

Ladbroke News

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

SUMMER 2023



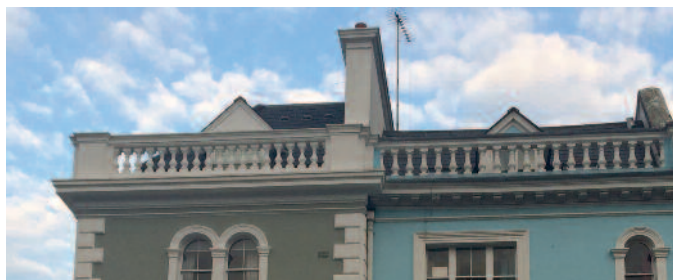
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Dormers on houses in Lansdowne Road built in 1843. Photo © Thomas Erskine 2006

DORMER WINDOWS

“Dormer” is a borrowing from the old French *dormeor* from the Latin for a sleeping room (as in dormitory). Dormer windows were first popularised in France in the 17th century as a means of giving light to attics under the roof used as bedrooms. They quickly spread to this country, but did not really take off for domestic urban buildings until the 19th century. The early architects of the Ladbroke estate, active in the 1820s and 1830s, did not design their buildings with attics. The earliest dormer windows on the estate are probably the ones with decorative barge-boarding on Nos. 2–12 Lansdowne Road (photo above), but dormers did not really become common until the 1850s, when they began appearing on a number of terraces. There are some good examples in Elgin Crescent, where single- or double-light dormers were built, both on the fronts and backs of the houses, on the front partially hidden behind bottle balustrades. These dormers are simple but elegant, with two lights.



Dormers on the fronts of houses in Elgin Crescent, hidden behind bottle balustrades.

There are dormers also in some of the grand streets east of Ladbroke Grove. The north side of Ladbroke Gardens has unusual protuberant angled dormers with windows on three sides. Again they are identical on both back and front, but with bottle balustrades on the front. Stanley Gardens also has neat square-headed original dormers. Further north and later in date, Ladbroke Crescent, built in the 1860s, a period when less grand houses were being built, has particularly prominent and less elegant dormers (photo overleaf). Our area had been almost entirely built up by the end of the 1860s, but there is a 1870s block on Ladbroke Terrace in high Victorian style that has really gone to town with its elaborate dormers (overleaf). ►►



Unusual dormers on Ladbroke Gardens. Unfortunately, the one on the right has been replaced with an ugly modern dormer extension.



Dormers on Ladbrooke Crescent

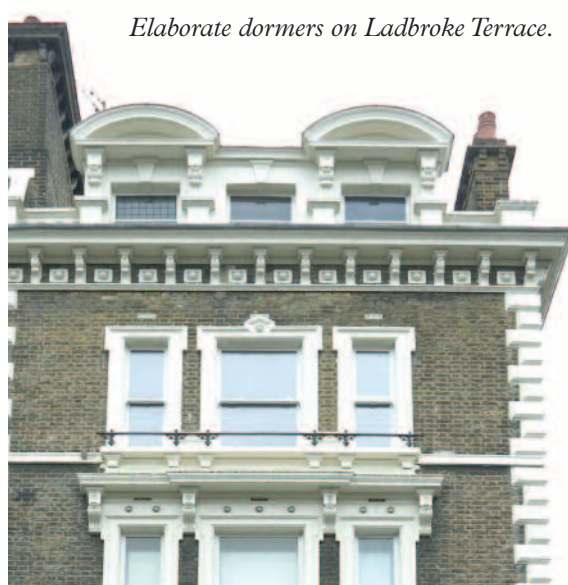
In most cases, the dormers have simply been widened by the addition of an extra window-light or two, but some (like the right hand one below), have dormer extensions that bear no resemblance to the originals (and would not be allowed today), to the great detriment of the streetscape (or gardenscape in the example below).



Rear dormers on Elgin Crescent. The first two are original; the one on the right has been enlarged, spoiling the view of these roofs.

For anybody wishing to extend their house, going into the roof-space is an obvious option. Many houses in the area built without dormer windows have acquired them over the years. Quite often there is a parapet that effectively makes a new dormer window invisible or barely visible from the street or communal garden, especially if it is well set back. But some really obtrusive ones have been erected, like the one below on the rear of a house in Lansdowne Road. In other cases, whole dormer floors have been added with little regard to the architecture of the house.

Council policy on dormer windows has been tightened up in recent years and many of the existing ugly dormers would not be allowed today. In particular the Council will not normally give planning permission for dormer windows or dormer floors for “groups of buildings where the existing roof line is unimpaired by extensions”, or on “terraces that are already broken



Elaborate dormers on Ladbrooke Terrace.

only by isolated roof additions”. The draft of the new RBKC Local Plan that is currently in preparation adds “alterations to dormer windows of architectural and historical interest, even where others on the same terrace have been altered” to the list of things that will not normally be given planning permission, which we greatly welcome. Our original dormers are a valuable architectural feature and it is important that the remaining unaltered ones are preserved.

So-called conservation rooflights – windows flush with the roof – are far less aesthetically harmful to our architecture and should generally be preferred. However, it is important to remember that any window on a roof can cause over-heating problems if facing south or near south. Even with double-glazing, the heat of the sun will penetrate and overheat the space inside in summer unless blinds or shutters are installed. Improved insulation from heat build-up in summer and heat loss in winter can also be achieved by the use of Low-E (low emissivity) glass, though most makes do have a very mild tint.



Ugly dormers on a Lansdowne Road communal garden. Note that the house on the right also has dormers, but lower and set back so as to be barely visible.

BLUE PLAQUES

MICHAEL IBRU

A blue plaque has gone up on 6 Kensington Park Gardens in honour of Michael Ibru (1930–2016), a Nigerian billionaire business magnate and philanthropist whose London home was in this house from 1974 to 2007. Despite the colour of the plaque, it is not an official English Heritage blue plaque, but was put up by the Nubian Jak Community Trust, an organisation dedicated to memorialising the historic contributions of Black and minority ethnic people in Britain.

Michael Ibru was one of Nigeria's earliest and most successful major entrepreneurs. In 1956, with a partner, he started a general trading company. He had an early success trading in seafood and branched out into numerous other areas, including other foodstuffs, transport, construction, tourism, brewing and timber, building the Ibru Organization into one of the largest conglomerates in Africa.

Ibru was born into a Nigerian family of chiefly rank and was the traditional chieftain of the Urhobo Nation in southern Nigeria. He became a major benefactor of his nation, as well as using his position and wealth to promote their culture and image (it had been one of Nigeria's least prominent nations). He is now regarded as a hero by his people.

JOHN AND JOAN HASSALL

The Ladbroke Association made a recent unsuccessful application for an "official" English Heritage blue plaque for John Hassall (1868–1948) and his daughter Joan Hassall (1906–1988), who between them lived at 88 Kensington Park Road over a period spanning some 82 years (John Hassall first moved there in around 1894).

John Hassall, known as 'The Poster King', was one of Britain's leading commercial artists and illustrators of the late 19th and early 20th century. He created hundreds of poster designs that appealed enormously to the Edwardian public at a time when the advertising hoardings were dubbed 'the poor man's picture gallery'. Hassall's robust, swashbuckling style, using bold lines, flat colours and minimal lettering had immediate graphic impact, and he is probably best known for the iconic 'Skegness is SO Bracing' poster featuring 'The Jolly Fisherman', commissioned by the Great Northern Railway in 1908. He also created enduring designs for brands such as Colman's Mustard and Fry's Cocoa.



Joan Hassall was born in the house. She was one of the most admired and distinguished wood engravers of the twentieth century. She also played an important role in gaining recognition for women in the male dominated arts establishment. During World War II she taught book illustration and drawing at Edinburgh College of Art, while also working on professional commissions. After the war she returned to 88 Kensington Park Road and refurbished her father's bomb-damaged studio for her own use. Unusually for a woman artist at that time she was able to earn her living from a mix of commissions for book illustrations and commercial and private work.

We think that they were well-deserving, and we had hoped that the fact Joan was a woman would help the application. But English Heritage decided that "their current profiles were not quite strong enough". The competition for plaques however, is very keen, as only up to a dozen are awarded every year in the whole of England. We are currently developing plans for a series of "Ladbroke Association" plaques for those unlikely to find favour with English Heritage. If our members have any suggestions for candidates, please let us know.



LADBROKE ART COMPETITION

Film companies filming in the area usually make a donation to the local residents' association as compensation for the disruption their activities cause to residents. We have now built up quite a nice little fund from this source. We plan to use part of it to organise an art competition of drawings and paintings of the Ladbroke area, so as to encourage better knowledge of the area and its architecture and features of interest. We hope to invite a distinguished artist to help judge the entries, which would then be exhibited. We will be writing round with further details shortly.

LADBROKE HALL

Although it is outside the Ladbroke area, members might like to know about the refurbishment of Ladbroke Hall (in Barlby Road just south of the Ladbroke Grove Sainsbury's) as an arts centre, with events and an exhibition space. Built in 1903, Ladbroke Hall is a large Beaux Arts building, with a grand portico evoking an Edwardian country house. It was built by Charles Chetwynd-Talbot, the 20th Earl of Shrewsbury, who was an early enthusiast of the motor car. He formed the Clément-Talbot company to manufacture in Britain a French car designed by Adolf Clément which he sold as "Talbots". A plot of land was identified in the open countryside of North Kensington, conveniently close to the gas works and what was the United Kingdom's first purpose-built automotive-manufacturing plant was constructed, with the front building serving as an enormous Edwardian car showroom. No expense was spared. The lavish entrance hall had marble floors and stained-glass windows, and it was surrounded by offices and a boardroom, all clad in oak panelling. The building's name does not have any connection with the Ladbroke estate further south, but comes from Ladbroke Hall in Warwickshire which belonged to Chetwynd-Talbot's wife's family.

NOTTING HILL POLICE STATION

Yet another delay for the decision on the future of Notting Hill Police Station. The Greater London Council has told RBKC that the Metropolitan Police asset strategy will not now be published until early Summer 2024 at the earliest. They confirmed that social value will be part of any consideration when/if they do dispose of the site, but there is no detail on how this will work. In the meantime, the site will remain as is – i.e. effectively mothballed, although the police are still using parts of it as offices.

The Talbots were highly successful and a Talbot was the first vehicle (in 1913) to cover 100 miles in one hour. In the First World War armoured cars, supply wagons, ambulances and gun carriages were manufactured at the plant. It was at the Clément-Talbot works that the first armoured crawler tractor – the precursor to our modern-day tanks – was made.

The company collapsed in the Depression and was merged with the Sunbeam company, manufacturing Sunbeam-Talbots. In the Second World War, motor manufacturing was suspended and the site used to repair Spitfires. Its post-War history was chequered. In the late 1980s, the site became studios for Thames Television and many TV shows were made in the old Talbot factory, such as *The Bill*.

In 2019 the building was taken over by the international Carpenters Workshop Gallery, who have reinvented it as an international venue for contemporary art, collectible design, culture, dining and music, while keeping much of its past decoration as a grand car showroom. It is open to the public. There are more details on their website www.ladbrokehall.com.



© photoBECKET

THE SHEPPARD TRUST

The Sheppard Trust, founded in 1855 by a wealthy spinster called Miss Elizabeth Sheppard to provide low cost accommodation for “ladies of gentle birth in reduced circumstances”, has since the 1930s been based in houses on Lansdowne Walk – Nos 2–4 and 12–14 – which were converted into 29 tiny self-contained flats for the elderly beneficiaries. The Trust has for some years been thinking of moving to larger premises away from central London, where they could house a greater number of elderly women in more comfortable accommodation. Most of the current residents are unhappy at having to move from an area that they know well and in which they have connections, even though the Lansdowne Walk flats are small and awkward flats. Although there has been considerable local opposition to the Trust’s plans, they have pressed ahead and have done a deal with a care home in East Molesey to erect a new building in their

grounds. Matters were delayed because there were problems getting planning permission, but that has been sorted and the Trust has found a buyer for their current buildings in the person of a local developer, Chris Bodker, who has refurbished a number of houses in the area. These are attractive early Victorian stucco houses that, if sold as single family houses, would undoubtedly attract high prices, and that is no doubt what he will aim for. The Council is, however, likely to resist because of the loss of housing units.

The new owner does not get possession of the Lansdowne Walk buildings until sometime next year. The new building in East Molesey will not however be ready until a year or more later. This means that the Trust will have to find interim accommodation and the unfortunate ladies face two moves – not a good experience for the elderly.

NEWCOMBE HOUSE

As we have previously reported, after obtaining planning permission to demolish the Newcombe House tower and redevelop the whole site, the property company behind the scheme sold the site on to another developer, Beltane. The latter decided not to implement the consented scheme but to refurbish the tower and replace only the other buildings on the site. Beltane has now submitted a planning application for its revised scheme. The application followed a number of consultative meetings with local residents’ associations, including the Ladbroke Association. Unfortunately, many of our concerns were not taken into account. Although the tower is not being refurbished, Beltane is adding some floors (although it would still be lower than the consented scheme) and making it fatter and wider. Except for retail units on Kensington Church Street, space for a doctors’ surgery with eight units of affordable housing above, the whole site is to be given over to offices. The buildings would not leave room for the public plaza that we saw as one of the chief benefits of the previous scheme. Instead they are proposing a “terrace” at the foot of the tower roughly where the elephant and

Waterstones now are. As this would be on the north side of the tower, it would be in almost permanent shade and risks being horrendously windy as well as being next to the traffic on Notting Hill Gate, so hardly the pleasant and useful public space that we had hoped for.

We supported the previous scheme because, although we did not like the height of the tower, the applicants were proposing a number of public benefits – not just the plaza, but a bigger medical centre than now proposed; disabled access to some of the platforms at the Underground station; and more affordable housing to replace the former rough-sleeper accommodation. The latest plans involve a denser use of the space on the site, bringing some 30% more lettable floor space. One would have expected the developer therefore to be offering more public benefits rather than fewer.

We will be making our concerns clear. However, we are in a bind. If this scheme is refused, it will certainly put off other developers and it may be years yet before this blighted corner of Notting Hill Gate gets the new buildings that it deserves.

NEW TREASURER

Paul Bastick, who has been our much treasured treasurer for at least 35 years (so long that he cannot remember when he began) has finally retired. At our Annual General Meeting last month (the minutes of which will shortly be put up on our website), Kay Broadbent was elected to take his place. Paul is a building services engineer who gives us invaluable advice on such things as air-conditioning, and we are happy to say that he will remain on the committee and we shall be able to continue to tap his expertise.

HIGH STREET KENSINGTON CYCLE LANE

Those of you who receive our email alerts will be aware that the Council decided to go for the minimalist option of an “advisory” cycle lane in High Street Kensington, with road markings only. It came into force in August and only operates west of Earls Court Road and east of Palace Avenue (by the Royal Garden Hotel), so the main part of High Street Kensington is unaffected. It is two metres wide.



PORTOBELLO MARKET

After sustained nagging by local residents, the Council has finally got its act together on clearing the graffiti in Portobello Road. Last year's Carnival caused the growth of an exceptionally large crop which was only slowly cleared; and when it was cleared, it was too often replaced by new graffiti. The general advice is that all graffiti must be cleared off immediately, as graffiti artists will cease to be interested in a site if they know that their work will only be briefly there. In the last few months, the Council has considerably beefed up its graffiti-clearing team and it really is making a difference. It has also promised a real blitz after this year's Carnival.

In our last issue, we reported on the criticism of the Council for trying to commission a "design brief" for

the Portobello market – the fear among traders and others was that this would lead to a sanitised Disney-type market without any of the present quirkiness. The Council has now accepted that this is not a sensible approach. Everybody agrees, however, that infrastructure improvements are needed – better pavements, anti-flood measures etc. – and the Council proposes to finance these through the money they collect from developer levies. To give local oversight, they have appointed a consultative panel of local interest groups – traders, businesses, residents' associations etc. The 24 members of the panel are keen to reflect the views of the community and would welcome ideas and suggestions from anybody involved in the Portobello Road. The panel includes the chair of both the Ladbroke Association and Pembridge Association, so you know where to come.

EMAIL ALERT LIST

Are you signed up to our email alert list? It allows us to send members emails about developments of interest between newsletters. If you would like to add your name, please email info@ladbrokeassociation.org.

PLANNING

There has been considerable churn in the Council's planning department over the last months. Derek Taylor, the long-time head of the North team (which deals with all planning applications in our area) retired at the beginning of the year and it was some time before he was replaced. The new head is Fiona Rae, who has come from another council, but who has worked in RBKC in the past. Most of the North team planning officers have also changed. There seems to have been some difficulty in recruiting new people to replace those who had moved on and for a while the council was relying heavily on temporary contract officers. All this did not make for efficient working and one case was so badly mishandled that an infuriated objector lodged a formal complaint with the Council. Fortunately, an almost full team of permanent officers has now been assembled and things are we believe looking up.

Planning applications in communal gardens are particularly difficult for officers to assess, as the gardens are not easily accessible to them and the rears of houses giving onto communal gardens cannot always be conjured up on Google Earth (an officer does make a

visit if there is an actual planning application, but not always if giving pre-application advice). We therefore invited Fiona Rae and her team on a visit to two of the gardens, which enabled us to point out some of our concerns about inappropriate development. Almost the entire team turned out and they told us that they found the visit extremely helpful.



The North planning team with the Ladbroke chairman on the tour of the communal gardens

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

41 Chepstow Villas

This is one of the end houses of a short symmetrical terrace on Chepstow Villas – see photograph on front page. We were appalled when the Council granted permission for the destruction of a historic bottle balustrade on its first floor balcony and its replacement

by a utilitarian metal railing. The applicant had applied for a rear extension (to which we did not object as it was out of public view) and as part of the same application the replacement of the front balcony. We objected strongly. The applicant argued that it would restore symmetry with a similar replacement railing on the matching house at the other end of the terrace. The latter lost its bottle-balustraded balcony a long time ago



Nos. 39-41 Chepstow Villas (bottle balustrade on right)

– probably it crumbled and became dangerous in the bad years and was replaced with a metal balcony as the cheapest way of making it safe, in the days before people bothered about planning permission for this sort of thing.

We are all for symmetry, but it seems to us quite wrong that this should be done by a move to the lowest common denominator and at the price of a valuable original architectural feature, especially as we were not without hope that the bottle balustrade at the other end would one day be reinstated. The Council admitted that the loss of the historic balcony would be highly regrettable, but told us that they thought that a refusal of this application on the sole ground that the balcony would not be upheld on appeal as the larger part of the application was acceptable. This seems to us nonsense. It would make a mockery of the planning system if anybody desirous of getting rid of valuable original fabric knew they could get away with it simply by making it part of a larger application that was otherwise likely to be acceptable.

We are appealing to the applicant not to proceed with this part of their planning permission.

14 Horbury Crescent

Fortunately, almost exactly the opposite happened in this case. When we are commenting on planning applications, we make a habit of suggesting that the applicant might consider voluntarily reinstating any lost architectural features. The Council are good at passing our suggestions on and did so in this case.

14 Horbury Crescent is one of three houses in the middle of a terrace that were built with pierced stucco balustrades along their roofline. Two of the houses still have them, but that on No. 14 is missing. The new owner



Pierced stucco balustrades on Horbury Crescent

of the house applied earlier this year to do some works on it and we suggested that they might take the opportunity of the works to reinstate the balustrade. Happily, they agreed.

16 Lansdowne Road

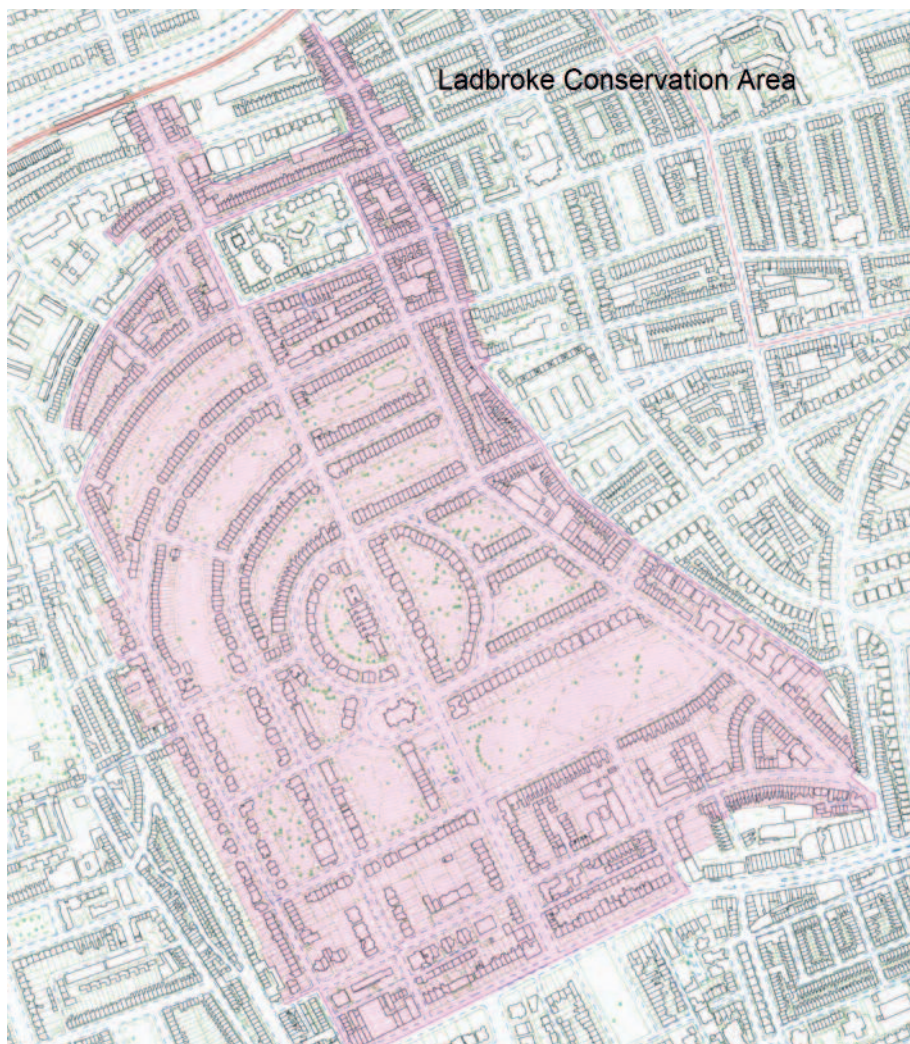
We were less successful in this case. No. 16 is one of a pair of attractive semi-detached villas, both of which would originally have railings on a low wall with stucco piers along their street boundary. The railings from both houses were almost certainly removed during the last war, when the government conceived the idea of collecting and melting down the railings in front of houses and around squares to contribute to the war effort (in the end, a use could not be found for them, and rumour has it that they were secretly dumped in the sea).

No. 18 still has a low stucco wall on which it has reinstated railings, so it probably looks much like it did originally. At some point, however, probably in the 1950s or 1960s, a not particularly attractive brick wall was erected in front of No. 16. As can be seen from the photo below, the result is not happy and the wall looks distinctly out of place.

A few months ago, No. 16 applied to rebuild its wall to the same height as the existing one and to replace the (almost certainly original) stucco piers by brick ones, which would have further differentiated it from No. 18. Brick walls are not a characteristic feature of our area and detract from the leafy and open aspect of our streets that was intended by the builders of the Ladbroke estate. As the wall has been in existence for many years, the applicant has the effective right to replace it by another wall of the same height. We suggested to the Council, however, that the applicant might instead replace the brick wall with a low stucco wall with railings to match No. 18. The Council were we believe supportive and relayed this suggestion to the applicant, but sadly they did not wish to do so. We are very sorry, as this would really have improved the look of both villas. The applicant did agree, however, to retain the stucco pillars, which is good news.



16-18 Lansdowne Road in 2006 (No. 16 with the wall on the left). Since then, No. 18 has reinstated a stucco pillar on the boundary between the two properties, to the benefit of the streetscape.



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 notice 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 and planning 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.org or apply to the Hon Treasurer: **Kay Broadbent**, kay@broadbentassociates.co.uk or **9 Kensington Park Gardens, W11 3HB**.

THE OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

President: Thomas Pakenham

Officers:

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Hon Treasurer: Kay Broadbent

Hon Secretary: Anne Chorley

Committee Members:

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Kay Broadbent

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THE OBJECTIVES OF THE LADBROKE 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.org

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 K J S Print Services Ltd, Peterborough.