

THE GREENING OF RUSSELL SQUARE: RUSSELL SQUARE AS A
LENS ON THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF
EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY LONDON

By

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Abstract

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Fashionable housing in London has moved inexorably to the West. This process started before the Great Fire of 1666 and did not end until the generation of the Sloane Rangers of Kensington in the twentieth century.¹ This thesis will explore this westward march by concentrating on the building practices, building laws, and the planned green space of Russell Square. A mere handful of men owned the majority of the undeveloped land around London. The decisions of these landowners impacted the entire city structure, not just a single house or block. Chapter one will set the scene. Factors that motivated the Duke of Bedford to develop his land a certain way included the growth of London, the perceived need for green space, and the location of the property within greater London. Each of these will be discussed in terms of their impact on the physical changes made within the square.

Chapter two will provide an overview of the history and development of the square, including a brief history of the Bedford Family. This section will also look at the builder, James

¹A Sloane Ranger was a London yuppie from the 1980s. For more information, see Peter York and Ann Barr, *The Official Sloane Ranger Handbook: How the British Upper Class Prepares its Offspring for Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

Burton, and the landscape gardener, Humphry Repton, to explore their contributions to the construction and physical makeup of Russell Square.

Chapter three examines Russell Square's development and compares it to three other areas of London. The first area is Belgrave Square. From the time of its construction in the 1820s, leading members of the British aristocracy occupied Belgrave Square. Looking at the differences between Belgrave and Russell Squares will determine exactly what attracted the aristocracy to a residential neighborhood. The second area is the Foundling Hospital estate. This area was adjacent to Russell Square to the east and attracted a much lower class of resident. This section will examine the importance of planning by landowners on the development of London. The final area is Bedford Square. The gardens of Russell Square were carefully planned and constructed. This was not the case for Bedford Square. Between 1776 and 1802, significant changes in the urban landscape occurred that caused the garden to become an important feature of an urban square.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, John, without whom I would not be the person I am today. Thanks for all your support and for driving me to school, picking me up, and all the in betweens!

INTRODUCTION

Fashionable housing in London has moved inexorably to the West. This process started before the Great Fire of 1666 and did not end until the generation of the Sloane Rangers of Kensington in the twentieth century.¹ This thesis will explore this westward march by concentrating on the building practices, planning by elite landowners, and the planned green space of Russell Square. I argue that Russell Square in Bloomsbury is representative of development trends in London during the early nineteenth century. The Dukes of Portsmouth, Bedford, and Grosvenor were the major private landowners in London at this time. The great estates of London were beginning to be divided into residential housing, beginning with Covent Garden in 1661. A mere handful of men owned the majority of the undeveloped land around London. The importance of these men lies with the methods and plans they used to develop their land. The decisions of these landowners impacted the entire city structure, not just a single house or block. Indeed, entire neighborhoods, districts, and boroughs were under the control of these men. Using Donald J. Olsen's *Town Planning in London: the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (1964) and John Summerson's *Georgian London* (1934) as a foundation, it is the intent of this thesis to extend their research on the great London estate by using the estate as the framework for development in the early nineteenth century.

Much has been written about the historical development of London. It is difficult to find an issue that has not been covered extensively within the field. The avenue of research explored here is that because of very specific historical conditions the great estates developed in a specific

¹A Sloane Ranger was a London yuppie from the 1980s. For more information, see Peter York and Ann Barr, *The Official Sloane Ranger Handbook: How the British Upper Class Prepares its Offspring for Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

way. This is a new research direction into the history of London. Not all of London was slums, not all of London was squares, not all of London built in the early nineteenth century looked like Russell Square. It is not enough to simply describe the development of Russell Square—to gain a better understanding of London itself, an historian needs to look at how Russell Square developed given the historical conditions that were present at the time. The squares of London were indicative of larger trends in urban development in the nineteenth century.

Emerging in the 1960s, urban history as an historical movement was a construct of its times. Issues of overcrowding, suburbanization, and urban decay were at the forefront of historians' concerns. Many of the earliest urban histories began as an attempt to understand the origins of some of these issues. Because of this, the historiography of the field has tended to focus heavily on the experiences of the lower and middle classes, including the more “pathological aspects of the modern city.”² This thesis will instead discuss some of the more pleasant aspects of cities: the well-kept roads, the nice houses, and the gardens of the wealthy upper and upper middle class. A more nuanced understanding of the historical development of London and its geography demands attention to all classes of Londoners.³ This is a study of the upper class, the land owning titled elite, and their impact on London. This social class has been studied in terms of their politics, their entertainment, and their intellectual pursuits, but their involvement in the physical growth of London has been neglected.

²Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), x. For more information on the lower and working classes, see *The Eternal Wen* (1971) by Francis Sheppard, *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) by Henry Mayhew, and *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (1971), by Anthony S. Wohl.

³With the focus being on social class, there will be little about culture or gender in this thesis. For more about gender issues in early nineteenth century London, see Catherine Hall's *White, Male, and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (1992) and Leonore Davidoff's edited work *Gender and History: Retrospect and Prospect* (2000).

Class was an essential component in the development of London socially, but also physically. The history of London in the nineteenth century is incomplete without an understanding of why different social classes gravitated to different areas of London. This social segregation provided a blueprint for understanding London's development. The most highly sought after areas became home to those who could afford them, the wealthy elite, while cramped quarters housed members of the lower social classes.

Interpreting the planning of the city itself is to study the social development of the city. According to Donald J. Olsen, "...we can regard cities as complex but legible documents that can tell us something about the values and aspirations of their rulers, designers, owners, and inhabitants."⁴ By using the physical structure of London as a "document," one can see the social differences between elite residential neighborhoods and residential neighborhoods owned and developed by the elite for other classes. Housing built for the elite was typically "large individual houses in park-like grounds," but the elite's nineteenth century building projects for other classes consisted most often of "small squares and short runs of terraced town housing."⁵ This difference was indicative of the perceived needs of the different social classes. There was a disparity between the housing the elite classes chose for themselves and what they created for members of lower social classes.

Although the field of modern British urban history has roots as far back as the 1910's, it was not until the 1960s that there was an official name for this subdivision within historical

⁴Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), ix.

⁵F.M.L. Thompson, ed., *The Rise of Suburbia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 8.

research.⁶ J.H. Dyos, editor of *The Victorian City* (1973), was the founding figure in this movement to explore cities and their impact on historical events.⁷ A collection of Dyos' essays, *Exploring the Urban Past* (1982), provides a glimpse of some of the seminal works in the field of urban history.⁸ The following pages will discuss the previous research on this topic, looking at the most influential works in the field of urban history, but also examining seminal works that do not address the needs of this thesis. Historians can only make new contributions to the field after gaining an understanding of the limitations of previous scholarship.

In *The Growth of Victorian London* (1976), Donald J. Olsen used the prism of architecture to examine society more generally. He looks at “what the Victorians did to London and what, in so doing, they revealed about themselves.”⁹ This volume, along with Olsen's *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (1982) and *The City as a Work of Art* (1986) form the basis for information on both Russell Square and the Foundling Hospital.¹⁰ It was through these works that Olsen examines this urban landscape and those living within it. His focus was on the architectural and structural development of the two areas. Olsen directly contrasted the upper class flight to the suburbs and their reconstruction of the “country” in their estates with the attempts to create a better environment for the working class. The study of

⁶David Cannadine and David Reeder, eds. *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History* by H. J. Dyos (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 204.

⁷Harold J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

⁸Harold J. Dyos, *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History*, ed. David Cannadine and David Reeder (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁹Donald J. Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London* (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd., 1976), 13.

¹⁰Donald J. Olsen, *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) and Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

architecture allowed for a focus on the upper class, as this class directed the physical development of London. By studying what the upper class built, Olsen was indirectly studying the social class itself.

The growth of London, in both population and geography, was a major factor in its urban development. Anthony S. Wohl's *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (1977), part of the "Studies in Urban History," looked at overcrowding itself as the cause of general public health issues.¹¹ Wohl argued that "[t]he colossal growth of London is the central fact in the history of the capital in the nineteenth century."¹² His analysis of London was that this increase in size and population had a role in determining every other aspect of the city, including transportation, industrialization, and political structure. He claimed in chapter three, "The Growth of London before the Railways," that the physical growth of London was irregular because of a lack of public or state control. This ignored the planned development by the elite landowners. By maintaining his singular focus on population, he neglected many facets of the city, including the elite experience. Although Wohl's work focused on Victorian London rather than the Late Georgian period, his argument about population growth provides the foundation for this study. It is the foundation, but this study looks at an earlier time period and the addition of factors such as location, planning, and garden space.

The physical development of London was also addressed in *The Making of Modern London* (1983), by Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries.¹³ They argued that it was due to a

¹¹Anthony Wohl. *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977).

¹²*Ibid.*, 1.

¹³Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries, *The Making of Modern London: 1815-1914* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1983), 16.

lack of natural physical boundaries. It traveled the familiar path of considering the growth of London to be of primary importance, but also investigated the forces that led to that growth. Weightman and Humphries argued that the importance of London as the capital of the British Empire and as the seat of the monarchy were factors in the direction and also the source of its growth. Also, the lack of natural physical boundaries, like mountains or swamps, allowed London to sprawl formlessly with only the River Thames standing in its way.¹⁴ They claim that natural barriers were absent in London allowing for unfettered growth; however, this does not explain the westward march of fashionable housing.

In Miles Ogborn's discussion of a hybrid modernity in *Spaces of Modernity*, he argued that historians must be attentive to the multiplicity of ways in which modern spaces are produced. Ogborn addressed the questions of how cities come into being, how they sustain their development, and what types of social interactions occur.¹⁵ This thesis uses these questions to draw a comparison between the neighborhoods of Russell Square, Belgrave Square, Bedford Square, and the Foundling Hospital estate. By looking at construction practices, builders, gardens and the location of each square within greater London, these points of comparison offer insight into how these areas began and the developmental direction they took. The relative importance of these building projects to the owners of the property were shown by the quality of builders they hired and the style of architecture they implemented. The same was true of the landscape gardener and the design of the gardens. The gardens in the different neighborhoods helped to determine the area's social class. An area that was landscaped to resemble the countryside was more likely to draw a high class resident. Yet the most important determinant of social class was

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780*, Mappings (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 20-21.

an area's location within greater London. The mantra of real estate has been location, location, location, for far longer than most people imagine.

The key factor in the westward shift in fashionable housing was the population explosion of London. From 1750 to 1800, the city's population grew from just over half a million to nearly a million people. Because of this, housing was in great demand for all classes of people. When the Duke of Bedford started construction on his estate, he built with the intention of attracting the highest class of residents possible. Therefore, when he started construction of Bedford Square in 1776, it was with the intention of his tenants being members of the wealthy elite, but by the time construction started on Russell Square, in 1800, the targeted social classes were the upper middle and middle classes. In a mere twenty-five years, the Duke of Bedford's Bloomsbury estate had gone out of fashion for the upper classes. Housing for this class had continued its westward migration.

The demolition of Bedford House in 1800 marked the beginning of the development of Russell Square. Francis, the fifth Duke of Bedford, hired the builder James Burton after seeing his work on the Foundling Estate, a property adjacent to Bloomsbury. The Duke also hired Humphry Repton, the foremost landscape gardener in England, to design the Russell Square gardens. This was after Repton completed massive renovations at the Duke's manorial estate in Woburn. Russell Square became home to the upper middle class with a majority of residents being in the legal profession, rather than a neighborhood of choice for the wealthy elite. This area of London was no longer desirable as housing for the elite by the time the square was complete.

Chapter one will set the scene. Factors that motivated the Duke of Bedford to develop his land a certain way included the growth of London, standard construction practices at the time,

building lease agreements, Acts of Parliament, and the location of the property within greater London. Each of these will be discussed in terms of their impact on the physical changes made within the square.

Chapter two will provide an overview of the history and development of the square. This section will also look at the builder, James Burton, and the landscape gardener, Humphry Repton, to explore their contributions to the construction and physical makeup of Russell Square. Humphry Repton and the garden he designed added value to Russell Square. A garden was perceived as a private oasis within the city itself. This chapter discusses Repton's particular contribution both to Russell Square specifically, and to landscape gardening in general. In addition, it includes an analysis of the text of the Act of Parliament, with special focus on the section detailing the creation of the "pleasure garden."

Of particular focus was the perceived need for green space within London. This need was caused by many factors: overcrowding, new ideas of health, the perception that disease was carried by "bad air," and the notion that men were becoming emasculated in the cities because of a lack of outdoor physical activity. Londoners in the early nineteenth century saw factory work and office work as both morally and physically weakening. Open space allowed a feeling of the country and gave the upper and middle classes the sense that the "dirty hordes" of the working classes could not invade their space. The land devoted to Russell Square garden could have been used for additional housing, which in turn would have brought in additional ground rents, but the decision was made to reserve the land for recreation. Popular ideas about health and nature, and appropriate activities for urban open space were important factors in the preservation of this land.

Chapter three examines how London's population explosion affected other areas of the city. Using Russell Square's development as a means of comparison, this chapter will compare and contrast three other areas of London. The first area is Belgrave Square. From the time of its construction in the 1820s, leading members of the British aristocracy occupied Belgrave Square. Its immediate success was encapsulated by the decision of another of London's leading freehold landlords, John, the sixth Duke of Bedford, to choose No. 6 Belgrave Square as his London home. What happened between 1776 and the 1820s that caused fashionable housing for the elite to move westward? Looking at the differences between Belgrave Square and Russell Square will determine exactly what attracted the aristocracy to a residential neighborhood. The second area is the Foundling Hospital estate. This area was adjacent to Russell Square to the east and attracted a much lower class of resident. Although developed by the same builder, James Burton, the estate was unable to maintain its popularity among the middle and upper classes because of decisions made by the estate governors. This section will examine the importance of planning by landowners on the development of London. The final area is Bedford Square. The gardens of Russell Square were carefully planned and constructed. This was not the case for Bedford Square. Between 1776 and 1802, significant changes in the urban landscape occurred that caused the garden to become an important feature of an urban square.

Both in London itself and in the historical writings about it, there is little ground that has been left uncovered. Its story has been written many times, from many different perspectives. These viewpoints have included the political history, the economic history, the history of women, and even the history of the treatment of animals.¹⁶ The substance of this thesis

¹⁶Dana Arnold, ed., *The Metropolis and its Image: Constructing Identities for London, c.1750-1950* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 50.

contributes to the historical record by including the story of the location, the planning, and the gardens of Russell Square, Bloomsbury, London.

CHAPTER ONE

Population Explosion of London

Nothing is more essentially characteristic of London than its squares...they have been built with residential houses surrounding them, and though some have changed to shops, and others the houses are dilapidated and forsaken by the wealthier classes, nearly every one had its day of popularity.¹

Population growth was the most important force in the development of London in the nineteenth century. This growth was caused by the effects of empire and the agricultural and industrial revolutions. Additionally, the needs of fashionable housing influenced the development of the city. Urban expansion was constrained by building laws, construction practices and the leasehold system, but fashion played an important role. It took the Dukes of Bedford over seventy-five years to develop their property in Bloomsbury, London. Many aspects of city life changed over this period. This specific historical episode in London's development is viewed using the lens of Russell Square.

London Growth

The population of Britain as a whole increased from 1750 to 1850. This increase occurred, in part, because of the technological advances created by the agricultural and industrial revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but also because of a decrease in mortality rates and an increase in birth rates. Increased food production led to fewer deaths from starvation and malnutrition. The death rate of all groups diminished over this period, but it was the 'natural' increase of population that led to the demographic change. As to why London itself got so huge, one must look at additional factors.

¹Alicia Cecil Rocklay, *London Parks and Gardens* (London: A. Constable & Co. Ltd., 1907), 217.

London's population tripled from 1750 to 1850. In 1750, London was five miles across east to west and its population was 676,000.² By 1800, London had not expanded geographically, but its population had grown to nearly one million. Fifty years later, the population had reached over 2.25 million and was nearly ten miles wide. This impacted housing in all areas of the city, but growth was mainly to the north and west of the city center.³ The Dukes of Bedford owned land throughout London, but their largest holding was in Bloomsbury, the heart of this new area of growth. The development of this estate coincided with the growth of London. Construction on Russell Square started in 1802.

Although the actual reasons for the exponential growth of London are important, popular perceptions of this event are also crucial. An article in "Monthly Magazine" written in February 1811, by Sir Richard Phillips attempted to answer the question, "...Whence come the inhabitants of all the new houses built in the suburbs of London?"⁴ He offered seven causes for this increase, but they can be conflated into one word: Empire.

Between 1601 and 1811, the British Empire grew from seven million to twenty million people.⁵ In the most general terms, this increase meant that more people were under the rule of the British. More specifically, more people considered London, the capital of the British Empire,

²Donald J. Olsen, *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 14.

³Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 53.

⁴Richard Phillips, "The Rise and Fall of Imperial London, 1811," *Monthly Magazine*, February 1811, 1ff., quoted in Bruce Coleman, *The Idea of the City in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 36. At this time, Russell Square and the Bloomsbury estate were considered part of the suburbs (See Appendix I, Map of London: 1750 and Map of London: 1844)

⁵Ibid.

to be their capital city. In order to control this empire, more civil service workers were needed in the capital. Three thousand more employees in the treasury, custom, and tax offices led to a corresponding increase in the need for housing for them, their families, and their servants. The Empire also led to an increase of people living off annuities supplied by the government. As London made advances in world trade, it became the Europe's premier money market. Trade increases, international banking, and finance provided fortunes to the lucky and shrewd alike.⁶

More manufacturers and traders of luxury items were also present in the capital to meet the demand of the new colonial markets. There was a corresponding increase in the wealth of the upper and middle classes that also allowed them to purchase more consumer goods. From 1796 to 1850, the aggregate value of domestic exports grew in value from thirty million pounds to seventy-one million pounds.⁷ Of course, not all of this increase in exports came from London, but as the center of trade in Britain, it saw the largest increase. This, in turn, provided more earning opportunities for people employed as artisans. There were more opportunities for artists, jewelers, and engravers, not to mention the increased hiring in the building trade that was spurred on by the population explosion in the first place.

In addition, there was an expansion of the army and navy to protect existing colonies and to add more colonies. From 1793 to 1815, there were a series of ongoing wars with France that bolstered the numbers of the rank and file. When these soldiers and sailors were not at sea or war, many lived on half pay or pensions in London, "not only for the advantages of society, but for the conveniences of receiving their annuities, and improving their interests with

⁶P.J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns: 1700-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 73.

⁷Brian R. Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics: 1750-1970* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 488-492, table F1.

administration.”⁸ They did not want to stray too far from the capital to ensure timely receipt of their pay, but also because they needed to stay within easy communication of their commanding officer.

These wars, although only partially caused by imperial pressures, led to the final reason for the population increase: immigration. Immigrants fled to London from all parts of Europe—France, Germany, Holland, Spain, and Italy—as a place of security in a time of war and revolution on the continent.⁹ But what was good for the rest of Europe was also good for the rest of Britain. “...[E]migration to towns is the great means, by which employment is found for an increasing population.”¹⁰ People from all over Britain flocked to the cities.

The urban population of Britain grew substantially over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There were two main forces at work here. The first was a “push from the countryside.”¹¹ As agriculture became more streamlined, fewer people were needed to achieve the same size crop yield. This released those who were born in the countryside from their previous responsibilities on the farm. The second force at work was “a distinctive ‘pull’ emanating from the cities.”¹² The attraction of cities ranged from the hope of advancement and opportunity, to the desire for riches and glamour. One certain appeal was higher wages available

⁸Coleman, *Idea of the City*, 37.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰John Sinclair, *Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland*. 1825, 170-173, quoted in Bruce Coleman, *The Idea of the City in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 53.

¹¹Corfield, *Impact of English Towns*, 101.

¹²*Ibid.*

in the city. The development of industry, particularly cotton and other manufactured goods, led to an increased level of earnings.¹³

These two forces—the push of the countryside and the pull of the cities—led to a huge growth in urban populations, with London always being the main drawing point. After 1750, the proportion of the population that lived in towns went from twenty percent to one third. The actual numbers reflect that change: whereas before 1750 less than a million people lived in cities, after 1800 the figure was more than three million.¹⁴

Housing in London became in short supply because of this massive population growth. From the end of the reign of Elizabeth I to 1811, an estimated twenty thousand new houses were created in London. If one estimates “eight souls to a house,” this was housing for only 160,000 people, or approximately half of the population increase of three hundred thousand people.¹⁵ When one factors in all the people necessary to support this population—bakers, butchers, grocers, and especially domestic servants—the need for additional housing in London becomes clear.

Growth, but in what direction?

During the late eighteenth century, development within London continued at a rapid pace, hemmed in only by certain natural and man-made barriers. The River Thames was a clear demarcation point that prevented fashionable development to the south. The New Road, built in 1756, marked the northern boundary of the Duke of Bedford’s Bloomsbury estate, and was also

¹³Michael Aston and James Bond, *The Landscape of Towns* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1976), 136.

¹⁴F.M.L. Thompson, ed., *The Rise of Suburbia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 7.

¹⁵Coleman, *Idea of the City* 36.

the northern boundary of the city itself. To the west was Hyde Park, and the financial district, better known as The City, was the eastern terminus.¹⁶

The history of fashionable neighborhoods in London begins in The City, moving west in the seventeenth century to Covent Garden and Bloomsbury. Fashion continued its march west in the eighteenth century, moving to Marylebone and Mayfair and then finally to Belgravia and parts of Kensington.¹⁷ This was because of the perception that the west and southwest side of London was healthier. There were many reasons for this idea, including wind direction, water flow, and sparse development. The wind blew smog to the east, the River Thames flowed to the east, and because of a lack of bridges crossing the Thames in the west, most residential development to this point had been in the east end of London.

As fashion moved to the west, it caused the physical and social transformation of Bloomsbury. Bloomsbury had once been the purview of the aristocracy and gentry, but, by 1800, this class of people were “retreating before the tide of population.”¹⁸ Its residents were being lured instead to Tyburnia and Belgravia, and the Bedford estate was becoming home to the upper middle class.¹⁹ Before the creation of Russell Square, in 1800, Bloomsbury had “one reasonably fashionable square,”²⁰ Bloomsbury Square. There were also three large mansions on this property—Bedford, Montague, and Thanet houses. These mansions were the London residences

¹⁶Andrew Byrne, *Bedford Square: An Architectural Study* (London: Althone Press, 1990), 43.

¹⁷Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). 160.

¹⁸Donald J. Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London* (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd., 1976), 129.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Olsen, *Work of Art*, 135.

of the Dukes of Bedford and Montague and the Earl of Thanet. The area to the south consisted of modest houses and narrow streets.

After the development of the Bedford estate, the homes of the aristocracy were taken over by homes for those who worked nearby—for the most part those associated with the law. This caused concern in the Bedford estate office that the buildings of Russell Square would disappear, “...and in a few years, when age begins to stamp its mark upon them, the last terraces of aristocratic, commercial, or professional opulence will vanish from among them.”²¹ The Bedford office was not prepared to let this happen without a fight.

The struggle to maintain a high social class of residents began even before the initial development of the Bedford estate in Bloomsbury. The New Road, later renamed Euston, Marylebone and Pentonville roads, runs just north of the Bedford estate.²² It passes to the north of Marylebone and St. Pancras and stretches eastwards from Paddington to the City of London. This road formed the northern boundary of London when it was built, but was also a new arterial road that allowed for the northward expansion of London. As it was quite a distance from The City, only those who could afford regular transportation fees or owned their own carriage were able to live in this area. The construction of the New Road helped set the pace and direction of future building plans.²³

²¹Olsen, *Growth of Victorian London*, 129.

²²See Appendix II, Bloomsbury Estate Plan: 1850.

²³George Rudé, *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808* (Berkeley: University of California, 1971), 3.

The Duke of Bedford originally opposed the opening of New Road, arguing in Parliament that it would be likely to deteriorate his property.²⁴ His concerns were based on the assumption that the New Road would become a major thoroughfare for goods entering the city.²⁵ Because of these fears, in 1756, the Duke of Bedford had a clause inserted in the Act that created the New Road. This clause prohibited “the erection of houses to within fifty feet of the road, the land in front of the houses being reserved for gardens only.”²⁶ This was to prevent the property being developed with inferior quality houses or shops and also to keep residences away from the busy street.

It was the building up of the Foundling Hospital estate and the influx of residents to Somers Town that pushed the Duke of Bedford to further develop his Bloomsbury property. Somers Town was a “triangular district between the Hampstead, Euston, and Pancras Roads.”²⁷ This was just to the northeast of Bloomsbury. Although Somers Town was never as infamous as some of the slums in London, it was plagued with the problem of poor housing and overcrowding throughout its early history. Built in 1790 at the time of the French Revolution, it was French emigrants fleeing the Reign of Terror who became the first tenants of the area. The houses they rented had gone unoccupied for months before their arrival. The filling of these houses specifically created a housing crunch in this area of London. This increased the demand

²⁴Rowland Dobie, *The History of the United Parishes of St. Giles-in-the-fields* (London: F. Marshall, 1829), 149n.

²⁵Rudé, *Hanoverian London*, 23.

²⁶Harold P. Clunn, *The Face of London*. New ed., rev. by E.R. Wethersett (London: Spring Books, 1960), 153.

²⁷George H. Cunningham, *London: Being a Comprehensive Survey of the History, Tradition, and Historical Associations of Buildings and Monuments Arranged Under Streets in Alphabetical Order* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1927), 652.

for ground leases²⁸ offered by both the Duke of Bedford and the trustees of the Foundling Hospital. The Foundling Hospital estate lay just to the northeast of the property owned by the Duke.²⁹

In 1790, the governors of the Foundling Hospital estate initiated construction of the surrounding lands. Initially, the Duke of Bedford was opposed to an agreement to allow streets to open onto the Duke of Bedford's private road, the turnpike road to Islington.³⁰ But the building up of the Foundling Hospital estate led to the disappearance of "a full view of the rising hills of Hampstead and Highgate."³¹ This dispelled any last doubts he may have had. This change, along with the change in social status of the area brought on by Somers Town's new residents, led to the demolition of Bedford House, the creation of Russell Square, and the subsequent development of the entirety of the Bloomsbury portion of the Bedford estate.

Location and Description of Russell Square

Bloomsbury falls within the area known today as "The West End." Although Bloomsbury currently lies in the north-central area of London, in the late eighteenth century it was on the outskirts of the city. It "was once a suburb of London—the most aristocratic and salubrious of all."³² The West End has meant different things to Londoners at different times: the

²⁸ "[A]n agreement by which the ground landlord, on the one hand, agrees to let, and the builder agrees to take, a block of land, as a rule, upon which the builder agrees to build one of more houses, usually a number of houses." in Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 29.

²⁹ Clunn, *Face of London*, 155.

³⁰ R.H. Nichols and F.A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 281.

³¹ Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 49.

³² Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries, *The Making of Modern London: 1815-1914* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1983), 42.

entertainment center, the premier shopping district, or simply the center of London. It was not a location with a formal designation by city planners, and maps did not specifically designate it. There was a distinct segregation of classes within London, which was apparent in the West End. As it was “conveniently placed for the City, the Court and the administrative centre of Westminster, [it] became the spacious preserve of the aristocracy and wealthier middle classes, tolerating only such working class pockets as were necessary for the supply of servants and tradesmen.”³³ Segregation of classes was also an issue in the older parts of London, with the working class living in “increasing densities under deteriorating conditions.”³⁴ Less housing was being built for this class, forcing their growing numbers to pack ever more tightly into the available homes.

The Bloomsbury portion of the Bedford estate lies within the rectangle formed by Tottenham Court Road, Euston Road, Woburn Place and Southampton Row, and New Oxford Street.³⁵ Bloomsbury “never became an important commercial or shopping center,”³⁶ in part because it was in close “proximity to the crime quarter of St. Giles” to the west and southwest.³⁷ The intention was to maintain the property as private residences. In hopes of doing so, the Bedford estate included stipulations in building agreements preventing trade and any number of

³³Aston and Bond, *Landscape of Towns*, 153.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 39.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 43.

³⁷Hugh Phillips, *Mid-Georgian London: A Topographical and Social Survey of Central and Western London About 1750* (London: Collins, 1964), 210.

professions including brewer, baker, distiller, dyer, anything secondhand, coffinmaker, and carpenter.³⁸

Russell Square is the second largest of London's squares, comprising a total of just over 2660 square feet. Only Lincoln Inn Fields, at 2800 square feet, is larger. The dimensions of Russell Square are 665' on the northern side, 665' on the southern side, 672' on the western side, and 667' on the eastern side.³⁹ The longer dimension runs roughly north-south. Russell Square lies north of Bloomsbury Square and to the east of Bedford Square.⁴⁰ Russell Square connects with Bedford Square by way of Montague Place, today leading between the rear of the British Museum and the Senate House.⁴¹ It was the second square, after Bedford Square, to be constructed on the Bloomsbury portion of the Bedford estate.

Although a square, its boundary was not restricted to only four roads. The north, south and east sides were divided into two separate sections for a total of nine roads. The street names themselves were all derived from the Russell family. The use of names associated with the family who owned the land or builders was common throughout London. This practice of naming streets was in large part an attempt to bring prestige to the area and, if development proved to be a success, to reflect well on the family name. In fact, the primary builder of Russell Square, James Burton, went on to develop other properties and thought it appropriate to name them Burton Crescent and Burton Street (now Cartwright Street).

³⁸Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 101.

³⁹Dobie, *History of the United Parishes*, 172.

⁴⁰Byrne, *Bedford Square*, 10.

⁴¹Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *London 4: North*, Buildings of London (London: Penguin, 1998), 325.

Because the estate used names intimately associated with the family, it was important that the quality of the houses reflected well on the family. Montague Street and Montague Place, which run into the southwest corner of Russell Square, were named after the first Duke of Montagu, who married Elizabeth, the stepsister of Lady Rachel Russell. Woburn Place, in the northwest corner of the square, was named after the principal seat of the Dukes of Bedford, who named Bedford Way and Bedford Place after their ducal title. Before the Bedfords took possession of the land, Southhampton Row was named by the previous owner, the Earl of Southhampton. Bisecting the eastern side of the square was Guilford Street, with unknown origin. The final road is Thornhaugh Street, in the northwest corner. This was named after an estate brought into the Russell family by the marriage of Anne Sepcote to John Russell, first Earl of Bedford.⁴² This leaves only the name of the square itself. Russell was the family name of the Dukes of Bedford. Within Bloomsbury, the Dukes of Bedford also developed Bedford Square, Woburn Square, and Tavistock Square, the last of which is named after a courtesy title of the Dukes of Bedford.

Building Practices in the Early Nineteenth Century

Construction during the early nineteenth century was not simply a matter between builder and landowner. Russell Square developed in a very specific manner, under very specific conditions. In order to see this clearly and in order to understand the scope of influences on its development, one must look at broader issues such as Acts of Parliament, lease agreements, and construction styles.

⁴²F. Peter Woodford, ed., *Streets of Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia: A Survey of Streets, Buildings and Former Residences in Part of Camden* (Camden: Camden Historical Society, 1997), 55.

The Duke of Bedford sought upper middle class tenants for Russell Square. But what does this mean in practice? How did a landowner build in such a way to appeal to a certain class? Also, what were the standard building practices of the time, and what factors were influential in determining these practices? It is necessary to know the standards of comparison to assess the quality of the construction of Russell Square. Without understanding construction techniques and practices that were standard at the time, it would be difficult to determine if Russell Square was built in an appropriate fashion for the social class of tenants to which the estate aspired.

The century following the Great Fire of 1666 saw the implementation of many new building codes in an effort to prevent a recurrence. In an effort to consolidate these laws, Parliament passed the Great Building Act of 1774, “a milestone in the history of [London’s] ‘improvement.’”⁴³ Additionally, there were Acts of Parliament passed to “...pave, cleanse, light, water, and embellish various squares in London...in order to improve and embellish the landlords’ estates.”⁴⁴ This act required strict rules of construction and also created categories or ‘rates’ of buildings.

There were four rates of construction for residential properties. A ‘first-rate’ house was at least 900 square feet and worth at least 850 pounds, while a ‘fourth-rate’ house was less than 350 square feet and worth less than 150 pounds. First-rate houses were the standard within Russell Square. The standardization of building practices forced speculative builders to maintain minimum standards, but it also created monotony through standardization of façades.⁴⁵ Builders

⁴³John Summerson, *Georgian London; an Architectural Study* (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1970), 124.

⁴⁴Frank Banfield, *The Great Landlords of London* (London: S. Blackett, 1888), 30.

⁴⁵Peter Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton: Architectural Trends in England* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1961), 7.

would figure out the optimum design using the cheapest materials possible, leaving very little room for variation.

In addition to encouraging monotonous building plans, the building act placed limitations on ornamentation. Windows had to be recessed at least four inches and were “further concealed behind brick reveals, leaving only a tiny margin of woodwork to catch fire and spread conflagration in the street.”⁴⁶ The annual tax on windows effectively reduced the number of windows. If a home had six windows or less, the duty was six shillings. After ten windows, the price rose to fifteen shillings per extra window. If a residence had twenty windows, the duty was ten pounds.⁴⁷ Designs for buildings would omit windows for cheaply constructed buildings as the future tenants would not be able to afford the window tax. This left little room or money for decoration when one added in further restrictions on exterior woodwork ornamentation. Builders had only a few materials left to choose from for exterior finishing: plaster, terracotta, and coade stone. Because of these limitations, these latter materials were responsible for the most distinctive Georgian decorations.

Lease Agreements

From 1660 through 1800, London developed a unique system of leases. Ninety-nine years became the standard term. For this type of lease, a builder was expected to pay a small yearly rent to the freehold landlord, but his obligation was to build houses of quality that would then be rented for a profit. In general, building leases were never less than five percent of the

⁴⁶Summerson, *Georgian London*, 126.

⁴⁷Robert Sutton, *A Complete Guide to Landlords, Tenants, and Lodgers, Being a Methodical Arrangement of the Whole Law* (London: W. Stratford, 1804), ***.

selling value.⁴⁸ The speculative building system, developed during the rebuilding of the City after 1666, was the standard method by which most housing was built.⁴⁹ The builder's interest was in constructing the cheapest building possible; the landowner's was in getting the most quality with minimal investment on his part.

In a typical building lease, the builder constructed only the shell of the structure, leaving roughly plastered internal walls. The builder would then lease the unfinished house to a tenant before the ground rent became due. The speculative builder paid this ground rent, usually only a token amount, for the first few months of the ground lease. It was the first lessee of the property, the tenant, who was responsible for completing the shell (unfinished property) of the house. This lease system developed because it served the interests of all the participants. The landowner could develop his property with minimal personal investment while gaining income from ground rents and ownership of the building at the end of the lease term. The builder only had to have enough capital to complete the shell of the structure. Finally, the tenant was able to complete construction in a manner that suited his or her personal taste.

Typical problems with these leases involved a lack of capital from the builder, political unrest that slowed investment and, most relevant to Russell Square, the building of the wrong sorts of houses in the wrong sort of place.⁵⁰ While insisting on first-rate houses in Russell Square, the Duke of Bedford had a hard time attracting the upper class tenants who could afford the rents and construction costs associated with these houses.

⁴⁸Herman Muthesius, *The English House*. Edited with an introduction by Dennis Sharp and a preface by Julius Posener, trans. Janet Seligman (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1979), 72.

⁴⁹Dan Cruickshank, *A Guide to the Georgian Buildings of Britain and Ireland* (London: Widenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), 22-23.

⁵⁰Cruickshank, *Georgian Buildings*, 22-23.

The lease system did not evolve in a vacuum. It came about as a result of pressures from population growth. Because there was a great demand for housing, good builders were in great demand. In order to attract respectable and responsible men—men who were known to finish their work and finish it at a high level of quality—landowners were forced to offer incentives to attract these builders. These incentives became standard parts of building leases. By freeing up landowners' capital, they were also more able to assist builders with standard amenities. In a common building lease, sewers, roads, and the garden were all the responsibility of the builder, but in many cases landowners assisted with the finances for these amenities. Because they did not have to pay the total costs for all of the buildings, landowners were able to offer builders many ways of helping. These included peppercorn rents,⁵¹ help with the amenities, and even short-term loans.

Speculative builders were so prevalent in part because landowners were unwilling to risk the entire amount needed to develop their land. The landowner only needed a small outlay of funds, leaving it up to the builder to come up with the majority of the capital needed to construct the houses. The owner got less return on his investment as they only collected a small amount in ground rents, but there was also less risk of losing money if the housing went unoccupied. This shared risk—the landowner depending on the builder to have the capital to complete construction and the builder being offered financial incentives—allowed for greater development opportunities for everyone.

An additional participant in this shared risk was the initial tenant. It was standard practice to have this tenant pay for the final finishing of the building. But, depending on the availability of tenants, this could also be a risk. If there was no interest in the property, shells were left

⁵¹See Chapter 2 for further discussion of peppercorn rents.

without being completed for months or even years. This is what happened in Somers Town. Splitting the financial risk with the tenant proved beneficial for the builder, the landowner, and the tenant alike. No single investor had to take the full risk, nor did any individual need to have all of the capital necessary to complete construction. The tenant was also able to complete the building to his or her own style and standards. However, this could backfire on the landowner at the end of the lease if the interior did not meet the standards to which other properties were developed.⁵²

London's leasehold system was uncommon in comparison to other areas in Europe. In Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, and "even in Bucharest building sites are freehold without exception."⁵³ Only a few countries like France, Turkey, and Sweden had "anything like the grievous system existent in London."⁵⁴ It was through Act of Parliament that this system was created and preserved. Throughout London's history, the crown parcelled out large estates to wealthy, titled individuals. There was no law against freeholds in Britain, but there were restrictions on the lands granted by the crown. This land could be leased, but it could not be sold without an Act of Parliament.

In 1888, Frank Banfield, a Special Commissioner of *The Sunday Times*, wrote a series of articles on "The Great Landlords of London." These articles were an indictment of the leasehold system, with special attention paid to the great estates of Portman, Grosvenor, and Bedford controlled by the Viscount Portman, the Duke of Westminster, and the Duke of Bedford,

⁵²Cruickshank, *Georgian Buildings*, 22-23.

⁵³Banfield, *Landlords of London*, 14.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 16.

respectively.⁵⁵ This leasehold system was mainly confined to London, Wales, and Cornwall and was particularly prevalent on crown, aristocratic and Church lands. It was also seen as the cause of the poor condition of London housing. Housing reformers believed that it led to landowners building shoddy houses.⁵⁶ This system of leases “encouraged builders to put up less substantial houses than they would if they owned the freehold.”⁵⁷

However, the lease system was not used to the exclusion of all other rental agreements. Before 1660, the Bedford estate granted a few fee-farm rents. This type of lease made the tenants “for all practical purposes freeholders.”⁵⁸ As long as the tenants paid the fixed annual rent, they were under no obligation to build to any standard. The Duke of Bedford was unable to control this land or rebuild on this property in any systematic or planned way. Unfortunately, this led to shoddy building practices and overcrowding on these properties. After 1660, the Bedford estate no longer granted these fee-farm rents, preferring to use the lease system that became standard in London. To reverse the damage done by these rentals, occasionally the Bedford estate office purchased available properties that were paying rent as part of the fee-farm system. This was particularly necessary when the estate was enacting a “general re-building scheme.”⁵⁹

Construction

Traditional London buildings of the terrace house format were built with brick bearing walls and timber joists and beams. Later developments included stucco and terracotta use for

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶White, *London in the Nineteenth Century*, 72.

⁵⁷Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 32.

⁵⁸Ibid., 40.

⁵⁹Ibid., 41.

exteriors, and iron to replace timber for some uses.⁶⁰ Use of all these materials was prevalent throughout London. The period from 1775 to 1850 saw four broad types of stucco in use, with many variations. It was often painted to resemble stone, using a color washing process. Not an innovative material in design terms, stucco was used in imitation of stone to make a house look more expensive than it truly was.⁶¹ In addition, to further reduce fire hazards, brick was used to replace timber. The best type of brick to use was malm or clay brick. In order to produce the “characteristic yellow- or white-coloured brick” of Georgian buildings, the builder added lime to nullify the red of the iron oxide.⁶²

In London in the early nineteenth century, the primary construction of housing was done in terraces or row houses. The façade of an entire city block was treated as a single unit. This included slightly emphasized end bays and an elongated center bay formed of stucco with a roof pediment. This was a recurring vertical feature. This design followed the Palladian tradition of center and balancing end masses.⁶³ Palladian architecture focused on the relationship between design and function, makes a virtue of simplicity, pays respect to the classical orders, and

⁶⁰Hermione Hobhouse, “Introduction,” in *Good and Proper Materials*, ed. Hermione Hobhouse and Ann Saunders, 1-2, London Topographical Society, no. 140, (London: W.S. Maney and Son Ltd., 1989).

⁶¹Frank Kelsall, “Stucco,” in *Good and Proper Materials*, ed. Hermione Hobhouse and Ann Saunders, 18-24, London Topographical Society, no. 140, (London: W.S. Maney and Son Ltd., 1989).

⁶²Alan Cox, “Bricks to Build a Capital,” in *Good and Proper Materials*, ed. Hermione Hobhouse and Ann Saunders, 3-17, London Topographical Society, no. 140, (London: W.S. Maney and Son Ltd., 1989).

⁶³Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton*, 8.

provides a system of proportion to govern the relationship between the elements in an elevation.⁶⁴

Conclusion

Nineteenth century London did not develop at random. There were specific forces that drove its expansion. The most important of those forces was population growth caused by the effects of empire and the agricultural and industrial revolutions. In addition, the relative fashion of an area had an impact on an area's development. There were also laws, construction practices and the leasehold system that helped point the direction. The history of Russell Square is unique as is the history of any location. The Dukes of Bedford developed their large London holdings over a period of seventy-five years. During this time, there were different men holding the ducal title, different sovereigns on the throne of Britain, and different ideas of what constituted a nice place to live. The specific development of Russell Square was important as it reflects this particular moment in London's history. It might not tell a comprehensive tale of London, but it allows a glimpse into a very specific historical moment. Having discussed the general development within London, let us now to move on to the details of Russell Square, its buildings and gardens.

⁶⁴Cruickshank, *Georgian Buildings*, 6.

CHAPTER TWO

Russell Square and its Garden

Iconology refers to an examination of the intrinsic meaning of a work of art. One can find this meaning “by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion—unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work.”¹ This chapter borrows from the field of art history to explore the iconology of Russell Square. Specifically, I argue that the work done by James Burton and Humphry Repton on Russell Square’s architecture and gardens, respectively, reveals deeper meanings about the wealthy elites who owned and managed the development of the space.

During the late eighteenth century, country estates provided the inspiration for urban development. The perceptions of the “upper and upper middle classes toward the country and country pursuits became increasingly romantic.”² The principles of the Picturesque style “which had been applied to the layout of the eighteenth-century garden were, during the Regency period, adapted to the layout of town parks and housing estates: even to the design of streets.”³ In both the architecture and landscape design of Russell Square, the influence of the countryside and the Picturesque was paramount.

¹Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 30.

²James A. Duncan and Nancy G. Duncan, “A Cultural Analysis of Urban Residential Landscapes in North America: The Case of the Anglophile Elite,” in *The City in Cultural Context*, ed. by John A. Agner, John Mercer, and David E. Sopher (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1984), 259.

³Donald Pilcher, *The Regency Style: 1800-1830* (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd., 1948), 13.

The Russell Family

It is with Francis, the fifth Duke of Bedford, that the story of Russell Square begins. On 20 June 1800, Francis obtained an Act of Parliament for developing his estate.⁴ This act stated that a square was to be built of houses of considerable value and that a garden was to be included. The garden was to be railed off and maintained by the residents of the square. The crown had granted the Duke of Bedford the land on which Russell Square rests, making an Act of Parliament necessary to sell it.⁵

Under the direction of Francis, Bedford House was sold and torn down, but he was unable to complete the development of Bloomsbury. Unmarried and without a son, he died after surgery on an incarcerated hernia in 1802. Before his death, however, he contracted with James Burton in 1799, "...to pull down Bedford House offering 5,000 guineas for the materials and furniture."⁶ Since he died without heirs, his brother John became sixth Duke of Bedford. John was "a keen farmer, a collector of the fine arts with a preference for sculpture, an informed botanist and ardent horticulturalist."⁷ Upon succeeding to the dukedom, he was now able to pursue these interests. He started with Woburn, the country estate of the Russell family and turned it into "one of the most magnificent establishments in the country."⁸ The Duke claimed that it was he, himself, who designed the road "from the London entrance to the west front,

⁴See Appendix III for the full text of this Act.

⁵Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 103.

⁶Donald Olsen, *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 52.

⁷Georgiana Blakiston, *Woburn and the Russells* (London: Constable, 1980), 178.

⁸*Ibid.*

assisted by Repton.”⁹ Humphry Repton, the foremost landscape gardener of the day, was hired to re-design the grounds of the Woburn estate.

The Duke’s “inborn love of the country” was quite typical for a member of the landed elite during the Regency period.¹⁰ He was in essence a “Man of Taste.”¹¹ This term reflected the influence of the wealthy on the style of the period. A “Man of Taste” was someone who was changed by the city. It was the urban environment that transformed Georgian taste, “[emerging] in a new guise as those of the Regency.”¹² The improvements the Duke made at Woburn were not directly copied within the development of the Bloomsbury estate, but they were a portent of the changes that were to take place in Russell Square. The city was “viewed as a product of the country, or at least of a set of attitudes and values still powerfully rooted in the idea of land as the foundation of wealth and status.”¹³ Indeed, it was to the country that architects and landscape gardeners looked for inspiration.

The Builder

On 24 June 1800, James Burton (1761-1837) was contracted to build the south side of Russell Square, both sides of Bedford Place, the north side of Bloomsbury Square, and the

⁹Blakiston, *Woburn and the Russells*, 181-82.

¹⁰Rosamond Bayne-Powell, *Eighteenth-Century London Life* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1938), 154.

¹¹For more information on this concept, see Donald Pilcher, “The ‘Man of Taste,’ ” in *The Regency Style: 1800-1830* (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd., 1948), 1-16.

¹²Pilcher, *Regency Style*, 1.

¹³Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 217. First published in 1984 by Croom Helm, Ltd.

southern portion of the west side of Russell Square, from Montague Place south.¹⁴ He paid rent in the amount of £1,572 per year with five years of “peppercorn” (a token amount) rent allowed. Burton, although not well known today, was the most enterprising and successful builder in London in the early nineteenth century.¹⁵ He worked on Russell Square and its adjoining streets from 1800 to 1814, and was largely responsible for the development of Bloomsbury, including the western portion of the Foundling Estate in the 1790s.”¹⁶ He was most well known for his work on houses along Regent’s Park and for his construction of the seaside resort town of St. Leonard’s-on-Sea in Hastings, East Sussex. He was a speculative builder who made a fortune from his work. Over the course of his career, he built some 750 houses worth over two million pounds.

James Burton began the south side of Russell Square by building two streets of terraced housing: Bedford Place and Montague Street. Bedford Place was completed on both sides between 1801 and 1805.¹⁷ Montague Street dates mostly from 1802 to 1811. These streets connect Russell Square and Bloomsbury Square. Each street ended with “shorter terraces set at right angles to face out onto the squares.”¹⁸ Bedford Place and Montague Street

¹⁴See Appendix II for a map of Russell Square. The north side of the square was the responsibility of Henry Scimshaw, Thomas Lewis, and David Alston, Jr. who built using the contractual agreements developed by James Burton and James Gubbins.

¹⁵Howard Colvin, *The Biographical Dictionary of English Architecture, 1660-1840* (London: J. Murray, 1978), 174.

¹⁶Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 52.

¹⁷Edward Walford, *Old and New London: A Narrative of Its History, Its People, and Its Places*, vol. 4, *Westminster and the Western Suburbs* (London: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1897), 566.

¹⁸Peter Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton: Architectural Trends in England* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1961), 9.

...have extremely austere brick façades with equally spaced windows, stucco ground floors, and third floor cill courses to imply a cornice level. Despite this repetition and austerity, however, the bold and generous proportions of the facades-which have a well emphasized *piano nobile*¹⁹-save these houses from any feeling of meanness.²⁰

This form was consistent with the Palladian style popular in the early nineteenth century. The Palladian style was characterized by a return to classicism and the influence of Greek and Roman architecture. The key ideas of this style were simplicity and “the rejection of exuberant decoration.”²¹

In 1896, the west side of Russell Square was given a terracotta facelift, but originally had a “pedimented shallow stucco bay relieved by Ionic pilasters.”²² Stucco was used to give the impression of stone building material, but it was also used to protect the face of the building from the wet London weather.²³ Ionic pilasters were used to give the impression of columns, but were not designed to support the structure. The cill (also called sill) course, was a horizontal line of bricks projecting from a wall at the level of the windowsills. Burton was looking for continuity of design and, to accomplish this, he used a few details throughout: continuous basement rustication, balconies the width of the house, and center and end bays to emphasize the verticality of the buildings.²⁴

¹⁹Piano nobile: the principal floor; usually the first floor which has the advantage of being raised above street noise and dirt but not too distant a trek up the stairs. In Dan Cruickshank, *A Guide to the Georgian Buildings of Britain & Ireland* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 303.

²⁰Cruickshank, *Guide to Georgian Buildings* 32.

²¹Stefan Muthesius, *The English Terraced House* (London: Yale University Press, 1982), 242.

²²Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton*, 11.

²³Cruickshank, *Guide to Georgian Buildings*, 303.

²⁴Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton*, 10. See Appendix III for pictures of the façades of Russell Square.

The development of the streets surrounding Russell Square was based on the astylar²⁵ terrace form. This form required uniformity of design within the façade of the structure and was very regimented. On the Bedford Estate, this style “might be termed the ‘speculative builders’ aesthetic.”²⁶ It differed from the Later Regency style because it used stucco and architectural ornamentation sparingly. As a ground landlord, the Duke of Bedford was concerned with financial and structural matters rather than aesthetic ones.²⁷ He demanded first-rate houses in his building contracts, but left the actual design of the façade up to Burton. Burton’s relatively simple design for the façade was in keeping with the current architectural style, but also suited the needs to keep the building costs down.

Detailed elevations of the building plans were included on the reverse of the contract agreed to by James Burton and the Duke. Although James Gubbins signed the plans, these same elevations were displayed by James Burton at the Royal Academy under the title, “West view of the houses erecting at the back of Bedford House, the south side of Russell Square.”²⁸ This, plus the wording of the contract as noted earlier, was strong evidence that Burton designed the façades of Russell Square.

Although he was in control of the facades, much of the rest of the structure was subcontracted out to masons, joiners, and iron workers who were themselves speculative

²⁵Astylar: of elevation, designed without columns, pilasters, or piers. In Cruickshank, *Georgian Buildings*, 302.

²⁶Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton*, 10.

²⁷Cruickshank, *Georgian Buildings*, 22.

²⁸Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 53 n.

builders.²⁹ The speculative building system was a method used between builders and landowners to spread the financial risk of development.

A well-known phenomenon in London was “the art of building slightly.”³⁰ If the quality of materials were not stipulated in the building contract, builders often used inferior materials and built quickly, rather than well. Concealed brickwork was often made from under-fired (i.e. poorly made) bricks. The façades were of higher quality bricks, but suffered their own problems. Only one brick thick—four inches in total—the façade bricks only bonded with the interior work by happenstance; there were no planned joinings. However, brickwork was not the only problem. There was also the use of softwood timber as supports, and even the lime mortar itself was often mixed with street dirt. “[T]he builder, unless his grace tyes [sic] him down in articles, does not choose to employ his money and his advantage” to build with high quality materials.³¹ To protect himself, the Duke of Bedford stipulated every detail in the contract to ensure the quality of the materials and the greatest return for his money.

James Gubbins, surveyor for the sixth Duke of Bedford, ensured the quality of the work performed on the Bedford estate as a whole. Because Burton was contracted to construct such a large area of the Bedford estate, it was difficult for him to oversee the continuity of design for the entire project. This is why Gubbins was to oversee this aspect of the construction project. James Burton’s construction on the Bedford estate was part of “a sequence of efforts to produce scaled down and watered down versions of aristocratic housing arrangements suited to smaller incomes: town terraces were imitations in gradations of compression and austerity of upper-class

²⁹Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton*, 9.

³⁰Cruickshank, *Georgian Buildings*, 23.

³¹*Ibid.*

town houses...”³² It was not just architecture, but also the parkland of country estates that were being imitated.

James Burton was the foremost builder in London at the turn of the nineteenth century. His work on Russell Square set the tone for the continued development of the Bedford estate. It was his responsibility to construct houses that would attract tenants from the upper classes. Although this class of tenants did not populate Russell Square, it was not his designs that were at issue. He used features of popular architecture that should have resonated with the Regency period elite. However, it was not just the architecture that was designed with the elite in mind.

The Garden at the Center of Russell Square

Some people have falsely assumed that England is a nation of shopkeepers, but that is not the case at all. England is rather a nation of gardeners, and London...has managed to provide all manner of internal spaces to accommodate the performance of carefully tended grassy lawns and coloured flower beds that contribute so importantly to satisfying that need for greenery.³³

London as an urban environment was not ideal. Everyone living in nineteenth century London suffered from “bad drainage, bad air, bad water, and bad smells.”³⁴ Cities were perceived as less healthy than the country for a variety of reasons. These included working in factories, water and air pollution, and overcrowding. Thus, it was to the country that the elites looked for inspiration for their city landscapes. They looked back with nostalgia at the rural past and attempted to re-create it. The countryside was seen “as innocent and virtuous. Pastoral visions were particularly potent because England’s grandees gloried in a country-house

³²F.M.L. Thompson, ed., *The Rise of Suburbia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 9.

³³Nicolai Canetti and Sandy Lesberg, *The Parks, Squares, and Mews of London* (Indianapolis, IN: Peables Press International, 1976), 5.

³⁴James Winter, *London's Teeming Streets: 1830-1914* (London: Routledge, 1993), 153-54.

culture...”³⁵ The elites wanted to retreat from the overcrowded and narrow streets of London because of the streets’ association with degeneracy and disease.

With construction of Covent Garden in the 1660s, “[t]he Bedford estate saw no better use for the open space in the center of Covent Garden than to rent it for a market...”³⁶ This changed by the time Russell Square was built in the early 1800s. Open space was now considered a valuable part of a square’s amenities, to be maintained as open space. A central garden was seen as a way to “display wealth in land as an attribute of taste and wealth...The landscape park was then a metonym for wealth, firstly, in its area understood as a proportion of a landholding, and secondly, in its exclusivity.”³⁷ By not developing the land, the owners were indicating their lack of need for the income it could have generated. In addition, a garden view “wants appropriation; it wants that charm which only belongs to ownership, the *exclusive right* of enjoyment, with the power of refusing that others should share our pleasure...”³⁸ By limiting access to the square and keeping it locked to non-residents, the owners were maintaining the status of the garden. These two aspects—wealth and exclusivity—were incorporated into the design for Russell Square garden. As the second largest garden square, there was no question that the Dukes of Bedford were foregoing a potentially large source of additional income. In terms of its exclusivity, the

³⁵Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 113.

³⁶Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Fall and Rise of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), 24.

³⁷John Macarthur, “Visual Appropriation and Property in the Theory of Humphry Repton,” in *The Geography of Law: Landscape, Identity and Regulation* (Portland, OR: Hart Publishing, 2006), 51.

³⁸Humphry Repton, *The Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the Late Humphry Repton, Esq.: Being His Entire Works on These Subjects*, ed. J.C. Loudon (London: Longman and Co., 1840), 601.

very Act of Parliament that created the gardens demanded that railings be installed and it be used only by residents of the square and, of course, the Duke of Bedford and his family.

The idea of a return to a pastoral idyll influenced nineteenth century building laws. As we have seen, the text of the Act of Parliament that allowed for the creation of Russell Square also required a garden built in the center.³⁹ The act reads in part:

...it would be much to the benefit and advantage of the owners and occupiers of the houses erected and to be erected in the said intended square, if the centre or area of the same was inclosed [sic] and railed in with iron rails, and if the inclosure or inclosed part was planted and laid out with walks, and properly ornamented and embellished, and made into a pleasure ground.⁴⁰

Parliament, filled with members of the elite classes, embraced the notion that it was beneficial for residents to live around a garden. Interestingly, they also called for it to be restricted to the use of its residents. These same residents were called upon to pay for the garden's maintenance and upkeep.

Humphry Repton, Landscape Gardener

The sixth duke commissioned Humphry Repton to build a garden in the center of Russell Square to commemorate his late brother, Francis. Humphry Repton was born in 1752 in Suffolk, England and started his career as a landscape gardener in 1788 at the age of 36. His first commission was in Norwich. He obtained it through a friend, William Windham, with whom he had worked in Ireland as a private secretary in 1783. He stayed in Ireland only three months, but this stay was very influential on his future as a landscape gardener. There, he met and became

³⁹See Appendix IV for full text of this act.

⁴⁰Danby Pickering, *The Statutes at Large from Magna Charta to the End of the Eleventh Parliament of Great Britain, Anno 1761 [Continued to 1806]* (Cambridge: John Burges Printer to the University, 1762-1807), 890.

friends with many wealthy landowners. It was they and their friends who gave Repton his start.⁴¹ During the five years following his departure from Ireland, Repton tried his hand at a number of occupations—as a writer, an investor in armed mail coaches, and as an art critic. He and his wife, Mary, moved from Old Hall, a brick manor house in Aylsham they had purchased with funds after the death of his parents, to the village of Hare Street in Essex after the loss of his position in Ireland.⁴² This brought him much closer to London. He was thirteen miles away, but the village he moved to was only a mile from a coach hub. His new home was convenient, as “[s]tage-coaches to London from throughout East Anglia passed Repton’s front door...”⁴³ This proximity to both the countryside and to London allowed him to expand his business beyond just the country estates of the elite.

Repton’s definition of the art of landscape gardening was “the pleasing combination of Art and Nature adapted to the use of Man.”⁴⁴ Repton was an admirer of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, the foremost landscape gardener in the late eighteenth century. Third in the line of prominent leaders of the English landscape garden movement after Brown and William Kent, however, Repton was the first to call himself a landscape gardener.⁴⁵ He believed that “...the art

⁴¹Edward Malins, *The Red Books of Humphry Repton*, vol. 4, *Explanatory Volume* (London: Basilisk Press, 1976), 12.

⁴²Edward Hyams, *Humphry Repton and Capability Brown* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 119.

⁴³Stephen Daniels, *Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 59.

⁴⁴Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London: J. Taylor, 1816; New York: Garland Pub., 1982), viii.

⁴⁵Dorothy Stroud, *Humphry Repton* (London: Country Life, 1962), 11. For more information on William Kent and Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, see John Hunt Dixon, *William*

can only be advanced and perfected by the united powers of the *landscape painter* and *practical gardener*.”⁴⁶ His ability to combine both skills—gardening and painting—was at the heart of his reputation.

It was his skill as a watercolorist that truly set Repton apart. Humphry Repton was perhaps best known for his *Red Books*. The books get their name from the color of their leather bindings.⁴⁷ He produced over 400 of these volumes, created as show pieces to display his work. Although not large—they were typically nine by twelve inches—they were important advertisements for his work. Potential employers were provided with a visual guide to the planned changes to their property. They contained watercolor paintings of properties on which he had been commissioned to work. To some extent these books were almost like blueprints, since Repton created an image of what a landscape could become.

A highly original feature of Repton’s *Red Books* was the overflap.⁴⁸ This is similar to a common feature today in children’s pop-up books. One image is visible on the page, but when the flap was lifted, the changes Repton recommended became visible. This made it very easy for the potential customer to see the changes Repton had in mind. It was also possible for the owner of the land to make any suggestions or alterations before construction began.

Kent: Landscape Garden Designer (1987) and Roger Turner, *Capability Brown and the Eighteenth Century English Landscape* (1985).

⁴⁶Humphry Repton, *An Inquiry Into the Changes of Taste in Landscape Gardening, to Which are Added Some Observations on Its Theory and Practice, Including a Defence of the Art* (London: J. Taylor, 1806; Farnborough, England: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969), 43.

⁴⁷Stroud, *Humphry Repton*, 36.

⁴⁸See Appendix V for an example of the overflap.

Included with the watercolors was explanatory text that gave the owner some sense of the reasons for the changes Repton was advocating and planning. These books were not always followed to the letter and, in fact, sometimes books were made for properties that were never developed by Repton. There were various reasons for this. Sometimes property changed owners. The land was sold or the owner died. Sometimes money became scarce and garden design was no longer a priority. Of those gardens for which he did complete the work, few are still recognizable as his design. One of those places is Woburn, the ancestral home of the Dukes of Bedford. Although no Red Book was made for Russell Square, one of the largest of all the volumes is the one he created for Woburn gardens. His work on this estate in 1804 was the reason Repton was hired for Russell Square's garden in the first place.

In 1794, a controversy erupted between Repton, Richard Payne Knight, and Uvedale Price. The debate involved gardening theory, and began after Price and Knight published works attacking Capability Brown.⁴⁹ His response to their writings helped to form his reputation as a landscape gardener working not only in the Picturesque style, but incorporating Brown's ideas as well. Brown's predilection for the "false beauty" of manicured lawns and overly thick plantings of trees was abhorrent to Knight and Price, who worked purely in the Picturesque style. Their work involved a more rugged, naturalistic garden that was left somewhat wild and tried to re-create the feeling of a landscape painting.⁵⁰ Repton selected some ideas from Capability Brown, but was more moderate in their application. He was able to use the ideas of Brown, but was ever

⁴⁹For more on this controversy, see Richard Payne Knight, *The Landscape: A Didactic Poem* (1795), Uvedale Price, *Thoughts on the Defence of Property* (1797), and Humphry Repton, *The Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the Late Humphry Repton, Esq.: Being His Entire Works on These Subjects*, ed. J.C. Loudon (1840).

⁵⁰Stroud, *Humphry Repton*, 82-83.

mindful of the result he sought: a garden. Creation of a landscape or of a picture was not his goal.

Brown “taught that nature was to be our only model.”⁵¹ Repton made clear in his writing that he followed other models as well, including Picturesque theory. He argued that what worked in one setting could be seen as ridiculous in another. He was concerned because “there is as much difference between garden scenery, park scenery, and forest scenery, as between horticulture, agriculture, and uncultivated nature.”⁵² There were different design principles for a forest and a garden and they should not be intermixed. A garden should conform closely to the desires of those who are to be using it. Similarly, park design was inherently artificial and often made little attempt to represent nature. In Repton’s work, the choice of plants—including where and how they were planted—were based both on their ability to produce a work of art and also on the particular needs of the setting and those using the space. In this way, Repton allowed for practicality as an essential part of his design.

By 1800, Repton’s style was becoming more emblematic; he was more often choosing plants for their symbolic meaning. He tended to distinguish the uses of softwoods and hardwoods by their social associations. Deciduous trees, especially oak, “were claimed to be venerable, patriarchal, stately, guardian and quintessentially English.”⁵³ Conifers, on the other hand, were a symbol of the newly wealthy “parvenus with neither money nor taste.”⁵⁴ Gardeners who worked

⁵¹Repton, *Inquiry*, 6.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 10.

⁵³Stephen Daniels, “The Political Iconography of Woodland,” in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 48.

⁵⁴Cosgrove and Daniels, *Iconography of Landscape*, 68.

in the picturesque style “found it increasingly difficult to abstract the formal qualities of landscape features from their social associations.”⁵⁵ This is where the use of oak and elm became a statement. When gardeners refused to use conifers like fir and larch even though they were more suitable for thin soil and were fast growing, they were comparing these plants with the nouveau riche. Repton’s philosophy was that “[c]onifers in traditionally deciduous landscapes were, like garish modern villas, signs of the disruptive influence of the new, often industrially rich...”⁵⁶ He preferred oak and elm because they were symbols of England.

In addition, Repton often worked in direct opposition to the principles of ancient Roman and Greek gardening. There were three main principles of ancient gardening. First, it was important to clearly delineate the art that had been produced instead of making a garden look like nature. Second, designers were supposed to subscribe to the most recent fashion regardless of the site’s inherent qualities. Finally, objects of convenience—stables, kitchen gardens, and barns—were placed close to the house without regard for their appearance.⁵⁷

Humphry Repton laid out four requirements for the perfection of landscaping gardening, some of which were in direct opposition to ancient gardening principles. The first was for a garden to display its natural beauty, “[hiding] the natural defects of every situation.”⁵⁸ The second was for a garden to have a sense of freedom and expanse. In a city garden, screening the edges of the property offered an oasis from the city. Rather than simply looking out onto buildings, nature surrounded the perimeter. Third was the disguising of the work involved in the

⁵⁵Cosgrove and Daniels, *Iconography of Landscape*, 57.

⁵⁶Cosgrove and Daniels, *Iconography of Landscape*, 52.

⁵⁷Repton, *Inquiry*, 35.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 34.

creation of a garden. Everything was supposed to appear as if intended by nature itself. The final aspect of landscape gardening, according to Repton, had to do with items in the garden that were only there for convenience or comfort. His concept was to incorporate these into the general layout of the scene or to make them ornamental. If this was not possible, these items had to be omitted from the garden. His overarching principle was one of unity. A well-planned urban garden should create a feeling of the country, block views of the city, and allow for each part of the garden to flow seamlessly into the next.⁵⁹

Repton's theory on landscape gardening was simple: "Places are not to be laid out with a view to their appearance in a picture, but to their uses, and the enjoyment of them in real life; and their conformity to these purposes is that which constitutes their beauty."⁶⁰ Using this theory to analyze the landscape of Russell Square, it was easy to see his theory at work. The perimeter screen was planted to offer some shield from the road to allow those in the garden to feel like they were in the country. The idea of bringing the country to the city was an essential component in the creation of open space in London. The gravel walkways within Russell Square garden were not a simple straight design because people walking through the park enjoyed the surprise of not knowing what was around the bend in the path. There were flowers planted in the center to offer some color. The trees were planted to offer cover in winter and shade in summer. The resting areas were for strollers to enjoy the serene quiet of the garden and, finally, grass sections were included to allow children to play. All of these plantings were practical and offered the residents of the square something more than simply a grass field. There was a thoughtfulness and a plan to the variety offered to allow many uses of the open space.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Stroud, *Humphry Repton*, 84.

The Garden Design

[T]his square may serve to record, that the Art of Landscape Gardening in the beginning of the nineteenth century was not directed by whim or caprice, but founded on a due consideration of utility as well as beauty, without a bigoted adherence to forms and lines, whether straight, or crooked, or serpentine.⁶¹

Prior to his work on Russell Square, Repton's work had all been on large-scale country estates. His entire output in London consisted of a mere three squares—Cadogan, Bloomsbury, and Russell—and two other commissions, Carlton House for the Prince of Wales, and Fitzroy Farm in Highgate for Lord Southampton. Because of this, he was more familiar with trying to enhance the natural character of a broad topography rather than designing plantings for a “restricted style, bounded on all sides by architecture.”⁶²

Repton's own writings contained the best references to the garden design of Russell Square. He laid out his design plans in his 1806 work, *An Inquiry into the Changes of Taste in Landscape Gardening, to which are Added Some Observations on Its Theory and Practice, Including a Defence of the Art*. This appeared to be the first time a professional landscape gardener was hired to construct a public garden.⁶³ This was the beginning of the transformation of opinion about urban green space; these public gardens came to be as highly valued as great estate parkland. The layout of Russell Square itself provided the opportunity for a garden. Earliest tradition was to have plain graveled walks in the Romantic landscape style.⁶⁴ Gardens were designed by the architect of the square or more commonly were simply open fields.

⁶¹Repton, *Inquiry*, 64.

⁶²Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton*, 11.

⁶³Stroud, *Humphry Repton*, 136.

⁶⁴ Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *London 4: North*, Buildings of London (London: Penguin, 1998), 32.

Occasionally, owners of the land would neglect any type of development and the center of the square became a dumping ground, the source of frequent complaints and calls for clean-up.⁶⁵

Before Repton was asked to design the garden, the center of Russell Square was completely leveled at great expense. This prevented him from engaging in one of the more common Picturesque techniques of using varying elevations to highlight certain areas of landscaping. It also left the garden itself at a slightly lower level than the street, as the removed soil was used in the creation of bricks for the houses of the square.⁶⁶ The north and west sides of the gardens were higher in elevation than the east and south. This had the unfortunate result of causing puddling on the pavement whenever it rained. This issue was not fixed until proper drainage was installed in 1868.⁶⁷ The leveled ground was something of a disappointment for Repton as it limited his design possibilities.

Repton's overall design consisted of "a semiformal arrangement, circular and diagonal paths amid lawn, neatly pruned shrubs, and straight rows of trees."⁶⁸ The garden contained clipped hornbeam, and privet formed the perimeter screen. A broad gravel walk was on the inside, encircling a grass lawn. In the center was a flower garden and erected on the south side of the garden, a statue of Francis, fifth Duke of Bedford. A committee was tasked with raising subscriptions to pay Richard Westmacott, a sculptor, to construct this statue. This committee decided to position the statue on one side of the square "facing Bloomsbury, and forming an

⁶⁵Alicia Cecil Rocklay, *London Parks and Gardens* (London: A. Constable & Co. Ltd., 1907), 224.

⁶⁶Rowland Dobie, *The History of the United Parishes of St. Giles-in-the-fields* (London: F. Marshall, 1829), 172.

⁶⁷Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 157.

⁶⁸Henry Lawrence, *City Trees: A Historical Geography from the Renaissance through the Nineteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 149.

appropriate perspective, as seen through the vista of the streets crossing the two squares.”⁶⁹

Westmacott created a bronze statue nine feet tall on a granite pedestal eighteen feet tall. The statue honors the late duke’s agricultural interests with depictions of the four seasons, a sheaf of wheat and a ploughshare in basso relievo.⁷⁰

The area nearest the statue contained London plane trees (*Platanus acerifolia*), which were planted in an irregular pattern. These trees were trimmed to a particular height to maintain the silhouette of the statue against the sky when viewed from below. Other areas of the garden were planted more informally, following the tastes of the time. Flowers and shrubs were planted in both regular and irregular patterns to appease those who enjoyed a formal garden as well as those who wanted a more Picturesque view. Repton advised perfect symmetry for these small flower gardens secluded from the general scenery.⁷¹ Repton based his ideas on symmetry versus variety on the writings of Montesquieu, who said “things that we see in succession ought to have variety, for our soul has no difficulty in seeing them: those, on the contrary, that we see at one glance, ought to have symmetry...”⁷² The relatively small size of these flower gardens lent themselves to a symmetrical design under this principle.

In addition to the flowers, the center of the garden featured a “repositoir...with four low seats, covered with slate or canvas, to shelter from rain, and four open seats to be covered with climbing plants, trained on open lattice, to defend from the sun...”⁷³ Repton again was showing

⁶⁹Repton, *Landscape Gardening*, 343.

⁷⁰See Appendix VI for a picture of this statue.

⁷¹Repton, *Inquiry*, 39.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 69

⁷³*Ibid.*, 63-64.

his knowledge of the specific needs of the location on which he was working, since London had an annual rainfall of thirty inches and only 125 days of sunshine. Repton planned for both of these eventualities with his seating plan.

There was no direct route across the garden square. Instead, a path followed the perimeter of the north and west sides of the square. From this path extended a walkway that cut through the center of the garden, from the northwest corner through to the southeast corner. A secondary pathway began in the southwest corner, and continued through the center of the garden and three-quarters of the way to the northeast corner, before making a ninety-degree turn to the west. It then met up with the perimeter walkway along the north side.

These pathways were intended to offer a refuge from the city. The dense planting of lime and plane trees was deliberate.⁷⁴ They blocked all direct sight lines across the square. The path itself often disappeared between the trees because of the narrow, twisting nature of the route. The garden of Russell Square contained “all the elements of Picturesque landscaping; irregularity, variety, concealment, surprise, the subtle constraint of the eye, of the feet, and the play on the senses.”⁷⁵

Repton’s design for the walkway within Russell Square garden included “two rows of lime trees, regularly planted at equal distances, not in a perfect circle, but finishing in two straight lines directed to the angle of the pedestal.”⁷⁶ The formality of this design was opposed by Picturesque designers, but Repton was more concerned with the end result. It was his plan

⁷⁴These lime trees were not original to Bedford House, as those were sold at auction along with the contents of the house. See Appendix VII.

⁷⁵Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton*, 12.

⁷⁶Repton, *Inquiry*, 62.

that the lime trees (*Tilia* species), when fully grown, would be trimmed to form an arch creating “a perfect artificial shade, forming a cloister-like walk composed of trees.”⁷⁷

The type of plants Repton chose were significant. A very knowledgeable gardener, he was familiar with what grew successfully in the soil and climate of Russell Square. He chose plants native to London as well as more recent imports. The plane tree and lime tree were by far the most common plant in London at this time. His choices did not include more traditional plants like evergreens or laurels. Although the latter plants were in style at the time, they were not as suitable to urban conditions.⁷⁸ Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) and privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*) were hardier plants and would survive the length of time required for the rest of the garden to reach full maturation. Using plants that were fashionable was contrary to Repton’s philosophy. It was more important to Repton that the end effect, only seen years down the road, would match his vision of the garden.

Repton used straight lines in his design of the perimeter plantings. In order to screen the walkway from the street, he planted a hedge of hornbeam and privet. His intention was to grow them to the height of six feet and keep them well trimmed. The height of the hedge was important to Repton because he wanted to make sure that mothers would be able to see their children at play within the confines of the garden. This implied two things. The first was that it was common for children to play in the garden unattended. The second was that it was important for children to be able to play outside.

Repton’s plan was to create a space that offered a degree of privacy and seclusion. This referred to the entire garden, not just to the walkway or reposoir (the areas set aside for resting).

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., 61.

It was an essential quality of the square that those using it would be secluded from the streets and buildings. It was not enough to simply have the garden space, but it was also an important feature that the city be blocked from view while within the confines of the garden. This, however, was in conflict with the requests by the mothers to make it possible to see their children at play.

...Gardening must include the two opposite characters of native wildness and artificial comfort, each adapted to the genius and character of the place; yet ever mindful that near the residence of man, convenience, and not picturesque effect, must have the preference, wherever they are placed in competition with each other.⁷⁹

So at all times, Repton worked between the contrasting and conflicting needs of beauty and utility. He never truly solved this dilemma, but instead compromised his design, putting the needs of utility first. He was also trying to create art, a beautiful landscape for people to enjoy. His writings, full of comparisons between landscape gardening, landscape painting, sculpture and architecture, clearly indicate his artistic influences, but Repton never forgot the importance of utility.

The planning of the garden took into consideration the needs of those who were going to use it. There was a need for a place for children to play, there was a desire for people to be able to walk in a country-like setting, and there was a need for a place to rest and escape the rain. There was also a need for color and grass and trees. Repton provided a lawn for children, but also “on the particular wishes of some mothers...the lawn is less clothed with plantation than it might have been on the principle of beauty alone.”⁸⁰

At heart, Repton was a practical landscaper. He frequently re-worked designs for such reasons as not wanting to offend the owner, or simply because the owner liked things a certain

⁷⁹Ibid., 137.

⁸⁰Ibid., 62.

way. He did not demand a certain style or particular plant if the owner did not want it, or if it did not suit the garden. When working on property that had been developed earlier by Capability Brown, Repton showed remarkable restraint in that he did not make too many adjustments and simply refined the work already done. He refused to re-grade Russell Square even though a flat piece of land did not allow for his usual style to be used. In his work on larger estates, he often complained about previous designers putting the kitchen gardens so far away from the house that they became nearly unusable for the staff. Even on his own property, he made use of a trellis of flowers to hide the neighborhood butcher shop across the way. This screen was simple, but effective. Within a portion of Russell Square, he included a plan for a gardener's tool shed. He understood not only the needs of the landscape, but also the needs of those charged to maintain it.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of the design and construction of Russell Square and its gardens, this chapter uncovered the intrinsic meaning of this location. In art history terms, this is the iconology of the square. Although not a "work of art," Russell Square is able to reveal some basic truths about the development of housing by and for the urban elite in the nineteenth century. There were many factors that influenced the decisions of the Dukes of Bedford, James Burton, and Humphry Repton when developing Russell Square. By understanding these factors, it is possible to understand the influence of the countryside and the Picturesque on the overall development of the Bloomsbury portion of the Bedford estate.

CHAPTER THREE

Russell Square Versus London

This chapter will compare the development of Russell Square with three other areas of London: Bedford Square, Belgrave Square and the Foundling Hospital Estate. Why were these areas chosen? What historical significance do they have within the greater scope of London's history? My interest began with the gardens of Russell Square. As one of only three areas within London designed by Humphry Repton, the foremost landscape gardener of his age, Russell Square was restored in 2002 based on the original nineteenth century layout. While researching this square, it became apparent that its development was not an isolated creation, but was instead part of a greater trend within London. Large-scale residential construction projects were nearly constant from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries. These projects were an essential component of town planning in London in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was large landowners developing their properties, not the city government, who had the largest impact on the way London was built during this time.

But what factors contributed to the development of these projects? Each building project attracted a specific social class because of specific criteria. These criteria included their location within greater London, planning by landowners, and the design of the gardens. This chapter will look at one criterion per area of comparison. When discussing location within greater London, Russell Square will be compared with Belgrave Square, both of which were located within the parish of St. George. For planning by landowners, Russell Square will be compared with the Foundling Hospital estate. And, finally, for garden design, the comparison will be between Russell Square and Bedford Square. All four of the areas under examination were connected to the Russell family or their estate in Bloomsbury. The Bedford estate made up a large portion of

Bloomsbury and was the site of both Bedford and Russell Squares. The Foundling Hospital estate sits adjacent to their property to the east. Belgrave Square was home to the Russell family from the time of its completion in 1828.

Location, Location, Location

One of the most important criteria for Londoners when choosing a residence was the location within the context of greater London. From the 1660s, with the creation of St. James Square, through the end of the nineteenth century, the closer the neighborhood to the West End, the higher the inhabitants' social class. The opposite was also true; proximity to the East End of London was an indicator of a lower social class of residents. In addition, even once respectable areas could quickly become 'infected' by the lower classes if they were too near a slum. This phenomenon became more noticeable as London expanded. Yet another factor in determining the social class of an area was the extent to which it was segregated by class. The more highly segregated, the more likely the area to fall within one of the two extremes: extreme wealth or extreme poverty.

The combination of the royal court, the Houses of Parliament, and the abbey in Westminster were important factors in attracting building development to West London. The dismantling of the monasteries in the 1530s by Henry VIII provided substantial land for development. All that was needed was a reason to develop the land. This came in 1665-66 with an outbreak of the plague, followed by the Great Fire. The fire consumed about four-fifths of the city; over 450 acres were devastated. It caused the destruction of over 13,000 homes, "[400] streets lay smoking; 100,000 were homeless."¹ The plague had killed 80,000 Londoners just a

¹Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 88.

few months before this.² After this destruction and loss of life, wealthy Londoners took this opportunity to move “to the more spacious and presumably healthier quarters being built to the west.”³

During the eighteenth century, development within London continued at a rapid pace, hemmed in only by certain natural and man-made barriers including the River Thames to the south and the New Road to the north. The City marked the eastern boundary and to the west was Hyde Park.⁴ These boundaries limited the direction of expansion. The New Road and the development around Hyde Park encouraged residential areas to be built to the north and west.

The history of fashionable neighborhoods in London begins in The City, moving in the seventeenth century to Covent Garden and Bloomsbury. Fashion moved west to “Marylebone and Mayfair in the eighteenth century, and then proceeded to colonize Belgravia and parts of Kensington.”⁵ The court and the crown were the initial lures to the West End. Since the time of Charles I (r.1625-1649), the London “Season” had drawn upper-class ministers of parliament and their households to court. Coinciding with the opening of Parliament, the season lasted only a few months of the year, with London being the quietest during the summer months.⁶ Because of this, the elite did not require housing in London year-round, but would return to their country

²Porter, *London*, 84.

³Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 133-34.

⁴Andrew Byrne, *Bedford Square: An Architectural Study* (London: Althone Press, 1990), 43.

⁵Olsen, *Work of Art*, 160.

⁶Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries. *The Making of Modern London: 1815-1914* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1983), 45.

estates at the end of each season. Rural landowners brought their wealth with them and used it to build or rent homes in the increasingly fashionable West End.

There were many reasons the West End was attractive as a residential neighborhood. First, the River Thames flowed west to east. As the river was used as both a source of drinking water and a sewer, the farther west one lived, the cleaner the water. Second was the distance from the industry and factories of the East End. These factors were important when considered in light of ideas about health and disease transmission and the social segregation of classes. Disease was thought to be transmitted through the air, but ideas of illness were also attached to working in factories and offices. There was a concern starting around the time of the Industrial Revolution in the 1770s that men were becoming emasculated and weak from the work that was required in factories.

The West End also offered endless amusements for the wealthy elite. It was home to the most fashionable modistes, the choicest of shopping, and of course, the parks and pleasure gardens where the elite would go to see and be seen. If one's residence was not part of this privileged area, it would have been difficult to reach the enjoyments of the finer things. The lack of convenient and affordable transportation for the lower classes made it difficult for them to travel to the West End. Hansom cabs were not introduced until 1834, and the horse-driven omnibus was not prevalent until the mid-nineteenth century. This led to only the wealthy being able to afford to live away from their workplaces. They were the only ones who could afford to own private carriages and to maintain a mews to house their horses. Thus, the West End was populated by the wealthy because of the amusements offered and its distance from most areas of employment.

There was a distinct segregation of classes within London, and this was clearly apparent in the West End. The majority of the residents were from the upper class because the West End tolerated “only such working class pockets as were necessary for the supply of servants and tradesmen.”⁷ Segregation was a reality in older parts of London, but instead of living in spacious dwellings like those found in Belgrave Square, the working classes lived in “increasing densities under deteriorating conditions” in the eastern and southern areas of the city.⁸ The separation of classes was an important component in the “success” of Belgrave Square.

Belgrave Square was in Belgravia, the heart of the West End. Russell Square was in Bloomsbury, still within the West End, but farther to the east. Although Bloomsbury and Belgravia currently lie in the north central area of London, in the late eighteenth century they were on the outskirts. Bloomsbury “never became an important commercial or shopping center”⁹ in part because it was in close “proximity to the crime quarter of St. Giles” to the west and southwest.¹⁰ Before the demolition of Bedford house and before the creation of Russell Square, this land in Bloomsbury was home to the mansions of three aristocratic families: the Dukes of Bedford and Montague, and the Earl of Thanet. Beyond this, there was but a single fashionable square, Bloomsbury Square, and a number of unremarkable homes. South of Bloomsbury lay the

⁷Michael Aston and James Bond, *The Landscape of Towns* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1976), 153.

⁸Michael Aston and James Bond, *The Landscape of Towns* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1976), 153.

⁹Donald J. Olsen, *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 43.

¹⁰Hugh Phillips, *Mid-Georgian London: A Topographical and Social Survey of Central and Western London about 1750* (London: Collins, 1964), 210.

“notorious rookery of St. Giles;”¹¹ an important component in the future of Bloomsbury and its social character. Proximity to this slum nearly ensured that this area of London, no matter the quality of the architecture, would not attract the level of tenant desired by the landowners.

Thus, although the Duke of Bedford was a member of the elite class and sought to develop his property for clientele of a similar position in society, he was unable to attract tenants higher than the upper middle class. There was one significant problem that could not be overcome: location. The distance from more fashionable neighborhoods created “doubt whether respectable tenants, able to pay the rent of a first-class house, would reside in a situation so far removed from the more frequented portions of the town.”¹² By 1840, Christopher Hawdy, the Bedford estate agent, was aware of the lack of regard for Bloomsbury and wrote to the Duke about possible tenants giving “preference to a more fashionable address at the west or north-west end of this town.”¹³

No amount of wide streets and fine houses could attract the occupants the Duke of Bedford hoped would live in Russell Square. This was not foreseen by the developers, as is evident from the building plans. Only first-rate houses were included in these plans. The number of people who belonged to the elite class was insufficient to fill the number of homes that had been constructed with them in mind. There were fortunes to be made for builders who were successful and “[t]he system was energized by mortgaging on a massive scale.”¹⁴ This made it profitable to build housing for this class, but it was also risky.

¹¹Olsen, *Work of Art*, 135.

¹²R.H. Nichols and F.A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 78.

¹³Weightman and Humphries, *Making of Modern London*, 50.

Built in 1828, Belgrave Square was the centerpiece of the Grosvenor estate in Belgravia. It was an immediate success. To take part in the London “season,” “anybody who was anybody absolutely had to have a place in Mayfair or Belgravia.”¹⁵ From the time of its construction, leading members of the British aristocracy occupied Belgrave Square. In fact, the Duke of Bedford, London's leading freehold landlord and owner of much of Bloomsbury, chose No. 6 Belgrave Square as his London home. Close to Buckingham Palace (the residence of George IV beginning in the 1820s) and near Westminster, the area of Belgravia was attractive to the wealthy elite and both titled and untitled Parliamentarians.¹⁶

Belgrave Square remained fashionable from the time of its creation in part because of the estate's efforts to prohibit trade and manufacturing. A strictly residential neighborhood was one key factor in attracting the upper class and keeping out tradesmen. The practice of shopkeepers living above their businesses was no longer seen as acceptable within nice neighborhoods. This helped keep Belgravia residential, fashionable, and segregated.¹⁷

Building first-rate houses was not enough to attract “first-rate” tenants. In London, the location of the construction was just as important as the quality of the homes.

It was one thing to build a street of mansions with Belgrave Square immediately to the rear and the grounds of Buckingham Palace to the front; quite another to maintain the character of an enclave of first-class houses surrounded on every side by socially inferior districts.¹⁸

¹⁴Porter, *London*, 207.

¹⁵Weightman and Humphries, *Making of Modern London*, 42.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁷Olsen, *Work of Art*, 136.

¹⁸ Donald J. Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London* (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd., 1976), 147.

The above quotation referred to the development of the Grosvenor estate, home of Belgrave Square and its potential in attracting the upper class versus the Bedford estate, home to Russell Square. With St. Giles to the south and the Foundling Hospital to the east, Russell Square was at a distinct disadvantage because of its location.

Planning

Builder James Burton was responsible for the construction of major portions of both Russell Square and the Foundling Hospital Estate. However, there were major differences between the two projects. The style of architecture and the quality of building materials was not the same. According to the lease agreement with the Duke of Bedford, Russell Square was built to the highest standards. The lease agreements with the Foundling estate do not reflect such careful oversight of the building process. The houses on the estate have little architectural distinction and “no one...saw fit to ornament the estate with dramatic classical compositions.”¹⁹ It was not until 1805 that a requirement was put in place for elevations to be approved by the governors of the estate. In the same year, they also recognized that their lack of oversight of builders had led to the erection of “improper tenements, such as to invite the lowest order of inhabitants, that disgrace so fair a plot of ground.”²⁰ This was not the end of complaints about builders. In 1807, it was reported that “several houses had...fallen in because of shoddy materials.”²¹

The Duke of Bedford placed strict covenants in his building contracts and sent out inspectors to ensure that builders were meeting these agreements. The governors of the

¹⁹Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 79.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 86.

²¹*Ibid.*

Foundling Hospital estate were not as quick to protect their interests. It took several years of development before they started mandating the design and the quality of construction materials. Because of this factor and the use of mixed-rate housing on the Foundling Hospital estate, the social class of residents could never hope to match that of Russell Square.

From the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, James Burton was the primary builder within Bloomsbury. He started construction on the Foundling Hospital estate in 1793 and on Russell Square in 1800. These projects were built in the twenty-five year period that marked the transition from English Palladian revival or neo-Palladian style to Georgian architecture. This shift represented important changes in the appearance and construction of the façades and led to an increased standardization of building. Much of this can be attributed to the Building Act of 1774. This Act was more a collection of previous laws than the development of any new restrictions. It dictated aspects of construction, from height and square footage of buildings, to windowsill depth, and even to construction materials themselves.²² The Act also created four rates of construction for residential properties. The different rates of construction had different legal requirements. A first-rate house had to be at least 900 square feet and worth at least £850, while the requirements for a fourth-rate house were less than 350 square feet and worth less than £150. First-rate houses were the standard within Russell Square, but the Foundling Hospital estate was home to mixed-rate development. The rules in place influenced the construction practices of the various builders and their finished structures. Yet even more important to the development of these estates than the Building Act were the sixth Duke of Bedford and the governors of the Foundling Hospital estate. Their planning, or the lack thereof, guided the style of architecture and the quality of construction.

²²For a description of the provisions of the Building Act of 1774, see John Summerson, *Georgian London*, ed. Howard Colvin (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 124-127.

In 1799, there were 916 homes within the parish of St. George, London. Both Russell Square and the Foundling Hospital estate were part of this parish. By 1829, the number of homes had more than doubled to almost two thousand. Thus, nearly 1,200 homes were added to the parish in only thirty years.²³ James Burton was responsible for building nearly seven hundred of these 1,200 houses. Burton built 336 of these on the Bedford estate. These houses ranged from first- to fourth-rate. There were 132 first-rate houses, forty-three second-rate houses, eight third-rate houses, and 153 fourth-rate houses. He built a total of sixty-five in Russell Square.²⁴ The 336 homes Burton built had an estimated rental value including ground rents of £32,240 and an estimated gross value of £299,400.²⁵

In 1790, development of the Foundling Hospital estate began and took a very different form than that of the Bedford estate.²⁶ Rather than building with the intention of attracting the highest class of tenants possible, the Foundling estate governors decided on a plan by Thomas Merryweather in 1791. His plan allowed for construction of a range of rates of houses, from first-rate to fourth-rate, and for them to be built “without the lower classes interfering with and diminishing the character of those above them.”²⁷

In 1793, James Burton started working for the Foundling Hospital estate. This marked the beginning of a ten-year relationship with the estate during which time he built 586 homes worth

²³Rowland Dobie, *The History of the United Parishes of St. Giles-in-the-fields* (London: F. Marshall, 1829), 146.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 146-147.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 148.

²⁶Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 50.

²⁷Summerson, *Georgian London*, 184.

£296,700.²⁸ Of these homes, only twenty-nine, or less than five percent, were of the first-rate. He built 159 second-rate homes (27%), 172 third-rate (29%), and 226 fourth-rate homes (40%). Thus, a full sixty-nine percent were less than second-rate. He was not contracted to build a fashionable district restricted to wealthy residents, but instead a place for a mixture of social classes. The Foundling Hospital Estate was never intended to be tenanted with the upper class; the building committee's aspirations were not that high. The estate was built for the middle classes at best. Artisans and factory workers initially lived there, but its proximity to the slum areas of Holburn and Clerkenwell led to its rapid decline.

The first work that James Burton performed on the Foundling Hospital estate was to construct the foundations for the new buildings to the west.²⁹ By May of 1793, he had started work on the corner of Lansdown Place and Guilford Street, and by December he was granted rights to build on the remainder of the ground north of Guilford Street to the end of Queen Square.³⁰ After this construction had started, the Foundling Hospital estate struck an agreement with the Duke of Bedford to allow streets to open onto his private road, the turnpike road to Islington.³¹

This agreement was the first example of the governor's attempts to encourage a mix of social classes. They did not think that street access to the east was sufficient, as this led directly to the slums of the East End. Without roads to more fashionable areas of the city, the governors feared tenants would be solely from the lower classes rather than from a mix. Although location

²⁸Some of the homes that James Burton built were outside the parish boundaries. For more information on James Burton's career, see Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton* (1961).

²⁹J. Manwaring Baines, *Burton's St. Leonards* (Hastings: Hastings Museum, 1956), 16.

³⁰See Appendix II for a map of Bloomsbury.

³¹Nichols and Wray, *Founding Hospital*, 281.

played a role in the class of tenants on the Foundling Hospital estate, lease agreements, discussed below, were more important to this process.

The motto of the Russell family is *Que sera, sera* (what will be, will be). However, this saying does not reflect the attitude of John, the sixth Duke of Bedford, when handling the development of his estate. A more responsible and involved landlord was hard to find. The Russell family “bear[s] quite as honorable a name as landlords as they do as politicians and...their estates [confirm] that impression.”³²

Before his death in 1799, Francis, the fifth Duke of Bedford, contracted with James Burton to demolish Bedford House. It was John, the sixth duke, who contracted with Burton to construct major portions of Russell Square.³³ These building agreements clearly outlined the requirements of construction for Russell Square and were very strict as to the quality of materials. Only the best quality materials were to be used, going so far as to specify the type of wood and the color of brick. The Bedford estate also included instructions as to the width of the walkways, the roads, and the sewers. The building contracts also required the façades to remain consistent with Burton’s design.³⁴ The Duke of Bedford was greatly concerned with financial and structural matters, which was part of the reason for his demanding the first-rate houses to be built within Russell Square.³⁵

³²George Clinch, *Bloomsbury and St. Giles: Past and Present* (London: Truelove and Shirley, 1890), 177.

³³See Chapter II for more information.

³⁴Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 46.

³⁵Dan Cruickshank, *A Guide to the Georgian Buildings of Britain & Ireland* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 22.

Although Burton was in control of the facades, much of the rest of the structure was the responsibility of subcontractors and speculative builders.³⁶ If contracts with these builders were not carefully written and enforced, they commonly used inferior materials and worked hastily. This type of construction was also called jerry-building.³⁷ This created poor quality homes. To prevent this, the Duke of Bedford stipulated every detail in his contracts to ensure the quality of the materials and the greatest return for his money. In order to ensure that the builders were complying with these agreements, the Duke's agents supervised the construction "and might enter and inspect any of the premises at any time."³⁸ What these covenants were attempting was to ensure that the property was developed in a manner that was acceptable to the landowner.

The estate worked diligently both before construction began and after tenants moved in to maintain the quality of the lodgings. After construction was completed on Russell Square, the property was then leased on ninety-nine year ground leases. The pattern of leases and the covenants they contained varied little, but over time, significantly more detail was added. This was an effort by the Duke to even more carefully protect his interests. Anything and everything that could be put in the contract and could be enforced did appear. The intention was to maintain the property as private residences. In hopes of doing so, the Bedford estate included stipulations in their building agreements to prevent trade. This included prohibiting the professions of brewer, baker, distiller, dyer, anything secondhand, coffin maker, and carpenter.³⁹ Any profession that made noise or created a lot of waste material was forbidden. This careful

³⁶Bohan, *James and Decimus Burton*, 9.

³⁷Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 33.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 46

³⁹*Ibid.*, 101

planning by the Bedford estate was very different from the lack of foresight shown by the governors of the Foundling Hospital estate when they were writing agreements with builders.

By 1872, *Architect* magazine considered Russell Square “unquestionably worse for its age” in response to its more affluent residents moving to the suburbs. In simple terms, it was no longer the residence of the wealthy, but it had also not become a slum. The Bedford Estate “retained a marked superiority to the streets and squares to the east of Southampton Row.”⁴⁰ Southampton Row defined the east-west boundary between the Bedford estate and the Foundling Hospital estate. This street was also the dividing line for class. Although the two estates were constructed nearly concurrently, on one side lived the upper middle classes in Russell Square in first-rate housing and on the other, the lower classes were predominant. This division was clear and pronounced because the majority of homes built along this boundary line were of fourth-rate construction.⁴¹

Gardens

As part of the development of London, open spaces were seen as important components of urban residential life. These often took the form of gardens in the center of residential squares, accessible only to the residents. But at the heart of this is why gardens and open space were important in the first place. What factors influenced landowners to forego additional housing (i.e. additional rent) and instead include these gardens in their development plans? The short answer is that Londoners in the nineteenth century saw factory work, office work, and urban living as both morally and physically weakening. Open space allowed a feeling of the country. The garden

⁴⁰Olsen, *Growth of Victorian London*, 130.

⁴¹Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 78 n. 21.

in the center of a “London square, in particular, was tending to become an oasis” within the city itself.⁴²

British high society did not reside permanently in London, but instead lived most of the year on their country estates, the source of their wealth and status. Elite country estates influenced the design and importance of gardens in the city.⁴³ The ideal of the British elite has long been to be in a financial situation where work is not required, excepting that of living on a country estate. A man who “worked” for a living was not considered a member of the elite. A job was not acceptable if you were a titled gentleman. A gentleman’s country estate was the pride of his belongings. The more land in one’s possession, the greater one’s social status.

The views of Highgate and Hampstead Heath were a major part of the draw of Bloomsbury for the elite. This open parkland to the north offered a glimpse of home, of the countryside. These views were still in place when Bedford Square was built and the garden was designed. However, they were blocked by the time Russell Square was constructed.

One can presume that a landscape gardener with years of professional experience will design a garden of higher quality than someone with little or no experience. If the garden were an essential part of the development of the square, hiring an experienced landscape gardener should be of the utmost importance. The gardens of Bedford Square were laid out under the direction of Robert Palmer, surveyor for the Duke of Bedford.⁴⁴ This was before Humphry Repton, the foremost landscape gardener in England, had designed the gardens at Woburn, before gardens became a critical piece of design for the network of squares in Bloomsbury. Bedford Square was

⁴²Simon Varey, *Space and the Eighteenth Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 27.

⁴³See Chapter II for more information.

⁴⁴Byrne, *Bedford Square*, 52.

built in 1776, but it wasn't until 1802 that Repton started his designs for the garden of Russell Square.

Unlike Repton, Palmer did not have specialized training or experience in landscape gardening. Rather, Palmer was an experienced surveyor and chief agent of the fifth Duke of Bedford. This is the same duke who later commissioned Repton to re-design the family's Woburn estate. By putting Palmer in charge of the construction of the gardens, the Duke was essentially saying that the actual design and layout of the garden was not an essential component of this urban space. It was important to have the garden, but it was not as crucial for it to be professionally designed. The combination of a central garden that was indifferently planned and private rear gardens—Bedford Square also included individual rear gardens for each of the houses—indicated a deeper concern for personal enjoyment of outdoor space, rather than the need for a shared space.

The design of Russell Square was the most interesting in London. Humphry Repton was well known for his country garden plans before designing these gardens. The Duke of Bedford hired Repton for the job after he completed work on Woburn Abbey, the Duke's country estate. Repton's design for the Russell Square garden followed the principles he set out in his writings.⁴⁵ In the simplest terms, the utility of the space must always be considered before beauty, but beauty could not be forgotten. He included grass areas, flower gardens, areas for children to play, and a hedge to screen the city buildings from view within the park.

In the twenty-five years between the design of Bedford Square garden and Russell Square garden, housing in Bloomsbury had increased dramatically. This development of previously undeveloped land cut off views of Highgate and Hampstead Heath as well as creating a feeling

⁴⁵See Chapter II for more information.

of the city. No longer was it possible to enjoy the country from Bloomsbury. With this fact in mind, the Dukes of Bedford placed increasingly high value on open space. In order to attract a high class of tenants, it was necessary to offer them a glimpse of the country. They did this by hiring the foremost landscape gardener in England, Humphry Repton, to design the gardens of Russell Square.

Conclusion

This chapter is a contextualized history of the development of London. A description of the physical changes that took place does not tell the whole story. It is also necessary to offer the historical context of the events. The four areas under examination—Bedford, Russell, and Belgrave Squares and the Foundling estate—were not the only way space in London developed. These areas were “shaped in specific ways by particular intersections of people, processes and practices.”⁴⁶ If one element had changed, the areas would have developed differently. Had these been middle class planners, perhaps the garden spaces would have been developed with housing, instead of remaining open space. Perhaps the location of Russell Square within Bloomsbury would have not have been able to sustain even upper middle class residents. It was the explicit decisions made by the Dukes of Bedford that led to the specific development of Russell Square, but the results were also tempered by the square’s location.

In the nineteenth century, London was a socially segregated city. The West End was home to the upper and upper middle classes, while in the East End, those of a lower social class were more prevalent. This division did not mean there were no working-class and poor populations in the West End, but by the end of the eighteenth century some landowners included contract stipulations intended to decrease these populations. The Bedford estate put in place lease

⁴⁶Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780*, Mappings (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 20.

agreements “designed to ensure social and occupational as well as architectural uniformity.”⁴⁷

These lease agreements were not always successful as one could not mandate the class of residents, but the planning by these estates was intended to increase the level of segregation.

Unlike the planning of the development of the Foundling estate which included housing for all classes of residents, Russell, Belgrave and Bedford Squares were all segregated based on both social class and function. These areas were all upper middle class residential areas, separated from the commercial and manufacturing districts.⁴⁸ Most of the Bedford estate remained residential property up through the beginning of the twentieth century, especially north of Great Russell Street. This was not the case for the Foundling Hospital estate. The governors were unable to prevent shops and tradesmen from entering the area. Keeping stores and hotels out of an area was crucial in maintaining its social cachet. When the Foundling Hospital allowed non-residential use, this lowered the value of the land and more working-class people moved into the area. Even though they were just slightly further to the east, the Foundling Hospital estate was a more socially diverse area of London.

The development of these areas was part of a greater building trend in early nineteenth century London. The building projects examined above varied widely in terms of social class of the residents. These variations were the result of the differences in location, garden design, and planning of the landowners of large estates. It was these men who were responsible for urban development, not the city government or the crown. Russell Square today remains the property of the fifteenth Duke of Bedford. It is no more socially diverse, but it is also no longer residential property. The goal of attracting upper class tenants has finally been achieved, but the buildings

⁴⁷Olsen, *Work of Art*, 135-36.

⁴⁸ Olsen, *Work of Art*, 132

have been leased to upscale businesses and the University of London. Certain aspects of the square have remained unchanged—the planning by the estate continues to be meticulous, the garden is once again in full flower, and Bloomsbury is once again a sought after location.

EPILOGUE

Russell Square garden has gone through many stages of care and concern. Up to the Second World War, the railings were still in place around all the Bloomsbury squares. During the War, however, the railings were removed and the gardens were thrown open to the public by the Duke of Bedford in response to the need for iron. Previously, most gardens in the residential areas of London restricted access to current residents. As of 2009, Bedford Square gardens remain railed and closed to current residents only. In 2002, the Holborn Borough Council restored the garden hewing as closely as possible to Humphry Repton's original plans. It had been neglected for a number of years, but "now contains a tea-house, a children's playground, and concerts are given here during the summer months."⁴⁹ The grounds also hold one of only 13 cabmen's shelters left in the city. This shelter was moved from Leicester Square in the 1980s.

In a sad postscript to the history of the square, the residents of London will also associate it with violence. On 7 July 2005, four terrorist bombs exploded mere yards from Russell Square. Fifty-six people were killed in the explosion, including the four suicide bombers. Another 700 people were injured.

⁴⁹Harold P. Clunn, *The Face of London*. New ed., rev. by E.R. Wethersett (London: Spring Books, 1960), 149.

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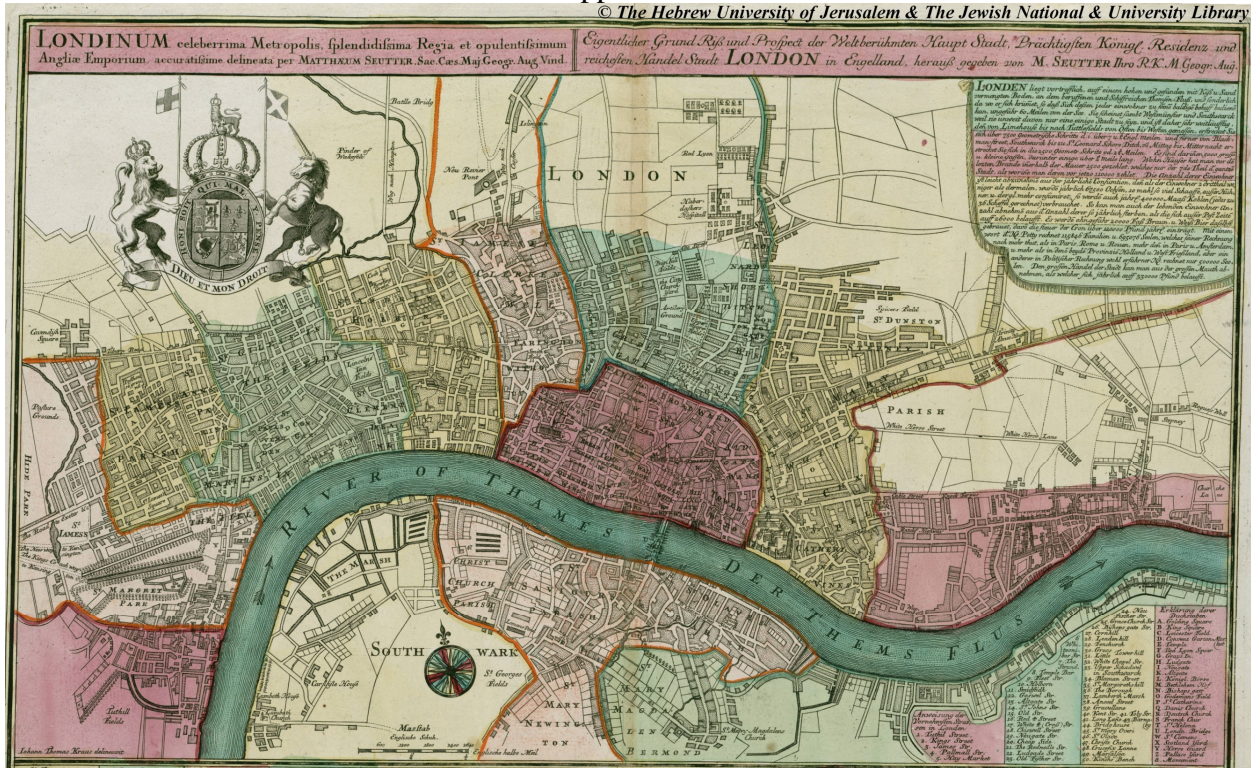
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Appendix I

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Map of London: 1750

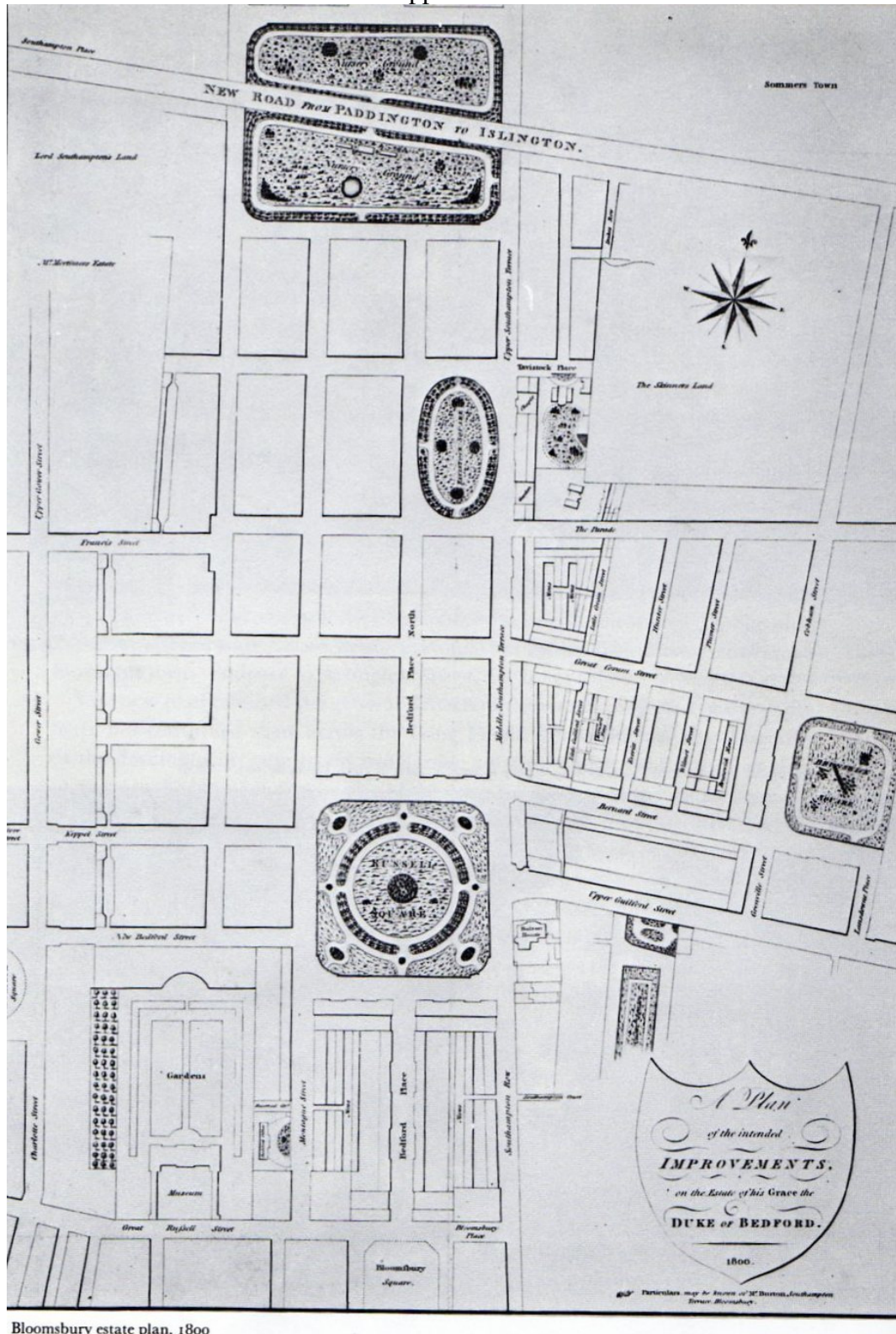


Map of London: 1844

Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge

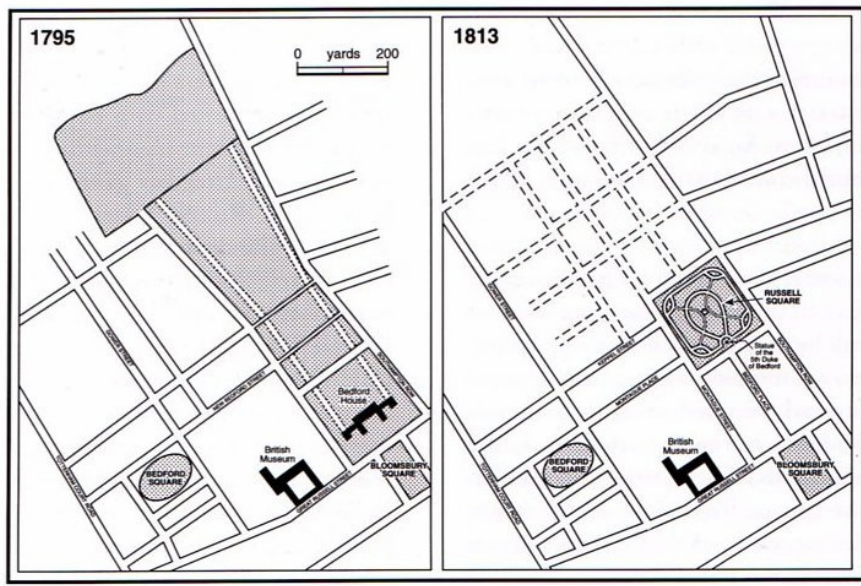
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Appendix II



Bloomsbury estate plan, 1800

Donald J. Olsen, *Town Planning in London: the Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), fig. 27.



177 Bloomsbury in 1795, before the demolition of Bloomsbury House, and in 1813, after the building of Russell Square. After the Bloomsbury estate survey of 1795, Bedford Estate Office; *Map of the Cities of London and Westminster* (1813). British Library.

Stephen Daniels, *Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 181.

Appendix III



Russell Square, north side



32. Russell Square, south side, in 1982

Donald J. Olsen, *Town Planning in London: the Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), figs. 31 and 32.

Appendix IV

39 & 40 Geo. III
Public Local and Personal Acts
Cap. 50

An act for enclosing and embellishing the centre or area of a certain square, intended to be called Russel Square, purposed to be made in the parish of Saint George Bloomsbury, in the county of Middlesex, and for forming and making the same into a pleasure ground, and for continuing and keeping the same in repair.—[June 20, 1800]

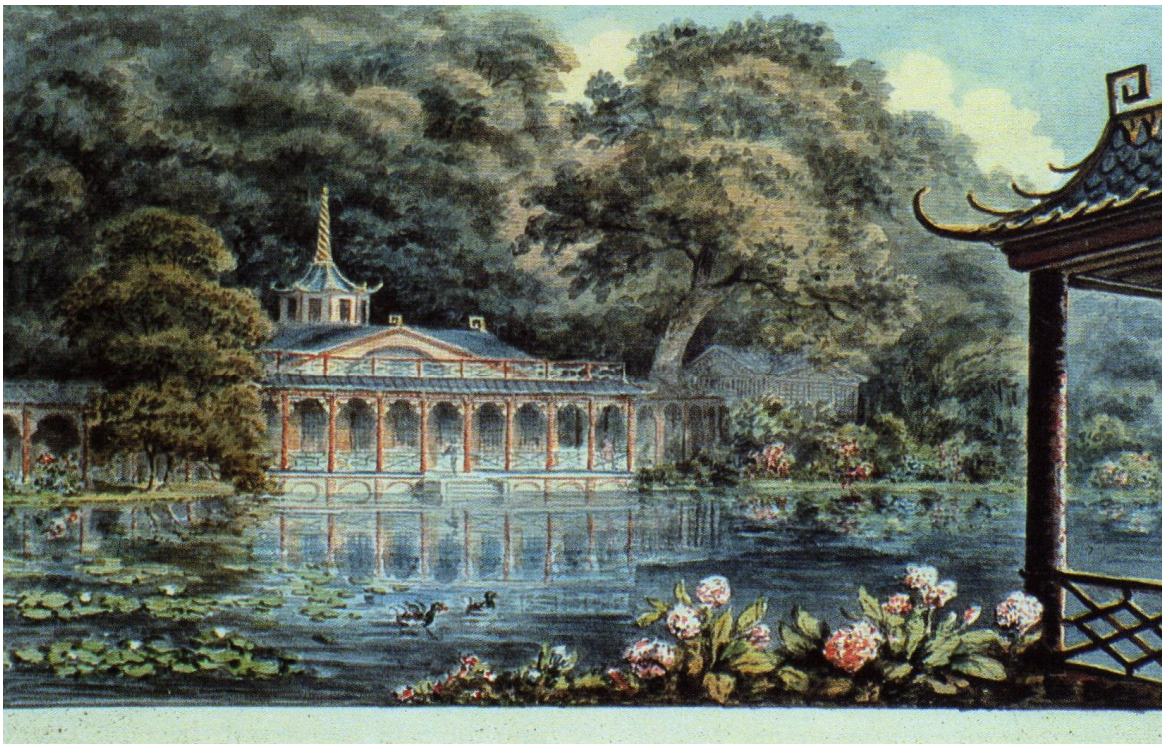
Whereas a square, intended to be called Russel Square, is purposed to be made on a certain piece or plot of ground, belonging to the most noble Francis duke of Bedford, situate in the parish of Saint George Bloomsbury, in the county of Middlesex, on the east side of which houses of considerable value have already been erected, and on the other sides thereof are intended to be erected: and whereas it would be much to the benefit and advantage of the owners and occupiers of the houses erected and to be erected in the said intended square, if the centre or area of the same was inclosed and railed in with iron rails, and if the inclosure or inclosed part was planted and laid out with walks, and properly ornamented and embellished, and made into a pleasure ground, and if provision was made for raising money to defray the expense of forming, inclosing, making, planting, ornamenting and embellishing such inclosure or pleasure ground, and of continuing and keeping the same in repair. Certain persons appointed commissioners for five years, and after wards the inhabitants to be commissioners. Meeting of commissioners. Women may vote by proxy. Commissioners may appoint officers. Proceedings to be entered in a book, and deemed evidence. Power to set out pleasure ground, &c. The inheritance of the pleasure ground not to be altered. Materials, &c. vested in trustees. To prevent annoyances. Commissioners may contract for making pleasure ground. Commissioner may compound for penalties. The duke of Bedford and the occupiers of houses to have the exclusive use of the inclosure. Rates, &c. for the several purposes of this act to be one shilling in the pound. Empty houses to be charged half rates. Rates of ambassador's houses to be paid by the owners. Exemptions of the houses of lord Loughborough and several other proprietors, from payment of rates for forming the square. Landlords, &c. subject to the payment of rates of houses let to lodgers, &c. Commencement of rates. Until houses shall be erected and become rateable, the duke of Bedford shall pay the amount of the rates. Commissioners may borrow four thousand pounds on mortgage or by annuities. Securities to be entered in a book. Treasurers and collectors to account. Recovery and application of penalties. Rate books to be admitted evidence. Distress not to be deemed unlawful for want of form. Proceedings not to be qualified for want of form or removed by Certiorari. Appeal. Limitation of actions. General issue. Treble costs. Publick act.

Danby Pickering, *The Statutes at Large from Magna Charta to the End of the Eleventh Parliament of Great Britain, Anno 1761 [Continued to 1806]*. (Cambridge: John Burges Printer to the University, 1762-1807), 889-890.

Appendix V



Woburn Abbey Before



Woburn Abbey After

Stephen Daniels, *Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 176.

Appendix
VI



178 C. Mottram after Thomas H. Shepherd, *Russell Square and the Statue of the Duke of Bedford*, from Thomas H. Shepherd *London and Its Environs in the Nineteenth Century* (1829). Crace Collection © The British Museum.

Stephen Daniels, *Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 182.

Appendix VII

A Brief Russell Family History

The noble history of the Russell family began with the creation of the first Earl of Bedford on January 19, 1550 by Edward VI, Henry VIII's sickly son, because of "...daring and leadership during the siege of Exeter."¹ It was a mere three years before the Russells were landowners in London. The first land in London "to be acquired by the Russell family was Covent Garden, which Edward VI granted to John, first Earl of Bedford in 1553."² This was to be but the first in a series of advantageous acquisitions.

The land on which Russell Square was built came into the possession of the Russell family on July 31, 1669, through marriage. The second son of William, fifth Earl of Bedford, was also named William. This son married Rachel, Lady Vaughan, daughter and co-heir of Thomas Wriothesley, fourth Earl of Southampton and in the process acquired one hundred nineteen acres within Bloomsbury, London.³ Built on the land were Southampton House and its gardens, also known as "Long Fields." Rachel (Lady Russell, upon her marriage) inherited the land upon the death of her father, The Earl of Southampton, who died May 14, 1667. She was co-heir to her father due to the lack of a direct male heir, along with her two sisters, both named Elizabeth. Using the rental value to divide the estates equally into three parts, "the decision as to which part should go to which daughter had been left to the ancient biblical method of casting

¹J.H.Wiffen, *Memoirs of the House of Russell*. 2 vol. (London: Longman, Rees, etc., 1833), 361.

²Donald J. Olsen, *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 39.

³Gladys Scott Thomson, *The Russells in Bloomsbury: 1669-1771*. (London: The Pilgrim Press Limited, 1940), 13.

lots.”⁴ It was purely by chance that the Russells came into this land as opposed to Titchfield or Wiltshire, other estates owned by the Southampton family. In addition to the London property of Bloomsbury, Covent Garden, and Figs Mead, the Duke of Bedford also owned property in Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Devonshire.⁵ The family seat was Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire.

Southampton House was granted to the Earl of Southampton’s widow, Francis the dowager of Southampton, for her lifetime, but she allowed Rachel, Lady Russell to take possession in 1669. Southampton House was where Lord William Russell and his wife Rachel spent their winters, preferring her estate in Hampshire for summers. William was executed on July 21, 1683 in connection with the Rye House Plot.⁶ In 1694, William, fifth Earl of Bedford and father of Lord William Russell, was created the first Duke of Bedford and Marquis of Tavistock.⁷ This was to honor his role in the Glorious Revolution.

The first Duke of Bedford died in 1700. William and Rachel had two daughters and one son, Wriothesley, who became the second duke of Bedford and died in 1711. His son, also Wriothesley, became the third duke upon his death. He died in 1732, only to be succeeded by his brother, John, fourth duke of Bedford, and his first wife, Lady Diana Spencer. They were the first to take up residence in the Southampton house since Rachel, Lady Russell had died of smallpox in 1724. It was during their tenure that the name was changed to Bedford House. “...[I]t would be far more fitting that it should be called after the family who had now inherited

⁴Thomson, *Russells in Bloomsbury*, 16-17.

⁵George Clinch, *Bloomsbury and St. Giles: Past and Present*. (London: Truelove and Shirley, 1890), 177.

⁶Thomson, *Russells in Bloomsbury*, 68-71.

⁷*Ibid.*, 79.

it” stated Gertrude, second wife of the fourth Duke of Bedford.⁸ In 1771, the fifth Duke, Francis, came to the title. He was but five years old and remained under the watchful eye of his guardians. His father had been killed in 1767, in a riding accident, placing his mother in the role of sole parent.⁹ It was this Duke who contracted with James Burton for the demolition of Bedford House. Before demolition on the house could commence, however, there was the small matter of the family’s possessions. The contents of the house including furniture and artwork were sold at auction on May 7, 1800 by Christie’s for about £6,000, much less than their original cost.¹⁰ Also, sold were a double row of lime trees and an acacia tree standing on the future site of Russell Square.

Francis died in 1802 of an incarcerated hernia, leaving the title to his brother, John, sixth Duke of Bedford. It is he who oversaw the development of the Bloomsbury portion of the Bedford estate. Robin, the fourteenth Duke of Bedford, is the current owner of this land as well as real estate holdings throughout London.

⁸Ibid., 169.

⁹Ibid., 370.

¹⁰Evelyn Beresford Chancellor, *The History of the Squares of London, Topographical & Historical*. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1907), 185-6.