

PARK PROJECTS

Benjamin Murphy, Chair of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, has published an update on work taking place in Wanstead Park. In the second of a series of extracts, the focus is on the Grotto

For those who may not be aware, **Wanstead Park is a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden (RPG) and has been on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register (HARR) since 2009.**

In 1954, the Temple and the nearby Grotto were designated as Grade II listed buildings, while in 1970 the Wanstead Park area was designated as a Conservation Area. The Wanstead Park Conservation Area was added to the HARR in 2010, while the Grotto was separately added in 2017. In its prime, Wanstead House was known to rival the Palace of Versailles in its grandeur – it was the pride of the East End of London.

The Grotto dates back to 1761. It was built over two levels with a boathouse that opened directly onto the Ornamental Water, and a room for entertainment above with a service area to the side. The Grotto survived the wreck of the Wanstead House estate and became a popular attraction when the park was opened to the public in 1882, with an admission price of sixpence. Sadly, most of the Grotto was destroyed in a fire in 1884, and while it has had patchy repairs over the intervening years, it has been badly declining. A restoration project is underway.

So, what specific actions have we taken? We have completed structural investigations and trial pits to understand the foundations, ground conditions and construction materials around the Grotto and landing stage. There has also been archaeological and geological cataloguing of any loose material, including retrieval of loose stones from the Ornamental Water. A restoration and maintenance plan is currently underway, focusing on essential repairs with recommendations for the conservation and structural stabilisation of



the Grotto, with the aim these measures will remove it from the HARR.

But more actions still need to take place. The structural investigations and trial pits identified there was a variation in the construction materials of the landing stage, therefore an updated construction specification and listed building consent for the landing stage had to be sought. This was submitted at the end of September, with consent hopefully due to be granted before the end of the year. Furthermore, the City of London Corporation has identified funding for the essential and recommended repairs, including a contribution of £14,000 from the Heritage of London Trust.

The restoration and maintenance plan will include recommendations for desirable repairs and restoration works to the Grotto, and will include recommendations on public access and visitor information for this construction stage. A further study will be required to look at options for the long term interpretation and visitor access to the Grotto along with opportunities to find the additional funding for this.

To read Benjamin's article in full, visit wnstd.com/parkupdate