

Queen Square and nineteenth-century reforming institutions: a talk by  
Deborah Colville and Rosemary Ashton at the Mary Ward Centre, Queen  
Square, 12 May 2009

Part 1: Hospitals, charities, and an outline of art and education in Queen  
Square (Deborah Colville)

The Bloomsbury Project was set up to investigate the local repeating pattern of established Georgian residential development being taken over by reforming institutions, particularly educational and medical ones. Queen Square and its institutions represent a microcosm of nineteenth-century Bloomsbury. I am going to outline the nineteenth-century history and development of institutions in Queen Square, and show how in some ways—and again this is characteristic of the Project's findings as a whole—there has been a remarkable continuity between that past and our present.

Queen Square is notable in particular for its hospitals, including the Na/F1 12

members of the medical establishment, despite now being part of University College London Hospitals NHS Trust; one eminent surgeon said “Homeopathy is no better than witchcraft”<sup>1</sup>, and urged the Trust to consider what other uses it might have for the Homeopathic Hospital’s buildings. And Great Ormond Street was the first hospital in Britain to be founded exclusively to treat children as in-patients, followed swiftly by the House of Relief for Children with Chronic Disease of the Joints, later the Alexandra Hospital. This was the first of London’s hospitals to be founded by nurses: Catherine Wood, the senior nurse at Great Ormond Street Hospital, and her colleague Jane Perceval (grand-daughter of the assassinated Prime Minister Spencer Perceval).

All these institutions, moreover, embodied the nineteenth-century transformation of hospitals, which went from being essentially charities for the sick poor to professional, research-active medical institutions. Professor Anne Hardy, co-investigator on the Bloomsbury Project, has established that specialist hospitals were particularly reforming, indeed rebellious, within their nineteenth-century context: despite scepticism and resistance within the medical establishment, the new way of treating disease by observing and treating multiple cases of the same thing became so successful that by the end of the century, the general hospitals were starting to incorporate specialist wards.

All the major hospitals in Queen Square followed the same trajectory, beginning with the addition of six to ten beds to a Georgian residential house, followed by expansion into a neighbouring house or houses on the same basis, until finally they all read (i)3.0(c6 288.8 Tm 0.48 Tm [(t)-4.9(h)2.0(e)



looking for information about the transition from makeshift and temporary accommodation in Georgian townhouses to purpose-built hospitals. All of Queen Square's hospitals, when they demolished their original homes and built hospitals by design, were affirming the success of the revolution in healthcare in the nineteenth century—the institutionalisation of specialist medicine had been achieved.

But there was one hospital that fell by the wayside. The National Hospital is usually described as being the first of the hospitals to be established in Queen Square, in 1859. Actually, the Post Office Directory of 1851 lists an intriguing “Private Spinal Institution” at no. 31 Queen Square. This was, we find from Low's Charities of London, a private institution “for the development of the mode of treatment pursued by Mr Joseph Amesbury”. It seems as if the Post Office Directory was out of date, as according to Low, the hospital had moved by 1850 to 26 Judd Place West (on the Euston Road) and changed its name to the Hospital for Spinal Deformities. Amesbury was a surgeon and author on orthopaedics, married with a large family by the time of the 1841 census, when he was living near Cavendish Square. He later moved to Fitzroy Square.

But in 1837 he lived at 54 Burton Crescent, Bloomsbury, and he took out patents on “certain apparatus for the relief, or correction of stiffness, weakness, or distortion in the human spine, chest, or limbs”. He subsequently founded the Spinal and General Orthopaedic Association to treat spinal disease with his machines and with a medical staff paid for by the sufferers themselves. The BMJ criticised him for running what ed



a home at no. 39 Queen Square in the same year. This took in men who already worked as sandwich men, carrying advertising boards, a seasonal job paid at the rate of 3/- or 3/6 a day, and not done during the summer, when the men all left London to do seasonal agricultural work such as hop-picking. The home also took in homeless men who had been long out of work and provided them with employment as sandwich-men for 2/- a day, delivering circulars for 3/- a day, or addressing envelopes at a rate of 3/6 per thousand. Many of these men had held good jobs such as clerkships, but simply could not find work.

The home in Queen Square apparently housed fifty men when it was visited for the Booth poverty survey update in May 1894. It even became self-supporting. Indeed, James Keates's brief obituary in *The Times* says that the home in Queen Square was so successful that he was able to open two other branches. Sandwich-men were notoriously prone to drunkenness, and were helped to become sober at the home in Queen Square, perhaps encouraged by the presence from the 1860s until the early twentieth century of the famous Shirley's Temperance Hotel next door but one at no. 37 Queen Square (where York House now stands). The novelist  
1888, and it also housed medical students from ne.16 Tmby University Coll

Charitable assistance in the Square also extended to those with physical disabilities. The Alexandra Institute for the Blind, established by Edward Moore in 1865, ran a home for adult blind women at no. 6 Queen Square from 1869. In 1871 this had 14 blind or partially blind residents, mostly employed

employed in Queen Square. The London Society for Teaching the Blind to Read had a school with resident blind pupil hnot only learning to read using an early form of raised type, but also

seems no longer to exist.

The Alexandra Institute for the Blind had moved into 6 Queen Square in 1869; before that date, both this house and no. 31 Queen Square had been occupied by St Margaret's Home and Industrial School for Girls, a Catholic charity. I have said that Queen Square was typical of nineteenth-century Bloomsbury in its institutionalisation, but one feature which was relatively unusual was the happy co-existence of several religious charities, and institutions run by religious orders, of totally different and opposing belief systems in the Square. The Catholic St Margaret's Homes were followed by the Society of St Vincent de Paul, another Catholic charity, basing itself at no. 31, where it also ran the Aged Poor Society in the late 1870s. (There was a Catholic hospital around the corner in Great Ormond Street from 1856 to 1897.)

The Anglican order of the Sisters of St Margaret of East Grinstead ran a hospital in their convent (also known as St Katherine's) at no. 32 Queen Square from 1873, later expanding into no. 33 as well. Ironically these sisters, one of the first orders of Anglican nuns established in England since the Reformation, all joined the Catholic church in the early twentieth century! Dr Williams's Library, the country's foremost collection of nonconformist literature, occupied no. 8 Queen Square from 1865–1873. From 1858 to 1864 the English Presbyterian College, a training college for nonconformist ministers, occupied no. 29 Queen Square, moving in 1864 to Queen Square House at the northeast end of the Square, where it stayed until 1899. This institution also still exists, and is better known as Westminster College, Cambridge. As it moved out of Queen Square House, the Jews' College moved in. It stayed for thirty years.

institution had begun as a day school, by the time it moved to Queen Square it was residential. The women and girls lived on site, almost fifty of them in the 1881 census.

The Working Women's College was founded in 1864 at no. 29 Queen Square, proudly single-sex, it was "the only institution in London devoted exclusively to the improvement and culture of working women", although it was forced to become co-educational a decade later as the College for Men and Women. It stayed at no. 29 Queen Square until 1901.



the first female chartered accountant, and the institution is still going strong as the Society for Promoting the Training of Women.

Not all of these institutions flourished into the twenty-first century, as we have seen, and not all of them remained in Queen Square.

with the journalist and author Edith Stewart Drewry), and architects<sup>4</sup>. It was the influence of two architects which brought the Art Workers' Guild to the Square. Founded in 1884 as mainly a networking association, its previous connections to Queen Square had been through William Morris, its Master in 1892, and through its involvement with the reform of art education in the 1890s, through which the Female School of Art was eventually subsumed into the Central School of Arts and Crafts. But in 1914 the Guild bought the freehold of no. 6 Queen Square, largely because of the efforts and encouragement of the architects Dunbar Smith and Cecil Brewer, who had an office in no. 6, and knew that its freehold was up for sale. There is more about Dunbar Smith and Cecil Brewer in the second half of this paper.

## Part II: The College of Preceptors, the Female School of Art, and the Passmore Edwards Settlement (Rosemary Ashton)

I'd like to start here in this very building, numbers 42 and 43 Queen Square, since two important educational institutions were located here in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the College of Preceptors, located in No. 42 from its founding in 1846 until 1882, when it was in Bloomsbury Square; and the Female School of Art, which moved into No. 43 in 1861 from its previous location in Gower Street.

I'll talk a little about both these institutions, which we are still in the process of researching for our Bloomsbury Project, then will move away from Queen Square temporarily to look at the very interesting and important forerunner of the Mary Ward Centre itself, namely the Passmore Edwards Settlement, begun in Gordon Square in 1890, continued on Tavistock Place from 1897 to 1982, when it moved, now called the Mary Ward Centre, to its current Queen Square home. I'll also mention another college, the shortlived Gordon College, which as its name suggests was intended to be opened in Gordon Square, but which – for reasons which the Bloomsbury Project will illuminate at several points – had to find alternative accommodation, which it did in 1868 in ever-hospitable Queen Square.

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<sup>4</sup> See 1901 census



of progressive ventures – in education and training. The College of Preceptors, established at number 42 in 1846, was the first professional body for teachers,

The School was a success, but like most innovative ventures, its progress was marked by controversy. The governors were all men, and Dyce was in overall charge, so the first female principal, an exhibited artist called Fanny McIan, found herself often in dispute with her superiors. The chief difference was between the governors, who insisted that the female students be taught the arts of ornamenting and japanning, so that they could be employed by manufacturers, as their working-class male equivalents were, and McIan, supported by many of the female students and their parents, who were keen to

the school itself continued at 37 Gower Street until 1860, when it was hit by the withdrawal of the government's annual £500 subsidy.

Some confusion arises out of the names here: the foundation in 1853 of the Department of Science and Art, arising out of the successful Great Exhibition of 1851, led to some parts of the School of Design moving to South Kensington shortly after that, but the Female School of Art remained in Gower Street and then Queen Square. It was known by many names, including – sometimes - the Female School of Design, the Gower Street School (to distinguish it from the Female School in Kensington),<sup>13</sup> the Queen Square School of Art, and even

moved to Queen Square, gaining a Royal Charter when the Queen became Patron in 1862, followed by Princess Alexandra in 1863.<sup>15</sup> Its President was

attacks in its early years by the Tory press, which called it the 'godless'



Elsmere (1888) – used her considerable powers of persuasion to liaise between the landlord, the eleventh Duke of Bedford, and Passmore Edwards.<sup>18</sup> She got the former to donate the land and the latter to put up the £14,000 it took to erect the building, which was designed in Arts and Crafts style, both functional and aesthetic, by two young Bloomsbury architects, A. Dunbar Smith and Cecil Brewer, who were themselves residents at University Hall in Gordon Square. The new Settlement building in Tavistock Place, with lodgings for residents - mainly young lawyers and architects – who lived there

objected to this; it would be, he wrote in November 1894, 'kid-glovish and Russell-Squarish'.<sup>19</sup> The site on more demotic Tavistock Place was found and an architectural competition held for the new building, which opened late in 1897. At the gala opening in February 1898, John Morley, MP, and others

than Gordon Square, located just behind UCL. The largest landlord in