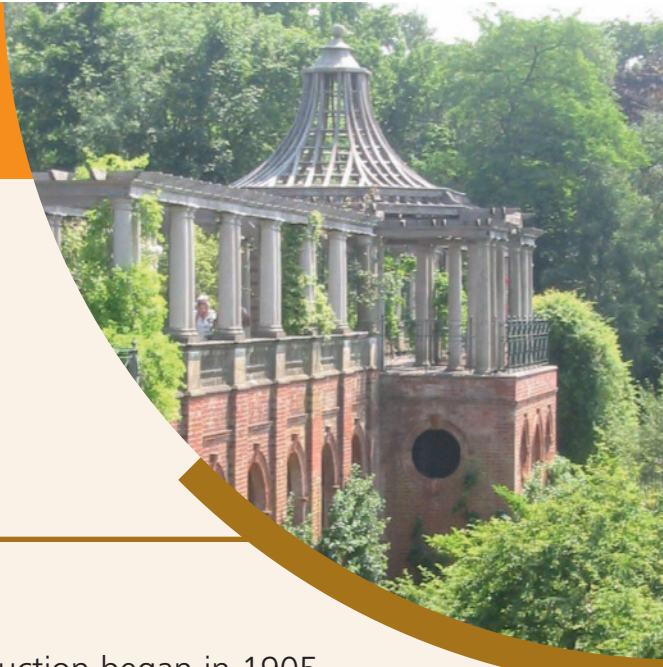


The Pergola and Hill Garden



The Pergola is one of the hidden delights of Hampstead Heath. It overlooks West Heath, and was the dream of William H Lever, later Lord Leverhulme, a wealthy idealist, patron of the arts, architecture and landscape gardening, and Thomas Mawson, the celebrated landscape architect.

In 1904, Lord Leverhulme purchased The Hill, a substantial house facing North End Way. He subsequently acquired adjoining land, and had the opportunity to create the Pergola, a magnificent Edwardian extravagance which would be the setting for garden parties and summer evening strolls and be a striking addition to the garden of The Hill.

Masterminding the work was Thomas Mawson, a world-famous authority on civic design, town planning and landscape architecture. He brought architectural treatment and formality to garden design, and The Hill's Pergola and gardens were destined to become the best surviving examples of his work.

Construction began in 1905. Central to the project was raising the large gardens of The Hill to the required level. This required an army of workers. There were no mechanical diggers or earth-movers then. Furthermore, a vast amount of material was needed. As chance would have it, the Hampstead extension to the Northern Line was being built at the same time. The contractors urgently needed somewhere to dump the spoil from tunnels being created. Soon thousands of wagon-loads of that spoil were making their way to The Hill, with the astute Lord Leverhulme being paid a nominal fee per wagon for accommodating the material that he happened to need to realise his dream.

The first part of the work was completed in 1906. It was extended in 1911 when further property became available. The difficulty of the public right of way between the two parts of the final structure was overcome by the construction of a fine stone bridge over the public path.

The landscaping work on what would become known as The Hill Garden was interrupted by the Great War. The final developments, involving a further extension of the Pergola, complete with



a Summer Pavilion and another viewing terrace overlooking the Heath, were completed by 1925, shortly before Lord Leverhulme died.

After Lord Leverhulme's death The Hill was purchased by Baron Inverforth – and renamed Inverforth House. He lived there until his death in 1955. The property was then for a period used as a convalescent home for Manor House Hospital.

The Second World War and subsequent years were not kind to the Pergola. In 1960, the London County Council bought the Pergola and associated garden areas, which were by now in a very dilapidated condition. The area was opened to the public in 1963 as the Hill Garden. Following the abolition of the

Greater London Council in 1986, the City of London Corporation took on responsibility for Hampstead Heath and its structures, including the Pergola, in 1989. By that time, many of the original timbers of the Pergola were twisted and rotted beyond repair and smothered by a profusion of climbing plants that had been allowed to grow unchecked. Much of the stonework was missing or damaged.

The LCC and its successor bodies began work of restoration, which has been continued by the City. However, the Pergola, a Grade II listed structure, still requires considerable investment. The City is seeking to find ways of meeting the financial challenge of ensuring that the Pergola remains true to the dream of its creators.



(Photos: credit Richard Lea-Hair)