CHAPTER 3

Marylebone Gardens

Marylebone Gardens originated in the mid seventeenth century as a garden and bowling green – the first of three – at the Rose Tavern on the east side of what is now Marylebone High Street. Long well-known, but of mixed character at best, the place was reinvented in the late 1730s on more genteel lines, becoming celebrated for concerts and fireworks until decline and closure forty years later. For all its popularity and fame, its reputation was never up to that of the top resorts: like Marylebone Music Hall run in conjunction with another High Street tavern, the Rose of Normandy, it was too small. Marylebone Gardens, said a critic in 1772, 'is a comparative pot of earth stuck out at a window, when mentioned with Vauxhall' – Vauxhall itself being second to Ranelagh, the most exclusive of London pleasure gardens. Adapted 'to the gentry, rather than the *haut ton*', Marylebone could be disdained as artistically and even morally inferior.[1] But its place in the cultural and social life of London over many decades was a major one, reflected in associations with famous and distinguished names, and by numerous literary appearances.

Most familiar is the visit by Pepys, whose diary in May 1668 records that 'we abroad to Marrowbone, and there walked in the garden, the first time I ever was there, and a pretty place it is'. Mary Wortley Montagu's line 'Some dukes at Marybone bowl time away' (in *Town Eclogues*) is a reference to John Sheffield, 1st Duke of Buckingham, who died in 1721 – supposedly a frequenter of 'the noted gaming-house at Marybone', resort of 'all the infamous sharpers'.[2] *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) is often cited in connection with the Gardens, for Captain Macheath's anticipation of 'deep play tonight at

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Marybone', and the prospect of good takings on the highway. But there is nothing to show that he is thinking of the Rose or its gardens, rather than gambling in various establishments in the vicinity; and it is most likely fighting at the Boarded House that Mrs Peachum refers to when she names Marybone as a place 'to learn Valour'. The often repeated story of Dick Turpin's dashing visit, untraceable before Victorian times, is doubtless made up.

Handel's association with the Gardens is uncertain, for although his work was often performed there in his lifetime, any suggestion of his ever having set foot inside is limited to the well-known anecdote concerning Handel and the Rev. Dr Fountaine of Marylebone School, recounted by Fountaine's grandson Norrisson Scatcherd.[3] The place Handel might have known was probably much changed since Buckingham's day, the bowling greens becoming subsumed into tree-lined promenades and open spaces for strolling and dancing, listening to concerts or watching fireworks. But promenading women were likely to be prostitutes, as Fanny Burney's Evelina found, and the men predatory. The Rev. Dr Trusler, son of the mid-century proprietor, recalled how the Duke of Cumberland 'used to amuse himself in the dark walks of this place, and gave way to a variety of unbecoming frolics with the women'.[4] Rowdiness could break out – as on the occasion when Dr Johnson, angry that the promised fireworks were cancelled because of rain, stirred up some hotheads to smash the lamps round the orchestra and try to ignite the fireworks themselves. In a more serious incident, performers in the orchestra were beaten up by three officers, the cause 'supposed to be only some trifling pique'.[5]

Although the history of Marylebone Gardens is mostly well-known as regards management and entertainments, musical, pyrotechnical and other, details of the layout, planting and buildings are obscure. The principal early accounts are Thomas Smith's in his *Topographical and Historical Account of St Marylebone* (1833); J. T. Smith's in *A Book for a Rainy Day* (1845); Warwick

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Wroth's in *The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century* (1896); and Thomas Harris's *A Historical and Descriptive Sketch of Marylebone Gardens* (1887). To date the fullest account, still far from definitive, is Mollie Sands's 1987 study, *The Eighteenth-Century Pleasure Gardens of Marylebone 1737–1777*.

The origins of the Rose Tavern and Marylebone Gardens go back as far as the Commonwealth, when two adjoining pieces of ground called Warren Close and the Rose Garden were in the occupation of William Long, a vintner in Covent Garden. In July 1649 Long took out a 48-year lease of this ground from Robert Forsett, lord of the manor. He was already in occupation of a small piece of Warren Close beside the future High Street (then just 'the lane leading to Marybone Church'), perhaps the site of an existing tavern. Long's term ran from Lady Day 1651, and as he mortgaged the property that July for £400 it seems likely that he was building, rebuilding or adding to the Rose. Long was already proprietor of another Rose Tavern, in Covent Garden – notorious by the 1730s when Hogarth made it the setting for the orgy scene in *A Rake's Progress*. Long died in 1661, after which the business at both Roses and other taverns was carried on by his widow Mary.[6]

A plan and descriptive notes of the garden's early appearance were published in 1813 from the 'Memorandums' of Samuel Sainthill, dated 1659 (Ill. 3.01).[7] The 'Garden at Marylebone Park' consisted of a square walled enclosure laid out and planted concentrically: fruit trees against the wall, bordering broad gravel walks; and an inner square of hedging through which ran a round walk, encircling the innermost feature of the garden, a bowling green. Let into the hedging were alcoves and more secluded bowers.

Rocque's map (see Ill. 2.02) shows a superficially similar arrangement, with two more bowling greens added to the south. These, shown already on Henry Pratt's survey of 1708 (Ill. 2.01b), are perhaps the two greens

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trumpeted as 'the finest that ever were seen' when opened for the season at Easter 1712.[8] All three were in the occupation of James Long, who inherited the Rose and grounds from his mother Mary Long in 1674 and ran it with his brother Benjamin and sister Deborah. The old lease was not due to expire until 1699, but in April 1685 Long took out a 78-year reversionary lease, perhaps the occasion for alterations and improvements.[9]

John Locke recorded in 1679 that here 'a curious stranger may see several persons of quality bowling, two or three times a week, all the summer'. A prize shooting match at 'Longs Bowling Green at the Rose, advertised in 1692, suggests some diversity of entertainment, but it was generally for bowling that the site was known until the 1730s. The Prince of Wales (Prince Frederick Louis) was reported bowling there in 1737, and by 1747 it was acknowledged that the greens at Marylebone had in late years become pre-eminent among the many scattered around London. A bowling green remained until 1752.[10]

James Long died in 1715, after which 'the Old Rose … with very fine Gardens belonging to it' was briefly in the occupation of Robert Wilkins before the Long family took over the management again. In 1723 a Mr Long, probably James Long's nephew William, was jailed for keeping a common gaming-house and speaking in 'very disrespectful' terms of the magistracy.[11]

The name Marylebone Gardens does not seem to have been in general use until the place was put on a more select footing in 1737, though it was referred to as 'Marybone Garden' in 1713. Daniel Gough, who ran the Rose from 1732, was responsible for raising the level of entertainment.[12] In 1736 a high scaffold tower was set up for the 'Flying Man', whose stunt was to 'fly' headfirst down an inclined tightrope, using a contraption with a grooved wheel – the same man who had half-demolished the church steeple at Bromham, Wiltshire, flying off it a year earlier. He also proposed to push a boy up (or down) the rope in a wheelbarrow. Wind brought the scaffold

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down before the show could be held, and subsequent entertainments were safer, musical ones.[13]

Next year 'Marybon Bowling Green' opened in April for the season, as usual. Admission to the gardens was free, and remained so when Gough, having 'lately erected a handsome Octagon' for a band, held the first concert there on 26 May 1737, a few weeks after the prince's visit. The following year he announced that he had engaged musicians from the Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres and Royal Opera House for evening performances of 'the most celebrated Concerto's, Overtures, and Airs'.[14] Now admission was a shilling, ostensibly to keep out 'indifferent company'; sixpence or a shilling remained the usual charge for many years. By the 1740 season 'great Alterations and Improvements' had been made, 'by new modelling and enlarging the Gardens, by making the Orchestra more handsome and commodious, and by erecting an elegant Room, for the better reception of the Nobility and Gentry'. An organ by the noted maker Richard Bridge was installed. Management was now relatively sophisticated, with silver season tickets obtainable from agents, and printed tariffs displayed against over-charging. Liveried servants were banned, smoking discouraged. Gough went bankrupt after the 1741 season, but found backers or otherwise recovered.[15]

He was succeeded in 1746 by John Trusler, a cook from Bath, under whose regime the Gardens became well-known for catering, notably the cakes made by one of his daughters, who became something of a celebrity. For much of the year, the Gardens were now open freely throughout the day for refreshments, cows being kept for milk and cream. By the late 1750s just 26 tickets were sold nightly at the bar for dancing in the ballroom, five shillings admitting a gentleman with two ladies.[16] Trusler stayed in charge until retirement in 1763, though not without financial and other difficulties. In 1751 he was in dispute with his nephew John Sherratt, Trusler claiming sole proprietorship, Sherratt claiming to have fitted up the Gardens 'in a better manner than heretofore' at his sole expense. They were officially in

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partnership by 1754, when they went bankrupt, and for a while thereafter Trusler seems to have been running the Gardens in association with a figure named Sweedes; Sherratt left to run the Upper Long Room at Epsom.[17] It was during Trusler's proprietorship that burlettas were introduced, with a production of Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona* in 1758, translated by Trusler's son and son-in-law Stefano Storace. It became a staple of the Gardens, for which a later proprietor, the composer Samuel Arnold, subsequently wrote additional music.

Trusler was followed by the actor and singer Thomas Lowe, formerly of Handel's oratorio company, a performer at the Gardens since 1750, who obtained a new 14-year lease from Robert Long. Lowe's failure in 1768 has usually been blamed on the wet summer of 1767, but his advertisements claim heavy losses over several seasons and he had had to assign the lease to creditors in 1766. He continued as manager and performer, bringing in the organist and composer James Hook as Master of Music.[18] In 1769 the lease was taken over by the violinist Thomas Pinto, who soon went bust and fled London, to be succeeded by Arnold, apparently in partnership with one John Berry. Defrauded by an employee, Arnold had to relinquish the Gardens in 1774, after which management and ownership become obscurer, with a syndicate of businessmen probably taking control.[19]

By this time the site was already too hemmed in by houses to sustain any lingering sense of bucolic detachment. Lacking intrinsic natural beauty, it was dismissed in 1772 as 'a wretched flat' surrounded by new building and brick-fields, 'no less repugnant to the ends of an agreeable prospect, than offensive to the nostrils'. Though the management had 'really done all that could be done with so scanty a spot in so detestable a situation', the narrow street entrance and lack of a room for visitors to await their carriages made departure chaotic and slow. To address this problem a carriage-park was opened behind the Gardens, with lights and stewards to show the way.[20] Worse was the annoyance caused to neighbours by the fireworks, a mainstay

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of the entertainments since the 1750s – sophisticated events involving ornamental structures such as a 30ft-high Chinese temple created in 1771, and the discharge of quantities of rockets, fire-balls, suns, stars, wheels and 'slow fires'. Fireworks reached a peak in 1772–4 with displays by Giovanni Battista Torré, whose pièces de résistance included an 'illuminated Colonade', 100ft broad and 40ft deep, and a spectacular tableau combining Vulcan's forge, the Cyclops' cavern, and the eruption of Mount Etna. In 1772 Arnold appeared at Bow Street following complaints about fireworks from Mrs Fountaine of Marylebone School and others, but the case was dismissed.[21]

Following the discovery of a spring, 'Marybone Spaw' was opened at the Gardens in 1774, a summer morning's attraction at a shilling a head, since dismissed as 'one of the spurious spas'.[22] From about this time entertainments at the Gardens became increasingly varied, sometimes gimmicky, as at other resorts. In 1774 a Fête Champêtre supposedly attracted some 3,000, when the gardens were 'ornamented with an infinite variety of lamps differently displayed' and the orchestra, burletta theatre and visitors' boxes were festooned with flowers. Also in 1774, William Kenrick held a 'School of Shakespeare' at the theatre, lectures and recitations interspersed with songs.[23]

For the 1776 season the Gardens were decorated as 'the Boulevards of Paris', the open-air boxes along the main avenue being made into little shops with punning names, while one end of the ballroom was fitted up as the English Coffee-house at Paris, with women selling drinks, and a female violin trio.[24] That summer the Gardens were also hired out to Mrs Stuart, formerly of the Casino in Great Marlborough Street, who mounted a 'Festivale di Campagna' with a mock-up of the Alameda de Cadiz and a temporary ballroom in the form of a Temple of Apollo. A mixed success, this ended acrimoniously, Mrs Stuart claiming that her entertainments alone had revived 'a place which was really deserted by the public', and demanding a share of overall profits.[25]

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The final days are obscure. 'Fritz' Robinson, writing to his brother Lord Grantham in June 1778, reported that the Gardens were no more, and entirely covered by buildings. Some sort of revival is said to have been attempted as late as 1794 on a remaining fragment, but it seems clear that the Gardens effectively ended in 1776.[26] There can have been no prospect of an extension to the head lease which expired in March 1777. In the summer of 1777 a visitor reported that the site, where 'the Gods of Etherial fire resided, is now become like a volcano, where the eruptions have overturned the fine orchestra, beautiful temples, and pleasant walks, that used to be grandly illuminated with transparent lamps of various colours, and left nothing but a mere chaos of confusion and desolation'.[27]

Development of the layout and buildings

Evidence for what Marylebone Gardens looked like is meagre and confusing. Written descriptions, most of them in advertising, are fragmentary and vague. There is a dearth of plans and pictorial material, and what exists is contradictory and of doubtful accuracy. Even definite statements may be unreliable – notably J. T. Smith's much-repeated assertion that the Orchestra stood on the site of 17 Devonshire Place – well outside the boundary of the Gardens so far as it is known.[28] Much was ephemeral, changing from season to season, any improvement likely to be over-stated in advertisements. There are hardly any references to the planting, and perhaps this aspect of the Gardens was relatively unimportant, or became so as music and fireworks were developed. In 1737, as Daniel Gough began the transformation, it was noted that 'the Beauty of the Place is sufficient to recommend itself, as is evident from the great number of Persons who daily resort thither'.[29] Rocque's map suggests formal and even intricate planting and layout. In 1762 an

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advertisement refers to ‘the Trees in full leaf, and the Shrubs in full Bloom, which renders them more immediately sweet and refreshing in the Morning’. The trees, however, were remembered as chiefly sycamores, as at Vauxhall – cheap, leafy and fast-growing, they were trimmed of lower branches and served as lamp-standards.[30] J. T. Smith’s sketch from memory of the field entrance confirms a profusion of such trees and bushes (Ill. 3.02).

Rocque shows the Gardens as altered by Gough in the 1730s–40s, and at first glance it looks as if the 1650s layout largely remained (Ill. 2.02). Comparison with Pratt’s 1708 map suggests that the Gardens had been extended northwards, and that the northern bowling green and circular path shown by Rocque were an enlarged version of the old layout (Ill. 2.01b). The northern green as shown by Pratt is closer to that described by Sainthill as measuring 112 by 88 paces. Apart from these, and comparatively sketchy representations on later maps, there is only one complete plan, which exists in at least three copies, and supposedly shows the Gardens as they were in 1756. The original seems to be that in the Marylebone Gardens scrapbook given by J. D. Crace to Arthur Ashbridge in 1912 (Ill. 3.03). Ostensibly informative, and with some similarity to Roque, what may collectively be called the Crace plan has such obvious errors in scale and proportion and in its placing of the buildings fronting the High Street and Bowling Green Lane that it has to be treated with great caution, along with its labelling and annotations.

Only one contemporary perspective view is known (Ill. 3.04). This was drawn by the architect and artist John Donowell and first published as an engraving by John Tinney in 1755. It was republished by John Ryall in 1761, and there are other versions, published by Robert Sayer, John and Carington Bowles, and others, with minor alterations.[31] This view is the basis of Cruickshank’s illustration to Harrison Ainsworth’s *The Miser’s Daughter* (1842), ‘Mr. Cripps encountering his Master in Mary le bone Gardens’. It has been suggested that the central couple shown by Donowell are the Duke and Duchess of Portland; they were omitted from an edition of the view published

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in 1762 after the duke's death. The suggestion that they might be the Fountaines of Marylebone School seems less likely.[32]

The engraving of Marylebone Gardens by Joseph Carmine of Augsburg dates from 1790 or thereabouts, when Marylebone Gardens had ceased to exist (Ill. 3.05). Garishly coloured and intended for viewing in a zograscope, it appears to be a fanciful reworking of Donowell's view. The additional structures shown are probably all imaginary, though just possibly with some basis in a later illustration or description.

There is little correspondence between Donowell's view and the Crace plan. Donowell's bandstand does not resemble the octagonal structure of the plan (presumably the Octagon of 1737) and stands on a main promenade instead of in an open space, facing a large building colonnaded in a manner reminiscent of the Walk at Tunbridge Wells and presumably containing the main concert hall on the first floor – the room first mentioned in 1740 as an 'elegant Room, for the better Reception and Accommodation of the Nobility and Gentry', and subsequently referred to as the Great, Long, Large, Ball or Assembly Room.[33] In the Crace plan the only candidate for this building is on the High Street, containing the entrance to the Gardens. However, it is certain that the High Street entrance was further north (roughly where the entrance to Beaumont Mews now is), while the building's footprint suggests that it is actually Oxford House, which was a school during the heyday of the Gardens. While the plan seems fundamentally unreliable, Donowell's view is partly corroborated by an advertisement of 1744 which mentions 'the Long Room facing the Orchestra'. There is further corroboration in advertisements of the late 1760s, which refer to a covered platform for dancing of 62ft by 22ft, laid in the 'great Walk' or 'near the Orchestra' – pinched dimensions for a platform in the broad open space before the Orchestra in the Crace plan.[34]

Extensive alterations were made for the 1753 season during the Trusler–Sherratt partnership, two years before Donowell's view. The remaining bowling green – probably the northern green shown by Rocque –

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was integrated into the gardens and several new walks were made. The greater part of the 'original Ground' was 'laid out in a new Form'. Some 'thousands' of trees were planted, many extra lamps put up, and a temple was erected, 'decorated with Painting and Machinery'. A promised cascade and other ornaments are said not to have materialized, and although advertisements that season refer to a cascade promised to be 'played off', they refer to a firework, not a water feature.[35]

Improvements for the 1764 season included 'an elegant obelisk' terminating the 'grand walk' and a temple 'facing the orchestra', its front pilastered, with a pediment painted to imitate bas relief. The ceiling carried paintings of the king and queen 'copied from those in the Guildhall', and busts of Handel and Shakespeare.[36]

In 1769, following the sale to Pinto and Troughton, a 'transparent' Temple of Apollo was erected, probably a structure of timber and painted fabric. Designed and painted by Francesco Bigari, 'Mechanist and Painter to the Opera House', it was described as 'a most elegant Piece of Machinery' and 'one of the first Pieces of that kind of Painting in the Kingdom'.[37] 'During the Fireworks,' it was announced in 1772, 'Martial Music will be performed by the whole band in the Temple of Apollo'.[38]

More improvements were reported for the 1770 season, the Gardens having been considerably enlarged and 'almost new laid out' under the direction of 'an eminent Surveyor', at a cost of over £2,000. Another 'new Building' was mentioned in 1773.[39]

The Temple of Apollo built for Mrs Stuart in 1776 was admired by an otherwise dismissive reviewer of her entertainments and decorations as 'a very elegant Fabric of the Doric Order, adorned with Pillars, Pillasters, and transparent Paintings … and much better proportioned and better illuminated than the *Colonade* at Ranelagh'.[40] Its designer may have been the young James Wyatt, for a newspaper report referring to the building's ephemeral nature (mis)quotes the conclusion to Paul Whitehead's lines on the architect's Oxford

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Street Pantheon, 'Wyatt should build in adamant'. Mrs Stuart's advertisements only say that it was 'erected and adorned on a most beautiful plan, drawn by one of the first artists in the kingdom'. She names Biagio Rebecca, who worked with Wyatt on the Pantheon, as having done the paintings.[41]

Marylebone Gardens in conclusion

As a commercial place of entertainment in stiff competition with other public gardens, concert rooms and the theatres, always at the mercy of the weather, Marylebone Gardens was strenuously promoted by advertising and press reports throughout the forty-odd years of its Georgian heyday. Much was promised, less delivered – 'as thin as a slice of beef at Marybone-Gardens' says one character of another in Samuel Foote's 1772 play *The Nabob*. Dr Johnson's anger over the firework cancellation was, he thought, because the management meant 'to save their crackers for a more profitable company'. A complainant in 1774 drew attention to the 'shameful roughness of the walks … so little attended to as to be over the shoes in loose gravel and dust' – and to the never-cleaned lamps, 'so glimmering and dismal as to render the whole most infernally gloomy'. At least the ground would have been reasonably dry, following the digging of 'effectual drains' in 1769 to carry off rainwater.[42] In the same season, a visitor reported that the decorations and entertainment were so tawdry and over-priced that resentment finally turned to violence: 'The Lamps suffered severely – the Stage was in Danger of being demolished: in short, from One to Three in the Morning was … a scene of Riot and Confusion'. Mrs Stuart's decorations in 1776 ran to mere '*Paper* ribbons twined round the Trees, and *Stuff* Festoons hanging over the Boxes' and much of the promised entertainment failed to appear.[43]

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In the end, the physical extent and appearance of Marylebone Gardens and its buildings remain elusive. Rocque's map and Donowell's view can be considered authoritative, but they show different phases of development. Later versions of the map are too impressionistic to serve as evidence for changes, and Carmine's view can hardly be taken seriously. The Crace plan is a mystery, grossly wrong in particulars and perhaps nothing more than a speculative reconstruction. None of this scanty material provides any clue to what the Gardens looked like after the changes of the 1760s and 1770s, and even their eventual extent – said to have swollen to some eight acres – is unrecorded.

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