

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

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SPRING 1998

A CAUTIONARY TALE

In the present climate, when more property speculators than private individuals are buying private family houses purely for financial gain, we are currently faced by a dangerous threat to our rare, and very special, private communal gardens.

To illustrate the problem, we would like to draw members' attention to the battle currently taking place in Arundel/Elgin garden, which could have grave repercussions for all garden squares on the Ladbroke Estate.

At some time in the past, a projecting structure was erected, overhanging the square, and supported by two struts planted in the garden beneath. At a later date, and some time after the structure had been built, the land beneath it was fenced by the Garden Committee—to protect the structure and the property from footballs, etc. This fence was replaced by railings in 1989, by the then owner of the house, with the apparent permission of the Garden Committee.

In January 1997 the house was sold, and the new owner applied for planning permission to build an additional entrance porch to the street, on the strip of land enclosed by the fence, this land being originally part of the communal garden.

Under the terms of the 1931 London Squares Preservation Act, our Council has an obligation to protect the garden squares from any encroachment. In this instance, however, the application for planning permission to build on the fenced area was granted by the Council to the property owner. This permission was contingent upon proof of ownership, the Council not being aware of all the facts of the case at that time.

Unfortunately, the Garden Committee have not been able to establish who actually owns their square, and the owner is now claiming adverse possession, i.e. Squatters Rights, from the Land Registry.

The planning application has now been withdrawn, and it is hoped that the Council will fulfil their obligation under the terms of the 1931 Act, and refuse any further applications.

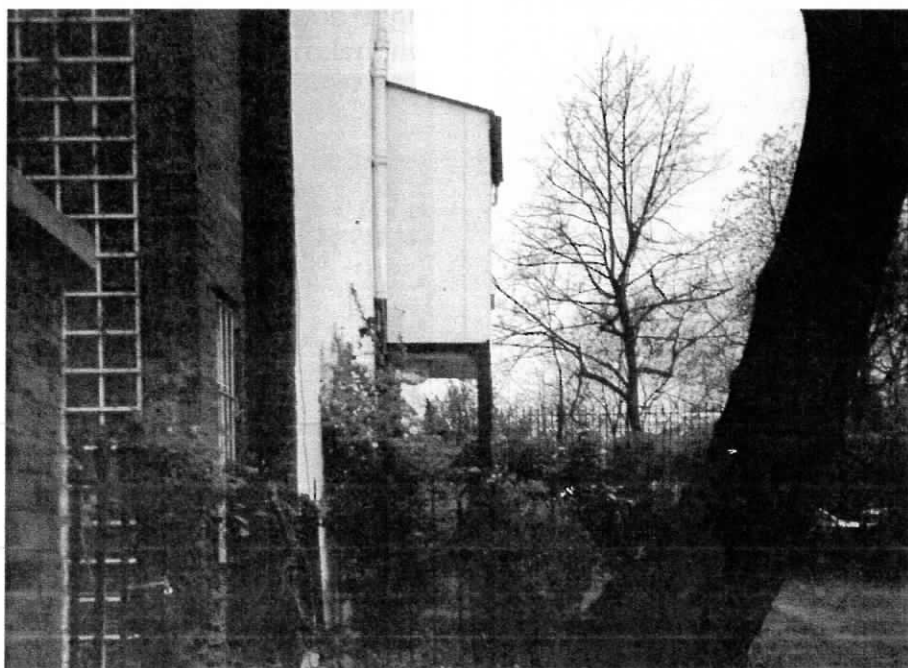
Meanwhile, the legal battle between the Garden Committee and the owner continues, with the Ladbroke Association pledging its wholehearted support for the Arundel/Elgin Garden Committee, who have been forced to incur substantial legal costs.

This case should act as an urgent warning to all other Garden Square Committees; particularly those who are not sure who owns their garden. While some ownerships are quite clear cut, there are others which are not—and it is these latter cases which must cause considerable concern.

Our MP, Mr Alan Clark, has voiced his support for an amendment to the 1931 Act, which was proposed initially by Dudley Fishburn, to give further protection to the land (i.e. the subsoil) beneath the squares. This would make it impossible for developers to buy up uncertain freeholds and use the land for car parks, etc. Several battles have already been fought in other parts of the Borough. Some have been won, but some have also been lost.

Council Leader, Mrs Joan Hanham, has issued a strongly worded warning to developers, to keep their hands off the Royal Borough's many garden squares. It is important, however, that we all remain vigilant; to ensure that the gardens on the Ladbroke Estate are protected in all their glory for future generations.

The disputed structure in Arundel/Elgin garden



PLANNING REPORT

The majority of Planning Applications are for relatively minor alterations. Nevertheless, each case must be looked at with care, for such minor changes may be part of a process of eroding the character of the area.

We frequently complain that the drawings submitted do not show adjoining buildings which form the context of the proposal. We had a dramatic case recently, when the drawings were so rough and sketchy that it was quite impossible to judge the proposal. We are glad to say that the Planning Department accepted our complaint and wrote to the applicant requesting better drawings.

Selected recent applications are mentioned below:

1-2 Ladbroke Gardens. We have mentioned these grand listed buildings previously. The work in turning them back into large dwellings is now almost complete and looks impressive. However, the flood-lighting and the various garden works at the back were, so far as we know, carried out without Planning Consent, and are not to everyone's taste.

39, 40, 40A Ladbroke Square. These houses were built in the gap caused by bomb damage during the last war; but they were built one storey lower than their neighbours, thus breaking the line of the terrace. The owners have now got together to build the missing storey, and thus restore the continuity of this important terrace. We have stressed the importance of the design detail matching the adjacent houses.

291 Westbourne Grove. This is the entrance and front part of the former Twentieth Century Theatre, a listed building which few people may have seen. There are welcome proposals to remove the ugly roller shutter and restore the entrance, but it is not clear how the theatre itself will be used.

61-63 Portobello Road. These two-storey domestic-looking buildings have for some time been used commercially. Recently there was an

application to change to residential use, and currently there is an application to build two three-and-a-half storey houses with garages, and with rendered façades. This increase in bulk would clearly affect the daylight and sunlight to nearby houses, and have a dramatic impact on the street scene, which is at present dominated by the adjacent church hall.

122 Kensington Park Road. This application has caused the most controversy. The building started as a rather grand double-fronted house at the corner of Westbourne Grove. In due course a shop was formed on the Westbourne Grove façade, and at some point a rather strange conservatory built above the shop-front. (Most people will remember its more recent use as a restaurant, long before restaurants proliferated in the area.) There was established commercial use for the building.

The recent application was to turn the building into a clothing shop and showroom. It has been thoroughly restored, practically rebuilt, and a two storey 'shop window' was to be built on Westbourne Grove, using modern plate-glass technology. This proposal was turned down. A modified single storey version was also turned down, and we understand that the old shop-front and conservatory are to be restored and put back. This seems a lost opportunity to design a modern shop-front which also relates to the character of the street.

Robert Meadows

STANLEY GARDENS SOUTH WINS SILVER CUP

We're not one of the biggest, we don't raise an enormous garden rate and we only have a part-time gardener. This makes first prize in the 1997 Brighter Kensington and Chelsea Gardens Competition all the sweeter. It's true we took discreet precautions as the judging approached this time: the garden sub-committee resolved to ask the

jays if they wouldn't mind marauding a bit less, the squirrels were instructed to suspend their aerial bombardments and we arranged for a couple of tropical showers in the Stanley Gardens microclimate just to green the place up a bit. It worked!

As everyone who lives on a communal garden knows, they are a source of huge delight as well as a fertile location for political skirmishing. The delight stems from the sheer unexpectedness of these green spaces hidden behind the tall, stucco properties of West London. Certainly one of the most inspired (and intimate) pieces of town planning in Britain. And it's the intimacy, of course, that leads to the politics. There are a number of factions that live cheek by jowl. When we get the management right they live in harmony, if not total agreement. The cat owners versus the dog owners, the footballers versus the horticulturalists, the laughing toddlers versus the dozing tendency and so on. Bless them all.

Peter Bazalgette

Chairman of Stanley Gardens South



THE CORRECT CLASSICAL STYLE

The Ladbroke Estate is almost entirely built in the Classical Style. Classical architecture is a language which should be spoken properly, with a vocabulary which needs to be used correctly; otherwise the whole 'sentence' makes no sense.



This row of houses in Ladbroke Terrace, although a trifle overblown due to its date, demonstrates very clearly and very neatly part of the classical language. The architectural basement is expressed in the ground floor supporting the *piano nobile* with, of course, the windows to the original drawing rooms. Then, with lesser importance and lower ceilings, the bedrooms above. The whole is covered by a massively projecting, crowning cornice above.



Many of the houses on the estate were very grand. This is the house on the corner of Kensington Park Gardens and Ladbroke Grove—a real mansion. Once again, strictly within the classical vocabulary.



Once, every architect and builder understood and spoke the classical language perfectly. On the left-hand side of this pair of houses in Lansdowne Road, you see the building as it originally was, with a large extension including a bay window added on the right.

The addition was clearly carried out by someone well aware of the vocabulary of the classical language, because he has got his cornice and proportions correct; the whole tied together with the existing building in a most satisfactory way.

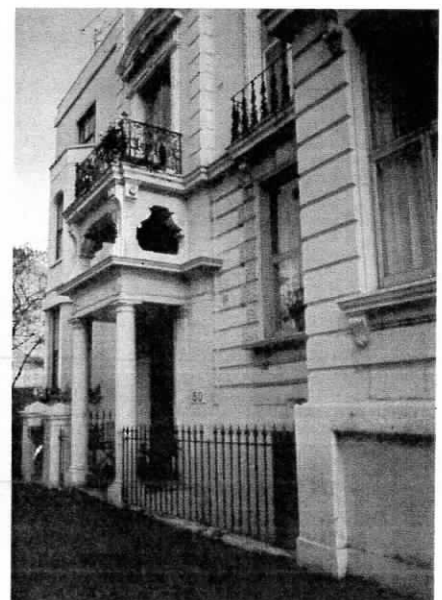
This row of humble houses in Ladbroke Grove was obviously built by somebody who understood perfectly what they were doing. All the elements of the classical language are here, put together in a perfectly grammatical manner.



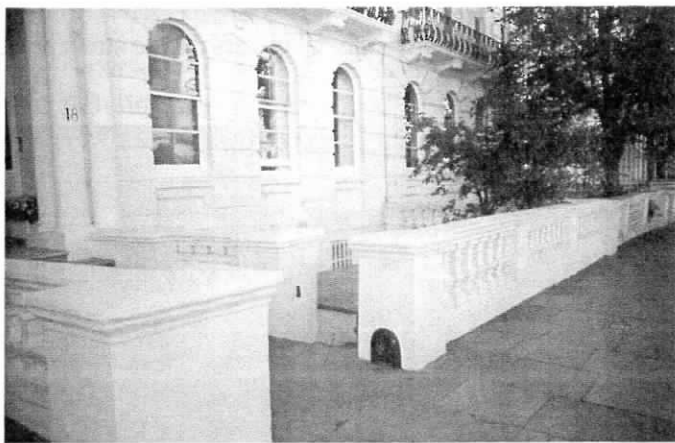
The builders on the Ladbroke Estate knew the classical language so fluently, that they were able to take a number of exciting liberties. This house in Ladbroke Grove has a large, segmental bay pierced at the top by arched openings in the most wonderful variety of form.



Almost opposite, another house has had its porch heightened and pierced by strange, trefoil openings of enormous charm, which are still within the classical vocabulary and yet add a spice of stimulation to what can sometimes be a rather dreary ensemble.



A FEW TRIUMPHS



This shows a length of restored balustrading, which replaced a forecourt parking area in Kensington Park Road. The original pattern has been copied absolutely accurately, with all the gain to the back edge of pavement which one would expect.



An oblique view of a length of balustrading, separating a private road from Ladbrooke Grove. It remained after the war in a state of extreme dilapidation. The owners of the houses have recently clubbed together to have it demolished and rebuilt, in a very attractive manner.



This shows the rebuild of what was a private hotel at the western end of Ladbrooke Square, the second building in, rebuilt entirely in the classical style, in a most acceptable manner. This does not clash with the original houses of the Square.



A very nice length of iron railing in Clarendon Road. Obviously somebody has taken the trouble to have the railing restored—in this case on a cast-iron plinth, which is set over brickwork.

A house on the corner of Ladbrooke Square and Ladbrooke Terrace. The back addition has been added in a perfectly sympathetic style, and although one might have hoped for a balustrade above the extension, nevertheless, we must be thankful for small mercies.



This last picture shows the railings on Kensington Park Road of Stanley Gardens South. These original railings are still in position, because the garden was used during the war as a site for a barrage balloon emplacement. This gives some clue of the kind of enrichment and general attractiveness that was promoted along the back edge of pavements in the area as a whole.



MILLENNIUM TREES

Chris Colwell, the new Royal Borough's Arboricultural Officer, has voiced his approval of the Tree Sub-committee's suggestion that, as a Millennium celebration, plane trees should be planted in Ladbroke Grove. It is hoped that these will link up with the City Challenge planting scheme, thus creating a wonderful avenue for the future.

BRIAN ELLSMOOR

The Ladbroke Association is very sad to have to accept Brian's resignation owing to deteriorating health.

All members have reason to be grateful for the thoughtful contributions he made for many years to our activities, and especially for his tireless pursuit of offending estate agents' boards, overhanging shrubs and his untiring efforts on the tree preservation front, which have greatly enhanced the visual delights of our Conservation Area. We all miss him.

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

We would like to offer our grateful thanks to Elfin, Lady Ebury, for allowing the Christmas Party to take place at her home in Kensington Park Gardens on Thursday, 11th December. As always, this proved to be a very popular event, and members much appreciated the opportunity to view a particularly interesting and artistic interior.

SUMMER WALK

This year it has been decided to make a slight break with tradition, and invite members of the Association to participate in a 'Summer Walk', when many of our gardens will be at their most lush and beautiful. Invitations will be sent out as soon as the date and time have been confirmed.

THOMAS ALLOM EXHIBITION

Special Evening for Members of the Ladbroke Association

An exhibition on the life and work of Thomas Allom—a founder member of the RIBA, and the architect responsible for many of the large Italianate houses still surviving in the Ladbroke Conservation Area—is being mounted by the Drawings Collection at the British Architectural Library, 21 Portman Square, W1, from 26th March to 9th May.

This exhibition, intended to illustrate Thomas Allom's two careers, as a topographical artist and an architect, will feature items from various private and institutional collections; much of the material never having been seen before in public.

The Curator, Charles Hind, has kindly agreed to allow members of the Ladbroke Association to attend a private showing on Tuesday, 21st April, 6.00–8.00pm, at which Mr Hind will give a brief introduction to the exhibition, and drinks will be served. The tickets, at a cost of £10 each, will be strictly limited to 40. Please apply to Paul Bastick, 75A Ladbroke Grove, W11 2PD.

FORTHCOMING PARISH EVENTS

Concert on Tuesday 10 March at 8.15pm at St Stephen's Church, Westbourne Park, Talbot Rd, by countertenor Michael Chance & lutenist Nigel North. Early English music by Dowland, Purcell etc. In aid of the Kiloran Trust. Reception at 7.00pm. Tickets for concert £15; for reception and concert £25; available from 36 Ladbroke Grove, London, W11 2PA (cheques payable to the Kiloran Trust).

Concert Wednesday 18 March 7.30pm at St Peter's Church, Kensington Park Rd, by Kensington Chamber Orchestra: Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No 3

and Tchaikovsky Symphony No 2. In aid of Action Trust for the Blind. Tickets £8 (concs £5) 0181 563 2922 or 0181 969 5097.

Concert Performances by Opera Integra on Friday 3 & Saturday 4 April in St Peter's Church, Kensington Park Rd. Further details from 0171 727 9708.

Concert by Halcyon Ensemble on Saturday 25 April in St Peter's Church. Details from 0171 603 8609.

A Chorus of Disapproval, by Alan Ayckbourn, performed by the Ladbroke Players from Wednesday 6 to Saturday 9 May, 8.00pm in St Peter's Church, Kensington Park Rd. Tickets £7.50 (concs £5) from 0171 727 5463.

THE COMMITTEE

The Officers and Committee at present are President, Sir Angus Stirling; Chairman, Stephen Enthoven (tel. 221 5167); Hon Treasurer and Secretary, Paul Bastick (tel. 229 1741); Anne Chorley; Ian Grant; David Marshall; Robert Meadows; Peter Mishcon; Thomas Pakenham; Peggy Post; Robina Rose; Diana Ward; Mary-Jo Wormell; Jean Ellsmoor; Hon Auditor, Guy Mayers; Minute Secretary, Janet Barton.

JOIN THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

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I would like to join the Ladbroke Association. I enclose a cheque/postal order for £5.00, payable to the Ladbroke Association.

Name:

Address:

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To Paul Bastick, Hon Treasurer, The Ladbroke Association, 75A Ladbroke Grove, W11 2PD.