



# Preserving the reserve

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**A** LOOK at the 1870 Ordnance Survey map of the area between East Reservoir, in Stoke Newington, and Stamford Hill shows that much of the land was then still undeveloped.

Farmland ran up to the gardens of elegant villas and mansions in Stamford Hill, many with their own large ponds. But things were about to change.

Just two years later the Great Eastern Railway branch line from Liverpool Street to Enfield cut a swathe through the rural peace and quiet, with new stations at Stamford Hill and Stoke Newington.

By 1894, not only had the pleasant gardens gone,

but most of the villas too, with the few that did survive being transformed into tenements and workplaces.

New roads had been laid out and the fields, gardens, and ponds, were swallowed up by a still-spreading residential suburb.

Today, the bricks and mortar and tarmac of Stamford Hill appear to have totally overwhelmed any traces of wilderness and wildlife. But along the sides of the railway that originally brought so much change to the area, one of Hackney's hidden nature reserves can be found.

The East and West Bank Nature Reserve takes its name from the two roads flanking the railway between Dunsmore Road and Stamford Hill

rail station in Amhurst Park, and consists of two 2,000 metre-long strips of woodland separated by

the Holmleigh Cutting. The tops of the banks are owned by the Council, and the slopes by Network

Rail. Parts of the reserve have been designated a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

Despite its small size, the reserve contains between five and 10 per cent of Hackney's mature woodland, including hybrid black poplar, ash, and wild cherry.

The reserve is also important because of the presence of the plant Good King Henry – once a common vegetable used like asparagus and spinach, but now an endangered species. Bird life includes great spotted woodpeckers, jays, song thrushes and house sparrows.

In 2002, residents formed the East and West Bank Nature Reserve

Group to help the Council and Network Rail with the management of the reserve.

Volunteers clear away litter and invasive plants, and plant native trees, shrubs and flowers to increase biodiversity and provide good sources of food for insects, birds and small mammals. The group meets on the first Sunday of every month – except next month when they meet on 12 December – to carry out jobs such as planting, pruning and fence mending.

• *To get involved, visit: [www.hackney.gov.uk/east-and-west-bank-nature-reserve](http://www.hackney.gov.uk/east-and-west-bank-nature-reserve), or just turn up at the next event, at 10am, on the corner of West Bank and Dunsmore Road.*



Clockwise from above: A train passing through Holmleigh Cutting, 1955; the cutting in snow, as it is today; volunteers at work; 1870 map of the area; 69 Stamford Hill c1865, one of the villas that made way for developments. Colour images courtesy of John Yeudall

## MORE INFO

**i** Hackney Archives – based at 43 De Beauvoir Road, N1 – looks after Council administrative records and archives dating back to 1700. It also keeps records for individuals and organisations with links to Hackney. Call: 020 7241 2886, or visit: [www.hackney.gov.uk/archives](http://www.hackney.gov.uk/archives)