

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

Summer 2016



Cast iron railings and piers in Ladbroke Grove

RAILINGS

The Ladbroke area has a good number of interesting domestic railings, which form an integral and important part of its architecture and streetscape.

Metal railings began to be used on domestic buildings in London in the 17th century, during the period of reconstruction after the Great Fire of 1666. The earliest railings were wrought iron, which continued to be used until the 19th century, when it was largely supplanted by cast iron. The late 18th century had seen the development of industrial techniques for making cast iron, which allows for much more versatile shapes than wrought iron. The 18th century Adams brothers, who were largely responsible for popularising the neo-classical style architecture characteristic of the Ladbroke estate, quickly realised the ease with which cast iron could be made into classical shapes and

almost all the railings and gates in the Ladbroke area are cast iron, or in some cases a combination, with the railings themselves being wrought iron and any decorative panels being cast iron. Unlike malleable wrought iron, however, cast iron is difficult to repair. So it has some disadvantages.

The early and mid-19th century norm was for railings to be mounted on low stone plinths, usually no more than 6-12 inches high. The brick or stucco piers and dwarf walls now so common were a later development. Rather than stucco piers, there was merely a thicker rail to mark gateways and the boundary between houses, or else elaborate ironwork piers were created, as at Nos. 76-92 (evens) Ladbroke Grove (see photo above).

The earliest (and the few wrought iron) railings on the estate were quite thin with simple spearhead tops, as for instance the probably original ones

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on Nos. 11-19 odds Ladbroke Grove, built in the 1830s. But more elaborate designs quickly became common, with each terrace having its own design, some of which are shown over the page. These cast iron railings could be mass-produced and builders probably used a pattern-book to choose the design they liked. Gates were usually designed to look like a continuation of the railings. They had locks, the remains of which can sometimes still be seen. There were simpler and thinner railings beside the steps into the basement area. Where there was a front garden, there were also simpler railings along the top of any basement area.

During World War II, most of London's iron railings were requisitioned to be melted down to help the war effort. In practice, the whole exercise proved a fiasco as most of the iron could not be re-used. There is a bit of a mystery over what exactly happened to the huge amount collected.



Railings on basement steps

But rumour has it that the Government, embarrassed by the pointlessness of this great patriotic gesture, had most of the iron secretly dumped at sea. As a result of this exercise, most of the railings around the communal gardens disappeared and many from private houses as well. For instance, a pre-war photograph of the long terrace at Nos. 21-55 Ladbroke Road shows that these houses all had matching railings mounted on low plinths, and it seems likely that these were a victim of this war-time depredation. Many of the missing railings in Ladbroke Road were eventually replaced, but usually on low walls quite unlike the original design.

There was some protection for pre-1850 railings; and where there were no front gardens, the railings that prevented people from falling into basement areas

were left in situ. Most of the original railings that remain in the Ladbroke area fall into the latter category. Thus, for instance, good railings remain in Arundel Gardens, Horbury Crescent, Stanley Gardens, and Stanley Crescent, as well as parts of Blenheim Crescent, Clarendon Road, Elgin Crescent, Ladbroke Gardens, Ladbroke Grove and Lansdowne Crescent.



Clarendon Road

When domestic railings were removed during the war, wooden or wire fencing was often the first cheap and easy substitute. It was then gradually replaced over the years with a wide variety of different types of railings and walls (although a few wooden fences remain). There has in particular been a trend towards low walls with railings on top.

The demolition, alteration or removal of railings and other boundary features along the street normally requires planning permission, and the removal of historic railings will not normally be permitted by the Council. If railings are damaged beyond repair, householders will be expected to replace them by

replicas (there are now a number of firms making good quality replicas of Victorian railings). In terraces where some of the houses still have their matching railings, we very much hope that any missing ones or modern ones in an inappropriate design will be replaced with suitable replicas of the originals.

Where there is no historical pattern to be observed, to preserve the character of the area, we believe it is nevertheless important that the spacing between the bars of any new railings or gates should be roughly similar to that of the traditional Victorian railings – the densely spaced railings favoured by some modern architects are unnecessary and give an unwelcome sense of enclosure. Similarly, the railings (together with any dwarf walls on which they are mounted) should be no higher than the general run of Victorian railings – i.e. about 4 foot – so as to avoid a fortress effect.

We see it also as very important to avoid full height walls along the street boundary. The views through railings to greenery and architectural features are one of the most essential parts of the character of our area and a valuable townscape amenity for residents. Walls along the street have never been a characteristic of our area and where they have been allowed (as for instance in parts of Ladbroke Road and Lansdowne Road) they create “an oppressive and unfriendly effect” (in the words of the Ladbroke Conservation Area Appraisal) that detracts from the charm of the area.



Stanley Crescent

Gates – whether leading to the front door or to a garage or parking area – also should be open ironwork (not solid wood) to give an effect of transparency. Again, they should not be too high and should follow the traditional pattern of the railings on that street or terrace.



Ladbroke Grove



Walls in Clarendon Road

There is a trend, deplored by some as unfriendly, for front gates to be locked with a bell by the gate so that there is no open access to the front door. This necessitates a post-box by the gate. We strongly support post-boxes being sunk into a pillar so that they are as unobtrusive as possible. It is also important that residents arrange for their post-boxes to be regularly emptied when they are away. An overflowing post-box is unsightly as well as an invitation to burglars.

Where there is no traditional ironwork there may be scope for imaginative wrought iron designs for railings and especially for gates. The attractive

garage gate below is in Lansdowne Walk on a house with a stucco bottle balustrade.

Railings must always be painted to protect the iron from corrosion and rust, and originally most were painted in shades of green to blend in with the greenery in the gardens. These early layers of paint can sometimes be found when railings are scraped down for repainting or repair. Other popular colours were chocolate brown and dark blue. It is said that railings were all painted black after the death of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's consort, in 1861 as a sign of mourning. Be that as it may, black is now the standard

colour encouraged by the Council (and the Ladbroke Association), as having railings of a single colour contributes to the historical symmetry and uniformity of our terraces. Sometimes the spearheads are painted silver or gold, but we take the view that this is a rather vulgar touch that does not belong in the conservation area. When railings are repainted, ideally all the previous layers of paint should first be removed and any rust dealt with. Where there are too many layers of paint, the crispness and detail of the original design is lost.

Many of the very grand stucco houses, especially those built in the late 1840s and 1850s, have stucco bottle balustrades instead of railings. The best examples are in Kensington Park Gardens and Lansdowne Road. These were no doubt in imitation of the stone balustrades on the grand classical country houses. Many of these balustrades crumbled along with much else during the mid-20th century years of decay on the Ladbroke estate. It is heartening that, over the last 10 or 20 years, quite a few have been replaced (again there are now firms who will make good replicas). But there are still many missing.

The City of Westminster has very detailed advice on railings on its website <http://www3.westminster.gov.uk/spgs/publications/Railings.pdf>.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING POINT

A charging pillar for electric vehicles is to be installed on the south side of Ladbroke Square, next to the junction with Ladbroke Grove (by the day nursery). We welcome the arrival of this facility, but are a bit concerned about the location. This is a fairly busy junction, as increasingly vehicles coming south down Ladbroke Grove turn left here to avoid the blockages by the junction with Holland Park Avenue.



PLANNING APPLICATIONS

There have been a number of planning applications of interest since our last newsletter, some of which are described below.

2A Horbury Crescent

2 Horbury Crescent is the house on the north-west corner of Horbury Crescent and Kensington Park Road. It belongs to the Women's Pioneer housing association. Last year they applied for planning permission to build a two-storey house (ground floor and basement) on a garage and parking space next door to the house, on the Kensington Park Road side. Their original plan involved an attractive and original pierced metal screen to cover part of the front of the building. This would have been a real improvement on the present boring garage doors. It is just the sort of modern design that we would like to see and we were extremely disappointed when the planning department apparently



The site of the proposed new house at 2a Horbury Crescent

persuaded the applicants to replace their design with one in which the house is – in the words of the planning officers' report – “disguised as a single storey garage structure”, little different from what is there at present. This application was approved, and we can

only hope that if the applicants apply for an amendment the Council will have a change of heart, as the decision seems quite contrary to the declared Council policy of promoting good modern design.

5 Ladbroke Road

This is one of the four shops next to the Prince Alfred pub, which have a big paved forecourt in front of them. Although pedestrians regularly walk across this area, it is in fact private property rather than public pavement. The building at the western end of

the terrace (No. 7) has long been a restaurant and over the years has gradually been building out over its part of the paved area, often without the benefit of planning permission, so that now the whole area in front of the house is covered by a solid structure with a retractable roof (although it is not often retracted).

The next door property at No.5 has been acquired by Uli, the pan-Asian restaurant on All Saints Road. They applied earlier this year to build a similar structure to that on No. 7 on their part of the forecourt so as to increase their dining area. The Ladbroke Association was extremely concerned about this. Uli will be a good addition to the restaurants of Notting Hill Gate and we saw no problem with the forecourt area being used for al fresco eating with tables and chairs outside. But the forecourt provides an attractive and useful open space at a point where the footway is very narrow. Moreover, it affords a view of the exceptionally well-preserved Victorian shop-fronts on this terrace – of which that on No. 5 is the best. We argued strongly that further encroachment onto the forecourt by solid structures hiding the shop-fronts should be resisted. Two of the Councillors on the Planning Applications Committee agreed. Unfortunately, however, the application was granted by a majority vote, and we fear that it will not be long before the rest of the forecourt is built over.



The terrace of Victorian shops in Ladbroke Road in 2006

16 Lansdowne Walk

This is one of the most difficult sites in the area. It lies between two sets of semi-detached villas. In the wide gap between the villas, two small buildings were erected many decades ago. One (No. 16½) was rebuilt a few years ago in an aggressively modern style which, while of architectural interest, is considered by many to be out of place in its situation. The other is a garage-cum-studio built probably in the 1930s, which has the merit of being small but is otherwise undistinguished, although not unattractive. As previous newsletters have reported, a number of attempts have been made to demolish and replace this structure with a new house and a fresh application came before the Planning Applications Committee in June. This proposed a three-storey house with a basement and Council officers recommended it for approval.

The Ladbroke Association did not object to the principle of replacing the existing building. But we were concerned that the new structure would be too large and bulky for the



16 and 16 ½ Lansdowne Walk

site and would obscure the decorated side elevation of No. 15. We were also concerned about the proposed use of a brick that would match neither of the neighbouring houses, making an already messy mix of materials along this stretch messier. There was also an exceptionally

large number of objections from neighbours. We are happy to say that the Committee decided to refuse the application, although we do not envy the unfortunate applicant, who now has the difficult job of finding yet another design for this problematic site.

120 Elgin Crescent

The same committee meeting looked at another application to which we had objected. This concerned only a small change, namely the moving of a porch.

The terraces on the Ladbroke estate are almost always symmetrical, deliberately designed with special features on the end houses (and

often also on the middle houses) to differentiate them from the others on the terrace. No. 120 Elgin Crescent is one of the two end houses of a long terrace, both of which have porches on their sides set back from the street – whereas other porches on the terrace are in front of the houses. The applicant wanted to bring forward the side porch so that it was on a line with the porches on the

fronts of the houses. Council officers had recommended approval on the grounds that the terrace was so long that nobody would notice the loss of symmetry. We felt, however, that this would obliterate an important historical architectural feature, while bringing little extra space for the residents. We are happy to report that the Committee members agreed with us and the application was rejected.

29 Lansdowne Road and 151 Elgin Crescent

Both of these cases involved basements which are allowable under the new policy and both applications were granted. However, in both cases one or more of the conditions laid down in the new policy was not met. In the case of 151 Elgin Crescent, the applicant was excused from having the one metre of soil that the policy says should be required above basements under gardens (important both for drainage and for planting). In the case of 29 Lansdowne Road (which is listed), of the basement

extended under the listed building (albeit under a modern extension) and the unaffected area of the garden was split into two – both also against the new basement policy.

The Government lays stress on the importance of Councils following the policies that they have adopted. At the same time, however, it also makes clear that they should not do so slavishly where it does not make sense – in planning jargon where there are “material considerations” that dictate otherwise. So we accept that the Council may depart from its policy where there are good reasons

to do so. But we believe that, when it does, it should make crystal clear in the officers’ report that it is doing so (in these cases they at first denied that there had been any departure). They should also demonstrate why a departure from the policy is justified in that particular case. In neither of these cases did they really do this; nor was it clear that other alternatives in accordance with the policy had been considered. We have complained and hope that the reports will be clearer and franker in future. It only engenders mistrust if the Council appears to be ignoring its own policy for no good reason.

BASEMENTS

In April, the Council finally adopted its long awaited Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on basements, which fleshes out the new policy restricting the size of basements and the area under gardens that they can take up. The SPD can be found on the Council website - www.rbkc.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/supplementary-planning/basements-spd-april-2016. The Council is not issuing paper versions.

More importantly, the Council has at long last drawn up a *Code of Construction Practice on minimising noise, vibration and dust* – something the Ladbroke Association has been advocating for years. It applies to all construction sites, but is particularly relevant to basement construction, given the enormous amount of noise, vibration and dust that basement construction can generate. The Code was drafted by the Environmental Health section of the Council who were scrupulous in their consultation of both residents' representatives and representatives of the construction industry. Inter alia, it restricts the hours during which particularly noisy construction works can be carried out (they will in future be banned completely on Saturdays) and stresses the need for contractors to keep in close touch with the neighbours. Again the Code must be read online and is to be found at www.rbkc.gov.uk/environment/code-construction-practice. If your neighbour is building a basement (or you yourself are doing so), we strongly recommend that you read the Code so that you are aware of what is or is not acceptable.

For a complete list of all the Council policy documents relating to basements, see our website www.ladbrokeassociation.info/RBKCpolicyonbasements.htm. RBKC is now well ahead of other boroughs in terms of basement policy, and others are now amending their own policies so as to catch up. Moreover, the number of applications for basement developments has dropped sharply across the borough. Some basements which gained approval a year or two ago, however, are only just starting, so no drop off in activity is yet apparent in most of our streets.

LORD DUBS' BASEMENT BILL

The Council has probably gone as far as it can under its present powers to bring basements under better control and it needs action by the Government and changes in the national legislation to achieve more. We were delighted, therefore, to find a new champion in the form of the Labour peer and former Minister Lord Dubs, who tabled first a private member's bill on subterranean development and then amendments to the Housing Bill that was before Parliament at the end of last year. The Association helped him with the latter and he acknowledged our role when introducing his amendments in the House of Lords.

Needless to say, the Government did not accept his Bill or his amendments. But he really worked on the Minister, and for the first time she admitted that there could be some problems beyond the control of local councils – until now the Government's line has been that local authorities had all the powers they needed to control the nuisance caused by basement development. The Minister committed the Government to carry out a review of the planning law and regulations relating to basement developments. We think above all that there needs to be a review of the party wall regime which only too often leaves people living next door to a basement development grossly out of pocket.

LOCAL GANG RIVALRY

There has been some quite serious teenage gang violence in northern Ladbroke Grove recently. It can spill out into our area, as on 4 July, when a 16-year-old youth was chased by a gang on bikes into the tourist part of Portobello Road. He was knifed in the neck and died on the pavement by the junction with Elgin Crescent, a tragic waste of a young life. A 15-year-old has been arrested. We can only hope that the gangs will not make for a disruptive Carnival.

TUBE NOISE

Since last autumn, a swathe of houses between Holland Park and Notting Hill Gate stations has been experiencing unwonted noise from the Central

Line. Residents have been affected as far away as Ladbroke Square and the mansion flats in Kensington Park Road. Transport for London originally said that it was because the rails had become rough and agreed to grind them. They did so, and that appeared to solve the problem. But within weeks the noise had come back. Although numerous approaches have been made to TfL, it is still far from clear what is causing the noise. We are not the only area affected, and a pan-London "Tube Noise Action Group" has been set up – see www.tubenoiseactiongroup.com. One of the main aims is to put pressure on TfL not to introduce the night tube on the Central Line until the noise problem has been sorted out. There is a local Notting Hill off-shoot of the main action group – you might like to email tubenoiseactiongroup.nhill@gmail.com if you are affected and are not already in touch with them.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Ladbroke Association AGM took place on 13 July at St Peter's Church in Kensington Park Road. It was preceded by an interesting talk by Graham Stallwood, RBKC Executive Director of Planning and Borough Development, about possible changes in the borough over the next 15 years. Two new committee members were elected: Cllr Catherine Faulks and Tom Croft. Catherine Faulks used to be a Norland Councillor and was on our committee in that capacity. She now represents Campden ward, but as she still lives in the Ladbroke area and made a valuable contribution to the committee, we persuaded her to rejoin in a personal capacity. Tom Croft is an architect who lives just outside our area but has been much involved with it and we greatly welcome the addition of another pair of architectural hands on the committee to help us deal with planning applications.

LADBROKE PARTY

We are most grateful to Lady Amabel Lindsay for allowing us to hold the Ladbroke Association annual party in her house. Fortunately the weather was good and we were able to spill out into her large garden, which must be one of the best on the Ladbroke estate.

OBITUARIES

In the last few months we were sorry to hear of the deaths of several people with longstanding connections with the Ladbroke Association.

Michael Cocks, who died in October 2015, moved to Kensington Park Gardens in 1970 and lived there until his death. He was a long-standing member of the Association, and a very private person. He left a part of his estate to be distributed to local charities, and we were surprised and delighted to be included with a legacy of £5,000. We are now considering how to spend the money in a way that he would approve and would welcome suggestions from members.

Professor Maurice Fraser, a former member of our committee, died in February at the far too early age of 55 from a brain tumour. He lived in Ladbroke Road. He had had a distinguished career as a political adviser to no fewer than four Conservative Foreign Secretaries and was latterly head of the European Institute at the London School of Economics. He was a keen promoter of Anglo-French relations (both *The Times* and *Le Monde* had obituaries of him) and was a committed European who would have been deeply saddened by the referendum results. He was also a man of many other interests, including antiques, and at one point ran a stall in the Portobello Road.

Henrietta Phipps, who lived for many years in Chepstow Villas, died in June at the age of 84. She came from an artistic background (she was the daughter of the painter Henry Lamb and his wife Lady Pansy Pakenham) and turned her talents to landscape gardening, working for many years for the Royal Borough and playing an important role in shaping its public spaces. She was also a mainstay of the Ladbroke Square Garden and probably knew more about the communal gardens of the Ladbroke estate than anybody else on the planet. For the Ladbroke Association, she will above all be remembered for the marvellous guided “Garden Walks” that she organised in the communal

gardens every year for members of the Association.

Kathleen Kinmonth Warren, who died in October 2015 at the age of 92 was among the group of people instrumental in the foundation of the Ladbroke Association in 1969 in response *inter alia* to an attempt by the Council to cut down the plane trees in Ladbroke Grove. Meetings to plan the campaign to save the trees were held at her house at 70 Ladbroke Road, at a time when it was rare for people to have such environmental concerns. She had a most interesting career, including a spell as a code-breaker at Bletchley Park during the Second World War. Like all who worked there, she kept the secret of what was happening there a secret even from her family for many years after the war; and when she finally told her husband (a distinguished professor of surgery), he evinced a singular lack of interest. Her last years were spent in a flat in the “Little Harrods” house in Kensington Park Gardens.

PUBS

In our last newsletter, we reported the closure of the First Floor Restaurant and Ground Floor Bar, one of the traditional pubs in Portobello Road (it used to be “The Colville”). We can now report that the building has been taken over by the Ginstitute who will reopen it as a bar and restaurant with a gin distillery, blending rooms and museum in the cellars. This is good news; there were fears that the building would be developed for offices and housing. The Ginstitute applied for planning permission in March to undertake various alterations, including the moving of the corner door. These corner entrances are traditional in our local Victorian pubs. The Ladbroke Association and others objected and we are happy to say that the applicants listened to the local community and changed their plans, so the corner entrance will remain.

The Ginstitute is currently based on the other side of the Portobello Road at the Portobello Star public house. As its name suggests, it specialises in gins

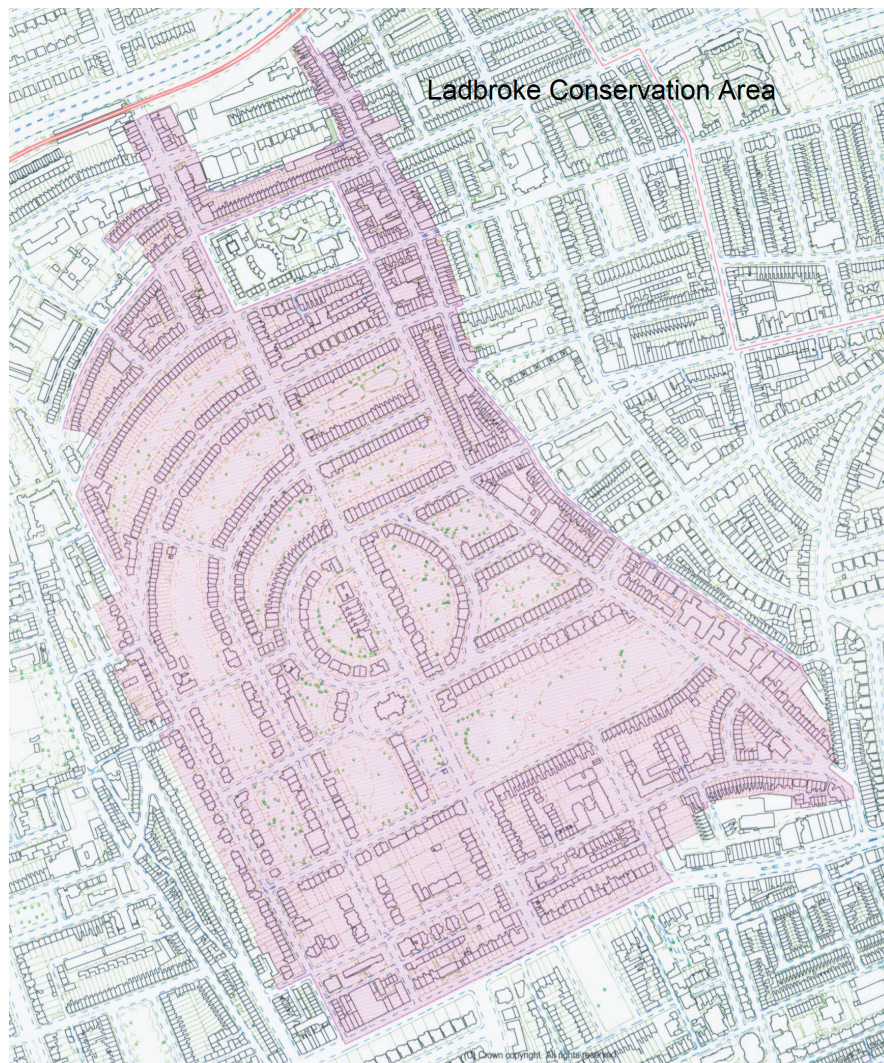
and has taken advantage of changes in the legislation some years ago to distill its own gin on the premises. It's “Portobello Road Gin” is now on sale in local shops, so it is not just a drinking place but a genuine local industry.

We also had fears that the Kensington Park Hotel near Ladbroke Grove station would close after the eviction of the publican by the new landowner, who is a property developer. But so far he too has, it seems, been receptive to the views of the local community and it is still operating as a pub with a new landlord.

BURGLARIES

Over the years, there has been a sharp decline in residential burglaries in RBKC. In 200/2001, there were 2,600 burglaries in the Borough (mostly in the St Charles and Golborne wards). By 2014/15, burglaries had fallen to an all-time low of only 910. However, there has been an increase in the number of local burglaries recently and the figure for 2015/16 was 962, or almost 6% up on the previous year – although the first quarter of 2015/16 is showing a renewed downward trend. Pemble and Colville wards are among those which have suffered most.

Many burglaries seem planned professional jobs rather than opportunistic break-ins. One of our committee members, who lives in a top flat in Kensington Park Gardens had photographic equipment and jewellery stolen mid-morning. It would appear the property had been watched to ensure all the residents were out before the break in, first through the door into the building, and then into the top floor flat. Four weeks previously, there had been an attempt to jemmy open a window in the same building. So make sure your security measures are up to date, that you use deadlocks whenever you leave the premises, and that no convenient ‘tools’ for smashing doors – such as fire extinguishers – are left in communal areas or areas accessible to the public. Summer, when people are careless about open windows, is the residential burglar's peak season.



THE OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE LADBROKE 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 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 Ladbrooke 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 Ladbrooke Association is on its website at:

www.ladbrokeassociation.info

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

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MEMBERSHIP

The Ladbrooke Association was founded in 1969, in the same year as the designation of the Ladbrooke 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 Ladbrooke 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 Ladbrooke 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 Ladbrooke 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

or apply to the Hon Treasurer:

Paul Bastick, 75A Ladbrooke Grove, W11 2PD