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For the like Uses, as the Moore-Fields': The Politics of Penn's Squares

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*“For the like Uses, as the
Moore-fields”: The Politics of
Penn’s Squares*

THE PUBLICATION, IN 1683, of a plan for Philadelphia, assured prospective settlers and investors that William Penn’s new colony of Pennsylvania would be anchored by a well-designed commercial center (fig. 1).¹ The so-called *Portraiture* is considered a seminal document in the history of city planning. Yet historians persistently have failed to grasp the importance of Surveyor General Thomas Holme’s statement, in an accompanying commentary, that four of five public squares were included “for the like Uses, as the Moore-fields in London.”² In so doing,

The research and writing of this essay was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The author wishes to thank Henry Ablove, Ellen G. D’Oench, Gregory Heller, and Diana Post, as well as the two anonymous readers who made several constructive suggestions. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Edmund N. Bacon.

¹ *A Letter from William Penn, Proprietary and Governor of Pennsylvania in America, to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders of that Province, residing in London* (London, 1683), reprinted in *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West New Jersey and Delaware, 1630–1707*, ed. Albert Cook Myers (New York, 1912), 243. The pamphlet was reprinted twice in 1683 and again in 1687 and was translated into Dutch, German, and French.

² Historians typically describe the squares simply as open areas “for recreational use,” as in Hannah Benner Roach, “The Planting of Philadelphia, A Seventeenth-Century Real Estate Development. I,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92 (1968): 36, or Gary B. Nash, “City Planning and Political Tension in the Seventeenth Century: The Case of Philadelphia,”

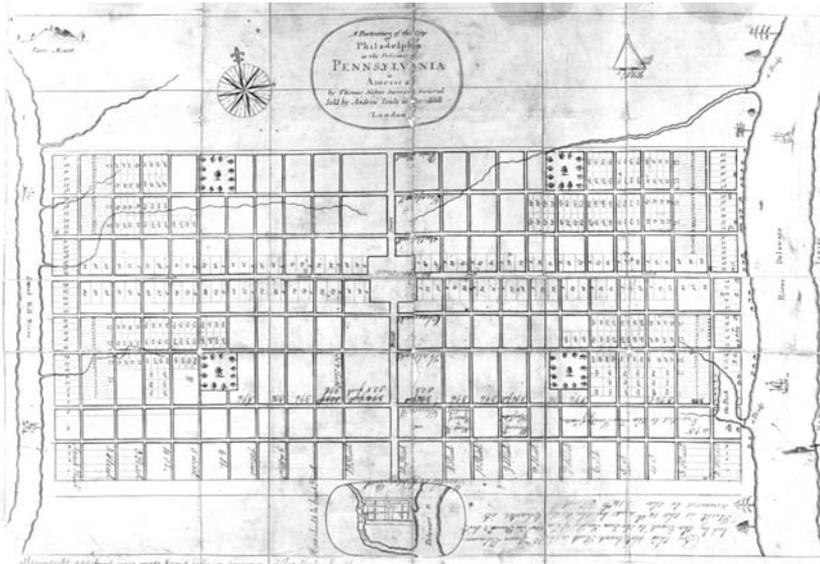


Fig. 1. *A Portraiture of the city of Philadelphia in the Province of Pennsylvania in America*, 1683. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

they have overlooked a significant category of spaces that inspired the form and meaning of what arguably were the most innovative elements of Philadelphia's plan. The Moorfields reference points to the considerable influence of landscape gardening in the genesis of the *Portraiture* and the moral as well as political meaning Penn invested in his ideal city plan.

Conscious of the destruction wrought by the Great Fire of 1666 as it swept through the narrow and haphazard streets of London, Penn initially planned his colonial capital as a two hundred-acre commercial center within a ten thousand-acre area that comprised "the bounds and extent of the libertyes of the town." Residential lots were to be laid out along the banks of the Delaware at Upland (now Chester), in a series of strips of land with houses erected at the center of each tract so as to leave generous space for gardens and orchards "that it may be a greene Country Towne,

Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 112 (1968): 61. Similarly, Moorfields is mentioned only in passing as in John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton, NJ, 1965), 163, and Perry L. Norton, "William Penn Plans His City," *Pennsylvania Heritage* 9 (spring 1985): 30. The notable exception is Anthony N. B. Garvan, who recognized the importance of the squares and proposed some sources in "Proprietary Philadelphia as Artifact," in *The Historian and the City*, ed. Oscar Handlin and John Burchard (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 189–90. His observations were a starting point for the present study.

w^{ch} will never be burnt, and allways be wholesome.”³ Penn did not specify how the commercial center should be laid out, directing the commissioners who preceded him to the colony only to find a navigable stretch of the Delaware with a viable landing area where a quay could be constructed with a storehouse “w^{ch} will yet serve for Market and State houses too.”⁴ He made no mention of public spaces such as parks or squares, nor did he direct that common spaces be reserved for houses of worship.

The commissioners discovered that this plan was impractical. A Swedish settlement was already well established at Upland and no adjacent site was large enough or topographically appropriate for Penn's town and the adjoining liberties. Accordingly they selected an alternate site farther upriver on a low-lying plain between the Delaware and the Schuylkill rivers and purchased a three hundred-acre tract on the Delaware for the commercial center. By the time Penn arrived in the autumn of 1682, Holme had sketched out a rudimentary layout of streets and house lots at this site, and distribution of town properties by lottery had begun.⁵ Because there was insufficient frontage property along the Delaware for all who had purchased land to date, Penn proposed that the town be extended westward to incorporate the east bank of the Schuylkill, lots along which would be assigned to absentee purchasers. He directed his commissioners to negotiate the purchase of Schuylkill properties and wrote back to prospective colonists in England to praise the Schuylkill's potential as the avenue into the heartland. Holme duly revised the plan.⁶

³ Penn's first plans are spelled out in “Certaine Conditions or Concessions agreed upon by William Penn . . . & those who are the adventur[ers] and purchasers in the same Province,” dated July 11, 1681, and in the “Instructions given by me William Penn Proprietor and Governo^r of Pennsylvania,” of Sept. 30, 1681, in *The Papers of William Penn*, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn, 5 vols. (Philadelphia, 1981–87), 2:98–102, 118–21 (henceforth abbreviated as *Penn Papers*). These strip lots would have resembled the land allotment pattern adopted in many New England settlements that in turn derived from long-established field systems in England and the continent. Sylvia Doughty Fries, “Philadelphia,” in *The Urban Idea in Colonial America* (Philadelphia, 1977), 91–92, suggests that the city might have stretched for some fifteen miles. Nash challenges this theory in “City Planning and Political Tension,” 57n21. See also Roach, “Planting of Philadelphia, I,” 6–10, 20, and Reys, *Making of Urban America*, 120–21, 138–40.

⁴ Penn, “Instructions,” 2:120.

⁵ The earliest surveys were started by Thomas Fairman, acting on orders from Commissioner William Markham; Holme took over the survey project after his arrival in the spring of 1682. Roach, “Planting of Philadelphia, I,” 24–25; Nash, “City Planning and Political Tension,” 55–59.

⁶ Complicating Penn's project was the fact that here, too, Swedish as well as some Dutch and English settlers already occupied much of the land. Roach, “Planting of Philadelphia, I,” 12–14, 31–34; Nash, “City Planning and Political Tension,” 58–59. See also Irma Corcoran, “William Penn and His Purchasers: Problems in Paradise,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 138 (1994): 478–79.

This revised plan, the full title of which was *A Portraiture of the city of Philadelphia in the Province of Pennsylvania*, was published, with Holme's commentary, to accompany Penn's enthusiastic description of the colony sent to the investment group known as the Free Society of Traders. "I remember not one better seated," Penn announced, "so that it seems to me to have been appointed for a Town, whether we regard the Rivers, or the conveniency of the Coves, Docks, Springs, the loftiness and soundness of the Land and the Air, held by the People of these parts to be very good."⁷ Holme was careful to label the plan a "draught" that might "hereafter, when time permits, be augmented" and drew in only a rough approximation of topography, leaving out such worrisome details as the numerous streams that zigzagged through the area and the marshy banks along the Schuylkill that would impede the building of roads or houses immediately adjacent to that river. The *Portraiture* described an efficient commercial hub where "Ships may ride in good Anchorage, in six or eight fathom water in both rivers, close to the City, and the Land of the City level, dry and wholsom: such a scituation is scarce to be parallel'd."⁸ And Penn could report that settlement was already proceeding apace: "The Planted part of the Province and Territories . . . [has been] cast into six Counties . . . containing about Four Thousand Souls," with "four Score Houses and Cottages," merchants, craftsmen and "Country-men . . . close at their Farms." The capital "Philadelphia, the Expectation of those that are concern'd in this Province," Penn noted, "is at last laid out to the great Content of those here, that are any wayes Interested therein."⁹

The city was projected to develop across a compact one-mile-by-two-mile grid of streets covering roughly twelve hundred acres. Holme subdivided the grid into four quarters, defined by the intersection of Broad Street, running north-south, and High (Market) Street, running east-west, both one hundred feet wide. "Front" streets along each river (also one hundred feet wide) were set back, leaving the banks open. The remaining streets would be fifty feet wide. The plan was symmetrical along Broad Street: on each side ten streets ran north-south; three streets

⁷ *Letter . . . to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders*, 239–40. This plan was adjusted as early as 1684, when Broad Street was shifted westward. See Hannah Benner Roach, "The Planting of Philadelphia, A Seventeenth-Century Real Estate Development. II," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92 (1968): 156.

⁸ [Thomas Holme], "A Short Advertisement upon the Scituation and Extent of the City of Philadelphia . . .," in *Letter . . . to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders*, 242.

⁹ *Letter . . . to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders*, 238–40.

ran east-west to the north of High; five streets ran east-west to the south. The intersection of Broad and High streets was opened out as a ten-acre central square at the corners of which "houses for public affairs, as a meeting house, assembly or state House, market house, school-house, and several other buildings for public concerns" could be erected. Holme also described four eight-acre squares, one in each of the surrounding quadrants, intended, as has been noted, "for the like Uses, as the Moore-fields in London." And while he left the center square blank, Holme drew trees around each of the other four squares so as to suggest some purposeful planting design. He laid out the squares symmetrically around the north-south axis of Broad Street: the two southern squares were centered in their respective quarters but offset within surrounding blocks so that streets ran along only two sides. Because he laid out fewer streets north of High Street, the two northern squares sat at the northern boundary and, though also offset within surrounding blocks, had streets on three sides.

Holme also drew in just over five hundred and fifty house lots of varying sizes. The largest lots, reserved for major purchasers, lined up along High Street and the two Front streets. Smaller lots for lesser purchasers would fill the blocks extending back from each river to the squares. On three of the squares he drew house lots along two sides to indicate how the houses could be oriented to the streets and the respective squares: he left blocks adjoining the northwest square blank. Though not capacious, still these lots would accommodate a house, garden, and small orchard, Holme noted in his commentary, "to the great Content and Satisfaction of all here concerned."¹⁰ He left the rest of the grid blank, to be subdivided later by the proprietary land office.

The decision to call Philadelphia's plan a "portraiture" rather than simply a "map" or "diagram" is intriguing because this word typically was assigned to the likeness of an existing and tangible person or thing or an established concept, as if the planners wanted to acknowledge their debt to an existing city here "re-presented." On the one hand, as Susan Mackiewicz has pointed out, the plan promised the future reordering of the selected site, in effect giving concrete form to a still abstract vision.¹¹ On the other hand, both Penn and Holme described the city as if already formed: "The City is so ordered now, by the Governour's Care and

¹⁰ Holme, "Short Advertisement," 243.

¹¹ Susan Mackiewicz, "Philadelphia Flourishing: The Material World of Philadelphians, 1682-1760" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 1988), 111.

Prudence . . . etc.”¹² Penn’s dislike of cities and his oft-quoted admonition, “When Cain became a murderer . . . he turned a builder of cities,” has prompted some scholars to assume that he desired a settlement that “would have little in common physically with the crowded London, or even Bristol of his day.”¹³ Yet though the spaces of the new city might not replicate those of the old, London was still Penn’s touchstone and he envisioned Philadelphia both as an explicit tribute to and an improvement upon his native city.

The grid of streets laid down by Holme was an ancient form particularly well suited to military and commercial settlements where ease and efficiency of movement were important. At Philadelphia access to or from either river to the central market was direct and blocks could be laid out quickly and efficiently; in theory the street grid might be extended as the population increased. Holme had lived in Ireland and likely adapted the plan from the standard castral grid around a central parade square used at British colonial outposts such as Londonderry and Limerick.¹⁴ In North America comparable street grids surrounding a central open space had been laid out in Newtown (later renamed Cambridge) in the Massachusetts Bay colony and in New Haven, Connecticut. Penn too had lived in Ireland and was familiar with the military model. During the 1670s, he had served as a trustee for the colony of West Jersey and so would have known Richard Noble’s axial plan for the new town of Burlington, though this did not include public squares.¹⁵

Holme included very few lots around the squares and these do not seem to have been oriented in any kind of consistent fashion.¹⁶ He may

¹² Holme, “Short Advertisement,” 243.

¹³ Edward Corby Obert Beatty, *William Penn as Social Philosopher* (New York, 1939), 164. But Penn made this comment in a letter to his children written on the eve of his return to Philadelphia in 1699, by which time the fractious politics of the young settlement had dampened his early optimism. See “The Advice of William Penn to His Children, Relating to Their Civil and Religious Conduct” (1699), in *The Select Works of William Penn*, 4th ed. (London, 1825), 3:598. Penn was paraphrasing Abraham Cowley, who did not condemn cities per se: “The three first Men in the World, were a Gard’ner, a Ploughman, and a Grazier; and if any Man object, That the second of these was a Murtherer, I desire he would consider, that as soon as he was so, he quitted our Profession [of husbandry] and turn’d Builder.” See “Of Agriculture,” in *The Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley. Consisting of Those which were formerly Printed; and Those which he Design’d for the Press*, 10th ed. (London, 1707), 2:708.

¹⁴ Garvan, “Proprietary Philadelphia as Artifact,” 190–94; Fries, “Philadelphia,” 97–98.

¹⁵ Reys, *Making of Urban America*, 126–30, 158, 161–63.

¹⁶ Garvan suggests that the large adjacent blocks left blank were intended for sizeable town houses to be built for the proprietor and his family, but this disregards the Moorfields precedent.

simply not have given the problem much thought because there was not yet substantial demand for these lots when the plan was prepared for publication. And he may have lacked a viable model. For most of the seventeenth century the London residential square was still a dynamic and evolving urban space with little or no consistency in form or layout. Not all new developments included squares, and not all squares were devised as part of a stylistically integrated design.¹⁷

It was most likely Penn who inserted a landscaped square into each of the quadrants of the city plan. As an educated Londoner and member (albeit a dissenter) of the court of Charles II, he would have been more familiar than Holme with new approaches to urban improvement encouraged by the monarch since the Restoration. Like both his father and grandfather, Charles II was an avid planner who recognized that civic improvements could promote London's status as an imperial capital. He created royal commissions to improve the condition of London's streets and to repair and restore Old St. Paul's, and he initiated major upgrades to London's royal parks. As early as the 1660s systematic studies of the demography of the city were begun and "informed debate about the size, function, and national impact of the metropolis had become common."¹⁸ When disaster struck in 1666, Charles moved quickly in the aftermath of the fire, joining with the Corporation of the City of London to appoint a Rebuilding Commission and recruiting Christopher Wren to oversee the revitalization of the city.¹⁹

As patron of the Royal Society, Charles supported the work of leading theorists and architects including John Evelyn, Wren, and Robert Hooke, all of whom devised plans for the rebuilding of London after the fire. In their respective rebuilding plans, both Evelyn and Wren envisioned opening up the city spaces with wide diagonal thoroughfares connecting major institutions such as the Royal Exchange and St. Paul's set within large public plazas. From these radiated secondary webs of residential cross streets punctuated by numerous smaller squares at selected intersections. Hooke, by comparison, exhibited a model of a plainer grid design at the Royal Society in 1667. This design is lost but may have resembled a plan inset on a map of London published in Holland, which showed an

¹⁷ Elizabeth McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London: The Development and Design of the City, 1620–1720* (New York, 1999), 197–98.

¹⁸ Craig Spence, *London in the 1690s: A Social Atlas* (London, 2000), 5–6.

¹⁹ See A. E. J. Morris, *History of Urban Form: Before the Industrial Revolution*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1994), 255–57.

expanded embankment along the Thames and four large market squares, three of which were aligned just north of the river for direct access.²⁰

Several historians have compared the *Portraiture* to a rebuilding plan submitted by mapmaker Richard Newcourt that featured a large central square at the intersection of streets labeled “Broad” and “High,” around which are four smaller squares (fig. 2).²¹ But this plan was never published and there is no evidence that Penn (or Holme) saw it. Close inspection reveals significant differences. New gates drawn in at points along the perimeter indicate fortifications where there were no such structures on the *Portraiture*. Moreover Newcourt’s was not a simple street grid; rather he drew a gridded arrangement of self-contained housing blocks or parishes, each surrounding an open space in which a church was depicted. And Newcourt’s plan makes no explicit allowance for parks or greens. No plantings are indicated in the squares and the southwest square is labeled “St. Paul’s,” indicating that the designer envisioned it as a ceremonial public plaza fronting the cathedral, not a park, and that he planned the other three squares for similar purposes. Most important, whereas both Wren and Evelyn drew in the Moorfields just beyond the walls of the City on their plans, Newcourt extended his parish blocks beyond the existing walls (drawn on the plan) thereby clearly obliterating the stated model for Philadelphia’s public squares.

Some guidelines promulgated by Charles II for the rebuilding of London influenced the Philadelphia plan, notably the use of fire-resistant building materials such as brick and the widening of streets. But there is no direct evidence that Penn or Holme ever saw any of the various rebuilding plans: those of Wren and Evelyn were later reproduced as engravings, but most were never published. Penn was acquainted with Evelyn and likely knew Wren and Hooke through the Royal Society, but

²⁰ Richard Waller described Hooke’s plan in the introduction to his *Posthumous Works of Robert Hooke* (London, 1705). Reps is among those who accept the accuracy of copies after Hooke. See *Making of Urban America*, 15–19, 163. But Michael Cooper has recently challenged this in “A more Beautiful City”: *Robert Hooke and the Rebuilding of London after the Great Fire* (Stroud, UK, 2003), 112–13. See also M. I. Batten, “The Architecture of Dr. Robert Hooke F. R. S.,” *Walpole Society* 25 (1936–37): 91–93.

²¹ Reps, *Making of Urban America*, 163; Roach, “Planting of Philadelphia, I,” 35; Nash, “City Planning and Political Tension,” 61. See also Mary Maples Dunn and Richard S. Dunn, “The Founding, 1681–1701,” in *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York, 1982), 10. John R. Stilgoe sees a connection between the Philadelphia plan and an ideal town plan by the earlier Dutch planner Simon Stevin, published posthumously in 1649, but this too was a fortified settlement and featured no parks or green spaces. See *The Common Landscape of America, 1580 to 1845* (New Haven, CT, 1982), 93–94, and E. J. Dijksterhuis, *Simon Stevin: Science in the Netherlands around 1600* (The Hague, 1970), 114–15.

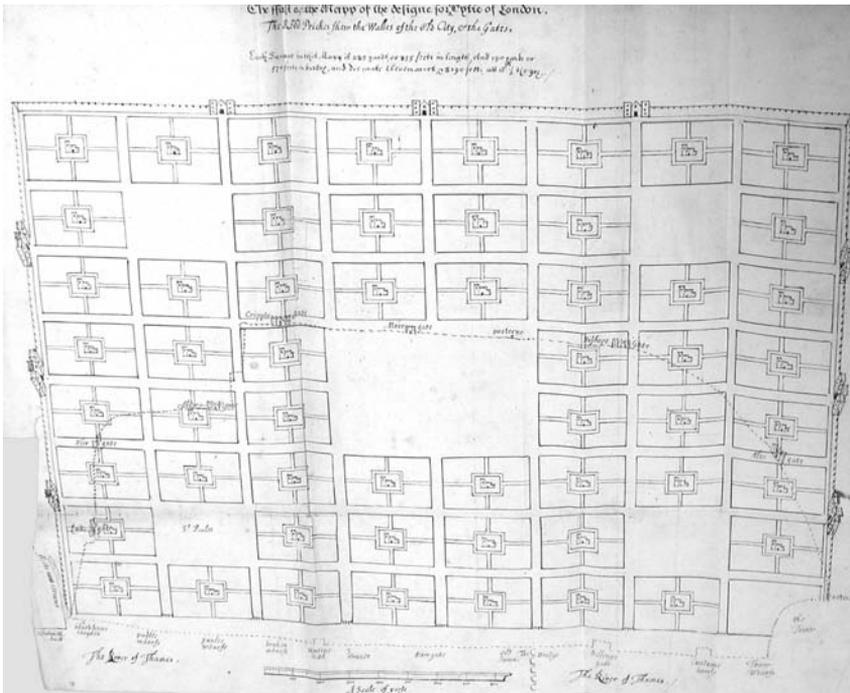


Fig. 2. Richard Newcourt, *The first of the Mapp of the designe for . . . London*, 1666. Guildhall Library, London.

his association with that group is not documented until the eve of his departure for Pennsylvania.²² Fifteen years separated the rebuilding proposals and Penn's acquisition of Pennsylvania. In that time, though significant building reforms were instituted, the basic shape of London actually changed very little. Because of pressures to resume business as soon as possible after the fire, as well as financial constraints and fear among court and city officials of public repercussions if large-scale expropriations and resettlement were attempted, much of the city was rebuilt on existing lots along old streets.²³

²² Penn was nominated by John Houghton, a tea merchant whose membership in turn was sponsored by Hooke. But Penn was never formally admitted and did not pay dues; colonial commitments may have prevented him from active participation. See Michael Hunter, *The Royal Society and Its Fellows, 1660–1700: The Morphology of an Early Scientific Institution*, 2nd ed. (London, 1994), passim. Evelyn was acquainted with Penn's father and made note in his diary in 1669 that the younger Penn had published a "blasphemous" pamphlet, likely *No Cross, No Crown*. *Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn*, ed. William Bray (London, [1859]), 1:305.

²³ Stephen Inwood, *A History of London* (New York, 1998), 245–51.

The London planners imagined public buildings at the vanishing point of main urban arteries and added no green spaces to the rebuilt city. In Philadelphia, the center of each quarter of the city was a green square. Mention of Moorfields in the *Portraiture* enabled prospective settlers to visualize the layout of these spaces. For Londoners it also carried the explicit political message that the squares would be preserved and protected by the civil government as public parks for healthful recreation, quite unlike the monumental plazas envisioned by Evelyn and Wren, or the commons of colonial New England towns.

London's Moorfields lay north of the walls of the City of London in the former manor of Finsbury, just beyond Moorgate. Said to have been given in trust to the City by two nuns "before the Norman Conquest," in 1478 the low-lying swampy area (hence its name) was mentioned in an ordinance passed "for the removal of gardens, herbs, hedges, and rubbish in the Moor." A sixteenth-century map shows archers at practice in one section of the fields and laundresses using another as a bleaching field. The fields were drained during that century and when leaseholders attempted to erect hedges and enclosures "that neither the young men of the city might shoot, nor the ancient persons walk for their pleasure," they met fierce resistance from local residents.²⁴

Efforts to preserve the space finally succeeded when James I confirmed the jurisdiction of City government and public access to the fields, then comprising about ten acres. Soon thereafter the aldermen ordered Moorfields laid out as a park with walks in "the fashion of a crosse," with benches and more than three hundred trees, labeled with the names of citizens who had paid to have them planted. A pamphlet of 1607 describing the "Pleasant Walkes of Moore-fields," praised the new "Garden of this City . . . a pleasurable place of sweet ayres for Cittizens to walke in." The author reports that fences were set up around the fields—unusual for this period—and strict rules instituted to prevent abuse: visitors who damaged trees or urinated in public could be sentenced to serve time in stocks set up near the entrance. Moorfields proved so popular that the City financed its expansion and further improvement. During the 1610s, a second area

²⁴ Jules Lubbock, *The Tyranny of Taste: The Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain, 1550–1960* (New Haven, CT, 1995), 28–31, and Edward Hall, quoted by John Stow, *A Survey of London: Contayning the Originall, Antiquity, Increase, Moderne Estate, and Description of that Citie, Written in the Year 1598*, ed. Henry Morley (London, 1890), 387–89. The military training ground called the New Artillery Garden, just to the west of Upper Moorfields was opened in the 1670s. See Norman G. Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London* (London, [1935]), 452–60.

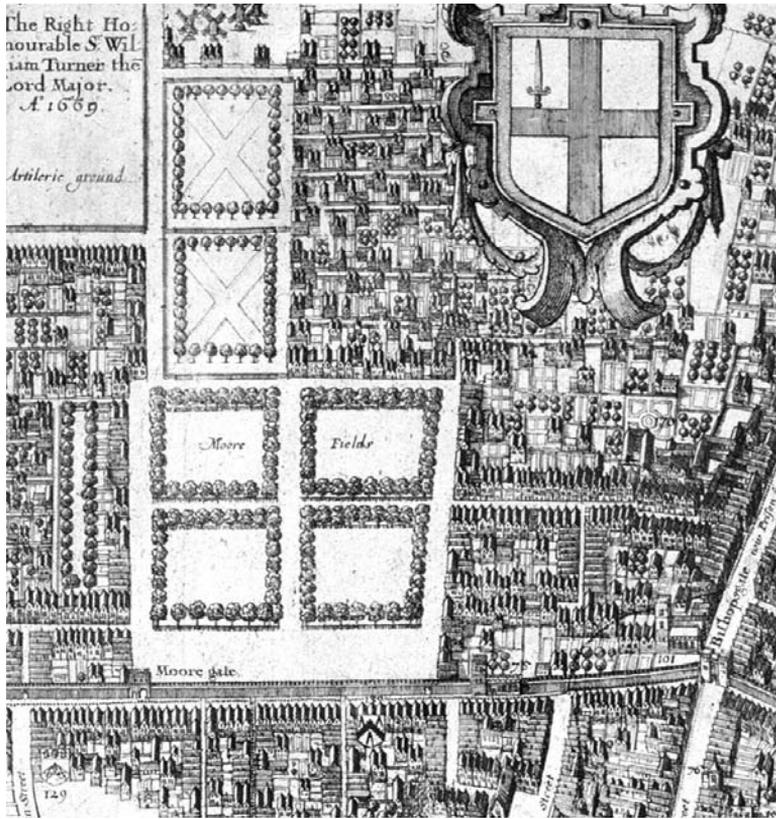


Fig. 3. Detail of Wencelas Hollar, *Map of London, Westminster and Southwark*, 1666. Permission British Library (Crace I, 45).

to the north was drained and leveled; still later a third area was fenced off to the north though this remained an open field.²⁵

By 1666, as shown in Wenceslas Hollar's map of London, Moorfields comprised three sizeable rectangular tracts (fig. 3): the southernmost was divided crosswise into quadrants, each ringed by trees; walkways in the other areas were laid out on the diagonal. It was a popular promenade and a convenient extramural refuge. That year, as fire raged through the City, diarist Samuel Pepys ascended a church steeple to survey the ruins. He then moved on to William Penn's father's house where he "received good

²⁵ Richard Johnson, *The Pleasant Walkes of Moore-fields* (London, 1607), n.p. Much of the landscaping was done by merchant and amateur botanist Nicholas Leate and two gardeners, John Percival and Michael Wilson. See Brett-James, *Growth of Stuart London*, 454. Improvement of Moorfields is mistakenly dated to the later 1660s by Dunn and Dunn, in "Founding, 1681–1701," 10.

hopes that the fire at our end is stopped” before walking “into Moorfields (our feet ready to burn, walking through the towne among the hot coles) [to] find that full of people, and poor wretches carrying their goods there, and every body keeping his goods together by themselves (and a great blessing it is to them that it is fair weather for them to keep abroad night and day).”²⁶ Soon after the fire was extinguished, Charles II himself traveled out to the Moorfields to assure Londoners who had taken refuge on the fields that a new city would soon rise like a phoenix, “purged with the Fire . . . to a wonderful beauty and comliness.”²⁷

Several historians recently have noted the important role played by communitarian efforts at open space preservation in the evolution of London’s residential squares and the particular significance of Moorfields in this history.²⁸ As space owned by the City of London and governed by the elected aldermen rather than by the Crown or private interests, Moorfields inspired a grass roots movement that forced developers to adapt new construction to existing conditions, unlike the grand architectural set-pieces created for aristocratic patrons such as at Covent Garden and Russell Square. Indeed, the language of Holme’s commentary echoed earlier documents. In 1617, residents of the area around Lincoln’s Inn Fields petitioned James I to protest planned housing developments and specifically requested that these fields “might for their generall Commoditie and health be converted into walks after the same manner as Moorfieldes.” The Privy Council concurred, warning of “the covetous and greedy endeavors of such persons as daylie seeke to fill upp that small remainder of Ayre in those partes with unnecessary and unprofitable Buildings, which have been found the greatest[t] meanes of breeding and harbouring Scarcity and Infection, to the general inconvenience of the whole Kingdome.” James directed royal architect Inigo Jones to develop a plan for Lincoln’s Inn Fields but this was not carried through.²⁹

Residents remained vigilant however and, twenty years later, required builder William Newton to leave a ten-acre space open at the center of

²⁶ *The Diary of Samuel Pepys M.A. F.R.S.*, ed. Henry B. Wheatley, 9 vols. (1894; repr. London, 1920–21), 5:426. Pepys often walked in Moorfields with Admiral Penn, his colleague and rival at the Admiralty. For Pepys and the Penn family, see Beatty, *William Penn as Social Philosopher*, 247–48.

²⁷ Charles II, *His Majestie’s Declaration to His City of London upon Occasion of the Late Calamity by the Lamentable Fire* (London, 1666), quoted in Mark Jenner, “The Politics of London Air: John Evelyn’s *Fumifugium* and the Restoration,” *Historical Journal* 38 (1995): 550.

²⁸ Lubbock contends that Moorfields, not Covent Garden, is the chief prototype for the London square. See *Tyranny of Taste*, 33; see also McKellar, *Birth of Modern London*, 191–207.

²⁹ Lubbock, *Tyranny of Taste*, 33.

Lincoln's Inn Fields and to lay out walks and lawns for recreation, though access was restricted to those who worked at the nearby law courts.³⁰ Similar protests occurred in the mid-1680s, when the gentlemen of Gray's Inn forced builder and real estate developer Nicholas Barbon to preserve an open square within his development at Red Lion Square just east of Gray's Inn Fields.³¹ Penn certainly would have been familiar with the history of the preservation of Lincoln's Inn Fields for he read law there in 1665. And he may have been acquainted with Barbon, at least by reputation. In 1675, the developer acquired Devonshire House in Bishopgate where the Society of Friends were leasing space while the Bull and Mouth Meeting House, destroyed in the fire, was rebuilt. Even after the new Bull and Mouth was completed, the Quakers elected to renew the lease with Barbon and built a new meeting house at Devonshire House in 1678.³²

However, Moorfields was a self-contained set of spaces with no direct visual or spatial connection to the nearby City or its immediate surroundings. Philadelphia's squares by contrast were interconnected. Each square defined a neighborhood, yet was related in form and scale to the whole by a street connecting each pair of squares, east and west, laid out symmetrically along Broad Street. Even as the city was built up, these connecting streets would provide a perspective to the adjoining square. And the squares were linked to spaces beyond the city, for Philadelphia had no walls or palisade—the pacific intentions of its founder left the town exposed to the surrounding country, with long avenues running from river to river forming the north boundary, at which the northernmost squares were sited, and the south, from which one street led to the center of the southern squares.³³ As the surrounding wilderness was cleared, farms and estates that would encircle the city would extend the greenery of the squares.

More than any of the unrealized London rebuilding plans, the disposition of Penn's squares within the street grid resembled the tidy rectilinear parterres and walkways of a formal garden (fig. 4). The square was a favorite element for, as John Worlidge announced in his 1683 *Systema Horti-culturae: Or, The Art of Gardening*, this was “the most perfect and

³⁰ Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *London, The Unique City*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, 1982), 90–91.

³¹ McKellar, *Birth of Modern London*, 198.

³² Brett-James, *Growth of Stuart London*, 338–39.

³³ Garvan, “Proprietary Philadelphia as Artifact,” 196.

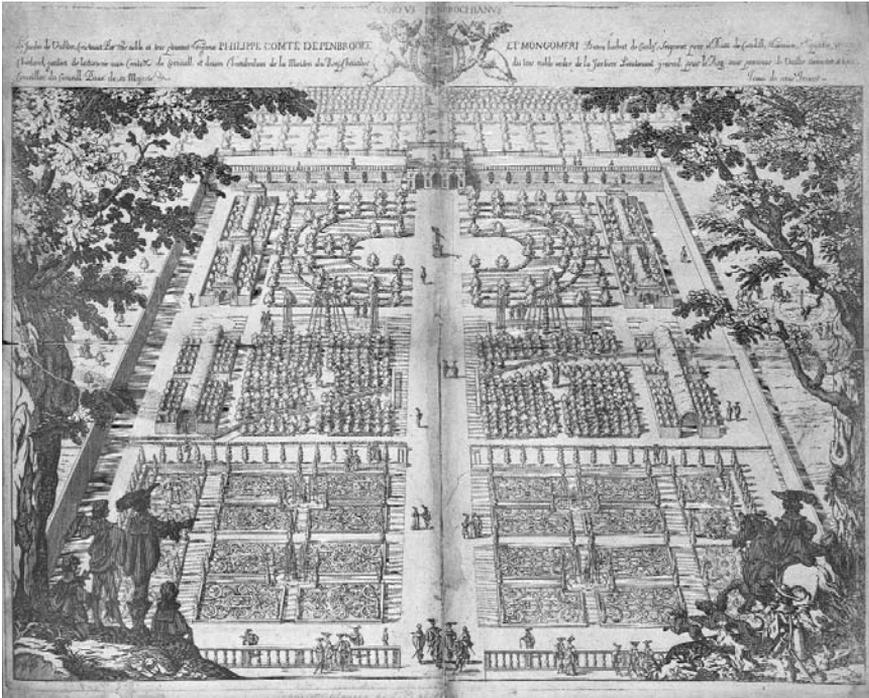


Fig. 4. *Bird's-eye perspective of the gardens of Wilton*, from Isaac de Caus, *Wilton Garden* ([London], 1647). Dumbarton Oaks, Research Library & Collections, Washington, DC.

pleasant Form that you can lay your *Garden* into.”³⁴ In the seventeenth century, as John Dixon Hunt notes, an obviously ordered garden was “an outward and visible sign of man’s scientific understanding of nature’s processes.” The street grid of the *Portraiture* conveyed the same emphasis on “geometricity and ordered visual effects” typical of formal garden settings.³⁵ And Penn was a dedicated gardener. He brought a French gardener to Pennsylvania to lay out vineyards at his Springettsbury Manor on the Schuylkill and by the late 1680s had two other gardeners working on the extensive gardens at Pennsbury on the Delaware.³⁶ As has been noted, he

³⁴ John Worlidge, *Systema Horti-culturae: Or, The Art of Gardening*, 3rd ed. (London, 1688), 16.

³⁵ John Dixon Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening during the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, 1989), 26; McKellar, *Birth of Modern London*, 207.

³⁶ The first was Andrew Doz, under whose care the vineyard prospered though little wine was produced. Ralph Smyth and James Reid were the Pennsbury gardeners. A letter from Penn to Smyth with instructions is published in *Penn Papers*, 2:584–85; see also 3:66, 119.

expected that each house lot in Philadelphia would be large enough to accommodate a garden and an orchard. Moreover Penn often described his colony as a “garden,” most famously in a letter to John Alloway: “[K]now that the Lord is very good to us, causing his most precious presence to shine upon us, that I may wth truth say is in a wonderfull manner Extended dayly to us in our assemblies, so that whatever Man may say Our Wilderness flourishes as a Garden, and our desert springs like a Greene field.”³⁷

Penn had witnessed at first hand how the insertion or improvement of green spaces could affect the urban environment. In particular he knew Paris, where he spent some time during 1662–63. Penn is said to have returned to England with “that polish of manners for which the French have long been distinguished”—polish no doubt in part cultivated by strolling through such spaces as the gardens of the Tuileries, laid out by Catherine de’Medici in the 1550s as a public resort and later replanted by Claude Mollet and Pierre LeNotre for Henry IV, or the grand Cours la Reine, a tree-lined promenade planted along the Seine for Marie de’Medici in 1616.³⁸ Certainly Penn saw the influence of French landscape gardening, for Charles II, who had spent his exile on the continent, quickly reopened public areas suppressed during the Commonwealth and recruited French gardeners to oversee the repair of parks that had suffered from neglect or disestablishment. Typical of Charles’s landscaping projects was the renovation of St. James’s Park, adjoining Whitehall Palace just west of the City, directed by the influential French gardener and theorist André Mollet, who had worked with his father at the Tuileries.³⁹

³⁷ Penn to John Alloway, [Nov. 29, 1683], in *Penn Papers*, 2:503.

³⁸ We know that Penn was something of a boulevardier at this time for it was while walking along a Parisian street one night that he was challenged for having neglected to properly acknowledge a passerby. Swordplay ensued, but when Penn disarmed his antagonist, contrary to custom, he allowed the man to depart. Penn later recalled this incident in his sermons to illustrate the absurdity of social status. See Samuel M. Janney, *The Life of William Penn; with Selections from His Correspondence and Auto-biography* (Philadelphia, 1852), 17–18. For the history of parks and promenades in Paris, see Hilary Ballon, *The Paris of Henry IV: Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), and Richard Cleary, “Making Breathing Room: Public Gardens and City Planning in Eighteenth-Century France,” in *Tradition and Innovation in French Garden Art*, ed. John Dixon Hunt and Michel Conan (Philadelphia, 2002), 68–81.

³⁹ Mollet, member of a celebrated family of gardeners, had worked in England as early as the 1620s; he later supervised projects in Holland and Sweden as well as France. He was the author of *Le jardin de plaisir*, “a milestone” in the history of the French formal garden, published in French, German, and Swedish editions in Stockholm in 1651. See Sten Karling, “The Importance of André Mollet and His Family for the Development of the French Formal Garden,” in *The French Formal Garden*, ed. Elisabeth B. MacDougall and F. Hamilton Hazlehurst (Washington, DC, 1974), 3–25.

Mollet enlarged the park, once the site of James I's menagerie, and added a long canal lined with lime trees, as well as a playing alley for the popular game called pall mall flanked by carriage drives and promenades also lined with elms and lime trees. Scientific pursuits joined recreation, for Charles also had the menagerie restocked with exotic animals and directed that a telescope be set up on a mound at the center of the park.⁴⁰

Charles's supporters applauded his efforts. John Evelyn dedicated his 1661 treatise *Fumifugium* to the monarch and likened the healthy city to the healthy body, where "Lucid and noble Aer clarifies the Blood, subtilizes it and excites it, cheering the spirits and promoting digestion; [while] the dark, and grosse . . . perturbs the Body, prohibits necessary Transpiration for the resolution and dissipation of ill Vapours, even to disturbance of the very Rational faculties, which the purer Aer does so far illuminate." Evelyn proposed that industry be moved away from the city, and that fields of trees, fragrant shrubs and flowers (such as roses, rosemary, lavender, and lime) be planted in low-lying areas to perfume the air, "not much unlike to what His Majesty has already begun by the wall from Old Spring-garden to St. James's in that Park."⁴¹ Evelyn's *Fumifugium* was also a tribute to the improving air of the restored nation and John Dryden called Charles the "Royal Husbandman." As Mark McDayer notes, the resuscitated St. James's Park, in particular, "both by design and accident," presented "a remarkably appropriate emblem of England" as a garden restored in the first decade of Charles's reign. Under the able direction of Mollet, St. James's assumed the form of "a kind of miniature pastoral refuge carefully nurtured by art and set apart from the city that was rapidly expanding all around."⁴² In his poem "On the Park at St. James's" written to commemorate the completion of Mollet's relandscaping in 1661, Edmund Waller called the park a "paradise" of harmonious order created by a benevolent and "natural" monarch whose reign looked back to a Golden Age:

⁴⁰ Hazel Thurston, *Royal Parks for the People: London's Ten* (Newton-Abbott, UK, 1974), 18–19, 37–38.

⁴¹ John Evelyn, *Fumifugium: Or The Inconveniencie of the Aer and Smoak of London Dissipated* (London, 1661), 24. See Jenner, "Politics of London Air," 547–49; Lubbock, *Tyranny of Taste*, 174–75; Laura Williams, "To recreate and refresh their dulled spirites in the sweet and wholesome ayre: Green Space and the Growth of the City," in *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype, 1598-1720*, ed. J. F. Merritt (Cambridge, 2001), 197–98.

⁴² Mark McDayer, "Poetic Gardens and Political Myths: The Renewal of St. James's Park in the Restoration," *Journal of Garden History* 15 (autumn 1995): 135, 137.

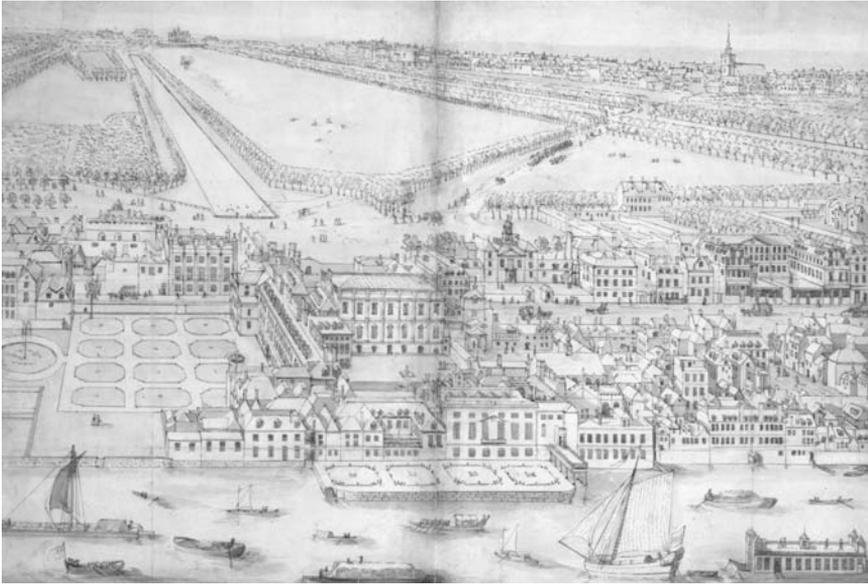


Fig. 5. *View of Whitehall and St. James's*, 1695. Attributed to Leonard Knyff. City of Westminster Archives Center.

In such green Palaces the first Kings reign'd
Slept in their shades, and Angels entain'd;
With such old Counsellors they did advise,
And by frequenting sacred Groves grew wise.⁴³

Mollet's design for St. James's was oriented around an expansive *patte d'oie* or "goosefoot"—a semicircular area from which radiated five broad avenues leading across the park to the City beyond (fig. 5). As McDayter goes on to argue, the physical layout of St. James's enabled Charles to walk out from his palace and stand at the center of the goosefoot to look down the avenues both to survey the park and to look past this to the City and countryside beyond, a perspective that embodied the extension of his absolutist authority. In effect the design of St. James's formed a symbolic portrait of the king, analogous to Waller's poetic tribute. As John Prest notes, the stately avenue of the seventeenth century "represented an ordered, or, according to your point of view, a subjugated society. The

⁴³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 140.

avenue flattered its owner.”⁴⁴ We see a counterpart to these park avenues in the grand promenades laid out by Evelyn, Wren, and others in their plans for London after the Great Fire. The fact that none of the authors of rebuilding plans for London introduced new parks within the walls of the City may be explained by Charles’s desire to monopolize green spaces as symbols of royal authority against his rivals in the City and in Parliament.

And we see an echo of these connective avenues in the *Portraiture*. Certainly Penn had no desire to endorse the absolutist implications of a layout such as St. James’s. The physical resemblance of Penn’s squares to Moorfields and the communitarian implications thereof conveyed a commitment to the political power of the people. By inserting four linked public green spaces into the Philadelphia plan, Penn appropriated the symbolic potential of such spaces. The avenues leading out from St. James’s, symbolizing the monarch’s oversight and control of his realm, could be adapted to embody an assertive but disciplined democracy. From Philadelphia’s squares, the ordinary citizen would look out to a community of interdependent equals.

This was a powerful selling point. By the time Penn collaborated with Holme on the plan for Philadelphia, public gardens were a feature of many continental cities, and towns throughout Britain had begun to lay out public promenades, typically sited to gain attractive views of a nearby river or expanse of countryside, in imitation of the London parks upgraded by Charles II.⁴⁵ At least half of the men and women who responded to Penn’s advertisements had lived for some period of time in the larger cities of Britain or the continent.⁴⁶ A shrewd promoter, Penn knew that the yeomen farmers and merchants to whom he advertised his colonial enterprise would be most attracted to a well-organized and *healthy* town. He specifically instructed his commissioners to find a site that was “high, dry, and healthy,” and in subsequent promotional writings he emphasized the fact that Philadelphia’s site was noted for “the loftiness and soundness

⁴⁴ McDayter, “Poetic Gardens and Political Myths,” 142. John Prest, *The Garden of Eden: The Botanic Garden and the Re-Creation of Paradise* (New Haven, CT, 1981), 93.

⁴⁵ Peter Clark and R. A. Houston, “Culture and Leisure, 1700–1840,” in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. Peter Clark (Cambridge, 2000), 2:585.

⁴⁶ Richard T. Vann, “Quakerism: Made in America?” in *The World of William Penn*, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn (Philadelphia, 1986), 159, 165–66. See also Gary Nash, *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania, 1681–1726*, new ed. (Boston, 1993), 18–28.

of the Land and the Air”—even making note of nearby mineral springs.⁴⁷

Like other progressive thinkers in Britain, Penn recognized the medical benefits of green spaces in an urban environment. In concert with ongoing research on respiration and the composition of air, members of the Royal Society frequently discussed air pollution and links between weather and the spread of disease.⁴⁸ Physicians attributed endemic diseases to bad air and miasmas—concerns that were heightened after plague swept through the city in 1665—and they encouraged the development or preservation of gardens and parks because it was commonly believed that plants could actively purify the air. Even within London's congested spaces many residents maintained gardens. The particular sanitary value of Moorfields was acknowledged in the mid-1670s when the hospital of St. Mary's of Bethlehem, better known as Bedlam, was relocated to a grand new building designed by Robert Hooke that fronted the south end of the park.⁴⁹ The *Portraiture* was a tangible representation of this healthy settlement. What better way to advertise Philadelphia's salubrity than with a system of public parks, sites for healthy public interaction mirroring the private gardens Penn expected residents soon to lay out?

But to successfully plant such spaces in his new capital, Penn had to ensure that they would not fall victim to the abuses that plagued London's parks and public gardens. On the Ring in Hyde Park, two concentric roads typically jammed with the carriages of the nobility on display, it was not unusual to see Barbara Palmer, the Duchess of Cleveland—one of Charles's several mistresses—lying “impudently upon her back in her coach asleep, with her mouth open.”⁵⁰ Charles often exercised in public among his subjects, even swimming in the St. James's Park canal. In the winter of 1662, Samuel Pepys accompanied the Duke of York (later James II) to the canal where, he reported, “though the ice was broken and dangerous, yet [the Duke] would go upon his scates, which I did not like,

⁴⁷ Penn, “Instructions,” 2:119; Penn, *Letter . . . to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders*, 240.

⁴⁸ Peter Brimblecombe, “Interest in Air Pollution among Early Fellows of the Royal Society,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* 32 (1977–78): 123–29; Jenner, “Politics of London Air,” 545.

⁴⁹ John Stow, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster: Containing the Original, Antiquity, Increase, Modern Estate and Government of Those Cities . . . Corrected, Improved, and Very Much Enlarged . . . by John Strype* (London, 1720) 1:iii, 64. See Williams, “To recreate and refresh their dulled spirites,” 198.

⁵⁰ *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 4:375.

but he slides very well.” Indeed the usually self-conscious Pepys did not hesitate to relax in St. James’s—on one especially hot summer day, he simply lay down under a tree near the canal to take a nap.⁵¹

By the 1680s even Moorfields—once London’s “garden”—had declined considerably. The surrounding districts were among the poorest in the city; pimps and prostitutes roamed the gardens or “At Brothel doors stood wheedling in / Unwary Woodcocks to the Gin” in the nearby streets. Poets and satirists adopted “Moorfields” as a byword for moral disorder, a place where innocent “suburban apprentices” lost their virginity and young girls were lured into prostitution.⁵² Political discontent haunted the district as well. For three days in 1668, several hundred apprentices and others (one estimate was as high as forty thousand) marched through the streets in the so-called Messenger riots, shouting antigovernment slogans and vandalizing brothels, ostensibly to protest the licentious atmosphere of Charles II’s court. In 1675, Moorfields was again the site of civil disturbance when silk weavers rioted against the introduction of mechanized looms. Rioters destroyed several dozen engine-looms before authorities quelled the riots; even so, the weavers of Moorfields and nearby Spitalfields continued to agitate in the face of declining working conditions and foreign competition well into the 1680s.⁵³

Penn often decried such behavior. Just before embarking for Pennsylvania, he published a revised edition of *No Cross, No Crown*, expanding the dissertation on Christian conduct and the nature of good government he first had penned in prison during 1668–69. In this tract, he preached the importance of modesty, temperance, and self-denial, counseling readers to reject the sins of pride and avarice that fed the luxury and indolence of Restoration London. “Mind, my friends, more heavenly things,” he urged, “hasten to obey that Righteous Principle, which would exercise and delight you in that which is eternal; or else with Babylon, the mother of lust and vanity, the fruits which your souls lust after shall depart from you, and all things which are dainty and goodly

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2:414, 5:365. See also Thurston, *Royal Parks for the People*, 37–39.

⁵² Henry Higden, “Juvenal’s Tenth Satyr, Made English,” from *A Modern Essay on the Tenth Satyr of Juvenal* (London, 1687), 40. See Pat Rogers, *Hacks and Dunces: Pope, Swift and Grub Street* (London, 1980), 37, 47; Leonard Schwarz, “London 1700–1840,” in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, 2:645. John Josselyn describes Boston’s town common as “where the Gallants a little before Sunset walk with their *Marmalet*-Madams, as we do in *Moorfields*,” in *An Account of Two Voyages to New-England* (London, 1674), quoted in Reps, *Making of Urban America*, 141.

⁵³ Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge, 1987), 82–83, 120–21, 192–93.

shall depart from you, and you shall find them no more!" Only by offering themselves to God, choosing "the good old path of temperance, wisdom, gravity, and holiness," would the people find a way to "the blessings of peace and plenty here, and eternal happiness hereafter."⁵⁴

In particular, Penn condemned the idleness and self-indulgence displayed in London's public spaces. "[Be] you intreated for your soul's sakes, O inhabitants of England, to be serious," he pleaded, "to reflect a while upon yourselves, what care and cost you are at, of time and money, about foolish, nay, vicious things: so far are you degenerated from the primitive Christian life. . . . View the streets, shops, exchanges, plays, parks, coffee-houses, &c. And is not the world, this fading world, writ upon every face?" Time was wasted, fortunes lost, pride indulged, "pleasure . . . taken in meer shame" in such places. Aimless amusements diverted people "from all serious examination of themselves. . . . a play, a ball, a spring-garden; the park, the gallant, the exchange; in a word, the world. . . , Thus are their hearts captivated from the divine exercise; nay, from such external affairs as immediately concern some benefit to themselves, or needy neighbours; pleasing themselves with the received ideas of those toys and fopperies into their loose and airy minds." Even the scenery of a park might disguise its dangers. "Yes, the very groves themselves, however pleasant for situation, beautiful for their walks and trees, must be cut down," Penn declared, "and why? only because they had been abused to idolatrous uses."⁵⁵

But trees, or their setting, were not intrinsically dangerous. And Penn did not call for good Christians to shun the world altogether. Receptivity to the Inner Light, not the reclusive life of the convent or monastery, ensured spiritual health: "True godliness does not turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it."⁵⁶ Nor did he proscribe recreation altogether. As Robert Barclay, another Quaker apologist, explained, relaxation "from the more serious duties" of life was healthy and necessary as long as "in doing these things, the Soul carryeth with it that Divine influence and Spiritual habit."⁵⁷ By comporting themselves in modest and devout fashion, espe-

⁵⁴ *No Cross, No Crown: A Discourse Shewing the Nature and Discipline of the Holy Cross of Christ* ([London], 1668/9), in *Select Works of William Penn*, 1:494, 496.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:465, 470, 481, 492.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:370.

⁵⁷ Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity, as the Same is Held Forth and Preached by the People Called, in Scorn, the Quakers* ([Aberdeen?], 1678), 387.

cially in an informal setting vulnerable to frivolous or improper behavior, Quakers could set a valuable example. “[T]he distinguishing mark between the disciples of Jesus,” Penn asserted, “and those of the world, is, that one minds the things of heaven, and God’s kingdom . . . and that the other minds eating, drinking, apparel, and the affairs of the world, with the lusts, pleasures, profits, and honours that belong to it.”⁵⁸

Both Penn and Barclay prescribed good works as the “best recreation”—visiting the sick or imprisoned, attending religious assemblies, or studying “moderately” such subjects as navigation, arithmetic, or geometry. They also listed husbandry and gardening among these acceptable pastimes. Indeed, such work could actively combat worldly temptations. “A garden, an elaboratory, a work-house, improvements and breeding, are pleasant and profitable diversions to the idle and ingenious,” Penn later wrote, “for here they miss ill company, and converse with nature and art; whose varieties are equally grateful and instructing; and preserve a good constitution of body and mind.”⁵⁹ For devout city dwellers, even the pleasant promenades of a landscaped city square might provide a space for meditation.

By the time Penn advertised for the Pennsylvania settlement, fears among the “better sort” in London had begun to force municipal authorities and proprietors of commercial pleasure gardens to make systematic efforts to regulate and “improve” the standard of behavior in London’s parks. To some extent the form of Philadelphia’s squares was consistent with what Laura Williams has called “the shift of focus” away from unregulated fields and pastures for walking and recreation towards more ordered and formal sites.⁶⁰ As early as 1668 a brick wall was built around St. James’s Park. A decade later more than a dozen entrances were walled up after an assassination attempt on the king. Soon thereafter sections of the other royal parks were fenced in, and fences and plantings screens became standard in the new residential squares to ensure privacy.⁶¹

Such measures were taken ostensibly to protect the clean air in such spaces from disease and contagion. But landscaping in the new residential squares also reflected the desire of the elite to advertise their role in the broader social and political management of the city. “Planting out

⁵⁸ *No Cross, No Crown*, 1:465.

⁵⁹ *Some Fruits of Solitude, in Reflections and Maxims relating to the Conduct of Human Life* (London, 1693), in *Select Works of William Penn*, 3:359.

⁶⁰ Williams, “To recreate and refresh their dulled spirites,” 186.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 201n76.

these squares not only improved the visual appeal of otherwise empty space, but stamped it with gardenesque associations of health, cultivated taste, and harmonious order," Williams points out. "It also established a stark contrast between leisured and pointedly non-productive garden, and communal ground that could be used for play and sport, trading, the grazing of animals, the collecting of firewood and so on. The enclosed garden square became recognized as emblematic of residential areas of distinction."⁶²

"Health, cultivated taste and harmonious order" were also the bywords of Penn's city plan. By publishing a plan of his new capital, Penn had assumed a delicate task. On the one hand, it was his privilege and obligation as proprietor to furnish prospective colonists with viable surveys and settlement plans. On the other hand, Penn must have recognized that designing a new city might be construed as a supreme act of pride and ambition such as he condemned in his sermons and tracts. Indeed he was likely aware of the fact that chief among ancient cities said to have been laid out according to a regularized plan was Babylon itself.⁶³ Nonetheless, at Philadelphia Penn had an opportunity to invent a space that might encourage the temperate Christian behavior he prescribed in *No Cross, No Crown*. In his writings and speeches, Penn repeatedly confirmed his belief in the political authority of the people. Well-ordered spaces, in addition to firm laws and responsible government, could ensure moral behavior for, as has been noted, it was through their comportment in public spaces that conscientious Christians set a proper example. Just as the order and regularity presented by the new city's street grid might promote social discipline, so too neatly rectilinear landscaped squares would provide public counterparts to the salubrious spaces of the private garden.

Penn envisioned his colony as a model of toleration, but he also recognized the need for laws to ensure high moral standards: "though *good Laws do well, good Men do better, for good Laws may want good Men, and be abolished or evaded by ill Men; but good Men will never want*

⁶² Ibid., 202; McKellar, *Birth of Modern London*, 204–5.

⁶³ Herodotus describes Babylon as laid out on a plain "in the form of a square" with "dead straight" streets within its walls in book 1 of his *Histories*. Penn does not mention Herodotus among the authors he recommended to a young friend who had asked advice on building a library, but it is most unlikely that someone engaged in designing a new city would have been unaware of this source. See Allen C. Thomas, "William Penn on the Choice of Books," *Bulletin of the Friends' Historical Society of Philadelphia* 4, no. 1 (1911). Several editions of the *Histories* in Latin and French as well as Greek were published in England and the continent after 1600.

good Laws nor suffer *Ill Ones*.”⁶⁴ The *Portraiture* shows that Penn did not intend to prohibit parks in Philadelphia, but he did take special measures to discourage inappropriate activities therein. As early as the first draft of his plan of government for the colony, he made it abundantly clear that he would severely limit opportunities for recreation and amusement, calling for the prohibition of taverns, theaters, and games of chance, as well as “Bowling greens, Hors races . . . and such like Sports, which only tend to Idleness and Loosness, and that all thos that goe about to erect or use any of thes things, be fined to the goverment and put into the next Common work hou{s} and kept by the space of 6 months to hard daly Labour as if he were some petty Fellow.”⁶⁵ As Penn and his councilors revised the laws, the language of this article became stronger. The list of prohibited activities was expanded, adding serious crimes and transgressions to the list of proscribed amusements. In the final version of *The Frame of the Government of the Province of Pennsylvania*, which Penn published in the summer of 1682, foul language, drunkenness, murder, duels, sedition, incest, sodomy, rape, “Whoredom, Fornication and other uncleanness (not to be repeated)” now were lumped in with “Stage-plays, Cards, Dice, May-Games, . . . Masques, Revels . . . Bear-baitings and the like,” all to be condemned as activities “which excite the People to Rudeness, Cruelty, Looseness and Irreligion.” In addition, he proposed a Committee of Manners, Education and Arts “that all Wicked and Scandalous Living may be prevented, and that *Youth* may be successively trained up in *Virtue* and *useful Knowledge* and *Arts*.”⁶⁶

After a year in Pennsylvania, the Founder was encouraged by the progress of settlement. When he likened Pennsylvania to a garden in his letter to John Alloway, Penn was describing the state of provincial government. “I have held two Generall Assemblies wth precious Harmony,” he reported, “Scarce one Law that did not passe wth a Nemine Contradicente, and as our opening of them was deepe and wth heavenly Authority, So our Conclusions were wth the word & prayer.”⁶⁷ Experienced legislators and jurists were few, yet Penn took heart in the

⁶⁴ From the preamble to *The Frame of the Government of the Province of Pennsylvania* . . . (London, 1682), in *Penn Papers*, 2:213.

⁶⁵ Penn titled this document “The Fundamentall Constitutions of Pennsilvania” and may have written it as early as the summer of 1681. *Penn Papers*, 2:151.

⁶⁶ *Frame of the Government*, 2:225, 217; see also Beatty, *William Penn as Social Philosopher*, 290–301.

⁶⁷ Penn to John Alloway, [Nov. 29, 1683], in *Penn Papers*, 2:504.

number and variety of courts and tribunals already operating in the six counties thus far settled, confident that his well-ordered society would become a reality. By 1684, the city was beginning to take shape: the north and south boundaries at Vine and Mulberry (later renamed South) streets had been established, the easternmost numbered north-south streets opened and major streets paralleling Market laid out, including Walnut, Vine, Chestnut, Mulberry, and Sassafras (later renamed Race), all named for native trees found at the site.⁶⁸

But politics and financial setbacks forced Penn to return to England at the end of 1684, by which time his vision of a well-regulated and temperate community was already beginning to dissolve as settlers challenged the authority of the proprietor and his deputies over land management.⁶⁹ Though Philadelphia's streets would continue to be opened along the grid described in the *Portraiture*, elements of the city plan were altered over time. Economic reliance on shipping thwarted consistent settlement across the grid as settlers clustered along the Delaware. Once generous city blocks were cut up into dense warrens of short streets and alleyways. Ineffective administrative procedures as well as inaccurate or contradictory surveys complicated the process of land allotment and public works. When Penn granted Philadelphia a new city charter in 1701, contrary to the novelty of the *Portraiture*, he instituted an antiquated form of municipal government that proved incapable of building public works in a consistent and accountable fashion.⁷⁰

Most important, Penn never obtained a legal warrant to confirm that city government, rather than the proprietary, had jurisdiction over the lots designated for Penn's squares. With no clear ownership the squares fell victim to neglect and abuse. The easternmost soon were put to use as burying grounds. Long before streets were extended west to the Schuylkill, the western squares were used as trash dumps and potters' fields: hangings took place in the northwest square as late as 1823. Even after independence, when the state supreme court confirmed the city's

⁶⁸ "A Further Account of the Province of Pennsylvania, by William Penn, 1685," in *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania*, 260.

⁶⁹ Nash, *Quakers and Politics*, passim; Corcoran, "William Penn and His Purchasers," 478–79. See also Edwin B. Bronner, *William Penn's "Holy Experiment": The Founding of Pennsylvania, 1681–1701* (New York, 1962), 250–53.

⁷⁰ Edward P. Allinson and Boies Penrose, *Philadelphia, 1681–1887: A History of Municipal Development* (Baltimore, 1887), 8–29; Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968), 9.

jurisdiction over the squares, improvements were long in coming.⁷¹

Nonetheless the Founder's intentions were not forgotten. In 1811, a guidebook author lamented the "prostitution" of the squares "expressly set apart, by the benevolent founder of the city, for the purpose of public walks and salutary recreation" (though by this date, trees and walks had been laid out around the new water pumping station at the Centre Square).⁷² Finally yielding to pressure from citizens and the press, by the 1820s city government began to fully rehabilitate the squares, giving all five commemorative names and properly landscaping the four parks. "The lindens, maples, horse chesnuts & oaks are the finest and the most beautiful trees I ever saw," wrote Sidney George Fisher after a visit in 1840 to the southeast square, now named for George Washington. "Every year adds to their effect as they are yet young. The quantity of trees in squares & in the streets is a great charm in Philad: &, combined with the cleanliness and neatness for which it is remarkable, make it the most agreeable city summer residence in the country."⁷³ A century and a half after publication of the *Portraiture*, Philadelphians finally could enjoy the urban park system William Penn had envisioned.

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⁷¹ Lawrence Lewis Jr., *An Essay on Original Land Titles in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1880), 137. See also Allinson and Penrose, *Philadelphia*, 79–82; Beatty, *William Penn as Social Philosopher*, 72–76, 201. See also See J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609–1884*, (Philadelphia, 1884), 3:1840–42, 1848.

⁷² James Mease, *The Picture of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1811), xi–xiii.

⁷³ Sidney George Fisher, *A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years 1834–1871*, ed. Nicholas B. Wainwright (Philadelphia, 1967), 101. A city councilman first proposed naming the squares after Washington, Franklin, Columbus, and Penn in 1816. The current names were assigned by a resolution of city councils of 1825: Franklin (northeast), Washington (southeast), Logan (northwest), and Rittenhouse (southwest). The center square was named for Penn at this time. Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, 3:1840–50.