped to raise £50 000 (the amount he had paid for the 97 acres of land), 'To expend . . . in the purchase of land and the erection of houses in the park. The rents, after payment of the annual expenses, will be divided among the proprietors . . . There is every probability of the scheme proving completely successful'.

In 1843, it was announced in a newspaper advertisement that: 'Several of the principal Gentry of Liverpool have already purchased Villa lots, and many have expressed a wish to rent houses, whilst others are prepared to build in Terraces for their own habitation or as an investment' (Hilary Taylor Landscape Associates Ltd, 2004: 4).

Yates hired Joseph Paxton to design and construct Prince's Park, which was accomplished in 1842 and 1843. Securing his services for this venture was 'a marketing coup for Yates. For Paxton, it represented his first essay in municipal design, setting a pattern that would be developed and extended in all his future projects' (Colquhoun, 2003, p. 115). His influence on the development of the early urban parks in the UK was to be profound:

Paxton could almost be said to have had the monopoly of laying out urban and municipal parks. He was involved in designing and laying out parks at Birkenhead, Glasgow, Halifax, Dundee, Dunfermline, Liverpool and London and his influence extended through the people who trained with him and subsequently went on to design parks themselves. (Conway, 1991: 87)

Prominent among these protégés were Edward Kemp, Edward Milner and John Gibson.

Paxton was emerging as one of the great public figures of Victorian England: a man with no formal education after the age of 14 and no professional education of any kind, who by the 1840s was renowned as the finest horticulturalist in Europe. Wherever he travelled, Paxton was treated as a 'lion' (Colquhoun, 2003). He was a writer who, by this time, had launched a number of journals and written several books on botany subjects. He was a skilful engineer and an architect who, in 1851, designed and built the Crystal Palace, arguably the most innovative and striking building of the nineteenth century. He was also a leading advocate and major investor in development of the railways, a respected Member of Parliament from 1854 to 1865, and a member of a small elite intellectual social circle which included Stephenson, Brunel and Dickens (Colquhoun, 2003).

Paxton was a frequent visitor to Liverpool with connections to the city's botanic gardens and various railway companies. On one of these visits, he met Richard Yates and, after several subsequent meetings, Paxton accepted his first private landscaping commission at Prince's Park (Thornton, 1984). When he arrived at Prince's Park, Paxton had been in charge of the gardens at Chatsworth, one of Britain's finest stately homes, for over 15 years. His patron at Chatsworth, the Duke of Devonshire, was passionate about botany and used his extravagant wealth to indulge his passion, sending expeditions around the globe to bring back to Chatsworth the most exciting and interesting plants. In this environment, Paxton's talents and fame flourished, and Chatsworth's gardens were the most famous in the country.

There was a personnel linkage with Regent's Park in that James Pennethorne, who had been Nash's primary assistant at Regent's Park, assisted Paxton in the design of Prince's Park. His experience in establishing the intimate relationship between the parkland and surrounding dwellings at Regent's Park, presumably was valuable in designing Prince's Park.

Paxton's design for Prince's Park is shown in Figure 2. A broad curving perimeter drive, flanked by a separate narrower footpath, linked the four road entrances. The design separated the park into two principal areas. The major area, which was to be the public access area, was wide open, undulating grass parkland, planted with informal groups and single trees. This contrasted with the more private, intensive garden area which was to be for the exclusive use of residents and featured an irregular, sinuous lake designed to create the impression of a long winding river with its own island linked by a bridge. The site benefited from having a natural valley transversing it. The housing around the formal park faced into it and ornamental

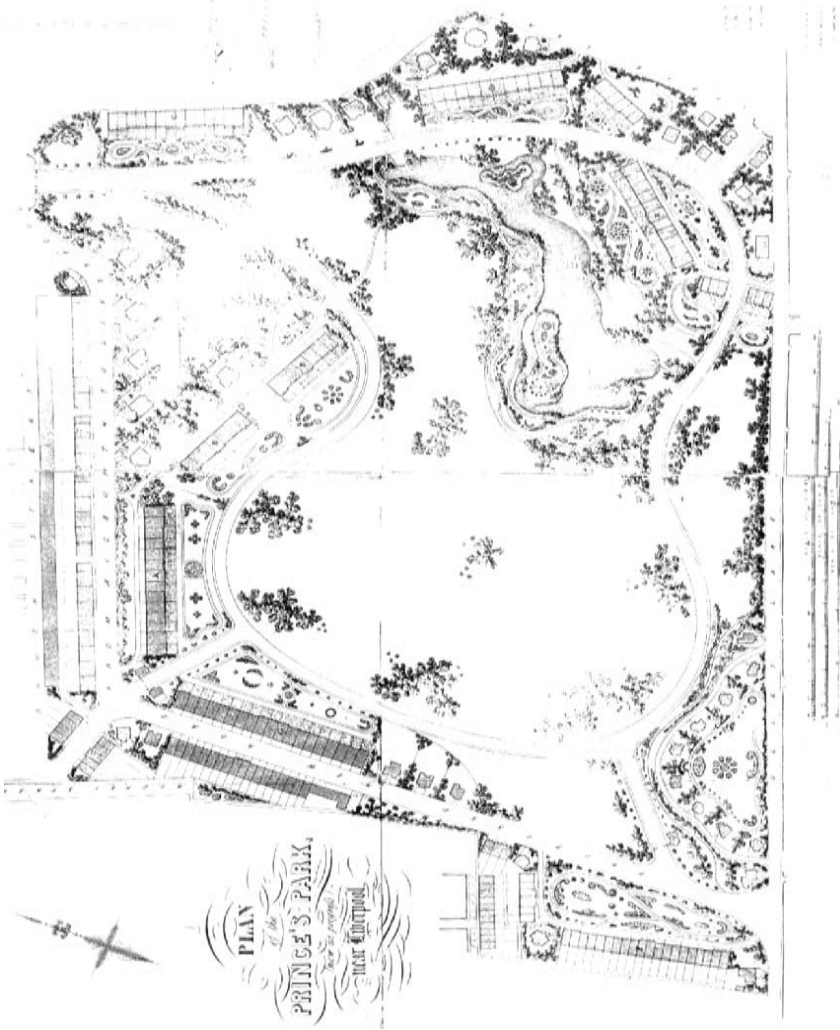


Figure 2. Paxton's Plan of Prince's Park, Liverpool
Source: Liverpool City Council

bedding fronted it linking the houses directly with the park (Chadwick, 1966), so the plan clearly embraced Repton's principle of appropriation. Like Nash's earlier design at Regent's Park, Paxton's design was inspired by features he was familiar with from his association with large country estates:

Lodge gates and lodge-keepers ensuring control of who came into the development; a carriage road accessible through the lodge gates, giving access to the houses and providing an agreeable drive through or round the park; and the park itself, embellished with winding walks, decorative planting and a lake. (Girouard, 1990: 270)

The land plots sold more slowly than Yates expected, and most of the terraces shown on the plan were never built. As a result, Yates 'incurred an outlay seriously affecting even his ample means' (*Liverpool Mercury*, 1856). Nevertheless, the project was an important advancement of the proximate principle because 'Prince's Park was a forerunner of later Victorian Parks, with its principle of exclusive housing built around the edges of the park on individual plots sold for profit? (Colquhoun, 2003). Indeed, when subsequently in the 1860s Liverpool city council developed Newsham, Stanley and Sefton parks at a total cost of £670 000 'much of this was recouped by the sale of building plots in the manner already shown profitable by private enterprise at Prince's Park' (Tatterdill, 1961, n.p.).

A key difference between Regent's Park and Prince's Park was that income from the former project accrued from ground rents while in the latter it came from the sale of lots. However, irrespective of the revenue source to this point in time, this principle of the enhanced property values paying for the acquisition and development costs of the park had been implemented only in the context of private land developments. The London squares and private estates, Regent's Park and Prince's Park used the park as an attraction to raise the price of surrounding residential property in the owner's development — in this sense, golf courses constructed as the central feature in real estate developments are their contemporary progeny.

Birkenhead Park

The next stage in the evolution of the development of urban parks was to transition the funding principles used in the private park development to the public domain, whereby public entities rather than private developers benefited from enhanced adjacent property values. This transition took place in Birkenhead. In terms of both design and financing, 'It is not an over-statement to say that Birkenhead Park established a pattern which was emulated

in many parts of the world. In this park was embodied a vision of the shape of the future' (Parklands Consortium Ltd, 2003: 2).

Birkenhead is located across the River Mersey from Liverpool. In 1821 its population was 200. The inauguration of a steam-powered ferry linking the two communities brought Birkenhead within 10 minutes of Liverpool and by 1831 its population had increased to 2500 (Mortimer, 1847). In 1833 an Act of Parliament established the Birkenhead Improvement Commission entrusting governance and expansion of the town to the mayor, two bailiffs and four aldermen of Liverpool, and 60 appointed commissioners who were inhabitants of Birkenhead. A second Act passed in 1838 reduced the number of commissioners to 24 and provided them with additional authority to borrow money and develop the community. In 1843, the third Birkenhead Improvement Act was passed by Parliament authorising the commissioners to, among other things, borrow money for the purpose of acquiring land for a park.

The commissioners used the borrowing authorisation to purchase a 226-acre site of unattractive, swampy low-lying land described by a contemporary writer as 'in some parts, a low swamp, exhaling the most pestilent vapour' (Mortimer 1847: 369). Because of its poor quality the land was purchased cheaply, for £69 960, which was approximately 1s 4d per square yard (Mortimer, 1847). Even this price was inflated because, by the time the land was purchased, immediately after the third Improvement Act was passed in 1843, key members of the Improvement Commission had used their inside information to quietly buy the land from the original owner and secure a personal profit for themselves when they resold it to the commission (Conway, 1991). Thus, the town 'benefited from that peculiarly Victorian blend of enterprise and liberalism which was the acceptable face of the industrial revolution' (Smith, 1983: 48).

Of the 226 acres, the commissioners appropriated 126 acres for use in perpetuity as a public park,¹ while the remaining 100 acres was to be sold for villas and terraces to the new captains of industry from Liverpool, following the precedents of Regent's Park and nearby Prince's Park. The commissioners were familiar with Paxton's work at Prince's Park and hired him to design and construct the new park. The site was flat and uninteresting, lacking the natural topographical features that were present at Prince's Park. Paxton proclaimed it to be 'not a very good situation for a park as the land is generally poor' (Chadwick, 1961: 51). Nevertheless, he accepted the commission.

Paxton started work in 1842 with approximately 1000 labourers employed to construct the park. It was completed in 1846, and the official opening was in April 1847. In May 1845, a writer from *Chambers Edinburgh*

Journal reporting on the creation of Birkenhead Park, which he termed ‘one of the greatest wonders of the age’, lauded the pioneering role of the park:

We feel the greatest pleasure in stating that, following the improved sanitary views of the last few years, they have made it one of their first cares to establish a ‘park’ — meaning thereby an open piece of ornamented ground — for the future inhabitants of their city. We found it in the course of being formed under the direction of the well-known Mr. Paxton of Chatsworth; and, to judge from what we saw of it in rather unfavourable circumstances, it promises to be a fine place. Already the required undulations of the ground have been effected; vast quantities of trees and flowers have been planted; two sheets of water are formed; several lodges are built; and though the act for purchasing the ground dates only from September last, we may be said to have the first sketch of a park presented to our eyes. The whole is expected to be complete and at the service of the public next September. We were delighted with what we saw here; but the satisfaction of the eye is nothing in such a case; the point really to be rejoiced in is that the ideas of men are now so far advanced, with respect to the essentials of public health and conveniency, that, in preparing a new city, a park for the use of the inhabitants should have been among the first things legislated for. (Mortimer, 1847: 336)

The park’s design exhibited many similarities to Regent’s and Prince’s parks. Lakes provided the focal point of interest and there were featured islands in the lakes and small hills which were derived from the lakes’ excavations, winding paths, picturesque meadows, open glades, and wooded areas designed for strolling and quiet reflection, with residential properties on terraces surrounding the park. A serpentine drive of nearly three miles in length was provided ‘for the use of equestrians, and for carriage exercise’ (Mortimer, 1847: 368).

Careful planning requirements were imposed on the house owners to ensure they would meet a high standard. The gardens of houses surrounding the park were required under the conditions of sale to be well-laid out and carefully managed, and there was to be an exchange of views between houses and park: ‘The houses were, then, not only to enjoy the views of the park, they were also to be part of the scenery or view to park visitors. They were designed to offer incident and participate in the kaleidoscope of colour and detail’ (Parklands Consortium Ltd, 2003: 11).

However, a major difference from the Regent’s and Prince’s parks was that access to the houses was from public roads outside the park, rather than from the carriage road inside the park as in Regent’s and Prince’s parks. He ‘was

determined that the park should not be, nor appear to be, the property of the houses which surrounded it' (Tate, 2001: 78). It was a public park and that required that it be designed to encourage all to have access. Birkenhead Park was 'an "aristocratic" park created for the proletariat' (Lasdun, 1992: 170). Writing in 1847, Mortimer described the park as follows:

Birkenhead Park is not, like many, a vast tract in the hands of some lordly owner, who too generally pursues a system of exclusion by which the public are debarred the opportunity of beholding its beauties; on the contrary, it contains extensive drives, beautiful walks, and elegant gardens, is adorned with groves, fountains, ornamental waters, and numerous sources of pleasure, all of which, by the projectors of this splendid and popular undertaking, are freely and gratuitously appropriated in perpetuity to the community, and that, too, at a period when an increasing desire prevails on the part of the aristocracy for the inclosure of lands, and the formation of private parks. It would be difficult to overrate the value of so great a boon to the public. (Mortimer, 1847: 367)

Figure 3 illustrates that Birkenhead Park was designed so that the public funds would be recovered by the sale of adjacent residential buildings lots: 'Birkenhead Park was a self-financing venture employing the simple device of surrounding the park with plots for single houses and terraces, and selling them at an enhanced value because of their relationship with the park. The profit from this paid for the park' (Smith, 1983: 50). The fashionable villas around the park commanded 'as fine a view as though each were set in its own park' (Taigel & Williamson, 1993: 123).

In his meticulous history of Birkenhead, Mortimer (1847) reported that the expenditures for acquiring the 226 acres, including interest for the first several years (the projected timeframe for sale of all the adjacent housing lots) was £94 296 (comprised of £69 960 for cost of the land, £540 legal expenses, and £23 796 interest for seven years). With reference to the cost of developing the park, Mortimer (1847: 425) reports: 'The expenditure in forming the park, exclusive of the purchase of the land has been £76 659 4s'. Thus, the total cost of the park was £146 619.

In the period 1844 to early 1846, Birkenhead was a boom town fuelled by the construction of Birkenhead Docks; completion of the Chester to Birkenhead railway line; and the exponential growth of shipping and associated industry in Liverpool, which resulted in 5000–10 000 people pouring annually into the Liverpool area. The boom was reflected in the success during this period of the sale of the lots around the park for fashionable

homes. Mortimer (1847: 370) reports: 'In June, 1845, a large portion of land surrounding the drives, was offered for sale by the Commissioners, and about ninety thousand yards were sold, at prices varying from seven to fifteen shillings per yard'. In a footnote to this statement, Mortimer declares, 'The actual average of the total sale was 11s 4d per yard.'²

The boom-town conditions during the period when the park was constructed ended abruptly with a classic 'bust'. Mortimer (1847: 436) concluded, 'the expansion has been too sudden'. In late 1846 and 1847, widespread strikes by the town's labour force interrupted the economic engine; the unbridled optimism of the boom years resulted in a large surplus of housing so that, by 1847, one-third of the town's dwellings were uninhabited; projects were abandoned; the Irish famine brought 2000 destitute people to Birkenhead; and quarrelling among the town's leaders led to many of them retiring from civic life.

These conditions had an obvious negative impact on the sales potential of the remaining lots around the park. The demand for high-end houses dissipated resulting in a substantial drop in the selling price of the lots. Figure 4 shows the price that was being asked for lots that were still on offer in 1850. The locations of the lots listed in Table 1 are shown on Figure 3. The total number of lots on Figure 3 was 43 and the total square yards available for building was 341 338. The 20 unsold lots listed in Table 1 accounted for 229 355 square yards.

Table 1 indicates that the income forthcoming from the lots available in 1850 if they were all sold at the prices being asked would have been £92 415 at an average price of a little over 8 shillings a square yard. The aggregate square yardage of the 23 lots which apparently had been sold by 1850 was 111 983 (341 338–229 355). If the average price reported by Mortimer (1847) of 11s 4d per square yard is applied to it, then it would have generated £63 457. Based on these calculations, the projected income would have totalled £155 872, which would have exceeded the park's cost of £146 619. In addition to paying for the capital cost of the park, this real estate would have provided a consistent income stream in property taxes to pay for the park's maintenance and future development (Tate, 2001; Henneberger, 2002).

Given the economic downturn after the park was completed, it is unlikely that the 1850 asking prices for the lots shown in Figure 4 were attained, so the actual financial viability of the park as a real estate transaction remains a matter of conjecture. Indeed, it appears that several of the lots were never sold and were subsequently absorbed as extensions to the park. Nevertheless, Birkenhead Park vividly illustrated the potential of using the premium

Table 1. Projected Revenue from Lots available for sale at Birkenhead Park in 1850

| Lot # | Total sq yds | Price in shillings* | Total revenue (£) |
|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 3 | 9640 | 10s | 4820 |
| 6 | 21969 | 7s | 7689 |
| 7 | 6362 | 7s 6d | 2386 |
| 8 | 4740 | 8s | 1896 |
| 9 | 7121 | 6s | 2136 |
| 10 | 5510 | 6s 6d | 1791 |
| 11 | 3083 | 5s 6d | 848 |
| 16 | 6086 | 6s | 1826 |
| 22 | 21620 | 9s | 9729 |
| 24 | 21987 | 9s | 9894 |
| 27 | 12860 | 8s | 5144 |
| 29 | 10238 | 6s 6d | 3327 |
| 30 | 4798 | 6s 6d | 1559 |
| 31 | 7566 | 6s | 2270 |
| 32 | 11532 | 8s | 4613 |
| 35 | 29146 | 7s 6d | 10930 |
| 36 | 8932 | 9s | 4019 |
| 39 | 9773 | 10s | 4886 |
| 40 | 15517 | 10s | 7758 |
| 41 | 10875 | 9s | 4894 |
| Totals: 20 | 229 355 | | £92 415 |

* English currency at that time was expressed in pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d). There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound.

created by a park on property values as a financial *raison d'être* to pay for public parks in urban areas.

Birkenhead Park 'brought the ideal of a huge rural landscape right into the centre of the city as a founding principle of its development' (Colquhoun, 2003: 136). It was the first urban park in the world to be publicly funded and to be freely accessible to all members of the public at all times. For this reason, it was widely known as 'The People's Garden'. While this moniker may be appropriate, it should be remembered that the momentum for the park stemmed from its economic viability and its congruence with the aims of developers and the affluent middle classes (Taigel & Williamson, 1993).

R E F E R E N C E .

| Quantities as included | | Quantities in Subdivided Lots if not subdivided | | Price per acre | | Quantities as included | | Quantities in Subdivided Lots if not subdivided | | Price per acre | |
|---------------------------|----------|---|--------|----------------------|--------|---------------------------|---------------|--|--------|----------------------|--|
| LOT 3 | Contains | 9040 Sq.Yds. | A 4419 | 10s. | LOT 27 | Contains | 12860 Sq.Yds. | B 6228 | 8s. | | |
| " 6 | " | 21969 | B 5221 | " | 29 | " | 10238 | C 3690 | " | | |
| | | | A 2461 | 7s. | | | | A 2959 | 6s.6d. | | |
| | | | B 2461 | " | | | | B 3527 | " | | |
| | | | C 7435 | " | | | | C 3752 | " | | |
| | | | D 5942 | " | 30 | " | 4798 | A 3103 | 6s.6d. | | |
| | | | E 3670 | " | | | | B 1695 | " | | |
| " 7 | " | 6362 | A 3506 | 7s.6d. | 31 | " | 7566 | A 7566 | 6s. | | |
| | | | B 2856 | " | 32 | " | 11532 | A 1565 | 8s. | | |
| " 8 | " | 4240 | A 2533 | 8s. | | | | B 4751 | " | | |
| | | | B 2207 | " | | | | C 5216 | " | | |
| " 9 | " | 7121 | A 3796 | 6s. | | | | | | | |
| | | | B 3325 | " | 35 | " | 29146 | A 6074 | 7s.6d. | | |
| " 10 | " | 5510 | A 2434 | 6s.6d. | | | | B 7768 | " | | |
| | | | B 3078 | " | | | | C 3181 | " | | |
| " 11 | " | 3083 | A 3083 | 5s.6d. | | | | D 6523 | " | | |
| " 16 | " | 6086 | A 6086 | 6s. | 36 | " | 8932 | A 5057 | 9s. | | |
| " 22 | " | 21620 | A 6640 | 9s. | | | | B 3875 | " | | |
| | | | B 7604 | " | 39 | " | 9773 | A 4351 | 10s. | | |
| | | | C 7376 | " | | | | B 5422 | " | | |
| " 24 | " | 21987 | A 6844 | 9s. | 40 | " | 15517 | A 8276 | 10s. | | |
| | | | B 8375 | " | | | | B 7241 | " | | |
| | | | C 6768 | " | 41 | " | 10875 | A 6312 | 9s. | | |
| " 27 | " | 12860 | A 2942 | 8s. | | | | B 4563 | " | | |
| | | | | TOTAL | | 229355 | | | 229355 | | |

Figure 4. Lots Available for Sale at Birkenhead Park in 1850

Source: Metropolitan Borough of Wirral

Post-Birkenhead Park

The landmark development of Birkenhead Park stimulated other cities to adopt the approach. For example, Glasgow hired Paxton to develop parks soon after:

The first site for developing a park with housing around was acquired in 1852 for £78,000 and Joseph Paxton was invited to prepare the design for Kelvingrove Park. Five years later the Council purchased the site for Queen's Park, which was also laid out by Paxton. The surrounding land was leased for housing and the park opened in 1862. (Conway, 1991: 58)

Despite these individual initiatives, central government had still not passed generic enabling legislation authorising local councils to invest in parks. This legislation finally emerged in 1859 with the passing of the Recreation Grounds Act which encouraged the donation to local councils of money or land for recreation, and the Public Improvements Act in 1860 which empow-

ered local councils to use local property taxes to acquire, hold and manage open spaces. However, the use of such taxation was limited to 6d in the pound and before tax funds could be used, half the estimated cost of the park had to be raised privately. This latter clause stimulated many local benefactors to come forward and resulted in a quantum increase in the number of urban parks created in the 1860s and 1870s compared to previous decades (Conway, 1991).

In many cases, benefactors recognised that their philanthropy could lead to enhanced financial returns by retaining property around a donated park. For example, in Southport (a coastal resort town, located 15 miles north of Liverpool), the Reverend Charles Hesketh, one of the local lords of the manor, donated 30 acres of sandhills for the creation of Hesketh Park (which was designed by Edward Kemp, a long-time assistant of Paxton whom Paxton had installed as superintendent of Birkenhead Park). However, he owned the surrounding land and hence benefited financially as this quickly became a desirable development site for large Victorian villas (Bailey, 1955). Similarly, when Lord Vernon gave Vernon Park to Stockport, he stipulated that 'a sufficient plot of land be reserved . . . for building purposes'. Henry Bokkow, who donated the 74-acre site for Albert Park in Middlesbrough in 1868, reserved three sides of the park for building 'villa residences'. When Z. C. Pearson donated the 30-acre site for Pearson Park in Hull, he retained 10 acres on the sides of the site for building purposes (Conway, 1991).

Thus, in the formative years of urban park development in the UK, the proximate principle was firmly embedded in the collective psyche as providing a primary financial rationale for investment in private parks, in public parks funded with public tax resources, and in public parks donated by benefactors.

Summary and concluding comments

The genesis of the large landscaped urban park dates to the first half of the eighteenth century in England where it started as a strategy used by private developers to create premium values for homes in their developments. In the countryside, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown pioneered the picturesque school of landscaping in the great country homes of England, including Chatsworth where Joseph Paxton later applied his craft. His work was continued by Humphry Repton. It was through his partnership with Repton that John Nash was inspired to introduce these principles into an urban context with his design of Regent's Park.

In addition to its design characteristics, Regent's Park also pioneered what in contemporary times has been termed 'The Proximate Principle'

(Crompton, 2004). This principle derives from the observation that many people are willing to pay a larger amount for property located close to parks and open space areas than for a home that does not offer this amenity. The higher value of these residences means that their owners pay higher property taxes. In effect, this represents a 'capitalisation' of park land into increased property values of proximate land owners.

This process of capitalisation means that, in some instances, if the incremental amount of taxes paid by each property which is attributable to the presence of a nearby park is aggregated, it will be sufficient to service any capital sum required to acquire and develop the park. In these circumstances, the park is obtained at no long-term cost to the jurisdiction.

When the rapidly growing English industrial cities were urged by central government to create parks, they balked at doing so because parks were perceived to be costly and a low priority. However, the financial viability of urban parks had been established by the private real estate developments at Regent's Park and Victoria Park in London, and Prince's Park in Liverpool. Thus, when the proximate principle was transitioned into the public sector at Birkenhead Park, it repositioned park expenditures as investments rather than costs in the minds of taxpayers and elected officials. This was the financial breakthrough that was critical to parks being supported by city councils and resulted in parks becoming a standard component of the British urban infrastructure. (It should be noted that a downside to embracing the proximate principle as the funding mechanism for urban parks was recognised in those early years: 'As land values around urban parks shot up, so the poorer classes were driven out' (Lasdun, 1992: 66).

Joseph Paxton subsequently adapted the Regent's Park principles to Prince's Park and then to Birkenhead Park. These parks, built on the principles that Nash and his erstwhile partner Repton pioneered, resulted in 'an informal gently picturesque landscape . . . its utility lying in its combination of suburb and public recreation area, ahead of anything else anywhere at its time' (Chadwick, 1966: 91).

Subsequently, the proximate principle was widely embraced by major cities throughout the United States. It was popularised by the fortuitous visit of Frederick Law Olmsted to Birkenhead Park in 1850; by Olmsted's plans and articulate rationales for Central Park in New York City; by the meticulous data he provided on the impact of Central and Prospect parks on surrounding property values; and by the extensive and pervasive influence of the Olmsted landscape architecture firm which spanned almost a century and completed approximately 3000 park-related design commissions. A recent

review of the influence of the proximate principle on early park systems in the US concluded:

From the earliest days of urban park development in the United States in the 1850s, through the 1930s, there was an insistent almost inviolate conviction among park and open space advocates of the legitimacy of the proximate principle. It was conventional wisdom among them, and it was also espoused by elected officials. (Crompton, 2004: 64)

The early studies of the proximate principle's impact undertaken by Olmsted were rudimentary and naïve when viewed through the lens of today's social science techniques. They reflected the underdeveloped nature of the statistical tools and research designs available in those times. In subsequent eras, substantial improvements were made in methods used for quantifying the impact of parks and open space on real estate values. Hedonic analysis using statistical techniques, especially regression analysis and econometric models, made it possible to identify the relative influence on property values of factors other than parks, such as house size, type and location, and the relative impact of other amenities, such as schools, shopping centres and the central business district.

These more contemporary studies revealed that there are selected contexts in which the proximate principle may exert a negative impact on property values (Crompton, 2004). Adverse impacts may emerge from nuisances, such as congestion, street park, litter and vandalism, deviant behaviour, noise and playing field lights and poorly maintained or blighted derelict facilities. However, for the most part, contemporary social science has confirmed the early premise and a recent review of this literature concluded: 'It is suggested that a positive impact of 20% on property values abutting or fronting a passive park area is a reasonable starting point guideline' (Crompton, 2004: 4).

It has been noted that 'the principles of Birkenhead Park are capable of application in the wider context of urbanism today' (Chadwick, 1966: 186). However, while the influence of the park's design and aesthetic principles have been widely acknowledged and embraced, the proximate principle on which the park's financial viability and political acceptability was vested has largely been forgotten in the context of urban parks. At the same time, it has flourished in the context of golf communities where a golf course is incorporated into real estate developments to create premium lot values. In the 1990s, almost 1000 such communities were developed in the United States (Mulvihill et al., 2001). Now that contemporary research has confirmed the

proximate effect to be as legitimate and valid today as it was in the nineteenth century, it is to be hoped that taxpayers and elected officials responsible for developing and renovating urban parks will embrace it as enthusiastically as have the developers of golf course communities.

Notes

1. There is some ambiguity about the actual area which was subsequently reserved for park use. This has occurred because some of the land that was originally designated for homes was subsequently: (i) acquired by the city and added to the park when houses were later demolished, (ii) never built on and incorporated into the park, or, (iii) became public property attached to schools. So it was, in effect, absorbed as part of the park.
2. A different price for the sale of these lots was given by the *Liverpool Mercury* (1847) correspondent reporting on the park's opening in April 1847: 'From 70,000–80,000 yards have been already sold at an average price of 6s 6d per yard.' However, it seems likely that whoever provided him with this information was misinformed, because Mortimer (1847) cited city documents in arriving at his 11s 4d figure and his history of Birkenhead was meticulously detailed.
3. The value of £1 in 1851 when converted to 2005 by using the retail price index equates to approximately £78.20. Thus, in contemporary values, the park's total cost approximated £11.5 million, revenues would convert to £12.4 million; so surplus revenues would be £900 000.

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