

## New Museum School Podcast Transcript– 2019/2020

**PODCAST TITLE:** *The Spaces We Need*

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**HOST INSTITUTION:** *National Trust (London Creative Team/Garden & Outdoors Team, Morden Hall Park)*

### SCRIPT

#### NMS INTRO STING

#### LINK 1

Hi and welcome to my podcast. My name is Edinam and I'm a New Museum School Trainee, based within the London Creative Team & Garden and Outdoors Team at Morden Hall Park. Today, I'll be talking about the spaces we need.

#### LINK 2

Commonly associated with the many country houses it owns, it might come as a surprise to some to learn that the National Trust was founded not just to protect country houses and their way of life, but to save green spaces for the benefit of the working class in London.

At the time of the Trust's founding, manufacturing had replaced agriculture as the main source of the country's income due to the Industrial Revolution, which led to thousands of people moving from rural settings to large cities in search of work.

This rapid movement depopulated the countryside and led to large slums developing in cities such as London and Manchester. With inadequate systems in place to deal

with the rise in population, such as no proper means of disposing of waste and poor housing conditions, combined with the pollution produced by the factories, this soon led to filthy urban living conditions which caused various health threats, including the spread of many diseases such as cholera. If you were wealthy, you could escape to a manor in the countryside every now and then or travel for a day outside the city but if you weren't like the vast majority of the urban population, you were trapped and had no escape from these conditions.

The open spaces movement, spearheaded by figures such as Octavia Hill and Sir Robert Hunter, and which led to the formation of organisations such as the Commons Preservation Society, the Kyrle Society and the National Trust, arose out of a need to improve these conditions and also from the recognition that access to all the benefits that green spaces can bring, such as their positive impact on the environment, our health and wellbeing, shouldn't be determined by wealth, location or any other factors.

Octavia Hill, already known for creating and managing a housing system for the working class that forms the basis of our modern-day social housing system, advocated for what she called 'open air sitting rooms', where for the working class "*the long summer evenings or the Saturday afternoon may be enjoyed without effort or expense*". She campaigned hard for the protection of existing green spaces and the creation of new ones. She was also the first to use the term 'Green Belt' for the protected rural areas surrounding London.

Sir Robert Hunter wrote six essays for a competition on the best means of preserving common land for the public. He argued that old grazing rights could be applied to a modern context in that common land should not be enclosed without due regard for "*the health, comfort and convenience of the inhabitants*" of nearby urban areas. His essays got him a role as a solicitor for the Commons Preservation Society and he went on to help save Epping Forest, Ashdown Forest and Wimbledon Common among other open spaces threatened with enclosure. By 1875, most of the arguments expressed in his essays were incorporated into English law.

Combining their ideas, both Octavia Hill and Sir Robert Hunter worked together within the Commons Preservation Society and Kyrle Society, saving several green spaces in London, such as Hampstead Heath and various garden squares in central London, before going on to establish the National Trust along with Hardwicke Rawnsley.

One of the sparks that led to the formation of the National Trust, following the Commons Preservation Society and the Kyrle Society, was the loss of Sayes Court, a celebrated manor house and garden in Deptford, Lewisham that people used to travel from all over to see. It was first developed by famous diarist John Evelyn in 1651 as part of his private residence. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was being used as a park, a homestay and a community centre of sorts. This was when Hill, Hunter and Rawnsley were approached to save it. Realising that the site couldn't be legally protected as there wasn't an organisation capable of saving a building and land together, the three came together to establish the National Trust.

Unfortunately, by the time the Trust had been established, the opportunity to save the garden and house had passed. Today all that remains of the site is a small park and despite being located in an area with very little access to green space, the park is underused.

This year is the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Trust. To commemorate it, the National Trust will be returning to Sayes Court to launch a new greening initiative in partnership with Lewisham Council and local park user groups. This will see part of Sayes Court park revamped into a garden with benches for the local residents as well as 125 trees planted across the borough.

Another notable project is the 2020 Everyone Needs Nature Campaign – an initiative that recognises the value that access to nature has on not just the environment but on our health and wellbeing as people. As part of that, I'll be working on the House of Wayward Plants project at Morden Hall Park. This will see thousands of plants being given away for free.

## LINK 3

Forming part of a recent push for the preservation of spaces in urban areas, where 84% of the country's population now live in, these projects signify a return to the history and values that the National Trust was founded on:

- a history and values that have somewhat been eclipsed by a century of increased building acquisitions;
- access to green spaces and special places for all, regardless of your income, location or background because these are spaces we all need.

Like Octavia Hill famously said: 'We all want quiet, we all want beauty, we all need space. Unless we have it, we cannot reach that sense of quiet in which whispers of better things come to us gently'.

Thank you for listening!

## NMS OUTRO STING

## SCRIPT ENDS