

The site of the Westminster Physic Garden

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Abstract

There has been a considerable amount of speculation about the site of the Westminster Physic Garden (WPG) over the years. The actual site is here defined as the area bound by Great College Street (Dead Wall) to the north, Bowling Alley to the west, Wood Street to the south and Mill Bank to the east. The background to the setting up of the WPG is discussed in the context of How(e)'s *Phytologia Britannica*, 1650, and Merrett's *Pinax*, 1666, and the end of the English Civil war.

Keywords: Morgan; How(e); Morison; *Phytologia*; *Pinax*; Abbey

How's *Phytologia* 1650 & Merrett's *Pinax* 1666

The Westminster Physic Garden (WPG) opened in 1650/51¹ and was still open in 1692². William How(e) (1620-1656) and Edward Morgan (1615?-1689) were the instigators. Although the detailed role of How is unknown, Morgan became the "botanist" at the WPG. Morgan's Bodleian Herbarium amounts to a total of 2484 specimens (Morgan's own count), most of which had been grown in the WPG³. Although there are many duplicates, this still constituted a significant proportion of the British flora. How's *Phytologia Britannica*, 1650, lists about 1400 plant species, but includes some non-natives. By the death of the outstanding English naturalist of his day, John Ray, in 1705, there were about 970 native plants recognised (Clarke, 1900). Today we have some 1600 native plants (excluding microspecies) (Pearman, 2017:17).

The *Phytologia* was the first attempt to bring together in one work all the native British and Irish plants, which was also the plan behind the WPG and reflects How's influence. The *Phytologia* was such a success that a second edition was called for by the publisher after How's death in 1656 (Webster, 1967: 402). "Ned Morgan tells me next Dr. Modesy [Robert Morison (1620-1683)], Dr. [John] Dale [d.1662?] Dr. [Christopher] Merrit(*sic*) [1614-1695] & Mr. [John] Goodyer [1592-1664] the last 3 were about a new *Phytologia* 3 or 4 years agoe but Dr. Modesie coming to towne [in 1660] Ned Morgan thinks they left of (*sic*)..." (ref: Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC., V.a.292 John Ward Diaries, Vol.9 23v-24c.). Dale and Goodyer died (How died in 1656) leaving Merrett to edit the *Pinax Rerum Naturalium Britannicorum*, 1666, which was effectively the second edition of the *Phytologia*. How also had other botanical ambitions. Hartlib reference 29/4/8A states: "Author Phytologie Britannicae Howe is about a collection of divers other Additional Catalogues as of Yorke-shire etc..." His early death precluded this.

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¹ The Hartlib Papers, Sheffield University, Ephemerides, c.April 1651, E28/2/13A.

² Middlesex County Records, Sessions Book 498, 1692.

³ Book of Benefactors, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford ref: Ash.Lib.AMS 2. p.12.

The WPG attracted many botanists, for example, John Tradescant the Elder (c.1570-1638) & Younger (1608-1662), Jacob Bobart the Elder (c.1599-1680) & Younger (1641-1719), Robert Morison, Edward Lhwyd (c.1660-1709), Thomas Lawson (1630-1691), James Petiver (1663/64-1718), Leonard Plukenet (1642 -1706), John Ray (1627-1705), Thomas Willisel (1621-c.1675), Sam. Doody (1656-1706), William Coles (1626 -1662), Sam. Brewer (1670-1743), John Evelyn (1620-1706) & Sam. Pepys (1633-1703) *etc.* Morgan thereby gained a considerable reputation as a botanist. Plukenet (1696:224) said of Morgan: "...the brightest in his time in the subject of botany", and Lhwyd: "...diligent and intelligent and knowledgeable, very skilled in botany."⁴ However, as Gunther (1922:353) and others have pointed out, the site of the WPG remained undetermined. Morgan is an overlooked botanist because of his common name and the fact that he did not venture into print, presumably because he could not afford it. He has, however, recently been the subject of a resurgence of interest but, the site has remained incorrectly or imprecisely determined (see below). Jeffers (1953) suggested that it appears that the WPG was in the vicinity of the West Cloister of Westminster Abbey, probably on the site of what is now Little Dean's Yard. This fails on two counts. Firstly, the WPG was not within the Precincts of Westminster Abbey (A. Trowles, Head of Westminster Abbey Muniments, pers. com.). There is no record of the WPG in the Westminster Abbey Muniments. The West Cloister and Little Dean's Yard are both within the Precincts of the Abbey. Secondly, Jeffers has mistranslated the following from Morison (1672:1-2):

"Dum haec scribo in horto Edvardi Morgan, pone caenobim occidentale Westminster dictum, omnium hortulanorum Botanicum..."

The correct translation (Miss C. Reynolds, pers. com.) is: "...I write this in Edward Morgan's garden behind the said western monastery [not "behind the West Cloister of Westminster Abbey..."] [*c.f.* The eastern monastery: St. Paul's Cathedral]...at Westminster, the most professional of all the small gardeners one ever visits." Burnby (1994:6) suggested that the WPG was south of Great College Street and east of Bowling Alley but "it requires further work." This the author has done. His conclusion is that the WPG was indeed in this area, which is not within the Abbey Precincts. Gregory (2023:56 + Figs. 1 & 2) states: "...Although both [the dean's house⁵ and garden and Dean's Yard] have been suggested as the site of Morgan's garden, another potential site is that of the former almshouse garden which stood by the west side of Dean's yard and immediately south of the former gatehouse..." This "almshouse" was the King Henry VII almshouse. Further, this "potential site" is also within the Westminster Abbey Precincts (Rushton, 2002:82). Oswald (2022) does not suggest a site for the WPG. Horsman (2023) herewith, Jeffers (1953) and Gregory (2022) having been ruled out, Burnby (1994:6) is the subject of further investigation. There follows a review of the evidence regarding the site of the WPG:

1. The most common reference to the site of the WPG is that it was "behind the [Westminster] Abbey". Both Leonard Plukenet (1696) and Robert Morison (1672:2) said this about the site. Most visitors approach the Abbey from the north. Therefore, "behind the Abbey" ("beyond the Abbey") is south of the Abbey.
2. James Petiver (Jeffers, 1953: 108) stated that it was "behind the Abbey Wall", which puts it outside the Abbey Wall. This wall partly encircles the Infirmary's Garden and

⁴ As ³ above.

⁵ Gregory, 2023:56. She points out that "...the dean's house and garden with Dean's Yard...both have been suggested as the site of Morgan's garden, another potential site is that of the former almshouse garden...the garden of which has been considered a strong contender for the location of Morgan's garden..." I haven't come across these suggestions.

runs just to the north of the WPG alongside the Mill Ditch which carries the River Tyburn west. The adjacent Tyburn would have met the water needs of the WPG. The "1664 Hearth Tax Return for St. Margaret's Westminster, Dead Wall", declares an "Edward Morgan" living on Dead Wall (renamed Great College Street in 1691) with two hearths. If he had a garden it would have been small. Only two (one and the same?) "Edward Morgans" are included in the eighty-three 1664 Hearth Tax Returns for Westminster. There are no connections with the other Edward Morgan. Living on Dead Wall would be handy for the site proposed for the WPG. I conclude that this is the Edward Morgan, the subject of this paper.

3. Referring now to the 1658 map of Westminster by Faithorne & Newcourt, this map was based on a survey done in 1643-47.⁶ Therefore, the 1658 map is not necessarily an accurate representation on the ground in 1658. It is not known how accurate the map is at 1658. There is a garden (B: Fig.1) behind the row of houses east of Bowling Alley (a street) (A: Fig.1). Samuel Hartlib (c.1600-c.1670) and Robert Child (1613-1654) both said that the WPG was "...near the booling alley..." in Westminster¹. There are eight or twelve plots in this garden. Thomas Lawson (1630-1691) visited the WPG four times in quick succession in 1677⁷. He recorded approximately five-hundred different plants (Jeffers, 1953:130). Lawson was the first Quaker botanist and he hailed from Cumbria. He recorded the bare outline of the WPG in his commonplace book which is now held at The Linnean Society of London. Raven⁸ (1947/48) gives an account of Thomas Lawson's commonplace book. This outline is repeated in Jeffers (1953:113-126). It is the only description of the WPG that we have apart from a purely conjectural plan of the WPG by Jeffers (1953:109, Fig.1). Lawson describes eight flower beds.⁹

4. The WPG was divided into two by a fence (C: Fig. 1). Lawson¹⁰ describes an "over thw'art way" dividing the garden into two. It is interesting to note that Morgan's friend, John Ward, who visited the WPG with Morgan frequently in the period 1661/62, remarked in his diary: "There is a pretty hedge of [medicinal] Spanish broome" in the WPG".

5. At the eastern end of this same area is what might be a small wood. Lawson describes an "arbour" (D: Fig.1) at the bottom of the WPG.¹¹ He also refers to a wall in this neighbourhood, the Abbey Wall?

6. The WPG was still open in 1682.¹² The 1658 map has been compared with the Robert Morden/Philip Lea 1682 map but the comparison is not useful.

7. Francis Naylor's "Physick Garden". This is dealt with in Horsman (2023). The general location of the WPG is confirmed but the actual location is not.

It is concluded that the WPG was Fig.1: B, C and D. This site was just over Great College Street from the Infirmary's Garden which is within the Precincts of Westminster Abbey (Harvey, 1992).

⁶ British History Online, Westminster. Plate 1: "Extract from Faithorne and Newcourts' map, surveyed in 1643-47 and published in 1658.

⁷ Ref: Ms. 18 Linnean Society of London.

⁸ As ⁷ above.

⁹ As ⁷ above: p. 241.

¹⁰ As ⁷ above: p.243.

¹¹ As ⁷ above: f.238. These trees were presumably part of the arbour.

¹² As ² above.

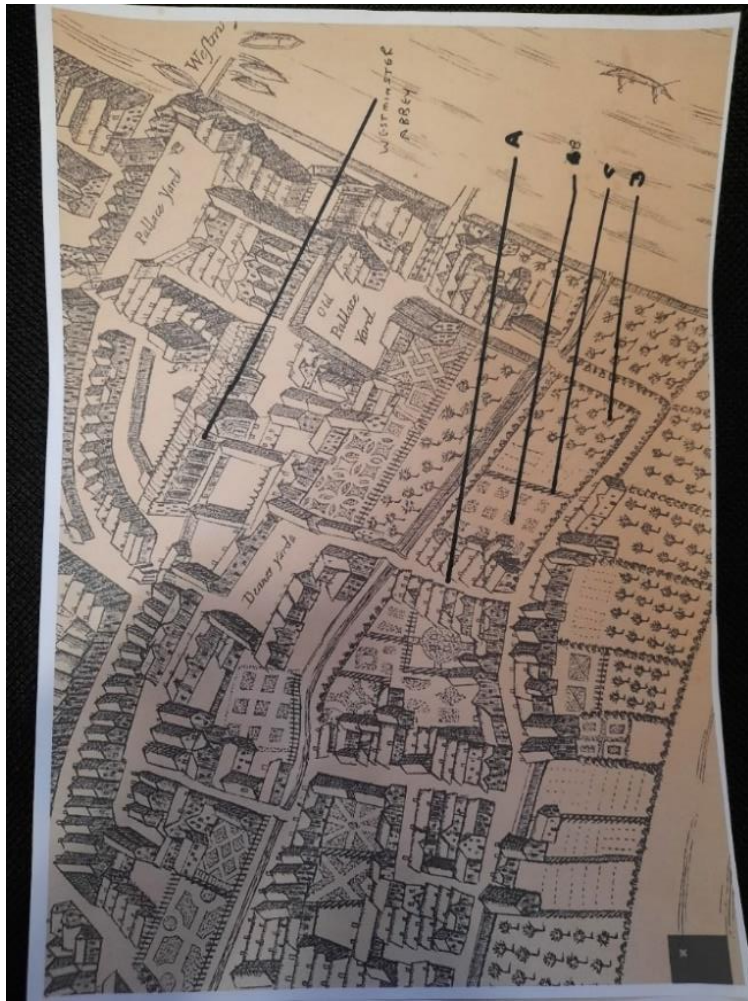


Figure 1. 1658 Newcourt, Richard, and William Faithorne, An Exact Delineation of the Cities of London and Westminster and the Suburbs Thereof....Beinecke Rare Books Manuscript Library, Yale University, USA. Surveyed in 1643-47. Site of Westminster Physic Garden. A- Bowling Alley, B - 8/11-12 Flower beds, C - Over th'wart way, D – Arbour

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