

space in Stepney, with the church at its heart: the churchyard as an enclave was to disappear, and blocks of public housing were to rise all around.²² As soon as these were announced, John Betjeman put pen to paper in defence of the old churchyard. Writing in *The Spectator* in early 1957, he appealed for a sympathetic approach to the churchyard:

One of the most repulsive forms of Subtopia is the current fashion for turning old country churchyards into semi-recreation grounds. A fate like this awaits one of the most remarkable and attractive Georgian country churchyards I know, and oddly enough it is in East London. It is that of the old parish church of St Dunstan, Stepney. Extensive bombing has turned the area beyond the churchyard into open country littered with prefabs. When the area comes to be rebuilt it should be possible for the LCC to create plenty of open space while keeping the churchyard the countrified place it is and retaining undisturbed the clustered Portland-stone Georgian headstones of various elegant outlines and commemorating dead merchants and sea captains as the charming and essential foreground they are to the old church. Perhaps it is not too late to suggest this, and St Dunstan's will be the first churchyard to be treated as something of beauty and not merely as something of antiquarian interest or a crazy-paved 'garden of rest'.²³

In spite of this appeal, extensive clearance of what remained of the tombs was carried out in 1958.²⁴ The tower blocks were built, but the Stepney mega-park never reached fruition: this scheme was finally abandoned in 1969 and only the pungent City Farm nearby, together with some of London's last bomb sites, reminds the passer-by of the grand post-Blitz plans once prepared for Stepney. After a low period of vandalism and neglect in the 1970s, the churchyard benefited from considerable restoration work in the mid-1980s when the paths were laid, and in recent times the local authority has overseen a successful programme of conservation and consolidation.

What is left of Stepney's once-legion tombs has been repaired and we can now hope that the days of clearance are over. The presence of death no longer hangs so heavily over the graveyard. (fig. 25) The consolatory presence of plane tree and turf now provides the only epitaph for thousand upon thousand of long-dead

East Enders that lie forever within this remarkable urban churchyard.

THE GARDEN at ST JAMES'S CHURCH, PICCADILLY: 'POIGNANT MEMORIAL FROM THE FIRST DAYS of POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION'

By Dominic Echlin

It is possible that after nearly sixty years we no longer fully appreciate the impact that the Second World War had on the people of London. War in preceding centuries had been the affair of soldiers, an activity that happened at a remove from the general population. The First World War heralded a change of sorts. The sheer number of casualties had an overwhelming impact on the populace back home. People struggled to come to terms with their loss and sought solace and patriotic comfort in the erection of monuments.

The response after the Second World War appears, on the surface, to have been different. There was no great orgy of new memorials. Most commemorations of the dead were tacked-on additions to the earlier war's cenotaphs. It was easier to aggrandise death when it was at a remove. Londoners found their city and their home-life scarred as never before. They had lives physically and mentally to rebuild, and perhaps little time for new monuments.

The garden at St James's Church, Piccadilly, proposed by Viscount Southwood as a lasting memorial to the fortitude of Londoners during the war, stands out as an exception. But before we examine this post-war work, let us consider the other factors that influenced the form of the garden at St James's, not least the past practicalities of burying the dead.

When Sir Christopher Wren laid out his new church in St James's in the 1680s, he was aware of the need for a commodious churchyard adjacent to the church. (fig. 26) Correct disposal of the dead was of spiritual and economic importance to the Church of his day. He therefore provided one plot to the west of the church, roughly equal in extent to the size of the church; this became known as the *green* churchyard. A separate, smaller piece of land was also annexed to the north of the church,

22. Bancroft Road Library, file TH/8254/59: *Stepney Churchyard Open Space* (c.1956-60).

23. *The Spectator*, 15 February 1957.

24. Guildhall Library, MS 18319/156.

separated from Piccadilly at that time by a row of buildings.

By the late seventeenth century the burial grounds were already replete, and the Vestry was compelled to acquire more land for burials. In 1693, the church opened a second burial ground in what is now Poland Street. In 1749, land adjacent to the north churchyard was consecrated as additional burial ground and, in 1762, the site of the church's watch house was added. Another, remote burial ground was acquired off the Hampstead Road in 1788.

By the middle of the eighteenth century it is thought that the north churchyard had been paved over, with burials in vaults beneath. A faculty of 1812 noted that the Vestry Room, subsequently erected in the north-west corner of the site on Piccadilly, was to be provided 'with vaults under the whole for the burial of the dead (which ... is likely to be a source of considerable revenue to the parish)'.

It is reasonable to suppose that the gradual acquisition and development of the churchyard around St James's led to the current somewhat haphazard extent of land and levels. Other questions about the form of the ground remain unanswered. One feature that is curious is the present level of the 'green' churchyard, some 10-12-feet above Jermyn Street. Did the Vestry really 'pack 'em in' thereby raising the levels, or is this just a remnant of the natural lie of land? The churchyard at nearby St Anne's, Soho is also at a raised level to the surrounding streets, so perhaps this was not an uncommon feature.

What is clear is that the economic zeal of the Vestries and the limited space left for burials meant that by the 1830s conditions in London's inner city churchyards were getting rather unpleasant. Grim tales from St Paul's, Covent Garden recount how bodies were disinterred and trampled into the mud just a few months after burial to make way for other bodies to be laid to rest. Public distaste and the great Victorian health reforms forced inevitable change. Burials ceased at St James's in August 1853.

The churchyard at St James's then seems to have entered a transitional period. In 1861 a faculty for work on a site adjacent noted that 'the said green churchyard is in a very unsightly condition and would be greatly improved if the several upright head and foot stones were

laid flat, the several box tombs lowered and the ground laid out in an ornamental manner'. This is the first hint that the churchyard had a future as a garden for the enjoyment of the living rather than a repository of the dead.

Yet improvements seemed slow to come. Mrs Basil Holmes, in her book *The London Burial Grounds* (1896), describes the churchyard in rather lugubrious tones:

This is a dreary ground and might be very much more attractive. The part where most of the burials took place is considerably raised above the rest. The yard on the north side of the church is entirely paved with stones, amongst which are many tombstones. In the upper part tombstones form the walks and the walls.

A Dr Wrathbone had offered to plant lime trees in the churchyard as far back as 1704, but it was in the second half of the nineteenth century that St James's fell victim to the Victorian passion for planting London planes. (figs. 27 & 28) Later, in 1906, the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association wrote to the Revd J McCormick, the then Rector, with an offer 'to plant two plane trees in [the] churchyard, one either side of the Piccadilly entrance gates'.

Bills from the 1920s refer to 'lopping of 5 planes in the churchyard'. In 1927, prodigious growth prompted Mr A James, a 'garden contractor' with an eye for work, to write to the church noting that 'the trees in the churchyard require topping and lopping very badly' and offering his services. In 1931, The Piccadilly Development Company, as landlords of the Princes Club and Greyhound Racing Society, wrote thanking the church for allowing the removal of a tree. In 1933, the City of Westminster was complaining to the church that 'the branches of the trees obscure the lighting from the public lamp'. This followed several earlier complaints.

Improvement of the grounds, first mooted by the likes of Mrs Holmes in the late nineteenth century, started to take shape in the 1920s and 1930s. Again the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association became involved. In 1923 they arranged for three seats to be placed in the north churchyard and they planted a catalpa, warning that 'if the weather should remain dry it should have a good soaking'. The church obviously took notice as the catalpa survives in the north churchyard today.

More seats from the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association were provided in 1934,

better positioned to avoid the full summer sun in the north churchyard. The Rector, the Revd C E Lambert, observed from his dining room that the new seats were 'largely used in the luncheon hour'.

The green churchyard seems, however, to have remained rather neglected. When questioned recently, the Revd Lambert's son, who grew up at St James's in the inter-war period, could not recall if there were steps to the higher level, and he thought that the area was not really used. Yet a bill from 1936 includes 'supply [of] two experienced men to rake over the whole of the church gardens under the trees, fork the beds, remove and cart away all rubbish'. And the bill notes that 'four large bushy Golden Privet 4-5-foot high and ten Aucubas 2-foot high [were] to be planted and arranged in the central bed'. This suggests a degree of cultivation.

Perhaps this burst of horticultural enthusiasm had been spurred on by a suggestion from Mrs Barbara Murray of the London Gardens Society (a society that proclaimed on its letterhead that it stood 'for stimulating pride in London more especially by the cultivation of flowers and home gardens'). Mrs Murray wrote to the Revd Lambert in April 1935 suggesting 'beautifying of the open spaces and ground to the west side' of the church, feeling 'sure it would attract a great number of people if it were possible to lay it out as a rest garden'.

The Revd Lambert at that stage was not convinced. He noted that there had been 'for many years...a kind of understanding with Princes [the *Princes Club*] to make little use of that piece of land, as it is just in front of their restaurant, and looks into their windows, so to speak'. Furthermore, he felt 'the ground [to be] of a very peculiar character'. He understood from his late verger 'that underneath it were a great many coffins. Consequently, from time to time the ground gives way'. A garden was 'impossible' as 'after many trials on the part of Princes, no flowers or small shrubs [could] be persuaded to grow on account of the trees'. His verdict was that 'it happens to be a particularly dusty and even dirty corner'. To cap it all he noted 'the piece of ground [to be] raised some feet above the rest of the churchyard' and that 'steps would have to be put there, which would encourage the Choir boys to go up there, which they are not allowed

to do'. His only comfort to Mrs Murray was to offer space for more seats in the paved north churchyard. Mrs Murray understood and even offered 'tubs'.

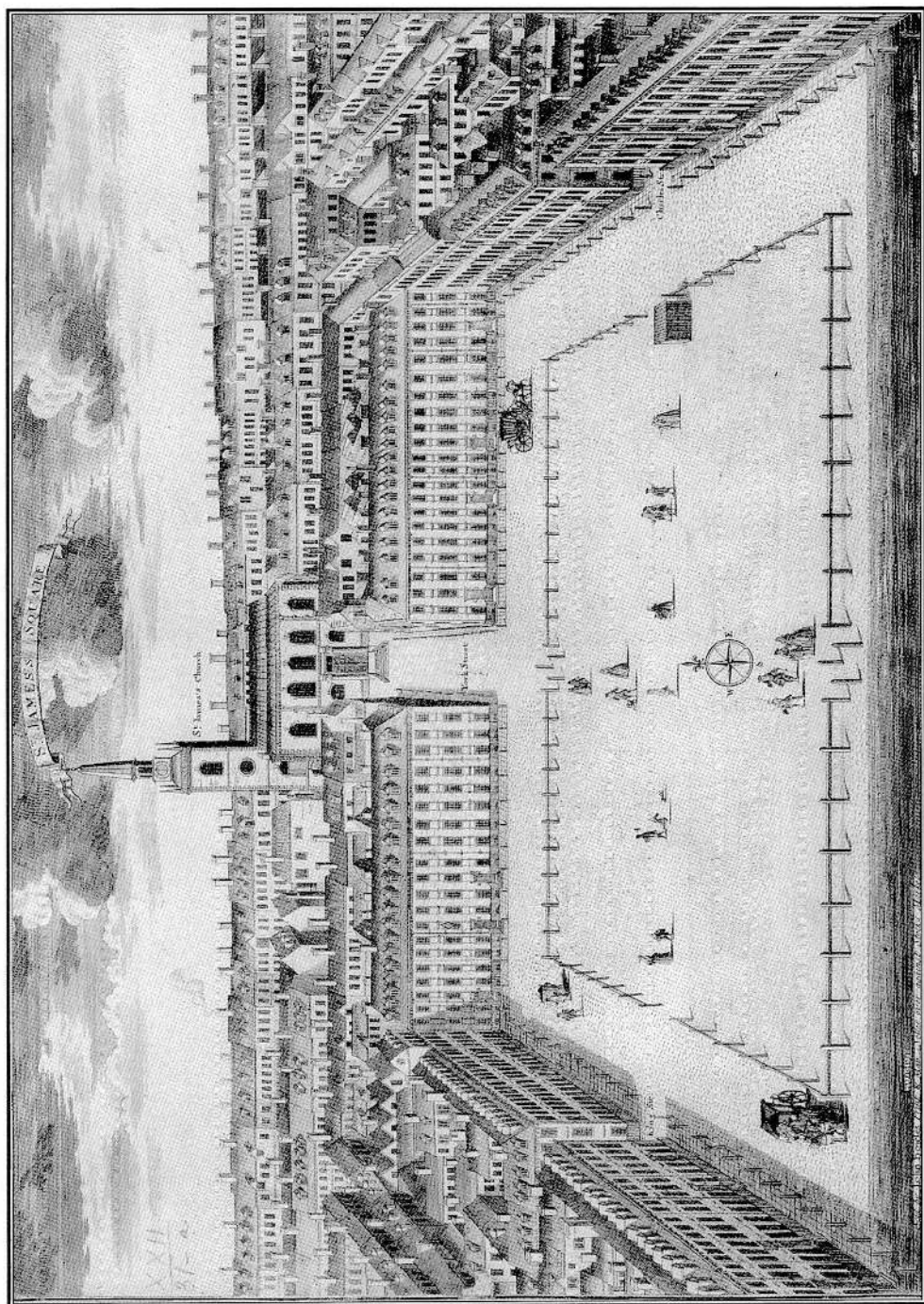
Further improvements were made to the north churchyard, most significantly in 1937 when an earlier brick-arched opening to Piccadilly was taken down. In commemoration of the coronation of King George VI, a pair of wrought iron gates was hung on urn-crowned brick piers flanked by two smaller gates, all to a design by Sir Reginald Blomfield, with metalwork by Bainbridge Reynolds.

Life at St James's was to change dramatically with the outbreak of the Second World War. The peace was shattered in one of the early bombing raids on London in 1940. The church was hit by incendiaries and fire engulfed the nave vault causing it to collapse. (fig. 29) Later, the rectory was hit by a high explosive bomb, completely destroying the building and killing the verger and his wife. Artefacts from the church were carted off for safe storage, including the aforementioned gates to Piccadilly.

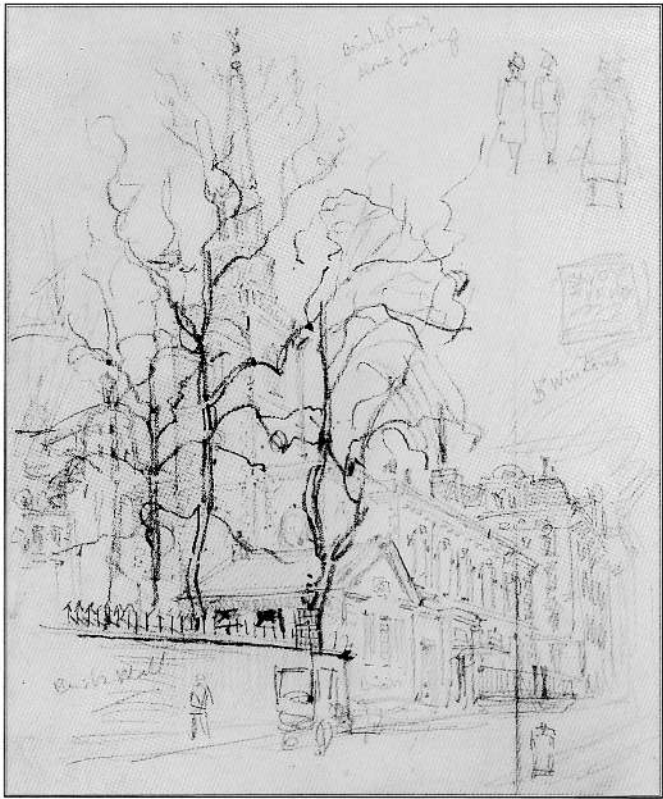
The grounds of the church were pressed into service. A faculty was granted in January 1941 for the erection of nine 50-person air raid shelters on the green churchyard, the foundations of which were to be 'very shallow, not resulting in the disturbance of any human remains', a Westminster Air Raid Precautions letter of 1940 reassured. The Revd Lambert puzzled over compensation forms. The compensation payable for the erection of the shelters was to be 'a sum equal to the rent which might reasonably be expected to be payable by a tenant in occupation of the land'. Perhaps not quite sure when his 'tenants' would rise from the dead to pay their due, the Rector claimed a token £1.

By the end of the war St James's was in a sorry state: the church was a ruin and the churchyard was heaped with rubble. It was the melancholy state of the grounds that prompted an important patron to emerge.

Julius Salter Elias, Viscount Southwood, was an influential Labour peer, head of Odhams Press and publisher of *The Daily Herald*. Prior to the war, Southwood championed the cause of the Labour and National governments of the 1930s, and had waged war



26. 'St James's Piccadilly' by Sutton Nicholls (1731). St James's Church (1676-82) formed the terminus for the north-looking vista from St James's Square (COURTESY TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM)



27. View of the south side of St James's Piccadilly from Jermyn Street. Drawing by Robert Randall (c.1910)
(COURTESY GUILDHALL LIBRARY, CORPORATION OF LONDON)

28. The 'Piccadilly Entrance' to St James's Churchyard. Drawing by Robert Randall (c.1910)
(COURTESY GUILDHALL LIBRARY, CORPORATION OF LONDON)

on his contemporary press barons, Beaverbrook of *The Express* and Rothermere of *The Mail*. With the outbreak of war, Southwood took up the promotion of war bonds and the Red Cross, and continued his patronage of Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Through his war work, Southwood would have been aware of the trials endured by the people of London during the Blitz. His biographer, R J Minney, records that on seeing the destruction at St James's, Southwood 'resolved that, when the war was ended, he would reconstruct it'; he proposed that the new garden would be 'a commemoration of the fortitude and courage of the people of London during the Second World War, and as a pleasant retreat from the bustle of the city'.

Southwood persuaded the Revd Lambert of the merits of creating a garden from the ruins of the churchyard, despite the Rector's previous resistance to such an idea. After the bombing in 1940, the congregation of St James's temporarily 'made do' in a chapel created in the remains of the south aisle of the church. A notice was fixed on the north side of the ruin declaring 'this church is still open'. The Rector may have been enthused by Southwood's proposal for some immediate work to tidy up the grounds around the church, as a way of sparking public interest in the church and its restoration.

The work to create the new garden took place in two phases. This seems to have been due in part to the time required for substantial work to be put in place, but, more crucially, a change in emphasis and design was prompted by Southwood's death in 1946 shortly after the planning started.

The initial phase concentrated on the paved north churchyard. The rubble of the rectory was cleared away and the ground laid out in a parterre of five neat beds arranged after a seventeenth-century design. (fig. 30) Geraniums and rhododendron bushes were planted. Forming an aisle from the gates on Piccadilly to the church door were stout square oak tubs with acorn finials and wrought-iron straps and lifting lugs. Trellis was erected as a screen to the ruined church and benches were provided. Sir Reginald Blomfield's gates were returned and erected on new brick pillars.

A flagstaff was erected for the opening ceremony on 12th May 1946 and trumpeters of the

1st Life Guards and the Hanwell Silver Band sounded fanfares. After gratitude was expressed by the Revd Lambert to the late Lord Southwood, and following a dedication by Dr J W C Wand, Bishop of London, Queen Mary formally unlocked and opened the gates to Piccadilly, watched by a crowd of spectators filling the street beyond.

Today, if one looks in the north churchyard, there is little evidence of this first scheme. The parterre is gone, the rectory having been rebuilt over the site by Blomfield in the 1950s. Under Professor Albert Richardson RA, the church was restored, so the shielding trellis was taken down and the remainder of the yard paved over. The only obvious remnants of the first scheme that are to be found are two of the square box tubs which today form part of a divide between the north churchyard and the seating area of the café by the west end of the church. Discarded in the gallery inside the church is an oak plaque carved with the words of the original dedication to Londoners.

The second phase represents the more permanent work that can still be seen today. Albert Richardson was busy at work in the late 1940s restoring the church; his remit extended to drawing up plans for the garden and a memorial to Southwood. The key issue that Richardson appears to have tackled was establishing a link between the lower paved north churchyard and the higher green churchyard. (fig. 31) This he achieved by creating a series of intermediate terraces linked by steps.

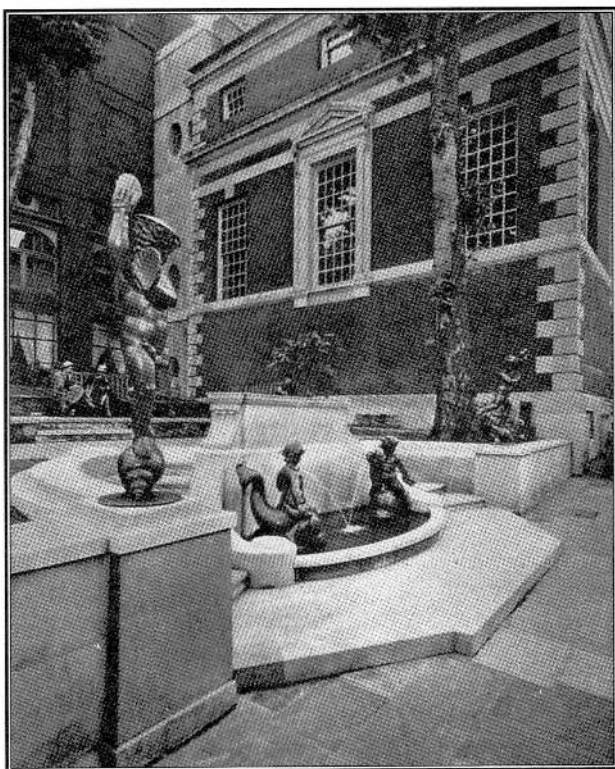
The steps from the paved yard to the first intermediate level form part of a Portland stone fountain. (fig. 32) The fountain basin is elliptical in shape with the steps curving up on each side. The back of the pool rises to form a low wall to the terrace beyond. The wall bears a simple inscription: 'Viscount Southwood'. The composition is completed by four life-size bronze figures of children by the sculptor Alfred Hardiman, RA. On stone plinths at the ends of the retaining walls either side of the fountain are two dancing figures, one using a pair of shells as cymbals and the other with a shell horn. Within the pool itself are two figures astride small dolphins. The dolphins emit jets of water from their mouths. A model of the fountain and sculptures was exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in



29. St James's Piccadilly, 20 November 1940
(COPYRIGHT HULTON GETTY PICTURE COLLECTION)

30. The north churchyard, St James's Piccadilly (May 1949)
(THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS PICTURE LIBRARY)

THE GARDEN at ST JAMES'S CHURCH, PICCADILLY



31. The north churchyard, St James's Piccadilly (April 1956)
(THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS PICTURE LIBRARY)

32. Viscount Southwood's memorial, St James's Piccadilly (July 1949)
(THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS PICTURE LIBRARY)

1949 while the fountain was under construction. Sadly, Hardiman, like Southwood, died before seeing his vision in place. Within the wall behind the fountain are two cavities, one containing the ashes of Lady Southwood, and the other the ashes of her husband in a bronze casket together with a vellum book containing signatures of Southwood's employees and colleagues.

The bulk of the higher level of the garden is laid out with four shaped lawns, originally of Cumberland turf, with a raised stone edging, the whole intersected by paths. Around the edges are beds for planting.

On the intermediate level beyond the fountain steps, but before reaching the high ground, there is a straight side path between two of the planting beds. At the end of this is another sculpture by Hardiman, a figure of a woman, 'Peace', in a more contemporary style. Then at one end of the higher lawned garden on a square plinth is an eighteenth-century stone vase. Around the vase in carved relief are the 'endless' coils of a serpent, ancient symbol of immortality. The vase, a remnant from an earlier monument, was apparently unearthed during the post-war reconstruction works.

The work on this second phase of the garden appears to have been completed by the late summer of 1949, the stonework for the fountain and new garden having been executed by skilled deaf and dumb masons under the supervision of builders Rattee and Kett.

The final element of the post-war improvements to the grounds at St James's was the incorporation of Blomfield's gates into new railings along Piccadilly, these latter given by the Piccadilly and St James's Association to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Since the post-war reconstruction, the garden has been variously cared for. In its current state it is rather neglected and it is under pressure from commercial activities on the church site. However, the importance of the fountain sculpture and the garden was recently recognised by English Heritage when the fountain was listed Grade II. English Heritage note that the fountain should be included in the list 'for the quality of the sculpture, as a novel piece of garden design and as a poignant memorial from the first days of post-war reconstruction'.

A PALMYRENE EYE-CATCHER for HANOVER SQUARE GARDENS?

By Todd Longstaffe-Gowan

A recent trawl through the Dashwood Archives at West Wycombe Park has resulted in a serendipitous reunion: two mid-eighteenth-century drawings – a plan and an elevation – have been reunited to reveal a proposal by Sir Francis Dashwood (of Hell-Fire Club fame) to erect a 32-foot eye-catcher in the central garden of Hanover Square – visible from his family townhouse on the corner of Tenterden Street.¹ (*fig. 33*)

The plan – which has always been known to be of Hanover Square – shows a large octangular 'grass-platt' at the centre of the square, the building lines of the surrounding houses, and the names and layout of the intersecting streets and their respective widths. (*fig. 34*) At the middle of the garden, however, there is a puzzling feature – a square with four dots inscribed within a circle – doubtless intended to represent the plan of some ornamental structure. This feature, which was always thought to represent the plan of a modest covered seat or a summerhouse, is not described in contemporary accounts, nor is it illustrated in early views of Hanover Square.

We now know, however, that the mysterious central feature on the plan relates to a hitherto unidentified elevation of a structure which has until recently been catalogued as 'a design for a three tiered Doric Ionic and Corinthian columned folly'.² In fact, the drawing shows the elevation of a structure unlike anything proposed for the garden of a London square. The pairing of this drawing with its plan throws up a number of interesting questions – most importantly, what prompted Sir Francis Dashwood to propose such an imposing structure in the first place?

A survey of the historic context reveals that Dashwood's proposal is not so peculiar as it might first appear. Hanover Square was formed between c.1717–20 as the centrepiece of the 13-acre Millfield Estate, or Kirkham Close Estate, which was bounded by Oxford Street

1. I am grateful to Tim Knox, Architectural Historian for the National Trust, for bringing these drawings to my attention. He discovered that the two drawings were related to one another in the autumn of 2000 whilst composing the forthcoming National Trust guidebook for West Wycombe Park.

2. *A Catalogue of the Architectural Drawings at West Wycombe Park* (1992).