

## Pump House Gallery History

As the Industrial Revolution spread across the country, English cities swelled. London saw its population expand from 1,114,000 in 1801 to 7,252,000 by 1911. Urban slums sprung up, bringing with them epidemics of cholera and crime.

The site of Battersea Park was previously named Battersea Fields, open ground and marshland that had been reclaimed from the banks of the Thames. Battersea Fields was a place where produce from outlying areas were sold to Battersea's new and burgeoning slum population. Activity revolved around the insalubrious Red House tavern, where the coarse pursuits of gambling, drinking and illegal racing held sway.



Following an 1833 Select Committee report on the benefits of public parks – both for the public's health and their civilising effect – the government initiated a programme of park-building intended to promote vitality, morality, pride and self discipline, qualities highly prized in Victorian Britain in the time of Empire. Following an 1844 proposal that Battersea Fields be developed as one such site, the government enacted a statute to lay out a royal park there. Initially drawing inspiration from a schematic design devised by James Pennethorne - who had contributed to the design of Regents Park and would go on to design Victoria Park and Kennington Park – several hundred tons of material was excavated from Surrey Docks to raise the level of the site.

In 1854, the park's first superintendent John Gibson (a former pupil of Joseph Paxton, head gardener to the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth and designer of one of the first public parks at Birkenhead) designed and built the defining elements of the park - the carriage drives, lake and mounding – which remain largely unchanged to this day.

Gibson was responsible for:

*“the elegant circulation patterns; the serpentine undulations of the lake; which create such a sense of anticipation in the visitor; the substantial mounds, planted with a range of trees and shrubs, separating the distinctive areas of the landscape; the sequence of views across and through the park.”*

Paxton's tutelage had taught Gibson not only about park and garden landscaping, but also about the art of planting. In 1835, Gibson was sent on a botanical mission to India to bring back rare and exotic species that could nevertheless flourish in an English climate. This knowledge contributed greatly to one of Battersea Park's

horticultural highlights, the Sub-Tropical Garden, and the tremendous diversity of trees and shrubs for which the park was famed.

The park was officially opened in 1858 by Queen Victoria. It became a major attraction for all classes of society and was described in glowing terms in the newspapers and journals of the day. It continued to be a unique destination until the early years of this century.

The Pump House tower was built in 1861 by Simpson and Son to house a coal-fired steam engine and pump to circulate water in the lake, water the park's plants and drive artificial rockwork cascades which were situated on the north bank of the lake. For safety reasons, in 1909 the pump tower's smaller adjoining building was built over the well from which the pump drew water. The steam-powered pumping system, although never completely successful, continued to be used until the 1930s.

During World Wars I and II, maintenance of the park was scaled back as the war effort took precedence. In World War II, shelters were dug into the park and anti-aircraft guns and barrage balloons installed to help protect Londoners from German air raids. Parts of the park were turned over to vegetable-growing allotments, while another part was converted into a pig farm.



With the end of hostilities, in 1951 the post-war Atlee government laid on the Festival of Britain to improve public morale and signal the start of a new modern age. Sites around the country were developed - most notably the South Bank and the Royal Festival Hall in London – and the Pleasure Gardens at Battersea Park were intended to afford a light-hearted alternative to the more serious cultural exhibits on the South Bank. Initially designed to be only a temporary attraction, the gardens proved so popular they lived on, albeit in a patched up form. Ad hoc repairs were carried out intermittently to various elements until the closure and removal of the funfair in 1974. After that time repairs and restoration continued to be undertaken in a

piecemeal fashion but much of the horticultural quality and diversity had been lost and the overall definition and quality of the 19th century landscape continued to decline.

After a fire in the 1950s which destroyed the windows and the original roof, the Pump House fell into disrepair. The chimney was removed and a temporary roof installed to enable the building to be used for storage. The building quickly became

overgrown, however, and soon became the subject of local folklore, assuming the name of 'the Haunted House'.

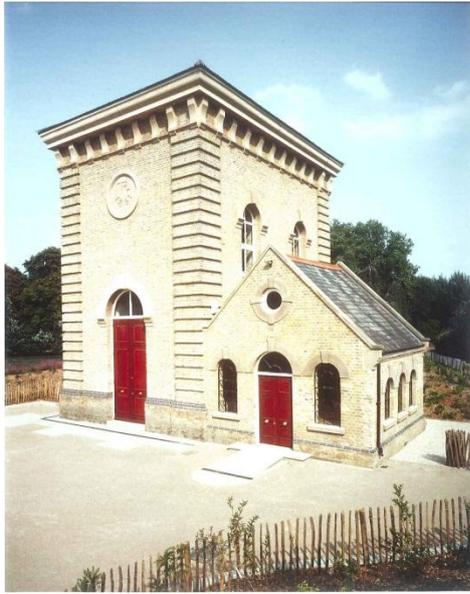
When Wandsworth Council assumed responsibility for the park in 1986, both park and Pump House were showing signs of serious neglect. Since then a fundamental programme of restoration has been initiated.



From 1988 to 1992, the Pump House was painstakingly restored with the

help of a grant from English Heritage. From 1993 to 1996, jointly funded by Wandsworth and the European Union, the larger part of the lake's edge was restored to its Victorian splendour and a vigorous replanting programme set in motion with the aim of reproducing the park's original horticultural beauty.





With further funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund the park's dominant characteristics of 'the dynamic conjunction of opposites, serpentine lines and manipulated sequence of views, all enhanced by a rich palette of colour, texture, light and shade' were restored to their former glory.

Initially intended as a 'park interpretation centre, education room and exhibition space', the Pump House became a permanent gallery space in 1999, running a year-round programme of contemporary visual arts exhibitions and developing a strong profile, both nationally and internationally. The Pump House continues to maintain strong links with the local community and has also become a private hire venue, hosting parties and events, weddings and civil ceremonies.

