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23/24 Leinster Gardens, Paddington, London W2

Dummy houses in the heart of London

Story and photos © Mike Slocombe, Jan 2007

The Metropolitan Railway - the world's first underground railway - began conveying passengers in 1863, with the subterranean lines constructed using a method called 'cut and cover'.

As the name implies, this involved digging a deep hole to house the underground tracks, and then covering over the tunnel.

The route of the line between Paddington and Bayswater (opened in 1868) necessitated the demolition of 23 and 24 Leinster Gardens, situated on a long, upmarket terrace of five story houses, and it was decided to build a 5ft-thick facade which matched the houses either side of the break.

The ensuing gap behind the facade left a stretch of railway track open to the elements, which proved to be a handy place for passing locomotives to 'vent' off.

It may sound rather rude, but venting was an essential means of keeping the underground tunnels clear of smoke and steam.

The original locomotives on the Metropolitan and District Line were powered by steam, and although they were fitted with condensers, engines still needed open air stretches of track to disperse the fumes.

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- [Leinster Gardens](#)

« [London homepage](#)

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Looking along Leinster Gardens. Can you spot the dummy houses?!



A view of Leinster Gardens, showing the entire five-storey facade of the 'pretend' houses. Although the building shares the same balconies, columns and decoration as its neighbours, the game is given away by the eighteen blackened windows.



Close up of the 'entrance' to 24 Leinster Gardens, complete with railings, door and plants. There's a long tradition of wagsters sending pizza deliveries, taxi cabs and religious representatives to this address!



Looking around the back of Leinster Gardens from Porchester Gardens. The charming graffiti on the bridge wall reads, 'Our Hearts Are Around Us'.



Looking over the bridge on Porchester Gardens, you can clearly see the empty space where the original houses stood, with metal girders stopping the adjacent buildings from falling onto the tracks!

The exposed area was used by steam locomotives to let off steam and smoke, which may not have been too pleasant for the neighbouring houses.

HOAXED!

A famous hoax in the 1930s saw a cheeky fraudster make a small fortune by selling 10 guinea tickets for a charity ball at Leinster Gardens.

It was only when the excited guests - in full evening dress - knocked on the fake door they realised they'd been ripped off!

(**Note:** these photos were taken in the early 1990s: [click here to see updated images from March 2012](#)).