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PALACE, PARK AND SQUARE: ST JAMES'S AND THE BIRTH OF THE WEST END

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The area today covering Westminster, Pimlico, Hyde Park, Mayfair, St. James's and Covent Garden was originally part of two manors divided by the River Tyburn. To the east, bounded by modern Drury Lane and Oxford Street, was the manor of Westminster; to the west lay the manor of Eye lying between the Rivers Tyburn and Westbourne. Royal landholding in these manors had originally been quite modest; apart from the Palace of Westminster the crown only owned the royal mews at Charing Cross.

The destruction of Westminster Palace by fire in 1512 briefly left the monarchy without a residential Westminster headquarters, but the fall of Cardinal Wolsey in 1529 and the appropriation of his Westminster mansion, York Place, gave Henry VIII the opportunity to re-establish a royal presence in Westminster. Not content with acquiring Wolsey's York Place, the king purchased a large amount of private land adjoining the new palace of Whitehall (as it became) to extend its buildings and gardens. To the north of the palace, for ancillary buildings, the king also purchased a square of land known as Scotland and to the north of that the hospital of St. Mary Rouncevall. Thus Henry VIII acquired all the land, some sixty acres or more, along the Thames waterfront from Charing Cross down to what is now Richmond House Terrace.

This complex series of land transactions, masterminded by Thomas Cromwell, the king's land agent, and later his chief minister, gave the English monarchy a large new royal palace in Westminster. In an act of Parliament of 1536 Henry VIII formally extended the legal boundaries of the old abandoned Palace of Westminster to cover Whitehall thus establishing the two, together, as the principal palace of the realm.

At this point the area of London which is now known as St. James's was still open countryside. As a consequence, it was regarded as a good location for Westminster's leper hospital founded sometime in the mid-thirteenth century. The hospital, its chapel, and the lodgings attached to it, were always to a greater or lesser extent in the orbit of Westminster Palace. Several royal clerks rented the residential parts and, in the fifteenth century, several bishops and royal ministers lived there. By the reign of Henry VIII there was not only a comfortable mansion attached to it but, the hospital church had become a fashionable place to worship for the richer residents of Westminster. It was also well endowed, owning 160 acres of land in its immediate environs. So when Henry VIII bought the hospital and land and annexed them to Whitehall he also acquired another house.

Most large royal manors had subsidiary houses to which the king could withdraw with a small number of companions: Woodstock had Langley, Greenwich had Wanstead and Richmond had Hanworth – so, was St. James's intended to be the royal satellite to Whitehall? Or was it perhaps intended for Anne herself, as a new London Residence for the queen to replace the riverside Baynard's Castle? Or was it intended to become a nursery house for the heir that Anne was to bear the king? So it would become like Greenwich and Eltham - a major seat and a nursery house. As we shall see later on, St. James's did, indeed, become the official nursery house for the royal family and the home of successive Princes of Wales, and there is no reason to imagine that this was anything other than the original intention.

It was to be a handsome thing. Two brick-built courtyards, one on the south with sets of royal lodgings joining in a tall slender tower overlooking the park. This was to be approached by an outer court through a great gatehouse, the one that you can still see today at the bottom of St. James's Street. It was small compared to Whitehall and even compared to Bridewell, but it was designed to be subsidiary to Whitehall and its relatively small size would have suited the smaller royal household of a royal child.

So the grand conception for Westminster embraced the sovereign's own house on the riverside and a linked but separate residence on the other side of a park for his son and heir.

But Henry VIII's Westminster was not just about buildings because a separate process, but one that further consolidated royal power over Westminster, was the transfer of the manorial rights of the Abbot of Westminster to a Crown appointee, the High Steward of Westminster. To retain control of the area round the royal palaces the post was held by the most senior ministers of the crown. The first holder was Sir Anthony Denny, the Keeper of the Palace of Westminster then, under Elizabeth I, it was held by William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and under James I by Robert Earl of Salisbury, and George Villiers Duke of Buckingham. These were men who both controlled England through their prime-ministership, but also controlled Westminster.

Lord Burghley introduced into Westminster's government a board of elected local officials in 1585 in the form of a Court of Burgesses and to them passed responsibilities for controlling housing, sanitation the highways and other matters of local government. You might like to know that, in a typical English way, this Court lasted until local government reform in 1901.

The title of an act of Parliament in 1584 succinctly sums up the character of Westminster as created by the Tudors. It calls it 'the seat of Royalty, the Receipt of the Nobles and Estate of the Honourable Council, the sanctuary of all justices, the place of Parliament, the Show of all the Nobles and Ambassadors coming from Foreign Parts'. This was a place quite unlike the old Palace of Westminster. The old palace was extremely urban, tucked in between Westminster Abbey and the river in a highly urban setting. The new palace was to have its own hunting park, now known as St. James's park and beyond that it was set in a vast landholding of some three thousand acres.

The Land transactions that were managed by Thomas Cromwell not only put together the land for the royal palace of Whitehall it also created a series of hunting parks and a huge area of land north of the Thames as the demesne of the new Westminster Palace. Immediately to the north of Westminster land was acquired from Abingdon Abbey (60 acres), the Hospital of Burton Lazar (42 Acres), the Mercer's Company (c.86 acres), Westminster Abbey and Eton College (185½ Acres). To this was added smaller parcels of land from St. Martin's Church and St. Margaret's Westminster and from Rouncivall Hospital; further small properties came from a number of private individuals. The crown thus acquired virtually the whole area of land south of Oxford Street east of Bond Street and west of St. Martin's Lane. Added to this was Covent Garden to the east of St. Martin's Lane.

Other than safeguarding the springs and conduit-heads that provided water to the royal palaces Henry VIII had no interest in keeping the lands to the north of St. James's park in hand and so, soon after their acquisition, they were granted out on leases of varying lengths. This tenanted landholding became known as the Baliwick of St. James.

The Bailiwick was not the full extent of Henry VIII's acquisitions because, as well as obtaining much (but by no means all) of the Manor of Westminster, between 1531 and 1536 he also acquired most of the manor of Eye to its west. This was a very large area covering some 1,090 acres, 482 north of Piccadilly and 608 to its south.

Sadly the detailed maps and surveys that must have been commissioned by Thomas Cromwell during the acquisition of the lands are all long lost and so we have to rely on later topographical information. And here the early history of Westminster is remarkably well served.

The copperplate map normally known as Agas shows Westminster Abbey and Palace and Whitehall but maddeningly only the corner of St. James's Park and Charing Cross. It shows the Royal Mews north of the cross on the site of what is now the National Gallery. So our starting point has to be the map drawn by the surveyor Richard Newcourt who conducted a survey of London and its suburbs in the early 1640s possibly in connection with the Parliamentary defence of the City. It gives an incredibly good impression of Westminster at the end of the early Stuart period, but the details are a bit problematic. His depiction of the royal residence of St. James, for instance, is completely made up. We also know that he made up a number of houses on the west side of the Park and Whitehall and Westminster themselves can only be described as being diagrammatic.

Yet Faithorne does show us graphically some important points. St. James's Park is completely enclosed by a high wall 1.7 miles long built in 1532-3. Access to it was only from the west side of Whitehall Palace or through St. James's Palace itself. In other words St. James's was inside the curtilage of the park. This can be clearly seen on Hollar's view of Westminster from the north. The gatehouse to St. James', which we can see today from St. James's street, was thus the entranceway to the park as well as to the palace. St. James's, built by Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn as the home to the heir to the throne, was super-secure and this is a fact that defines its history up until the reign of Queen Anne. The park wall prominently appears in an equestrian portrait of Henry Prince of Wales, a later occupant and owner of St. James's and form this you can see that it was a proper wall designed to keep people out.

Faithorne's map needs to be cross-referenced with a remarkable sketch map in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. It is not known who drew this sheet showing Westminster, which was stuck onto a map of the early 1640s originalluy printed as *The Countrymans or Strangers Ready helpe, in his finding of our streeyts, lanes or Places in London.* The stuck on section shows Westminster immediately before the Civil War and makes a slightly better job of depicting St. James's itself.

Both maps make clear the complete isolation of St. James's on the far side of the park. They show the road now known as Pall Mall which had run from Charing Cross to the Leper hospital of St. James since the early middle ages. This road continued westwards fording the river Tyburn and eventually crossing the Westbourne River at Knights Bridge. They also show the new road built by Henry VIII to link the gatehouse of St. James's with what is now Piccadilly. Faithorne accurately shows the tennis court on the corner of St. James's street. North of that, not properly shown or either map, was a physic garden set up in Charles I reign for the production of medicinal herbs.

As for the rest of the land, when it was acquired, it was mostly common fields although some of it had been enclosed. Henry VIII fully enclosed St. James's field and translated the arable land to meadow. He had no real use for the land himself and so almost all of it was immediately leased on commercial terms. In 1585 there was a dispute over land boundaries between two of the tenants and the legal proceedings resulted in a plan that covers much of the Bailiwick, in fact from St. Martin's Lane in the east to Bond Street in the west and from Oxford Street in the north to Charing Cross in the south. It shows in detail the fields and closes let out by the Crown and the three large fields, St. James. St. Martin and St. Giles.

In 1617 the Bailiwick (less the Royal Mews, and St. James's Park) was granted to Prince Charles. The land was to be held on a 99 year lease and held by trustees for the Prince's benefit. To release value from the gift the trustees were permitted to grant leases of less than 31 years on the lands. The Bailiwick remained Charles's as King but, in 1629, in order to top up Henrietta Maria's inadequate jointure, Charles I instructed his trustees to pass the Bailiwick on to the queen's trustees for her benefit.

The level of detail which we have for the bailiwick is replicated in another map related to another legal dispute. This remarkable map is of the Davies estate which would later become the Grosvenor Estate and which stretches between the Thames and Hyde Park covering all the land in the Manor of Eye bought by Henry VIII. It was drawn by lawyers in around 1665 and is a copy of an earlier survey of the estate of 1614. It shows the whole of the west side of Henry VIII's Westminster lands as acquired from the Abbot of Westminster.

Here, in the southern portion, was the Abbots' country retreat, La Neyte, a fine moated manor house only a mile away from the abbey but set in the rural estate of Eye. The house was one of Henry VIII's prizes and it was at least as fine a catch as the master's residence at St. James's. The King kept La Neyte in hand together with the land immediately round it but the rest he leased. The king and his courtiers sometimes used the manor house, but under Elizabeth it too was leased. The manor remained a crown freehold until it was sold by King James I in May 1623.

It seems likely that the village of Eye, such as it was, was located at the west end of what became St. James's Park, on the site of Buckingham Palace today. This little settlement may have limped on into the early seventeenth century, but in 1609-10, as part of his scheme to create a home-grown silk industry, James I enclosed four acres of land at the west end of the park and planted it with Mulberry trees. The Mulberry Garden, roughly on the site of the southern wing of Buckingham Palace, was a significant investment in which the king hoped to lead the nation: the new garden cost nearly a thousand pounds, the trees £435 and the annual outlay on silkworms was to be £120.

The 1614 map also shows part of the huge manor of Hyde bought by Henry VIII in 1636. This was part of the hunting estate and the early 1540s Henry built a new road linking St. James's with Hyde Park so he could conveniently take carts and wagons there. There was also a new banqueting house built in 1546 and it is possibly this that is indicated on the 1614 plan. The Tudors and Stuarts used Hyde Park for shooting of both deer and of wildfowl and the banqueting house and a number of lodges were used for refreshment and entertaining.

The information on these various maps can be combined to give a good picture of the royal estates in Westminster. The geographical centre of them was the Park. Today it is still possible to get a sense of its topography. St. James's palace is built on one of the river terraces of the Thames valley and in the park you can see the fall from the terrace down to what is now the lake. The park was full of watercourses and was used by the Stuarts for wildfowling and also for shooting at driven deer. It was a sort of menagerie and many strange beasts and fowls that were given as royal and diplomatic gifts. At one stage there were a number of elephants and camels resident and provided with a special house.

Because the park was a rural atmosphere so close to the densely packed streets of Westminster it was also a favourite place for royal picnics, for strolls. But what is crucial to remember is that this was a private estate. Charles I enforced regulations that restricted access to the park only through the Whitehall stairs and through St. James's, the park was definitively not open to all comers.

Indeed part of the purpose of purchasing the land around Westminster was to preserve the environs of the royal enclave. A series of royal proclamations first issued in 1580 but repeated and reinforced many times attempted to restrict the growth of London and the build-up of Westminster. Although famously James I had regarded the growth of London as 'a general nuisance to the whole kingdom and, on the face of it, royal policy was to throttle its growth, Charles I, in particular, was happy to grant licences to individual peers to build in its environs. The most obvious example of this was his encouragement of the earl of Bedford to develop a residential area in Covent Garden. This was allowed only on the condition that the buildings were of a quality of which the king and his surveyor of Works, Inigo Jones, approved. In fact the royal aspiration to both increase the quality of buildings in Westminster, and also the class of people living there, had been started by James I and can be seen as a consistent royal ambition before the Civil War.

It was an ambition that was only partially fulfilled because although Covent Garden was indeed completed there was also a huge amount of unregulated building attracting not only the artisan and tradesman but the poor and the beggarly. At the start of James I reign Westminster was a town of around 6,500 with the surrounding parishes containing perhaps another 6,000 mostly living along the Strand. By the time the Civil War broke out the population of the core of Westminster had ballooned by 250% and the Parish of St. Martin in the Fields had grown 500% to a population of 17,000.

Wealthy Courtiers obviously wanted to live in old Westminster near the Abbey and palace but, during Charles I reign in particular, they start to build and buy houses in the Parish of St. Martins. It has been calculated that

between 1625 and 1641 more than 750 people with a claim to gentility owned or occupied property in the parish; this compares to 71 people in 1614. In 1640 there were twenty English Peers, 57 knights and fifty-one esquires as residents.

This is not what King Charles wanted. His concern was to ensure that the aristocracy and gentry resided in their country seats to govern the kingdom, as was their duty. But there were exceptions for, during the 1630s, special permission was given to close friends to build houses in the orbit of the royal palaces.

We can see the most important of these on Faithorne's Map. The house was built by Sir Thomas Howard one of those who participated in the equestrian circle of Henry Prince of Wales and who became, in 1614, became Master of Horse to Prince Charles. Howard was one of those who joined Charles and Buckingham in Madrid and in 1622; he was created Lord Howard of Charlton and Viscount Andover he received the earldom of Berkshire at Charles's coronation. Sometime in the first half of the 1620s Howard built a house opposite the riding house at St. James's on the other side of the road that ran between Charing Cross and Knights Bridge. It was a substantial place with large gardens to the north and in an excellent position for access both to St. James's and for the court at Whitehall.

To the south of the Mulberry garden at the west end of St. James's Park was a half-acre plot on which a successful lawyer, Sir William Blake, had built a modest house in 1623. Blake died in 1630 and his house was sold to George, Lord Goring in 1633. Goring was a courtier and a soldier, but more importantly was vice-Chamberlain to Henrietta Maria and Master of her Horse. He spent a huge amount extending the mansion, building outhouses and stables and a series of beautiful walled gardens facing St. James's Park.

A third huge mansion was built in the northern part of the Baliwick by Robert Sydney third earl of Leicester, a leading Caroline diplomat who bought four acres of St. Martin's Fields. Prohibited from developing it by royal decree, in August 1631, he acquired a licence from Charles I to build a house 'with necessary outhouses buildings and gardens', on the condition that 'the forefronts and all the utter walls and windows of the premises bee wholly made of brick and stone or one of them, the forefronts to be made in that uniform sort and order as may best beautify the place'. Nearby to the North West was the house of Sir William Howard, a crypto-catholic close to Henrietta Maria which he had begun in 1627.

What all this shows is that by the outbreak of the Civil War although there had been a lot of building in old Westminster and in the Parish of St. Martin's, with the exception of a small number of aristocratic mansions licenced by the king in order to enhance the environs of the royal lands, St. James's and the lands around it were still remarkably undeveloped. Hollar's view of Westminster from the north shows a view across St. James's field uninterrupted apart from the Tudor brick conduit house.

The civil war changed all this. In 1642 and 1643 Parliament ordered the fortification of London. The City of London was still walled, ditched and fortified with gates but Westminster was much more vulnerable to attack. At first there were stand-alone defences, small earthwork forts, short trenches, bars and chains across roads. But in 1643, with the real prospect that Charles I's forces could make an assault on London, it was resolved to construct a comprehensive defensive line around the city and its suburbs. In this the bailiwick and Park of St. James was enclosed. The line of the fortifications ran from St. Giles's in an arc across St. James's Fields towards Hyde Park Corner where it ran south past Goring House round the south side of Westminster to Tothill and so to the Thames.

The lines comprised 9ft wide ramparts 18 feet high on the outer ditch side. These were studded with earthwork forts including three in the bailiwick of St. James. These were particularly strongly defended as St. James's was an obvious target and the falling land would give an attacking army an advantage there. The Hyde Park Corner fort was one of the largest on the whole circuit defending the way to Westminster. It was a double fort with seventeen angles and nineteen canon. Within this defense described at the time as 'wonderful strong and of great bounds' were further security measures: turnpikes were set up on the principal routes including crucial roads past St. James's palace towards Charing Cross.

After the execution of the King with London under military occupation all the large buildings round Westminster were commandeered by the army. St. James's was taken over as a barracks and Goring House and eventually Leicester House were also requisitioned. Royal property was put up for sale and parliament was not squeamish about selling the Westminster estates of the crown. In general the leases in the Baliwick of St. James held good but freehold crown land that was in hand in 1649 was gradually sold off by Parliament. The most important sale was of St. James's Fields which was bought by one Hugh Woodward for nearly £2,000 with a view to building houses on it; he immediately began to dig for brick earth. However in the seventeenth century Nimbys were as busy as they are today and after an outcry Cromwell was forced to halt building works.

It is for this reason that St. James's Field was still undeveloped in 1660 when Charles II returned to the throne. Given the pressure both from developers and aristocratic owners this is remarkable. But I think understandable. First of all the fields were the site of the annual St. James's fair a popular and often rowdy four-day event that had been established in the thirteenth century and held most years until Cromwell stopped it in 1651. It was later resumed and was still staged in 1660. Like many a long held tradition, the fair was seen as sacrosanct right of people to enjoy.

The land also had another purpose. Just as the ground on the west side of Whitehall was the palace recreation ground, so was the land on the other side of the road at St. James's. There was the tennis court and Physic garden and crucially there was also the pall mall. The first mention I can find of this game is in 1630 but I think that the long narrow alley built for it is earlier than that. James I recommends the game as one which his son Prince Henry should practice. I don't think anyone now knows how exactly it was played but the accounts describe crushed cockle shells being rolled and beaten into the loam to create a long narrow running surface where players would whack a ball with a croquet-like mallet. When the alley was valued by the Parliamentary Commissioners it was lined by a double avenue of lime trees, 140 in all, and it is this that can be seen on Faithorne's map.

In the years after the Restoration neither of these objections was insurmountable. In 1665 the fair was simply re-located by an order and the Pall Mall was re-located to the much more private confines of St. James's Park. Here, half a mile long it was carefully maintained by its keeper and cockle-shell strewer throughout Charles II reign.

The way was thus open for the field to be developed. After the Restoration all Henrietta Maria's lands were restored to her and amongst there were the freeholds of the bailiwick of St. James. This land was granted to Henry Jermyn, earl of St. Albans. Jermyn had entered Henrietta Maria's household in 1627 and had risen to be her favourite, inevitably causing gossip about their relationship. After fighting with the king during the Civil War he went into exile as the Queen's Lord Chamberlain and was her closest companion through the interregnum.

During this time St Albans had raised 647,416 livres tournois (about £20–25 million in modern terms) and had incurred vast debts in the royalist cause. At the Restoration to repay him Charles II confirmed him as co-proprietor of the Northern Neck of Virginia and granted him leases of the former royal houses of Byfleet, Oatlands, and Weybridge, Surrey, and, crucially of the Bailiwick of St James's, Westminster.

It was as the owner of this land that Jermyn effectively founded the West End. And as he did so he effectively brought into reality the dream that Charles I had – of an aristocratic quarter that complimented the royal estate of Westminster. St. Albans explicitly stated that his new houses were 'for the conveniency of the Nobility and Gentry who were to attend upon his Majestie's Person, and in Parliament'. The centrepiece was St James's Square, based on the principles of classical architecture advocated by Inigo Jones, whom St Albans had known well, St Albans also commissioned Sir Christopher Wren—whose career he had furthered by introducing him to the best builders in Paris in 1665—to design St James's Church.

There is a map or chart drawn by Jonas Moore of around 1665 that although intended to show the river and the docks also shows St Alban's development half built. The land around it is still open fields but the square close to what had become pall mall is well up.

The inhabitants were indeed the great and Good of Restoration London and the Square became and remained an aristocratic quarter for several centuries. Before 1675 in residence were Lord Bellasis, the earl of Arlington, Viscount Halifax, Thomas Jermyn and The French Ambassador, Monsieur Courtin. As the square was developed so houses were built along the park wall on the south side of Pall Mall. These were also occupied by the crème of Restoration Society including famously the king's mistress Nell Gwyn. These houses had the great advantage of backing onto the royal gardens and several of them built high mounds or terraces so they could see over the high park wall and enjoy views of the park.

Meanwhile St. James's palace reverted to its original purpose, the residence of the heir to the throne. Here James Duke of York and Anne Hyde his wife set up household. This was no dingy backwater it was the centre of a glittering court. The residents of the new West End now lived in its bright light and reflected that light back at it.

It is often said, not least by me, that in the development of London the Crown played a relatively slim role. However in the birth of the west end we can see that from Henry VIII's time monarchs were determined that they controlled the land round Westminster. This was for security, for hygiene, law and order, but most of all it was for dignity. Monarchs from Henry VIII to Charles II wanted to dignify their royal palace by an aristocratic quarter ironically it was the Civil war that provided the opportunity for this to happen, thus bring a royal dream to life.