

The Mall and St. James's Park

London, UK

Photographs by Alan Ward 2006, 2023

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

The Mall and St. James's Park are historically linked dating back to the early seventeenth century, when the broad grassy mudflats along the River Thames were drained and converted to a royal deer park for hunting, including ponds with islands for waterfowl. When Charles II returned from exile in France, he had the site made into an ordered French-style landscape in 1660 with a 760m long canal at the center, flanked by avenues of trees. Additional allées were planted along the borders of the property, including an avenue to the north that would later become The Mall. At times the site was open to the public, an initiative that would eventually lead to making it London's first public park.*

In an 1829 redesign, John Nash converted the canal into a sinuous lake with curving paths (8,9,12,13,15,19). He made a verdant landscape composed of varied trees and massed planting of shrubs bending over flowing lawns - remaking the site into a public park with the character of a picturesque landscape garden (8-10,12-16,19). Nash's design remains largely intact, including allées of trees that form the southern and northern borders of St. James's Park, including The Mall that continue the character of the earlier planting on the edges of the site (3,6,7). One of the principal entries to the park is on the north side from St. James's Palace, at a tripartite gate opening to The Mall (6).

Birds have figured prominently in the use of the site since the first plan for making reclaimed land with ponds and islands for waterfowl. Aviaries were located in the parkland early on, and in 1841 a bird keeper's

cottage was added to the east end of the lake (14). Pelicans have been in the park since the seventeenth century (13); and Birdcage Walk remains a major path along the entire length of the southern border of the park.

I chose early morning for the photography because of favorable light conditions that can be expressive in interpreting a design to achieve a layered image, emphasizing the spaces in the composition with darker tones in the foreground and lighter tones receding in the distance. This is evident in several images, especially in the views of paths and allées looking easterly (1,6,7). It can be challenging shooting toward the light because of the contrast range encountered in backlit situations, however when slightly overcast, it reduces the dark silhouetting effects, and can have an inherent softness and emotional quality. It is not just morning light that is conducive to good photographs. With experience, a photographer is able to read light conditions to visualize an image and know how it will be realized after processing. In the past, it was also required to have excellent printmaking skills in a chemical darkroom to get the intended expressive tonal range, however with digital technology there are expanded tools to achieve the visualization. The few people in some of these images give a sense of scale without distracting the eye from the descriptive qualities of the landscape design (1,2,7,18); while other photographs included here aim to depict the social aspects of the park with people using one of the most popular green spaces in central London (9-11).

List of Photographs

1. St. James's Palace, Marlborough Road to The Mall, 2006
2. View east on the south side of The Mall, 2006
3. View east on the north side of The Mall, 2006
4. Duke of York Monument, steps north from The Mall, 2006
5. View at east end of The Mall to Admiralty Arch, 2006
6. Gate from Marlborough Road to St. James's Park, 2006
7. View east inside the Marlborough Road gate, 2006
8. St. James's Park Lake, 2006
9. Path to the lake from the south, 2006
10. Lawn at west end of the park north of the lake, 2023
11. Lawn north of the lake, 2023
12. View east to Whitehall from pedestrian bridge over lake, 2006
13. East end of lake and Whitehall, 2006
14. Bird keeper's cottage, 2023
15. View west at east end of lake, 2006
16. Horse Guards Parade ground and Whitehall, 2006
17. Gate from St. James's Park to Horse Guards Road, 2023
18. Steps to Whitehall and Clive of India Memorial, 2006
19. View east from west end of lake, 2023
20. Victoria Memorial, Buckingham Palace, The Mall, 2006
21. Green Park connecting north from The Mall and palace, 2006











































Notes

* St. James's Park is Grade I listed on the National Heritage List for England. See the Official List Entry for the history of the site.