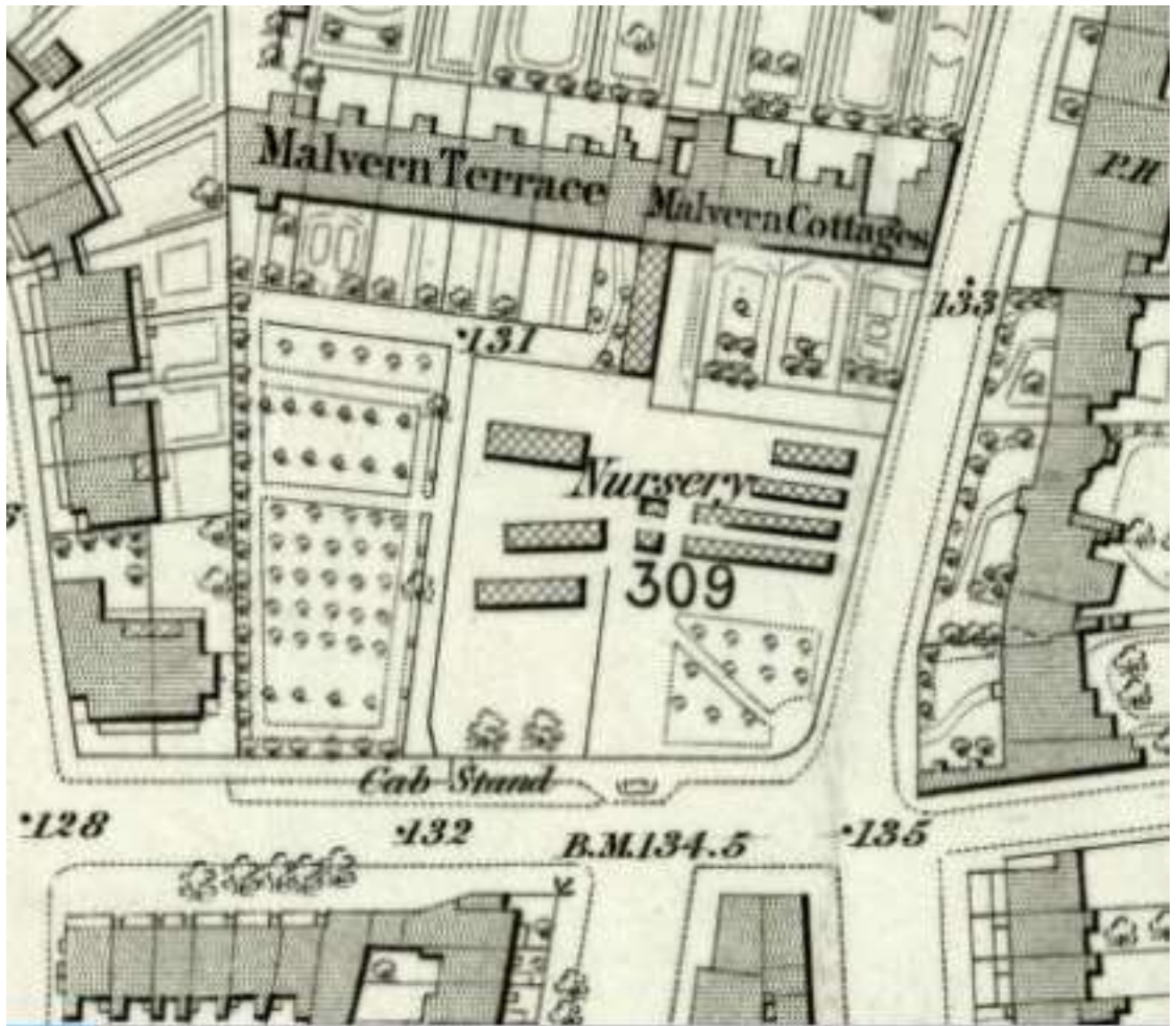


History of Thornhill Gardens (1871-2025)



OS Map 1871 showing the Nursery Gardens that became Thornhill Gardens



Notes:

- Before 1800 most of “our” part of Islington was fields.
- Nursery Gardens: Note structures. What were they? Glass houses/sheds? What was grown?
- John Smith, the Nurseryman, rented the land from Mr Thornhill, a major Islington landowner.
- Cab Stand – That part of the pavement is still extra wide.
- PH marked just off the map = The Albion Pub was already there. Note Malvern Terrace/Cottages.
- In 1887 the Nursery land was sold by the Landowner Mr Thornhill to the Islington Vestry (St Mary’s) for £2,000, who laid it out as a public garden. Squares were probably Private – Keep out!
- Total final cost £3,025
- Thornhill Garden opened to the Public on 20 May 1890. There was a Fountain in the centre but unfortunately no image of it has yet been found

OS 1896 Map shows a central Fountain with steps leading to it from north and south



Notes:

- Note garden layout with borders and paths.
- Central Fountain marked Fn. Built by 1890, with 3 steps up to it from the north and 2 steps from the south. Built by 1890.
- Note the Drinking fountain (DF) nearer the gate on Thornhill Road.
- Shows St Thomas' Vicarage. St Thomas' church, was just to the south/west across Hemingford Road on the corner of Everilda St., but cleared away with all streets and houses in c1947 after WWII and is now under the Barnard Park extension, known locally as "The Dog Park".
- Urinal marked on now Richmond Avenue (was Richmond Road)
- There are letters FP and FA marked on the map. FP may be Footpath. FA still to be established but could be Fire related, particularly being placed near the Urinal and a water source.
- I understand from long term residents that the original TG railings were removed, possibly as part of the war effort and later replaced. The way they have been inserted into bricks is not traditional.
- In living memory: TG was a Rose garden. The smell of roses reached you before you entered the garden. There was a Park Attendant who allowed "No Walking or Sitting on the Grass". You had to keep to the paths of which there were more than there are now, or sit on the benches.

Temporary WWI War Shrine in Thornhill Gardens



- **Notes:**
- Photograph of Temporary WWI War Shrine in Thornhill Gardens, backing onto Malvern Terrace. You will note that many of the people are women and girls who came to the shrine to pray and grieve for the local men serving during WWI. The two Vicars are those from Holy Trinity, Cloudesley Sq.
- Some men are in uniform near the front, but it seems overall like “Men at the front, women at the back” to me.
- On Sunday 01/02/1920 there was a Torchlight procession starting at 5.00pm through the streets and the wooden shrine was then taken to rest in Holy Trinity Church, Cloudesley Square.

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

BARNSBURY WAR SHRINE

HONOUR TO OUR BRAVE LADS

GREAT TORCHLIGHT PROCESSION

SUNDAY, FEB 1, 1920 AT 5 O'CLOCK

TO ESCORT THE SHRINE IN DUE AND SOLEMN CEREMONY FROM THORNHILL GARDENS TO ITS
FINAL RESTING PLACE IN HOLY TRINITY CLOUDESLEY SQUARE

THE PROCESSION WILL BE THE GRANDEST BARNSBURY HAS EVER KNOWN
MILITARY AND OTHER BANDS WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE
ASSEMBLE: CLOUDESLEY SQUARE
MARCH OFF: 5 O'CLOCK

ROUTE: CLOUDESLEY PLACE, BARNSBURY ROAD; THORNHILL ROAD;
BELITHA VILLAS, HEMINGFORD ROAD TO THE SHRINE

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN DESIROUS OF TAKING PART IN THE PROCESSION SHALL PURCHASE
THEIR TORCHES, WHICH ARE SOLD AT COST, 1/6 EACH, ON FRIDAY NIGHT NEXT AT THE PARISH
HALL, RICHMOND ROAD, 8 TO 9.30 OR AT ANY TIME FROM COUNCILLOR GORROD, 160 BARNSBURY
ROAD

BY CORDEN & CO., PRINTERS, 141 COPENHAGEN STREET

WWI Granite War Memorial in Thornhill Gardens (Grade 2 Listed by the Imperial War Museum), and Memorial Board listing the names of those who died. Islington Project listing those who died street by street.



- **Notes:**
- The granite War Memorial was commissioned in 1919 by the Vicar of Holy Trinity to represent the men from what was then, Trinity Ward who died during WW1. Is this the only WWI War Memorial in Islington?
- Inscription is difficult to read but full text is available on the Cloudesley Association web site
- There is also an elegant wooden Memorial Board still on the wall of Holy Trinity Cloudesley Sq. in what was once the Memorial Chapel. Names transcribed on website mentioned above.

First World War – Islington 1914-1918. Street Marker Project

- **Notes:**
- Still on the theme of WW1, step outside Thornhill Gardens into Thornhill Road and view the **First World War Islington 1914-1918 Marker** attached to the street sign at the junction with Richmond Avenue. This commemorates the 4 men aged 24, 18, 27 and 24 who were killed in action in France and who lived on Thornhill Road.

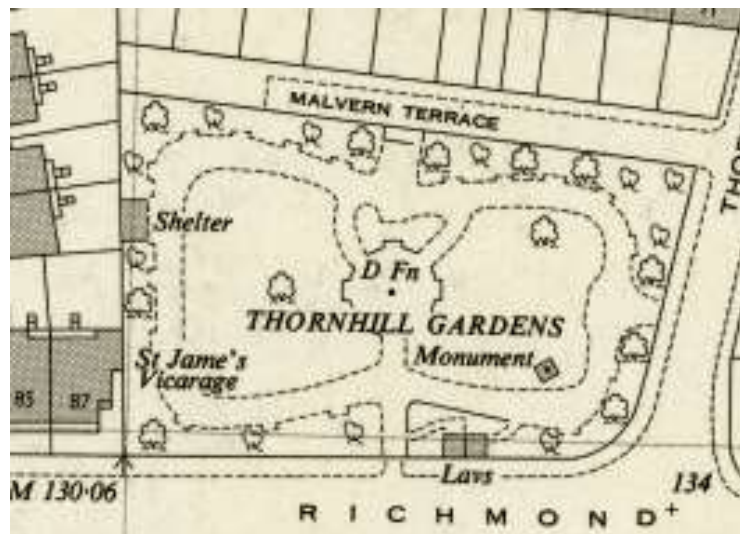


WWII (1940-1945) – 2 Trench Shelters in Thornhill Gardens



More Recent OS Map (1940/60).

Note: See simplified garden layout below. Suggest after removal of 2 Trench Air raid Shelters.



Notes:

- We know that there were Trench Air raid shelters built in 21 Islington parks, including two in Thornhill Gardens running East-West across the centre. These could accommodate 200 people, seated opposite (no bunks). Suggest that the simplified garden layout resulted from the demolished trench shelters and general dumped rubble. This is more or less the layout we have to-day.
- Note now marked St. James' Vicarage. The Church (1778-1985) was on Pentonville Road. The Famous Clown, Joseph Grimaldi who performed at Sadler's Wells Theatre and elsewhere is buried in the Churchyard – re-named Grimaldi Park
- See what was earlier a central Fountain is now marked D Fn (Drinking Fountain) and the Drinking fountain near the Thornhill Road has gone
- Shelter, backing onto the Blair's house, now gone, Local residents suggest wooden, 3 sided, possibly painted blue. Failed to find when it was demolished but understand that the Blair's had a metal Bailey bridge built from their garden into TG as security, perhaps this was when the shelter went. Local residents suggest that "Things went on in it apart from sheltering from the rain."
- Believe that the Blair's Night security personnel were accommodated in the TG shed.
- Public Lavatories, showing 2 entrances, presume "Men" and "Women". These were demolished in the 1980's after the discovery of a de-frosting severed head in a cardboard box in one of them.
- WWI War Memorial marked "Monument".

Winter Painting of Thornhill Gardens by David Higginbotham C1975
(Original in Islington Local History Centre Collection)



Below: Recent Photograph taken from the same angle



- **Notes:**
- David Higginbotham Painting (Local History Centre, Finsbury Library)
- Check out the size of our present Trees and Shrubs compared with the past.
- A Mystery. Are the stone walls built from lost paths, following post WWII re-construction?
- Yes there were flower beds at the base of the walls and grass on the lower lawn

Formation of Friends of Thornhill Gardens 2019

- **Notes:**
- Islington is said to be the London borough with the highest residents density and the least Green space
- However Barnsbury, the ward where we live has many green spaces and garden squares
- Over the years Volunteers have got together to assist in looking after these spaces, allowing Islington Greenspace to concentrate their work where it are most needed.
- Thornhill Gardens became rather overgrown and neglected and in 2019 The Friends of Thornhill Gardens was formed with the aim of bringing the local community together and empowering them to look after the garden and encourage all parts of the Community to enjoy and value them.
- The Friends are supported by Islington Greenspace but are almost entirely funded by donations from the Public including Table sales.
- During COVID lockdown many local residents became aware of the value of their local Green spaces and since then these have been popular places to visit.
- The Volunteers have strived to make TG a strong and divers community and a safe supportive space where plants and wildlife can thrive and all people, with or without their dogs can meet, make friendships and cooperate together.



Winter flowering Mahonia

Their sweet smelling winter flowers provide life -saving nectar for the small buff-tailed Bumble Bees who venture out of their burrows on sunny winter days.

Alert human visitors also ask “What is that intoxicating smell?”

Love them or otherwise these colourful and noisy Green Ring-necked Parakeets make their homes in holes in the trunks of the magnificent ancient London Planes.

Here they are feeding on the winter berries of the Cotoneaster. They seem to live in pairs and can often be seen sitting close together in a patch of sun



Where a Volunteer is at work a Robin is usually close by hoping for a meal of worms or insects



**Here are some Volunteer Projects completed by The Friends and the Community
financed mainly by Table sales and generous Public donations**

- Corner Pond area and pond dug.
- Top grass revived
- Woodland walk designed and built
- Nesting boxes and bird feeders Installed
- Hosted various community events and monthly volunteering days
- Caroline's History Walks
- Flower beds re-instated
- 2 Commemorative benches inscribed and others renovated
- 6 Fruit trees planted
- Mulch heap instated – All TG leaves and vegetation re-cycled
- Regular annual composting and mulching
- Annual pruning to maintain healthy and attractive shrubs
- Protective fencing put up as appropriate
- 5 Standpipes Installed to aid summer watering.
- Annual bulb planting
- New Fountain installed – Opening Ceremony 03 July 2023
- What's next? It's over to you!



POST SCRIPT. We've recently received some detailed Cricket research linking the TG area to the eventual establishment of the MCC. This history timeline stretches back to.c1784 when a north/south swathe of land between White Conduit House and The Albion Tea House were still fields. We plan a plaque on the TG shed.

For much more Local History visit the website cloudesleyassociation.org

February 2025