

SGI 22 Burgess Park lime kiln

London Borough of Southwark

Burgess park lime kiln, Burgess Park, between Walworth & Peckham

Grid Ref: TQ 32866 77644

This lime kiln stands alone in Burgess Park, one of south London's largest and newest parks, which was created on a broad strip of land which once bordered the Grand Surrey Canal. At the start of the nineteenth century, with the growth of heavy industry to the south of the capital, a three-mile stretch of canal was planned, to provide a means to service the industries and to transport cargoes, mainly timber and Kent's market garden produce, into London. The canal had its beginnings in 1801, with the passing of the Grand Surrey Canal Act. At that time, Rotherhithe, at one end of the proposed canal, was within the county of Surrey. The canal opened in stages, reaching the Old Kent Road in 1807, Camberwell in 1810, and Peckham in 1826. It was first used for cargoes in 1810.



Friends of Burgess Park

The kiln was built in 1816 by Edward R. Burtt & Sons, a company supplying local builders.

The kiln, which stands in what is now known as Burgess Park, was probably one of several along the short stretch of the Grand Surrey Canal. [Larger lime works often had a group of seven kilns: the process of converting limestone to quicklime took seven days, so with seven kilns, there was always one ready to be loaded and one ready to be emptied, thus making the operation more efficient.] There is no chalk in Southwark to make the lime and it probably, too, arrived from Kent via the canal.

Guy Miller's 1927 watercolour shows the kiln in operational mode. The steps up the side gave access for the workmen to feed the fire.

The kiln is octagonal in plan, with alternating long and short facets. Each short facet has, at the base, a round-arched draw-hole. The central, inverted, truncated cone has been relined with brick several times. Huge quantities of coal and limestone were transported by barge along the Grand Surrey Canal to the lime works. The limestone was broken up and burnt in the kiln to produce quicklime, which was subsequently taken away by boat. Quicklime is used in agricultural fertilisers and mortar for houses, amongst other uses. Much mortar was needed locally for building works to house the rapidly growing population. In Victorian times, quicklime was burned to provide light ('limelight') in theatres.



Watercolour by Guy Miller, 1927

More information about the production processes can be found on the excellent website of the Friends of Burgess Park (see below) and on a series of paving slabs surrounding the kiln itself.

The Grand Surrey Canal was not as successful as hoped. The rapid increase in rail links throughout the nineteenth century provided faster transportation for both industrial goods to and from the London Docks, and market garden produce from the rural areas to the south and south-east of London. With the decline of the canal, the small, local industrial sites on the canal banks also declined.

During the Second World War, when production had ceased, pigs were kept at the lime works. Burgess Park lime kiln ceased operations completely in the 1950s, but was restored in 2002, and is now a Grade II listed building. The listing gives a more detailed description of the kiln's construction.

Unfortunately, the Grand Surrey Canal, which could have been maintained as a valuable asset to the park, was filled in during the redevelopment of the area. Its course can still be followed, along the main paths of Burgess Park.

Access

Burgess Park can be reached easily from Elephant and Castle tube station, with a short bus ride southwards along the A215, Walworth Road, to the junction with Albany Road. On entering the park at the Albany Road entrance, take the main path to the left past the tennis courts. The kiln will be seen shortly to the left of the path.



Photos: Ann Davidson (2016)

References

Friends of Burgess Park: www.bridgetonowhere.friendsofburgesspark.org.uk

London's Lost Rivers: www.london'slostivers.com

Useful historic sight: www.british-history.ac.uk/old-new-london

Watercolour by Guy Miller: www.exploringsouthwark.co.uk



Lime kiln in 1930 (*Friends of Burgess Park*)