

Bermondsey Street Back Stories

Number 3: Leathermarket Gardens

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The rose garden with The Shard in the background

Roses bloom on the site of factories and warehouses

The gardens are a happy outcome from the sad destruction of World War 2. A tannery and warehouses here on the site were destroyed by bombing during the war. Now there is, instead, a wonderful local recreational space with an ornamental garden.



1860 map showing LEATHER MARKET buildings on the site

The proposed design – planting and seats

The site extended to just under two acres and the plan for the construction of the park was approved by the London County Council (LCC) in June 1954. The scheme included an area with grass, trees, shrubs and polyantha rose beds arranged with seating accommodation. The plan for the park incorporated part of Tyers Gate so a road closure order had to be obtained before the works could start.

A children's playground too

There was general rejoicing when a children's playground with sandpit, climbing net and apparatus was opened at the end of 1957. It included an attendant's room and toilets for children.



The opening of the children's playground at Tyer's Gateway, Bermondsey, May 1951. The Mayor of London, Sir Robert Gordon, with the directors of Barrow, Hambro and Gale Ltd.

The opening of the children's play area

A Shelter and Plaque to honour the Salters

In December 1955, there had been a suggestion that a shelter be built at the east end of the ornamental garden. It was to be in memory of Dr Alfred Salter, first Labour MP for Bermondsey and his wife Ada, a Bermondsey councillor and mayor, and member of the parks committee from 1925-41. Ada had been responsible for the remarkable Beautification Committee that had overseen the planting of trees and nurtured open spaces on Bermondsey Council land, most notably, Southwark Park.

Funding was offered by the Bermondsey Independent Labour Party. The LCC agreed to the contribution and request in view of the 'honour and affection' with which the Salters were remembered in the borough. The shelter and a commemorative plaque were put in place, although they were later removed.



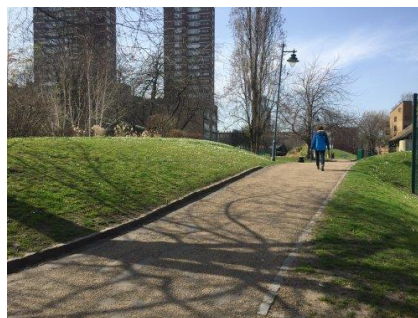
The official opening in January 1958

Official Opening in 1958

The Chairman of the LCC Parks Committee along with members of the Borough Council braved the winter weather to attend the official opening of the gardens in January 1958. The ceremony was performed by the Mayor, watched by an enthusiastic crowd of well-wishers who cheered and waved from the warmth of nearby workplaces.

Hills, in Bermondsey?

At the time the new park was opened, wreckage had not been fully cleared from the western end of the site. It was not until the 1980s that the final section of the Gardens fronting Weston Street, was completed. Major re-landscaping included the grassed-over mounds, now used for sunbathing and picnics. They are thought to contain building rubble.



Mounds at the western end of the gardens

Village Hall, Bee-Friendly Planting and a Dog Show!

The original shelter has been removed, but the park retains much of its original layout. A village hall has been built in the centre of the park and is well used for community activities (below, left). An area of bee-friendly planting has been introduced at the western end, including shrubs, climbers and dwarf fruit trees (below, right).



Come September, the gardens host the much-loved Bermondsey Street Festival dog show and other entertainments.

