



2.8 Covent Garden Market

market clear of any ‘undesirables’. Users can be removed, with force if necessary, for drinking alcohol, playing music, leaflet distribution, or preaching. Furthermore all street entertainers and buskers must have a permit to perform in the area, and to obtain this they are required to undergo an audition to ensure they meet certain standards. A timetable is given to each permit performer who performs at certain times and on certain days of the week. Design and aesthetic changes also seek to keep out those who are not wanted. This is most noticeable through changes in floorscape and street furniture, the placement of which demarcates legally which land is owned by Scottish Widows and which is public, owned by Westminster Council.

For some, Covent Garden, is now facilitating a homogenised commerce aimed at an international clientèle rather than locals. Image and history are used to create a consumable vision of urban public space for tourists (Figure 2.8). Critics argue that the multifunctional market or the social realism of the Victorian market are now largely reduced to pure commercial exchange, where the fostering of civility and community are consequently diminished (Franks 1995). For tourists and many Londoners however, Covent Garden represents one of the great destinations of the capital, and a success story in how to re-invent public space.

The evolution of the London residential square: access and control

The evolution of the London square demonstrates the changing attitudes in England towards public and private urban space, particularly when compared to post-renaissance continental Europe. Webb (1990: 91) observes that with the exception of Trafalgar Square and Sloane Square, all London’s planned squares were intended as the private domains of residents in the surrounding properties. As such, the residential square contrasts sharply with the public marketplace as regards access, activity, and therefore design and setting.

The London residential square was first developed in the seventeenth century as commercial speculation by aristocratic landlords who had obtained tracts of land from the church via Henry VIII a century earlier. The first London square to be laid out was Covent Garden in 1631. When



2.9 Leicester Square with private garden for residents, 1721



2.10 Gates with gatekeeper on the Taviton Street entrance of Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, shortly before their removal in 1893

the Earl of Bedford applied to Charles I to develop the land, he intended to create a residential area for aristocratic families. These new London residents were country house dwellers who increasingly wanted a winter residence in London for business and for socialising (Girouard 1990: 156).

If Covent Garden did not fully realise its potential for residential development (see above) for the new society Londoners, the squares of Bloomsbury that followed certainly did. The land in Bloomsbury was also owned by the Bedfords, who, with the help of speculative builders, built many of the residential squares in Bloomsbury: from Bedford Square in 1776 to Gordon Square in 1860. The development process employed created new typologies of space and ownership.

The central squares in Bloomsbury were gravelled and fenced off with wooden rails so the affluent residents of the square could promenade in semi-privacy (Girouard 1990: 158). Railing off the central space of the London square to residents became the norm after Covent Garden, preventing stalls, hawkers, carts and so forth from entering, an example being Leicester Square (Figure 2.9).