



IN THE **VILLAGE**



# GREEN SPACES

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Unlike many metropolises, London is blessed with many green spaces, a gift that has become increasingly important over the last year when many of us would otherwise have been couped up, confined to our homes. In our own 'Village', there are plenty to choose from, some hidden away around corners that you might not be aware of.

## Red Lion Square

Starting from the Inn, heading west the first is at Red Lion Square, part of the Barbon Estate in the late 17th century and named after the nearby Red Lion Inn. It is



rumoured to hold the bodies of three regicides, including Oliver Cromwell, but don't let that put you off your coffee. Today it has been influenced by more left leaning individuals, being home to a statue of Fenner Brockway, a bust of Bertrand Russell and the always intriguing Conway Hall, home of the Conway Hall Ethical Society, which holds the largest and most comprehensive Humanist and Ethics library in the UK.

## Queen Square Gardens

Head north to Great Ormond Street and, while not quite a square or a park, the eastern part of the street, is a wonder of pots and planters – guerrilla gardening at its finest. At the far western end is Queen Square Gardens, which used to be the private garden of Sir John Cutler 1st Baronet, an English grocer, financier and Member of Parliament. It has a statue of Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III, the madness of the King having been treated in part in a house on the square.



## Coram's Fields



Further north, at the end of Lamb's Conduit Street is Coram's Fields. Access to this wonderland is only permitted to those accompanied by a child; 'no adult can enter without a child' is their catchy motto. Coram's Fields, has a surprising mix of animals as well as sandpits, zip wires and huge climbing frames. It also hosts fairs and events. Captain Coram gave the field his name after he set up the Foundling Hospital here; it was eventually relocated, with the area being cleared and used for recreation.

## Brunswick Square

For those without children, to the west there is Brunswick Square Gardens – the public twin to Mecklenburgh Square to the east, which is a local resident only area. This was originally part of the grounds of the Foundling Hospital (now Coram's Fields) and was named after Caroline of Brunswick, who was wife to King George IV.



## St George's and St Andrew's Gardens

Hidden away and just slightly further north of Brunswick Square are two ancient churchyards: St George's Gardens and St Andrew's Gardens. St George's is actually two burial grounds, with a line of stones marking the demarcation between St George's Queen Square and St George's Bloomsbury. This was one of the first burial grounds to be established away from a church (in 1715). At first there was some reluctance, but after some influential people led the way (if that is the correct expression), many followed. The burial grounds ceased to be used as such long ago, and now make pleasant gardens. St Andrew's, which lies to the east of Gray's Inn Road – just to the north of Calthorpe Street – was founded a little later (in 1754) and is a little smaller, but very similar.



## Lincoln's Inn Fields

Plummeting south, past Gray's Inn, and across High Holborn, the final destination is Lincoln's Inn Fields, a public square, to the north of the Royal Courts of Justice and to the west of Lincoln's Inn. It is the largest public square in London; first laid out in 1630 by the celebrated architect Inigo Jones. In its time it had its own theatre, where the first performances of both *The Beggar's Opera* (in 1728) and *Dido and Aeneas* (in 1700) took place. The square is laid out with grassy areas in three quarters, tennis courts (which are available for hire), a restaurant and a bandstand. Barbeques are even permitted, and it is popular with the al fresco gym groups as well as local dog walkers. It is surrounded by many handsome buildings most of which are occupied by lawyers of one sort or another.



## And one long gone

While this feature has concentrated on the spaces we can enjoy today, it also provides an opportunity to recall a herbal garden now sadly lost to us. John Gerard (1545–1612) was a noted English botanist, herbalist, gardener and Master of the Company of Barber-Surgeons. For many years he lived in a cottage, or tenement, close to Gray's Inn between Barnard's Inn and Fetter Lane. It had a large garden – often mentioned in his writings – that is believed to have been owned by Lord Burghley. Gerard developed the space into a magnificent herbal garden that contained 'all manner of strange trees, herbes, rootes, plants, floures and other such rare things, that it would make a man wonder how one of his degree, not having the purse of a number, could have accomplished the same'.

Perhaps the answer to that question is simple. Lord Burghley, a keen gardener himself, employed Gerard as a 'superintendent gardener' at his homes in the Strand and at Theobalds, Hertfordshire, for 20 years from 1577 until possibly the Lord Treasurer's death in 1598. Burghley imported many plants from all over the world, no doubt relying on Gerard's knowledge to guide him. It would have been only common human decency for Burghley to have permitted his esteemed botanist and employee to take cuttings from his plants or indeed for him to have given Gerard any spare plants he had.

In 1596 Gerard published his *Catalogue of Plants* containing a list of rare and exotic plants, many imported from the New World and numbering upwards of one thousand, all of which he cultivated in the garden in Holborn. It became a very popular work and is regarded as the first catalogue of its kind ever published, a copy of which lies in the British Library. A year later, Gerard published *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes*, which was the most widely consulted book on plants in English in the 17th century, though it soon emerged that it was an unacknowledged or plagiarised translation of a foreign work.



If Gerard's Herbal Garden had survived, it would surely have offered the same healing balm and solace in Holborn that the Physic Garden in Chelsea (dating from 1673) has long provided the human soul.