

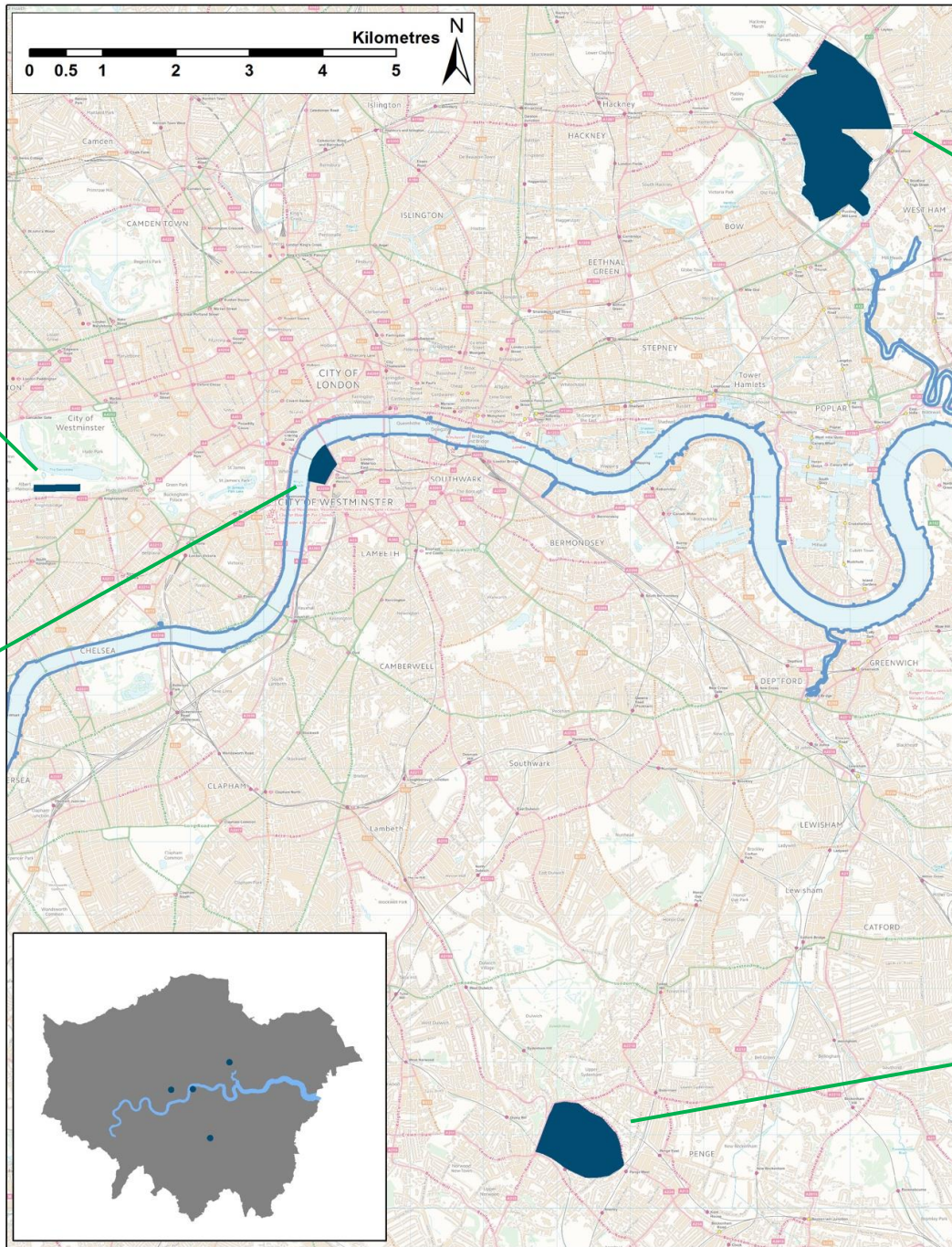


Legacy or heritage? Reconsidering the Olympic inheritance

Jonathan Gardner
School of Art, Edinburgh College of Art (University of Edinburgh)

Three heritages/legacies

1. The 'wasteland' and the history of the (pre)Olympic Park
2. Olympic legacy as instant heritage
3. Ancestors – East Bank and the ghosts of mega events past



Somewhere beneath the site of the Olympic Stadium, December 2007...



The 'wasteland' and the history of the (pre)Olympic Park

‘derelict’ and ‘run
down’

(Beard 2006)

‘a vast corridor of
wasteland’

(Lee 2006, 6)

‘the majority of the [Compulsory
Purchase] Order Lands are
characterised by remnants of past
uses’; ‘unused and under-used’

(Eversheds LLP quoted in Davis and
Thornley 2010, 92).

‘From a neglected and derelict
industrial landscape a new park will
emerge providing world-class
leisure and sporting facilities for
Britain, one of the top visitor
destinations in the country.

(Powell 2012, 423)

‘a derelict
contaminated
wasteland’

(Tessa Jowell in LOCOG 2012, 9)

‘Once the Victorian industry
declined, there was little left to
recommend the region, making
it the perfect dumping ground
for bombed-out building rubble
and other landfill.’

(*Current Archaeology*, 2012)

Beard, M., 2008. Foundations dug for 2012 aquatic centre. *Evening Standard*, 17 July

Davis, J. and Thornley, A., 2010. Urban regeneration for the London 2012 Olympics: Issues of land acquisition and legacy. *City, Culture and Society*, 1(2), 89–98.

LOCOG, 2012. London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony Media Guide.

Powell, A., 2012. *By river, fields and factories: the making of the Lower Lea valley: archaeological and cultural heritage investigations on the site of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games*. Salisbury: Wessex Archaeology.

2012

‘...what is now the Olympic site was a desolate, unloved barren wasteland ripe for redevelopment.’

Daily Mail, 27 July 2012

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2179912/London-2012-Stunning-images-showing-seven-year-transformation-Stratfords-Olympic-Park.html>

2022

‘What was once a heavily polluted industrial wasteland, peppered with electricity pylons and invaded by Japanese knotweed, is now a tranquil landscape of wetland, woodland and wildflower meadows.’

BBC News, 22 July 2022

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-62251671>

Olympic Delivery Authority
Building the Olympic Park 2005-11
July 2011



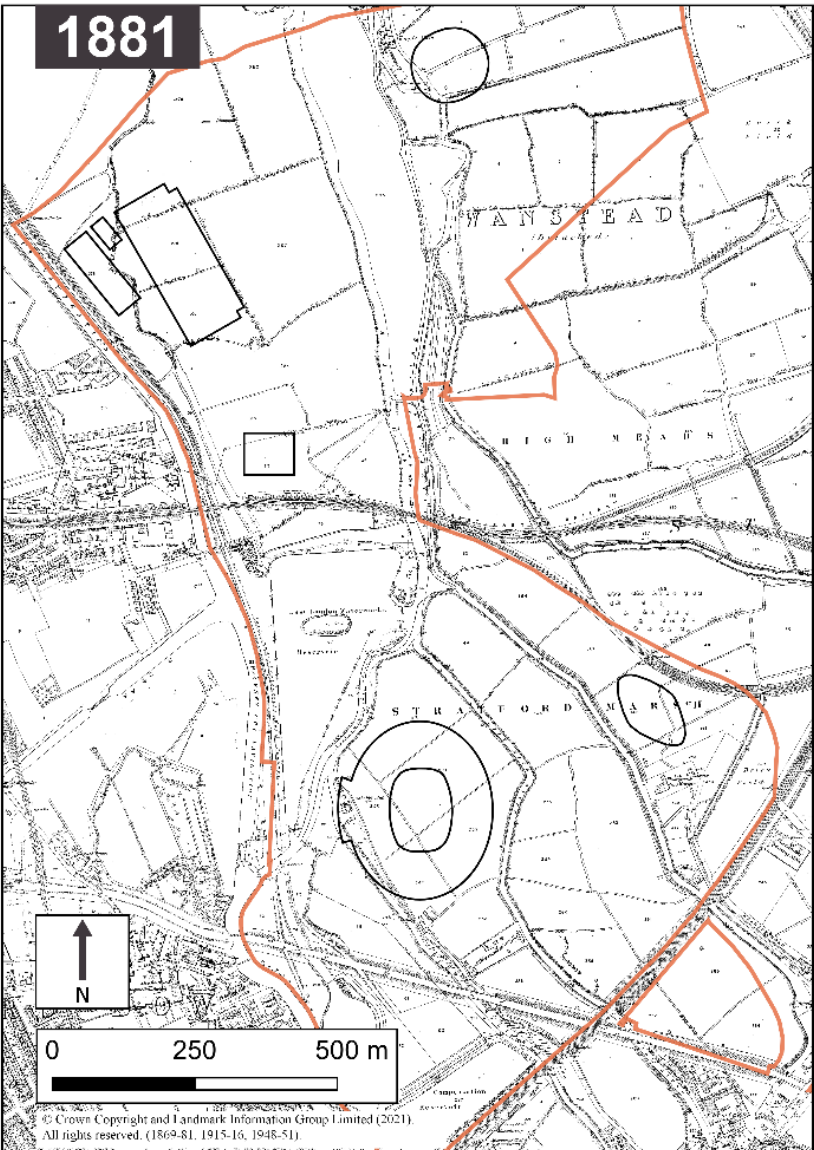
Transform



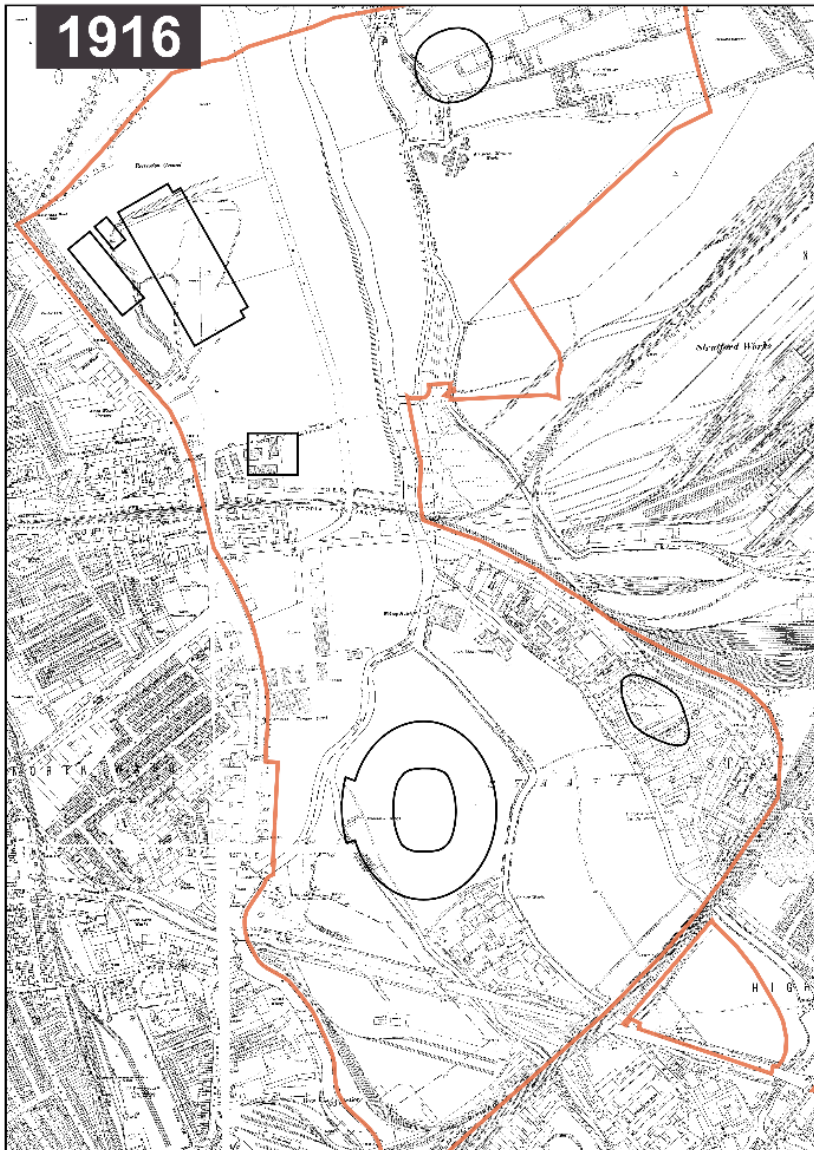
In the beginning

Typical of the condition of the area, the site of the new Aquatics Centre was an old car breaker's yard.

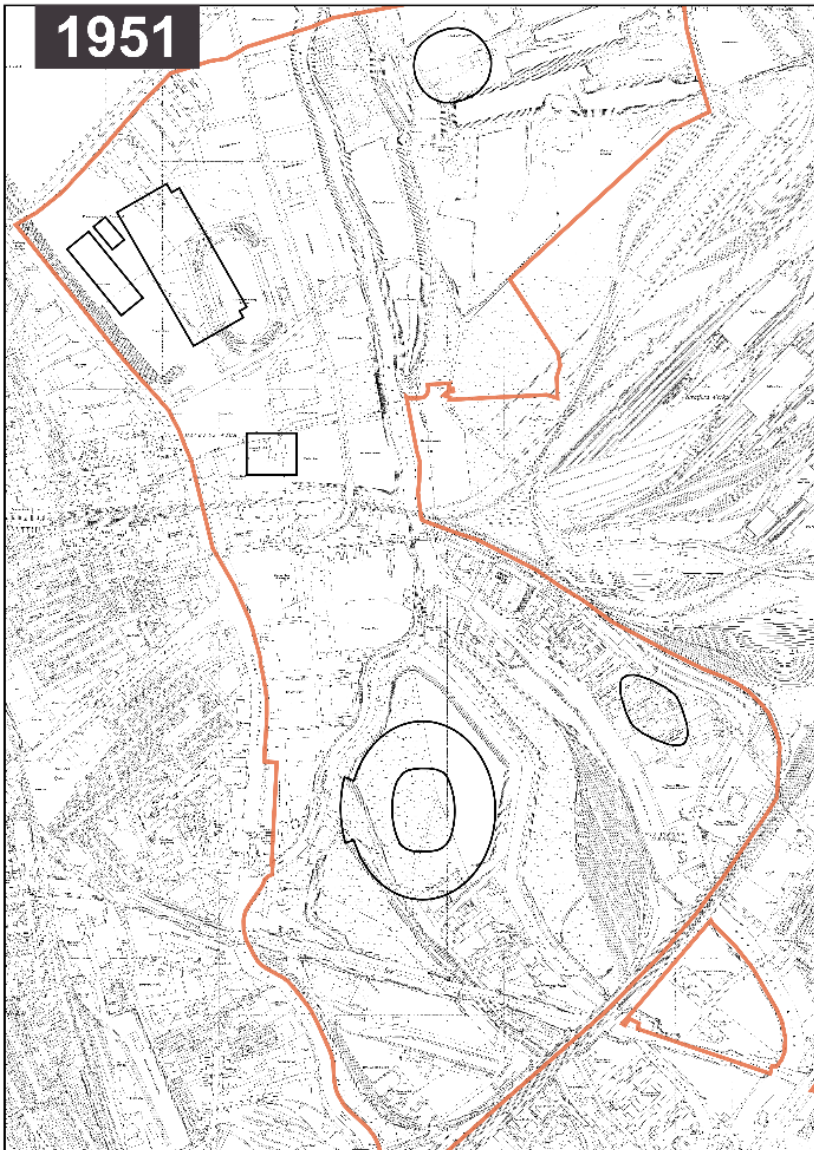
1881



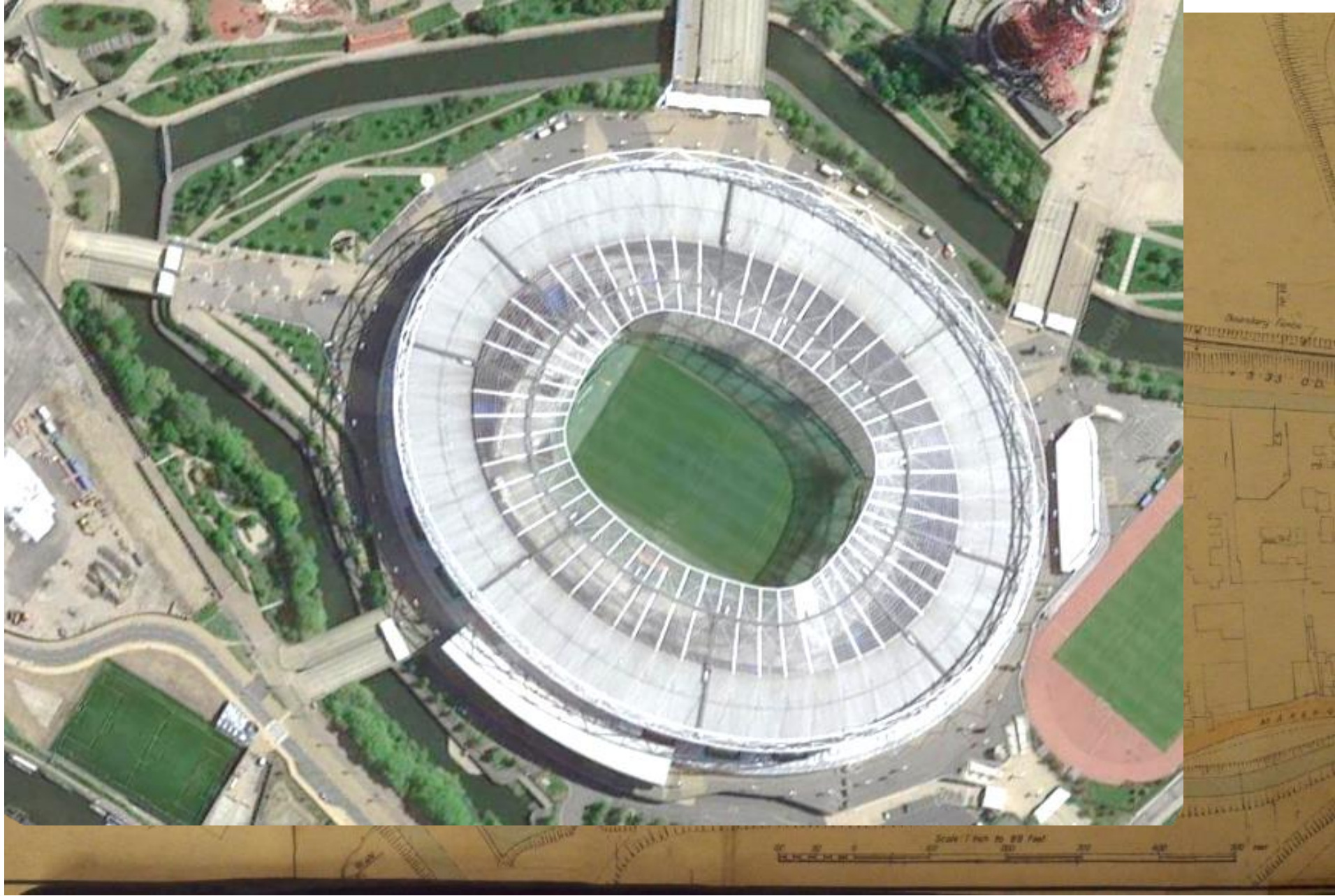
1916



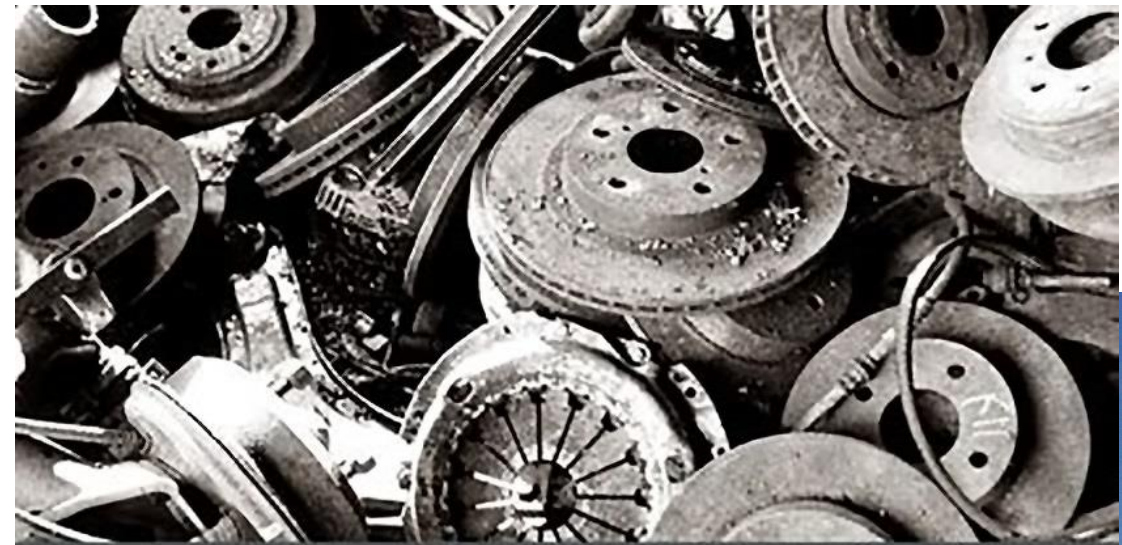
1951



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Google 2019// London Metropolitan Archives: ACC/2423/R/001 River Lea Flood Relief Contract Plans: Stratford Marsh. Contract 1, Plan 2321 Drawing No. 454 A.



Dispersal

Picturing urban change in east London

Marion Davies, Juliet Davis and Debra Rapp







Archaeologists at work in the Park (2007-8)

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A Neolithic (4000-2200 B.C.) hand axe, minutes after its discovery by archaeologists.

This was recovered in 2008 at excavations for a Games-time carpark site south of Stratford High Street.





Excavations on the site of the Aquatics Centre in 2008.

An archaeologist records an Iron Age burial (ca. 400-100 B.C.)

This was part of a settlement that had been sporadically occupied since the Middle Bronze Age (1500-1000 B.C.)

‘a story of change and transformation dating back centuries’

David Higgins, Chief Executive, ODA 2007

‘the change represented by the construction of the Olympics is absolutely in keeping with all the change that’s happened in the Lea Valley beforehand – it’s just happening in a shorter time period.’

(YouTube Press release) MOLAS-PCA Project archaeologist 2009

‘Archaeologists and local people have had the opportunity to learn more about the development of Lower Lea Valley and the people that have lived here for thousands of years before it is transformed for future generations.’

John Armitt, Chief Executive, ODA 2009

‘[...] London 2012 demonstrates how archaeologists can [...] turn what might be a negative into long-lasting positives.’

Atkins Global – (lead archaeological consultants on the site)
N.D.

Olympic legacy as instant heritage

‘By the time of the proposed creation of Olympic Park much of this land had been given over to a largely unplanned mix of temporary light industrial uses including the infamous ‘fridge mountain’. There was no structure or identity to this landscape and there was little or no access to the waterways which are now one of the defining features of the Park landscape. Havens of green such as the Manor Garden allotments provided small beacons of relief within this hostile landscape.

To talk of the heritage recognises the enormous changes which have occurred in the last ten years following the creation of the Park, enabling the re-discovery of the natural and landscape features such as the rivers and canals which define the local area within a dramatic man made landscape. Strategic views along the waterways and through the landscape to the venues and other features such as artworks are a defining and carefully managed feature of the Park, providing reminders at each visit as to how the Park and surrounding areas are changing. They are one of many ways in which the success or otherwise of how the Park is being managed can be measured.’

(LLDC Park *Management Plan* 2020, 57, my emphasis)

1.1 Vision

A great part of a great city

In 2030...

... the investment and change triggered by London's hosting of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games has not only helped create a successful, new part of the city but also helped renew all the communities that surround it. It is no longer a place at the periphery of London that suffers from its industrial past, cut off from surrounding communities and a tear in the city's urban fabric.

Stratford is bustling with shoppers and office workers, busy with visitors from across London and the world. It is a destination and one of the best connected places in London – internationally, to the rest of the city, and most importantly to the revitalised neighbourhoods around it.

Each of which has its own character. Hackney Wick and Fish Island are a lively mix of homes and new enterprises, in canalside apartments and revived Victorian yards. Pudding Mill Lane is a new mixed use community and Bromley by Bow and Sugar House Lane combine to make a family-oriented neighbourhood straddling the River Lea. On the north side of the park, Leyton and Leytonstone have new shops, new homes, and new links to Stratford.

Twenty years after the Games, it's now one of the best places in London to live and work – the best legacy there could be from the 2012...

Mayor of London, 2012.
*Olympic Legacy
Supplementary Planning
Guidance, 3.*



GET

It's the year 2030. Welcome to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

Arrive by bike, dock at a secure parking station and begin your exploration on foot.

Stroll along the canal paths and watch children kayaking, water taxis returning locals from the city and fishermen sitting on the shaded banks.

Take in the view of London's iconic skyline from the panoramic heights of the ArcelorMittal Orbit's viewing platform. Admire the sweep of the Velodrome's curving timber roof across the park, and look down at crowds parking their bikes and hopping off buses as they arrive for a concert at the Stadium.

Explore the community gardens, walk along the wetlands, or wander among the new homes, capped with green roofs, solar panels, and clever ways to catch rainwater. Discover the buildings – as smart as they are stylish – built from sustainable materials, and designed to use energy and water sparingly.

**OR JUST RELAX IN THE PARK
WITH A PICNIC, LISTEN IN TO AN
OPEN-MIKE SESSION AND WATCH
THE VIBRANT COMMUNITY
THAT LIVES THERE GO BY.**

LLDC, 2012. *Your Sustainability Guide to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park*. London: London Legacy Development Corporation, 7.

Ancestors – East Bank and the ghosts of mega events past



AJ Architects' Journal

Major redesign for Olympicopolis to save St Paul's views

3 MARCH 2017 • BY RICHARD WAITE



**‘Albertopolis’
– South
Kensington**



Site of the Crystal Palace

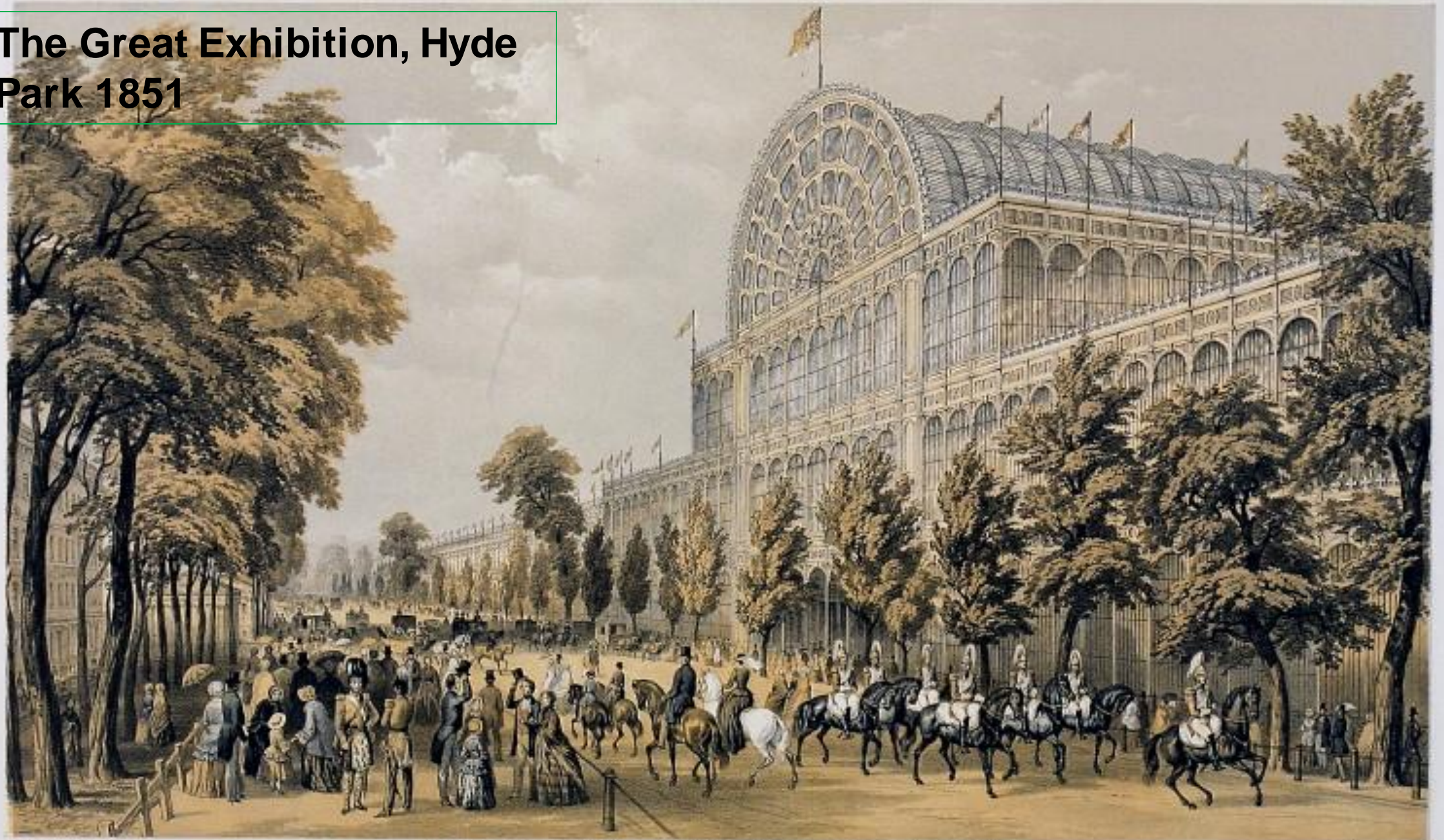
Imperial College
London

Science Museum

Natural History Museum

V&A

The Great Exhibition, Hyde Park 1851



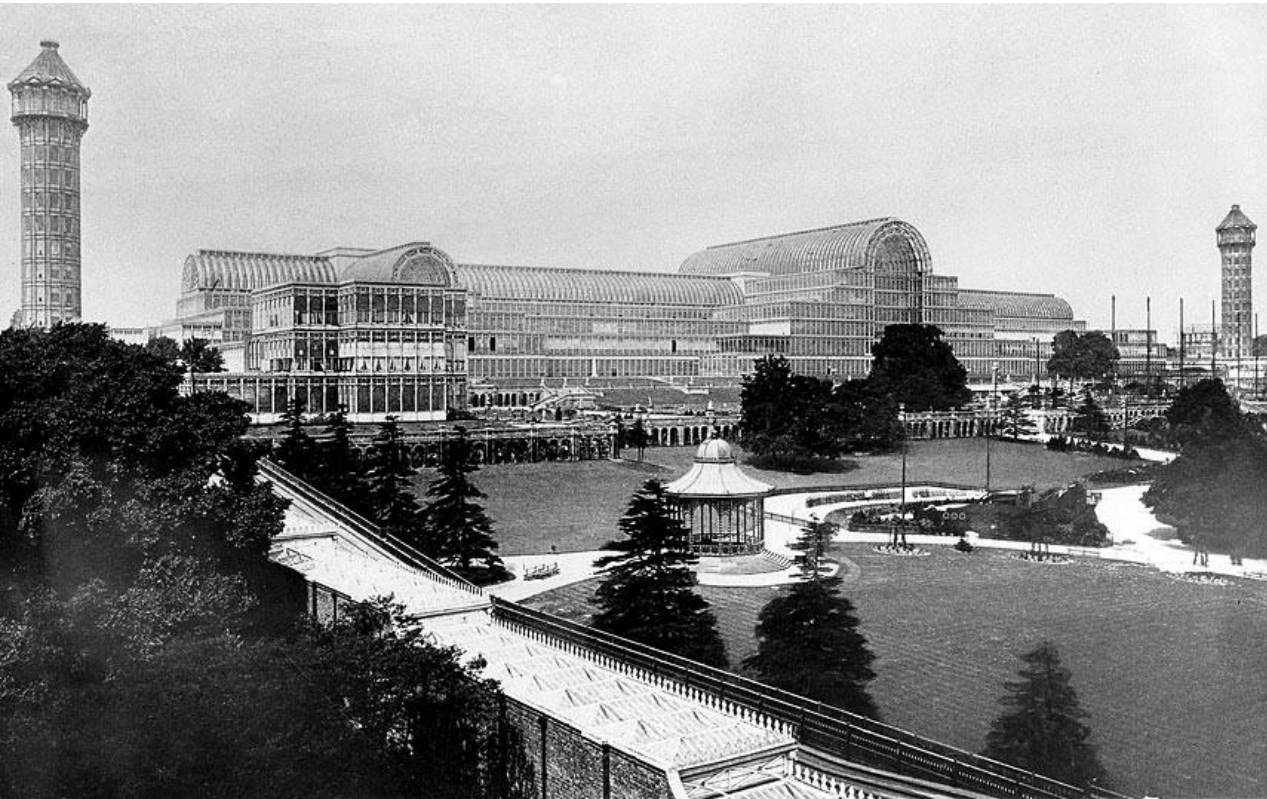
Printed and Sold by J. H. Colburn, 15, St. Andrew's Street, London.

THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1851, AT THE PALACE OF CHRISTIANITY, HYDE PARK, LONDON.

W. G. & Co. Lith. 1851.

VIEW OF THE SOUTH SIDE FROM NEAR THE PRINCIPAL GATE, LOOKING WEST

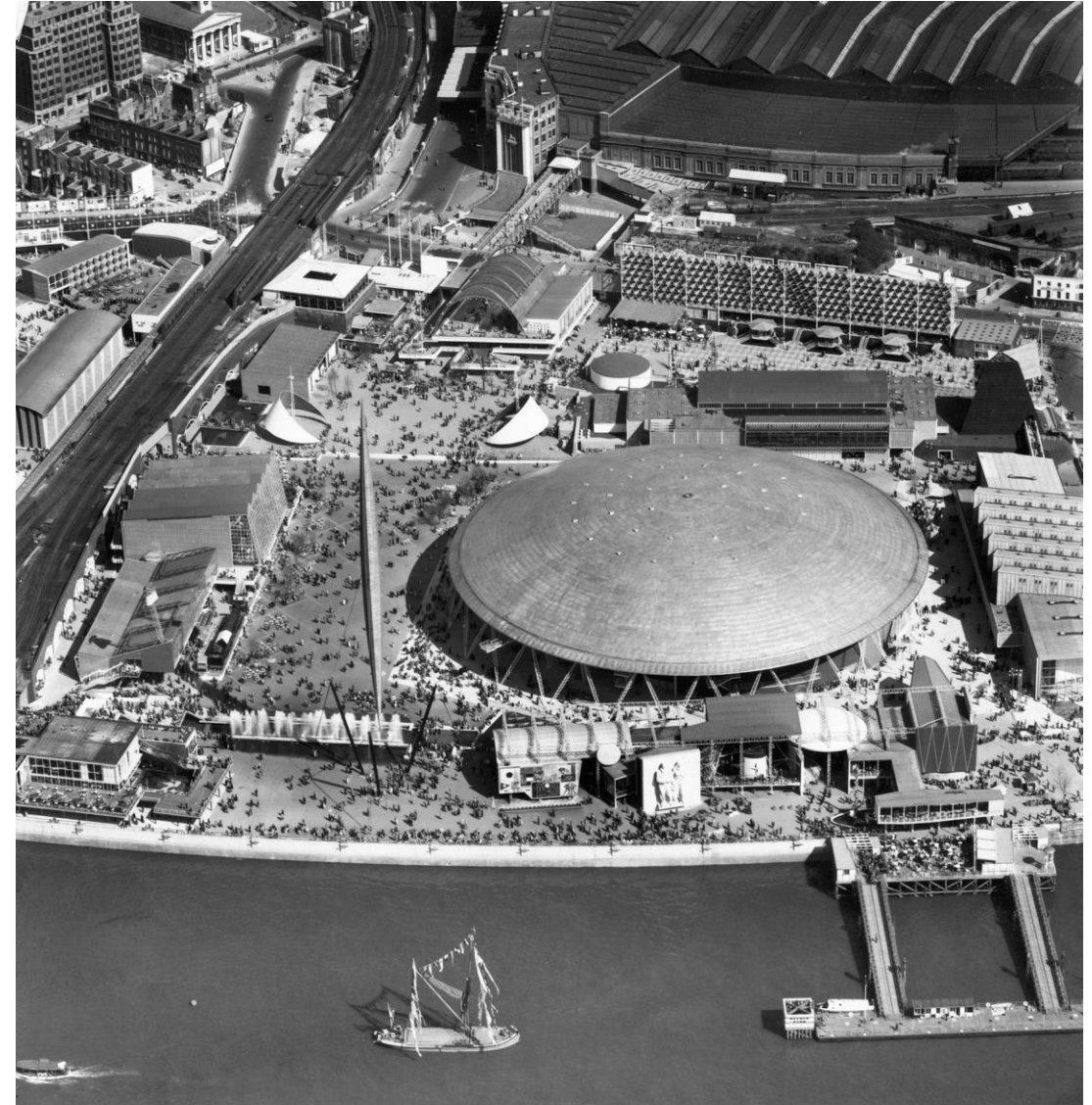
The Crystal Palace at Sydenham, 1854-1936



Redux: 2012-15



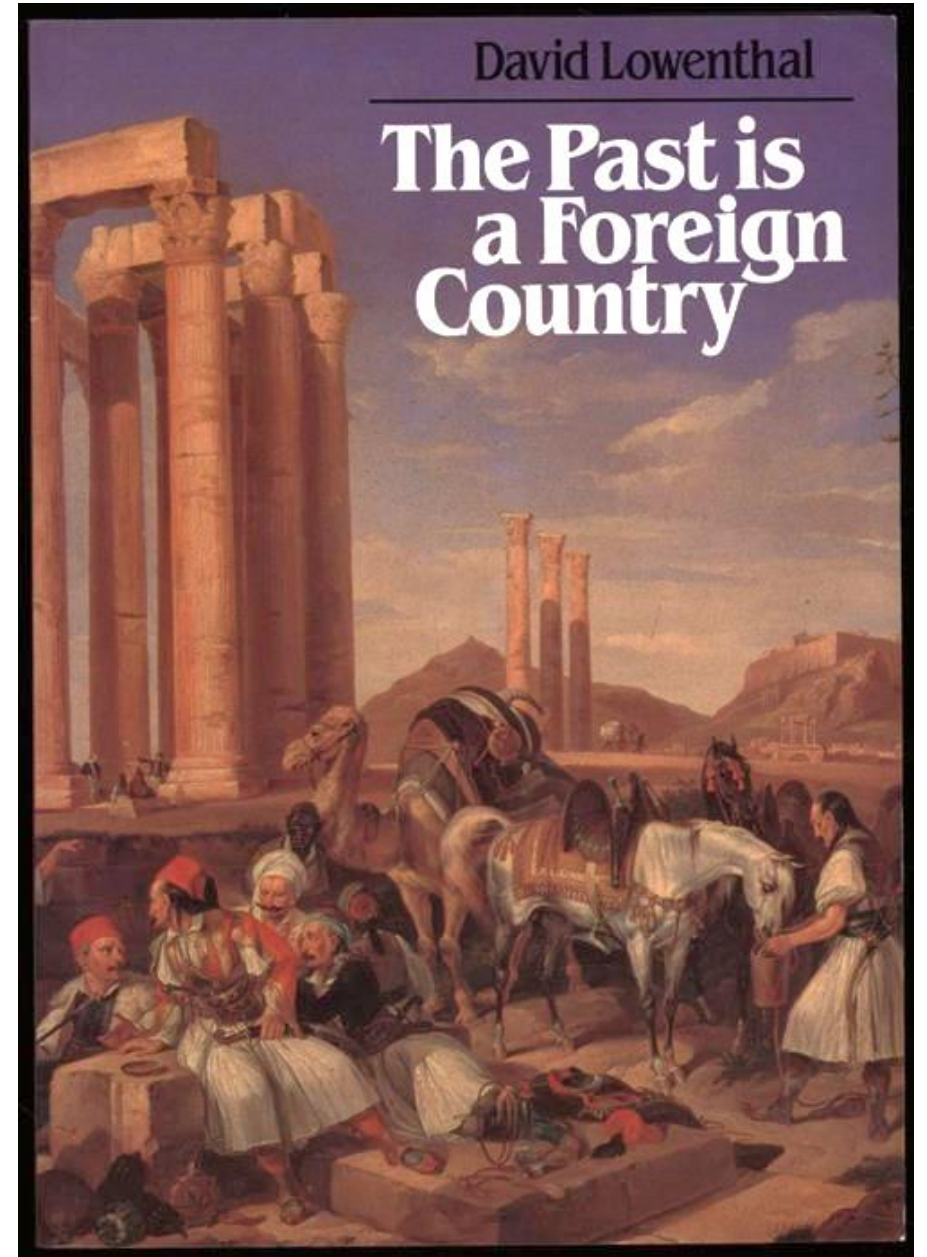
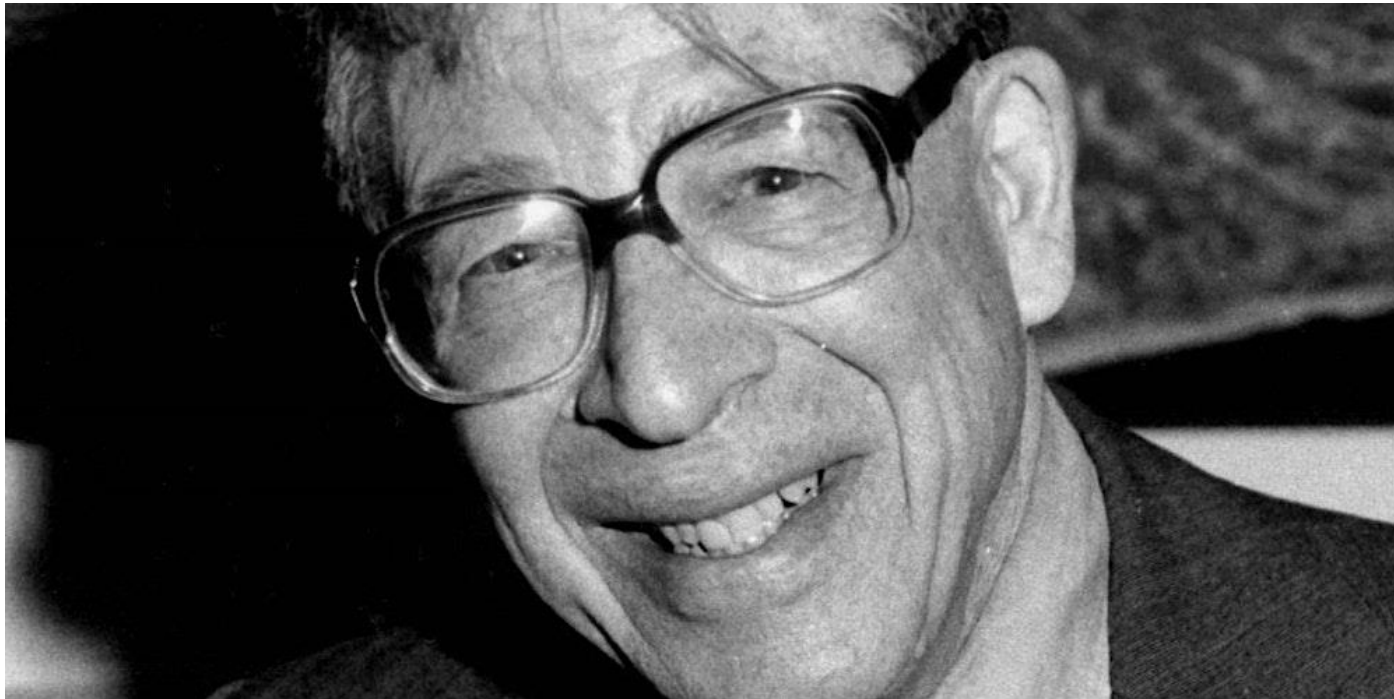
East Bank – Southbank



EAW035702 © Historic England.
<https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/image/EAW035702>.



Creative anachronism?

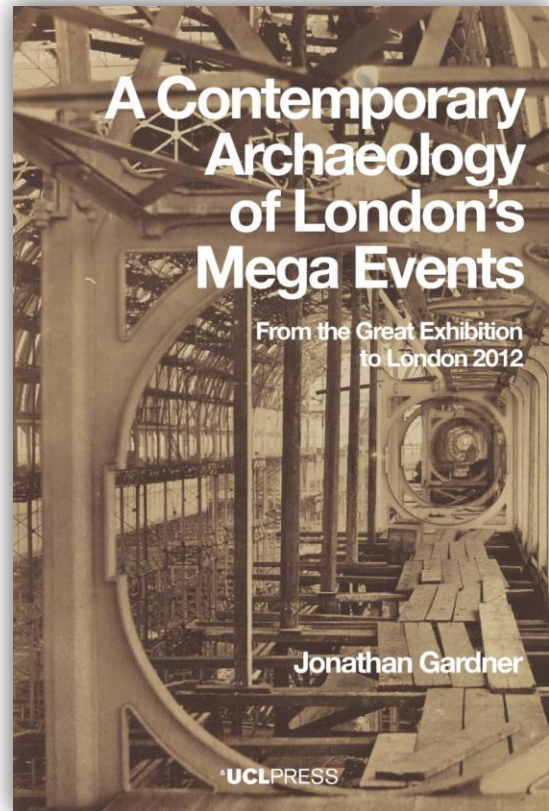


Thanks!

Research funded by the **AHRC**, 2012-15 (ref. 1159756).

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download from UCL Press



Explore our new Heritage Guide to the Park:
<https://www.livingmaps.org/groundbreakers>