

St James's Park was to be the palace garden and as such would be inaccessible to the inferior ranks of people and training recruits whom Gwynn held responsible for bringing the sacred spot to a state of near ruin.¹⁷ The garden was to be enclosed, as Gwynn suggested, with iron palisades which allowed the public a view of their royal family. However, the boundary did not take in the whole of the tree-lined avenues. Two shady walks, each consisting of three lines of trees, were 'purposely' left out for the benefit of the populace in summer when the Royal Family was not in town.¹⁸ Duck Island conveniently came within the garden enclosure and was transformed into a large central pond appropriately shaped like a duck's egg, which replaced the long canal.

The surrounding garden was laid out with different configurations of segmental shrubberies rather like niches containing seats, interspersed with circular thickets and flower beds, and trees in triangular groups of three. Facing the palace were two curved shrubberies reflecting the quadrant links and forming a kind of sheltered forecourt to the main part of the garden. A similar spatial arrangement was planned for Badminton.¹⁹

Unlike Gwynn's garden plans which were devised for parade and extensive outward views, Wright's were largely inward looking and concerned more with the privacy of the Royal Family and their pleasure than with the curious public. This is not to say that Wright was totally uninterested in the prospects to be enjoyed from the palace and garden. It was almost certainly for the sake of the view of St Paul's (noted on his plan) that most of the existing trees were removed from the far end of the garden abutting on Horse Guards Parade and replaced by low, segmental flower beds.

Duck's Pond was the focus of the two sides of the garden, where there were two types of curved shrubberies: one with additional segments closing each end and round shrubs or clumps behind, the other partially closed by two arcs in front. Though the plan is symmetrical, it is much less formal, more fluid and varied than both the original 1660s layout and Gwynn's proposal.

However, the mannerism of the internal arrangement is unusual for 1766 and more like a Victorian garden. The highly finished character of Wright's *Plan of a Royal Palace and Garden for St James's Park*, compared with his sketchy designs for the individual buildings, strongly suggests that it was presented to George III. It is unlikely, however, that he seriously expected anything to come of his proposals. They were the spontaneous inventions of his eternally creative mind.

THE PUBLIC GARDENS of BLOOMSBURY

By Tim Crane

In a journal entry of February 1941, Virginia Woolf contemplates her fellow diners in a Brighton tea-room. In the lavatory, she overhears the conversation of 'common little tarts ... powdering and painting themselves'. Later, watching a 'fat, smart woman' eating cakes, she asks plaintively, 'where does the money come to feed these fat white slugs?'

On the ground floor of the Russell Hotel in Russell Square, there is an indifferent brasserie of the sort London does so well. It sells overcooked international food and over-priced international beer to tourists. Across the window runs the uninspiring motto: 'grills, burgers, pastas'. The only thing that redeems this dingy place is its name: 'Virginia Woolf's bar and grill'. The fat slugs wreak an unintended revenge.

The irony of this attempt to cash in on Bloomsbury's famous residents is matched elsewhere in the area. A recent development of flats near Cartwright Gardens contains one bunch of buildings called *Virginia Court* and another called *Woolf Mews*. (*Leonard Court* is also there, but one suspects knowledge of its etymology will not survive.) For those who have little enthusiasm for the Bloomsbury Group, there is some satisfaction to be had in seeing the names of these self-styled aesthetic prophets distributed across burger bars and housing estates.

The lover of Bloomsbury's public gardens, however, might still have reasons for regretting the presence of Virginia's bar and grill and its ilk. Russell Square, the largest of the Bloomsbury squares, and the largest square in

17. Gwynn, p. 88

18. Inscribed on Wright's plan of the gardens in The Royal Library, Windsor. 17625 c

19. E. Harris, ed. *T. Wright*

1. Virginia Woolf, *A Moment's Liberty: The Shorter Diary* edited by Anne Olivier Bell, (London 1990), pp. 302-3

London, is the entry point to central London for many visitors. Buses from Heathrow and from all over Europe empty their contents onto the Square. Various large hotels have a grim Eastern European character which should make many of the travellers feel immediately welcome. But what else do these visitors find? It ought to be a glamorous place. And in itself, Russell Square is magnificent. Laid out originally in 1800, the garden has vast trees surrounding wide paths. Despite the fact that few of the original buildings in the Square remain, it is still impressive. In winter and summer there are fine views of the 1898 Russell Hotel on one side and Charles Holden's Senate House (1932) on the other.

But the garden itself is a disappointing experience. The re-fashioning carried out in 1959-60, whatever it looked like at the time, now looks shabby. In the centre of the garden are three large circular fountains, which an inscription tells us were built for the enjoyment of the inhabitants of the borough of Holborn and those who succeed them. They are now no longer functioning, and serve only as uncomfortable *ad hoc* seats for weary tourists, students and the ubiquitous drunk. The grass is in poor condition, and inadequate drainage makes the garden a water-logged mess in wet weather. On the north-east corner of the Square is a miserable flat-roofed brick café, which for some reason has avoided the superficial face-lifts experienced in the 1980s by places like Virginia Woolf's. It sells fried food, damp sandwiches and greasy ice-cream. Only the most sentimental devotee of England's culinary heritage could think such a thing worth preserving at one of the gateways to London. What would Paris or New York have done with such a site?

On a new building in the north-west corner of the Square there is an amusing curiosity. This building was built for the School of Oriental and African Studies, using money provided by the Sultan of Brunei, to house the School's small collection of Islamic art. On the Russell Square side of the building there is a small plaque, on which the University of London records its apologies to the Russell family that the family did not give its full approval to the plans for the Brunei building. The inscription, though recent, is hard to read because the lettering has not been carved very

deeply into the stone. Given the level of air pollution in the square, it will surely not be long before it is completely illegible. A cynic might conclude that this says something about the sincerity of the apology. But an admirer of Russell Square might think that there are worse aspects of the development of the Square for which apologies are due.

The garden comes alive only in the dark. Throughout the night groups of men circle the Square in what looks like a ritual in a painting by Samuel Palmer. This particular popularity of the Square certainly adds glamour, but it leaves unsolved the problem of how to improve the garden during the day.

Not every Bloomsbury public garden, each of which has its own special character, has such problems. North of Russell Square are Tavistock Square and Gordon Square, both designed by Thomas Cubitt (1806 and 1850 respectively). Cubitt's houses survive only on the west side of Tavistock Square, and the east side has Lutyens' stiff and imposing BMA headquarters. The garden is simple and pleasant. In the south-east corner there is a small monument to Louisa Aldrich-Blake, a pioneer of women's medicine, above a stone seat also designed by Lutyens. The centrepiece is a dumpy statue of Gandhi, and the well-meaning, somewhat municipal feel of the place is matched by a fenced-off area in the south-west corner with a Camden Council sign reading 'Dog Free Area'. In my experience this area is normally scattered with defiant turds.

Gordon Square feels very different. The rows of houses on the west and east of the Square are almost intact, and the garden is the closest among Bloomsbury's public gardens to match the elegance of the private gardens of Fitzroy Square and the impeccable Bedford Square. Outside the University's term, the well-kept garden is as peaceful a place as can be found in central London. In the summer, it can seem like part of an American campus, with half-dressed students lying on the grass indulging in 'revision'. Somehow, this doesn't quite spoil its charm.

In the south-west corner of Gordon Square, there is the so-called University Church of Christ the King (1853), a building which somehow manages to be both skinny and squat. The effect may be due to the absence of the planned 90 metre steeple, which would have



4. Russell Square as seen from Southampton Row, looking south towards the former Imperial Hotel, 1959.
(LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

matched the height of Senate House. Originally built for the Catholic Apostolic Church, a bizarre nineteenth-century ritualistic sect, the building only really impresses from the inside, chiefly for its narrow, high nave. Next to the church is the attractive Tudor-style Dr Williams' Library (1848) built as a hall of residence for University College but now housing *inter alia* the library for poor students founded in 1711 by Dr Daniel Williams, a Presbyterian minister of poor origins himself. The library is now home to the Royal Institute of Philosophy, an institution which seems surprisingly happy to be known by its acronym.

To the south of Gordon Square, there are two areas, Woburn Square and Torrington Square, which are squares in name only. Woburn Square is in effect a passage linking Gordon Square with Lasdun's Institute of Education (1975-79). Torrington Square, linking Gordon Square with the unfinished Senate House, is a mess for which the University of London must take the blame. This large space features rear views of the University's Student Union and Birkbeck College, but the prominent impression is one of waste ground (plus the smell of chlorine exuding from the Union's underground pool). Scattered around the 'square' are disused trolleys – objects without an obvious function – and ugly recycling bins. If Holden's Senate House plans had ever been completed, the picture would have been very different. As it is, the area could only serve as a memorial to the lack of commitment to public funding of the University.

Further south, beyond Russell Square, is Bloomsbury Square, which despite its size and the elegant Bedford Place linking it with Russell Square, doesn't really live up to its name. Begun in 1660 by the Earl of Southampton, of whom John Evelyn reported that 'he was building a noble square or piazza, a little town', the Square now features a large underground car-park. Despite the garden built on top, it is impossible not to feel the presence of the car-park underneath. The garden feels somewhat inauthentic, like a reclaimed slagheap.

Virginia Woolf would doubtless have had an opinion on the hordes of office workers and students who flood Bloomsbury's gardens at lunchtime in the spring and summer. But the gardens exemplify much of what is good about

working in this crowded and polluted area of London: at their best, in Gordon Square and Tavistock Square, they are islands of elegance, surviving examples of a time when London's planning was carried out with more ambition, confidence and flair than has been apparent recently. A millennium project: the redesign of Russell Square's garden. A new café should be part of the deal.

THE MODEL TRAFFIC RECREATION AREA at LORDSHIP LANE

By Ruth Guilding

Children love reading Enid Blyton's adventures of Noddy and Big-Ears because of their lawless behaviour on the roads. In his little red motor car, Noddy drives dangerously, exceeds the speed limit, and honks his horn rudely at the gollies, teddies, and even the policeman! In 1938, a dull-sounding Superintendent of Parks in a working class area of north London dreamed up a playground scheme which harnessed this fantasy. Mr G.E. Paris, F Inst PA, FRHS created the plan for a 'model traffic area,' laid out like a model village, but with real roads, traffic lights, and pedal cars which could be hired by the half-hour for a ha'penny.

Lordship Lane Recreation Ground in Tottenham was opened in 1932, a *lung* of ninety acres in a built-up working class area to the south of the White Hart Lane Estate. At first almost half the land was given over to allotments, but soon after, more glamorous attractions were laid out on the remainder by direct labour schemes, under the local councillors' 'land for the people' policy. Within four years a paddle boat lake, shell bandstand and tennis courts had all been built on the northern part of the recreation ground. The borough engineer designed the boating lake with its ornamental rockery island; laid out beside it, the model traffic area marked the climax to all these exciting improvements. Contemporary press-cuttings record the palpable excitement on its opening day, when 500 children were clamouring for tickets soon after 8 am.

Cars were entering 'no entry' streets, going the wrong way round roundabouts, and crossing traffic lights against the red light with a gay abandon that would have cost 40s. in any