

Waterlow Park and garden

Grade II* listed 30 Sept 1987

The first record of ownership dates to 1580 when City of London goldsmith Richard Martin bought the land. The first evidence of there being a dwelling on the land is found on deeds of sale in 1599 to the next owner, John Povey, though Historic England note that the house was probably built c.1582. The gardens mentioned would have been formal, patterned pleasure gardens as was the fashion of the day, and the terrace on which Lauderdale House (as it is known today) is built would have afforded a perfect view of the layout from above. Today's parterres reflect that theme. To build a dwelling on a hillside required not just terracing but retaining walls to hold the terrace in place and the walls retaining the terrace today probably contain vestiges of the original walls rebuilt when the park was created in the late C19. The mount, flanking the parterres, could have been waste from building those terraces, and was a throwback to medieval gardens.

By 1625 the next owner, Sir William Bond, almost doubled the size of the estate by enclosure, purchase or rent. It was a couple of decades after this that the Lauderdale period of ownership began when the Countess of Home bought the land and bequeathed it to her daughter Anne who in turn became Countess of Lauderdale. The Lauderales were the 'hosts with the most' in the C17 and the rich and landed flocked to the house to enjoy their hospitality in the formal gardens that would have prevailed then. The Earl was evicted and imprisoned during the Civil War for his Royalist stance but returned during the Restoration – a wealthier and more powerful man under Charles II's reign for whom he was, as local historian Pam Cooper puts so delicately in her book *Waterlow Park*, 'privado in the king's secret pleasures'. It became a mecca for the nefarious entourage of the king.

Perhaps because of Lauderdale's role at court, the garden wasn't his prime consideration. Thus it fell to later owners to develop them for both pleasure and practical use. New ponds appeared together with a lower terrace with steps descending to what is now the St. Joseph's entrance. Beyond that were kitchen gardens which are referenced by our own kitchen garden today.

At the death of the Countess of Lauderdale, the Earl remarried and moved to Ham House in south-west London (now owned by The National Trust). For nearly a century after that the estate was owned by the Knapp family during whose tenureship formal gardens were restored and meadows with workaday names like Pond Field, Hill Field and Pond Meadow appeared on maps. The man-made ponds, fed by the many springs on the estate that source the River Fleet, provided fresh water and fish.

Nearly a century later in 1848 the land and houses were acquired from the Knapp family by unitarian, philanthropist, antiquarian, botanist and educationist James Yates. Under his ownership Lauderdale House became a mecca for the leading scientists and artists of the day with his '*matinées archéologiques*'. The gardens metamorphosed into an

arboretum with trees that he planted still in evidence in the park today. But for his rare plants – his first love -- he built an octagonal palmhouse situated downhill towards the kitchen garden, sadly demolished by the London County Council (LCC) when it became trustee of the park.

Between Lauderdale House and Fairseat House (later part of Channing School, founded 1885), stood Andrew Marvell's cottage. This building was demolished in 1869. In 1871, after Yates' death, Sir Sydney Waterlow (Lord Mayor of London 1872-3, fellow unitarian and philanthropist) purchased Lauderdale House and grounds, and the leasehold interest in Fairseat House where he chose to live, granting Lauderdale House rent-free to St Bartholomew's Hospital as a convalescent home.

In 1889 Waterlow presented Lauderdale House and grounds to the London County Council, with a donation of £6000 towards the cost of laying out the gardens as a public park or alternatively for purchasing the freehold interest in Fairseat House. Although Fairseat House was initially intended to be part of the park, this never happened and the £6000 was used instead to fund the work to turn it into a public park. By 1889 the planting, paths and upper ponds were in a similar layout to the present one but additional work was needed to convert it into a public park, including the construction of the southern lake, tennis courts, new entrances and paths, a rustic bandstand (demolished late C20), an octagonal aviary (demolished late C20) on the site of Marvell's cottage (demolished 1869), and some further planting. The park was opened to the public in October 1891 as a 'garden for the gardenless'.

A statue was erected to Sir Sydney Waterlow by public subscription in 1900. The final layout was shown on a LCC plan of c.1895 and there have been few changes since this date. In 1907 Mrs Evelyn Cecil described Waterlow Park as 'undoubtedly the most beautiful of all the parks [of London]' and it was renowned for its magnificent views. The park is well preserved and still has fine views.

The park underwent extensive restoration during the early 2000s when the Friends together with Camden applied and won Heritage Lottery funding.