

# Gardens 6 September 2025

Oyez, oyez, oyez!

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the opening of these two very special GARDENS - thanks to the determined efforts of the wonderful team of volunteers, the friends of QUEEN'S PROMENADE, led by the inimitable Stefan Gross.

I am honoured to have been invited to open the Bandstand Garden, and in an hour or so the Athelstan Garden will be opened by someone far grander than myself, HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.

These openings are part of the climax of celebrations for King Athelstan's coronation here in Kingston in the year 925. On Thursday evening there was a truly magnificent service in All Saints Church, and at noon today there will be a vast flotilla of boats along the river - itself an important landmark in Saxon history, since this was the border between the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia, hitherto so often at war.

Over the past few days, we have heard much about the achievements of King Athelstan, who not only unified the previously warring seven kingdoms of Saxon Britain but who was also a man of deep faith and learned scholarship who ruled with fairness and justice.

It is therefore appropriate that his eponymous garden will be officially opened today by one of his descendants.

Because of Athelstan, subsequent generations have looked upon our town, **Kingston**, and proclaimed, with rightful pride: "**Here is where England began.**"

King Athelstan reigned until 939 and has since been remembered as

## **“The pillar of dignity in the western world.”**

We in Kingston have therefore commemorated him with proper respect this summer, and today's opening of his garden marks a very special place for this great King's memory to endure.

Our Victorian predecessors were, like us, extremely keen on the town's Saxon history, and it is therefore fitting that we are here on Queen's Promenade, opened by Queen Victoria in 1856 – in a sense, by mistake! The Queen was returning from her country estate, Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, alighting the train in Surbiton, at that time called Kingston upon Railway. Her carriage then diverted down to the Promenade where a group of schoolchildren had been placed to cheer for her. All no doubt contrived, and it is said that the Queen was NOT AMUSED!

There is evidence that, in the warmer months, people on Queen's Promenade had enjoyed band concerts, years before a bandstand was constructed here. For example, on 22 August 1874, the Surrey Comet reported that the band of the 3rd Surrey Militia played on Raven's Ait, the adjacent island, during the 12th Annual Surbiton Watermans' Regatta. Furthermore, the issue of 23 May 1885 carried a notice from Mr. Magnus George Moatt, who went on to become Mayor of Kingston in 1899, stating that the Kingston and Surbiton Promenade Band season would start on the coming Wednesday, and that performances would continue every Wednesday thereafter until further notice.

Research shows that a bandstand was installed here in 1893, the gift of one Rufus Martin Boniwell, a Surbiton auctioneer and estate agent. Band concerts were funded out of the rates by the Corporation of Kingston upon Thames and for many years Magnus George Moatt, the Mayor of Kingston, was responsible for the management in the summer months of band performances on Queen's Promenade.

This bandstand, however, seems not to have been used since about 1910, whereas, as you all no doubt know, the one in Canbury Gardens is still used regularly to this day.

It therefore gives me enormous satisfaction to recognise the stupendous efforts of the Friends of Queen's Promenade to create a garden on the site of the former bandstand which will give pleasure of a different kind to the many people who pass by or who choose to sit in it.

Huge credit must go to Stefan Gross, the Chair of QPF, and to Clive Fishman who has played an important role in this project. Thanks must also go to all the volunteers who have worked so tirelessly to create these two new gardens and to water them with such loving care in this unusually dry summer. I have no doubt that this loving care will continue, and with no apology for my pun, that it WILL CONTINUE IN SPADES!

I now DECLARE THE BANDSTAND GARDEN OPEN. May it be a place for pleasure, a place for tranquility and, perhaps most important of all, add to the sense of community here in Kingston.