

# West Ham Park

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## Official list entry

Heritage Category: Park and Garden

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1001685

Date first listed: 17-Feb-2004

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## Location

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Greater London Authority

District:**Newham (London Borough)**

Parish:**Non Civil Parish**

National Grid Reference:**TQ 40038 84268**

## Details

A late C19 public park laid out on the site of a botanic garden of the second half of the C18.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

There are records that a house known as Rooke Hall existed on the site by 1566 (Fry 1888). The Rocque survey of 1745 shows Sir Robert Smith as owner of a house with a square, enclosed (possibly moated) garden to the south and a prominent mount to the north. The estate passed through several hands and was known as Upton House by the time of its purchase by the Quaker physician Dr John Fothergill in 1762. Pre-existing planting included some cedars, yews, and wall fruit. Dr Fothergill enlarged the estate of c 30 acres (12ha) to c 60 acres (24ha). Fothergill commissioned plant hunters, including William Bartram, to build up his collection of specimens from the Americas, Far East, Europe, and Africa. The 1777 Chapman and André plan records Fothergill's 5 acre (2ha) walled wilderness garden which was later described as follows:

a winding canal, in the figure of a crescent, divided the garden into two [parts], occasionally opening on ... rare exotic shrubs ... A glass door from the house gave entrance into a suite of hot- and green-houses, nearly two hundred and sixty feet in extent, containing upwards of three thousand four hundred distinct species of exotics, ... and in the open ground ... nearly three thousand distinct species of plants and shrubs. (Fry 1888)

There was also a very early rock garden, possibly predating that at the Chelsea Physic Garden (qv) of 1773. The garden was described by Sir Joseph Banks as second only to Kew in Europe and it attracted visitors from abroad (Thompson 1782). At Fothergill's death much of his collection was sold, including botanical drawings of the collection, although trees and greenhouses remained.

The Quaker banker and philanthropist Samuel Gurney bought the house, then known as Ham House, in 1812. He opened the garden to the park by demolishing the wall to its west, filled in part of the canal after the spring which fed it dried up, and invested £500 in American shrubs (Pagenstecher 1908). Samuel Gurney rebuilt Upton Lane House, later known as the Cedars, for his sister, the prison reformer Elizabeth Fry, who lived there from 1829 to 1844 (Fry 1888). This house was opened to Ham Park and in 1888 it became a military headquarters.

In 1856 the estate passed to Samuel Gurney's son and then his grandson, John Gurney, who did not wish to live at Ham House. The OS map of 1868 shows the House with extensive glass to the west, the main carriage drive curving between lodges on Upton Lane and Portway, serpentine perimeter belt planting, the mount, the pleasure garden without the canal, and a kitchen garden in the north-east corner of the estate.

The house was demolished in 1872 and after a long fund-raising campaign the site transferred to the Corporation of the City of London as a public park in 1874. The public park was laid out by 1887, incorporating features from the earlier park including the pleasure gardens, mature trees, and the carriage drive. Part of the kitchen garden was retained while the northern section was developed for housing. A new entrance was made from Ham Park Road to the north and new paths were laid out and planted as avenues. Park buildings including a bandstand, refreshment house, and urinal were erected and a drinking fountain and cairn marked the site of the former Ham House (OS 1894-6). By 1914 the site of the mount had been incorporated into a circular pond with a central island, and tennis courts and a bowling green had been added (OS 1920). The tennis courts were moved to the west of the pleasure garden and a raised terrace made along the western edge of the gardens in the mid C20. Railings removed during the Second World War were replaced in the 1950s, while the late C19 gates survive.

The gardens have continued to be developed, with a new sunken rose garden (1992) and a rock garden laid out in the pleasure gardens on the site of Fothergill's mid C18 rock garden. The site continues (2003) in use as a public park in the ownership and management of the Corporation of London; the Corporation's nurseries are located in glasshouses in the north-east corner of the site.

## DESCRIPTION

## LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

West Ham is situated in the London borough of Newham in east London, c 10km east-north-east of Charing Cross. The c 30ha roughly rectangular park is on almost level ground. It is bounded to the north by railings along Ham Park Road, with Victorian terraced housing and a late C20 school overlooking the park. The small area of housing at the north-east corner of the site is enclosed with brick walls. To the east the park is bounded by railings and by two sections of wall running along Upton Lane, beyond which is housing and two schools.

The southern boundary runs long Portway, enclosed with metal railings and with Victorian terraced housing to the south. The Territorial Army site (formerly the Cedars) extends into the south of the park and is enclosed with galvanised palisade fencing. The west of the site is bounded by housing, largely of the later C20, and is enclosed with C20 railings and sections of wall and fencing.

The setting is suburban, with terraced housing largely developed in the later C19 overlooking the park. There are views out of the park towards Stratford church and Canary Wharf.

## ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

There are eight access points to the park, of which one in the south-east corner is currently (2003) out of use. The principal entrance is from the east via gates on Upton Lane. A lodge formerly stood slightly further to the east but was demolished in the late C19 when Upton Lane was widened and the new East Lodge was built further into the park. A curving tree-lined drive leads from this entrance, passing to the north of the site of the former Ham House and sweeping south and west towards the main entrance gates on Portway at South Lodge, a mid C20 building. There is another entrance in the centre of the Portway boundary with C19 cast-iron gate piers and a mid C20 lodge. The north-west entrance is via gates with cast-iron piers on Ham Park Road, leading via a path hedged on both sides to a tree-lined path which follows the line shown on the 1860s OS map. Further substantial C19 ornate wrought-iron gates and piers (Margery Gate) give access c 450m east along Ham Park Road to a tree-lined path laid out as part of the public park in the late C19. There are two further pedestrian entrances, one to the east and one to the west of the park.

## PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Ham House was demolished in 1872.

## GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gardens form a discrete area and lie in the south-east corner of the park, south of the site of the former house, as shown in the mid C18 (Rocque, 1745). The entrance to the gardens lies c 45m north-west of the main entrance on Upton Lane. A brick-paved path (resurfaced in 1991) leads south past the stone cairn marking the site of Ham House and the ginkgo planted c 1760 against a wall of the House. There are numerous other mature trees and specimen trees in great variety, many planted as commemorations. Some 100m south of the entrance to the gardens is a rock garden made in 1994 in the position of Fothergill's rock garden of 1765. At the south of the garden is a bridge (rebuilt late C20) over the former canal, much of whose course can still be discerned by sunken areas and the path layout. The path continues c 70m east and then c 100m north past specialist planting beds to the 'dell' or sunken lawn in the north-east corner of the gardens, which may mark the end of the former canal. The path then leads west past the national collection of Liquidambar to reach a raised terrace walk, some 110m south-west of the garden entrance, which runs c 90m from north to south along the western edge of the gardens. Steps flanked by two Coade stone urns lead to the west, passing the tennis courts. There are bedding displays to the west of the terrace and a sunken rose garden (1992) to the east. The area continues to be developed with specialist plant collections.

## PARK

The remainder of the park is laid out on former grazed parkland. It is laid largely to lawns, divided by a network of paths planted as avenues of plane and lime, many of late C19 date. There are some fine specimen trees including a group of cedars near the Margery Gate on Ham Park Road and rare trees such as a *Carpinus quercifolia* near the bandstand. The park is largely encircled by a perimeter belt of trees and a dense shrubbery along the southern boundary.

Some 100m north-west of the principal entrance are a playground and paddling pool made in 1965 in the form of a segment of a circle. It is on the site of the circular pond and island shown in 1920 (OS), which in turn replaced the C18 mount, a former rabbit warren (Pagenstecher 1908). In the centre of the park the bandstand stands within a hedged enclosure; it was erected in 1882 and repaired in 1972 (Corp of London 1996). North of the bandstand an area of grassy mounds marks the site of a former pitch and putt course. The curving drive which links the East and South Lodges is planted with trees along much of its length. Two timber shelters along this path were replaced in steel in the late C20. The north and west of the park accommodates sporting facilities including hard tennis courts, cricket and football pitches, and running tracks. There is an area of all-weather surface west of the Territorial Army's site.

**KITCHEN GARDENS** The north-east corner of the park was formerly the site of the early C19 walled kitchen garden as illustrated on the OS map of 1868. After the Corporation of London took ownership of the park in 1874, the northern part of the kitchen garden was developed for housing. Following the Second World War, this area was used by the Corporation of London as a nursery with extensive glasshouses, a dutch barn and other buildings of post-war date. The nursery closed in 2016. The area is enclosed in part by historic brick walls to the east, west and north, truncated and rebuilt in places, and elsewhere by hedges and chain-link fence.

## REFERENCES

G Thompson, *Memoirs of Fothergill* (1782)

W Bartram, *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida* (1791)

K Fry, *History of the Parishes of East and West Ham* (1888)

G Pagenstecher, *Story of West Ham Park* (1895)

G Pagenstecher, *Story of West Ham Park* (2nd edn 1908)

R H Fox, *Dr John Fothergill and his friends: chapters in eighteenth-century life* (1919)

## Maps

J Chapman and P André, *County of Essex, 2" to 1 mile*, 1777

J Rocque, *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark and the country near ten miles around*, surveyed 1741-5, published 1746

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1863-7, published 1868

2nd edition revised 1893, published 1894-6

3rd edition revised 1914;15, published 1920

OS 100" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1893, published 1894-6

## Archival items

Catherine the Great's lost Botanical Drawings, (Cardington International Adventures Ltd c 2000) [MS copy on EH file]

West Ham Park, unpublished guide, (Corporation of London 1996)

D Calder, West Ham Park, unpublished MS, (1982) [copy on EH file]

J C Lettsom, Hortus Uptonensis or a Catalogue for Stove and Green-house Plants at Dr Fothergill's garden at Upton at the Time of his Decease (1783)

Description written: October 2003

Amended: January 2004

Register Inspector: SMC

Edited: January 2005

This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 21 August 2025 to update details in the description

## Legacy

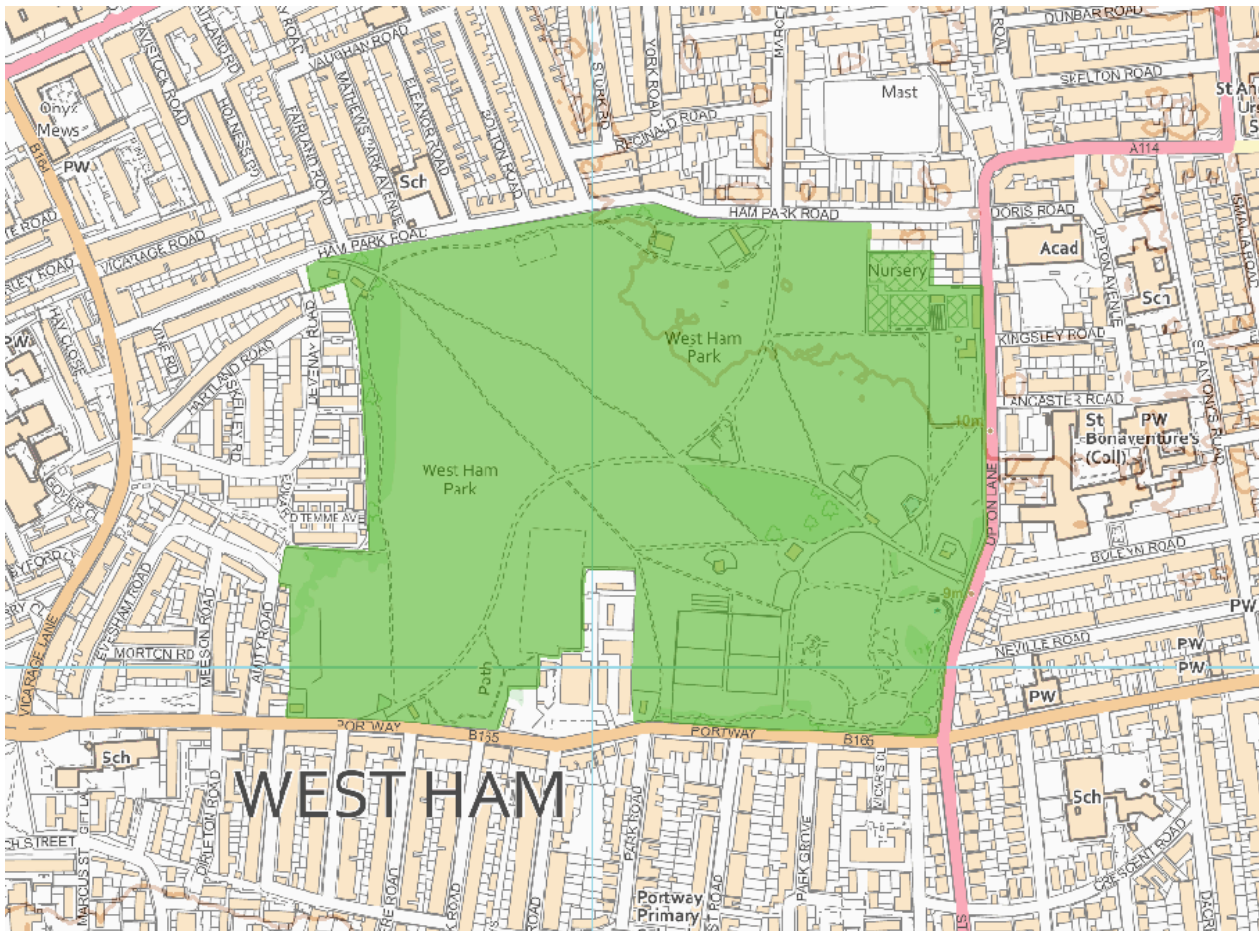
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Legacy System:**Parks and Gardens**

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## Map

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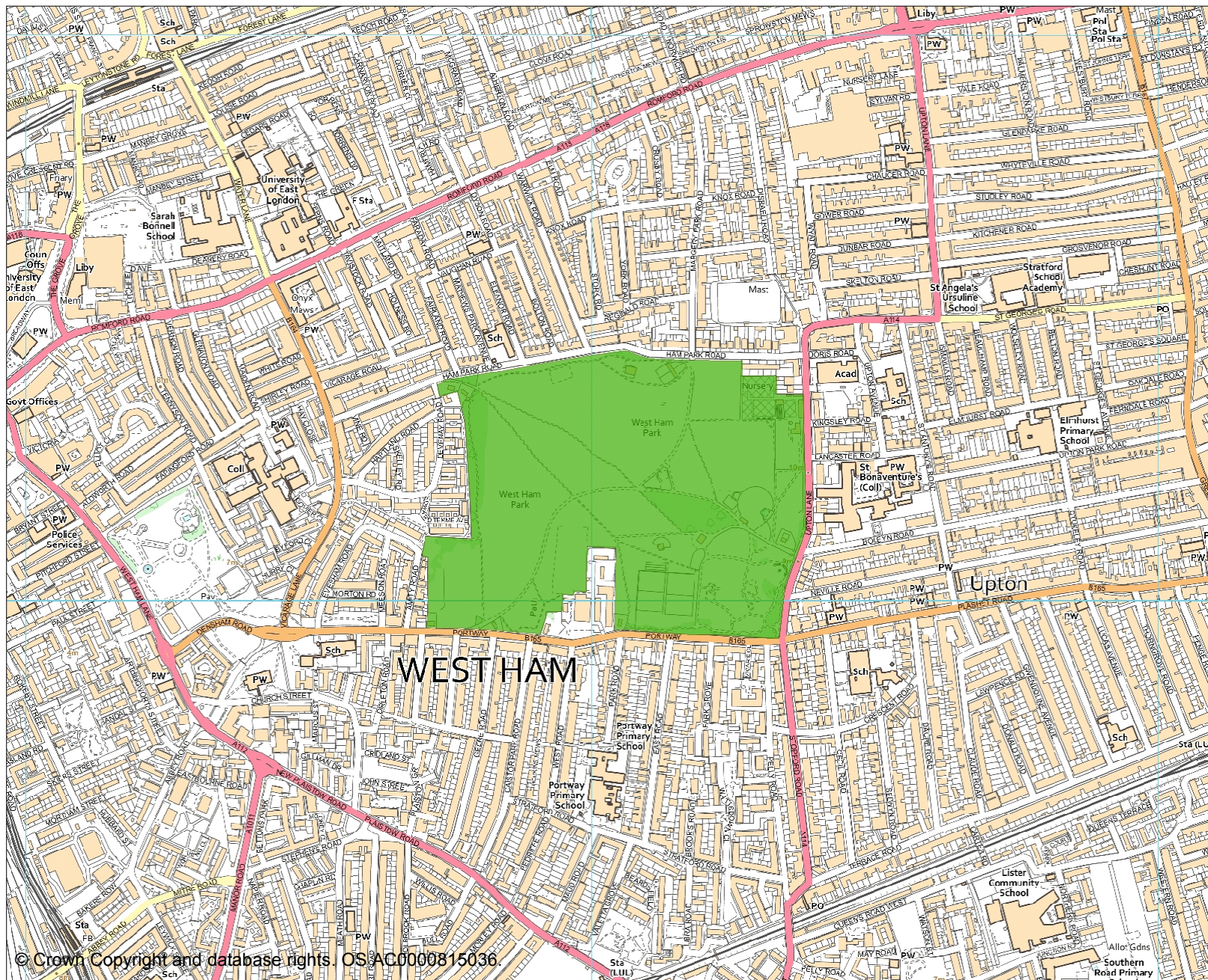
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1001685

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II

**County:** Greater London Authority

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**Parish:** Non Civil Parish

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**List Entry NGR:**

TQ 40038 84268

**Map Scale:**

1:10000

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