

APPENDICES

Bibliography
Notes on London Squares
Endnotes

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NOTES ON LONDON SQUARES

History of the London Garden Square

While the first formal urban square in Europe was constructed at Place des Vosges in Paris during the earliest years of the seventeenth century, the garden square is an English phenomenon. Some thirty years after Henri IV created the French prototype of a residential city square, Inigo Jones is thought to have designed the English equivalent at Covent Garden. On three sides of the Covent Garden Piazza, as it was formerly known, the pattern of three-storey upper levels over an arcaded ground floor repeated the Parisian design, while the fourth, west end was dominated by Jones's fine Doric style church. The principal intention behind the creation of this new urban form was to provide convenient residences for persons of quality who could enjoy light, ventilation and views, while living within the metropolis. Other London squares followed during the subsequent decades of that troubled century, both pre- and post-the restoration of the monarchy. These including Charterhouse, Lincoln's Inns, Hoxton, Bloomsbury, Soho and St James's Squares, establishing a precedent that would multiply a hundred fold during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



Fig. 104 View of Covent Garden in seventeenth century.

Urban Typology

The great building boom of Georgian London, that grew from the ducal estates of Bedford and Westminster led to many new residential squares being constructed in the city. New urban blocks

appeared, where formerly there had been either large town mansions and their private gardens, or the farmland or common grazing lands that once surrounded the outskirts of the more compact city. Areas such as Bloomsbury are dominated by squares of varying sizes and shapes, mostly orthogonal, but occasionally crescent shaped, circular or elliptical. The increasing number of residential squares became the defining characteristic of the city, which is acknowledged as England's greatest contribution to European town planning. Other large towns and cities in Britain were to follow this pattern during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most notably those of Edinburgh and Bath. Dublin was to follow later in the eighteenth century, but no other city has quite the abundance of squares that were created in London, most of which survive to this day.

Characteristics

The early squares were generally dull, flat and rather featureless, consisting of grass plats and gravel walks, with possibly a fountain or a statue marking the centre point, and a simple post and rail fence around the perimeter. Anti social behaviour, and robberies, due to the lack of control over access, rendered many of the squares unusable by the privileged classes whose houses look onto them. While they did bring much needed light and air into the city, they were frequently criticised for their lack of ornamental planting. By the end of the eighteenth century the idea of controlling access to the central area, through the erection of metal railings, had been established and the first serious attempts at creating gardens – dressed in the country manner, had begun.

Planting & Thomas Fairchild

Early planting schemes in London appear to have been created by nurserymen, such as Thomas Fairchild who had a nursery just off Hoxton Square. Fairchild set out his ideas in *The City Gardener*, which was published in 1722. In this he advocates that the square gardens be laid out in the form of a wilderness, which he argued would delight the eye and attract songbirds. His garden designs were decidedly formal and geometrical, with grass plats, gravel walks arranged within symmetrical planting beds containing shrubs and flowers, arranged in the style of a wilderness. Species recommended by



Fig. 105 Portrait of Thomas Fairchild (1667?-1729).

Fairchild included – lilac, laburnum, Spanish broom, jasmine, guelder rose, apple, pear, grapevine, Virginian Acacia, elm, lime, mulberry, fig, whitethorn, plane, horse, chestnut, morello cherry, almond, currant and honeysuckle. For the flower borders he recommends – scarlet thrift, lilies, martagons, perennial sunflower, sweet-William, primrose tree, asters, scarlet lynchnis, campanula, French honeysuckle, dwarf iris, monkshood, colchicum, valerian, feverfew, pinks and carnations.

Humphry Repton

The two greatest English landscape designers of the early nineteenth century were Humphry Repton and John Claudius Loudon. Both had strong ideas about how the gardens in the London squares should be laid out and planted. Repton believed strongly in the – seamless integration of landscape and architecture and had the opportunity to illustrate his theories in the gardens of a number of prominent London squares. During the first decade of the nineteenth century Repton designed schemes for Bloomsbury Square, Sloane Square and what many consider to be his masterpiece at Russell Square. Repton recognised the dual function of a garden square as being both public object and private garden that would contribute to the embellishment of the capital. In his - *An Enquiry into the Changes of Taste in Landscape*

Gardening (published in 1806) he sets out his design principles for landscaping garden squares. This include such matters as – displaying natural beauty, creating a sense of extent and freedom, by disguising the boundaries with planting, omitting functional objects that are not ornamental, and creating a central space that is secluded and in character somewhere between a garden and a park.

Loudon Theories

The other great landscape garden designer and author of that period was Loudon, who also wrote about garden squares and produced theoretical strategies for them rather than fixed designs. Like Repton, Loudon believed that the owners of garden squares had a responsibility to enhance the beauty of the metropolis, beyond their own private use and internal enjoyment. He anticipated, prophetically, that these private squares would one day be open to the wider public. His schematic design for a garden square is a fairly formal mandala-like arrangement, with a dynamic central section divided by four double curved spokes meeting at the central point. The model included - perimeter planting, of trees and ever-green shrubs; an outer walk; sloping lawns falling to a circular inner walk lined on both sides by trees; with a network of paths leading to a central

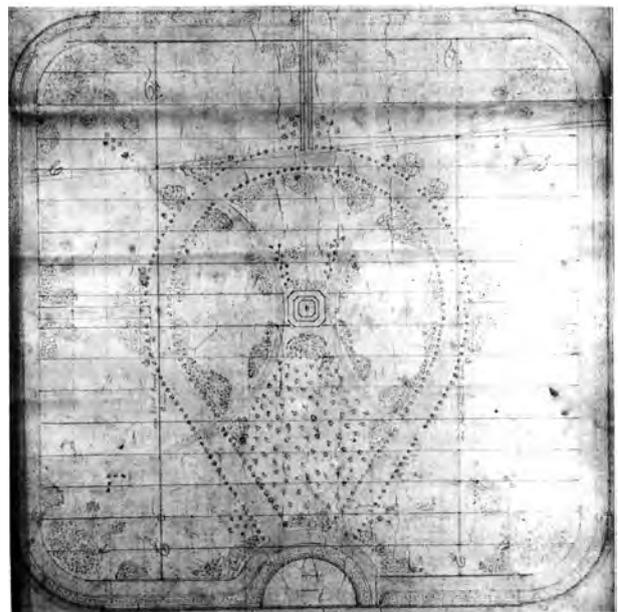


Fig. 106 Repton's plan for Russell Square.

column or statue, between raised banks enriched with shrubbery and planting beds. Full of common plants, singular for beauty, fragrance and luxuriant growth – within a general mixture of variety and uniformity.

Health & Security

Garden squares were popular not only for their aesthetic beauty but for the health benefits of the greater levels of light and air; that they brought to the metropolis generally, and especially to the lucky beneficiaries who were fortunate enough to be able to play there, unaffected by the filth and disease common to other parts of the city. For some critics garden squares were little more than leafy resorts for the exercise of privileged children, while other commentators noted that the strict levels of control imposed by parents and other attendants afforded little freedom or joy to their charges.

Issues

As the planting matured and garden squares became less open and more discreet, impropriety and indecorous behaviour increased, culminating in some high profile members of the nobility being caught in flagrante within the shrubberies. Noise and disturbances were common in other squares due to prostitution, causing nuisance to residents. Recognising the importance of the elevated vantage point provided by first floor drawing rooms, Loudon noted that – planting in a square should not preclude surveillance of the central area from the first floor level of the houses surrounding it. Doubtless not only for the geometry of the layout, but also for passive surveillance that could curb antisocial behaviour.

Later Developments

During the final two decades of the nineteenth century, reforming landlords such as the first Duke of Westminster and his friend the twelfth Earl of Meath founded an organisation called the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association MPGA, the aim of which was to create playgrounds and public spaces for the benefits of all. This movement and the various impacts of the two world wars that marked the first half of the twentieth century, saw almost all of the private square parks become accessible to public. A combination of the blitz; the removal of iron railings

to be recycled as armaments to support the war effort; the erection of air raid shelters; the planting of crops to increase food supplies; and a general lack of maintenance – led to a dramatic change both in terms of planting, layouts and boundary treatments. Whether or not owners wanted their parks to be public, they were now and with the exception of those mature specimen trees that survived the bombing, much of the planting was lost.



Fig. 107 View of recently restored Russell Square.

London Garden Squares Today

Today new railings and some hedges have been erected around most of the park gardens, and while they are nearly all closed at night, most are now publicly accessible by day. With over three hundred square parks in central London the levels of maintenance are not consistently high, but the high amenity value is unquestioned. Many of the finest squares in Bloomsbury, Westminster and Belgravia have been restored to some degree in recent years, and provide many of their former aesthetic qualities to add to the amenity value of being relatively quiet places into which one can go to escape the noise and bustle of the city. They remain as London's most striking urban characteristic and a joy for citizens and visitors alike.

ENDNOTES

1. O'Kane, F. in Casey 2010, 98
2. O'Kane, F. in Casey 2010, 99
3. Rooney 2013, 10
4. O'Kane, F. in Casey 2010, 98
5. de Courcy 1996, 333
6. Craig 1952, 133
7. Matthews in Clark 2006, 58
8. Casey 2005, 578
9. Matthews in Clark 2006, 82
10. Dictionary of Irish Architects
11. Casey 2005, 590
12. Warburton et al. 1818, 463
13. Wright 1825, 141
14. Rooney 2013, 10
15. Rooney 2013, 68
16. Craig 1952, LX
17. O'Kane, F. in Casey 2010, 99

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

- Merrion Square is the most intact of the public squares of Dublin. It is considered by many to be the pre-eminent example of Georgian architecture in the city; comparing favourably with urban squares of this period elsewhere in Britain and Europe.
- The Georgian era extended from 1714 to 1830, and in Dublin was a period of unrivalled growth. Situated on the south side of the city, the Fitzwilliam estate stretched from outside the walls of Trinity College along the coast road to Booterstown as far as the family seat in Mount Merrion.
- There were plans to establish a new garden square in front of the east side of Leinster House from 1762, but the construction of the houses surrounding Merrion Square continued for at least another forty years.
- By the early nineteenth century the twelve-acre garden and the townhouses that surrounded it were complete; with the precursor of the present garden layout shown on a survey drawing by John Roe from 1822. The garden was reserved for the sole use of the residents whose houses faced onto the square.
- This park was purchased by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin in 1930 as the intended site for a new cathedral, and was subsequently leased to Dublin Corporation in 1974. Following a programme of restoration works it was opened to the public for the first time under the name of *Archbishop Ryan Park*, renamed *Merrion Square Park* in 2010.
- The urban square has historic antecedents with many variations in form and purpose; but the model of the garden square is particular to Britain and Ireland. Key characteristics include- metal railings enclosing a private shared garden with simple planting schemes, pathways fringing open lawns enhanced with statuary and memorials; surrounded by townhouses arranged in terraces to give an overall coherence to the urban space and the surrounding streets.
- Garden squares have in many cases been re-designed or redeveloped with buildings for new uses. They were originally designed to be for the sole private use of the *keyholders* who used the garden to socialise and to promenade among their peers detached from the busy surrounding streets.
- A plan dated 1762 depicts a scheme for a rectangular central space with narrow plots occupied by parapet and gable-fronted townhouses on the remaining three sides of the square. The park is shown laid out as a wide, open lawn with tree-lined pathways around its perimeter. When the square was constructed, lands to the south and east remained as fields, which were soon to be replaced by expanding development.
- By 1791 the residents obtained an Act of Parliament that provided for the enclosure of the park, and Benjamin Simpson won the competition for its design. In 1792, the Rutland Memorial was built to the west side of the park to the designs of Francis Sandys. By 1794, the planting, perimeter pathway and wrought-iron railings were in place fringing a wide open lawn.
- Maps record how the park landscape was gradually altered over the nineteenth-century, but also how the original scheme remains intact, albeit partially obscured. Interlocking pathways were installed to connect the entrance gates on the north and south side, and formed an elegant ellipse at the centre of the park. The new paths created five open areas laid out as lawns with curved blocks of planting appearing periodically within the perimeter pathway.

- Since the opening of the park to the public in 1975, Dublin City Council have maintained the square, introduced new planting schemes, new buildings and sculptures. The historic path layout was largely retained, with some alterations to the southeast corner to accommodate the installation of depot buildings.
- The internal paths are in a reasonable state of repair, with some signs of erosion in the form of holes, hollows and patch repairs. However, the quality of the surface is poor and should be replaced in time with a more attractive finish appropriate to an historic park.
- The replacement railings are in a reasonable state of repair, however, the moulded granite plinths are in a poor condition in many places. The railings, especially to those sides used as the outdoor gallery, are in need of redecoration. Works are required urgently to the plinth stones to avoid their being damaged beyond repair.
- The depot buildings are of poor quality construction, visually unattractive and nearing the end of their life span. They are to be removed in the near future, allowing the reinstatement of the perimeter path network.
- Improvements to the public realm could include uncontrolled pedestrian crossings opposite park gates, and a new esplanade to Merrion Square West which could act as a national event space where pedestrians would have priority. This would improve links to the National Gallery and Natural History Museum.
- The planted areas having grown into the central area of the park have altered its original character. Dublin City Council have initiated a programme of selective clearance and tree surgery that is being carried out during the winter months. This work has re-established the prominence of the specimen trees, as well as opening up historic views across the park and towards surrounding buildings by reducing the height of the understorey.
- The Rutland Memorial was conserved as recently as 2009, and remains in good condition. Consideration should be given to reinstating the water features and also adapt it to act as a gateway into the park. The site of the former park lodge to its rear could be used as an outreach facility for the many cultural institutions around the park, or a memorial to the diaspora supported by the Irish Famine Commemoration Fund.
- As identified by the Merrion Square Innovation Network, the park would benefit from the provision of new facilities such as a café and toilets, in order to improve links among the many institutions that line the square into the garden and to allow visitors to linger. This should be sited beside the new playground, and be sensitively designed and respond to its historic setting. It could incorporate a gallery space and interpretation material.
- Another idea would be to provide a new *event shelter* and performance hub beside the mound in the south-east corner that would enliven this part of the garden.
- Merrion Square is an historic place of national significance and makes a major contribution to the European significance of Georgian Dublin, with its fulfillment of Enlightenment urban planning ideas that flourished throughout the continent during the eighteenth century.
- Although its original intended purpose as a private garden was to be transformed considerably when it was opened some forty years ago, Merrion Square Park has become an important part of the social fabric of the city as well as being a valuable amenity for all. It is an ideal setting to present Georgian garden heritage, its historical associations and its ongoing conservation to visitors and locals.

Howley Hayes Architects are recognised for their work in both contemporary design and for the sensitive conservation of historic buildings, structures and places. The practice has been responsible for the conservation and reuse of numerous buildings of national and international cultural significance, several of which have received RIAI, Opus or Europa Nostra Awards. Under the Conservation Accreditation System, implemented by the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland, Howley Hayes Architects is accredited as a Conservation Practice Grade 1 and its director and associate director James Howley and Fergal Mc Namara are Conservation Architects Grade 1. Over the years the practice has completed many projects for the restoration and conservation of numerous historic buildings and places including – Russborough, Lambay Larch Hill, Dromoland & Carton. Howley Hayes Architects have to date been responsible for over one hundred and twenty conservation plans, reports and strategic masterplans for clients such as the Heritage Council, the World Monument Fund, the Office of Public Works together with numerous local authorities and private clients.