

Perhaps the first impression of Abney Park Cemetery, after you pass through the gates, is of trees – lots of them. Covering an area of 13 hectares (32 acres), Abney is Hackney's only mature woodland. Originally it was a wooded area, sloping down from an ancient ridgeway track in the south (now Church Street) to Hackney Brook in the north (diverted underground in Victorian times). By about 1700, this area had become the parkland grounds of Abney and Fleetwood House (see map under ABNEY'S HABITATS & WILDLIFE).

ABNEY'S ARBORETUM & TREES

In 1840 the parkland became a non-conformist and non-denominational garden cemetery. It contained an arboretum which held up to 2,500 named varieties of tree, making it the largest tree-collection in Britain after Loddiges' Nursery of Hackney, who supplied most of the trees. The collection was also used for education. Few of those 'heritage' trees survive. Some present-day trees are of particular note, and their hybridisation (cross-breeding) adds a fascinating dimension.

Oak (*Quercus*) If you thought an oak was an oak, then think again: apart from English Oak, here are 11 distinct species plus any number of self-seeded hybrids. Some hybrids are of very mixed ancestry and have been referred to as '*Quercus naturi*' (quirk of nature). Lucombe Oak (*right*), a cross between Turkey and Cork Oak, is an Abney speciality.



Lucombe Oak leaves are elongated with a variety of lobe shapes.

Thorn (*Crataegus*)

Hybridisation occurs also between thorn trees. One Hawthorn is thought to be 200 years old, and is possibly Hackney's oldest tree and a relict of the old parkland. Various-leaved Hawthorn has naturalised from the legacy plantings and is nationally important.



Pink blossom of Hawthorn.

Elm (*Ulmus*) A fine avenue of English Elms grew along

ABNEY PARK CEMETERY NATURE RESERVE, STOKE NEWINGTON



High tree canopy, patches of open sky, shady paths, majestic old trees, spring flowers and monuments to those departed – all part of Abney Park Cemetery's diverse and atmospheric habitat.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Buses

67, 73, 76, 106, 149, 276, 243, 349, 393 & 476.

Trains

BR station: Stoke Newington.



Great Elm Walk (2006).

Great Elm Walk, but they were felled as a result of Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970s. Suckers are still produced by the old rootstock, however, and may grow to a height of about 6m (20ft) before dying.

Pine (*Pinus*) Heritage pines include Bhutan and Corsican. At least one other pine defies identification and is dubbed '*Pinus mysterious*'.

Chestnut (*Aesculus*) One magnificent old Horse Chestnut is hollow to the top of its trunk. This makes it more resistant to toppling: being a brittle wood, its 'tubular' trunk gives the tree greater flexibility. A fungal disease, *Rigidoporus*, is affecting many Horse Chestnuts in Abney Park and elsewhere.

Poplar (*Populus*) A line of Lombardy Poplars runs E-W towards the Entrance Drive. Pollarding (cutting back the main branches) of Hybrid Black Poplars is carried out on a three-year cycle to extend their lives.

Other heritage trees include: the Service Tree of Fontainebleau (naturalised from original plantings and nationally important); Swamp Cypress (N of the Booth monument); and Indian Bean Tree with exotic flowers.



Flowers of Indian Bean Tree, behind the Chapel.

Regeneration and Planting

Trees such as sycamore, willow, oak and ash, are regenerating from their seeds. Native trees and shrubs are being planted in the northern half of the Park; and a mixture of native and exotic species (in the original Loddiges' list) in the southern half. A new avenue of English Yew has been planted along former Yew Walk.

See also: ABNEY'S HABITATS & WILDLIFE

FURTHER READING (available at the Visitor Centre)

Paul Joyce, A Guide to Abney Park Cemetery, 1994

David Solman, Loddiges of Hackney: the largest hothouse in the world, 1995

Isobel Watson, Hackney and Stoke Newington Past, 1990