# The transformation of Burgess Park: From war-torn landscape to urban oasis



Burgess Park in Southwark stands as a testament to resilience and transformation, having evolved from an extensive war-torn landscape to a thriving urban green space. During World War Two, London endured significant aerial bombardment, with over 20,000 metric tonnes of bombs dropped upon the city. The Blitz resulted in nearly 30,000 civilian casualties and the destruction of about 70,000 buildings.

In 1944, as part of the Abercrombie Plan aimed at creating open spaces across the city, it was decided to transition a formerly dense neighbourhood in Southwark, which suffered catastrophic damage during the bombings, into a park instead of embarking on a rebuilding effort. This area had housed hundreds of homes, factories, churches, and even a canal. The legacy of the Blitz now manifests in the tranquillity of the park, which features peaceful parkland and ponds.

Maps from 1945 show just how devastated the area had become, with rows of houses entirely obliterated. Notable incidents include two V2 rockets, the first long-range guided ballistic missiles, striking the vicinity of what is now Burgess Park. One rocket, which fell on Trafalgar Avenue on the park's east side, resulted in the loss of 18 lives. The damage still resonates within the urban landscape, as evidenced by the exposed flank of a surviving Victorian terrace house that had to compensate for the destruction of its neighbour, which was subsequently replaced with modern architecture.

The second V2 rocket landed on Albany Road near Haywood Street, killing 17 people. In the aftermath, the area was redeveloped, now filled with flat blocks where the earlier terraced houses once stood; the place where the rocket struck is now a green space, creating a striking contrast between past devastation and present tranquillity.

The park's development has unfolded over several decades. The earliest section, known as King George's Field, predates the Abercrombie Plan, having been opened in 1938 on the site of former baths and a swimming pool. Unlike other Victorian parks, which were typically designed as planned leisure areas, Burgess Park emerged from a densely populated urban environment. Local authorities actively pursued the purchase and demolition of homes to enhance parkland, and by 1965 it included North Camberwell Open Space, subsequently undergoing further landscaping in 1966.

The 1970s brought about another significant change with the closure of the Grand Surrey Canal, which previously bisected the area. Traces of this canal still exist, exemplified by road names like Canal Approach and Surrey Canal Road. The park was named Burgess Park in 1973 in honour of Jessie Burgess, the first female mayor of Camberwell.

In recent years, significant investment has continued to shape Burgess Park’s landscape. In 2012, the park closed for an £8 million renovation that aimed to remove outdated infrastructure remnants from the once densely populated neighbourhood, while preserving notable features, such as the Burgess Park lime kiln. The addition of a BMX track in 2013 reflects the park's evolution to meet contemporary community needs.

Despite its ongoing development, there remain disputes regarding its boundaries, resulting in regular planning proposals that often differ from the traditional treatment of other Victorian parks in London. Burgess Park embodies a unique blend of history, heritage, and contemporary urban life, continually adapting to the needs of its community while honouring its past.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.friendsofburgesspark.org.uk/history-in-burgess-park/the-history-of-burgess-park/> - This URL provides details about the history of Burgess Park, including its development from a heavily damaged area into a park, and the removal of housing and infrastructure.
* <https://artinthepark.co.uk/park/> - This link offers insights into the transformation of Burgess Park from open spaces and market gardens to a modern park, highlighting its unusual past and development.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burgess_Park> - Wikipedia details the historical background of Burgess Park, including its creation from a built-up area, the Abercrombie Plan, and its modern facilities.
* <https://www.britannica.com/event/The-Blitz> - Although not directly mentioned in the search results, this link would typically provide information about the Blitz, its impact on London, and the resulting devastation.
* <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list> - Historic England lists the protected sites and buildings in the UK, which could include some of the historical remnants found in and around Burgess Park.