

The Ruins
Virginia Water
Past and Present



WINDSOR
GREAT PARK

The Royal Landscape

SAVILL GARDENS • VALLEY GARDENS • VIRGINIA WATER



The Roman City of Leptis Magna

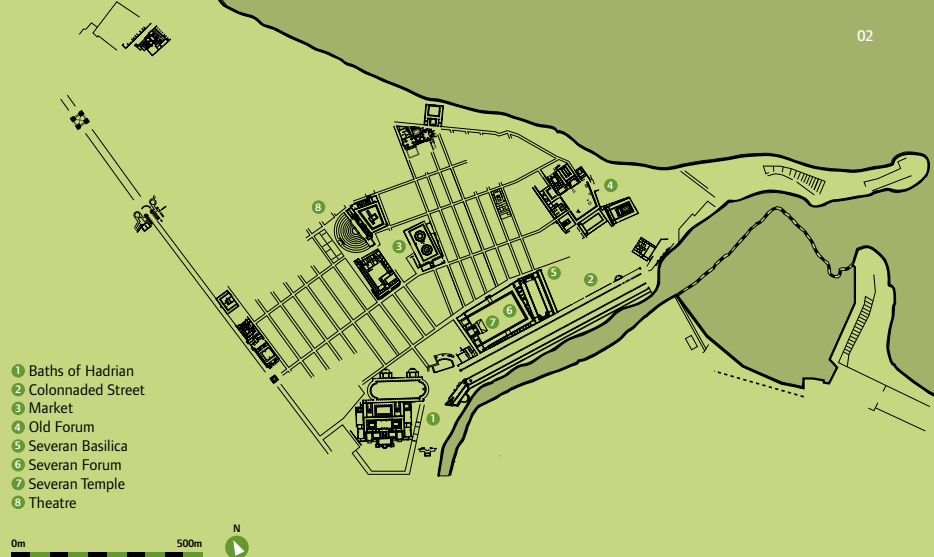
The source of many of the stones that were used to create The Ruins at Virginia Water is Leptis Magna, a Roman City site on the shores of the Mediterranean near Tripoli, in present day Libya.

Leptis, together with much of present day Libya, became a Roman province in the mid first century BC (before Augustus), although the most spectacular development phase of the city was during the first and second centuries AD.

Leptis Magna continued to flourish under Augustus from the end of the first century BC until the start of the third century AD. The city underwent several monumental programmes of replanning and renewal and developed into a fine, classical Roman City, with a theatre, colonnades, temples and a market.

The Roman Empire declined from the 3rd century AD. The province of Triolitania was created, with Leptis as its capital, but it too slowly declined over the next two centuries. Leptis Magna was occupied briefly by the Byzantines but today is an abandoned site, still largely buried in the sand.

The columns and stones that were transported to Windsor are from several different buildings in the ancient city of Leptis; reportedly “the principal basilica, an arcade and several minor palaces”. The Ruin is not therefore, a reconstruction of a temple, but a ‘picturesque’ style designed set piece using materials from Leptis Magna and elsewhere.





The Gift, and Transport from Libya

In the 17th century over 600 columns from Leptis Magna had been presented to Louis XIV for use in his palaces at Versailles and Paris.

In 1816 Colonel Hanmer Warrington, Consul General in Tripoli, persuaded the local Governor that the Prince Regent (later George IV) should also be able to 'help himself' to the ruins, and permission was given to British officer Commander WH Smythe to remove columns and stones.

Local people were outraged, perhaps as they found the stones useful themselves, for building and as mill stones. They obstructed Smythe's efforts and many statues and columns were destroyed as they waited to be loaded onto the ship.

As a consequence, Smythe collected fewer stones than perhaps was planned. Three large columns still lie on the beach today, waiting to be shipped. However in 1817, 22 granite columns, 15 marble columns, 10 capitals, 25 pedestals, 7 loose slabs,

10 pieces of cornice, 5 inscribed slabs and various fragments of figure sculpture, some of grey limestone were shipped to the UK.

After a stay at the British museum, in 1826 it had been decided to transfer the stones to Windsor and they were transported on gun carriages, in 12 loads, between August and October. The route was along Tottenham Court Road, Oxford Street, Hyde Park and along the Great West Road through Egham, Staines and to Virginia Water.



1. Abandoned columns on the beach at Leptis Magna

Description of Wyatville's Monument

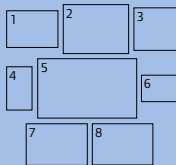
Between June 1827 and March 1828 the antiquities were arranged by Sir Jeffrey Wyattville, George IV's architect, in the form of a ruined Roman temple.

The Ruins were arranged along a central ride which ran from Virginia Water lake landing stage, under the Blacknest Road Bridge on to the Belvedere Woods and Fort Belvedere.

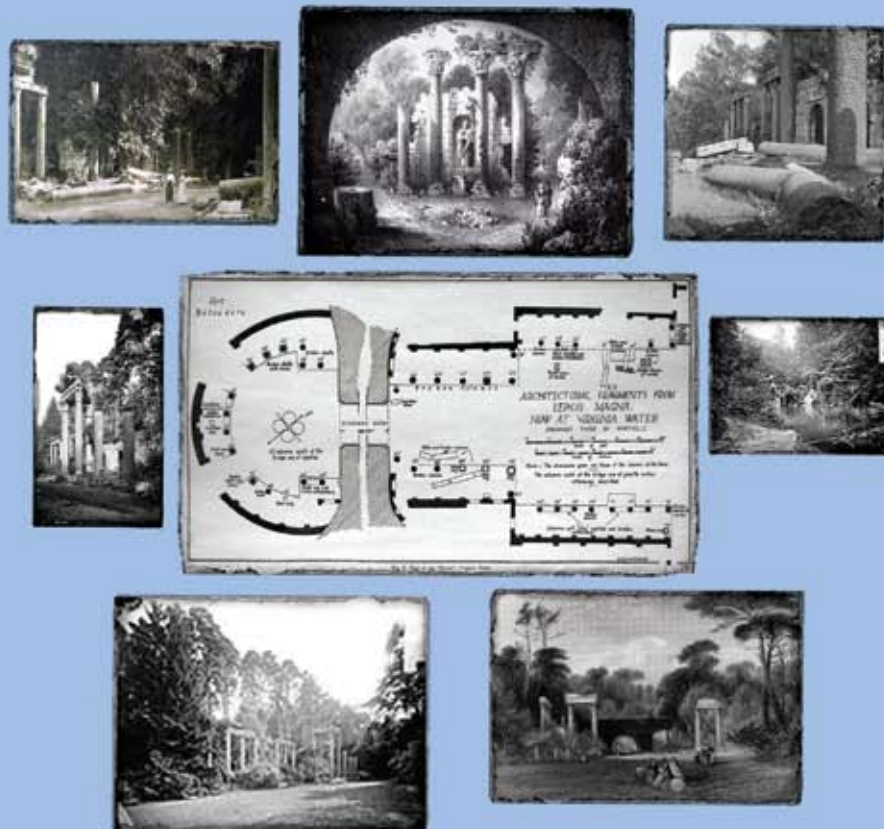
All of the columns and many of the decorated pieces of entablature (the lintels) were from Leptis Magna but in order to complete the monument, Wyattville used stones taken from the recently demolished Carlton House; either to construct walls or roughly carved to imitate the Roman capitals.

Statues from the gardens of Carlton House were also taken to embellish at the Ruins and some fine pieces acquired by Frederick Prince of Wales were added later.

The monument was sometimes referred to as the 'Temple of the Gods' or 'Temple of the Augustus' in early years.



1. An Edwardian view of the Ruin
2. An early artist's impression of the Portico from the bridge
3. The Ruin in the 1950s
4. A photograph from the 1950s showing the Portico still standing
5. A survey drawing by of the Ruin by Andrew Lane
6. An early photograph
7. An early photograph, the Portico still standing
8. A Victorian artist's impression





Landscape Significance

The Ruins at their time of construction formed a final key component of the wider 'picturesque' style of landscape at Virginia Water, reflecting the fashion of the late Georgian period.

Other elements added over time, which contributed to the overall composition included:

- the lake itself
- the Belvedere viewing tower
- the cascade and grotto
- Five Arch Bridge
- the China Tea House
- a floating 'Mandarin Yacht'
- an oriental style 'Fishing Temple' on Manor Lodge island
- a Hermitage
- The Clockcase Tower eyecatcher

The locations of these lost and surviving features are today identified along a heritage trail around Virginia Water.

The restoration of lost vistas and the repair of selected features, including the Cascade and Five Arch Bridge, form part of the ongoing Royal Landscape conservation project. The significance of the Ruins is recognised in its listing as a Grade II Star Listed Building, whilst Virginia Water is listed as Grade I in the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens.

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1. Virginia Water steps
2. Five Arch Bridge
3. Virginia Water cascade
4. Panoramic view of Virginia Water





The Monument in 2008

There are few contemporary descriptions and no plans recording Wyattville's design of the Ruins, and so there is some uncertainty about what changes have taken place to its original and intended appearance.

However from early 19th century etchings and descriptions, we are aware of certain deliberate alterations, accidental changes and damage.

Most significantly, two of the three largest columns which formed a 'portico' grouping in the southeast range had been taken down. This was carried out on the instruction of Queen Victoria in 1897 because of concern about the stability of the structure.

In the 1950s, one further column fell and several sections of entablature were displaced. Other columns had been toppled by vandals and visitors.

There were several areas of collapse to the enclosing side walls that were caused mostly by unchecked ivy and plant growth.

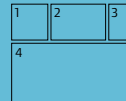
Iron clamps used in the original construction had also rusted, causing damage to the masonry and the collapse of at least one arch in the northwest sector.

A number of fragments such as inscribed stones and particularly a carved head were buried beneath the ground, obscured by the growth of the turf. These were intended to be part of the setting of the temple ruin.

Several items of statuary and inscribed stones had been removed for safekeeping or display.

There has been a loss of detail to the inscriptions and decorated entablature elements, due to weathering, particularly in the marble and limestone pieces.

A general deterioration in the condition of the masonry has occurred due to loss of mortar, damage by plant roots and weather.



1. A damaged column base
2. The cracked lintel of the four-column apse
3. Failing stonework to the entablature
4. The west range before repair

The Repair Project

The repair approach adopted was one of compromise between minimum repair, i.e. enough to conserve the monument in damaged condition and to prevent further deterioration, and full reinstatement, including reproduction of all missing statuary and building elements, to recreate the monument as envisaged by Wyattville.

As a first step invasive vegetation including ivy and self seeded tree saplings were removed and the ground level, which had been raised over the years due to leaf fall and plant growth, was reduced to its original level, revealing previously lost low walls and steps.

The collapsed walls have been rebuilt where it was clear that the damage was either accidental or deliberate, and not part of the original ruin.

All the columns that were known to have fallen were re-erected, and made more secure using modern fixing methods.

The three-column portico and its highly ornate entablature was re-erected.

The mature trees that over the years that had encroached and were obscuring the monument were cut back in order to protect the structures.

All of the stone and brick used in the reconstruction was found on the site, and all the building methods used were traditional ones that would have been used in the early 19th century. New railings and gates were introduced, designed in a Georgian style with hand forged finials and a hand painted finish.



The Ruin during repair



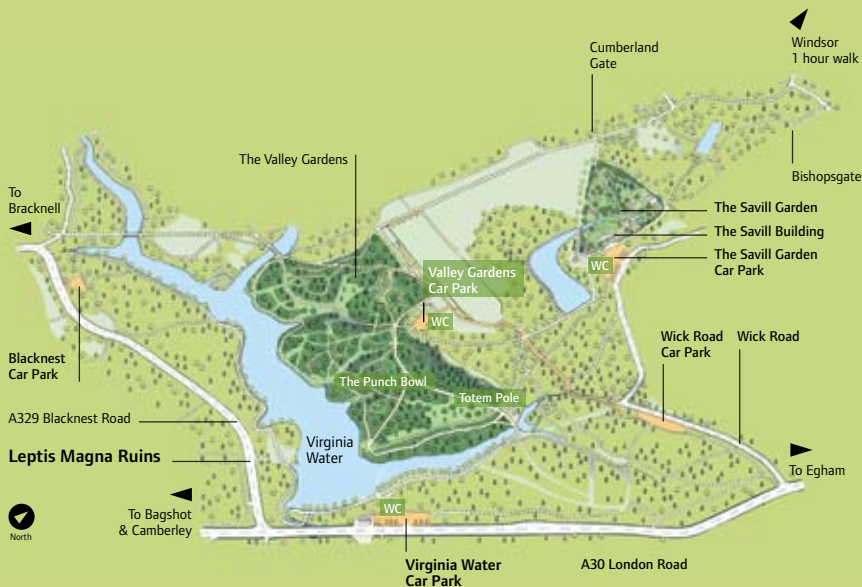
The restored Ruin, May 2009

The Ruins Repair Project Team

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|---|---|
| Project Manager (for The Crown Estate) | - Mark Flanagan, Keeper of the Gardens |
| Clerk of Works (for The Crown Estate) | - Graham Sanderson, Assistant Keeper of the Gardens |
| Conservation Architect | - Barry Stow |
| Project Co-ordination and Landscape Architect | - Russ Canning, Russ Canning and Company Limited |
| Archaeologist | - Andrew Lane |
| Structural Engineer | - Edney Ndumbe, Elliott Wood Partnership |
| Petrologist | - Robin Sanderson |
| Planning Supervision | - Mark Crisp, Andrew Goddard Associates |
| Surveyors | - Glanville Consultants |
| Main Contractor | - Paye Stonework and Restoration Limited |
| Paye Contract Administrator | - Chris Gladwell |
| Paye Quantity Surveyor | - Andrew Burnett |
| Paye Stonemason and Foreman | - Mick Murphy |
| Paye Stonemason | - Tony Carter |
| Railings Contractor | - Newton Forge |
| Groundworks Contractor | - Guy Ducker |
| Landscape Contractor | - The Crown Estate |

Photographs, plans, etchings and illustrations provided courtesy of Andrew Lane, Barry Stow, Russ Canning, Warwick Sweeney, Nick Day and the Royal Collection.

Leptis Magna Ruins



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