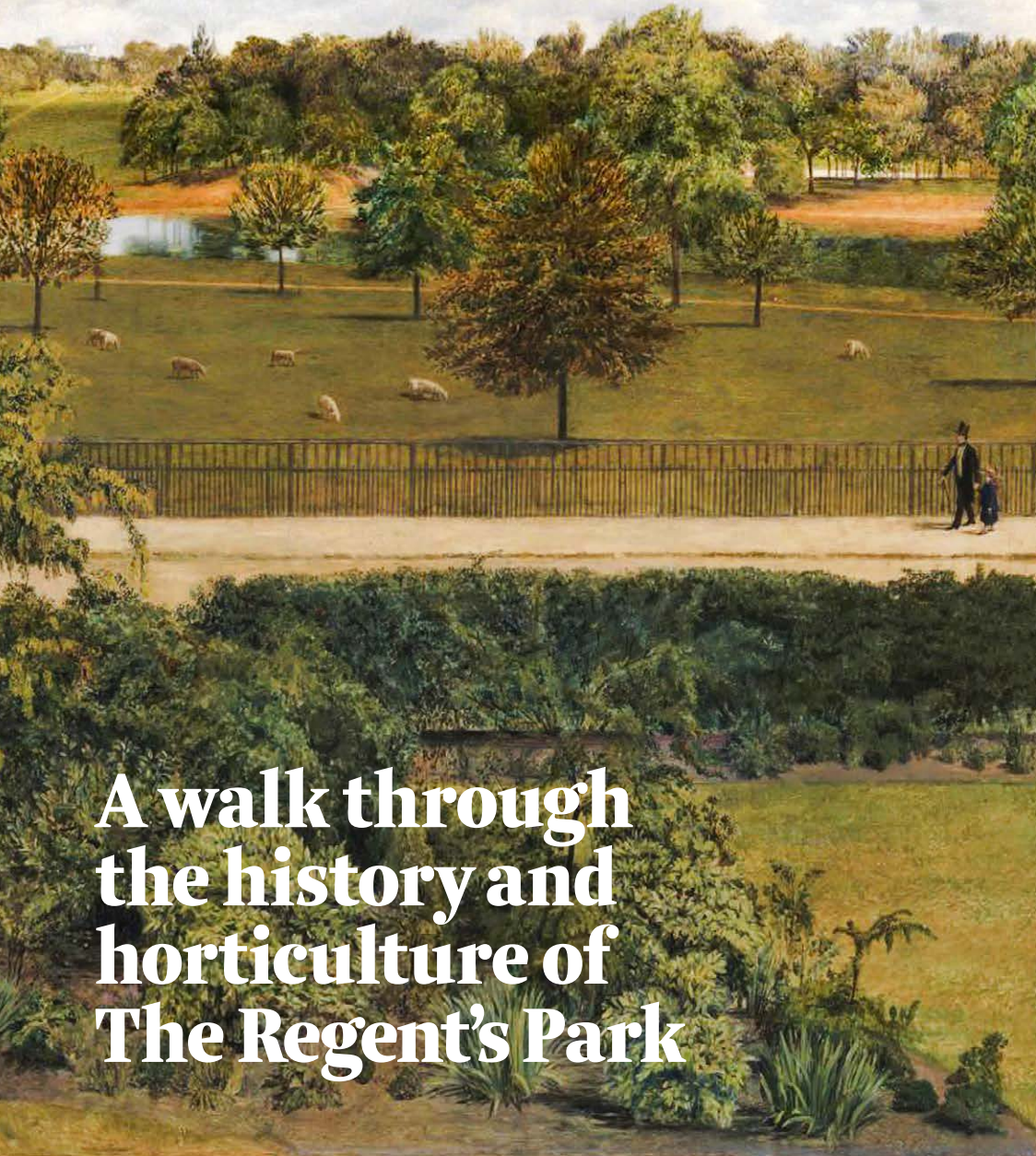




**REGENT'S**  
UNIVERSITY LONDON

*London's Independent University*



**A walk through  
the history and  
horticulture of  
The Regent's Park**

## **Regent's Park, which covers almost 400 acres, was one of the earliest public parks in the UK. It is named after the Prince Regent, who later became King George IV.**

The park was not originally intended to be public. It was designed in the early 19th century as a fashionable private estate to house the upper classes.

The land here was originally part of the Middlesex Forest – a vast tract of woodland, full of wild deer, bulls and boars. In 1538, Henry VIII enclosed the area for his exclusive use as a royal hunting ground, known as Marylebone Park.

As well as hunting, the park was used for royal revels. Henry VIII and Elizabeth I both used it for entertaining visiting foreign aristocrats and ambassadors from Russia, France and Spain.



In the early 19th century, The Prince Regent, who needed to fund his lavish lifestyle, as well as his war with France's Emperor Napoleon, realised that there was money to be made from turning Marylebone Park into an exclusive residential estate.

The royal architect John Nash planned the new development in 1811 as a complete small town, with exclusive residences for the gentry, a church, marketplaces, service areas and housing for servants and tradesmen.

He used the existing circular shape of Marylebone Park to create a design based on concentric circles and envisaged 56 private villas surrounded by a landscape of lakes, sweeping grassland and carefully composed groups of trees.

This layout was a type of design known as 'picturesque', and much influenced by the ideas of landscape designer Humphry Repton, with whom Nash had worked previously.

As well as the individually designed villas, each set in their own grounds, the park was to be surrounded by four imposing residential terraces, designed to look like grand palaces.



The blend of urban architecture with a countryside setting, was a pioneering version of the concept known as *rus in urbe* or 'countryside in the town'. Nash's ideas were very influential, and this combination of buildings and landscape have been an important feature of English town planning ever since.

Nash had hoped that the new estate would bring the Crown an income of almost £60,000 per year, for an

outlay of just £12,000. Work began on construction in 1812, but progress was slow and costs escalated.

The landscape setting was completed within the first year, but the building work was not finished until 16 years later. Ultimately, just eight of the private villas that Nash proposed were built, enabling the magnificent public park as we know it today to emerge in the 20th century.

### John Nash (1752-1835)



John Nash was a leading architect of his time, designing many country houses as well as churches, theatres and other buildings in London, including Regent Street and Marble Arch. He

began work for the Prince Regent late in his career, designing Regent's Park when he was almost 60. He also created the Royal Pavilion at Brighton, Carlton House Terrace (the Prince's London residence) and remodelled Buckingham Palace and St James's Park.

### The Prince Regent (1762-1830)

The Prince Regent lived an extravagant, partying lifestyle.

His interest in fashion, interior design and architecture helped to create what became known as the Regency style, but his lavish

spending from the age of 18 meant that he was always in debt. He ruled in place of his father, George III, from 1811, becoming king in 1820. His dissolute ways took a toll on his health, and he was grossly overweight and an object of satire by the time he died, aged 68.

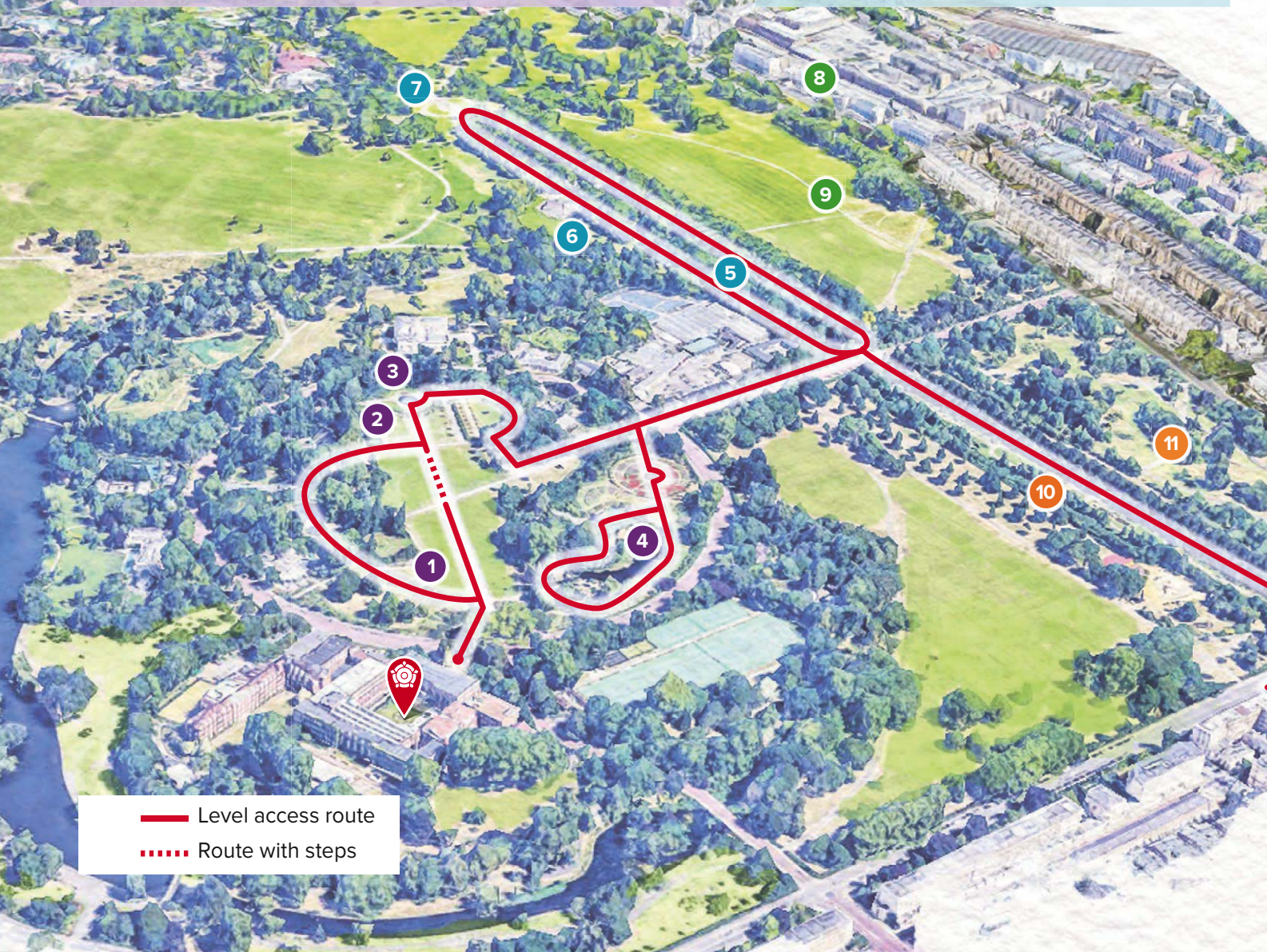


## Queen Mary's Gardens

- 1 This 18-acre garden was home to the Royal Botanic Society from 1838 to 1932. The gardens displayed plants for medical, agricultural and manufacturing uses. Huge tents were erected each year for flower shows in May, June and July. Queen Victoria loved the gardens and was a regular visitor with her children.
- 2 A huge conservatory of iron and glass once stood here, designed by Decimus Burton, who later designed the Palm House at Kew. The conservatory opened in 1846. It was 175 feet long and 75 feet wide, with a 40-foot high roof. It was here that Queen Victoria tasted a banana for the first time. There was also a water-lily house, home to a giant Amazonian water lily. Its leaves were so large that a man could sit on a chair upon them.
- 3 The Triton Fountain, by William McMillan, commemorates wealthy local artist and resident Sigismund Goetze, who paid for the ornate gilded gates of Queen Mary's Gardens and much of the garden's planting and statuary in the 1930s.
- 4 The gardens were re-designed in 1935 by Duncan Campbell, the park's first Superintendent, to include a miniature lake with an island and a bridge, and a large circular rose garden, which today contains 12,000 roses. The mound at the centre of the garden that forms the rockeries and waterfall, was made from the soil and stone excavated when the larger park lake was created in 1812.

## The Broad Walk

- 5 The Broad Walk is what remains of Nash's original 1811 plan for a major thoroughfare that was to lead all the way from the centre of London at Westminster to a grand new summer palace for the Prince Regent in the park. The avenue was originally planted with elm, but these trees were devastated by disease in the 1970s. A series of storms did further damage during the late 20th century. In just one night, 192 trees were blown down across the park during the Great Storm of October 1987. This section of the Broad Walk was the first part of the park to be opened to the public on Sundays in 1836.
- 6 The Broad Walk café stands in the place where John Nash planned to build the Prince Regent's summer palace. Work on the park took longer than expected and the palace was never built. The Prince Regent became king in 1820 and turned his attention to developing Buckingham Palace instead.
- 7 The Ready Money Drinking Fountain was given to the park by Indian potentate Sir Cowasjee Jehangir in 1869. It is designed in Victorian gothic style, made of Sicilian marble and granite.



- Level access route
- ..... Route with steps

## Queen Mary's Gardens

- 1 This 18-acre garden was home to the Royal Botanic Society from 1838 to 1932. The gardens displayed plants for medical, agricultural and manufacturing uses. Huge tents were erected each year for flower shows in May, June and July. Queen Victoria loved the gardens and was a regular visitor with her children.
- 2 A huge conservatory of iron and glass once stood here, designed by Decimus Burton, who later designed the Palm House at Kew. The conservatory opened in 1846. It was 175 feet long and 75 feet wide, with a 40-foot high roof. It was here that Queen Victoria tasted a banana for the first time. There was also a water-lily house, home to a giant Amazonian water lily. Its leaves were so large that a man could sit on a chair upon them.
- 3 The Triton Fountain, by William McMillan, commemorates wealthy local artist and resident Sigismund Goetze, who paid for the ornate gilded gates of Queen Mary's Gardens and much of the garden's planting and statuary in the 1930s.
- 4 The gardens were re-designed in 1935 by Duncan Campbell, the park's first Superintendent, to include a miniature lake with an island and a bridge, and a large circular rose garden, which today contains 12,000 roses. The mound at the centre of the garden that forms the rockeries and waterfall, was made from the soil and stone excavated when the larger park lake was created in 1812.

## The Broad Walk

- 5 The Broad Walk is what remains of Nash's original 1811 plan for a major thoroughfare that was to lead all the way from the centre of London at Westminster to a grand new summer palace for the Prince Regent in the park. The avenue was originally planted with elm, but these trees were devastated by disease in the 1970s. A series of storms did further damage during the late 20th century. In just one night, 192 trees were blown down across the park during the Great Storm of October 1987. This section of the Broad Walk was the first part of the park to be opened to the public on Sundays in 1836.
- 6 The Broad Walk café stands in the place where John Nash planned to build the Prince Regent's summer palace. Work on the park took longer than expected and the palace was never built. The Prince Regent became king in 1820 and turned his attention to developing Buckingham Palace instead.
- 7 The Ready Money Drinking Fountain was given to the park by Indian potentate Sir Cowasjee Jehangir in 1869. It is designed in Victorian gothic style, made of Sicilian marble and granite.

## Cumberland Green

- 8 Cumberland Terrace, built in 1826, was originally designed to form the view for the Prince Regent from his summer palace. Three blocks are linked by immense decorative arches. It has a 'palace front', disguising the row of separate houses and apartments behind and making it appear as a single magnificent building. The grand blue and white pediment features statuary by George Bubb, representing the arts, sciences and trades of the British Empire.
- 9 In the First World War, a vast wooden post office stood on Cumberland Green. It delivered more than two billion letters and 140 million parcels to and from the frontline. Called the Home Depot, it covered five acres and was the largest wooden building in the world. Most of the 2,500 workers were women, replacing the men who had been called up to fight. By 1918 they were handling 12 million items each week – 19,000 bags of mail crossed the English Channel every day, bound for the trenches. Some didn't make it – 134 mail ships were destroyed by the enemy in four years.



## The Victorian Gardens

- 10 The Avenue Gardens, opened in 1864, were designed by William Andrews Nesfield in formal Italian style. The gardens were a popular attraction in Victorian times, but fell into neglect. They were restored in the 1990s, with ornaments and urns recast from the original designs in reconstituted Portland stone. The layout of flowerbeds at the centre of the garden is known as a 'parterre'. This type of decorative display featured densely packed blocks of brightly coloured flowers, known as 'carpet bedding'. The giant circular bowl at the centre, supported by four winged lions, is known as the Griffin or Lion Tazza. It was made by artificial stone craftsmen Austin and Seeley in 1893.
- 11 The English Garden was designed by William Nesfield's nephew, Markham Nesfield, in 1865-6. The naturalistic style of the garden contrasts with the formality of the Avenue Gardens. From July to October each year, the English Garden is home to Frieze Sculpture, London's largest free display of outdoor art.
- 12 Across the road is the Royal College of Physicians, designed by Denys Lasdun in 1964. The area at the front of the building is laid out as a physic garden, displaying more than 1,000 plants with medicinal uses. There are many tall trees at this junction, known as the London plane. The plane is the capital's most common tree. It can grow to 35 metres and live for hundreds of years. It is particularly resistant to pollution, shedding toxins along with its bark.

Download an audio version of this walk at [regents.ac.uk/localwalks](https://regents.ac.uk/localwalks)

## Park Square and Park Crescent

- 13 Park Square is one of the largest private garden squares in London. John Nash designed the square, together with Park Crescent, to replace his original plan for a grand circular entrance to the park. The area was previously the location of a temporary art gallery, set up by Count Truchsess, who brought his collection of European artworks to London from Vienna in 1803. The price of entry was one shilling and refreshments were available (a refinement not to be found anywhere else at the time). The gallery featured works by Durer, Rembrandt, Leonardo da Vinci, Holbein, Cranach, Murillo, Poussin and Watteau. The Count hoped to sell his collection to the nation, but a subscription (an early form of crowd-funding) to purchase the collection raised just £77 and 14 shillings. The gallery closed in 1806 and the contents were sold off – a Rembrandt went for £126, while a Crucifixion by Cranach fetched three guineas.
- 14 The Marylebone Road (originally known as New Road) was laid out in 1757 to link the countryside of Islington and Paddington. In Park Crescent there are two ornate garden buildings that mark the entrance to an underground passage beneath the Marylebone Road to Park Square. Known as the Nursemaids' Tunnel, it allowed children and their nannies, to cross between the two gardens safely. A corresponding pair of lodges marking the other end of the tunnel can be seen through the railings of Park Square.

Sources: *Regent's Park* by Ann Saunders (Bedford College, London, 1981), [royalparcs.org.uk](https://royalparcs.org.uk), [londongardensonline.org.uk](https://londongardensonline.org.uk), [stjohnswoodmemories.org.uk](https://stjohnswoodmemories.org.uk) and [parksandgardens.org](https://parksandgardens.org)





**This walk explores the history, ornamental features and gardens of The Regent's Park.**

**Find out about the origins of the park, the people and royal personages behind its layout and the design ideas that influenced centuries of future town planning.**

**Discover the places where a giant conservatory once stood, a pop-up gallery holding priceless works of art and a wooden post office that sent millions of letters and parcels to soldiers on the frontline during the First World War.**

The walk begins outside the gates of Regent's University London on the Inner Circle (NW1 4NS).

Baker Street is the closest underground station.

There is level access along the route, except where noted at the beginning of the walk in Queen Mary's Gardens.

The walk ends at Regent's Park underground station.



**Download an audio version of this walk at [regents.ac.uk/localwalks](https://regents.ac.uk/localwalks)**