

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

RUSSELL SQUARE

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

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Name:	RUSSELL SQUARE
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Camden (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.522133 Longitude: -0.12637054 National Grid Reference: TQ3008682021 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000213 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Early C19 public square, forming part of the Bedford Estate, the garden designed by Humphry Repton by 1806.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

By the end of the C17 the Russell family owned extensive estates in London, including that of Bloomsbury, a large area now bounded by Tottenham Court Road to the west, New Oxford Street to the south, Euston Road to the north, and Woburn Place and Southampton Row to the east. The Bloomsbury Estate was developed from the 1660s to the 1850s. In the first phase Bloomsbury Square and Great Russell Street were laid out. In 1723 the Bloomsbury Estate became part of the Bedford Estate. By Rocque's survey of 1762 the 'New Road' (Euston Road) had been laid out, enclosing the Estate to the north, but the land to the south remained largely undeveloped as Lamb's Conduit Fields. In 1776 building agreements were granted for Bedford Square (qv) and a second phase in the development of the Bloomsbury Estate started, transforming the pasture fields into a planned estate. The Square became the focal point of a new grid of streets to the west, north and south and although this was to take eighty years to complete, the design was harmonious and ensured the unity of the whole. The overall plan of the estate was based on the existing pattern of closes and field boundaries, hence the variations in the size and shapes of the squares.

Building agreements for Russell Square were granted in 1801 and the building work was largely completed by 1804. Russell Square was designed by James Burton and was larger than any square already laid out, including Grosvenor Square (qv).

Humphry Repton (1752-1818) was commissioned by the fifth Duke of Bedford to design the gardens in Russell Square. The design consisted of a broad gravel perimeter walk, with a privet and hornbeam hedge clipped to 6ft to screen the walk from the street. Within the perimeter walk was a large area of lawn, intersected by a broad walk in a bulb-shape and under two rows of limes. This started and terminated at Westmacott's statue of the fifth Duke of Bedford. Repton intended that the limes should be clipped to form an enclosed 'cloister-like walk'. Two narrower walks intersected the gardens. These were bow shaped and led from the north-east to south-east corner and north-west to south-west corner, almost meeting in the centre of the Square. Together the paths divided the centre of the gardens into four compartments, which Repton treated in different ways: a grove of trees in the southern section, near to the statue; flowers and shrubs arranged in different ways in the other three sections. A shelter, or reposoir, was set in the very centre of the gardens. This consisted of four low, covered seats and four open seats, the

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whole covered with trellis with climbing plants. The seats concealed a courtyard with a gardener's shed. The area outside the centre of the gardens was laid out as lawns, kept relatively free from plantation so that 'children may be kept always in sight from the windows of the houses immediately opposite' (Humphry Repton quoted in Loudon 1840).

Repton's layout was shown in Hewitt's early C19 plan of Russell Square (private collection) and in Horwood's plan of 1819. The first three editions of the OS map (1870, 1894, 1914) show that the path layout and pattern of the planting were retained throughout this period.

Major changes were made to the square in 1959-60 by the Borough of Holborn (later London Borough of Camden). These included extensive replanting; the installation of a large paved area, with three large fountains, in the centre of the Square; and a 'Tea House' in the north-east quarter. The Square is being re-landscaped in 2000-1 by the London Borough of Camden, loosely based on the original scheme by Repton.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Russell Square, c 2.5ha, is located to the east of Tottenham Court Road and the British Museum, in Bloomsbury. The garden, which is on level ground, is enclosed by cast-iron railings. The gardens are surrounded by the buildings of the Square, which are on a square plan. Woburn Place and Southampton Row run down the east side and Montague Street runs down the west side. Upper Bedford Street and Bedford Place run north/south off the centre of the north and south sides respectively. Four streets run east/west from the Square: Keppel Street and Montague Place on the west side and Bernard Street and Upper Guilford Street on the east side.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are eight entrances to the gardens, two in each of the four corners. These are through gates set within the railings.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS A broad perimeter walk encircles the gardens and is divided from the perimeter railings by a shrubbery. Repton's original path layout survives, with two curving bow-shaped paths crossing the garden from the corners and meeting at the centre. A further path leads from, and returns to, the centre of the south side, by Sir Richard Westmacott's bronze statue of Francis Russell, fifth Duke of Bedford (unveiled 1809, listed grade II), on a granite pedestal with reliefs, and putti at the foot of the statue. This path is straight at its beginning and end and directly aligned on the statue but then circles around the centre of the garden to make its return. The statue is directly aligned (through Bedford Place) on the statue of the Charles James Fox (also by Westmacott) at the northern end of Bloomsbury Square (qv).

In the centre of the gardens there is an extensive paved area, with three large, circular fountains (installed 1959-60), formed of concrete and of low, shallow-dome shape; in 1998 not working and topped by large concrete planters. The fountains are surrounded by further planters and areas of bedding and roses set in and around the paved area.

Surrounding the centre of the gardens are areas of lawn, with scattered trees (mostly planes) and shrubberies in the corners. There are low serpentine hedges set in the lawn but not now associated with other features. A tea pavilion, surrounded by an area of hexagonal paving slabs and areas of bedding, stands in north-east quarter of the garden. An air-monitoring site with fencing around it stands in the south-west quarter.

The gardens were extensively replanted in 1959 and many of these trees survive, as well as mature planes, lime, thorn, acacia and ailanthus.

On the west side some of the original Burton houses survive; those on the north and south sides were altered in the C19. The Burton houses on the east side were demolished to make way for the Russell Hotel (1898-1900) and the Imperial Hotel (1905-11), both by Charles Fitzroy Doll.

REFERENCES

J C Loudon, *Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of ... Repton, being his Entire Works on these Subjects* (1840) E B Chancellor, *The History of the Squares of London* (1907), pp 212-26 G Carter et al, *Humphry Repton* (1982), p 157 D J Olsen, *Town Planning in London* (1984 edn) B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 4: North* (1998), pp 325-6 Maps

John Rocque, *Plan of London on the same Scale as that of Paris ...1762 with new improvements* 1766 Cary, *Plan of London*, 1787 Richard Horwood, *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster*, 2nd edn 1813 N R Hewitt, *Plan of the Bloomsbury*

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Estate, c 1820s (private collection) Wallis, Guide for Strangers, 1828 Stanford's Library Map of London and its Suburbs, 1862
Stanford's Library Map of London and its Suburbs, 1877

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.