

The Story of Waterloo #11: The Queen's Walk Trees

Jenny O'Neill decided to investigate the history of The Queen's Walk, an avenue of trees planted in the 1970s to memorialise the Civilian Dead killed in aerial bombardment during WWII. The story of this avenue is itself the story of development on the South Bank, as revealed by Jenny in this abridged version of the study.

"The research that prompted this study was the work of Thames Central Open Spaces, Folly for London and the general knowledge of the community that the trees on the Queens Walk are a memorial to victims of Second World War aerial bombardment. Digging my way through documents from post-war parliamentary discussions into the expressed concern and decision of the London County Council that a memorial garden be created on the South Bank, it would seem that a decision was taken that the memorial garden become an avenue of trees.

To date I have been unable to find the definitive decision but in 1985 the Public Arts Develop Trust understands this to be the case. This was reflected in background information for discussion on the development of the South Bank Centre in 1998."

I was also concerned for community wellbeing that acknowledgement was made of this proposed memorial: there are few memorials to these deaths – for example in the foyer at the Young Vic, but no London or UK acknowledgement. The very lack of memorial contributes to the current debate on history and appropriate memorials."

– Jenny O'Neill



1926

The Royal Fine Arts Commission write a letter to the London County Council (LCC) regarding the new Waterloo Bridge. They state that the riverfront must be developed so as to enhance the greatest environmental asset of the Capital city – the river.

1934

LCC promote a bill to develop and open up South Bank.

1939

Powers granted to develop Thames South Bank and the River Wall to “beyond Waterloo Bridge”. In the same year, the site which is to become the National Theatre is also agreed.

1943

A Special Committee on the County of London Plan meet at Lambeth Town Hall to discuss the River Front and South Bank Scheme.

1945

A Comprehensive Development Plan for the area is established.

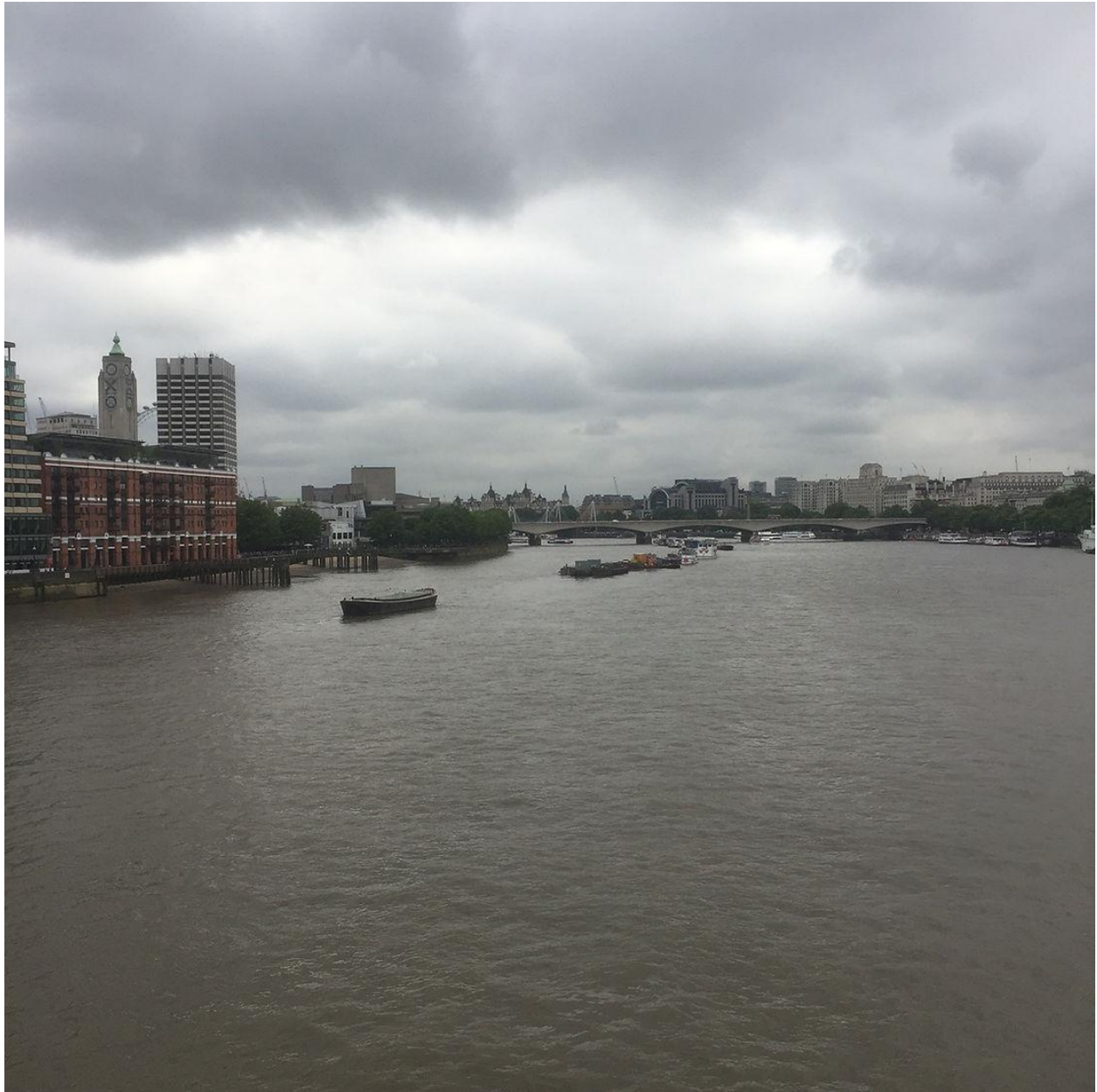
1947

There was discussion in parliament regarding a memorial garden on the South Bank as part of the wider topic of remembrance in "the empire."

LCC resolved to include in the "redevelopment of the South Bank of the Thames an open space suitably planned as a memorial to the people of London who met their death in the course of the defence of their city and the empire during the late war."

1948

The Thames Conservancy Board agree to a strip of land as a public open space along the Thames.



1951

Notes to National Theatre and Young Vic Joint Council: "Trees will be planted in the riverside gardens and then in time fuller mitigate the effect of duality. In fact the planting of trees could be planned with this intention."

A letter to Kenneth Rae on the Joint Committee of National Theatre and Young Vic from the architect, Brian O'Rourke highlight concerns that the LCC Memorial Garden shouldn't be sited directly on the riverside front of the theatre.

1961

London's evening press give detailed plans for the development of South Bank and indicate that the LCC was in discussion with the Arts Council about the proposed memorial within the riverside gardens. They describe "new riverside gardens with a continuous promenade through an avenue of trees between County Hall and Waterloo Bridge".

1964

A revised scheme shows the river wall complete and riverside garden leading to a new residential development.

1965

Development of tree bank begins by Greater London Council (GLC) who take over from LCC.

1970 - 73

In this three year period there is a significant planting of trees and shrubs.

1974

A letter is sent to Waterloo Community Development Group (WCDG) from GLC leader:

“The Council’s long-term intention is for the existing river wall and riverside walk in front of the National Theatre to be extended along the Kings Reach development to the new length adjoining Blackfriars Bridge, so as to give a complete riverside facility between the two bridges, and to reclaim the land behind it probably for public open space. This means that there will not be an irregular- shaped area left as indicated on your map, and as you can appreciate the provision of an enclosed building such as a swimming pool elsewhere in this immediate location might seriously intrude into the riverside walk and view.”

1976

The National Theatre opens on its current site.



1985

The Report of the Public Services and Fire Brigade Committee alongside the The Arts and Recreation Committee ask that the council authorise a sculpture to commemorate non-combatant victims of aerial bombardment in WWII, subject to the Public Services and Fire Brigade Committee approving a revenue virement to cover the full cost. At this stage it is being considered for an East London site and reference is made to women and disabled people in particular as victims of war by the Ethnic Minorities Committee. The consideration for this subsequently changes to a south London site.

1986

A request is received from GLC by Lambeth for erection of the commissioned Memorial Statue to Civilian Victims of Aerial Bombing. It is suggested it needs to be unveiled on the 27th of March 1986 as the last enemy attack on London happened on the same day in 1945.

Following information provided by the Henry Moore Trust (May 2017) who hold the Public Art Development Trust (PADT) Archives, Jane Ackroyd commissioned to be the sculptor. From correspondence with her it is clear that the placement of the sculpture was affected by the closing down of the GLC in March 1986 and the failure of the LRB to deal with the matter. It seems the company who had the sculpture in store went into liquidation and Jane can only assume that the sculpture was destroyed and sold for scrap. She was eventually paid for the Commission.

1988

The Queen walks along the Queens Walk, officially opening that section of the Jubilee Walk following the opening of the upper section in 1977.

1995

Lambeth Environmental Services Committee/South Bank Development Principles discuss the Master Planning Strategy for the South Bank Centre which has been developed for the South Bank Board by the Richard Rogers Partnership; and seeks approval.

There is public consultation on a set of development principles which would, if adopted following consultation, form the basis for the consideration of any planning application.

The South Bank Centre Development Principles Appendix 1 is circulated by Lambeth Council to interested parties for comment. This includes a section on Trees:

“The Council considers it is very important to protect the trees in the vicinity, which provide a valuable foil to the heavily built up urban character of the area. The trees along the river in particular both enhance the natural feature of the river and provide a contrast of the imposing architecture of the buildings. They add to the quality of the experience of the riverside walk, and they are also significant feature when viewed from the north bank, and from the river itself. The double row of plane trees along Queen’s Walk also has an important cultural and historic significance. They were planted as a memorial to civilians killed in the bombing of London in the Second World War.

“All the trees within the Conservation area are protected in that any works to them require permission from the Council. In addition the trees along the river are further protected by a Tree Preservation Order (No.170) and would need to be replaced if lost for any reason.”

With thanks, records held at:

London Metropolitan Archives

British Library (Newspapers)

Lambeth Archives (Minet Library)

Public Records Office Arts Council Archives (V and A) National Theatre Public Arts
Development Trust (Henry Moore Inst. Leeds) Port of London Archives Waterloo
Community Development Group