

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BLOOMSBURY SQUARE

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Name:	BLOOMSBURY SQUARE
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Camden (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.518957 Longitude: -0.12289742 National Grid Reference: TQ 30336 81674 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000210 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Early C17 public square, forming part of the Bedford Estate. The garden redesigned, early C19 by Humphry Repton, and late C20.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

By the end of the C17 the Russell family owned extensive estates in London, including that of Bloomsbury, an extensive site encompassing the 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 in several phases, starting in the 1660s and continuing until the 1850s. The first phase involved the development of Bloomsbury Square and Great Russell Street. 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 the Lamb's Conduit Fields and Southampton or Long 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. Although the estate was planned, the underlying pattern, with the diverse sizes and shapes of the squares, was due to the fields and closes from which it was developed. A third phase of development in the mid C19 involved a further series of garden squares, including Gordon, Tavistock, Woburn and Torrington Squares, with their associated streets and mews.

Bloomsbury Square was laid out in the early 1660s for Thomas Wriothesley, fourth Earl of Southampton, to the south of his house (Southampton House built c 1657, known as Bedford House after 1734). The original layout was cruciform, with four railed and grassed quarters divided by paths. Rocque's plan of 1746 shows the square with a simple design of four paths crossing vertically, horizontally and diagonally through the centre, dividing the square into eight.

In 1800 Francis, fifth Duke of Bedford obtained two Acts of Parliament for the development of his estate and his first move was to demolish Bedford House (1800). Between 1800 and 1814, James Burton built the houses on the north side of Bloomsbury Square on the site. Bedford Place was built to run north from Bloomsbury Square to the newly built Russell Square (qv), through the site and across the garden of Bedford House. The Square was redesigned at the same time by Humphry Repton (1752-1818) (c 1807) and consisted of walks, including a formal lime tree walk and shrubberies. Hewitt's plan of c 1820s shows the gardens

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with a perimeter shrubbery and walk and a large lawn occupying the centre of the gardens. An oval shrubbery was shown in each corner, and an oval line of trees in the centre of the lawn.

The first three editions of the OS 25" map (1873, 1894-6, 1914) show a slightly different layout (unaltered 1873-1914) consisting of a perimeter shrubbery and walk (which curved around Fox's statue on the north side), a large lawn with scattered trees, and five large, oval-shaped shrubberies; one in each corner of the lawn and one in the centre. A curving path crossed through the central shrubbery, slightly angled from north-west to south-east.

The southern end of the Square was redesigned in the mid C20 to a geometric pattern. Further alterations took place in 1971-3, when an underground car park was constructed beneath the square and the gardens were redesigned by David Lee to their present layout.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Bloomsbury Square, c 0.5ha, is located to the east of Tottenham Court Road and south-east of the British Museum, in Bloomsbury. The gardens, which are on level ground, are enclosed by cast-iron railings. The gardens are surrounded by the buildings of the Square, which are on a rectangular plan. Great Russell Street, Bedford Place, Bloomsbury Place, Vernon Place, Southampton Street and Bloomsbury Way enter the Square from the north-west, north, north-east, south-east, south and south-west respectively.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are nine entrances to the gardens, one in each corner, one in the centre of the western, northern and eastern sides, and two in the southern side. These are through gates set within the railings.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS A perimeter walk circuits the gardens and is divided from the perimeter railings by a shrubbery. At the centre of the north side of the square, set back in the shrubbery is the bronze statue of Charles James Fox by Sir Richard Westmacott (1816, listed grade II), on a granite pedestal and Portland stone base. The statue is directly aligned (through Bedford Place) on the statue of the fifth Duke of Bedford (also by Westmacott) at the southern end of Russell Square. Within the perimeter walk the northern and southern halves of the gardens are landscaped differently. The C19 layout is partially retained in the northern portion, where there is a lawn with scattered trees and remnants of the oval shrubberies in the north-west and north-east corners. The southern portion, designed by David Lee in the early 1970s, consists of an extensive paved area, with three large, slightly raised islands of grass with trees, flowering shrubs and some perennials and bedding. The square was replanted in the 1970s and many of these trees survive, as well as the mature planes.

James Burton's terraced houses survive on the north side and the houses on the west side are C17 (altered C18 and C19) and C18. Those on the south side are C18 and C19. On the east side is Victoria House.

REFERENCES

H Overton and J Hoole, *Britannia Illustrata* (c 1724), pl 69 E B Chancellor, *The History of the Squares of London* (1907), pp 183-201 W Bray (ed), *The Diary of John Evelyn I*, (1945), p 396 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 321-2 Maps John Rocque, *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster ...*, 1744-6 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 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 1873 2nd edition published 1894 3rd edition published 1914

Description written: August 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.