

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Regent's Park's stunning royal garden

RECENTLY spent the night in London, after watching the Les Mis Arena Concert Spectacular at the Albert Hall.

I opted to spend the following morning, before I caught the train home, visiting the newly opened Queen Elizabeth II Garden in Regent's Park. What follows are some of the descriptive elements taken straight from The Royal Parks website.

This is a two-acre living memorial, built on a former plant nursery site within the park. Officially opened on the late monarch's centenary, which also happened to be my birthday, 21st April, it features climate-resilient plants, a central promenade, a circular pond and a hidden corgi detail in the water tower.

The garden is located in the heart of Regent's Park, tucked behind the Espresso Bar and metres away from the Avenue Gardens. The garden is accessible through four new entrances including one on Chester Road and one on the Broad Walk. The main entrance is actually on the Broad Walk next to the Espresso Bar.

The site once grew shrubs and plants for London's eight Royal Parks but following the opening of the Hyde Park Nursery in 2018, it was decommissioned. This site now returns two acres of public green space to central London.

I found the design of the garden fascinating and very interesting. The straight path that runs through the garden represents the late Queen's unwavering loyalty and service with each end offering a moment of quiet reflection.

At the southern main entrance, visitors are greeted by a large pond complete with seating and a pergola. The central promenade is bisected by a meandering path which leads visitors through a series of beautiful landscapes. A network of small-scale informal paths allows visitors to wander through the planting and explore the garden further.

The plants chosen for the garden are wildlife-friendly and designed to create a vibrant year-round horticultural display. Many of them have a direct connection to



Geoff on the viewing platform on the water tower. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

Queen Elizabeth II and the places she loved. Lily of the valley, which featured in Her Majesty's coronation bouquet, grows alongside Narcissus Diamond Jubilee and Tulipa 'Royal Celebration'. Myrtle, rosemary, oak and Maackia amurensis all carry royal or personal associations. More than 40 new trees have been planted, each selected to complement the garden, to be climate-resilient and to provide food and habitat for wildlife. Specimen trees from Commonwealth nations take their place alongside native species.

The garden has four entrances and has been designed to be usable by, and welcoming to, as many people as possible regardless of age, ability or background. Entrances are open, inviting and

unimpeded by gates or physical obstructions during opening hours. The main path is even and level, generous in width and visually contrasts with the surrounding planting. Passing and turning places, along with seating, are incorporated at regular intervals. Spaces are provided next to seats for wheelchair users, buggies and mobility scooters.

The day I chose to visit was a stifling hot one, so the beautiful shaded areas were very welcoming to sit and admire the garden from many vantage points. I have to confess it was a real effort to cross London by bus on such a hot day, but I can assure you it was well worth it. One plant that stood out for me was the allium, with so many perfect, spherical blooms

around the garden. Close to the entrance were beautiful red poppies too. The whole garden was a feast for the eyes.

While there, I also took the opportunity to visit Queen Mary's Gardens. The rose garden has London's largest collection of roses with approximately 8,000 bushes planted within. There are 85 single variety beds on display, including one which is home to the 'Royal Parks' rose. Examples of most rose varieties, from the classics to the most modern English roses, are present in the gardens. The shrubberies are strategically designed and located to add a sense of mystery and privacy to the gardens. I was very lucky to visit in the first two weeks of June, which is said to be the best

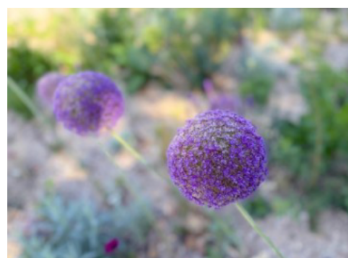
time to see the blooms.

I lived in North London for over 30 years, before I moved to Sussex. I had driven through the Royal Park hundreds of times in that period but can honestly say, I had never appreciated what beautiful gardens were on show for visitors to wander through. Next time you visit the capital, set time aside to go and see what is on offer, if you are a garden lover it will be time well spent. More importantly it is all free. I can assure you, based on my recent experience it is a wonderful day out.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media. Book a visit to Geoff's garden by emailing driftwood@gmail.com.



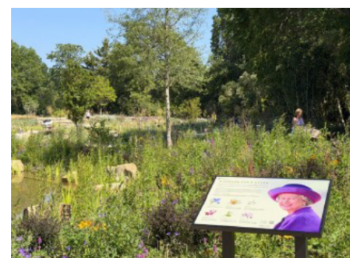
Delicate achillea



Stunning alliums growing



Poppies with a water tower in the distance



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