

# History

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Alexandra Palace (1863) and Finsbury Park (1869) in the London Borough of Haringey are two of the earliest public parks to be created in the UK. The park land was previously a 450 acre dairy farm known as the Tottenham Wood Estate, owned by Thomas Rhodes - great uncle of imperialist Cecil Rhodes. When he passed away in 1856, his heirs sold the land to a consortium wanting to create a venue and grounds to rival Crystal Palace in South London.

Between 1871 and 1891 the population of Haringey more than doubled from 20,000 to 45,000. Alexandra Park created an opportunity for residents to escape the overcrowding in the city. The Park was designed by landscape architect Alexander Mackenzie who developed a style of informality for the park, contrasted with the formal layout of the grounds at Crystal Palace in South London. Rather than decorative planting his aim was to *'provide grass to walk on'*.

# provide grass to walk on

The Grove at the west side of Alexandra Park had been a private garden of the Grove Estate, owned by Topham Beauclerk. Once described as: *“the wooded grove, That verdant spot all unadorned by art. Where stately trees and grateful shade impart, Whose gnarles and mossy trunks bespeak their age, And stern resistance to the winter’s rage”*

In the 1870s the Grove was open to the public with an admission fee for three days a week, with it available to hire for private parties the other four days. The Grove became known for its open-air concerts illuminated by thousands of tiny coloured electric lamps, with a formal bandstand being constructed in 1890. In 1873 the model Japanese Village was built on what is now the Grove car park, but sadly burnt down in 1897. After financial troubles for the owners and following an Act of Parliament in 1901, the Alexandra Palace and Park Trust (APPCT) was set up, administered by the local authorities. It required that the Trustees maintain the Palace and Park and keep them *‘available for the free use and recreation of the public forever’*. In 1911 a chalet was built in the grove to provide refreshments for up to 6,000 people attending evening concerts in the Grove. In the 1920s tennis courts replaced the Japanese Village, the avenue was planted and an area made for dancing. Shakespeare’s

pastoral plays were regularly performed and open air animated pictures were shown on Sundays with arrangements to move into the Palace in bad weather. Attendance gradually decreased and in 1932 the last season of outdoor concerts was held.

The GLC took over responsibility in 1966, creating a car park where the Japanese village and tennis courts had once stood. In 1980, Haringey Council installed a bridge into the Grove from Muswell Hill and took down the bandstand. The Parks Yard was built to house the park’s team, in charge of upkeep of the whole park. Haringey Council, together with Haringey Mencap, established the Islands nursery and the Actual Workshop - an after-school and holiday club for school-age children that also provided for children and adults with learning difficulties. The management of the park and palace was transferred to Haringey Council as sole Corporate Trustee of the APPCT before the closure of the GLC in 1986.