ENGLISH HERITAGE

The Park Keeper

'Most of us remember the park keeper of the past. More often than not a man, uniformed, close to retirement age, and – in the mind's eye at least – carrying a pointed stick for collecting litter. It is almost impossible to find such an individual . . . over the last twenty years or so, these individuals have disappeared from our parks and in many circumstances their role has not been replaced.' [Nick Burton[1]]

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FOREWORD

The future of our public parks is under debate. In 2001 GreenSpace (the former Urban Parks Forum) published a survey, *Public Park Assessment,*[2] which estimated that conditions in well over one-third of all locally-run parks and open spaces were in decline. The government commissioned its own Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, charging it with examining how a renaissance in the use of public parks might be encouraged. The taskforce's final report, *Green Spaces, Better Places,*[3] identified skills and training as key factors in any parks rebirth. Despite a consensus that the old-fashioned park keeper and his authoritarian 'keep off the grass' image were out of place in the 21st century, the matter of his disappearance crept back constantly in discussions. The press have published articles[4,5,6] highlighting the need for safer public open spaces, and in particular for a rebirth of the park keeper's role.

English Heritage, as the government's advisor on the historic environment, has joined forces with other agencies to research the skills shortage in public parks. These efforts have contributed to the government's 'Cleaner, Safer, Greener' agenda,[7] with its emphasis on tackling crime and safety, vandalism and graffiti, litter, dog fouling and related issues, and on broader targets such as the enhancement of children's access to culture and sport in our parks and green spaces.

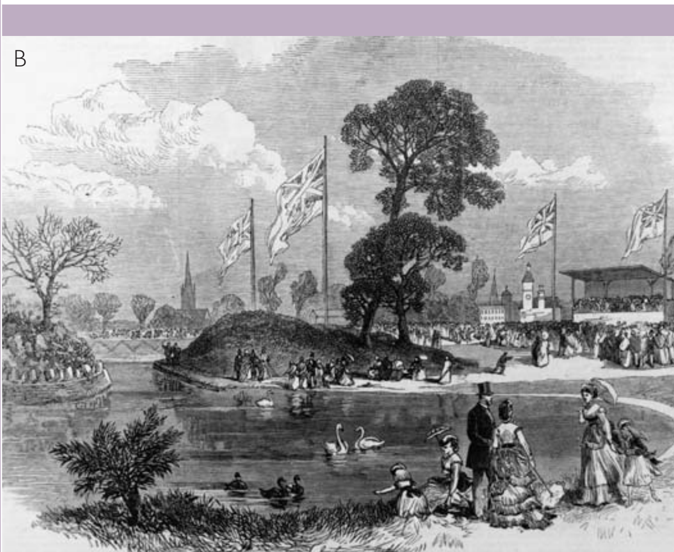
To help inform this debate and illuminate the evolution in parks management, English Heritage commissioned David Lambert of the Parks Agency, one of the country's leading public-park experts, to prepare a brief history of park-keeping. The 'parkie' of old has clearly come a very long way: today's park-management teams must combine the traditional functions of groundskeeper and guardian, with strategic planning and design, recreation and fitness, community liaison and outreach, wildlife management and more. Lambert also calls attention to another, widely overlooked element of the traditional keeper's role, namely that he was part of the local community, always on hand, a familiar figure trusted by all.

It is hoped that the following historical account will be of value to all those with an interest in the evolution of our parks, whether in government agencies, in local parks departments or in a future generation of 'parkies' in their many guises.

Cover: Park keeper at Hampden Park, Eastbourne, August 1937. (The Parks Agency)

A The archetypal park keeper, from an early 20th-century view of Eastville Park, Bristol. (By kind permission of Bristol Reference Library W1316)

B The opening of Alexandra Park, Manchester, in 1870. The potential difficulties of managing a public park were little understood at the time. (Manchester Library and Information Service: Manchester Archives and Local Studies)



OVERVIEW

The word 'keeper' has been used for centuries in connection with managed green spaces. The *Oxford English Dictionary* quotes John Heywood's use of the word in 1530, referring to 'rangers and keepers of certayne places as forests, parkes, purlewes and chasys', and aligns the word in this context with others signifying a position of primary responsibility, analogous to the Keeper of the Privy Seal.[8] It was a technical and managerial role associated with maintenance of a park and its stock.

With the development of public parks in the mid-19th century the term was adopted to new use. By 1855 'park keeper' could be used merely to signify someone who manned the gates.[9] During the initial period of public park development, the term was used alongside others with various nuances of seniority and responsibility. As W W Pettigrew, parks superintendent in Manchester (1914–32), put it in his 1937 book, *Municipal Parks: Layout, Management and Administration:*

> A considerable divergence exists regarding the recognised designation of certain members of the outside staff employed in public parks in various localities in the British Isles. It is regrettable that this lack of uniformity should exist, as the adoption of a standard denomination would make it so much easier to compare similar classes of work with the remuneration paid for it in all parts of the country.[10]

Divergence between local authorities is nothing new, but this inconsistency, viewed from the early 20th century, also reflects the development of public parks management. There were simply no management models or structures available in the early period: nothing like free public access to high-quality horticulture had ever been attempted before.

The potential difficulties were little understood. Within a month of the opening of Manchester's first three public parks in 1846, the Public Parks Committee was hastily assembling regulations, signage and additional staff, the need for which had not been foreseen. Incredibly, 'no one had been made responsible for the management of the parks and the necessity for such action seems to have taken the committee by surprise.'[11] The Corporation put together a staffing structure for each park, comprising:

> A park keeper, to reside at one of the lodges, and act as lodge-keeper, who shall also possess a competent knowledge of gardening, and who shall have the entire control of other men employed in the park, and generally be responsible for all tools and other property in the park, at a salary of 25s per week, together with the lodge or cottage, free of rent.
>
> A second lodge-keeper, to act under the directions of the park keeper, to reside in the other lodge, rent free, at the wages of 18s a week.
>
> Two spadesmen, or labourers, to be employed in keeping the grounds in order, and for the general protection of the property, at 18s per week each.[12]

A NOTE ON NOMENCLATURE

> The officials responsible . . . are variously described in different towns as assistant superintendents, curators, head gardeners, park-keepers, caretakers, and sometimes merely as foremen. For persons in charge of first-class parks the designation of curator is coming into fashion in preference to that of assistant superintendent or head gardener. In many towns, however, the official title of those in charge of all classified parks is still head gardener, although in some instances quite an inadequate designation for the duties they have to perform.[i]

Nomenclature has varied widely with period and locale. In Belfast the supervisor responsible for dedicated staff in a particular park was known as the *foreman.*[ii] The same person might also be called a *superintendent,* although this was also used in reference to the director of a citywide parks service. In the mid-19th century the officer in charge was frequently designated *head gardener* in recognition of expert staff imported from the private sector.[iii] *Ranger*, now associated with post-1970s countryside and urban park management, has been used for uniformed park staff since at least the late 19th century, for example in Bristol.[iv]

The meaning of *park keeper* itself seems to depend on the context: for example, 'the park keeper' tended to refer to a supervisory position while 'park keepers' could be unskilled labourers or security staff. Indeed in a recent careers publication[v] the work of a park keeper is described as entirely horticultural, and based on being a trained gardener.

By the turn of the 20th century J J Sexby, chief officer of the London County Council Parks Department, was attempting to formalise nomenclature to distinguish between maintenance and security work by using police-service terms for the latter – for example, *park inspector, park sergeant* and *park constable* – an approach also advocated by W W Pettigrew in his 1937 manual on park management.[vi] A *caretaker* was a subsidiary position, while a *watchman* was specifically a night-time post.

Any discussion of the role of the park keeper must recognise that the terminology is historically slippery, and was for much of the 19th century further confused by the willingness of local authorities to blur the lines between maintenance and security.

Notes

i Pettigrew 1937, 150–51.
ii Scott 2000, 181–2.
iii An example was John Peebles, who arrived in 1886 at Marine Parks, South Shields, from Aberdeen to oversee their design and was ultimately appointed resident senior supervisor of parks.
iv Lambert 2000, *passim.*
v Oliver 2002, *passim.*
vi Pettigrew 1937.

Jeremiah Harrison was appointed keeper. By 1848 his title was 'Principal Keeper & gardener' with his deputy, John Chadwick, termed 'Assistant Keeper & gardener'.[13]

Inherent in Harrison's position, and recorded at length in his daily reports, was the difficulty of juggling what Pettigrew termed *working* (maintenance) and *watching* (security) duties. The role of head gardener was already well established, expanding during the 19th century with the progress in horticultural technology and the growth of a professional gardening press. But to combine this with wholly new responsibilities to safeguard council property, discourage inappropriate behaviour and protect the public was not always a straightforward matter.

As experience of the needs of public parks grew, management structures developed. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, parks department directors such as Pettigrew at Manchester and J J Sexby, chief officer of the London County Council (LCC) Parks Department, championed professionalism, career structures and training, and successfully demanded increasing resources. Pettigrew set out a model for the staffing of a complete parks department (*see p7*) while Sexby's reports on London's parks and open spaces detailed staffing structures for the many different classes of parks and gardens he oversaw.

In broad terms we can see the gradual separation of working and watching duties, from the early days when they were combined more or less effectively, to the professionalism of the early 20th century and beyond. Sexby, for example, records a system whereby a large park would be managed by a superintendent, with a foreman-gardener and an inspector responsible respectively for gardening and security staff.[14]

During the Second World War and the subsequent period of austerity, budgetary cutbacks within local authorities led to the gradual dismantling of these structures. Staff losses were often compounded by problems arising from the removal of railings and 'keep off the grass' signs as part of progressive social policy. Rationalisation also had an impact; in Belfast during the 1960s and 1970s, for example, staff originally based at single sites were made responsible for more than one park.[15] Long before they became a feature of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (*see p14*), peripatetic gangs began replacing dedicated staff.[16]

The decline of maintenance budgets and staffing levels in the last quarter of the 20th century is well documented.[17] Local authority reorganisation after 1974 saw parks departments swallowed up into larger leisure-service departments and losing out to indoor leisure facilities, and parks professionals edged out of parks management. The following years 'witnessed the transformation of the parks superintendent from horticultural journeyman into business manager, and financial accountability rather than horticultural flair and innovation became the order of the day.'[18]

From the late 1970s the Countryside Commission had pioneered the role of rangers in their new Country Parks, using models derived from the National Park Service in the USA. The introduction in the Local Government Acts of 1988 and 1992 of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), under which local authorities had to demonstrate competitiveness in the procurement of services, saw maintenance work contracted out and park wardens left underemployed. Enlightened authorities such as Birmingham, Walsall and Southwark began redefining their remaining services, recruiting staff with environmental backgrounds and rebranding wardens as 'rangers', beyond the reach of CCT.[19] Rangering in essence combined a portion of basic maintenance with community and interpretive work, though it was often dogged by lack of experience and the difficulty of balancing on-site and community efforts; a further handicap seems to have been the absence of a dedicated supervisor overseeing rangers' activities.[20]

CCT's most immediate impact was the transfer of working (maintenance) duties to external contractors, generally to drastically pared-down specifications. Alan Barber, a consultant on urban green-space strategies and a Commissioner with CABE Space,[21] has summed up the impact as follows:

> There seemed to be no room for the kind of important but . . . near unmeasurable things that site-based gardeners used to do as a park keeping role. So many were withdrawn to become part of mobile maintenance teams. This was also the time that older park keepers would have been persuaded to take early retirement.[22]

Thus at the same time as spending on maintenance was being slashed, dedicated staff – both working and watching – were being removed, with predictable results on public perceptions of parks' security and appeal.

The last decade has seen a belated recognition of the importance of dedicated staff. Public-attitude surveys repeatedly confirm that the absence of keepers or dedicated gardeners is the single greatest factor in the perception of parks as uncared-for or unsafe. The Heritage Lottery Fund is providing grants for the reintroduction of dedicated staff, and with the rising political profile of public space on quality-of-life agendas many local authorities are following suit, although the budgetary scope for reintroducing keepers remains severely limited.

The Green Flag Awards[23] have, since their establishment in 1996, created a national benchmark for recreational green space in England and Wales. The Local Government Act of 1999 replaced CCT with Best Value,[24] a scheme for assessing improvements in the performance of local and other authorities in delivering services. Best Value and the Green Flag criteria – both of which take account of public perceptions as well as basic maintenance standards – have given authorities a further framework for assessing the impacts of the vanishing park keeper and for devising remedies.

Notes

1 Burton 1993, 5.
2 GreenSpace 2001.
3 DTLR 2002a.
4 Hinsliff 2003.
5 Flanagan 2004.
6 Wainwright 2004.
7 ODPM 2002.
8 *Oxford English Dictionary.*
9 Ibid.
10 Pettigrew 1937, 150.
11 Ruff 2000, 51.
12 Ruff 2000, 52.
13 Ruff 2000, 54.
14 See for example the staffing of Battersea Park, described in LCC 1899b, 15–16.
15 Scott 2000, 181.
16 Scott 2000, 155.
17 For an excellent summary *see* Harding 1999. The impacts of local government reorganisation and of CCT are referred to in Select Committee 1999a, pp xxiii-iv.
18 Chapman 2000, 122.
19 Greenhalgh *et al* 1996, 116.
20 Alan Barber, *pers comm,* 13 Mar 2004.
21 The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment www.cabespace.org.uk.
22 Alan Barber, *pers comm,* 13 Mar 2004.
23 www.greenflagaward.org.uk.
24 www.bvpi.gov.uk.

THE WORK OF THE PARK KEEPER

The park keeper had two simultaneous roles to fill, being responsible both for care of the park's physical fabric and for its protection and security – respectively Pettigrew's 'working' and 'watching' duties.

In addition to the complex and delicate job of nurturing the park's gardens, working tasks included sweeping walks, cleaning and rolling playgrounds, raking and hoeing borders and, in the winter, removing dead trees, painting seats, renewing gravel and cinders and repairing boats.[25] Keepers were often expected to tend to the park's visitors as well: in London they were trained in first aid to deal with minor injuries, for example during the skating season.[26]

In parallel with these duties of care, it was the responsibility of the keeper or supervisor to enforce the park's regulations and by-laws, the framework by which antisocial behaviour could be defined and discouraged. As Hazel Conway, garden and architectural historian and author of several books on public-park history, has noted, 'Without them any nuisance or breach of order would be subject to criminal law, which was inappropriate for trivial offences, or to civil action for damages, which was impracticable.'[27]

The Recreation Grounds Act of 1859 allowed park managers to make and enforce by-laws, but with no penalties attached except removal from the grounds under the laws of trespass or breach of the peace. The Charity Commission later approved the insertion of financial penalties. Initially, local authorities tended simply to draw up their own regulations rather than use their powers under the act; in Manchester, for example, no actual by-laws were passed for some 20 years after the opening of the first parks.[28]

Rules varied widely. Along with the usual prohibitions against walking on the grass, picking flowers and damaging park structures, some parks forbade dancing to the band (Queen's Park, Longton), games such as skipping, leap-frog and kiss-in-the-ring (Alexandra Park, Hastings) and washing or drying clothes (Brandon Hill, Bristol). The 1904 by-laws of Baxter Park, Dundee, prohibited cycling, smoking in the buildings, sitting on the walls, unofficial games, drinking and gambling.[29] At Queen's Park the superintendent was also obliged to implement decisions to ban bicycles, tricycles and dogs (1888), to install 'keep off the grass' signs but not to install swings or make provision for cricket or football (1889), and to impound cattle straying into the park (1892).

Hours were long. In Manchester in 1844, a head gardener worked 55½ hours a week in summer and 48 in winter; by 1848 summer hours were from 5.00 am (7.00 am in winter) until dusk or 9.30 pm, seven days a week.[30] In Bristol, keepers worked from 8 am to 8 pm Monday to Saturday and 10 am to 8 pm on Sundays, with the exception of two hours off on Sunday afternoons.[31] By 1899 keepers with the LCC were on a 48-hour week from November to February and a 54-hour week the rest of the year.[32]

Park keepers were expected to patrol in all weathers. In 1898 a ranger at Ormeau Park, Belfast, asked the Public Parks Committee to arrange for a watchman's box so that he would not get wet while guarding the flower beds. He was refused, on the grounds that his job was to be moving through the park and not staying indoors.[33]

The day book of Jeremiah Harrison, the first principal keeper of Philips Park – one of three Manchester parks which pioneered the concept of parks by public subscription – gives eloquent testimony to the difficulties of combining working and watching duties. These were sometimes performed simultaneously, for example 'one man weeding plantations in the middle of the park so that he may check upon visitors for plucking flowers', but gardening staff also regularly did duty as watchers after finishing their own work. Some park staff were sworn in as special constables, allowing them to arrest and fine those who broke the by-laws (*see p*7), although this was in addition to their regular gardening responsibilities.[34]

While the removal of gardeners to security duties gradually faded out, the reverse – assigning security staff to maintenance work during winter or slack periods – remained commonplace. The duties of LCC park keepers in 1915, and as defined until at least 1955, were 'to maintain order, protect the public, preserve the Council's property from injury, and to carry out labouring or other work (including paper, etc, picking) as directed by the officers-in-charge'.[35] In winter 'as many under-keepers as possible are to be taken off patrolling duties and employed on renovation work, etc.' The LCC was also keen that senior keepers 'shall be afforded the opportunity of gaining experience in directing labour in addition to supervising the reduced patrol staff'.[36]

Notes

25 Manchester City Art Galleries 1987, 41.
26 LCC 1906a, 82.
27 Conway 1991, 203.
28 Ibid.
29 Jamieson 1998, 73–4.
30 Ruff 2000, 54.
31 Lambert 2000, 56.
32 LCC 1899b, 4.
33 Scott 2000, 18.
34 Ruff 2000, 74.
35 LCC 1915, Regulation 50.
36 LCC 1915, Regulation 53.

C The park keeper in his domain: superintendent and keeper on patrol at Forbury Gardens, Reading, *c*1907. (The Parks Agency)

D Mr J McPhail, the first superintendent at Queen's Park, Longton (Stoke-on-Trent), late 19th century. (Photograph courtesy of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery)

E Immaculate gardening and maintenance at Belper River Gardens, Derbyshire, 1907. (The Parks Agency)

C

D

E

PARK KEEPERS AND GARDENING SKILLS

The senior officer at any given park, generally called the park superintendent, was almost invariably a trained and experienced gardener. In the early days this might simply mean having 'a competent knowledge of gardening', as required for the principal keeper at Philips Park, Manchester, in 1846 (interestingly, the title seems to have changed to head gardener soon afterwards).[i] However, as time went on and public expectations rose, the need for skilled horticulturalists was recognised.

When Marine Parks in South Shields (Tyne and Wear) were laid out beginning in 1886, John Peebles, a Scottish gardener from Aberdeen, was employed to advise on and oversee the soft-landscape design, and was later appointed head gardener, residing in a lodge in the park. In that role he was responsible not only for the park's overall management – including ticket sales and even some on-site security – but for seasonal bedding, ordering plants, propagating in the greenhouse, alpine and rockery planting, and the planting and management of perennials, shrubs and trees.[ii]

In 1926 the Manchester Parks and Cemeteries Committee appointed Arthur Foster, a skilled private-sector gardener, as head keeper at Philips Park. The Corporation also opened a horticultural school in Heaton Park, to train gardeners from boyhood. Foster's brief was to design and manage elaborate winter and summer bedding schemes as well as to propagate the plants required, and it was during his tenure (he retired in 1947) that Philips Park achieved its reputation for horticultural displays.

The officer in charge of a park often had an influential design role via ongoing maintenance. George Manderson, curator from 1873 of Alexandra Park, Manchester, introduced large areas of bedding, changing Alexander Hennell's original design. Others were specialists in their own right. Arthur Cobbold, curator to Charles Darrah, the cacti collector from Heaton Mersey, moved to Alexandra Park when Darrah bequeathed to it his collection of succulents in 1903. Between 1921 and 1933 Capt A E Sandys-Wynch, as parks superintendent in Norwich, designed seven city parks, drawing on his training at the Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley and his work in the office of the leading landscape architect of the time, Thomas Mawson.[iii]

The need for skilled gardeners was a constant complaint. Jeremiah Harrison, first principal keeper of Philips Park, Manchester, observed that there was no other staff member but himself who was 'accustomed to the cultivation of plants' and skilled in bedding out, work which took him away from his main duties.[iv] Thirty years later things were much the same: Mr J Melville, superintendent of London's Finsbury Park, reported in 1894, 'I find I am rather short of practical gardeners; there are several men employed here who do not know plants from weeds. I consider the majority of the men employed in the parks should be gardeners, and drawn from the best sources.'[v] Despite its separation of watching and working duties the London County Council was keen to offer cross-training, allowing under-keepers to sit its horticultural examination and transfer to the position of under-gardener, thus starting on the ladder to senior, skilled gardening work.[vi]

Notes

i Ruff 2000, 53–4.
ii Park Keeper's Record Book, South Marine Parks, 28 July 1886 – 24 May 1906, *passim* (courtesy of Ron Weetman, Tyne and Wear Council).
iii Conway 2000a, 119.
iv Ruff 2000, 79.
v LCC 1894, 8.
vi LCC 1899b, Regulation 57.

THE PROVISION OF PARK-KEEPING SERVICES

As the need for watching staff grew during the 19th century, various alternatives to the seconding of working staff were tried. Pettigrew identified four different systems in use.

Using regular working staff

Workers were instructed 'to keep their eyes open so as to detect and check any tendency on the part of visitors to ignore the by-laws. During busy times when the parks are thronged a number of selected workmen are released from their ordinary tasks and are put on patrol duty to maintain order.' The advantage was the availability, in emergencies, of working staff with some watching experience. The disadvantage was that 'when the working staff is also the watching staff the general maintenance work . . . is apt to suffer. In addition . . . where they have to do much overtime they are not so physically fit to attend to their ordinary duties as their supervisors would desire.'[37]

Relying on local police services

Pettigrew remarked that 'while admittedly the appearance of one policeman in a park may have a far greater effect on would-be mischief makers than a host of civilians, yet for a park to be patrolled merely as part of an ordinary police beat would hardly meet the requirements of the majority of public open spaces during busy times.' This system also had the disadvantage of a confused chain of command, shared by the chief constable and the park superintendent. 'For this reason,' he concluded, 'the aid of the police should only be requisitioned under special circumstances and never employed for mere patrol duty.'[38]

Engaging temporary or part-time watchmen

Pettigrew termed this 'a post-war institution', inaugurated to find employment for numbers of 'partly disabled men for whom there were so few openings'. He remarked that this had not proved as successful as hoped, 'for during the short days of winter . . . the services of disabled men are not required except for a few hours on Saturday and Sunday'. The wages thus did not make up their pensions, so they were always on the lookout for other jobs. As a result watching staff retention was low.[39]

Hiring dedicated watching staff

Pettigrew considered this the most satisfactory system for the policing of public parks. He commented that candidates should be 'strong, well set-up men, who, if carefully selected from the garden labourers on the staff, will prove very much more useful than men who have had no previous park experience. Apart from their being able to give needed attention to little gardening matters during their patrol duties . . . they can, during slack times in winter, fill in their time by assisting the garden staff.'[40] It was not essential that the sergeant in charge of the park should be an ex-police officer, Pettigrew remarked that, 'the ablest sergeant park keeper I have met is one who, until he was about 40 years of age, was the head blacksmith in a parks department workshop'.[41]

The mechanics of upholding by-laws varied. In the early days of Manchester's new public parks, keepers were sworn in as special constables and had powers to arrest and fine, although the park was also put on the beat of a police constable. In most cases transgressors were brought to the park's officer-in-charge, identified and summonsed to appear before the Public Parks Committee to be fined. In Philips Park, however, these measures seem to have had little effect. Public behaviour declined in the 1860s, and in 1865 was the subject of a formal report to the committee by Jeremiah Harrison, giving a vivid picture of the reality that pertained in a people's park:

> In fine weather [the park] was frequented by a number of exceedingly ill behaved young men and women whose dress and language was both disgusting and filthy . . . to such an extent had the loose and immoral conduct . . . become the practice that many respectable persons in the neighbourhood were deterred from visiting the park for fear of being insulted or of exposing their children to the risk of hearing language and perhaps witnessing conduct of a most detestable nature.[42]

The relationship with the police was also problematic. Harrison complained that the police constable was reluctant to take action on what he considered petty offences, and refused to address anything occurring when he was not in the park. His beat was only extended into the park well into spring; before that time, when staff were at their busiest with horticultural work, 'the roughs who frequent the Park have the opportunity to do pretty much as they like'. In addition, as he only worked in the park for three to four months per year, he did not 'feel that amount of responsibility which is necessary to satisfactorily discharge his duties, and to the preservation of order in and protection of the Park'.[43]

In 1903 John Carnochan, superintendent at Baxter Park, Dundee, wrote a comprehensive and damning report on that park's condition, 40 years after its opening. In addition to setting out the work needed to restore it (including new fencing, repairs to buildings, thinning of overgrowth and upgrading of paths) he asked for a

F The park keeper at Fishponds Park, Bristol, distinguished more by his bearing than by his straw boater, early 20th century. (The Parks Agency)

G Royal Parks Police at Coutt's drinking fountain, Regent's Park, London, c1870–1900. (© English Heritage. NMR CC97/00624)

H The head gardener at Grove Park, Weston-super-Mare, c1906. (The Parks Agency)

I Pillars of the community: park keepers at Victoria Park, Bristol, early 20th century. (The Parks Agency)

UNIFORMS

As their role developed, the need for park keepers to appear analogous to police officers was frequently recognised, although the use of uniforms developed gradually. In the 1840s staff at Philips Park in Manchester were, when serving as watchers, equipped with distinguishing caps, a whistle, a stave and, after 1868, half a dozen pairs of handcuffs.[i] But as late as 1889 caretakers in Bristol's parks were provided only with caps; in 1896 in a new park in the city's St George district the keeper had to petition the council for permission to wear his fire brigade overcoat to keep warm in the winter.[ii]

But the need for gravitas was increasingly recognised. In London in the late 19th century the senior officer on the watching staff (generally termed an inspector) and his deputy (or sergeant) were each issued annually with a helmet, a tunic, two pairs of trousers, three pairs of gloves, a pair of leggings and two pairs of boots, plus an overcoat every two years and capes, buttonsticks, brushes and belts as required to a value of £6.10s annually. A summer uniform featuring a serge tunic was also allowed, with black gloves to be replaced by white.[iii]

The annual allocation for head keepers, keepers and under-keepers in London was, by 1915, one tweed coat and vest, a felt hat and a white Homburg hat, a pair of gloves, two pairs of boots, a pair each of trousers, cord breeches and pigskin leggings, six collars and two ties, plus an overcoat every two years and a mackintosh cape every four years.[iv] Acting keepers and under-keepers with special service allowances wore stripes on their left cuff: one for five years of service, two for 10 years.

Keepers were expected to be impeccably turned out (except when engaged in maintenance duties, when they changed into old clothes). As LCC regulations put it in 1915, 'Keepers must at all times be clean and neat in appearance, and must wear their uniforms, as prescribed, without addition or alteration. Any man who comes to work unshaven or otherwise untidy must be sent home and lose time accordingly.'[v]

Gardeners and labourers were not expected to dress as formally, although it is clear from photographs that gardeners typically wore a waistcoat, shirt and collar, and cap, while the senior gardener often wore a bowler hat to dignify his position. In London each gardener or labourer was issued with just two round felt hats – one could be replaced with a straw hat in summer – bearing the letters 'LCC' and his number.

Notes

i Ruff 2000, 74.
ii Lambert 2000, 56.
iii LCC 1899b, 4–5.
iv LCC 1915, Regulation 105.
v LCC 1915, Regulation 52.

dedicated ranger, citing the example of Glasgow: 'In addition to the Ordinary Police Constable, who covers the Parks as part of their beat, they have at each of the principal Parks one Ranger with a distinctive uniform, whose sole duty is to patrol the Park . . . the Parks Department is charged by the Police Department for his service and uniform.' Baxter Park, he added, 'has suffered more abuses than any other of our Public Parks, and before it can be maintained in a proper order these abuses must be stopped'. A dedicated ranger was seen as the key to achieving this objective.[44]

In London the LCC was, by 1899, pretty comprehensively anticipating Pettigrew's preferred system, of hiring dedicated watching staff. Park and garden keepers were styled 'park constables' and commons keepers 'constables on open spaces'. Battersea, a large (80ha) first-class park, had the following staff under a superintendent and a foreman:

- Security: inspector, sergeant, constables (16), night watchman
- Gardening: propagator of plants, assistant propagators (9), night stoker, gangers (3), gardeners (18), labourers (23), improvers (2), boys (2)
- Miscellaneous: stores clerk, boy clerk, stores labourer, jobbing man, engine driver, waterfowl attendant, lavatory attendants (2), gymnasium attendants (2).

The modest Bethnal Green Gardens (3.6ha) had a foreman, a ganger, a sergeant, two constables, three gardeners, a labourer and a lavatory and gymnasium attendant. A simple square such as Beaumont Square (0.4ha) was staffed by one full-time gardener, Aske's Playground by one full-time caretaker.[45]

London parks' watching staff were to take the particulars of suspected offenders and make a report to the head of the department with an opinion on whether the offense warranted a summons. Ordinary prosecutions were conducted by park officers, with LCC solicitors brought in only for serious cases. Arrests were to be made with 'the greatest care' and only if guilt was reasonably beyond doubt, or if suspects refused to give details, or for serious offences such as assault or indecent exposure. Constables could take offenders before a magistrate or to the nearest police station if the police refused to do so.[46]

London's Royal Parks were patrolled by officers of the Parks Constabulary, a branch of the Metropolitan Police Service. Duties ranged from apprehending pickpockets and 'swell thieves' to supervising public lectures and prayer

WAGES AND STATUS

Given the variations in nomenclature and in the parks themselves, it is not easy to compare wages across the country. Allan Ruff has looked at the wages of Jeremiah Harrison, the first principal keeper of Philips Park, Manchester. Harrison was appointed in 1845 on a wage of 25s per week plus free lodgings, coal and water worth an estimated 5s a week. This compares well with wages for traditional craftsmen such as calico printers, painters and masons but is well below those for skilled factory workers. The salary made him just about secure, although the arrival of additional children forced him to request a raise, citing the 30s plus house and coal paid to the head gardener at Peel Park, Salford; he was awarded an extra shilling. Over the next few years his wages did rise, but slowly, to 32s in 1870 and to 40s in 1873.[i]

Wages for officers in charge appear to have varied considerably between the provinces and the major conurbations. The keeper at People's Park, Grimsby (Lincolnshire), was appointed in 1882 on a weekly wage of 30s.[ii] The same was offered in 1888 to the new superintendent at Queen's Park, Longton, although three years later this had risen to 40s.[iii] On the other hand, park superintendents' wages in London in 1899 ranged from £100 per annum in fourth-class parks to £225 in first-class parks (by comparison J J Sexby, chief officer of the Parks Department, was on an annual salary of £500 and his head clerk on £400).[iv]

Comparison of 1899 wages in London between working and watching staff reveal a good degree of parity. A foreman-in-charge would receive 28–40s per week depending on the class of park, a propagator of plants 20–30s, assistant propagators 28s. An inspector of constables could expect 30–40s, a senior commons keeper 30–34s, a sergeant park keeper 30s. Park constables, gardeners and labourers were all on the basic wage of 27s, although a caretaker would be on around 24s.[v]

Park superintendents' wages were augmented by free accommodation in the principal park lodge, as well as free water and coal or gas.[vi] Other smaller lodges might also house park staff, generally paying rent but in some cases – as at London's Brockwell Park – excused from rent in return for opening and closing the adjacent gates.[vii]

Notes

i Ruff 2000, 54.
ii Fiona Green, pers comm, 19 March 2004.
iii Lawley 1998.
iv LCC 1899b.
v Ibid.
vi This was the case, for example, in Manchester's Philips Park in 1849 and in London in 1933.
vii LCC 1899b, 3.

STAFFING LEVELS AT LONDON PARKS, 1899[i] AND 1902[ii] (1902 FIGURES IN BRACKETS)

Park	Area, acres	Annual maintenance	Staff numbers
Waterlow Park	29	£2,290 (£2,900)	Resident superintendent, 23 men, 1 woman
Finsbury Park	115	£5,605 (£7,200)	Resident superintendent. 42 men, 2 women
Clapton Common			1 constable
Hampstead Heath, Golders Hill, Parliament Hill	c543	£4,035 (£4,300)	Superintendent, inspector, 3 sergeants, 3 leading labourers, 12 constables, 12 labourers, 3 other men, 2 women
Clissold Park	53	£2,050 (£2,000)	Resident superintendent, 16 (15) men, 1 woman
Highbury Fields	$27\frac{1}{2}$	£715 (£1,200)	1 foreman, 7 men, 1 lavatory woman summer only
Hackney Marsh	337	£1,890 (£1,900)	Inspector, 12 men
Spa Green	$\frac{3}{4}$	£135 (£180)	1 gardener
Whitfield Garden	Old graveyard	£140 (£130)	1 gardener
Bethnal Green Gardens	9	£905 (£1,000)	Foreman, 8 men, 1 woman
London Fields	$26\frac{1}{2}$		1 constable, 1 labourer
Meath Gardens	$9\frac{1}{2}$	£1,065 (£750)	Foreman and 8 men
Victoria Park	217	£11,600 (£11,900)	Resident superintendent, 99 men, 3 women
Shepherd's Bush Common	8	£235 (£170)	1 constable, occasional labourers
Lincoln's Inn Fields	7	£625 (£660)	Foreman-in-charge, 5 men
Red Lion Square	$\frac{1}{2}$	£185 (£100)	1 gardener
Victoria Embankment (inc Leicester Square)	$12 + \frac{1}{2}$	£1,975 (£1,975)	1 superintendent and 14 men
Newington Recreation Ground	$1\frac{3}{4}$	£260 (£370)	Caretaker, labourer, woman gymnasium attendant
Wapping Rec/G	$2\frac{1}{2}$	£270 (£250)	Constable, gardener, woman gym attendant
Beaumont Square	1	£105 (£155)	1 gardener
Holy Trinity Churchyard		£75	1 caretaker
Shandy St R/G	$1\frac{1}{2}$	£240 (£151)	1 gardener-in-charge
Brook Green	$4\frac{3}{4}$	£260 (£219)	1 constable, 2 occasional labourers
Ravenscourt Park	$31\frac{1}{2}$	£1,915 (£1,902)	Resident superintendent, 16 men, 1 woman
Battersea Park	198	£10,315 (£12,450)	Resident superintendent, 94 men, 3 women
Eel Brook Common	14	£360 (£590)	1 constable, labourers when required
Kennington Park	$19\frac{1}{2}$	£1,785 (£1,950)	Resident superintendent, 17 men, 2 women
Southwark Park	63	£5,090 (£6,031)	Resident superintendent, 31 men, 2 women
Deptford Park	$16\frac{1}{2}$	£810 (£810)	Foreman-in-charge, 4 men, 1 boy
Island Gardens	Small	£455 (£432)	Resident foreman-in-charge, 2 men
Maryon Park	12	£740 (£771)	Resident foreman-in-charge, 5 men
Plumstead Common	100	£860 (£1,122)	Resident inspector, 6 men
Wandsworth Common	183	£1,660 (£1,641)	1 inspector, 9 men
Clapham Common	220	£2,220 (£3,227)	1 inspector, 9 men, 1 woman
Myatt's Field	$14\frac{1}{2}$	£1,245 (£1,309)	Resident superintendent, 10 men, 1 woman
Peckham Rye Park	$120\frac{1}{2}$ (inc Peckham Rye etc)	£3,160 (£3,750)	1 resident superintendent, 23 men, 1 woman
Hilly Fields	$45\frac{1}{2}$	£635 (£600)	1 sergeant, 4 men
Ladywell R/G	$46.\frac{1}{4}$	£1,020 (£1,000)	Senior constable, 7 men, 1 woman
Telegraph Hill	$9\frac{1}{2}$	£740 (£800)	Foreman-in-charge, 6 men
Blackheath	267	£1,580 (£1,300)	Resident inspector, 9 men
Brockwell Park	$84\frac{3}{4}$ ($127\frac{1}{2}$)	£3,250 (£3,700)	Resident superintendent, 27 men, 1 woman
Tooting Beck and Tooting Graveney Commons	$210\frac{1}{2}$	£1,305 (£1,500)	Resident inspector, 8 men
Dulwich Park	72	£3,390 (£3,250)	Resident superintendent, 31 men, 1 woman
Bostall Heath	$133\frac{3}{4}$	£580 (£670)	Resident inspector, 4 men

Notes
i LCC 1899a
ii LCC 1902

meetings, from sorting out accidents on Rotten Row to directing traffic in Kensington Gardens. Officers – equipped with a small twig or switch that they could shake in a threatening manner – patrolled the Serpentine, chasing off fishermen and regulating swimming by the hundreds of children for whom this was a public bath. They enforced by-laws forbidding everything from sketching and palmistry to the exercising of dogs without muzzles.[47]

Despite the obvious value of a general knowledge of park work, watching staff were often drawn from other walks of life such as the military, fire brigade or police. They were often middle-aged which, while it gave them a degree of authority, also meant that they were, as Harrison put it, 'in no fit state to run after the young fellows who infest the Park and who feel that they can in most cases, even if detected, evade capture'.[48] Harrison drew the Public Parks Committee's attention to the average age of his staff, four of whom were over 50, 'unequal to the performance of a hard day's work and quite unsuited afterwards to the discharge of the duty of watchers'.[49] Perhaps as a result of such problems, by 1915 it was the LCC's policy that 'no man above 40 years of age or below 25, or woman above 50, is to be engaged on the permanent staff.'[50]

By the end of the 19th century the unworkability of combining working and watching duties was finally recognised, although some use of security staff on labouring work in slack periods, and of gardening staff on watching duties in busy times, probably continued.

There is a clear pattern of growth in staff numbers through the 19th century as the scale of park-keeping work was recognised. Park superintendents' reports to the LCC are full of requests for additional help. In 1894 Mr Curle, superintendent at Southwark Park, stated, 'The greatest drawback is the deficiency of labourers to keep the park in anything like order . . . The public expect some vast improvements since the Council has made it a second-class park, and to be kept in better condition.' [51]
Mr Moorman of Victoria Park was more eloquent:

> The weakest feature here during the summer is the park-keeping staff. The extent of ground to supervise is large and intersected by two public roads . . . Every part of it is frequented by a teeming population of thousands, and the Council has ordered that no keeper must work more than 9 hours per day or 54 hours per week, while the park is open for 16 hours or more per day in the height of summer; and in order to meet the requirements of this the gardening staff are terribly intrenched upon at a time when they cannot well be spared . . . From the numbers who use this park in the summer for bathing and other purposes, it is absolutely necessary that there must be protection as soon as the park opens.[52]

J The park keeper may have been a figure of fear but he was also a reassuring presence, Hornsey Recreation Ground, 1914. (Reproduced by permission of EH.NMR PC06682)

The perceived need to increase staff was also related to developing ideas on how parks should be used. By the late 19th century horticulture and gymnastics were not enough: other uses, including swimming, boating, cycling, tennis, bowling, photography and music, as well as public meetings, had to be accommodated. The appointment in 1890 of Robert Lamb as Manchester's first general superintendent of parks and open spaces signalled a recognition of this trend, which Pettigrew continued to encourage after succeeding Lamb in 1915. Pettigrew saw parks developing from 'beautiful lungs confining visitors rigidly to footpaths and enforcing a considerable number of restrictions' to 'places of active participation and recreation'. Where there had been a 'one-sided use of public recreation grounds' there was now a 'growing demand for their more rational use' to be met by new facilities for sport and other pastimes.[53]

Notes

37 Pettigrew 1937, 157.
38 Pettigrew 1937, 158.
39 Pettigrew 1937, 157.
40 Pettigrew 1937, 158–9.
41 Ibid.
42 Manchester Parks and Cemeteries Committee, vol 122, December 1895, quoted in Ruff 2000, 78.
43 Ruff 2000, 78–9.
44 *Report on Baxter Park by the Superintendent of Parks, &c.,* 26 October 1903, Dundee City Archives, quoted in Jamieson 1998, app X.
45 LCC 1899b, 15.
46 LCC 1899b, 10.
47 Owen 1909.
48 Ruff 2000, 78.
49 Ruff 2000, 79.
50 LCC 1915, Regulation 1.
51 LCC 1894, 8.
52 LCC 1899b.
53 Pettigrew 1937, 4.

THE PARK KEEPER AND THE COMMUNITY

In the early days, working staff obliged to undertake watching duties were often unhappy at being put in confrontational positions with park users. The logistics of being both a gardener and a security guard were problematic as it was, and when watching duties followed on after working duties staff were often too tired to chase troublemakers. A Manchester Public Parks Committee request in 1848 that staff take summary deposits on fines for by-law violations caused a good deal of resentment.[54] In 1868 keepers at London's Victoria Park were sworn in as special constables and issued with cutlasses to augment the police and army in dealing with Chartist meetings on Bonners Field. Hazel Conway noted that the 'dual role of park worker and special constable did little to enhance relations with the public, and park keepers acquired a reputation for officiousness from an early date.'[55]

When Manchester's Philips Park opened in 1846, little forethought had been given to agreeing acceptable behaviour with users, and its early days were fraught with disagreement between staff and public. Hastily introduced regulations – no entering the park drunk; no gambling or improper language; no games on Sundays; no dogs; no males to intrude upon the playgrounds of females – frequently led to confrontation. The following year saw signs introduced warning against walking on the grass, picking flowers and plants, riding horses or carriages. In the first weeks of the park's opening, Harrison on one day turned away 70 people with dogs, and on another there were over 1000 visitors 'and very rude'.[56] He recorded in May 1850 that they often had to eject 20 or 30 boys from the girls' playgrounds and commented, 'I may safely say that I have had more abusive language and insolence shown me since the swings were put up this spring than the whole time I have been in the parks before.'[57]

Instructions, from a Public Parks Committee uncertain of what was acceptable in a space still under cultural negotiation, were often unclear and passed the buck to hapless staff. For example, the committee did not wish to risk an outright ban on public meetings, so staff were instructed to prevent meetings 'from which annoyance or disturbance might arise'.[58] It is easy to imagine how this could cause problems on the ground.

The LCC's 1933 staff handbook, which offered guidance to park keepers on handling transgressors, was notable for its concern about public relations. It warned against manhandling anyone, and about the need for certainty about an offence before any action is taken. 'Discretion,' it said, 'should be exercised in the application of the by-laws, many of which should only be strictly put into force when nuisance or damage is arising from their non-observance.'[59] On the subject of obtaining troublemakers' particulars, the handbook advised that 'When an offender is with friends, ask him his name and address a little apart, so that his friends cannot overhear his answer. Then ask one or more of his friends separately to give the offender's name and address.'[60]

As notions of acceptable behaviour in public parks firmed up, and as the park keeper became an established figure in the community, his authority was less open to question. While vandalism and transgression undoubtedly remained a fact of life, negotiation over the keeper's role declined. Indeed by the mid-20th century his authority was often seen as absolute. Dave Pick, a former keeper in Leicester, recalled that he was known as 'the little Hitler of Abbey Park. I used to look officious, I had a moustache, and the uniform I had, it did look ominous.'[61]

The collective image of the park keeper amongst the older generation is summed up by Gwynneth Dunwoody MP:

> The old London parks in my youth were terribly formal and had park keepers who were very much respected. I remember as a child in Bishops Park you were never allowed to run on the grass. It looked beautiful but it was always carefully protected from mere people. That image of the park keeper, they were custodian but also chastiser and you were terrified of the park keeper.[62]

Of course the park keeper did in many cases provide a welcome, avuncular presence, but in her reference to 'mere people' Mrs Dunwoody pinpoints the resentment which was to crystalise in parks policy in the 1960s, and which led ultimately to the demise of the authoritarian keeper as a figure unsuited to a modern social democracy and in particular to a public place.

Notes
54 Ruff 2000, 75.
55 Conway 1991, 205.
56 Ruff 2000, 75.
57 Ruff 2000, 77.
58 Ruff 2000, 74.
59 LCC 1933, 30.
60 Ibid.
61 Pick 2001.
62 Select Committee 1999c, 9.

THE DEMISE OF THE PARK KEEPER

As part of an effort to integrate parks into the wider urban fabric, a policy of removing railings and other barriers began in the 1930s. J J McIntosh, superintendent of Northampton's parks, recorded that during 1936–9 the local authority had removed several thousand metres of railings, although this had 'presented problems with the boundary planting and patrolling of parks during winter evenings'.[63]

The war effort in 1939–45 provided another reason for the removal of barriers, with parkland used for allotments, municipal piggeries, air-raid shelters, anti-aircraft batteries, searchlight and barrage-balloon sites, sandbag quarries and temporary buildings.[64] In many urban areas park gates, where they survived at all, were left unlocked to allow access during air raids.[65]

As a result of these changes, 'a new viciousness in the matter of wilful damage' was soon noticed by commentators.[66] In May 1944, four years after railings were removed at Manchester's Philips Park, the director of parks reported:

> Since removal a considerable amount of damage has been caused to property and trees and shrubs by groups of mischievous youths who congregate in parks after dark and seem animated by a spirit of vandalism. They break into pavilions, damage shelters, conveniences, and other property, strip bark from trees and damage turf on bowling greens. The public are now able to gain access to the parks at numerous points and take full advantage . . . to take short cuts across shrubberies, flower beds, and grass areas. The attitude of many seems to be that now the railings and gates have gone they have a perfect right to walk where they like irrespective of any damage they may do.[67]

A further phase of removals washed through parks in the 1960s, again inspired by socially progressive policies and this time accompanied by the disappearance of forbidding signs and other authoritarian paraphernalia.

The decision to remove barriers fundamentally changed the context in which park keepers worked. At a stroke the security on which they premised their work, and on which public attitudes to parks were based, vanished. Brent Elliott, Head Librarian at the Royal Horticultural Society and an expert on Victorian designed landscapes, has referred to the 'the consequent wave of destruction – of flowerbeds, trees, park furniture and buildings, swans'.[68]

Guy Fawkes Night in 1947 saw gangs of children, armed allegedly with axes, knives, crowbars and saws, raiding Philips Park and removing trees, hedges and wooden fences; one keeper reported that the gangs even used trip-wires to foil watchers.[69] According to a 1952 report by the council's musical adviser, children disrupted band concerts, with keepers powerless to control them.[70] Belfast park rangers – 'wakkies' as they were known locally – fought an uphill struggle, 'armed with a stick and a whistle', against increasing vandalism during the 1960s; one was beaten up after he intervened with a pitch-and-putt player who was damaging a green.[71]

The superintendent of Victoria Park in Portsmouth wrote, 'I sometimes wonder if the death-knell has not been rung on ornamental gardening in public parks . . . unless there is a great improvement in the behaviour of those who visit the parks, and for whom they are provided, it will not be possible to regain the high standard of floral displays to which we were accustomed'.[72] A *Gardeners' Chronicle* leader referred to 'park superintendents who have seen their life's work defaced and defeated'.[73]

A second decisive impact on the job of park-keeping was the disappearance of park lodges as dedicated staff accommodation, and therefore of keepers themselves as a reliable presence in the parks. On-site accommodation for the officer-in-charge had been a fundamental of park management throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th.[74] The lodge had a powerful symbolic role, signalling not only authority but also custodianship and care. Except when on leave or on council business, the superintendent was expected to reside in the park and to be within it during open hours.

Sale or demolition of park lodges accelerated in particular with the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in the late 1980s: as staff were made redundant or relocated from single parks, lodges were vacated and sold either for private use or under right-to-buy legislation. This policy was given a major boost by the government's 1992 decision that local authorities could retain for capital purposes all receipts from the sale of redundant assets (previously half of these had to be retained for the servicing of debt). As a result, in a very short period the London borough of Ealing, for example, sold off all its park lodges as a matter of policy. Many more lodges were simply boarded up and allowed to fall into dereliction. By 1993 the Garden History Society was commenting:

> The entrance lodges which characterise most public parks were occupied by keepers, whose continuous

presence sent very different signals to those transmitted by the emptiness of many parks today, or even by roving security patrols. Now many of those lodges are in private ownership, or derelict, or demolished.[75]

The loss of park lodges or their withdrawal into private ownership, often behind new fences or hedges, was highlighted in an Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee inquiry into town and country parks in 1998–9. The Friends of Barnford Park presented to the committee a litany of destruction including the removal of the resident keeper, the sale of his house and the demolition of the keeper's pavilion.[76] The Victorian Society drew attention to 'the selling off or boarding up of park entrance lodges, gardener's cottages, etc further contributing to the impression that nobody cares what goes on in the park'.[77] As the committee noted, 'increasingly this accommodation has been sold off, demolished or become the prey of vandals.'[78] The Public Parks Assessment of 2001 highlighted the fact that since just 1980 nearly a quarter of all park lodges had been lost to use.[79]

The critical element was the disappearance of keepers from the parks: 'With CCT, park budgets were cut and park keepers replaced by teams who come once a week to cut the grass. If the parks are not policed regularly, then people . . . become fearful of using them.'[80] The Select Committee report noted the 'drastic reduction' in the number of keepers: by 1996 only a third of public parks still had dedicated staff,[81] the rest being subject to more or less infrequent tours by peripatetic maintenance gangs, security staff or rangers. Some hard-pressed authorities relied on outside contractors, a solution memorably characterised by Ken Worpole, one of the country's most influential writers on urban social policy, as 'two men in a rundown vehicle and an Alsatian dog driving through everyday at 4 o'clock'.[82]

The general perception was summed up concisely by a senior parks manager from the City of Westminster: 'The lack of staff presence in parks is the main reason for the decline in public open space and parks.'[83] The consensus, from friends groups to government ministers, was that the absence of park keepers had encouraged vandalism and increased public fears. To make matters worse, as park keeper jobs and job security disappeared 'it became more difficult to recruit young park keepers, and local youths began to see the (often elderly) "Parky" as impotent and laughable.'[84] Worpole speculated on whether 'the keeper-less park' would join the unstaffed railway station, the poorly lit underground car park, the unsupervised playground and the deserted town centre at night as 'another ghost zone of modern Britain'.[85]

ON-SITE STAFF ACCOMMODATION IN LONDON PARKS, 1899[i]

Park	Accommodation
Battersea Park	3 lodges (superintendent, foreman, inspector)
Blackheath	1 lodge (inspector)
Brockwell Park	Mansion (superintendent) with ground floor and basement refreshments rooms, and old coachman's rooms over stable (constable); 2 lodges (constables)
Bostall Heath	1 lodge (inspector)
Clissold Park	1 lodge (superintendent)
Dulwich Park	2 lodges (superintendent, constable)
Finsbury Park	1 lodge (superintendent)
Golder's Hill	1 gardener's house; 2 lodges (constables)
Island Gardens	1 house (foreman-in-charge) with Free Library
Kennington Park	1 lodge (superintendent)
Peckham Rye Park	1 lodge (superintendent)
Ravenscourt Park	2 lodges (superintendent, gardener)
Royal Victoria Gardens	1 lodge (superintendent)
Southwark Park	1 lodge (superintendent)
Tooting Common	1 lodge (inspector)
Victoria Park	7 lodges (superintendent, foreman, inspector, propagator, 3 constables)
Waterlow Park	2 lodges (superintendent, foreman)
Wormwood Scrubs	1 lodge (constable-in-charge)

Notes
i LCC 1899a

The Select Committee recommended that 'if the decline of parks is to be arrested and reversed it is essential that there should be sufficiently high quality staff'.[86] A key recommendation of Working Group 2 of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce on improving public spaces was 'bringing park ranger and dedicated gardening staff back into parks in order to ensure a skills base for the future and reverse the physical spiral of decline and the perception of fear'.[87] Recent research by CABE Space shows compelling evidence that where parks are allowed to fall into disrepair or their original design is corrupted, anti-social behaviour often increases.[88]

All this is not to suggest that there has been no progress in the understanding of parks management. As early as the 1960s progressive officials such as Arthur Oldham, superintendent of Glasgow's parks, were not only removing 'keep off the grass' signs but introducing school visits, community events, nature trails, interpretive leaflets and other means of increasing participation and access, both physical and intellectual.[89] Many superintendents argued

for a greater diversity in recreational provision, including horse and bicycle racing, fêtes and galas, water sports and less traditional horticulture. Regarding these new leisure forms Philip R Sayers, in a 1966 article in the *Journal of Park Administration* tellingly entitled 'From Parks Superintendents to Leisure Planners', wrote enthusiastically that 'In a garden-free park many of these could be catered for.'[90]

The provision of facilities for sport and formal recreation would eventually become a dominant feature of public parks. As a result of the Bains Report on the management of local councils,[91] and the Local Government Act of 1972, many parks departments were in the mid-1970s absorbed into broader 'leisure and amenity services' structures. In 1983 the Institute of Parks and Recreation Administration, the professional association of park administrators, renamed itself the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM).

The introduction of urban park rangers in the early 1990s was another recognition of the need to engage with the local community rather than just policing it.[92] Typical of this trend was the ranger service introduced by the London borough of Southwark, based on a belief that 'making parks feel safer will persuade people to make greater use of them'.[93] In an era of reduced budgets and declining standards, to make parks intrinsically attractive it was imperative not only to address maintenance and control but actively to encourage users back into the park.

K The lodge at Queen's Park, Longton, late 19th century. (Photograph courtesy of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery)

L The keeper at Bedwelty Park, Tredegar, c1921. (The Parks Agency)

Notes
63 Conway 2000a, 122.
64 Conway 2000a, 123–4.
65 Elliott 2000, 117.
66 Maurice Hellier, quoted in Conway 2000a, 123.
67 Manchester Parks and Cemeteries Committee, vol 55, 5 May 1944, quoted in Ruff 2000, 147.
68 Elliott 2000, 117.
69 Ruff 2000, 148.
70 Ruff 2000, 147–8.
71 Scott 2000, 140.
72 Elliott 2000, 117.
73 Ibid.
74 See for example LCC 1899b, 3.
75 Conway and Lambert 1993, 7.
76 Select Committee 1999b, 2.
77 Select Committee 1999b, 41.
78 Select Committee 1999a, p xxvi.
79 GreenSpace 2001, table 4.1.
80 Conway 2000b, 13.
81 Association of Direct Labour Organisations, quoted in Select Committee 1999b, 84.
82 Select Committee 1999c, 9.
83 Comedia and Demos 1995, 59.
84 Select Committee 1999a, p xxvi.
85 Select Committee 1999b, 112.
86 Select Committee 1999a, p xxviii.
87 DTLR 2002b, 10.
88 CABE Space 2005.
89 In 1973 Oldham was awarded the St Mungo Prize, presented since 1936 to citizens who had done most 'to beautify the city, to increase the well-being of the citizens, to purify the atmosphere, to foster better relations between all classes, to extend cultural and educational development, and to bring Glasgow into honourable prominence'.
90 Quoted in Conway 2000a, 129.
91 Bains Committee 1972.
92 Holtkott 1997.
93 Lasdun 1995, 25; see also the summary in Greenhalgh *et al* 1996, 116.
94 Burton 1993, 5.
95 Colvin and Moggridge 1992, 9, 28.
96 LCC 1915, Regulation 50.
97 Stewart Harding, *pers comm,* 12 Apr 2004.

THE ROLE OF THE PARK KEEPER TODAY

A 1993 report by the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management, *Urban Park Wardening*, commented that:

> The [traditional] park keeper had a multiple role: he collected litter, locked and unlocked the park, issued tickets for tennis and other facilities, and generally policed the park. With the demise of the park keeper, some or all of these functions are missing from our urban parks. Several years on, many local authorities are coming to terms with the fact that, even though park keepers were outdated, many of the duties previously undertaken by them have a place in today's urban park. Many authorities have shared park keepers' traditional roles amongst other staff through a reorganisation of duties but this has not always been as successful as anticipated.[94]

The need to reverse the trend towards keeper-less parks was flagged by various reports throughout the early 1990s. User surveys repeatedly found that the top priority was to see uniformed staff back in the park. A 1992 study of People's Park, Halifax, for example, noted that 'several members of the public casually encountered in the park identified the demise of a park keeper (and his dog) as a key point in [the park's] decline'. Among the study's recommendations was the building of a lodge for a resident keeper.[95]

The lesson of history is that because of the nature of public parks there is a need for dedicated staff 'to maintain order, protect the public [and] . . . preserve the Council's property from injury'.[96] This has been directly linked to the investment of public money, and it is not surprising that the Heritage Lottery Fund, by far the biggest investor in public parks in recent years, has since 1996 earmarked nearly £40m for the reintroduction of park managers, dedicated garden staff, and wardens, rangers and keepers.[97]

The Heritage Lottery Fund has developed considerable experience in the framing of job descriptions for these posts; those for wardens, rangers and keepers generally encompass:

- Carrying out daily inspections
- Greeting visitors and providing a point of information and contact
- Organising events, activities and programmes, or implementing activities programmes
- Issuing fixed-penalty notices for infringement of by-laws, for example on dog fouling or litter
- Maintaining links with residents, friends groups, local businesses and others
- Acting as an ambassador for the park, for example by visiting schools
- Managing a budget specific to the individual park
- Reporting to the Council
- Implementation of an agreed 10-yearly management and maintenance plan.

The new posts are thus a long way from the mere watching duties of the 19th and early 20th centuries. They aim to address community engagement as well as security, the need for welcoming as much as policing, and the concerns of both users and non-users.

More recently many local authorities have begun addressing this question and, in part enabled by Best Value and the end of the CCT stranglehold, have started redirecting scarce resources towards dedicated staff. The government's current programme of grant aid for neighbourhood wardens, and its general interest in 'liveability' or quality-of-life agendas, have provided additional guidance for a new approach. In the borough of Halton (Merseyside) a rolling programme of capital improvements has gathered sufficient momentum that a dedicated gardener is to be part of the restoration of Rock Park. In St Paul's, Bristol, restoration of the lodge in tiny St Agnes Gardens (now St Agnes Park) as a community facility in 2000 was complemented by the employment of a park keeper, who will also serve as a 'community facilities coordinator'.

Children's books such as Nick Butterworth's popular *Percy the Park Keeper* series celebrate the now almost mythical role of the keeper as custodian of the park and friend to children within the Eden-like security of its boundaries. Ironically, for most of Butterworth's readers (largely in the two- to seven-year-old bracket) the park keeper is a purely fictional character, but there are clear signs of a rebirth of the keeper's role. The importance of the public's perception of parks as safe and welcoming is being recognised, and local authorities are again turning their attention to the fundamentally immeasurable benefits of dedicated staff. Rising capital investment has forced agencies and local authorities to consider how to protect that investment, and again the presence of dedicated staff seems to offer a cost-effective solution.

The park keeper now works in a very different social climate; the lessons of rangering – visitor welcome, outreach, community liaison, interpretation – are now embedded in the thinking on public parks. While the days of the 'little Hitler' are gone for good, it is to be hoped that we are witnessing a renaissance of staff dedicated to the safekeeping of these urban oases and their users.

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Abbreviations

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DoE	Department of the Environment
DTLR	Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
ILAM	Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management
LCC	London County Council
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

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Cleaner, Safer, Greener
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Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)
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M A historic postcard image of a Bushy Park officer tending the deer. Wildlife management is likely to part of the modern 'parkie's' role too. (Reproduced by permission of EH.NMR PC10429)

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