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CO-CURATING THE CITY

UNIVERSITIES AND URBAN HERITAGE PAST AND FUTURE

EDITED BY

CLARE MELHUISH,
HENRIC BENESCH, DEAN SULLY
AND INGRID MARTINS HOLMBERG

UCLPRESS

Co-curating the City

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Universities and urban heritage past and future

edited by Clare Melhuish, Henric Benesch,
Ingrid Martins Holmberg and Dean Sully

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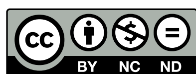

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7

London's mega event heritage and the development of UCL East

Jonathan Gardner

Introduction

This chapter considers the development of UCL East in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Stratford, as a 'legacy' of two of London's previous 'mega events': the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the Great Exhibition of 1851. Since their emergence in the mid-nineteenth century, mega events – a genre of large-scale international, transitory spectacles including expositions, world's fairs, and sporting events like the Olympic Games – have been recognised as drivers of dramatic urban change (Kassens-Noor, 2016). In the case of UCL East, the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games are directly responsible for the existence of its site and the support it has received from central government through the event's legacy development (LLDC, 2019).

In what follows, I provide an overview of how UCL East emerged as a result of these earlier mega events. I suggest that the new campus' development relies upon a selective understanding and use of heritage discourses, pertaining not only to its location in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park ('the Olympic Park' hereafter), but also its relationship to the Great Exhibition of 1851 and that event's legacy educational institutions at South Kensington (collectively known as 'Albertopolis'). I demonstrate that the comparisons that have been made between these earlier mega events and UCL East (along with East Bank) are based on an over-simplification of their complex geneses and argue that we must be wary in assuming a simple line of travel between these 'ancestor' events and the present.

Heritage discourses

Like other contributors to this volume, I argue that universities and other cultural organisations rely upon constructed heritage discourses to justify their programmes of expansion, appealing to notions of tradition or appropriateness for how that institution 'fits' with its host city and community. Following David Harvey (2001), heritage can be understood as an ever-changing 'process', a social phenomenon that is not fixed or ever fully agreed upon, and whose invocation has great power to influence behaviour and the claims we make about how the world is understood to 'work' and the construction of understandings about the past, present and future (Wu and Hu, 2015: 41). I suggest that we must understand UCL East and East Bank's emergence as being at least in part derived from several competing visions of the past: a genealogy of understandings of both the history of the host site and London's previous mega events, each of which can be 'excavated' to examine the original assumptions and evidence upon which they were founded.

Below, I critically analyse these discourses through examination of texts, media and other materials related to the UCL East, East Bank and Olympic projects for their contents and intertextual relationships, to highlight the value claims they make to effect change or maintain the status quo. I suggest that two interlinked discourses are at play in legitimising and creating the current development of UCL East and East Bank as a whole.

The first of these heritage discourses is the portrayal of both the physical traces of 'the past' (old buildings, archaeology, landscapes, existing populations) within the UCL East and East Bank projects *and* the mechanisms by which these traces have been 'dealt with' – both literally and discursively – in the creation of the Olympic Park, without which no legacy development would be occurring. Given that the current projects have directly benefitted from narratives that often portrayed the pre-Games site as an 'industrial wasteland', I suggest it is critical that we now interrogate how the past has been represented here and to ask how UCL East and its fellow institutions can be true to their desire to become 'rooted' in this 'new piece of city' without reproducing such tropes (UCL 2017a: 4, 20).

The aforementioned ancestor story operates as a second discourse that connects East Bank's planned cultural and educational institutions to London's first mega event, the Great Exhibition of 1851 (also referred to as '1851' hereafter) and the institutions that emerged from its aftermath,

particularly the South Kensington Museum (now V&A). The desire to 'learn' from this illustrious ancestor was reflected in the nicknaming of East Bank as 'Olympicopolis' in 2013 by (then) London Mayor Boris Johnson (examined further below). I suggest that a tension exists between this ancestor discourse and that of the wasteland and, at the end of the chapter, I consider how UCL East might act as a useful opportunity for reconciliation of these discourses.

Situating UCL East

UCL East emerged in its current form in 2014 with UCL's '2034 Strategy', which outlined a desire to strengthen the institution's role as a 'global university' situated in London yet accessible to its communities and, more practically, to provide additional teaching space and new degree programmes (UCL, 2014). The 2034 Strategy and East project had an earlier genesis in a 2011 UCL Council 'White Paper' (UCL, 2011a), with major plans for the redevelopment of its existing estate with the 'Bloomsbury Masterplan' (UCL, 2011b), and, a scheme for a Stratford-based campus on the site of the Carpenters Estate (see Figure 7.1), a collection of council housing managed by the London Borough of Newham and located immediately to the south of the Olympic Park (UCL, 2011c).

'UCL Stratford', as this initial eastern campus became known, was opposed by a coalition of local Newham residents and UCL students and staff after its announcement in late 2011 (CARP, 2012; UCLU, 2013). This saw campaigning against plans for a campus that would have entirely demolished the estate and seen its remaining 700 residents rehomed elsewhere (BBC, 2012). The scheme, developed in partnership by UCL and its Provost, Malcolm Grant, along with (then) Mayor of Newham, Robin Wales, eventually collapsed in 2013 due to difficulties agreeing a business case. However, according to Grant's successor, Michael Arthur, the negative publicity received by UCL played a significant part in the university's decision to pull out (UCL, 2013).[1]

From the ruins of UCL Stratford emerged UCL East in 2013, developed in discussion with the Mayoral Development Corporation responsible for developing the Park – the 'London Legacy Development Corporation' (LLDC) – with plans to develop a campus within the Olympic Park itself (UCL, 2013). This campus is now being built in the south of the Olympic Park across two parcels bisected by the Waterworks River, a much-modified channel of the River Lea (sometimes spelt 'Lee'), itself the

Figure 7.1 The Carpenters Arms and housing blocks of the Carpenters Estate, Stratford, East London, January 2016. Site of the now cancelled UCL Stratford scheme. Photo: Jonathan Gardner. CC BY 4.0

largest tributary of the River Thames. The easternmost area of the UCL East site, adjacent to the London Aquatics Centre, is subdivided as 'Pool Street East' and 'Pool Street West', while the westernmost site is known as 'Marshgate', with the first phase projected to open in 2023. As detailed elsewhere in this volume, this campus will be the largest expansion of the university in its 195-year history and will provide a wide range of new degree programmes and research opportunities, as well as laboratory facilities, student accommodation and community engagement programmes.

The history of 'a new piece of city'

Moves towards hosting the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games in London emerged from the late 1990s onwards, with the Lea Valley identified as a potential site by 2000 (Lee, 2012: 6). London's eventual bid, launched in 2003, is generally seen to have been successful due to its emphasis on a planned 'legacy' of social and material change to East London and the UK (Gold and Gold, 2017).

The intention to radically rework the urban landscape in this part of East London has had a long gestation, with the Lea Valley and, particularly Stratford, eyed as a place of 'opportunity' since the Second World War (Abercrombie, 1944: 105). Stratford was chosen for the 2012 Games' main venues for a wide range of factors: it had excellent transport links, areas of dereliction and contamination of former industry that was earmarked for regeneration, and cheap land costs (Rose, 2006: 7–8). This dereliction was partly a result of deindustrialisation related to the closure of London's docks, as well as wider structural changes to the UK economy over the second half of the twentieth century.

Following the beginning of dock closures from 1967, docklands-related industrial areas like Stratford saw a long period of disuse and stalled development projects (Hostettler, 2002). In the docks themselves, it was only with a 1980s programme of state investment under the quasi-governmental 'London Docklands Development Corporation' (LDDC) that this began to change. The LDDC was controversially granted full planning controls over the dockland area, the ability to compulsorily purchase sites and, from 1982 onwards, its lands operated as an 'Enterprise Zone', with developers exempted from paying most property taxes (Brownill and O'Hara, 2015). This, alongside government-funded infrastructure improvements (particularly the Docklands Light Railway), led to massive office and residential development that continues to this day and kick-started the ongoing mass redevelopment of the East End more broadly.

It is important to recognise that the development model pioneered by the Docklands Development Corporation now also underpins the Olympic Park's legacy, with the *LLDC* (a Mayoral Development Corporation – but note the similar name to LDDC) having similarly devolved planning responsibility for the former Olympic Park until the 2030s.[2] The wave of deindustrialisation that affected the docks – and the planning model which was developed in response – can therefore be said to have played a significant role in directing development of East Bank and UCL East.

The Olympic Park itself was developed following London's winning Olympic Bid in 2005, with construction starting in 2007. This led to the exit of 5,000 workers from over 280 businesses and over 1,500 residents from the site as a result of a compulsory purchase order enacted by the London Development Agency (Davies, Davis and Rapp, 2017: 1; Rose, 2006). The vast scale of preparations for the Games saw almost all pre-existing structures demolished, the cleaning of the upper layers of the site's contaminated soil, archaeological and ecological 'mitigation', and

construction work to build stadia and other facilities for the mega event. In 2012, with the Olympic Park completed (along with other venues across southern England), the Olympic and Paralympic Games were held from 27 July to 9 September.

Following the Games, legacy plans came into place that saw the Olympic Park remodelled to maintain several permanent stadia, the dismantling of temporary venues and construction of new homes, schools and offices. The success of this legacy is still debated, though it has demonstrably delivered a major clean-up of the area's soil and waterways, improved infrastructure, new parklands, led to the creation of permanent sporting facilities and seen the building of thousands of homes. However, there has also been strong criticism of the mega event and its legacy programme as it currently stands. Much of this centres most prominently around a failure to deliver the amount of affordable housing as originally promised and a failure (so far) to provide a similar number of replacement jobs from those lost through the original compulsory purchase (London Assembly, 2017; Cheyne, 2018). I will not add to this here, but clearly UCL East will have to grapple with these concerns as it develops. Instead, I now consider how heritage discourses were employed in the construction of the Olympic Park and how these may have influenced UCL East.

Mitigating the past and creating the wasteland

As part of the Olympic Park's development, large-scale archaeological investigations took place in advance of construction, with the digging of 121 small evaluation trenches, and eight larger excavations, along with the recording of significant historic buildings prior to their demolition. Some of this work provided important discoveries, including a prehistoric settlement at the Aquatic Centre, a rare Neolithic hand-axe, an early nineteenth-century rowing boat and a Second World War anti-aircraft gun emplacement (Powell, 2012). The future site of UCL East itself showed evidence of prehistoric use, including a likely Bronze Age/Iron Age settlement at Pool Street East (AECOM, 2017: para. 6.4.62).

This archaeological work was mandated by UK planning guidance, with the developers – the government-run Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) – obliged to fund mitigation of damage to archaeology and historic buildings either through preservation or recording and documentation. However, I suggest that a second sense of the word 'mitigation' was also at play here: the use of findings and representations of the ancient past to *mitigate against* negative perceptions of the project.[3] Archaeological

investigations provided a ‘good news story’ for the project and the language used in press releases appears to aim to legitimise the changes the Olympics wrought. An example is found with a 2007 ODA release where the discovery of three prehistoric roundhouses on the banks of the Waterworks River (said to house ‘the first Londoners’): ‘We are taking this opportunity to tell the fascinating story of the Lower Lea Valley before it is given a new lease of life for the Games and future generations. It is a story of change and transformation dating back centuries’ (ODA, 2007a).

The implication here seems to be that the seasonal occupation of a piece of riverbank by a small group of people more than 3,000 years ago was no different from the wholesale re-landscaping and change of the 250 hectare, £9 billion mega project.

While such use of archaeological data by developers as a ‘good news story’ is perhaps inevitable on construction projects, this and similar examples of where the legitimacy of change and development of the Olympics was situated somewhat awkwardly, showed that the past was, at this point at least, seen as useful to the project (see Gardner, 2020a and 2022 for further examples). However, while I would suggest that this positive view of the Olympic Park’s ancient past provided useful PR, in order to complete the area’s transformation, another portrayal of the past was required, namely, the denigration of the more recent history of the site.

The pre-Olympic Park area was frequently labelled an ‘industrial wasteland’ and a ‘problem place’ by the ODA and much of the national media, with the activities of existing inhabitants often shown in a negative light: for example, a focus on abandoned buildings, rather than the numerous businesses and creative industries that were still operating here until 2007 (Raco and Tunney, 2010: 2070; Farquhar, 2012; Gardner, 2020a). Strohmayer has noted that spaces seen as ‘brownfield’ or ‘underdeveloped’ like the pre-Olympic site are often taken to be unproblematic ‘mirrors’ of their supposed opposite: the dystopian ‘industrial wasteland’ contrasted with utopian regeneration of promised Olympic ‘legacy’ (Strohmayer, 2018: 543). The way in which the wasteland narrative operated was therefore to delegitimise the recent past in favour of promising a better future and legacy, often through contrasting images of dereliction and CGI renders of the future Olympic Park (see also Brown, this volume). In this calculus, in contrast to the ancient past, recent history and still operating industrial businesses (not to mention residents) on the site in 2007 were seen as ‘underutilising’ the area and were required to be made absent in the ‘post-industrial’ future of the Games and their carefully planned aftermath (ODA, 2011: 33).

A wasteland of a sort was soon made real, however, through the enactment of the compulsory purchase in 2007, with the commensurate exit of workers and residents, and demolition of industrial premises and housing. The only traces of the past recorded (officially) were those heritage 'assets' that were safely archaeological or considered architecturally 'significant' (buried villages, gun emplacements) rather than any pertaining to those recently working or living on the site (for example, businesses and allotment gardeners). Even the older archaeological past that was excavated was barely recognised after 2012: there are currently still no plans to display or provide interpretation of any of this material in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (though a site publication was produced – see Powell, 2012).

Most of the traces of this recent past were instead recorded only by photographers, artists and academic researchers in 2005–7 (though on occasion some more unusual work on contemporary structures was ODA-funded – for example, see Dwyer, 2007). These investigations contradicted the idea that the area was entirely 'post-industrial' or empty of inhabitants by interviewing and photographing businesses still in operation, and residents of the Clay's Lane housing estate and users of sites like the Manor Gardens Allotments (Davies, Davis and Rapp, 2017; Hatcher, 2012; Marshall, 2012).

The assertion that this place was a barely inhabited 'wasteland' still seems to pervade legacy planning today, with elements of the Legacy Masterplan Framework describing the pre-Olympic site as an 'industrial backwater' and a 'historically disjointed part of the city' (LLDC, 2013: 146), and, post-Games, almost no traces of these former industries or inhabitants are visible in its landscape today.

Why then was the recent past seen to be unacceptable? Primarily, I would suggest that the presence of contemporary industry and inhabitants acted to contradict the positive or 'redemptive' promise of such a mega project (see Butler, 2007 for a similar example): that is to say that such a project inevitably produces negative effects as well as positive ones. For this area to truly be 'regenerated', anything that was a holdover from the past was potentially seen as a threat to the future. This not only included physical traces such as contamination or old factories, but also the activities of people who still inhabited and used this space in a way that was seen to be incompatible with what was planned. With this in mind, I now turn to how UCL and East Bank are engaging with the history of the site and how far this wasteland discourse can be said to persist today.

UCL East and the Olympic Park

UCL East's own recognition of the history of the Olympic Park currently appears to be only fleetingly articulated, but even at this stage it is worth examining how conceptualisations of the past are presented by the project.

In UCL East documents and webpages, efforts have been made to establish both a local and a London-wide connection to the past. On its 'Location' webpage – first seen from 2017 –for example, a brief 'History of the area' was presented and is worth quoting at length:

> In 1868, the area was largely agricultural. Adjacent uses included a gasworks, a brick field, a spinning mill and nearby railways on the embankment. By 1893, a number of light industrial premises (Victoria Oil and Candle Works, Varnish Works, Oil and Chemical works and Hudson's Bay Fur and Skin works) occupied a vacant area of land to the south including the UCL East site. From the end of the twentieth century until the early 2000s the site was used as a scrap yard.
>
> The wider site was subsequently developed for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Legacy Communities Scheme (LCS) planning application, which was approved in September 2012, is the overarching scheme developed to guide the long-term development of the Olympic Park and its neighbourhoods after the Games.
>
> Building on East London's reputation as a trailblazer in design and creativity, and inspired by the vision for the legacy of the Great Exhibition that created Exhibition Road in Kensington, the Olympic Park now plans to make its name as a new centre for attracting and nurturing talent and industry. The Cultural and Education District will create a world-class destination, bringing together outstanding organisations to showcase exceptional art, dance, history, craft, science, technology and cutting edge design (UCL, 2017b).

This shows a succinct overview of the site's recent past, including the details of individual businesses.[4] It is notable, however, that nothing prior to 1868 is mentioned or that no history of the wider Olympic Park is included – for example, the prehistoric settlement at the Aquatics Centre and nearby Pool Street mentioned above. That said, a relatively neutral

emphasis on more recent industrial uses does stand in contrast to the 'wasteland' narrative discussed previously.

The reference also made here to a 'trailblazer in design' is similar to language used by the LLDC within the overall East Bank project, and which emphasises a non-location specific 'vitality of East London' narrative (LLDC, 2019). This more general sense of being part of a 'vibrant' idea of the East End as a whole suggests that while a wasteland discourse is less overtly in use today, a certain need for distance from the local past lingers, and that an alternative, more acceptable and generic recent past is to be foregrounded.

> Within the wider East Bank project webpages where UCL East is mentioned, we see the LLDC's desire for the project to slot into an existing topography of other 'cultural destinations' in London rather than those pre-existing within Stratford (for example, the Theatre Royal or University of East London):
>
> The ambition of the project is recognised in the new name – the East Bank – which will complement London's major cultural and education centres, such as the South Bank, the cluster of museums and academic institutions in South Kensington and the Knowledge Quarter around King's Cross and Bloomsbury. (LLDC, 2019)

The overall intention with East Bank therefore appears to be to create a destination within the Olympic Park and East London whereby the area is no longer primarily associated with the Olympic and Paralympic Games (or indeed the supposed previous 'wasteland') or significant local history, but fundamentally, is to be understood as a wholly *new* part of London (Mayor of London, 2018). Arguably, the eye-catching institutions of museums, universities and concert halls are an attempt to make good on promises for legacy, which espoused a wholesale transformation of the area and to create a 'destination' beyond sporting venues or new housing (Gold and Gold 2017: 527). In Graeme Evans' view, East Bank appears to assume that the pre-2012 era was therefore also a 'cultural wasteland' and argues that the project ignores any pre-existing industrial and creative heritage in favour of 'a Guggenheim style import … without a vernacular reference' (Evans, 2020: 67).

Thus, potentially the wasteland heritage discourse lingers but its emphasis shifts from a focus on physical signs of dereliction or contamination to something less tangible, and perhaps an assumption that this place is in need of a 'cultural regeneration' alongside a physical

one. With regard to UCL East's efforts at place-making, despite discussion of being 'rooted' in the community, the absence of much discussion of contemporary or ongoing heritage value here seems odd. While at least some of the planned academic departments of UCL East will actively engage with local heritage and history (particularly the 'Urban Room and Memory Workshop' focusing on the 'impact of industry, globalisation and gentrification on the six Olympic Park Boroughs and their people' (see UCL, 2018), those planning the buildings of the new campus itself appear unaware or uninterested in this heritage. For example, Clare Melhuish relates that a member of UCL East's development team suggested their approach to the new campus was based on a belief that 'there's very little long-term heritage' nearby the site, specifically on the basis of the 'poor quality' of the buildings of nearby housing estates like Carpenters (Melhuish, 2019: 15). Not only does this ignore UCL's negative influence on the residents of Carpenters Estate in 2011, given its original expansion plans, but it also highlights a failure to integrate the experience of people living in the area today or those who worked (or lived) in the Olympic Park area previously, not to mention its industrial history and buried archaeological remains.

This lack of short-term institutional memory may be related to UCL's contrasting use of its own 'institutional history and heritage' to justify the East campus (Melhuish, 2019: 14). This includes UCL presenting a generally positive version of its own past, such as the fact it was the first university to accept women and enrolled all students regardless of 'race' or religion. Relatedly, Beverley Butler notes the way 'utopian' origins are often foregrounded in UCL's 'myth-history' particularly around the auto-icon of Jeremy Bentham and his utilitarian belief in 'greatest good for the greatest number' (Peters, Wengrow, Quirke, Butler and Sommer, 2018: 60). This 'myth-history', that the university is more progressive or 'radical' than others, is epitomised by the branding on hoardings around the current UCL East worksite stating the university's 'heritage of disruptive thinking', 'since 1826'. While clearly much of this history is indeed noteworthy, it is obviously valorised over more problematic episodes in the institution's past, including the abortive Carpenters' expansion as UCL Stratford, while the idea that this space was simply empty is not helped by another hoarding slogan claiming to be 'breaking *new* ground in East London' (my emphasis; McLaughlin, 2019).

Above, I have explored how heritage was used in the building of the Olympic Park and in the early stages of UCL East's development. The developers of the Olympic Park, and those now responsible for its legacy

plans, appear to have relied on a simultaneous valorisation and denigration of different elements of the past, resulting in what I have called the 'wasteland' discourse. While the ancient past was briefly of interest in supporting landscape changes or useful for positive news stories, this relied on the more recent history of the Olympic Park being castigated as entirely dirty, ruinous and wasteful, despite evidence to the contrary. With the development of UCL East and East Bank, this discourse becomes somewhat modified: the fear or 'threat' of the wasteland appears less directly but the developers of these institutions seem instead to either highlight a more generalised sense of East End history which bypasses Stratford, or their own institutional 'myth-history'. Another ancestor is also at play here, however, that I have not yet discussed, and it is one that lies at the heart of UCL East and East Bank's development: the Great Exhibition of 1851 and its 'legacy' as Albertopolis, to which I now turn.

An educational heritage: 1851 and its legacies

Looking again at UCL East's 'location' webpage (above) we see that the project is said to be, 'inspired by the vision for the legacy of the Great

Figure 7.2 One of the few photographs of the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851, which hosted the Great Exhibition. Attributed to Claude-Marie Ferrier. Public Domain. Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Crystal_palace_1851.jpg

Exhibition' (UCL, 2017b). UCL here draws on a wider East Bank foundational narrative that makes reference to South Kensington, this first appearing at the district's December 2013 launch by then Mayor of London (and LLDC chair), Boris Johnson. Johnson referred to the planned 'Culture and Education District' (as it was then officially called) as 'Olympicopolis' and noted that '[t]he idea behind [the project] is simple and draws on the extraordinary foresight of our Victorian ancestors', referencing the fact that institutions such as the South Kensington Museum were developed in part from the profits of the Great Exhibition (Mayor of London, 2013). Johnson thus deftly established a connection between the legacy of the London 2012 mega event and that resulting from its Victorian predecessor.

Though described as 'his vision' in UCL East documentation (Soundings, 2016: 17), it seems unlikely that the Mayor's nostalgia for the Victorians was the sole reason for making the link to Albertopolis, given that the district is arguably the world's most successful mega event-led cultural legacy project (albeit one that was originally unplanned – see below). Such evocation of the 'spirit of 1851' is not new or specific to London. Following 1851, many Great Exhibition imitators appeared, ranging from the short-lived and combustible New York Crystal Palace (1853), to the enormous *Expositions Universelles* in Paris (held regularly from 1855 until the Second World War), with many other mega events subsequently hosted around the world from the late nineteenth century up to the present day.

The Great Exhibition (see Figure 7.2) has also been frequently referenced by subsequent UK mega events. For example, the other 'ancestor' most often mentioned by the current East Bank developments, the 1951 Festival of Britain, was held in the Great Exhibition's centenary year, although it only grudgingly acknowledged the date, given its organisers' progressive emphasis (Conekin, 2003: 85–6). Reference to 1851 was also made in support of the ill-fated 'Millennium Experience' and its Dome at North Greenwich (Porter and Stokes, 1999), and this ancestor event is once again now enthusiastically taken up as inspiration for the planned 'Great Brexhibition' of 2022 to celebrate the UK's departure from the EU (Sandbrook, 2018).

Imitations of this original event (and its legacies to some extent) are therefore not uncommon, but to understand how appropriate it is to draw links between UCL East and this 'ancestor', it is important to revisit the context of the original spectacle in 1851 and its legacy developments, given the significant differences between them and East Bank.

The Great Exhibition

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was held in Hyde Park in London between May and October of 1851, in a vast temporary structure that became rapidly known as the ‘Crystal Palace’. Plans for the Exhibition were led by Henry Cole (Assistant Keeper at the Public Records Office) and by Prince Albert (husband of Queen Victoria) and it was funded through public subscription. The Exhibition housed around 13,000 exhibits (with over 100,000 individual items), encompassing everything from lumps of coal and steam-powered machinery to looted colonial diamonds and elaborate displays of taxidermy. Attracting some six million visitors, the event was primarily intended to display the UK’s manufacturing prowess to the world and to stimulate demand for British-made goods (Auerbach, 1999; 12–13).

The Exhibition was considered a great success, with its closure attracting consternation and calls for the Crystal Palace’s retention as a ‘winter garden’ or exhibition hall (Piggott, 2004: 33). Its novelty and this great success led to its almost instant ‘heritagisation’, with letters calling for the erection for a memorial found as early as October 1851 (‘Delta’, 1851). Such nostalgia – and a degree of mythos – continues to exert a strong pull on both scholarly and political imaginations of the event to this day.

Despite East Bank and UCL East’s emphasis on 1851’s educational ‘vision’, and though famously linked to the origin of modern museums by Tony Bennett (1995), the Great Exhibition was not intentionally created as a museum-like space by its organisers; its educational focus was instead intended primarily to improve the ‘taste’ of consumers. Similarly, the Exhibition was planned as a one-off spectacle and hosted in a temporary venue with no plans made to leave a legacy in the form of permanent educational institutions or buildings (indeed, the ‘temporariness’ of its structure was a key condition of securing its site – see Gardner, 2018). As discussed below, the institutions of South Kensington emerged only afterwards with the addition of significant government investment and decades of effort (Gold and Gold, 2005: 70; Physick, 1982; Gardner, 2022: chapter 4). We must therefore be careful in assuming a clear line of travel between 1851’s ‘legacy’ and current day initiatives like East Bank, given that conscious mega event ‘legacy planning’ is a phenomenon that really only fully appears with much later mega events and particularly the Olympic Games from the 1960s onwards (see Gold and Gold, 2008: 304). Albertopolis and the other cultural/educational ventures that emerged from the Exhibition can be more properly understood as unplanned,

albeit fortuitous, legacies, and thus quite different from the detailed plans for the aftermath of London's 2012 Olympics, which were always a part of its original Bid and planning applications (ODA, 2007b).

Albertopolis

The development of Albertopolis was kick-started with the Great Exhibition's profits of £186,000 and the actions of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 to distribute these funds. After much discussion, the commissioners decided to use this money, along with match-funding from the government, to purchase 86 acres of land in South Kensington to create 'a Site for Institutions connected with Science and Art', and to 'serve to increase the means of Industrial Education' (HM Government quoted in Physick, 1982: 21). This eventually led to the formation of the South Kensington Museum (renamed the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) in 1899), which officially opened in 1857 in several temporary buildings. The Museum and its planned permanent structures were then developed in piecemeal fashion with the building 'finished' (excluding later extensions) in 1909, following more injections of government money and several aborted schemes (Physick, 1982: chapter 3).

Following the South Kensington Museum, numerous other institutions were then developed in Albertopolis, again in stop-start fashion over several decades, with the Natural History Museum opening in 1881, what became the Science Museum emerging in the 1860s, and the Imperial Institute (a precursor to Imperial College London) in 1887. Evans has argued that the Great Exhibition and Albertopolis were a 'Victorian example … of event or culture-led regeneration' just as the Olympics and its legacy schemes are to Stratford and East London (Evans, 2020: 52). He leaves unspecified just what was actually 'regenerated' in 1850s South Kensington, but I would suggest this comparison is misleading given that the original Crystal Palace was built within a Royal Park and Albertopolis was constructed (mostly) over a combination of mansions, paddocks and market gardens and was spatially and socially very different from twenty-first-century Stratford.[5] So while Evans rightly draws attention to other differences between South Kensington and East Bank, his argument is overly simplistic in equating the impact of two very different mega events upon London's landscape. A correction to this is important given that the Olympic Park, despite claims of 'wasteland', was no edgeland or *tabula rasa* prior to the mega event and had considerable

density and variety of occupation, and was quite unlike the semi-rural Hyde Park and South Kensington in 1851.

Before concluding, I now want to briefly consider one last and sometimes forgotten legacy of the Great Exhibition, the rebuilt Crystal Palace at Sydenham, South London, and what it might tell us about the long-term fate of post-event educational legacies.

Meet the ancestors

While development of Albertopolis ramped up through the late 1850s, the Crystal Palace building that had housed the Great Exhibition was already in operation from 1854 as a privately operated venture at Sydenham in south London. Its owners, the Crystal Palace Company, sought not only to stay true to the educational ideals of the Great Exhibition but to 'outdo' it and, later on, actively competed with the South Kensington Museum (Piggott, 2004: v, 34). This saw the Palace rebuilt at Sydenham five times larger than the Hyde Park version and filled with educational exhibits. The vast range of these cannot be covered here but included ten 'Fine Art Courts' (reconstructions of rooms and artworks

Figure 7.3 The models of dinosaurs and extinct animals that remain as one of the few surviving traces of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham. Photo: Jonathan Gardner. CC BY 4.0

from ancient civilisations), a 'Tropical Department' complete with palm trees and parrots, exhibits of industrial machinery, and a display of model indigenous people arranged in a racist 'civilisational' hierarchy (Qureshi, 2011). These, along with displays of geology and extinct animal models outside in a vast elaborately landscaped park (see Figure 7.3), supported the Palace Company's vision to 'create a visual encyclopaedia of culture and nature' (Moser, 2012: 5), and to operate as '[a]n institution intended to last for ages, and to widen the scope, and to brighten the path of education throughout the land' (Phillips, 1854: 10).

Unlike Albertopolis, the Palace and its Park also rapidly developed an entertainment component as the finances of the Crystal Palace Company worsened. These leisure uses included fairground rides, sporting events, fireworks displays and many temporary expositions, including the enormous Festival of Empire in 1911 (Piggott, 2011; Gardner, 2018). Following bankruptcy during this last event in 1911, and their purchase 'for the nation' by Lord Plymouth, the Palace and Park operated as a Naval training base during the First World War and then hosted the first iteration of the Imperial War Museum from 1920 to 1924. Under new management from the late 1920s onwards, the Palace began to turn a profit, only for it to accidentally burn to the ground in November 1936, with its loss much mourned (Auerbach, 2001: 93).

To summarise; though the establishment of East Bank and UCL East is said to be inspired by the successes of Albertopolis as a legacy of the Great Exhibition, the Crystal Palace at Sydenham arguably provides a useful 'alternative' ancestor. If nothing else, it illustrates the risk in creating such large-scale educational ventures that may not always benefit from regular injections of government funding. In the case of East Bank, such funding is heavily reliant on development of adjacent residential units (and commensurate growth in the east London housing market), and in UCL's case, its own financial resilience and ability to recruit more students (Viña, 2016), both of which are inevitably subject to uncertainty, particularly in the wake of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. Sydenham also shows that 'legacy' can be a messy business, and its (mis)fortunes confront us with evidence of how such an educational institution can struggle to stay true to the aims of both its backers and 'ancestors' alike (Gardner, 2020b; 2022).

An added complication to this desire to evoke Albertopolis has come with the renaming of Olympicopolis as 'East Bank'. This brings yet another ancestor into play: the Thames-side site of the South Bank Exhibition of the 1951 Festival of Britain and its (originally unplanned) legacy of the 'South Bank' cultural centre. Upon relaunching Olympicopolis in 2018,

Sadiq Khan, the present Mayor of London, said that East Bank was 'inspired' by South Bank's institutions and their 'transforming a location through [providing] world class art and learning opportunities' (Mayor of London, 2018). Thus, just like Johnson, the past of a whole district is to be employed in condensed form for the service of the present. Should a new Mayor be elected in 2024, perhaps yet another mega event forebear will be found.

Much like the long gestation of Albertopolis, following 1951, the South Bank complex took many decades to arrive at anything like the place we see today. The Festival of Britain was hosted by a Labour government who were ousted in a snap election at the end of 1951 – shortly after the South Bank Exhibition's closure – and all of the mega event's structures were razed except the Royal Festival Hall (always intended as a permanent venue). The district then saw no further permanent cultural developments until 1967 with the construction of the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the Hayward Gallery in 1968 and the National Theatre in 1976. No original legacy plan was made for the area beyond the retention of the Festival Hall, except for an intention to construct a large-scale set of government buildings that were never built alongside a vague intention to locate some kind of cultural centre here under the wartime *County of London Plan* (Hutchinson and Williams, 1976; Forshaw and Abercrombie, 1943). It was only with the end of the twentieth century, and further redevelopment, that the area took on its current coherent form. It will be difficult for East Bank and UCL East to replicate such a unique environment quickly, which, like South Kensington, went through a complex series of false starts and, like the Olympic Park, also had a rich history prior to 1951 despite being branded a 'slum' prior to the South Bank Exhibition's construction (*Picture Post*, 1951).

Conclusion: remembering the past at UCL East and East Bank

A complex picture emerges from this survey of how the mega events of 1851 and 2012 have informed the development of UCL East. As part of East Bank, the campus construction now occurring at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park relies upon a pair of interlinked heritage discourses. Firstly, a particularised understanding of the history of the Olympic Park and Stratford and, secondly, a reification of the (apparent) success of the institutions of South Kensington and, latterly, South Bank. Albertopolis, after a long gestation, has become one of London's most preeminent

centres for education and culture and is rightly recognised as a successful and long-lasting legacy of the original event. Its referencing by the institutions of East Bank is therefore easy to comprehend, particularly given the Games' site was in an area which was said to have no prior value under the 'wasteland' narrative, but, as I have argued, this somewhat distant ancestral heritage has come at the expense of an understanding of the broader historical context of both Stratford and these earlier mega events.

A comment from London's Deputy Mayor for Culture and Creative industries, Justine Simons, at the East Bank 2018 (re)launch event shows that there seems to be a confused attitude towards London's past mega event legacies:

> East Bank represents the most significant single investment in London's culture since the legacy of the 1851 Great Exhibition, and will shape the cultural life of the city for the twenty-first-century and beyond. (Mayor of London, 2018)

Thus, we see a complicated movement between 1851, its legacies at Albertopolis, and the Festival of Britain and South Bank (along with an absence of discussion of Stratford's past and the Sydenham Crystal Palace) and between its different partners and developers. Just as mega events and their structures are often conflated (Gardner, 2018), there seems to be a lack of certainty between the use of different events and their legacies (not to mention a certain degree of Mayoral political manoeuvring).

David Lowenthal's concept of 'creative anachronism', our tendency to project our own desires and wishes upon the past, is useful here (Lowenthal, 1985: 363). In this case, both the changes brought by the Great Exhibition and the 2012 Games have become overdetermined as paradigmatic shifts, 'precipice[s] in time' that are alleged to have utterly changed both society and their host city (Johansen, 1996). Therefore, much nuance related to the complexities of these events' geneses, their uneven social impact, institutional history and popularity is lost, along with alternative histories and the story of entire institutions like the Sydenham Crystal Palace and Park.

Melhuish (2019) suggests that UCL East is already moving towards creating its own heritage, one that is mainly based around the activities within the new structures themselves and combined with the history of UCL in Bloomsbury as a 'disruptive' institution. While this may be preferable to misrepresenting or oversimplifying the past, it potentially

means that a valuable opportunity to be 'rooted' in the community is lost. While I do not suggest a focus exclusively on the industries or former residents of the Olympic Park should be the only way of engaging with the past here, it would be a bold move for institutions like UCL to make a positive break from the wasteland discourse and the near constant denigration this area has faced for over 15 years. One of Cohen's informants (this volume), a care worker, speaks of their frustration at this misrepresentation and speaks of a desire to be proud of the contribution their family made in working in this area over generations for example. In being silent on such an issue, UCL East risks, like the Games project before it, being seen as an alien or elite presence in the East End and just the latest example of a desire to reimagine the east of the city by those in the west (Newland, 2008).

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Notes

1. Carpenters' future still remains uncertain; its few remaining residents will be neighbours to UCL East project (L. B. Newham, 2019).
2. The Games' site was developed by the quasi-governmental Olympic Delivery Authority which acted as the planning authority, with compulsory purchase handled by the London Assembly-based London Development Agency (LDA). These were not Development Corporations but had similar powers over planning and development, with local London Borough council districts where venues were built unable to overrule decisions – such a planning model has been criticised for its lack of democratic accountability.
3. The opinions of the author are solely his own and do not reflect the position of any archaeological company he has previously worked for or any other entity or individual involved with the Olympic project, East Bank or UCL/UCL East. All information discussed in this chapter is derived from material in the public domain which can be found by following links in the references.
4. Shortly after the final version of this chapter was submitted in early 2020, this text disappeared from the web (though an earlier version captured in 2017 remains accessible; see UCL, 2017b). A new webpage now stresses the importance of 'understanding the area's rich history prior to the Olympics, and its diverse local communities' (see https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-east/explore-east-london). Georeferenced mapping of the area can be viewed through the National Library of Scotland: https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=16.27&lat=51.54073&lon=-0.01558&layers=6&b=1.
5. For example, consider this map of 1843 (tick 'view' checkbox): http://hgl.harvard.edu:8080/opengeoportal/?ogpids=STANFORD.RT316DV2497&bbox=-0.18091%2C51.485011%2C-0.165932%2C51.503861.

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