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## Belgrave Square in literature or 'how others see us'

Margaret Harcourt Williams

Belgrave Square was built in the 1820s and 1830s and quickly became known as a desirable area to live. Novelists and playwrights have always thought so; the following are some examples:

Charles Dickens mentions Belgrave Square twice: in *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1838–39, he refers to Cadogan Place as

"the one slight bond that joins two extremes; it is the connecting link between the aristocratic pavements of Belgrave Square and the barbarism of Chelsea".

Its inhabitants, he says, do not

"claim to be on precisely the same footing as the high folks of Belgrave Square and Grosvenor Place".

In *Reprinted Pieces*, 1858, a collection of the stories and essays first published in the weekly periodical *Household Words*, Dickens dreams of a deserted city where

"In Belgrave Square I met the last man – an ostler – sitting on a post in a ragged red waistcoat, eating straw and mildewing away".

Anthony Trollope clearly liked the area: to begin with, in *The Warden*, 1855, it is "august".

"A noble old man, my august inhabitants of Belgrave Square and such like vicinity – a very noble old man".

Then, in *Dr Thorne*, 1858, he says it is fashionable:

"The Duke of Omnium was, as we have said, a bachelor. Not the less on that account did he on certain rare gala days entertain the beauty of the county at his magnificent rural seat, or the female fashion of London in Belgrave Square".

But it is difficult to decide what he means in *Framley Parsonage*, 1861, when he writes:

"Oh, yes; he is a Lazarus now, so of course we are bound to speak well of him; but I should like to see him tried. I don't doubt but what he'd have a house in Belgrave Square, and become noted for his little dinners before the first year of his trial was over".

W. S. Gilbert is more critical. In *Iolanthe*, 1882, he reminds the audience:

"Hearts just as pure and fair  
May beat in Belgrave Square  
As in the lowly air  
Of Seven Dials"

And Oscar Wilde is cynical: in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1895, he writes:

"Jack: I own a house in Belgrave Square. . .  
Lady Bracknell: . . . what number in Belgrave Square?  
Jack: '149'  
Lady Bracknell: (shaking her head): The unfashionable side, I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered."

Does anyone know of others – I'm sure there must be more.