

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CORAM'S FIELDS, with MECKLENBURGH
and BRUNSWICK SQUARES

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CORAM'S FIELDS, with MECKLENBURGH and BRUNSWICK SQUARES

Name:	CORAM'S FIELDS, with MECKLENBURGH and BRUNSWICK SQUARES
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Camden (London Borough)
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.524339 Longitude: -0.12036960 National Grid Reference: TQ 30496 82277 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000212 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Mid C18 children's gardens, symmetrically flanked by an C18 and an early C19 square, designed to preserve the surroundings of the Coram's Fields gardens.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Foundling Hospital was founded in 1742 by Captain Thomas Coram. He had been shocked by the state of London's poorest children and put a petition before the King, signed by twenty-one ladies and a group of noblemen (who became the Trustees of the Hospital). Initially the children were housed in Hatton Garden but over a third of them died in the first year. Fifty-six acres (c 23ha) of land were found in Lamb's Conduit Fields and the Trustees purchased it from Lord Salisbury for £6500. The plan was to develop the surrounding estate to provide ground rents to support the Hospital but also to retain the open situation. The Hospital itself was located towards the centre of the land and was designed by Theodore Jacobsen. Work began in 1742 and the boys were moved into the completed west wing in 1745. The east wing, for the girls, and the rest of the Hospital were completed by 1753. There was an extensive forecourt, with a broad walk up the centre flanked by lawns. To the north of the Hospital gardens were laid out, which stretched up to the St George's burial grounds walls. To the west was West Conduit Fields (34 acres, 13ha) and to the east further open land. The final development of these parts of the Foundling Hospital Estate was not completed until 1826, illustrating how difficult it was to impose a unified plan on a rapidly expanding city.

The Hospital proved so popular that rules had to be imposed for entry. These varied but the children selected would generally be fostered out in the country until they were four or five and then educated in the Hospital from that age. Most of the boys joined the army and most of the girls became ladies' maids. Two of the early benefactors of the Hospital were Hogarth and Handel. Dickens was a regular attender of the services in the hospital chapel.

The building committee of the Hospital appointed Samuel Pepys Cockerell (1754-1827) to develop the Foundling Estate surrounding the Hospital. Cockerell presented his plan in 1790 in which he planned two squares to balance one another on either side of the Hospital grounds. The general principles were accepted but the details for the west side followed the plan of Thomas Merryweather, the secretary of the Hospital. Various contractors built the square, the principal one being James Burton (1761-1837), who between 1792 and 1802 built 586 houses on the estate.

Brunswick Square, on the west side, was named after Caroline of Brunswick, wife of the Prince Regent. The houses were built 1795-1802 and the gardens were railed and laid out in 1799. Mecklenburgh Square, to the east, was named after Queen

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CORAM'S FIELDS, with MECKLENBURGH and BRUNSWICK SQUARES

Charlotte, formerly Princess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. Although planned by Cockerell, he quarrelled with the Governors of the Hospital and his pupil, Joseph Kay (1775-1847), designed the square c 1810-20 with Cockerell acting as consultant. The gardens were laid out by Kay (The London Encyclopaedia) in 1809-10.

In Emma, Jane Austen's character Isabella Knightley approved of the vicinity of the Foundling Hospital and noted that: "Our part of London is so very superior to most others! ...The neighbourhood of Brunswick Square is very different from almost all the rest. We are so very airy!".

John Britton's map of St Pancras (1837) shows the completed Foundling Estate. The Foundling Hospital is shown with its forecourt to the south and gardens to the north (developed early C20 as the Coram Foundation's building and gardens), adjoining the burial grounds; to the west, Brunswick Square gardens, with an oval-shaped perimeter path and shrubberies, one central and the others next to the paths and around the edge; and to the east, Mecklenburgh Square gardens, with a perimeter path and two bow-shaped paths, meeting at the centre. Shrubberies or beds, one central and the others next to the paths and around the edge, are shown within the gardens.

In 1926 the Hospital sold the whole of its London property and moved to Redhill and then to Berkhamsted. The old house which stood to the north of the grounds was demolished but the forecourt buildings were retained. A new house was built for the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children at 40 Brunswick Square by J M Sheppard, on the site of the gardens of the Hospital. Thomas Coram's work is carried on by the Foundation.

Coram's Fields were bought by Lord Rothermere and others to be preserved as a children's playground. Coram's Fields is owned and managed by an independent charitable trust. Brunswick and Mecklenburgh Squares are owned by the London Goodenough Trust and the former is leased to and administered by the London Borough of Camden.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Coram's Fields and Brunswick and Mecklenburgh Squares, c 4ha, are located to the east of Tottenham Court Road, the British Museum and Russell Square, on the eastern edge of Bloomsbury. Coram's Fields are surrounded by the forecourt buildings with gates and railings (together listed grade II) to the south, further C20 cast-iron railings with gates to the west and east (both listed grade II), and by a mesh fence to the north. Brunswick Square is enclosed by mesh fencing on the north, west and south sides, and by cast-iron railings, with an additional mesh fence, to the east. Mecklenburgh Square is enclosed by a mesh fence. The gardens are all on level ground. Coram's Fields is surrounded by the Coram Family Campus across a footpath to the north, Brunswick Square to the west, Landsdowne Terrace to the south-west, Guilford Street to the south, Mecklenburgh Place to the south-east and Mecklenburgh Square to the east. To the west of Brunswick Square is the Brunswick Centre (1969-72), with cantilevered and terraced flats above, designed by Patrick Hodgkinson. To the north is the School of Pharmacy and to the south is International Hall, both London University.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to Coram's Fields is through the gate from Guilford Street to the south. There are side entrances (not used by the public) through the west and east sides. Brunswick and Mecklenburgh Squares each have three entrances: on the north, west and south sides and north, east and south sides. These are through gates set within the railings or fence.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The forecourt buildings, with railings, surround the garden on the west, south and east sides. The buildings form a continuous line except at the south where it is broken by sections of railings, with entrance gates and porters' lodges. The present pedestrian entrance is through a C20 gate with railings. The buildings are stuccoed and painted brick, with slated roofs. The ranges are closed with round-arched windows except the northern halves of the east and west ranges which have open peristyles. There are loggias on the west, south and east sides, and pavilions terminating the northern ends. In the south range there are offices on the east side of the entrance and a nursery in the west side, with its playground to the north. The west range of buildings houses animals (sheep, goats, peacocks) with their pens opening to the west into a small area between the building and perimeter railings. In the comparable space on the east side there is a small wildlife garden (not accessible to the public). In the east range there is a cafe in the far northern end of the loggia and room for children's indoor activities within the colonnades.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
CORAM'S FIELDS, with MECKLENBURGH and BRUNSWICK SQUARES

The basic layout of the gardens is as it was in the mid C18, as the forecourt of the Foundling Hospital. A broad strip of asphalt runs around the edge of the gardens and north/south through the centre of the gardens. The centre is taken up by an ornamental fountain at southern end, a rectangular paddling pool in the middle, and a pavilion (listed grade II) at the northern end. To either side there is a large rectangular lawn, both open with scattered trees, including large mature planes. At the outside edges of the lawn there are: to the south-west the nursery playground; to the north-west a playground for older children; along most of the east side and part of the south-east a playground for younger children. There are lines of mature plane trees along the west and east sides. To the north of these features is an extensive all-weather sports area, on the site of the hospital building (demolished c 1926).

Mecklenburgh and Brunswick Squares are completely separate from each other and from Coram's Fields, with their own boundaries and entrances. Mecklenburgh Square is D-shaped and enclosed by a privet hedge. Paths run around the perimeter and curving paths from each corner meet at the centre. The remaining ground is lawn with scattered mature trees, especially plane. This is very similar to the original early C19 layout. There is a tennis court to the north. The Square is surrounded to the east by the original houses built by Joseph Kay c 1810-20 (listed grade II*), to the north by five 1820s houses (listed grade II) and by William Goodenough House (a students' hostel), and to the south London House (listed grade II; now a hostel for overseas medical students). Coram's Fields adjoins the gardens on the west side.

Brunswick Square is a mirror-image of Mecklenburgh Square. A shrubbery runs around the curving west side, with a perimeter path. The central lawn is crossed by a winding path from north to south. There are very large plane trees scattered on the lawns. At the south end there is a shrubbery with laurel, copper beech and ornamental cherry. Coram's Fields adjoins the Square on the east side.

REFERENCES

E B Chancellor, *The History of the Squares of London* (1907), pp 243-5 LCC, *Survey of London XXIV*, (1952), pp 25(30, 40-3, 47-9 J Summerson, *Georgian London* (1978 edn) D J Olsen, *Town Planning in London* (2nd edn 1982), pp 74-95 B Weinreb and C Hibbert, *The London Encyclopaedia* (1983), p 521 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 4: North* (1998), pp 269, 328, 332-3

Maps John Rocque, *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster* ..., 1744-6 Cary, *Plan of London*, 1787 Richard Horwood, *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster*, 2nd edn 1813

[The following appear as plates in Olsen 1982] Foundling Estate Building Plan, c 1775 (pl 62) Thomas Merryweather, Foundling estate building plan, 1792 (pl 64) John Britton, *Map of St Pancras*, 1838 (pl 65)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1870/1873 2nd edition published 1894 3rd edition published 1914

Description written: August 1998 Amended: March 2000 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.