

## = Leicester Square =

Leicester Square ( / ˈlɛstər / LESS @-@ ter ) ) is a pedestrianised square in the West End of London , England . It was laid out in 1670 and is named after the contemporary Leicester House , itself named after Robert Sidney , 2nd Earl of Leicester .

The square was originally a gentrified residential area , with tenants including Frederick , Prince of Wales and artists William Hogarth and Joshua Reynolds . It became more down @-@ market in the late 18th century as Leicester House was demolished and retail developments took place , becoming a centre for entertainment . Several major theatres were established in the 19th century , which were converted to cinemas towards the middle of the next . Leicester Square holds a number of nationally important cinemas such as the Odeon Leicester Square , Empire , Leicester Square and the now closed Odeon West End , which are frequently used for film premières , The nearby Prince Charles Cinema is popular for showing cult films and marathon film runs . The square remains a popular tourist attraction , including hosting events for the Chinese New Year .

The square has always had a park in its centre , which was originally Lammas land . The park 's fortunes have varied over the centuries , reaching near dilapidation in the mid @-@ 19th century after changing ownership several times . It was restored under the direction of Albert Grant , which included the construction of four new statues and a fountain of William Shakespeare . The square was extensively refurbished and remodelled for the 2012 London Olympics , costing more than £ 15m and taking over 17 months to complete .

## = = Geography = =

The square lies within an area bound by Lisle Street , to the north ; Charing Cross Road , to the east ; Orange Street , to the south ; and Whitcomb Street , to the west . The park at the centre of the Square is bound by Cranbourn Street , to the north ; Leicester Street , to the east ; Irving Street , to the south ; and a section of road designated simply as Leicester Square , to the west . It is within the City of Westminster , north of Trafalgar Square , east of Piccadilly Circus , west of Covent Garden , and south of Cambridge Circus .

The nearest tube station is Leicester Square tube station , which opened in 1906 . London bus routes 24 , 29 and 176 run on nearby Charing Cross Road .

## = = History = =

### = = = 16th ? 18th centuries = = =

The land where Leicester Square now lies once belonged to the Abbot and Convent of Westminster Abbey and the Beaumont family . In 1536 , Henry VIII took control of 3 acres ( 1 @.@ 2 ha ) of land around the square , with the remaining 4 acres ( 1 @.@ 6 ha ) being transferred to the king the following year . The square is named after Robert Sidney , 2nd Earl of Leicester , who purchased this land in 1630 . By 1635 , he had built himself a large house , Leicester House , at the northern end . The area in front of the house was then enclosed , depriving inhabitants of St Martin in the Fields parish of their right to use the previously common land . The parishioners appealed to King Charles I , and he appointed three members of the privy council to arbitrate . Lord Leicester was ordered to keep part of his land ( thereafter known as Leicester Fields and later as Leicester Square ) open for the parishioners .

The square was laid out to the south of Leicester House and developed in the 1670s . The area was originally entirely residential , with properties laid out in a similar style to nearby Pall Mall . In 1687 , the northern part of the square became part of the new parish of St Anne , Soho . The Jocelyn Sidney , 7th Earl of Leicester took ownership of the property in 1728 and it was briefly the residence of Frederick , Prince of Wales from 1742 until Leicester 's death the following year . The poet Matthew Prior lived at what is now No. 21 around 1700 and artist William Hogarth resided at No

30 between 1733 and 1764 , where he produced some of his best known works including Gin Lane . The magistrate Thomas de Veil , later to found Bow Street Magistrates ' Court , lived at No 40 between 1729 and 1737 ; this location is now the Odeon West End . The painter Joshua Reynolds lived at No 47 from 1760 until his death in 1792 ; this location is now Fanum House , once the Automobile Association head office .

At the end of the 17th century , Lord Leicester 's heir , Philip Sidney , 3rd Earl of Leicester , permitted a small amount of retail development in booths along the front of Leicester House . A statue of King George I was built on the square in 1760 following the coronation of his grandson , George III . The square remained fashionable throughout most of the 18th century , with notable residents including the architect James Stuart at No 35 from 1766 to 1788 and the painter John Singleton Copley at No. 28 from 1776 to 1783 .

Leicester House was intermittently inhabited during the mid @-@ 18th century , and was finally sold to the naturalist Ashton Lever in 1775 . Lever turned the house into a museum with a significant amount of natural history objects . In turn , the square began to serve as a venue for popular entertainments . Brothels started appearing around Leicester Square during the century , and visitors could pay to watch the severed heads of traitors executed at Temple Bar through a telescope . Leicester House became home of a museum of natural curiosities called the Holophusikon in the 1780s . It was demolished in 1791 ? 72 due to rising debts following the extinction of the Leicester peerage , and replaced by Leicester Place . That in turn was converted into a church in 1865 and is now the site of the Prince Charles Cinema .

In 1790 , a new Royal Opera House was proposed to be built in Leicester Square . The scheme was led by The Prince of Wales , Francis Russell , 5th Duke of Bedford and James Cecil , 1st Marquess of Salisbury and aimed to re @-@ establish London as a centre for Italian opera and ballet , with an opera house to rival those in mainland Europe . The opera house was never built , as the royal patent needed at that time to license a theatre was refused . The plans for the original design are preserved in Sir John Soane 's Museum , while a 1790 painting by William Hodges , which displays the finished design , belongs to the Museum of London .

= = = 19th ? 21st centuries = = =

By the 19th century , Leicester Square was known as an entertainment venue , with many amusements peculiar to the era , including Wyld 's Great Globe , which was built for The Great Exhibition of 1851 and housed a giant scale map of the Earth . The construction of New Coventry Street made it easier for traffic to access the square , resulting in private residences being replaced by shops , museums and exhibition centres . Savile House at No. 5 ? 6 , built in 1683 for Thomas Bruce , 2nd Earl of Ailesbury , had become a museum by this time , and was ultimately destroyed by fire in 1865 . It was rebuilt as the Empire Theatre .

Several foreign @-@ owned hotels were established around the square , making it popular with visitors to London . Brunet 's Hôtel at No. 25 was opened by Louis Brunet in 1800 , later expanding to Nos. 24 and 26 during the following decade . It was bought by Francis Jaunay in 1815 known as Jaunay 's Hôtel . The Hôtel Sablonière et de Provence opened at No. 17 ? 18 in 1845 as the Hôtel de Provence , and renamed in 1869 . It closed in 1919 and became a public house . The Cavour , at No. 20 at the southeast of the square , opened in 1864 . It was badly damaged in World War II but subsequently restored .

The Alhambra Theatre was built in 1854 on the east side of the square , dominating the site . It temporarily closed two years later when the original owner , Edward Clarke , became bankrupt , but then reopened in 1858 as the Alhambra Palace . It enjoyed a surge in popularity after Queen Victoria and family came to see " Black Eagle ? The Horse of Beauty " . It burned down in 1882 , but reopened the following year . In the early 20th century , the theatre became a popular venue for ballet . It was demolished in 1936 and replaced by the Odeon Cinema . The Empire Theatre of Varieties opened in 1881 on the former site of Savile House , but had a troubled start , closing for a time , until the end of the decade . The theatre had a notorious reputation for high @-@ class prostitutes frequenting the theatre , and in 1894 the London County Council ordered the promenade

on the upper balcony to be remodelled . A young Winston Churchill , then a cadet at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst , helped destroy canvas screens that had been erected to prevent access to the balcony . The theatre closed in 1927 , to be replaced by the Empire Cinema .

During the Winter of Discontent , where the incumbent Labour Party struggled to meet demands of trade unions and a shrinking economy , refuse collectors went on strike in January 1979 . Leicester Square was turned into a de facto dump , earning it the nickname of " Fester Square " . In the 1980s , the square was pedestrianised , cutting off all vehicular traffic . Access to the square for goods and deliveries is now controlled by specially designated marshals .

By the start of the 21st century , Westminster City Council were concerned that the square was too dangerous at night , and wanted to demolish sections of it to encourage the growth of theatres and cinemas , and reduce popularity of nightclubs . In 2010 , a major redevelopment of Leicester Square took place as part of a Great Outdoors scheme proposed by the Mayor of London , Boris Johnson . The improvements included 12 @, @ 000 square metres ( 130 @, @ 000 sq ft ) of granite paving and a water feature surrounding the Shakespeare statue . The square re @-@ opened in May 2012 after 17 months ' work at a total cost of £ 15 @. @ 3 million . The Greater London Authority said the refurbishments would accommodate more than 1 @, @ 000 new jobs . The re @-@ opening coincided with the 2012 Summer Olympics later that year .

= = Features = =

= = = Gardens square = = =

In the middle of the Square is a small park that was originally available for common use on Lammas Day ( 12 August ) , such as washing clothes and herding cattle . The Earl of Leicester was obliged to preserve these grounds , which were separated from the rest of the square with railings . In 1808 , the garden was sold by the Leicester Estate to Charles Elmes for £ 210 ( now 14770 ) , who neglected to maintain it . Ownership changed hands a number of times during the first half of the 19th century , including Robert Barren following Elme 's death in 1822 , John Inderwick in 1834 , and Hyam Hyams and Edward Moxhay in 1839 . Little maintenance was done and the garden deteriorated to the point of severe dilapidation .

In 1848 , the land was subject to the significant legal case of Tulk v Moxhay . The plot 's previous owner , Moxhay , had agreed upon a covenant not to erect buildings but the law would not allow buyers who were not " privy " to the initial contract to be bound by subsequent promises . The judge , Lord Cottenham , decided that future owners could be bound by promises to abstain from activity . Otherwise , a buyer could sell land to himself to undermine an initial promise . James Wyld bought the assets of the garden from the Tulk and Moxhay 's deaths in 1849 in order to erect the Great Globe , though buried the statue of George I under 12 foot of earth with the globe stuck on top . The statue was subsequently uncovered following the globe 's demise , but by 1866 it had deteriorated due to vandalism and was sold for £ 16 . Arguments continued about the fate of the garden , with Charles Augustus Tulk 's heirs erecting a wooden hoarding around the property in 1873 . These were quickly removed after the Master of the Rolls ordered that the land must be preserved for its original purpose .

The garden was saved by the Member of parliament Albert Grant , who purchased the park in 1874 for £ 11 @, @ 060 and donated it to the Metropolitan Board of Works . The title deed for the square passed to the succeeding public bodies and is now in the ownership of the City of Westminster . After the purchase , the architect James Knowles redesigned the park . A statue of William Shakespeare surrounded by dolphins was constructed in the centre . The four corner gates of the park had one bust each of famous former residents in the square : the scientist Sir Isaac Newton designed by W. Calder Marshall ; Sir Joshua Reynolds , the first President of the Royal Academy by H. Weekes ; John Hunter , a pioneer of surgery , by T. Wooler ; and William Hogarth , the painter , by J. Durham . Ownership transferred to Westminster City Council in 1933 . The most recent addition was a bronze statue of film star and director Charlie Chaplin , designed by sculptor John

Doubleday in 1981 . On the pavement were inscribed the distances in miles to several Commonwealth countries , including Canada , Kenya and Jamaica . After the Great Outdoors refurbishment of the square , only the statue of Shakespeare still remains .

= = = Entertainment = = =

Leicester Square is the centre of London 's cinema land , and one of the signs marking the Square bears the legend " Theatreland " . It contains the cinema with the largest screen and another with the most seats ( over 1 @, @ 600 ) . The square is the prime location in London for film premières and co @-@ hosts the London Film Festival each year . Similar to Grauman 's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood , the square was surrounded by floor mounted plaques with film stars ' names and cast handprints . During the 2010 ? 2012 refurbishment , many of the plaques were removed , confusing tourists who still expected to find them there .

The Leicester Square Theatre is based in nearby Leicester Place . It was constructed in 1955 as a church , before becoming the Notre Dame Hall , then the Cavern in the Town , a popular live music venue in the 1960s . In the 1970s , it was renamed back to the Notre Dame Hall , where the Sex Pistols played one of their first gigs at the club on 15 November 1976 . It was converted into a theatre in 2002 as The Venue , and refurbished as the Leicester Square Theatre in 2008 . In 2014 , it began a production of a musical based on Oscar Wilde 's De Profundis .

The Square has been the home for TKTS ( originally known as the Official London Half @-@ Price Theatre Ticket Booth ) , since 1980 . Tickets for theatre performances taking place around the West End that day and during the week are sold from the booth at a significant discount . The popularity of the booth has given rise to other booths and stores around the Square that advertise half @-@ price tickets for West End shows . The Official London Theatre Guide recommends avoiding these booths as they are not official and do not contain the Society of Ticket Agents & Retailers ( STAR ) logo .

The Square is home to the 93 @, @ 000 square feet ( 8 @, @ 600 m2 ) Hippodrome Casino . Following a £ 40m refurbishment in 2012 , the premises can now accommodate 2 @, @ 000 patrons .

Global Radio has its headquarters on the east side of Leicester Square at No. 30 , close to the Odeon . The building houses the radio stations Capital , Capital Xtra , Classic FM , Gold , Heart , LBC , Smooth Radio and Radio X.

= = = = Cinemas = = = =

The Odeon Leicester Square , which dominates the east side of the square , hosts many film premières . It has a capacity for 1 @, @ 683 people , arranged in circle and stalls . The last 70mm film showing was Armageddon in 1998 , after which the theatre began to use digital technology . The projection room still contains some of the original 1930s decor and normally houses two projectors . The Empire opened in 1962 . It was previously the largest cinema on the square , but in 2013 it was subdivided to cater for an IMAX screen . The Odeon West End , on the south side , opened in 1930 . It was not generally used for premières and was earmarked for demolition in 2014 , to be replaced by a ten @-@ storey hotel including a two @-@ screen cinema . Westminster City Council reported 400 new jobs would be available after the redevelopment . Vue West End , on the north side , near the north east corner , was the first cinema in Europe to show a 3D film with Chicken Little in 2006 .

A short distance from the west of the Square , on the south side of Panton Street , is the Odeon Panton Street . The Prince Charles Cinema , to the north of the square opened in 1962 with a " satellite dish " design where the audience looks upwards to the stage . The cinema became notorious for showing pornographic and erotic films during the 1970s , including 1974 's Emmanuelle . It later became a favourite venue for showing cult films , including the The Rocky Horror Picture Show ( 1975 ) and a sing @-@ along version of The Sound of Music ( 1965 ) , and marathon performances including all seven Muppet films back to back . Prices are considerably

cheaper than the main cinemas in the square ; in 2013 a ticket for a new release at the Prince Charles cost £ 10 , compared to £ 24 at the Odeon .

= = = Other attractions = = =

Leicester Square is one of several places in the West End that puts on events relating to the Chinese New Year . The celebrations are organised by the London Chinatown Chinese Association and held on the first Sunday during the new year period . Events include music , acrobatics and dancing . In 2015 , the celebrations attracted more than 1 @, @ 000 participants , becoming the largest of their kind in the UK . These included lion dances , a show of the Cultures of China and a drum show . A parade ran nearby through Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury Avenue .

The School of English operated on Leicester Square from 1992 until its closure in 2015 . It taught over 25 @, @ 000 students during its years of operation .

= = = Infrastructure = = =

The main electrical substation for the West End is beneath the Square . The electrical cables to the substation are in a large tunnel ending at Leicester Square , and originating in Wimbledon , at Plough Lane , behind the former Wimbledon FC football ground , before which the cables are above ground .

= = Cultural references = =

In 1726 , anatomist Nathanael St André claimed to have delivered rabbits from a woman at No. 27 Leicester Square . The event was widely reported around London , attracting interest from King George I and Royal Society president Hans Sloane . Shortly afterwards , the woman was caught trying to buy a rabbit in secret , and the incident was uncovered as a hoax .

Leicester Square is commemorated in the lyrics of the music hall song " It 's a Long Way to Tipperary " along with nearby Piccadilly , which became popular with soldiers during World War I. During the war , British inmates of Ruhleben Prisoner of War camp mentioned the square in a song : " Shout this chorus all you can . We want the people there , to hear in Leicester Square , That we 're the boys that never get downhearted . "

The square is mentioned in the lyrics of several rock group tracks , including the Rolling Stones ' notorious " Cocksucker Blues " , ( 1970 ) " Jeffrey Goes To Leicester Square " on Jethro Tull 's album Stand Up ( 1969 ) , " Emit Remmus " on the album Californication by the Red Hot Chili Peppers ( 1999 ) , and " Leicester Square " on Rancid 's Life Won 't Wait ( 1998 ) , . A verse in " Something About England " on the Clash 's 1980 album Sandinista ! refers back to " It 's a Long Way to Tipperary " , including a reference to Leicester Square .

Leicester Square has acquired a reputation for being difficult to pronounce for non @-@ native British English speakers . A report by Premier Inn said it was the most mispronounced place in Britain by tourists , usually as " / la??t??st?r / " ( " Lie @-@ chester " ) Square . It is one of a group of three on the British Monopoly board along with Coventry Street and Piccadilly .