



London County Council.

DEDICATION TO THE PUBLIC

OF

DEPTFORD PARK,

BY

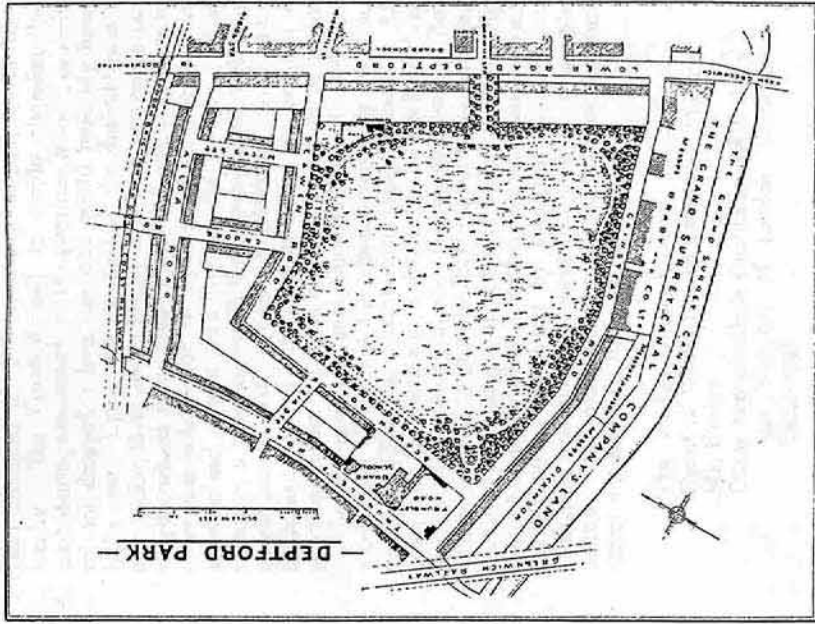
DR. W. J. COLLINS, J.P., D.L.,

Chairman of the Council,

ON WHIT-MONDAY, 7TH JUNE, 1897.



THE land known by this title, now about to be dedicated to public use, has an area of 17 acres, and is situated to the north of the Grand Surrey Canal on the south-west side of Lower-road, Deptford. It is connected with this thoroughfare by a narrow entrance which is a continuation of Hoopwick-street, the other portion of the boundary on this side abutting on the gardens of houses in the main road. The land forming the park was formerly a part of the Deptford estate of Mr. Evelyn, and was first offered to the Council in February, 1893, when negotiations for its purchase were commenced. Before this time it had been let as market gardens, and when the tenancy expired on Ladyday, 1893, Mr. Evelyn decided not to take any steps for dealing with the property till the Council had considered the offer. The purchase money was eventually fixed at £2,100 per acre, or a total of about £36,000, which in the opinion of the Council's valuer was less than the market value of the land, and towards the sum required Mr. Evelyn generously promised £2,000. Mr. Keylock, who was then the representative of the district upon the Council, devoted considerable time to the matter, and thought he could guarantee a sum of £13,000 towards the purchase money, such contribution being derived from a probable vote of at least £7,000 from the Greenwich District Board of Works,



and the remainder from other sources, including Mr. Evelyn's offer. The custom of the Council in making contributions towards the acquisition of new parks and open spaces is to provide half the required sum; but seeing that the resources of the inhabitants of the district had recently been considerably taxed in the collection of money for the purchase of Hilly-fields, it did not appear probable that more than one-third of the necessary amount could be raised locally. The Council had to decide therefore between contributing two-thirds of the purchase money, or seeing the scheme dropped, when the land would probably have been built over. Upon the question of the desirableness of the acquisition, there could hardly have been two opinions. The neighbourhood is a densely crowded one, and there was no other land suitable for an open space for the thousands of artisans and others who live in this locality. It seemed therefore a case in which the Council might well adopt the course pursued with reference to Hackney-marsh and Hilly-fields, and not restrict its contribution to one-half of the purchase money required, but should provide, as in the case of Hackney-marsh, a sum equal to about two-thirds of the whole cost. This was the amount voted by the Council in February, 1894, the contribution being limited to £24,000 apart from the costs which also had to be paid by them. In April of the same year the Greenwich District Board of Works resolved to provide £8,000 towards the balance, to be borrowed and charged upon the parish of St. Paul, Deptford, and subsequently when a further sum was wanted to make up the £2,000 to be raised by subscriptions, they voted an additional amount not to exceed £250 so as to complete the matter. The total amount of the purchase money (including costs) was £36,031, made up as follows—

	£
The London County Council	24,031
Board of Works for the Greenwich District	8,250
Mr. Evelyn	2,000
Other contributions (including £800 from the Trustees of London Parochial Charities)	1,750
	<hr/>
	£36,031

Mention must be made of the fact that Mr. Evelyn, in addition to selling the land below market value, and contributing a sum of £2,000, has also presented five of charge two additional strips of frontage, 20 feet wide each, on either

side of the approach from Lower-road, in order to increase the width of the entrance.

The laying out of the land as a park has been executed by the Parks department from the designs and under the supervision of the chief officer.

As before stated, the ground was used as market gardens, and was laid out in deep ridges and furrows and intersected by farm roads and wide open drains. The design for laying-out is a simple one, consisting principally of a considerable central playing ground, surrounded by a broad walk for pleasure, with margins well planted with trees for shade and embellishment. The ground-work, owing to the condition of the land as described, was rather heavy, and the total cost of the laying-out, including drainage, water supply, formation of paths, planting, internal fencing, and temporary boundary fence, has been about £3,100. The other works in connection with the park have been executed by the Works department, under the supervision of the architect, and consist of boundary walls and fencing, entrance gates, public conveniences, store-shed, mess-room and other buildings. The cost of these has been about £1,400.

Historical notes.

The changes through which the neighbourhood of Deptford has passed even in the present century are many and varied. One hundred years ago a recreation ground would scarcely have been needed, for at that time there were 500 acres of market gardens in the parish, chiefly cultivated for the onions, celery and asparagus for which Deptford has long been famous.* A meadow flower, the *coryophyllus pratensis*, was named by old botanists the Deptford pink, because of the abundance in which it grew in the fields here. The change in the character of the town from an agricultural to a manufacturing centre has rendered what little land that still remains uncultivated quite unsuitable for market gardens. It seems to be the opinion of antiquaries that in the time of Chaucer, the whole of this district between Shooter's-hill and London was a stretch of woodland and commonly covered with gorse and brushwood. For centuries after the place was nothing but an insignificant fishing village, many respects like Woolwich, except that it was less fashionable. Henry VIII. was the first monarch to raise its name by the establishment of the royal dockyard here in 1513. So rapid was its rise to importance that in less than 40 years it came to be the chief English dockyard. Many of the earliest expeditions despatched

* Lysons, "Environ of London," 1811, Vol. I., pt. II., p. 100.

from this country on voyages of discovery were fitted out here, including those of such men as Frobisher, Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh, Captains Cook and Vancouver. The list of famous "wooden walls" built in the Deptford dockyard would fill many pages, and so great was the fame of its master shipwrights that Peter the Great, Czar of Russia, worked for some time as a ship's carpenter in this yard in order to perfect himself in that art.*

Deptford thus became the chief centre of naval affairs, and was the cradle of that far-reaching institution, the Trinity House Corporation, in the establishment of which Henry VIII. took a prominent part. Some idea of the essentially naval character of Deptford may be gathered from an old pamphlet,† written nearly two centuries ago, which describes a visit to the Horn Fair at Charlton, and incidentally gives us an insight into the state of Deptford at that time. "From hence we proceeded till we came to Deptford When we came a little further into the town, we might easily discern, by the built (*sic*) of the houses, what amphibious sort of creatures chiefly inhabited this part of the kingdom; their dens were chiefly wood, all of one form, as if they were obliged by Act of Parliament to all build after the same model Many shops we observed open in the streets, but a brandy bottle and a quartern, a butcher mending of a canvas doublet, a few apples in a cabbage net, a peel-full of Deptford cheesecakes, an old waste-coat, a thrum cap and a pair of yarn mittings, were the chief shows that they made of their commodities, every house being distinguished by either the sign of the Ship, the Anchor, the Three Mariners, Boatswain and Call, or something relating to the sea; for as I suppose, if they should hang up any other, the salt-water novices would be as much puzzled to know what the figure represented, as the Irishman was, when he called the Globe the golden case-body, and the Unicorn the white horse with a barber's pole in his forehead." After disparaging the hospitals of Deptford, this ancient writer sums up the character of the place. "The town's without necessaries, they've butchers without meat, ale-houses without drink, houses without furniture, and shops without trade; captains without commission a church without religion, and hospitals without charity."

This description cannot be taken quite literally, but it is interesting from an antiquarian point of view in showing what a change has passed over the "navy-building town" as

* Dew's "Deptford," 1883, p. 87.

† "A Frolick to Horn Fair," 1700, pp. 14 and 15.

Pope called it. Deptford dockyard was found unsuitable for the construction of the present class of war vessels that have supplanted those by which England won her naval supremacy, and it was therefore closed in 1869, and the greater portion of the site is now occupied by the Corporation's foreign cattle market.

Deptford derives its name from the *deep ford* by which the river Ravensbourne was crossed before the erection of Deptford bridge. The first record of any bridge across the river dates back to 1395: but although the necessity for a ford has been done away with since this time, the old name has still clung to the town which afterwards sprung up around it.

The manor of Deptford or West Greenwich, of which these lands formed part, was bestowed by William the Conqueror upon Gilbert de Maminot or Maminot, one of the eight barons associated with John de Fiennes for the defence of Dover Castle. No less than 56 knights' fees were given him for this purpose, and he was instructed to distribute these among other trustworthy persons who should assist him in this important work. These eight barons had to provide between them one hundred and twelve soldiers, twenty-five of whom were always to be on duty within the castle, and the rest to be ready for any emergency. Gilbert de Maminot's share of the lands amounted to 24 knights' fees, which together made up the barony of Maminot, held at Deptford as the head of the barony. Maminot built a castle for himself at Deptford, of which all traces have now disappeared; but from the remains of some ancient foundations which have been discovered, it is now conjectured that its site was on the brow of the Thames in the neighbourhood of Sayes Court, near the mast dock. The grandson of Gilbert de Maminot, named Walkelin, held Dover Castle against King Stephen, although he afterwards surrendered it to his queen. In 1145 Walkelin gave half his estates in Deptford to the monastery of Bermondsey. His heiress, Alice Maminot married Geoffrey de Say, and brought to him the lands of the barony. He granted this manor, together with the advowson of the church and other appurtenances, to the Knight Templars, but his son, also named Geoffrey, regained possession by exchanging the manor of Sedlescomb in Sussex for it. The manor continued in the Say family by direct descent till the reign of Richard II., when Elizabeth de Say, to whom it belonged, married first of all Sir John de Fallele (Falwesle), and afterwards Sir William Heron. The first-named knight married the heiress without the licence

of the Crown, and King Richard II. seized her lauds, but, upon appeal, Parliament decided in the knight's favour. Her second husband died without issue, and this manor fell to the share of Otho Watlyaton. The next owner of historical importance is William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, created Duke of Suffolk in 1448. He was charged with the loss of Anjou and Normandy, and being impeached by the Commons, was sentenced to banishment for five years, but he was way-laid on his way to France, and murdered in 1450. His infant son, however, was restored to the title, and another descendant and owner of the manor was involved in political troubles, for in Henry VII.'s reign he entered into the plot to place Lambert Simnel on the throne, which cost him his life at the battle of Stoke, near Newark-upon-Trent, to which place he was marching. His forfeited estates were at once granted by the king to his uncle, Oliver St. John, but Henry VIII. in 1514, granted unreservedly to Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, all the estates that formerly belonged to the De la Poles, apparently prejudicing the rights of St. John, whose representative was then but ten years of age, and unable to protect himself. Charles Brandon secretly married Mary, Queen of France, and upon the advice of Cardinal Wolsey, propitiated King Henry VIII. with certain payments out of her dowry. In return for his services as mediator, the duke bestowed this manor upon the cardinal for the term of his natural life. He died in 1530, and five years later the duke gave the manor to the king in exchange. The grandson of Oliver St. John then came forward and petitioned that the estates granted to his ancestor might be restored to him, and in this he was successful.

Before the year 1538 this manor seems to have reverted to the king, who granted it to one of his many wives, Katherine Seymour. On her death it again came to his possession, and he bestowed it on Sir Richard Long of the Privy Chamber for the term of his natural life. The next king, Edward VI., granted to Sir Thomas Speke for the term of his life the office of stewardship of his lordships and manors of Sayes-court and West Greenwich (i.e., Deptford), and when he died the same offices were held by Sir Thomas Darcy, K.G., Lord Darcy of Chiche. The manor was retained in the hands of the Crown during the reigns of James I. and Charles I.; but Sayes-court, the mansion-house, was leased for a term of 41 years to Christopher Browne, who had been resident bailiff here, and during his term of office had spent considerable sums in repairing the buildings. This lease was subsequently renewed, and the remainder was devised to his grandson Richard,

afterwards knighted, whose only daughter and heiress, Mary, married John Evelyn, who took possession of Sayes-court in 1648. Five years later he bought the mansion for the sum of £3,500, and at once commenced laying out the famous garden there. Charles II. confirmed the same to him in 1663 for 99 years at 22s. 6d. rent, including about 64 acres of land. In the same year the king, in consideration of £3,896, expended by Sir Richard Browne during his residence in France, demised to him for a term of 31 years at an annual rent of 40s. certain other lands adjoining these. This was surrendered in 1672 for a new patent, extending the term to 99 years. We have already seen that his son-in-law, Evelyn had been for some time previous to this in residence at Sayes-court, whither he had been sent from Paris to endeavour "to compound with the soldiers," and so save something in the general wreck caused by the confiscations of the Commonwealth. The grandson of Evelyn, also John, afterwards became entitled to both leases. He petitioned therefore for a grant in fee after payment of such consideration as should be determined by the officers of the crown, and this petition was allowed. His descendants are still the owners of these lands, called the Evelyn estate in Deptford.

To return now to the manor. Upon the death of Charles I. all the royal estates were seized in order to be surveyed and sold to supply the necessities of the state. The manor and residue were sold to Thomas Buckner for himself and others for the sum of £12,583, but on the restoration of Charles II., in 1660, the manor and demesnes undemised by the crown, returned to the royal revenue, part of which the manor itself continues.*

An inundation of unparalleled magnitude swept over not only the site of Deptford-park, but also the greater part of the town, in 1651. About 2 p.m. on New Year's day, the storm became so violent that the waves braced down the piles of wood, and entered the shipping yards, removing great trees and banks of timber that twenty horses could scarcely move. By 2.30 there were seven feet of water in the lower town, which had increased to ten very soon. The inhabitants fled to the upper town, leaving "all their property "to the mercy of the merciless waves," as one writer described it. Those who were not sufficientl prompt to effect their escape in time had to be rescued by boats from the upper windows of their dwellings, and some are said to have been drowned. Fortunately the waters began to abate by 4 o'clock, but not

* These particulars relating to the manor are condensed from Hasted's "History of Kent," edited by H. H. Drake, 1886, pp. 2-9.

till enormous damage had been done. In addition to the havoc wrought in the dockyards and dwelling houses, more than 200 head of cattle were drowned in the meadows of Deptford and the adjacent fields. It seems that three black clouds were seen in the firmament on the evening preceding the day of this great flood, so that an old chronicler gives warning "that when you discern the sun to be eclipsed and the appearing of three black clouds, then expect great inundations, loss of cattle, changes and dreadful revolutions, even as a signal from heaven, to purge nations and commonwealths from oppression and tyranny, and to restore to the freeborn their just freedom and liberty, that so peace may abound within the walls of Sion, and each man enjoy their own again." *

The Grand Surrey Canal to the south of the park, is the property of the Surrey Commercial Dock Company. It commences at a point nearly opposite the eastern entrance of the London Docks, and runs as far as the Camberwell-road, with a branch towards Peckham. It was this canal which connected the old Croydon canal with the river. The land on the other side of the canal, in the direction of Greenwich, now entirely covered with houses, was originally known as Black-horse-fields. Upon this land was a windmill, which was burnt down in 1854, while grinding stores for the use of the Government during the Crimean war. †

JNO. J. SEXBY,
Chief Officer, Parks Department.

* Quoted in Dew's "Deptford," pp. 248 and 249.

† Sturdee's "Old Deptford," p. 49.