

How the West End was won: the struggle to remove street barriers in Victorian London

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ABSTRACT

The West End of London was a long-lived élite residential district. One feature which helped to establish its privileged character was the protection of certain key boundaries with barriers impermeable to non-residential traffic. Public dislike of restrictions on movement hardened in the mid nineteenth century into the lobbying of parliament and the establishment of pressure groups. In the case of gates and bars across private streets, the most effective opposition came from local authorities and a number of prominent vestrymen. The paper shows how change accelerated with the installation of the London County Council. Acts of Parliament in 1890 and 1893 sealed the fate of many street obstructions and significantly changed the balance of public and private space in London.

Notice is hereby given that there is no public thoroughfare through this estate. That no cattle are allowed to be driven through this estate, to or from the New Cattle Market, Islington. That no tramps, vagrants, organ grinders, bands of musicians, or disreputable characters are permitted on the estate. That no railway vans, coal waggons, beer trucks or carts, furniture vans, dung carts, or other heavy traffic, are allowed to pass through the gates of this estate, unless they have to deliver or take up goods on the estate. That no hackney coaches are allowed on the estate, except going to or returning from the residence of any inhabitant, either to take up or set down. By order of the trustees of the Marquis of Camden.^[1]

The West End of London represented the very peak of residential prestige in nineteenth century Britain. The physical and social spaces, for decades both closely circumscribed, were controlled by the wealth and power of the aristocratic élite and their fellow travellers.^[2] It was in and through this space that a coalition of classes was forged which dominated many aspects of national culture and politics.

Henri Lefèbvre has written about the 'production' of social space.^[3] He argues that this space is 'both a product and a means of production'. It is a cause, a mediation, and a geographical effect which cannot be separated from the production process in time. In effect it is the concretized material spatiality of biased social relations. Social space is 'both a weapon and a sign' in the struggle between classes and between people and nature.^[4]

One convenient strategy for the ruling class to reproduce its hegemony has been to develop pseudo monopolies of key places and spaces through ownership-, transactional- and

use-patterns. For Lefèbvre the resulting signified spaces are decodable but the reading is merely secondary: it cannot help to understand the actual production process.^[5] The analysis of that process of producing the social spaces of Victorian London is a task for another paper. Here we will concentrate on single issue pressure group politics in the hope of providing a new insight into the changing balance between public and private rights. The pseudo monopoly of élite urban space was challenged in the second half of the nineteenth century in a logical extension of the passion for the public scrutiny of space described by Martin Daunton. He has shown that public space changed from being communal and participatory to being regulated, policed, neutral and merely connective.^[6] This paper will argue that there was additional pressure for public access to private streets that amounted to a democratization of space.

The paper will explore the hypothesis that the West End was a gilded cage of privilege, the limits of which were constituted not only in the informal and subtle manipulation of the 'quality' of its residential neighbourhoods and communities, but also more crudely through the blockading of streets to keep out undesirables and to restrict or ban access to traffic. In the second half of the nineteenth century there was a shift in public opinion about the balance between private and public rights in the street, symbolic of the wider changes in society which gradually eroded élite power. The eventual freeing of the streets in the 1890s marked the conclusion of a period of struggle and debate about the penetration of privatized space by the public realm, the balance having shifted from the exclusive to the inclusive. The powers of both the local and central state were enhanced as a result of this outcome.

The paper picks up a theme articulated by Olsen who has carefully documented the role of estate policy in the 'town planning' of London in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.^[7] Our focus of interest will be the gates and street barriers which sought to exclude the 'other' and in doing so delineated what were to become some of the contested spaces of Victorian London.^[8]

Road restrictions and the beginnings of a debate

There was a variety of physical restrictions on movement in early nineteenth century London. Firstly, there were the bars at the City of London's gates which had an ancient pedigree. They were used to boost the Corporation's revenue but had less impact on the daily lives of Londoners as the built-up area extended beyond the walls. Secondly, there were the toll bridges and toll booths at the limits of the turnpikes which had proliferated in the eighteenth century. These were an expense and an annoyance to commerce and long distance travellers. Thirdly, there were bars, posts or gates blocking or restricting access to private streets. Most of the last group were erected at the boundaries of estates to prevent the use of privately

maintained roads by those who had not paid for their upkeep and also to preserve peace and quiet. The inhabitants of Mecklenburgh Square, for instance, in 1822 claimed their attraction to the district had been `principally the tranquil and private nature of that part of the estate, a lodge and gates being erected at the northern entrance...to shut it up as a public thoroughfare and to prevent all traffic whatsoever.'^[9]

The Bedford Estate, one of the most stringent in the protection of its territory, employed uniformed ex prison officers to vet traffic, and these men acquired a reputation for unflinching defence of their domain, occasional surliness and even violence. At an 1874 court hearing of the reasons for a fracas at the Gordon Street gate, the keeper declared that `he would suffer death rather than let the cab through.'^[10] The irritation of drivers at times boiled over and assaults on gatekeepers were frequent. On this particular occasion a fight resulted in the death of a cabbie. At the subsequent inquest, the coroner called the government's conduct `disgraceful in allowing these squares and places to be closed to the public', but he was hissed by the jury when he accused them of being prejudiced in favour of the deceased.^[11] As local residents they were affronted by the lack of access to an estate on their doorstep.

The Duke of Bedford forbade access to most vehicles, except those originating in the estate or delivering to his tenants. There is correspondence in the Bedford Estate archives to show that even funeral cortèges were restricted.^[12] The gates were closed between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. in summer and from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. in winter. Out of hours, tenants paid 2/6d each time the gate was opened up to 3 a.m. and 3/6d after that. The Upper Woburn Place gates were opened only for private carriages and residents on horseback.^[13]

Public debate about these restrictions on movement was muted until the 1830s when the issue of the Thames toll bridges first surfaced. A Metropolitan Anti-Bridge-Toll Association was formed in 1839 to protest that only three out of fifteen Thames crossings were free. In 1840 a petition was presented to parliament. There were public meetings, one at least with an attendance of up to 10,000, and numerous parliamentary enquiries, but the sticking point was always the need to compensate the bridge companies for their loss of revenue.^[14] An 1868 Act freed six bridges upstream but the final denouement for those in central London was delayed until 1877-80, by which time public resentment had reached fever pitch.^[15]

A parallel campaign concerned London's turnpikes. Reform was in the air from 1826 when the Metropolis Roads Commission was established to restructure the turnpike system and pay off debts. Many gates were abolished but the expectations raised were not immediately fulfilled. In the 1850s the Toll Reform Association organized several petitions and their persistence was rewarded by two major parliamentary enquiries. The pressure eventually told and, in 1864-65, 163 miles of road were turned over to the local authorities and 140 tollbars

removed. The last London turnpike lapsed in 1871.^[16] Again the 40 year delay had been largely due to a concern about the need to avoid any public expenditure.

As for gates and bars, in 1856 a member of the new Metropolitan Board of Works (hereafter M.B.W.) J.A. Nicholay enquired about barriers on private streets in London, presumably with a view to their general abolition under the new regime.^[17] He was referred to section 107 of the Metropolis Management (1855) Act which explicitly stated that the M.B.W. had no powers to take down any obstruction without consent of the owner. The authority had started as it meant to go on, subsequent actions showing a distinct lack of enthusiasm for engagement. It is noticeable that comparatively little of the M.B.W.'s business on gates and bars was ever initiated from within. The printed Minutes of Proceedings and the manuscript committee minutes show only reaction to letters, petitions and deputations from the Vestries and Boards of Works. These appear to have been taken seriously but generally were allowed to lose their impact by prevarication.

Atkins has argued that the period of the M.B.W.'s administration, 1855-89, was one of considerable frustration for activists.^[18] They rejoiced over the victories on toll bridges and toll roads but were unable to force a review of other types of street barrier. Questions were asked in parliament about individual barriers but there was no general enthusiasm in the legislature for change.^[19] The only helpful development in this period was the 1867 Metropolitan Streets Act which reduced the nuisance of cattle being driven through residential streets on their way to market and therefore undermined one of the arguments given for the maintenance of gates and bars.^[20]

Figure 1 shows the number of times that the issue of gates and bars was raised in the general meetings of the M.B.W., its successor the London County Council (hereafter L.C.C.) and the Vestry of St Pancras.^[21] The last of these was a particularly pro-active local authority, with respect to the freedom of its streets at least. The graph is a reliable barometer of fluctuations in the political pressure through time and shows that 1884-86 and 1890-94 were the principal periods of discussion.

The pressure group politics of gates and bars

The scale of the problem was revealed in surveys of 1867, 1882, 1892, and 1897, undertaken respectively by the M.B.W., the Home Office and the L.C.C. (1892 and 1897).^[22] A total of 156 barriers of all kinds in 1867 is certainly an underestimate since it omits the districts of Wandsworth, Hammersmith, Fulham, Islington and Lewisham, which between them in 1882 had 47% of the total. Scaling up *pro rata* would give roughly 230 in 1867, to compare with 249 in 1882, 201 in 1892, and 217 in 1897. Of these the largest category was the movable

swing or drop bar, or gate of wood or iron, followed by fixed iron posts, permanent wooden fences or barriers, and a stone or brick walls.

There must be doubts about the reliability of the data for spatial analysis. Only 59 barriers are continually identifiable 1867-92. Others were thrown up and removed at the whim of landowners, or slipped through the net at one or more of the survey dates. Figure 2 is indicative only, but does show some interesting patterns. Note the blanks in the City of London, excluded from all three surveys, and in the poor areas of the East End, which were presumably not considered worth defending. Inner west and north London exhibit a corona of symbols bordering the great estates, like a tide mark around the shores of high society. There were also clots of no-go areas in the expanding suburbs to the west (Hammersmith), north (Highbury), east (Woolwich), and south (Clapham, Camberwell, Sydenham).

The problem then was a substantial one of two to three hundred gates and bars furring the arteries of traffic flow, but we should not imagine an immanent sclerosis. Apart from the key choke points across the Thames and along the Euston Road, it is doubtful that the situation amounted to more than inconvenience for the general public. Nowadays we unquestioningly experience tens of thousands of equivalent restrictions on our movement by road in the capital, as one-way systems or other modes of traffic management. It was more the symbolic aspect of the gates and bars which outraged the Victorian public. They became increasingly intolerant of perceived hindrances to the efficiency of daily life, their political spokesmen stressing the utilitarian gains of public access through private streets which were key links in the network. Real gains were never quantified, although traffic did double on Waterloo Bridge shortly after it was freed.^[23]

As it unfolded, the campaign resolved itself into five separate interest groups. In the pro-reform camp there were several ad hoc citizens' groups and the local state. The anti-reform lobby comprised residents' groups and estate owners. In the middle, as a more or less neutral arbiter, was the central state.

There do not seem to have been many associations pressing for reform as there were for turnpikes and toll bridges. This was probably because gates and bars caused less immediate cost and disruption, and their abrogation was therefore more likely to have been an issue at a higher political level. Nevertheless the M.B.W. did receive representations from the General Council of the Metropolitan Ratepayers Protection Association and the Metropolitan Cab Proprietors' United Associations, among others, arguing on behalf of their members for the freeing of traffic.^[24] The impact of such memorialists was minimal.

Far more effective in taking up the cudgels was the local state which, in the absence of an effective M.B.W., took the form of the Vestries and Boards of Works. More specifically it

was the St Pancras Vestry, and particularly one of its members, Thomas Westacott, who were the principal protagonists. Westacott was a member of the St Pancras Vestry 1872-1892 and was elected to the first L.C.C. in 1889. He regularly raised the issue of gates and bars at Vestry meetings, was a key witness before four parliamentary Select Committees, and helped to draft the bills which became the 1890 and 1893 Acts as Chairman of the L.C.C.'s Highways Committee and Vice Chairman of their Parliamentary Committee.

Inexperience in pressure group politics led the St Pancras Highways Committee to try polite persuasion at first. Their 1863 concern over the Mabledon Place gate received a predictable rebuff, as did their subsequent efforts over the next fifteen years. It was in 1879 that they resolved to seek wider support, by convening a conference of all the local authorities in London.^[25] Twenty Vestries and Boards of Works sent delegates to the St Pancras Vestry Hall in October of that year. Similar conferences met in 1884 and 1885. They acted as a convenient means of raising the political temperature, sending well publicised deputations to the Council of University College, London, for instance, to complain about their Gower Street bar.^[26]

At the same time as twisting the constitutional arm of state, the St Pancras Vestry perpetrated an extraordinary incident of coldly calculated illegality. Early in the morning of 4th November 1884 they sent in their workmen to deal with the Sidmouth Street obstruction, on the Harrison estate. Under cover of darkness the gates were removed, the iron hinge posts destroyed, and road works initiated to prevent their reinstatement. The Vestry denied responsibility and, at the next Vestry meeting, the angry representative of the Regent's Square Residents' Committee was met with ridicule.^[27]

The St Pancras Vestry continued to carry the colours of the abolition lobby throughout the 1880s. They sent many letters and delegations to the M.B.W. and at one point, in 1885, even managed to persuade them to include a clause in one of their parliamentary bills.^[28] This came to nothing, mainly because of the feared cost of compensation. Real action was delayed until the M.B.W. was replaced by the L.C.C..

The third and fourth important groups of players were the residents' committees and landowners of the larger estates. One example will suffice, that of the Westminster estate in Belgravia.

Thomas Cubitt built five gates and lodges at entrances to the Belgravia estate of the Earl of Grosvenor in the 1820s. These were maintained by the estate until 1837 when, due to the uncertain legal position, they were abandoned and taken over by the residents.^[29] In 1860 this residents' group enquired of the M.B.W. whether it intended to use the Metropolis Local Management Act Amendment Bill to abolish bars and gates.^[30] The reply, in the negative,

must have delighted them, but they were less pleased by a letter from the Grosvenor estate office to the clerk of the Vestry of St George Hanover Square, dated 1st March 1865, which stated that 'The Marquis of Westminster feels that the interests of the public will be much promoted by the removal of any causes of obstruction to the general traffic, and his Lordship is willing to give whatever authority may be necessary to facilitate the removal of the gates and bars from his estate in Belgravia'. The executors of the developer Thomas Cubitt had not been consulted by the Marquis in making this declaration and they threatened litigation to protect their interests.^[31]

The printed minutes of a public meeting held in June 1867 also show the irritation of the Marquis' tenants.^[32] Among their number were some of the wealthiest and most influential people in the country. The Earl of Sefton was in the chair, supported by a Duke, two Earls, a Lord, three knights, an Admiral and a General, seven M.P.s and many others. In May 1868 a deputation delivered a petition to the Marquis bearing the signatures of 105 residents who wished to keep the bars.

For the moment the gates were safe but, to emphasise their own frustration, the St George Hanover Square Vestry ceased to light the gates in 1869. In 1871 the Vestry appealed to the M.B.W. for help with abolition, but received no satisfaction.^[33] The Marquis this time backed his tenants, who argued with feeling that 'the leaseholders and inhabitants had paid large sums to builders for their houses partly because of the quiet condition of the neighbourhood, which condition they attribute to the gates and bars...'.^[34]

An uneasy truce was broken in 1885 when the M.B.W. was considering a clause on gates and bars in its Various Powers Bill. The Duke of Westminster, who was a member of the St George, Hanover Square Vestry, stated in a meeting that personally he was in favour of removing the bars but that he did not sanction action by the M.B.W..^[35] A deputation from Belgravia was allowed to address the Board, a procedure which required the suspension of standing orders.^[36] Their impressive deputation comprised Lord Claud Hamilton M.P., the Earl of Sefton, Earl Fortescue, Lt Col. Baring, W. Christie M.P., and W.S. Seton-Karr. They made six points, stressing in particular the depreciation of property values which would ensue and the damage which would be caused by heavy traffic, leading to increased rates. The Belgravia committee also petitioned parliament against the 1890 Act. Such was their clout that in 1893 the Earl of Feversham asked in the House of Lords whether the third reading debate could be postponed until after a Belgravia residents' meeting.^[37]

There were other formal or ad hoc residents' groups elsewhere in London. Walter Scadding led a committee in Bloomsbury which worked closely with the Bedford Estate in order to prevent through traffic. They cleverly trimmed their sails as circumstances demanded in order

to ease the pressure for change. In 1875, for instance, they recommended that empty carts should be allowed through all four gates in order to avoid antagonizing the police. This was to be achieved informally, without changing the published regulations.^[38]

The other residents' association on the Bedford Estates was at Oakley Square.^[39] Interestingly these pressure groups seem to have had more success in mobilizing their constituents than did the Duke of Bedford's Steward. A circular from him in March 1867 had elicited only 23 responses, one of which even had the (anonymous) temerity to argue in favour of abolishing the gates.^[40]

The fifth interest group was the central state. Successive governments refused to become involved in the issue of gates and bars. They regarded the issue as one for private members and their neutral stand inevitably favoured inertia. This was not to say that individual politicians were themselves indifferent, as was amply demonstrated in the House of Commons debates in 1890 when ministers clashed.

The final phase

After decades of inaction under the M.B.W., the effectiveness of the L.C.C. was breathtaking. Within two months its first meeting, Westacott had raised the issue of gates and bars.^[41] A Parliamentary Committee reported along predictable lines about likely opposition from private residents and the heavy cost of compensation.^[42] Their innovation was a suggestion that a number of gates should be selected as test cases for a private bill. Four gates were chosen, all in St Pancras: Torrington Place, Gordon Street, Upper Woburn Place, and Sidmouth Street leading out of Regent Square.

The bill had reached the House of Commons by February 1890 and in June/July it was discussed in Select Committees of both houses. Detailed cross examination of 38 witnesses, representing a total of 287 petitioners, elicited evidence on the disruption of traffic flows, the additional cost of road repair which would arise from a greater volume of through traffic, the potential loss of peace and quiet, and the prediction that property values would fall if gates were removed.^[43]

In the cut and thrust of the committee and the subsequent formal debates, two concessions were wrung from the bill's sponsors. Firstly, compensation was to be allowable for landowners, but not for tenants. The Duke of Bedford had already given a hostage to fortune by declaring that he would be making no claim, and the impact of the amendment was therefore minimal. Secondly, provision was made for the installation of wooden 'noiseless pavements' on some roads. These were minor flaws in an otherwise major victory for the

abolitionists. The act scraped through as the very last one of the session. It could so easily have been lost to better organized filibustering.^[44]

With this precedent, the fate of London's gates and bars was effectively sealed. There were practical problems with removing the four in Bloomsbury but the legal strategy had been vindicated. Defeat in the front line of the struggle, the Euston Road, threw the opposition into confusion. A bill attacking 66 more obstructions, introduced into parliament by the L.C.C. in December 1892, met with sustained resistance from only four groups of petitioners.^[45] The act in its final form in 1893 dealt with 59 obstructions in 56 roads, with provision for noiseless pavements in ten streets.^[46]

Five recorded compensation claims received a grand total of £1, showing what a spurious argument that had turned out to be. It is understandable that this should have been such a very live issue, however, particularly in the 1870s and 1880s with the debate about compensation for slum landlords after the clearance of their property.^[47]

The London Building Act (1894) prevented the unauthorized erection of 'any post, rail, fence, bar, obstruction or encroachment whatsoever...', and after that the issue withered and there was an insufficient political will to deal with the other, remaining restrictions.^[48]

Discussion

Single issue pressure groups in nineteenth century cities deserve more attention. We have seen that they could be either defensive or aggressive, neighbourhood based or commercially motivated. To an extent they were able to ride the wave of public opinion, whether conservative or radical, but our experience has been that much depended upon the energies of individuals in nodal positions of influence. Without the agency of T.B. Westacott, for instance, it is doubtful that the means or the end would have been the same.^[49]

The political context of each locality was also of significance. St Pancras before 1855, for instance, has been described as 'the most extreme example of administrative disintegration in the whole of London', in contrast to its more centralized neighbour, St Marylebone.^[50] This was because of its seventeen paving boards, each of which had responsibility for a small fiefdom of thoroughfares. They had been the focus of public obloquy for decades and Sheppard argues that the roads issue, along with church rates and the poor law, was responsible for the radicalization of the vestry. Even after 1855 there was relatively little for the 120 St Pancras vestrymen to do. There was a crisis of agency and efforts to improve the roads were a convenient safety valve for the pent-up head of radical steam. Road access was one of the 'apple-pie' issues of the day, with residents resenting the difficulty of movement both locally and south of the Euston Road towards the City. St Pancras achieved more in road

improvements than any other local authority before 1889 and was notorious for its belligerent, pro-active attitude on this front.^[51]

This description of London's politics does not quite square with expectations. The selfless, energetic campaigning and dogged attitude of a few members of the St Pancras Vestry transcends Davis' model of a 'hopelessly corrupt and inefficient' local government.^[52] As it was, the St Pancras Vestry and their allies tried every tactic at their disposal: archival research, media briefing, conferences, lobbying, letters, petitions, opinion polls of residents, and even direct action. Little was achieved until Westacott, working from within the new L.C.C., pulled the appropriate strings. Even then, all might have been lost due to the vagaries of the legislative timetable and the underhand tactics of some Members of Parliament.

The theorizing of this political process is complex. Notions about public rights to the collective consumption of physical infrastructure such as trunk roads and side streets were indeed developing in the second half of the nineteenth century but the urban social movement we have described was hardly class-based in the Castellsian sense.^[53] Nor were party politics particularly relevant. St Pancras was home to factions and alliances such as the blues and pinks but their legitimation was from the 'smoking and drinking coterie of pot-house Jacobin clubs' rather than any broad constituency or popular democratic mandate.^[54] The existence of such factions was, in the words of Owen, 'likely to be nasty, brutish and short'.^[55]

Least of all can we interpret the anti-bar movement as street-active or revolutionary. There were occasional violent incidents but this was not Rebecca come to town nor the barricades of the Paris Commune. It was rather a case of persuasion and achieving change by the slowest of what can best be called 'trickle action politics'.

The recent revival of the 'civil society' debate may prove a viable framework of understanding. Cohen and Arato advocate this Gramscian third category to supplement the usual duality of state and economy.^[56] Civil society comprises a voluntarist, associative process of asserting new agendas for public debate. It is from civil society that pressure groups emerge, demanding new definitions and applications of rights. This is predicated on the acceptance of the existing constitutional articulation of state and capital but seeks the democratization of institutions. More work is now required to see whether our description of the clashes between pressure groups and vested interests, leading eventually to compromise and change, is an accurate representation of the nesting of local issues within the broader politics of Victorian London.

Not all élitist residential districts felt the need to erect barriers, but those in the front line of a potential traffic nuisance mostly did. Their construction of exclusive spaces in central and inner west London was the victim of its own success: the barriers became too 'visible'

politically, as a direct result of a progressive formation of public opinion over the decades from the 1820s to the 1880s. This was at least partly led by small, self-appointed pressure groups, although a reading of the contemporary press suggests that their actions were widely supported. Eventually the gates and bars were sacrificed on the altar of public freedom. Society had become unwilling to accept restrictions on their movement, especially in a city with such chronic traffic congestion, and the bars inevitably had to follow the turnpikes and toll bridges into oblivion.

The element of power in this discussion is very important. The landlords were at first able to appeal to their own private acts of parliament in maintaining their interests. This meant that the barriers went unchallenged in law for about one hundred years, aided it seems by the classic unresolved Victorian struggle between the central and local state for the levers of decision-making power. During this time there was a crucial balance between, on the one hand, those forces wishing to achieve a symbolic victory for the common people in allowing them free access to all of London's roads and, on the other hand, those who insisted on limiting public expenditure. Eventually the latter case collapsed when it was realized that compensation need not be paid for dismantled gates, and the former case was strengthened by the perceptible weakening of the political influence of the aristocratic landowners in the last twenty years of the century. Even the Daily Telegraph by 1882 was protesting of the 'persistence on the part of a few great landowners in a selfish and tyrannical policy' and suggesting that 'the noble obstructors of the Queen's highway have enjoyed that fantastically feudal privilege quite long enough'.^[57] In the event the 1893 Act was an anti-climax but its implications were profound. Bloomsbury and other estates began to look less attractive and in the early twentieth century the inability of residents to maintain their total exclusion zones was one reason for the decline of the West End as the glittering summit of the world's most powerful élite.

Atkins has shown how the symbiosis of Society and West End evolved over the period 1792-1932.^[58] There were changes of fashion as peripheral neighbourhoods came and went, and the complex internal structure is a hint that the West End was a warm coral reef with many kinds of privileged fish swimming over it, but the overall picture is of a remarkably stable district held together by a powerful social cement. It is a convincing example of what Soja calls spatiality as a substantiated and recognizable social product, simultaneously the presupposition and embodiment of social action.^[59] The space was authored, produced, controlled, manipulated and consumed by the élite for their own reproduction as a class. It was spectacularly successful in fulfilling that purpose.

The gates and bars were merely one means of protecting accumulated territory. The disappearance of many in the 1890s coincided with the final decades of the West End mode II just as their origins had mirrored its rise in the 1790s. Mode I had been a peripheral and semi-rural suburb in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Mode II was the tightly knit arena of the nineteenth century Season. Mode III in the twentieth century is the home of embassies, expensive shops, prestige offices, and a residue of residential accommodation. The élite has now dispersed and greatly declined in influence.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that gates and bars in either their surveillance function or their phase of destruction were crucial in overall scheme of the West End but their fate is an interesting indicator of wider trends in society. There was a certain inevitability about their demise but its nature and speed can only be appreciated as an outcome of local politics.

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Notes

[1] Camden Estate, St Pancras, circa 1823. Quoted in Return of all gates, bars, rails and posts, situate on private property in the metropolis, which obstruct the free passage of vehicles in the streets, with the authority under which they claim their right, and the regulations which govern them, British Parliamentary Papers (hereafter B.P.P.) 1882 (369) lxi.355

[2] P.J. Atkins, The spatial configuration of class solidarity in London's West End 1792-1939 Urban History Yearbook 17 (1990) 36-65

[3] H. Lefèbvre, The production of space (Oxford 1991)

[4] Ibid., 85, 109

- [5] Ibid., 143
- [6] M.J. Daunton, House and home in the Victorian city: working class housing 1850-1914 (London 1983) 15
- [7] D.J. Olsen, Town planning in London: the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (New Haven 1964); D.J. Olsen, The growth of Victorian London (London 1976)
- [8] For other studies of contests for the appropriation of space, see D. Harvey, Consciousness and the urban experience: studies in the history and theory of capitalist urbanization (Baltimore 1985); M. Harrison, Symbolism, ritualism and the location of the crowds in early nineteenth century English towns, in D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels (Eds), The iconography of landscape (Cambridge 1988) 194-213; P. Jackson, Street life: the politics of Carnival, Society and Space 6 (1988) 213-27; ibid., The politics of the streets: a geography of Caribana, Political Geography 11 (1992) 130-51; P.G. Goheen, Parading: a lively tradition in early Victorian Toronto, in A.R.H. Baker and G. Biger (Eds), Ideology and landscape in historical perspective (Cambridge 1992) 330-51; ibid., The ritual of the streets in mid-nineteenth century Toronto, Society and Space 11 (forthcoming 1993);
- [9] Paving Commission Minutes 4, 324 (1822), quoted in Olsen, Town planning in London, 147
- [10] Daily Telegraph 7th August 1874, p. 3
- [11] A summons was taken out against the driver at Bow Street Court, but he died before the hearing. His co-defendants were bound over to keep the peace for three months in a £10 surety. Report of inquest on George Rumsey, held on 8th August 1874 in Paddington. Transcript in Bedford Estate Archives, Woburn Abbey
- [12] For instance one letter, dated 10th April 1888, complaining that entry was refused to a hearse picking up a body from Taviton Street. Bedford Estate Archives, box marked 'bars and gates'
- [13] M. Draper, Bloomsbury gates and bars: the maintenance of tranquillity on the Bedford estates, Camden History Review 12 (1984) 2-5
- [14] M. Searle, Turnpikes and toll-bars vol. 2 (London 1930) 636
- [15] Select Committee on toll bridges (River Thames), B.P.P. 1876 (244) xiv. 435-554; Select Committee on the toll bridges (River Thames) bill, B.P.P. 1876 (328) xiv. 555-70; Select Committee on the metropolitan toll bridges bill, B.P.P. 1877 (156) xiv. 1-36; Metropolis Toll Bridges Act (1877) 40 & 41 Vic., cap. 99. Southwark Bridge had been freed in 1865, Kingston 1870, Kew and Henley 1873, Hampton Court 1876
- [16] Searle, op. cit., passim

- [17] Greater London History Library: Metropolitan Board of Works, Minutes of Proceedings (hereafter M.B.W.M.O.P.) 11th April 1856, 106. The Times 14th April 1856, 11
- [18] P.J. Atkins, *Forbidden ground: the gates and bars of Victorian London* (forthcoming 1993); P.J. Atkins, *Freeing the streets of Victorian London*, History Today (forthcoming 1993)
- [19] Hansard's Parliamentary Debates 192 (14/5/1868) 243
- [20] 30 & 31 Vic., cap. 134, sect. 7. No cattle were to be driven in the street 10 a.m.-7 p.m. without police permission
- [21] Sources: M.B.W.O.P., passim; London County Council Minutes of Proceedings (hereafter L.C.C.M.O.P.), passim; St Pancras Vestry Minutes (hereafter S.P.V.M.), passim
- [22] Greater London History Library: Works and General Purposes Committee, M.B.W., Reports of the Solicitor and Superintending Architect, in reference to the existing bars and street obstructions in the metropolis (1867); Return of all gates, op. cit.; Greater London Record Office, LCC/MIN/9107: Return of the existing obstructions to traffic in the London thoroughfares, submitted by Highways Committee 19th July 1892, Papers of the L.C.C. Parliamentary Committee; L.C.C.M.O.P. 29th June 1897, 727
- [23] M.B.W.M.O.P. 25th October 1878
- [24] M.B.W.M.O.P. 25th April 1884, 695; 2nd May, 1884. It is interesting to note that not all cabmen were in favour of abolition. The Amalgamated Cab Drivers, Cab Proprietors and Tradesmen's Society lobbied in favour of retention in order to keep their wealthy clients in central London
- [25] The Times 11th October 1879, 10
- [26] University College London, Manuscripts Room, College Correspondence, 29th July 1879; The Times 11th October 1879, 10 and 18th October, 11; M.B.W.M.O.P. 17th October 1879, 458-60; University College London, Record Office, Council Minutes, 1st November 1879; S.P.V.M. 17th December 1879. This bar eventually disappeared in 1893. S.P.V.M. passim; University College London, Record Office, Council Minutes, passim; The Times 27th April 1893, 6; W.R. Merrington, University College Hospital and its medical school: a history (London 1976) 15
- [27] S.P.V.M. 19th November and 3rd December 1884; The North-Western District Advertiser, The Camden and Kentish Towns, Hampstead, Highgate, Holloway and St Pancras Gazette (22/11/1884) 4
- [28] S.P.V.M. 8th April 1885
- [29] H. Hobhouse, Thomas Cubitt: master builder (London 1971) 74, 124-6
- [30] M.B.W.M.O.P. 18th October 1860, 36

- [31] B.P.P. 1882 (369) lxi.365-66. One can only assume that the Marquis felt able to make this statement because there was no immediate threat to property values on his West End estates. He was forced into a form of retraction when he later informed the Vestry that, 'as they had declined to avail themselves of his consent, he should hold himself entitled to give or withhold consent on any future occasion'. The Times 10th February 1868, 11
- [32] A copy of these minutes is in the Bedford Estate Archives
- [33] M.B.W.M.O.P. 5th May 1871, 628; 19th May 1871, 699; 16th June, 1871, 810
- [34] The Times 9th May 1885, 12
- [35] The Times 9th May 1885, 12
- [36] M.B.W.M.O.P. 6th March 1885, 420-1
- [37] Hansard's Parliamentary Debates 4th series, 2 (1893) c. 1525
- [38] Letter dated 9th November 1875. The regulations for the Gordon Street gate were changed in January 1876, to allow access to empty cabs. Bedford Estate Archives and Walter Scadding in evidence. House of Lords Record Office: House of Commons Select Committee on Private Bills (Group A), London Streets (Removal of Gates) Bill, House of Commons Books of Evidence (Private Bills) vol. 41 (1890) (hereafter H.C.S.C. 1890)
- [39] Oakley Square was 0.5 km north of the Euston Road, embattled by deteriorating property on the neighbouring Somers and Southampton estates
- [40] Letters preserved in the Bedford Estate Archives
- [41] S.P.V.M. 4th July 1888; L.C.C.M.O.P. 5th March 1889, 44-5
- [42] L.C.C.M.O.P. 9th April 1889, 153; 21st May, 331; 23rd July, 625-6
- [43] House of Lords Record Office: H.C.S.C. 1890; Minutes of Proceedings before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the London Streets (Removal of Gates) Bill, House of Lords Books of Evidence, vol. 13 (1890) (hereafter H.L.S.C. 1890)
- [44] London Streets (Removal of Gates) Act, 53 & 54 Vic., cap. ccxlvii
- [45] House of Lords Record Office: House of Commons Select Committee on Private Bills (Group A), London Streets (Removal of Gates etc.) Bill, House of Commons Books of Evidence (Private Bills) vol. 17 (1893); Minutes of Proceedings before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the London Streets (Removal of Gates etc.) Bill, House of Lords Books of Evidence (1893)
- [46] London Streets (Removal of Gates, Bars, &c) Act, 1893, 56 & 57 Vic., cap. lxvi
- [47] I am grateful to an anonymous referee for reminding me of the contemporary significance of the compensation issue
- [48] 57 & 58 Vic., cap. 213, sect. 199

- [49] Westacott was acting with an overwhelming mandate from his Vestry. He estimated that only ten of the 120 vestrymen favoured retention of the gates and bars. H.C.S.C. 1890.
- [50] F. Sheppard, St Pancras, in D. Owen, The government of Victorian London 1855-1889 (Cambridge, Mass. 1982) 284
- [51] ibid., 293
- [52] J. Davis, Reforming London: the London government problem, 1855-1900 (Oxford 1988) chapter 2
- [53] M. Castells, The city and the grassroots (London 1983)
- [54] Sheppard, op.cit., 287
- [55] Owen, op. cit., 217
- [56] J.L. Cohen and A. Arato, Civil society and political theory (Cambridge, Mass. 1992)
- [57] The Daily Telegraph 28th July, 1882, 5
- [58] Atkins, The spatial configuration of class solidarity
- [59] E.W. Soja, Postmodern geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory (London 1989) 129