

The History of Springfield Park –

An extract from the Springfield Park Management Plan

Glimpses into the history of the site where the park now stands stretch back to early human occupation, the evidence having been provided by a number of archaeological discoveries made on or around the site during the last two hundred years. Prehistoric finds include flints, a Paleolithic axe and Roman artefacts. In 1814 and 1847, Roman vessels and two coffins, as well as human bones, were excavated. Evidence of activity during the Saxon period was provided by the discovery of a Saxon boat during the excavations of the former children's playground. The results of pollen and wood analysis indicated that, at that time, the Lea was a fast-flowing river, with an abundant aquatic flora. The results also suggested that the surrounding area was used for some form of agriculture or husbandry.



Figure4: A replica of the log boat in the Hackney Museum, the original boat was found in Springfield Park and thought to be used as a ferry to enable people to cross the River Lea.

Little is known of the subsequent development of the site until the 18th century, when evidence of industrial activity is revealed by old maps. It is assumed that prior to this the landscape was formed of meadows and hedgerows. However it is thought that Wilson's Hill would have remained uncultivated due to its steepness. The steep slope of Wilson's Hill would have made cultivation extremely difficult and, as a result, the hill and other areas, have remained unploughed even during the second world war when other parkland areas were turned over to food production..

The map of 1774 shows areas in what is now the park marked as the 'calico printer's field', 'the calico ground' and 'the Milliners Hanging Hill'. Bordering on Spring Hill was 'the New Tile yard', which, it is thought, may have dug the clay from the area in which the bandstand is now located.

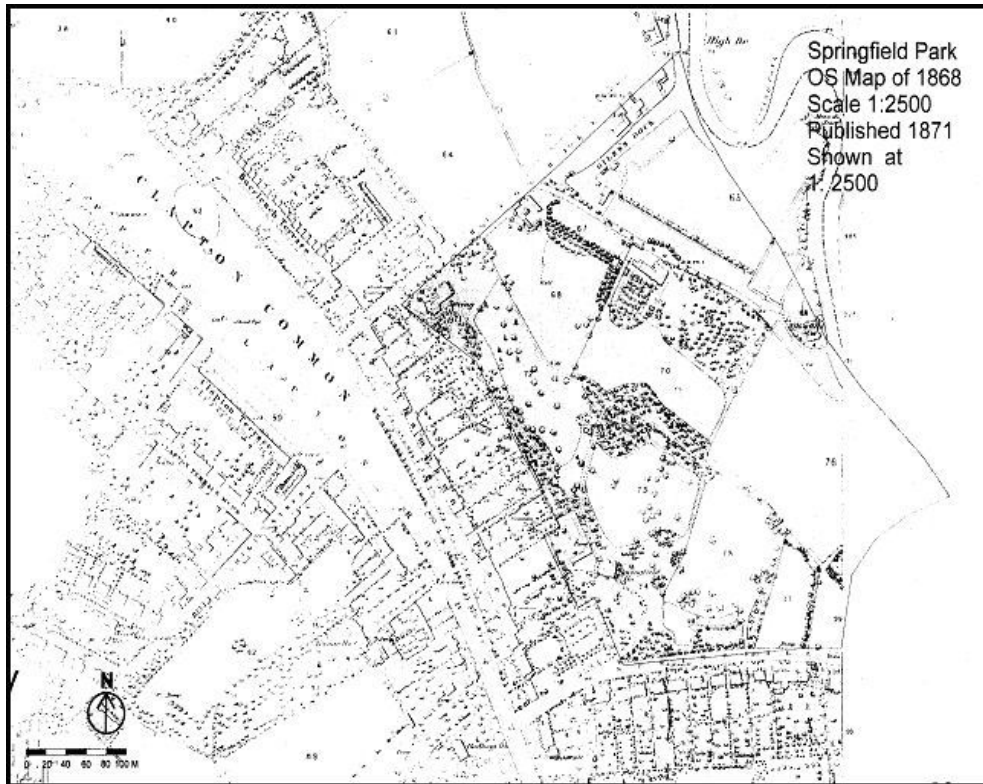


Figure 6: A map of the park area from 1868

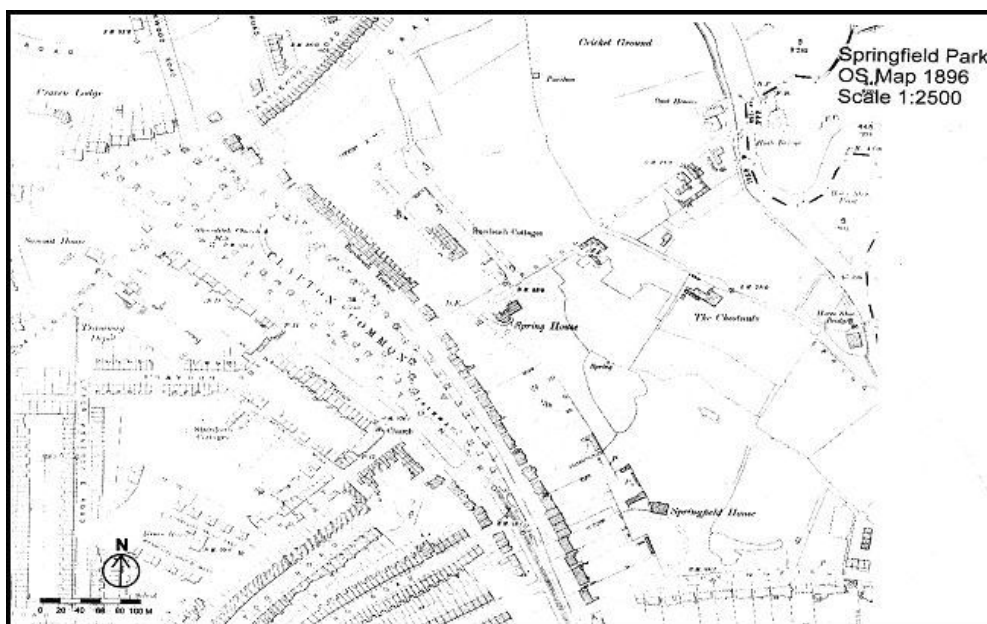


Figure 7: A map of the park area from 1896

In 1902 the land that now comprises the park was put up for sale. This resulted in a campaign to raise money and London County Council to buy the land to create a park for the local populace. The purchase of the park by the Council was finalised in 1904. The park was designed by J.J Sexby, who was the Chief Officer of the London County Council (LCC) Parks Department. The main alterations involved in creating the park included the removal of two

of the large houses and ancillary buildings, and the diversion of Spring Lane which, at that time, ran through the centre of the park. Other additions included alterations to the path network and the pond with a creation of an island and the construction of a bowling green which can be seen in the 1915 map of the park. At the ceremony to open the park, on the 15th August 1905 the Clerk of the Council stated,

‘this beautiful park is now destined to minister to the health and happiness of the present and future generations of the enormous, and in many cases overcrowded, population of the surrounding districts’.

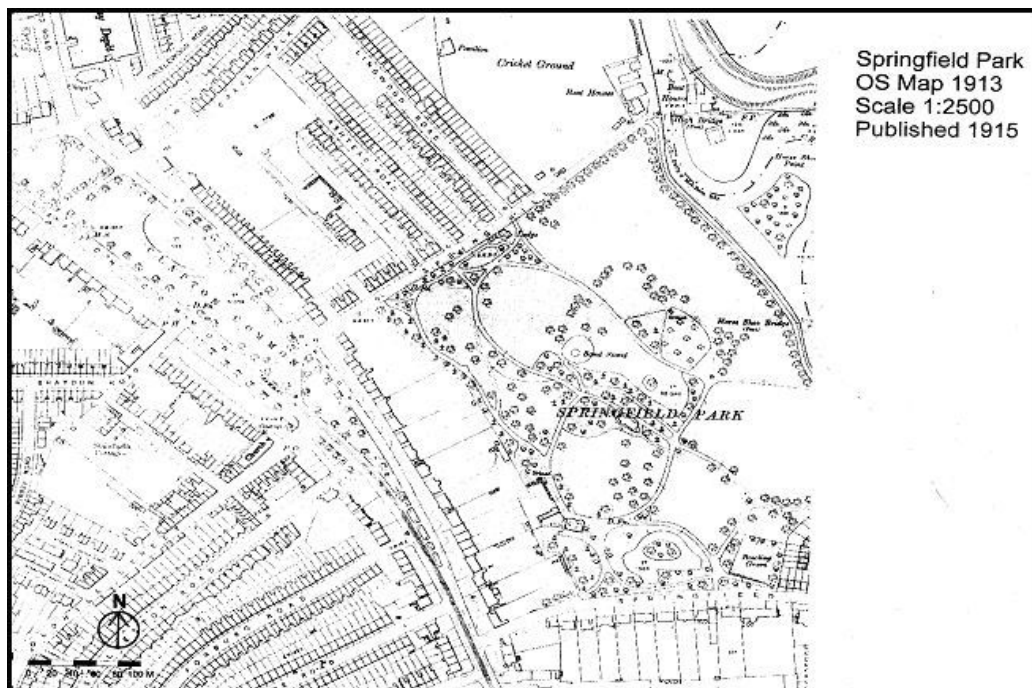


Figure 8: A map of the park area from 1913