

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ST GEORGE'S GARDENS

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Name:	ST GEORGE'S GARDENS
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Camden (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.526032 Longitude: -0.12106394 National Grid Reference: TQ 30443 82464 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000832 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Early C18 burial ground, laid out as public gardens in the C19.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The centre of London became densely populated during the C17, resulting in severe congestion in the small parish churchyards. The burial practices became so troublesome and unhygienic that major reforms were introduced. The inner London parishes established burial grounds removed from the churches, in what was then open fields, on the edge of the built-up areas.

A rectangular parcel of land was purchased in August 1713 to serve as burial grounds for the churches of St George-the-Martyr, Holborn, and St George's, Bloomsbury. The land was laid out in c 1713 as two separate burial grounds, both surrounded by red-brick walls with capped piers. The burial ground of St George's, Bloomsbury lay to the north and that of St George-the-Martyr, Holborn, to the south. The first person to be buried was Robert Nelson (1665-1715) and the grounds became popularly known as Nelson's Burial Ground.

There was an entrance to each ground from the west but no connection between them. Rocque's plan of 1746 shows both grounds, with a small building in the south-west corner of the southern ground. Horwood's plan of 1813 shows the same building and another (probably the present lodge) in the northern burial ground. Housing had been built by this date in the surrounding streets to the west, north and east. The southern ground appears to have been entered from the west and the east.

The burial grounds remained in use until the Burial Acts of the 1850s caused them to be closed.

The 1st edition OS map (1871) shows the two grounds, each with a single path running from west to east, and with scattered trees within. Both grounds are marked as disused cemeteries.

A movement to turn the smaller burial grounds into gardens, which was started as early as 1843 by Sir Edwin Chadwick, gained momentum in the 1870s and by 1877 eight had been transformed. Following the foundation of the Metropolitan Gardens Association in 1882, many of the London burial grounds were reopened as gardens, including both the St George's grounds, which were laid out as a single garden between 1884 and 1889. The OS 2nd and 3rd editions (1894 and 1914) show the layout of the gardens. The southern portion had been divided, the part to the west having been separated from that to the east which had been joined to the northern ground, involving the removal of that section of wall. All the other boundaries, entrances

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and buildings remained the same. The gardens were laid out with a system of meandering paths amidst scattered trees, with shrubberies along the north and south sides. Except for planting there have been no changes to the gardens since the early C20.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING St George's Gardens, c 1ha, are located to the north of Coram's Fields and west of Gray's Inn Road, on the eastern edge of Bloomsbury. The gardens are on level ground and are rectangular in shape but with the south-west quarter (a disused cemetery) now divided off. The gardens are enclosed by early C18 brick walls on the south, west and north sides and by a mesh fence on the east side, and are surrounded by the buildings in the surrounding streets to the north and west, by a school to the east and by the Coram's Foundation to the south.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the gardens is from Handel Street to the west, through gates flanked by cast-iron railings with spearhead finials and served by an early C19 one-storey lodge (listed grade II with the walls and monuments) to the south of the gate. There are two further entrances, one from Sidmouth Street to the north-east and one from Heathcote Street to the south-east.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS On entering the gardens from the main entrance to the west there are steps descending to the gardens, with views through to the far side. The gardens are laid out as lawn, with scattered mature trees including plane, lime, oak, catalpa and weeping ash. Amongst the trees on the grass are C18 table tombs, including the tomb of Robert Nelson, an obelisk, an urn and other large monuments, left in their original positions and reminiscent of the Avenue of the Tombs, Pompeii.

To the south of the entrance is the lodge and south of this, beyond the boundary of the gardens, is the nursery and glasshouse for the garden and the disused cemetery (formerly part of the burial grounds but separated from the rest of the grounds in the 1880s). Against the north and south boundary walls are shrubberies and most of the gravestones, which were repositioned when the gardens were laid out.

Paths meander through the gardens, leading through an area of formal bedding in the western portion, to the centre, where the grounds are their original width (double that of the western portion). Most of the large table tombs are located in this area and the obelisk is located in the south-west corner, near the southern boundary wall of the St George-the-Martyr burial ground.

To the east the wall has been demolished and the mesh fence gives views over to the school beyond. In the north-east corner of the gardens, close to the Sidmouth Street entrance there is an area of rose beds.

REFERENCES

LCC, Survey of London XXIV, (1952), pp 72-9, pl 66 D J Olsen, Town Planning in London (1982 edn) B Cherry and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: London 4: North (1998), p 263 R Bowdler, 'St George's Gardens', The London Gardener: 9 (2003-4), pp 38-43

Maps 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 Wallis, Guide for Strangers, 1828

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1871 2nd edition published 1894 3rd edition published 1913

Description written: August 1998 Register Inspector: CB Edited: May 2000 Amended April 2005

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.