

# News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

WINTER 2016-17



*Sir Aston Webb's house at 1 Lansdowne Walk*

## ARCHITECTS' OWN HOUSES

Given the charms of our area, it is not surprising that right from the beginning a number of architects have chosen to build or remodel houses on the Ladbroke estate for their own use or that of their family. The four bow-fronted houses at Nos. 23-29 Clarendon Road, for instance, are thought to have been designed by Thomas Allason, James Weller Ladbroke's architect and surveyor, for his four daughters. Charles Chambers, the developer of much of Blenheim Crescent in the 1860s, chose to live in the unusual house at No. 137 Blenheim Crescent (which used to be known as Blenheim Villa or Blenheim House) and may have had a hand in its design.

Lansdowne Walk has no fewer than three houses built or remodelled by

architects for their own use. No. 1 (see photograph above), which was built in the 1840s, was acquired probably in the 1880s by Sir Aston Webb (1849-1930), the architect *inter alia* of the

Victoria and Albert Museum and of the principal façade of Buckingham Palace. He completely transformed the house inside and out into a fine arts and crafts-style dwelling, moving the



*137 Blenheim Crescent in 2006*

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entrance to the Ladbroke Grove side. The interior decoration is said to be good and fortunately much survived its later transformation into flats. The house is now Grade II listed.

At Nos. 9 and 10 Lansdowne Walk there were two semi-detached villas that were destroyed by bombing in World War II. The bombed site was acquired in the mid-1950s by the Swiss-born architect Rudolph Mock, in combination with two other families who wanted to build homes for themselves. Mock designed a terrace of three houses for their use. The Council wanted larger houses to be built than the families needed, so the lowest floor was designed as lettable flats, with an entrance on a raised ground floor for the families.

In the 1970s No. 19 Lansdowne Walk was acquired by the American landscape architect, designer and author Charles Jencks. Together with the Terry Farrell Partnership, he completely redesigned the interior and added an imaginative “conservatory” onto the southern end. There is a long description of this interesting “Thematic House” in Pevsner’s volume on North-West London, and photographs of the interior have figured in a number of architectural publications.

In 1969, a young architect called Jeremy Lever acquired the plot in the



*9-10 Lansdowne Walk in 2006*



*Infill house in Lansdowne Crescent*

narrow gap between two terraces on Lansdowne Crescent. The front of wedge-shaped plot was no more than 13 feet 22 inches, but despite its narrow

width, he designed an ingenious infill consisting of two maisonettes (one for his own use) which became Nos. 28½ and 29½ Lansdowne Crescent. The house won an RIBA award for ‘courage, invention and skill’ with particular praise for ‘the section and the consistency of detail’, and has been given a Grade II listing.

Cyril Mardall (1909-1994), a Finnish-born architect, and his wife June Park, also an architect and author of books on house design, designed for their own use the house at 5 Boyne Terrace Mews, built in the 1970s in the place of two derelict garages. Although the house presents a rather blank façade, it is lit by large windows on the back and its stylish interior is mainly open-plan with an elegant central spiral staircase.



*19 Lansdowne Walk in 2007*



*5 Boyne Terrace Mews*

## **NEW BOOK**

A new book on the area has just been published called *Wild about Notting Hill and North Kensington*. It is one of a series about areas of west and south-west London by photographer Andrew Wilson and is a small format coffee table book with a lot of good photographs and an introduction by local historian Caroline Macmillan.

## **BASEMENTS**

We reported in our last newsletter that, as a result of the efforts of Lord Dubs, the Government agreed to a review of the planning law and regulations relating to basements. In November, the Government issued a “call for evidence” about how the present planning arrangements could be improved. The Ladbroke Association put in a detailed submission – see <http://www.ladbrokeassociation.info/Basementwishes-lists.htm#DCLGList>. In particular, we argued that it was not just planning law that fell short, but the party wall system which often fails to provide neighbours with the protection and compensation to which we believe they are entitled.

## **LOCAL PLAN**

The Local Plan is the huge and unwieldy document that sets out the Council’s planning policies for the Borough. It is important, as the Council are required to abide by their stated policies unless there are good reasons not to do so. A couple of years ago, as some may remember, the Council reviewed the parts of the Local Plan dealing with basements, and with conservation and design. In 2016, they initiated another review of various parts of the plan, including the chapters on individual localities, among them Notting Hill Gate and the Portobello Market.

The Kensington Society put in detailed comments, to which we made an input as well as sending in our own briefer comments. In particular, for the Portobello Road, we argued for the desirability maintaining mixed communities and the need for a good social infrastructure; the importance of the traditional markets (antiques, vegetables etc) for the attractiveness of Portobello as a tourist destination; and the need to avoid over-sanitation and over-gentrification, which would risk making the area just like any other trendy shopping street. We also stressed the importance of traditional

public houses for the character of the Portobello area; and urged improvements to the current appalling way-finding which leaves too many tourists wandering around lost.

## **COMMENTING ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

RBKC encourages anybody commenting on planning applications to submit their comments in electronic form through the Council website. We accept that this is desirable, as it reduces work for Council officers and means that comments will reach the right person and will be dealt with quicker than if they are in the form of a letter or email. We suspect, however, that many people do not like the impersonality of filling comments into an online box. It is possible simply to put in the box “see attached letter” and then to attach a proper letter in the form of a pdf (but type rather than sign your name as the Council policy is - sensibly- to remove all signatures before putting letters on their website). Photographs or photocopies of documents to illustrate your arguments can also be attached as jpgs.

The pro-forma on the Council website asks you to state whether your comment is a general comment, an objection or an expression of support. This makes it difficult to decide what to do if the comment supports some aspects of the application and objects to others. We also think that some people may be put off describing their comment as an objection to avoid unnecessarily antagonising their neighbours. We have urged the Council to have a fourth category of “part-support/part-object”. In the meantime, it is important to remember that, if you do not classify your comment as an objection, it may not count towards the three objections that are needed to trigger the referral of an application to the Planning Applications Committee and it may be decided by Council officers without any reference to Councillors.

## **CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES**

As has been reported in the press, the Boundary Commission for England has been consulting on a redrawing of the country’s boundaries for parliamentary elections, to make constituencies more equal in size. This requires reducing the number of constituencies in London. At present, the Royal Borough is in

two parliamentary constituencies: there is one constituency for Kensington; Chelsea is in the separate “Chelsea and Fulham” constituency. The Commission proposes that from 2018 the whole of the borough should be in one “Kensington and Chelsea” constituency. This is strongly supported by our Council as administratively tidier (and it would of course be a very safe Conservative seat). However, the Labour Party has opposed this change and would prefer the recreation of the old North Kensington constituency in the north of the borough, which would give a greater influence to the sizeable pockets of Labour voters in that part of the borough, who currently feel effectively disenfranchised. Because this issue has become so politicised, the Ladbroke Association has not submitted any comments. The consultation ended on 5 December.

## **PRIZE FOR RBKC**

We reported in our last newsletter on the Council’s excellent new Code of Construction Practice which inter alia restricts noisy working on Saturdays. The RBKC Noise and Nuisance team has just been deservedly awarded the John Connell Local Authority Award (named after the founder of the Noise Abatement Society) for its outstanding efforts to reduce noise pollution.

## **NEXT DOOR LABROKE**

A new online social network has been set up in our area to enable neighbours to help each other (a sort of local Facebook). It was launched by a big American website company who run a similar series of local neighbourhood networks in the US. At the moment it does not have advertisements, but will no doubt begin to have them once it has grown a bit. To join, one has to prove that one lives in the area and only local members have access to it. Messages posted on it can be about almost anything. One of our councillors uses it to spread information he thinks would be of interest to residents. People have been using it to find specialist tradesmen, educational establishments and medical practitioners; to look for lost pets; to offer things they don’t want (one post earlier this year was from someone who wanted a home for the tadpoles in their pond); and – from people recently arrived in the area – to seek information about local practices, like what their children should or should not do at Halloween. If you are interested, the link is <https://nextdoor.co.uk/>.

## RECENT PLANNING APPLICATIONS

### Roof extensions

Building upwards is a favourite way of increasing the amount of space in one's house and a very large number of houses in the area have roof extensions, including some rather unfortunate ones from the aesthetics point of view. We certainly do not oppose all roof extensions. But, in the words of the Ladbroke Conservation Area Appraisal, there are some original roof forms that contribute strongly to the historic and architectural character of the conservation area and which we think it is important to preserve. We objected recently to two applications for roof extensions that we felt would compromise the buildings concerned, and we are happy to say that in both cases the applications were refused. One was for a roof extension to



50 Ladbroke Grove

50 Ladbroke Grove, a particularly fine and well-balanced detached building (see photo) where what was proposed would have upset that balance in a way only too visible both from the street and the

communal garden behind. The other was for an extension to a house in a long terrace in Westbourne Park Road which has an apparently unaltered and unbroken row of historic "butterfly" or valley roofs.

### 2, 4, 6 Lansdowne Rise

Planning permission was recently granted for the demolition of the three 1950s houses on Lansdowne



2, 4, 6 Lansdowne Rise in 2006

Rise and their replacement by two slightly larger houses. The applicants explained that they are two families who had acquired the properties and wanted to build houses for their

own use. This application attracted a large number of comments, mostly objecting but some supporting the proposal. Although the present houses are a pleasant example of 1950s architecture, they are not particularly distinguished and we did not object to their demolition. But we did express the hope that they would be replaced by some really interesting modern architecture (as there are not many opportunities to build modern houses in this area) rather than by the somewhat dull buildings that were finally accepted.

We also unsuccessfully objected to the white-flecked brick proposed. This type of brick (the brick equivalent of limed oak) seems to be the current architectural fad and is attractive, but it just makes for a visual muddle to use it in an area where there are already two other types of brick in use on neighbouring properties (London stock and red brick). It also seemed to us questionable, given the pressure on housing in the Borough, whether it made sense to replace three housing units by two.

## 18 Vernon Yard

We keep an eye on changes to modern buildings as well as on those which are part of our Victorian heritage. This property is one of a group of four rather interestingly designed 1970s mews houses and we were not happy when an application was made to replace the modern garage door by a pseudo-stable door and the first floor windows by faux Georgian windows, which would have resulted in a real mish-mash of styles. Fortunately, the council agreed with us and the applicant was persuaded not to make these changes.



17-20 Vernon Yard

*photoBecket*

## 20th CENTURY THEATRE

Sadly, the 20th Century Theatre on Westbourne Grove has now closed. The theatre has had an interesting history. It was constructed behind one of the houses on Westbourne Grove and opened in the early 1860s. Over its life it has had a variety of names; born the Victoria Hall, it was renamed the Bijou Theatre; then the Century Theatre; and finally in the 1930s it became the 20th Century Theatre. In its early years it put on mainly farces and other popular entertainment of the music hall type. In 1924 it was acquired by Lena Ashwell, an enterprising actress who had organised entertainment for the British troops during the First World War – a sort of one-woman ENSA. Her company (which at one time included the 17-year-old novice Laurence Olivier) was more culturally ambitious, putting on a varied fare from Shakespeare and Dostoevsky to Noel Coward. In 1936, the theatre was acquired by the Rudolph Steiner organisation, and used for visiting lecturers and artists from Steiner's headquarters in Switzerland and to popularise "Eurhythmy" or eurythmics – an expressive movement and music art invented by Steiner.

The theatre finally closed in 1963, and the building was acquired by a

Portobello Road antique dealer who opened an arcade on the ground floor, underneath the theatre. Although the theatre was never again used for its original purpose, in 1999 it was rented by a local resident, Sandra Kamen (who is a member of our Committee) and she reopened it as an event venue. Since then it has been much used for commercial purposes such as fashion shows, but also for art and photography exhibitions and by local people for weddings, book

launches etc, as well as charity events. Unfortunately, last year her lease was not renewed and the antique dealers who operated in an arcade under the theatre have also had to leave. We understand that the landlord is now seeking to rent the whole building out for retail purposes. The new tenant will, however, be severely restricted by the building's Grade II listing, as a "rare survival of a rectangular hall-type theatre with a gallery along one end".



20th Century Theatre

## DOORWAYS AND PORCHES

The Ladbroke estate was built up between the 1820s and the 1870s, a period which saw a major evolution in the treatment of front doorways.

The earliest houses on the estate, along Holland Park Avenue, were built during the first spurt of development in the 1820s and follow the Georgian pattern of very simple doorways, flush with the front of the building and without porches or decorative surrounds, as below.



By the 1840s, however, when development began again in earnest, doorways were designed with decorative plaster frames – usually shallow pilasters on either side of the door and a discreet architrave above – and porches began to appear. Many of the early porches were rather square and clunky. But the architects of the 1840s and early 1850s soon began experimenting with a wide variety of different styles. Columns became mainly round rather than square and occasional ionic and Corinthian capitals started appearing, although Tuscan capitals remained the commonest. The favourite pattern for architraves was the triglyph, three vertical grooves alternating with a metope or square space. The porches were built to classical proportions, encompassing entasis – a convex curve in the column, to correct the visual illusion of concavity produced by an absolutely straight column.

By the 1850s most houses were built with porches, although there were some harking back to earlier styles. Porches themselves began to be crowned with bottle balustrades and railings, in some cases allowing the effect of a continuous first floor balcony along a terrace. Most porches are open at the side, but there are quite a few examples of enclosed porches (see below in Clarendon Road).



Recessed front doors was another option pursued by some architects. Usually, the entrance was framed by pillars and architrave to give the appearance of a porch (see example below in Ladbroke Crescent).



The 1840s and 1850s were the era of grand semi-detached villas, especially in Lansdowne and Clarendon Roads. To give more internal space, doorways were placed in a separate wing on the side of the villa. Usually, they were set back from the main building, and often a floor was built above the doorway. In the case of terraces, the end houses of the terrace sometimes also have their porches on the side, creating a “book-end” effect. This is particularly

noticeable in the section of Elgin Crescent between Ladbroke Grove and Rosmead Road, where on each side there are three separate terraces, each book ended by set-back side porches (see photograph below). These side porches are an important part of the character of the Ladbroke estate and we were pleased when the Planning Applications Committee, despite the officers' recommendation, refused permission for one of the porches to be brought forward, which would have marred the symmetry of the terrace.



Porches on terraces are sometimes single and sometimes paired, so that the two neighbouring houses are a mirror image of each other. Pairing is used in particular to create a symmetrical effect in a terrace. On Stanley Crescent and in Kensington Park Gardens, the architect Thomas Allom used neighbouring porches to create the effect of a colonnade between some of the houses, one of the most interesting features on the whole estate (see photograph below).



A porch wing on the side of the house creates an immediate temptation to build further floors on top of it. This started happening very early in some cases, for instance on the south side of Kensington Park Gardens, where the infills now look as though they have always been there. In more recent

years, however, there have been some ill-fitting examples of extra floors over porches. Generally we are against such floors where they would interfere with the rhythm and symmetry of a terrace or villa group.

Where houses were built without porches, the late Victorians and Edwardians often added either a porch or a wrought iron and glass canopy. Some of the latter are extremely decorative and add to the character of the area. We were sad, therefore, when the owner of 20 Lansdowne Road decided to replace their canopy with a standard porch (shown in the photograph below).



Doorways and porches seem to attract fiddling, and in some cases the whole doorway has been moved, to another side of the house or to the lower ground floor, not always to happy effect. Where the door or porch remains in its original position, and especially when the house is part of a matching group, we think it important to avoid significant alterations, as the form and position of the doorway is an important part of the historical architecture and character of the building. At the same time, where original porches have been lost through decay (and many crumbled or lost part of their decoration during the bad years of the mid-20th century), we encourage their reinstatement or repair.

## NEW HOUSES

Two new houses were completed in the Ladbroke area in 2016. The first is on the eastern side of Ladbroke Grove, next to No. 78, by the corner with Elgin Crescent. This was a World War II bombsite on which a tiny building had been erected. This has been demolished and an elegant small house has been erected, in the modern idiom (see photograph below).



The other is at 85 Ladbroke Road or Horbury Villa. This is not exactly a new house, but rather a more than doubling of an existing house. The original Horbury Villa had two bays and a small pavilion on the side for the entrance.

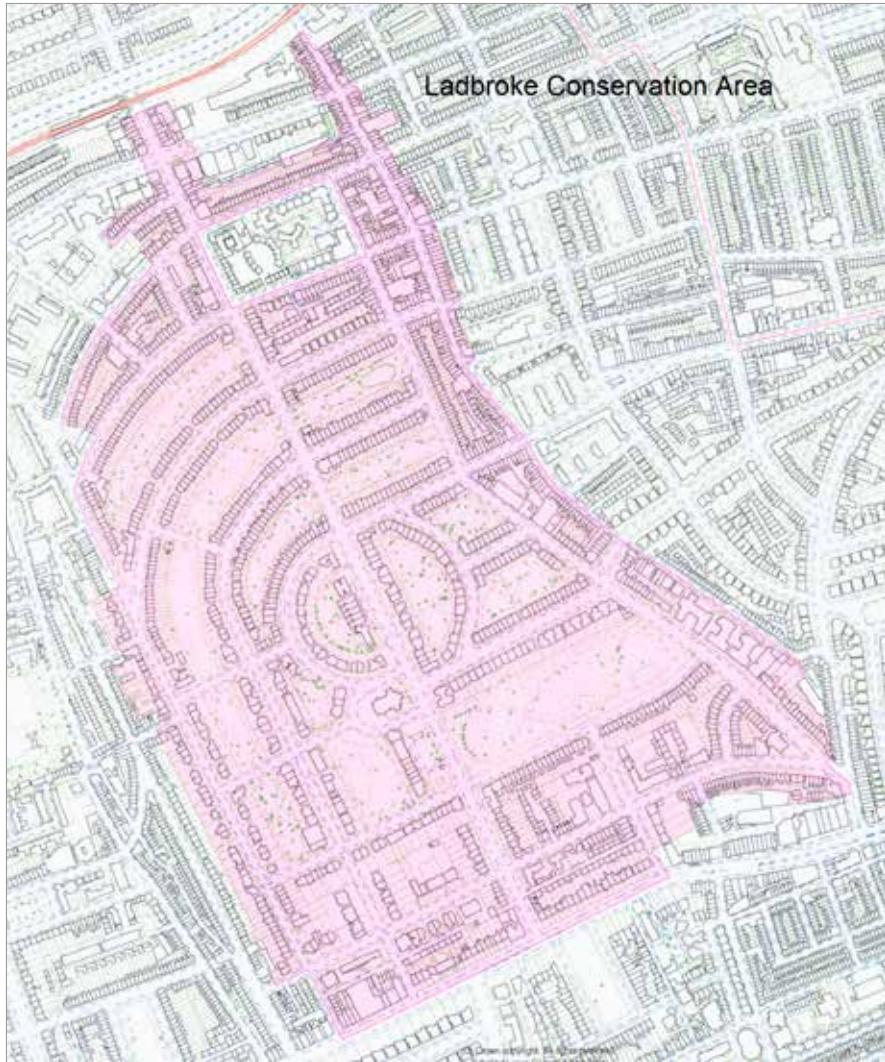
The new villa has incorporated the old building but effectively added four extra bays in a space previously occupied by garages and garden. Unlike the Ladbroke Grove house, it has stuck to the traditional style, we think quite successfully. Our main concern about both these houses is that solid walls and garage gates have been erected in front, quite out of character with our area, where the norm is railings and ironwork gates through which one can glimpse greenery and the architecture of the house behind. The huge black gates of Horbury Villa are particularly oppressive.



*Original Horbury Villa*



*New Horbury Villa*



## THE OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE LABDROKE ASSOCIATION

### Officers:

*President:* Thomas Pakenham  
*Chairman:* Sophia Lambert  
*ViceChairman:* Peter Chapman  
*Hon Treasurer:* Paul Bastick  
*Hon Secretary:* Anne Chorley

### Committee Members:

Kay Broadbent  
David Campion  
Tom Croft  
Catherine Faulks  
Sandra Kamen  
David Marshall  
Peter Mishcon  
Malcolm Pawley  
Peggy Post

*Newsletter:* Sophia Lambert

## THE OBJECTIVES OF THE LABDROKE ASSOCIATION

The Association is a charitable non-political organisation. Its constitution requires it to promote and encourage the following objectives by charitable means but not otherwise:

- ♦ To encourage and promote high standards of architecture and town planning within the Ladbroke Estate Conservation Area
- ♦ To stimulate and promote public interest in, and care for the beauty, history, and character of the neighbourhood
- ♦ To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity or historic interest.

The complete constitution of the Ladbroke Association is on its website at:

[www.ladbrokeassociation.info](http://www.ladbrokeassociation.info)

and the website also includes much historical information about the conservation area.

This edition of the newsletter was edited by Sophia Lambert and the printing was done by The London Printing Company.com in Notting Hill Gate.

### MEMBERSHIP

The Ladbroke Association was founded in 1969, in the same year as the designation of the Ladbroke Conservation area. The original impetus for the setting up of the Association was a proposal by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to cut down and replace the plane trees along the southern end of Ladbroke Grove. Led by the well-known architect and town-planner Robert Meadows and other local residents, the Association was successful in opposing the proposals, and the trees remain.

The Association is registered as a charity (Charity No. 260627) and is therefore subject to the strict rules governing charities.

The Association receives notices of planning applications and inspects, discusses and comments on those which affect the Ladbroke area in any significant way. In addition, the Association has been involved in (and sometimes initiates) discussion with the planning authorities on wider questions of conservation policy.

We are concerned that we should reflect the views of the broad community who live in the area. Everyone who is a resident of the Ladbroke Conservation Area should be a member of the Association so that their views may be heard in the debate on continuing issues in the area.

The more members we have, the more influential we can be. At present we have under 400, as many people have moved away. If you have new neighbours, please do encourage them to join. Membership for a person or family costs only £15 a year, which is we reckon a bargain in this day and age.

Would-be members can download a membership form from our website:

[www.ladbrokeassociation.info](http://www.ladbrokeassociation.info)

or apply to the Hon Treasurer: **Paul Bastick, 75A Ladbroke Grove, W11 2PD**