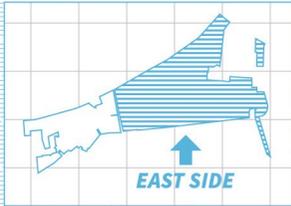


BRIDGE TO NOWHERE

Burgess Park Heritage Trail

EAST SIDE



Bomb Damage contributed significantly to the formation of Burgess Park. In 1917, a Zeppelin raid destroyed 3 houses near here, killing 12 people. During WW2 the area was again damaged by bombers, and later the infamous V1 'doodle-bugs' and deadly V2 rockets. Local people were given temporary pre-fabricated housing - known as 'prefabs'.



Watkins Bible Factory stood on the site of what is now the children's playground. It was one of the area's biggest factories. At its peak it bound 1 million bibles a year, employing 400, mainly women, known as 'folder girls'. It was deemed to offer more 'respectable' employment than some other local factories. Suffering WW2 bomb damage, the factory was rebuilt in late 1950s but eventually closed in 1977.

← Continue to WEST SIDE overleaf



The Bridge to Nowhere recalls the park's past life, when it spanned the Grand Surrey Canal. Along most of its length, the canal was wide enough to let two Thames sailing barges pass. Built at the beginning of the 20th century, it saved a long walk to cross the canal at Wells Way or Trafalgar Avenue.



R. Whites began in 1845, with Robert and Mary White selling ginger beer in stone bottles from a barrow. Eventually it would engulf local rival Rawlings, with seven premises around the area. Locals recall the clatter of horses and carts used for distribution, and bottles bursting on hot days at the storage depots.



Newby's Ice Store stood on the north bank of the canal in the 1860s, between the football pitch and the canal walk. Ice was used to keep food fresh during transport and in shops. Imported mainly from Norway, ice was delivered along the canal by horse-drawn barges to Newby's store, where ice wells were used to store the ice deep below the level of the canal.



Pubs were a major feature of the area - in 1871 Albany Road alone boasted 5 public houses with 7 more just a barrel roll away. Hard work often went with hard drinking, and drink became such a problem in the area that a stretcher to carry drunks away was permanently stored in Addington Square, ready for a lift to the local police station.

The Lake was built in 1982, featuring the world's largest plastic sheet lining, 12 million gallons of water, 11,000 fish, and sailing dinghies for school children. "The Cascade", a metal sculpture, replenished the lake with £30k worth of tap water a year. Things are more natural nowadays; ducks and fish are the main occupants and fishing is the most popular sport.

The Nature Reserve captures much of the Burgess Park story and was developed by Dave Sadler, a local resident and deputy park manager in the early 60s, on a WW2 bomb site that was incorporated into the park. Instead of the 'clear & turf-over' approach, he allowed nature to take hold, encouraging local school groups to plant woodland flowers and learn about wildlife.

Gleggall Wharf Basin is now a thriving communal garden growing fruit and vegetables. It replaces the refuse wharf at the end of the Surrey Canal Walk where the main arm of the canal opened out into a junction known as Gleggall Basin, wide enough for barges to turn down to Peckham. The Peckham branch of the canal opened in 1826, 15 years after the main section from Surrey Docks to Camberwell Road. Opposite the Wharf, Edison Bell turned out early records and gramophones.

The Peckham Botanist was a self-educated 18th century Peckham Quaker, Peter Collinson. He was a discoverer, cultivator, planter and provider of plants which transformed the appearance of English gardens, pleasure grounds and parks, influencing the gardens we enjoy today. He introduced over 180 flowers, shrubs and trees to this country - species now taken for granted as 'home-grown'.

Willowbrook Bridge actually forms a pair (although they differ in detail) with the bridge in Commercial Way. Originally completed in 1870, the single-span wrought-iron bridge displays some of the best cast-ironwork of the Victorian period. One of the many canal-side pubs in these parts, the Waterman's Arms stood alongside the bridge in the 19th century.

Whitten's Timber Yard is the current base for the Whitten family business. Starting in 1919, first from barrows and later shops in Sumner Road, they later moved to timber yards in Canal Head (now Peckham Square) and Eagle Wharf. Timber from the Baltic, Scandinavia, and around the world is still sold there today.