

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

FINSBURY CIRCUS

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Name:	FINSBURY CIRCUS
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	City and County of the City of London (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.517847 Longitude: -0.086491164 National Grid Reference: TQ 32865 81616 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001259 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Early C19 gardens in the centre of Finsbury Circus, laid out by the City Surveyor, William Montague, to the designs of George Dance the Younger, on the site of the Bethlehem Royal Hospital and the C16/C17 walks of Moorfields.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The moor on the site was drained in 1527 and gravelled walks were laid out across the open fields. By the mid C17, the southern part (known as Moor Fields, which lay to the south of Middle Moor Fields and Upper Moor Fields) had been laid out with more formal walks dividing quartered lawns edged by lines of trees and fencing (Newcourt and Faithorne, 1658; John Leake, 1666). In 1675-6 Bethlehem Royal Hospital (or Bedlam, founded in 1247) was re-sited in buildings at the southern end of Moor Field, along the line of the City wall.

George Dance the Younger had conceived the idea of an oval 'amphitheatre' for the redevelopment of the Moorfields estate in 1802, but it was only after Bethlehem Hospital was demolished in 1815 that the Circus was started. The gardens, surrounded by terraced houses and the London Institution, were laid out in 1815-17 for the City of London by the City Surveyor, William Montague, to Dance's designs.

At first the gardens were maintained by a committee of leaseholders who contributed towards the cost of their upkeep. In 1864, income was boosted by a yearly payment of £100 from the Metropolitan Railway who had cut a tunnel through the site. By the 1890s however, the area had become predominantly commercial rather than residential, and in 1898 the Comptroller of the City Lands Committee produced a report recommending that an Act of Parliament be obtained to open the garden to the public. This was secured in 1900, although it was not until 1909 that the garden was re-planned and new facilities added.

The gardens were described in 1931 (London Squares Preservation Act, Appendix III) as 'An oval-shaped enclosure surrounded by thick shrubberies and attractively laid out with a bowling green, flower beds and shrubberies. Contains some fine trees. Overlooked by business premises'. The Circus remains (1998) an open space.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The gardens of Finsbury Circus, 0.5ha, are located to the east of the Barbican Centre and west of Liverpool Street Station, in the City of London. The gardens are oval in shape, with the long

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axis orientated west/east. The surrounding railings, road and the buildings of the square all follow the oval plan. Small roads connect the Circus to Moorgate to the west, London Wall to the south (via Circus Place), and Blomfield Street to the east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are entrances to the gardens on the north, west, south and east sides through early C20 gates set in the railings. The original arrangement was through gates in the north-west, south-west, south-east and north-east corners and was altered to the present layout in the early C20.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING None of the original early C19 houses survive, all having been replaced by offices. Several of the buildings in the square are listed including Lutyens House (Nos.1-6 Finsbury Square), designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, 1924-7 (listed grade II*); London Wall Buildings (No.25), designed by Gunton and Gunton, 1901 (listed grade II); and Salisbury House (No.31), designed by Davis and Emmanuel, 1901 (listed grade II).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS Following the boundary, but separated from the encircling roads by a ring of dense shrubbery and tree planting, is a perimeter walk, as laid out in the early C19.

The central area of the gardens is occupied by a lawn, with serpentine paths, following the early C19 pattern, leading off the outer walk, across the lawn which has randomly placed beds of shrubs to the west, and formal bedding to the north and east. The centre of the gardens is occupied by a bowling green (1925) surrounded by a low box hedge, and a pavilion (built in 1968, when the bowling green was enlarged, as a bowling pavilion and wine bar) to the south. This pavilion replaced an early C20 bowling hut, greenhouse and tool shed. To the west of the bowling green is a bandstand (erected in 1955 and restored in the 1990s), with a railed seating area, which was part of the early C20 developments that replaced the shrubbery in this area. It is now paved with York stone (laid out in the 1990s to replace asphalt) and surrounded by low walls. On the lawn to the north of the bowling green is a pink granite drinking fountain (listed grade II), designed by John Whitehead and Son, Westminster, in 1902, with a shelter based on the design of a well by Philip Webb for William Morris' 'Red House' in Bexley Heath.

REFERENCES

London Squares Preservation Act (1931), Appendix III D Stroud, George Dance (1971) N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 1: the City of London* (1985), pp 492-3 E Harwood, Report for English Heritage, (December 1990)

Maps Richard Newcourt, *Exact Delineation ... of London*, 14" to 1 mile, 1658 J Leake, *Exact Surveigh ... within the ruins of the City of London*, 1666 Stow, *Map of London* (published in *Survey of London*, 1720 edn) John Rocque, *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster ...*, 1744-6 Richard Horwood, *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster*, 2nd edn 1813 Surveyors' *Miscellaneous Plans* (nos.24, 95D25, 95D26), (Record Office of the Corporation of the City of London)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1873 2nd edition published 1894 3rd edition published 1914

Archival items Finsbury Circus Gardens, Report by Mr Comptroller (July 1898), (Guildhall Library)

Description written: April 1998 Register Inspector: CB Edited: May 2000

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.