

THE COMPANY'S GARDEN

The garden has been an important feature of the Company's property through the centuries and, while we all know what it is like today, much has happened to it and in it during the past five hundred years. On the occasions when the garden has been discussed by the Court of the Company, the details of its deliberations have been recorded in the Court Books. These are kept in the Company's Archive, and they provide a window into the past.

Although the garden and the Hall buildings appear to be on ground that is largely flat, they are actually on a hillside, which falls away to the west. A walk down Ludgate Hill to Fleet Street shows the nature of the slope.

When Stationers' Hall was built, the western edge of the garden followed the line of the Roman wall of Londinium, which at this point ran roughly from north to south. The church of St Martin Within Ludgate was also built with its west wall on the same alignment – and using some of the old stones.

Bastions were built onto the eastern and northern lengths of the wall by the Romans, but it was not until the 13th century that these defences were added to the western wall. One of them was built onto the part of the wall that later became the boundary of the Stationers' garden. This bastion no longer exists, but three surviving examples from that period can be seen near to the Museum of London.

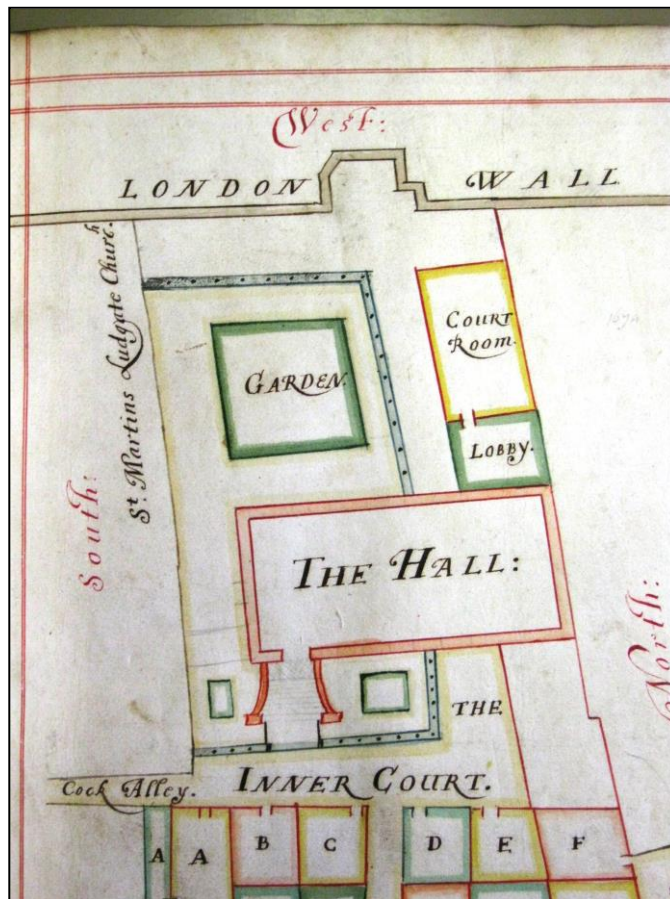
The first time that the garden is mentioned in the Court Books comes in August 1616, when it is recorded that a contribution had been received to make up "the staires in the Garden up to the Cittye wall". In September 1630, the decision was made for "Elmes to take care of the garden".

Between 1630 and 1639, leases were granted for at least four warehouses in the garden, and in February 1635, the Court received a "peticōn" from Dr Jarman and the Churchwardens of St Martin's, "desiring that they might have part of the garden for a Buriall place". At this point it must be noted that St Martin's has never had a graveyard of its own.

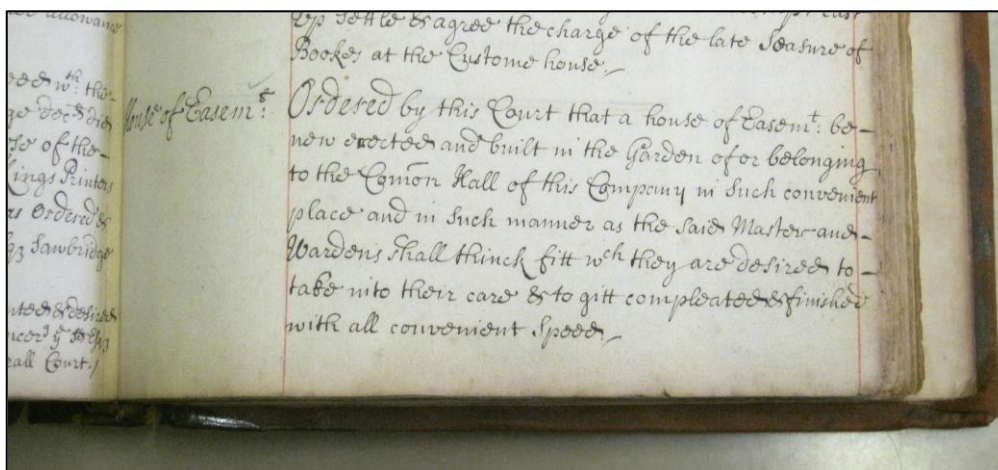
In 1653 the Court was "acquainted with the hurt daily done to their Garden by drying of cloths there", and it becomes clear, in a series of confrontations with St Martin's, that the Court had a continuing concern over the ownership and protection of its garden. In July 1656, it was ordered that "a Padlock shall be hung on the doors of the Parish Church of St Martins Ludgate...to manifest the said Companies right...for ye span of 2 months at least". As a warning shot, this was not completely effective, and less than a year later a similar order was passed – followed by another in 1660. Six years later, in July 1666, the Churchwardens of St Martin's (who must have had rather short memories) asked the Court why the north door of the church opening into the Company's garden was being kept locked with a padlock.

This little dispute must have faded into insignificance in September of that year though, when both St Martin's and Stationers' Hall (and garden) were destroyed in the Great Fire. The Court then had to hold its meetings at Cooks' Hall, where it decided to place a day-and-night guard over the ruins while a team of labourers searched them.

The Hall was rebuilt, and the plan view below (which is from the Archive's copy of Leyburn's 1674 survey) also shows the bastion on the west wall. St Martin's was rebuilt at this time by Sir Christopher Wren.



In 1680, St Martin's achieved a small victory, when the Court agreed that the rector could "make a dore out of the side of the church, opening to this Company's Garden, to be a convenience only of Private Weddings". Only two years later however, the Court ordered that a "House of Easement" (a privy) should be built in the garden and "finished with all convenient speed".



One can perhaps imagine a happy couple and their wedding guests, processing to the church through the garden, with their fingers firmly clamped on their noses.

By July 1691 the Court was so worried about boys playing in the garden and breaking the Hall's windows that it ordered a "convenient Brick Wall" to be built to keep them out. This was not completely

successful, and in November of the same year it ordered that “an Oaken piece of Timber with iron spikes to be fixed and fastened on the covering of the Wall”.

Two years later the Court agreed to build another warehouse in the garden but, aware of the significance of calls of nature, made the condition that “five foote be left for a passage to the House of Easement”.

The turn of the century in 1700 saw the Court still concerned to protect the garden, ordering that “noe Boyes be permitted to play in the Company’s Garden and that noe Pidgeons be kept there”.

In 1709, the Minister and the Churchwardens of St Martin’s were requesting that they “might have liberty of making a Vault to their Church into the ground of the Company’s Garden for the Burial of their Dead”. The Court wanted the Church to pay rather more than it was offering, and it was only after eighteen months of negotiations that the Vault was built in 1711. Four years later the Church was back again, asking for the “liberty of laying in the River Water in to the Pipe belonging to the Company in the Garden”.

In 1723 “Considerable Damages” to the garden gates were noted and, following expensive repairs, the Court ordered that “no cart or carts should hereafter be Permitted to go into the Company’s Garden to any of the Warehouses there”.

The bastion was mentioned in 1737, when an entry in the Court Book mentioned that “The Mount behind Stationers’ Hall was anciently a Bulwark or Watch Tower of the Wall of the City of London”.

Until 1790, everything in the garden was lovely. It was then that a big threat emerged.

Messrs Rowley and Leach of Ludgate Hill proposed to pull down the Company’s warehouses “on the West Side of the Garden” to let more light into some buildings that they were planning to put up. The Court bridled at this, and ordered the immediate building of a “temporary Fence...to preserve the Right of the Company to carry up those warehouses to any necessary Heighth”.

The fence proved to be an inadequate response and, within months, it was to be replaced by “a 14 Inch Wall the whole length of the warehouses...to the Heighth of the second Row of Windows”. In January 1791 the construction of this wall was interrupted by one of Rowley’s employees, who was found to have removed some bricks from it and. In a tit-for-tat measure, the Stationers promptly took down part of Rowley’s own wall and took legal action for trespass.

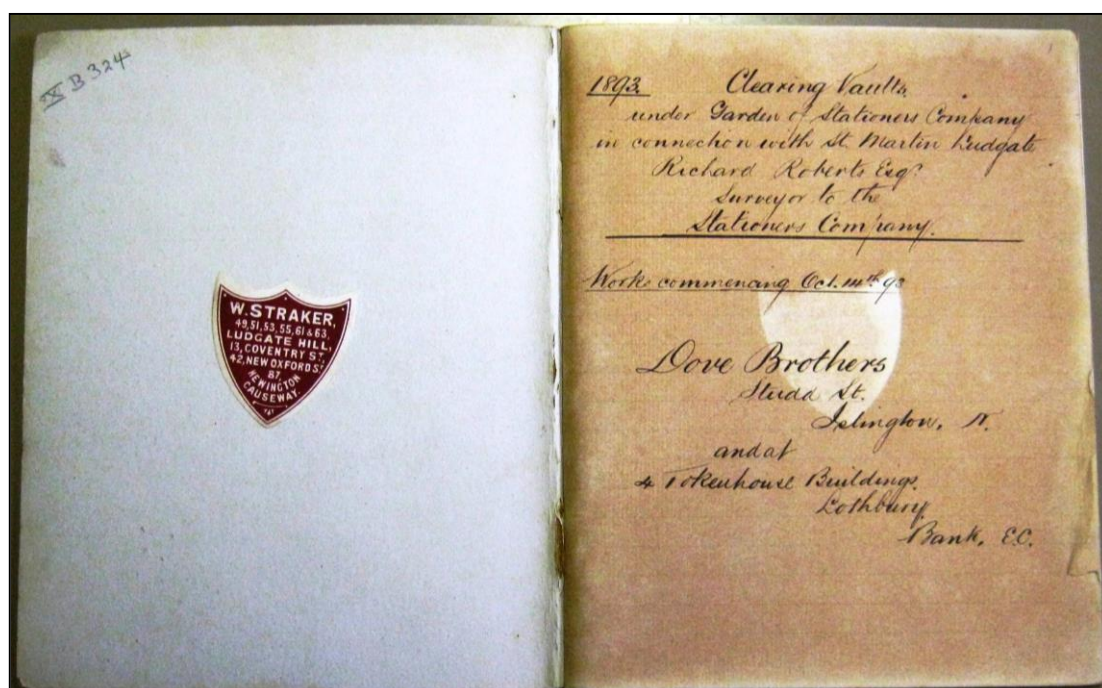
Realising “the anxiety which a tedious Law Suit must naturally Occasion”, Rowley caved in, and the Court was advised on 4th February that “he was willing to submit to whatever had been proposed on behalf of the Company”.

In 1800 a certain John Leach of the London Coffee House (adjoining St Martin’s on the west) asked the Court for permission to occupy “a small part of..the North West corner of the Garden”, but it was not until 1806 that the Court agreed “to give Mr Leach possession of the Bastion as soon as possible”.

Rather more mundanely, the Court discovered in 1811 that there was “an arrear of 15 years rent due from the Parish [of St Martin] to the Company for the use of the Drain in the Garden”, but many years were then to elapse before St Martin’s turned up in the Court Books again.

It was in October 1893 that the Court agreed to an application from the Rector and Churchwardens of its ecclesiastical neighbour for “a faculty for the removal of all human remains in the...Garden Vault which was built in 1711”, subject to the work being carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Medical Officer of Health.

The Vaults were cleared by Undertakers under the supervision of the Company’s Surveyor. In a document now in the Archive (below), he recorded the removal of “47 coffins fully named; 12 lead coffins no names; 159 boxes of Bones and Coffin debris; and one box filled with plates, etc”. All of the items were removed over several days around dawn, and on 8th November 1893 the “Arch of Stationers’ Vaults” was “Hermetically sealed with Concrete”. At some time the seal must have been broken and replaced with what is now a badly rotting wooden door, which is due for replacement as part of the latest refurbishment of St Martin’s.



The final entry in the Court Books records that permission was granted to the Institute of Journalists “to give instruction to small numbers of their men in the first elements of drill in the garden”. Perhaps it is indeed true that the pen is mightier than the sword.

What emerges from the Court Books is that, through the centuries, the Company has been a successful custodian of its garden: confirming its ownership, ensuring its appropriate use, preventing encroachment by others, and receiving revenue from it. In recent years the garden has however no longer been a subject for Court discussion, and revenues now come indirectly, when the Hall is used for events that are able to move outside the Hall and its associated rooms.

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