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## Some Parks

Some people go on a pub crawl, but we like to do that with parks. You only crawl when you can barely make it to the next establishment, so I think our journeys need another name, maybe Park Perambulation is better. Many London parks are large enough to provide sufficient interest for a whole day's visit. We have had many days of very hot weather lately and as it has only just now become a little cooler, we decided to go to a very small park to see what was there, intrigued by the name on the map, Telegraph Hill Park, in Nunhead, South London. It is on a 50 metre high hill overlooking the city. It is the location of a former telegraphic semaphore station built in 1795 and the notice board describes it as "one of a line of stations linking the Admiralty in Whitehall with Deal and Portsmouth and providing the Navy with a fast means of communication in times of war." By 1847 it had fallen into disuse and the exact spot is now a small tennis court. Views over the city can be seen through the gaps between the trees and beyond the rooftops of the suburban terraced houses. Its former name was Plow'd Garlic Hill, reflecting the area's past use for agriculture and market gardens.

We continued down and across the road to Lower Telegraph Hill Park, a similar area with mature trees, grassy slopes, pond and playground. The children's slide in the photo was quite interesting. They have to toil up a steep mound and approach the little gateway at the back. After their brief but worthwhile exertion, they have the fun of zooming fast and effortlessly down the smooth steel channel which goes between dense

shrubs on either side. It has a bend in it which serves to slow down the descent slightly for a safer landing, but no doubt also provides extra excitement. Just like the shorthand student, successful high speed is the certain result of conquering the initial uphill struggle. As these green spaces are quite small, we decided to continue our park perambulation and go on to Southwark Park not too far away, very much larger and promising much more to see. We took the short train ride to Surrey Quays station and the park entrance was only a minute's walk away.

Southwark Park is a large Victorian park with a lake in the centre. The breezy morning had turned into calm hot sunny weather and we were glad that the paths were shaded by large spreading trees. The flat grassy areas were dotted with lots of crows, mostly congregating near the groups of people sitting around on the green. In the plant beds behind the lakeside railings were groups of pigeons all settled and resting, having pressed themselves down into the warm dusty soil and stones, flopping their wings down and many with shut or half shut eyes. As pigeons are bolder around people than crows are, one would assume that they have fed reasonably well and were now enjoying lazing and snoozing, while the crows were still hesitating and hovering out on the green. However, the pigeons always have an eye on their surroundings, even if it is intermittent between naps, in case more offerings start appearing nearby, and they will all be refreshed and ready to move quite quickly at around the human lunch hour.

## Some Parks

At the far end of the lake is a delightful semicircular formal garden, with large tall bedding in hot colours, and grapevine covered pergolas, at the end of which there are glimpses of the lake beyond. In the middle of the lake is a large metal sculpture of three leaping dolphins, somewhat incongruous in an English landscape but very graceful nonetheless and its steely grey colour blending in well with all the greens of the water, reflections and trees. Further along the park we came to the bowling green, surrounded by a shoulder high hedge, and within is a perfect square of short grass, with not a weed, dandelion or creeping buttercup in sight. A couple of unhurried games were in progress, with others sitting and watching the leisurely proceedings. Next to the bowling green is a marble drinking fountain, a curiosity to us and maybe a convenience on a hot day, although this one is not working, but it was a necessity in Victorian times when the poor of the area did not all have easy access to clean drinking water. Further on is the bandstand, a large ornate structure, which is a replica of the original one.

We left the park, crossed the very busy road, and continued through another park. Maybe it was a park crawl after all!

This was King's Stairs Park, a small green open space with official "village green" status, with trees, grassy slopes and a playground partly enclosed in a low hedge. At the top of the slope we found ourselves at the riverside. It was high tide, so the river looked much wider and brighter, and the coffee coloured water was slopping around just a short way beneath the wall. To the left we could see many of the large buildings of central London in the distance, and to the right the old wharf buildings which are now residential apartments.

Finally we walked through the narrow back streets of Rotherhithe, past more of the old wharves converted to dwellings but retaining the historical exterior fittings such as cranes, chains and other unidentified ironwork. Built into the old pub wall was a milestone that said "London Bridge 2 miles" but we would be going home in the opposite direction. The train station was nearby and we returned the easy and comfortable way, avoiding the traffic and noise of the suburban roads. Pleasant as the parks are, we appreciate coming back to our own small scale back garden park, with lawn and roses, and private fishpond, no dolphins but a crowd of eager fishes awaiting their next meal. (1003 words)