

## Freebord – The Deer’s Leap

by Max Lankester and Ron Crompton



Walk out of Roehampton Gate and turn immediately left down the alley towards Palewell Common, or leave Bishop’s Gate and turn right along the passage. You’re now on the Park’s freebord.

The freebord is a legal term (‘bord’ being the same word as border) and is ‘the right to a narrow strip of land outside the fence or wall around a park or forest’, so that the owner of the park can inspect, maintain or repair it.

Richmond Park’s freebord was established when it was enclosed in 1637 and is a ‘rod’ wide (the old medieval measurement, equal to 16 ½ feet or about 5 metres). More romantically, it’s also known as the ‘deer’s leap’ – the story being that if an escaping deer managed to leap beyond the freebord it would no longer be on Park land and could not be recaptured.

Over the years some of the freebord has been sold off, for example most of the stretch between Petersham Gate and Ham Gate. Elsewhere it’s been encroached on by developments but is still Crown land and The Royal Parks licenses it for an annual fee to people who use it. The fee currently ranges from £10 a year for a few very old licences to £200-300 for more recent ones. The licence also has restrictions on the use of the freebord, and on building and tree planting or felling on it.

There’s a long list of residential properties, businesses, schools, cemeteries, public parks and gardens, allotments and public roads that have the freebord as part of the land they use. Part of the Alton Estate Junior School in Roehampton is on the freebord; the whole of the small back gardens of Florence Terrace next to Robin Hood Gate are on it and the trees on the Park side of Fife Road in Sheen are also on it.

In many areas the freebord forms an important green bridge between the Park and adjacent green spaces. There are about 1,000 trees on the freebord and The Royal Parks has the responsibility for managing them, so that they continue as valuable wildlife habitats and don’t damage the wall or cause injury to local residents and the general public from falling branches.

The freebord may seem an archaic relic from 1637, but without it the repair work that The Royal Parks plans on four stretches of the wall this year would be much more difficult.

[See Further details](#) about the freebord in an article by Robert Wood published by the Richmond Local History Society.

*Photo: © Robert Wood. Freebord to Bishop's Gate, with Bishop's Lodge on the left and a house on Chisholm Rd on the right.*