

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

SUMMER 2000

A NAPOLEON IN NOTTING HILL

Sir Edmund Davis and the artists of Lansdowne House

When Mark Girouard gave the first Ian Grant Memorial Lecture in the dazzlingly beautiful Leighton House on 23 November 1999 it was standing room only. The popularity of the occasion and the numbers attending were eloquent testimony both to the affection in which Ian

Grant was held, and to the eloquence and erudition of the architectural historian Mark Girouard. Grant, a founding member of both the Ladbroke Association and the Victorian Society, was an architect who lived in Notting Hill for many years and who played a fundamental role in preserving the architecture and character of the area. So what possible connection could there be between a memorial to Ian and Sir Edmund Davis? Who was Davis anyway, wondered some, and what was his link with Napoleon? Why was Lansdowne House significant and what artists had lived there?

Mark Girouard's fascinating lecture revealed all. Born in Australia in 1862, educated in London and Paris, Sir Edmund Davis belonged to a cosmopolitan network of able Jewish families. A highly successful businessman, he made a fortune mining in South Africa, Australia and China. In public life Davis was described as aggressive, ruthless and sometimes unscrupulous. Small and dynamic, he had his portrait painted in the guise of Napoleon, a 'resemblance' that was ap-

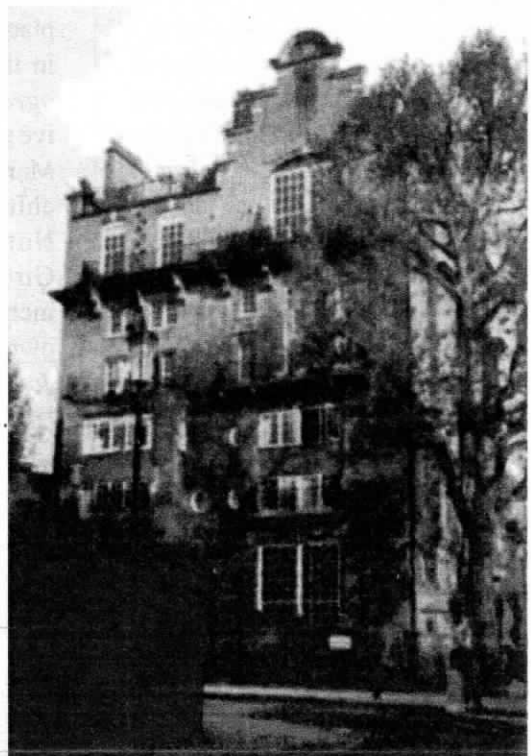
parently ruined by his long, sharply pointed nose.

Whatever reputation Davis may have acquired as a tough businessman, in his private life as a family man and friend, he 'was all a person could desire'. In 1889 he married his cousin Mary and moved into a house in Lansdowne Road (now no. 9) which he enlarged and had decorated by Charles Conder and Frank Brangwyn. He also bought property overseas, including a palace in Venice, as well as Chilham Castle in Kent.

Edmund and Mary Davis, advised by Ricketts and Shannon, amassed a collection of superlative Old Masters, including paintings by Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Canaletto, Reynolds and Gainsborough. They also patronised contemporary artists, including Auguste Rodin, and acted as discerning and generous friends to them. They donated much of their collection to galleries and museums in Paris and Cape Town. Davis used his house to entertain regularly with parties to which he invited musicians, artists as well as locals.

At the time Ladbroke Grove had 'no élan at all'. Solidly middle class, the Grove was not known as a haunt for creative people. Davis took a decision that helped to change that. In 1900 work

started on Lansdowne House. Designed by William Flockhart to Davis's specification, the house contained six flats, each with a two-storey studio with good north light. It had a huge storage area on the roof, communal bathrooms in the basement and a Real tennis court. Mary Davis got girls from the Notting Hill orphanage, which she founded, to clean and cook for the tenants. Described by P. D. James in *A Taste for Death* as 'a hideous Victorian building', over the years the house provided studios and flats for a colony of artists, writers and theatrical people.



1. Lansdowne House, designed by William Flockhart, showing the high north-facing windows of the studios



2. Edmund Dulac, *The Musical Soirée: Mr and Mrs Edmund Davis at home in Venice, 1912*, British Museum

In 1902, while building was still under way, the first tenants moved in. The sculptor Charles Ricketts and the painter Charles Shannon were a dedicated couple who filled their flat with exquisite works of art, including a collection of Indian miniatures. As artists, said Girouard, they 'were not terribly successful'. Their numerous friends included Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Leon Bakst, Isadora Duncan, W.B. Yeats and George Bernard Shaw. Ricketts designed book covers for Yeats, and sets and costumes for some of Shaw's plays and for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. Other artist tenants at Lansdowne House included Glyn Philpot, Vivian Forbes, James Pryde and F. Cayley Robinson. Davis installed Cayley Robinson and his family in the House in 1913 when he commissioned him to paint a number of pictures, including the four magnificent paintings now in the entrance hall of Middlesex Hospital. Pryde, painter of huge four-poster beds and dream-like architecture, became a tenant in one of the studios in 1914, but took to drink and 'petered out his life' in the House. Davis also installed the illustrator Edmund Dulac in a studio apartment in Ladbroke Grove next to Lansdowne House.

Although the Davis's patronage

brought many artists together in Lansdowne House, they all went their own way, and there was, commented Girouard, little contact between them. A number of them came to sad ends, becoming alcoholics, committing suicide or having accidents: Shannon was reduced to a vegetative state after falling and hitting his head. After his death in 1939 Davis was almost totally forgotten, with no blue plaque on his house, and no entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. As generous, supportive patrons of the arts, Edmund and Mary Davis contributed to the architecture and diversity that is Notting Hill today. Mark Girouard's lecture was a fitting memorial to Ian Grant, who in his own way, did exactly the same.

Jan Brownfoot



3. Niel Sebag-Montefiore

A LETTER FROM THE NEW CHAIRMAN

I was very pleased to become Chairman of the Ladbroke Association because I view it as an opportunity to contribute to ensuring the character of our area remains attractive. Having lived in and around the Ladbroke area for most of the past 35 years, I feel very strongly how important it is to preserve the consistent style that surrounds us.

All the villages of London have a vibrancy which is constantly changing, and yet which constantly stays the same. But in the last 30 years or so, many of the inner-city areas have lost both the sense of community and the physical environment which makes them attractive places to live. Bayswater, Belgravia, Marylebone and Mayfair have been mostly taken over by offices or become havens for *pieds à terre*. They would scarcely be recognized by their pre-war inhabitants if they were to return.

Because of the vigilance of our predecessors the Ladbroke estate has survived more or less intact for about 170 years as a place to live and work, and the human scale of the buildings and the open spaces have been well preserved. Our streets are lined with mature trees in a way that is becoming rare. Our garden squares are green and peaceful islands in a busy metropolis. The unity of the architecture mostly has been unspoiled. We need to retain all this.

At the same time, as always, the area is changing. The high price of property threatens the mixed nature of the community and the wide variety of owner-run shops in the environs. The use of personal computers is wholly changing the nature of work so people spend more time working at home. Writers and journalists abound. Someone said to me that half the Internet business plans in the UK come from Notting Hill Gate! Our natural resistance to external change has somehow to ac-

commodate the living and working demands of the 21st century.

At the Ladbroke Association, we monitor every planning application made in the conservation area we cover. We have a good working relationship with the Council and with our neighbouring conservation bodies. If, in a decade or two, the area is much the same, that will be our legacy, and a task well done. We try to ensure that our views, when strongly expressed, are listened to by the planners who are pressurized from every direction. We shall strive to maintain the area as it is.

Niel Sebag-Montefiore

STREET FURNITURE:

AESTHETICS VERSUS SAFETY

As a former Chairman of Friends of the Earth who is still an ardent environmentalist and an occasional user of the bicycle, I approach the subject of bicycle lanes in the Ladbroke Estate with a considerable bias in favour of the cyclist. Nevertheless, I wish to register a complaint to the Highways Committee of Kensington and Chelsea Council and request that it might reconsider its policies.

For a number of years there has been a steady growth in the number of bollards, lines, signs, lights and other impedimenta interfering with the pleasant aspects and clear sight lines which we are fortunate to possess in the streets of Kensington. We are told that this street furniture has been installed for the greater safety and better living conditions of the inhabitants. No thought appears to have been given to the question of aesthetics in determining our enjoyment of the area. If the beauty of our surroundings is destroyed, is not a major reason for our very lives removed? I beg the Council, and specifically the Highways Committee, to give this plea some consideration.

As an example of an unnecessary visual horror, I would ask you to

inspect the signs, bollards and bike lanes in Ladbroke Road, particularly around the junction of Lansdowne Road and Ladbroke Road. Ladbroke Road has always been a quiet and peaceful street, pleasant to walk, cycle or drive along. It is now disfigured by street furniture and ugly painted signs on the road. It is also dangerous, in that the unknowing driver, descending Lansdowne Road to turn right into Ladbroke Road, could easily fail to see the over-confident cyclist, pedalling happily eastwards up Ladbroke Road.

I would be interested to know if I am alone in my views. I very much enjoy a cycle ride in the Ladbroke Estate, but I do not consider that I need the nannying of bicycle lanes or the offensive intrusion of unnecessary street furniture to assist my journey.

Charles Levison

LONDON'S GREEN SPACES: A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

The Ladbroke Association is to consult the Council on rationalising the conservation area so that its boundaries do not bisect a street, leaving one side in the conservation area and the other outside. It is

hoped that it can include the Electric Cinema in Portobello Road, the Synagogue in Kensington Park Road and Ladbroke Crescent.

The Ladbroke Estate was designated a conservation area by the RBKC in 1967, the first in the Borough. The unique features of the estate – the picturesque layout of streets and crescents with glimpses of the communal gardens behind them – were already recognised. But over the years many of the gaps between houses that once offered views of the gardens have been filled with extensions, garages and conservatories, and the recent boom in house prices means that space is at a premium.

The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies, which represents over 120 conservation societies, has recently issued a policy statement on parks and open spaces in the city. For too long gardens and open spaces have been pushed to the bottom of the political agenda with the result that infill and new housing encroaches on London's green spaces. The Forum urges Ken Livingstone, the new Mayor, to complete an audit of all London's open spaces and to draw up a strategy (the Spatial Development Strategy) for their conservation and renewal.

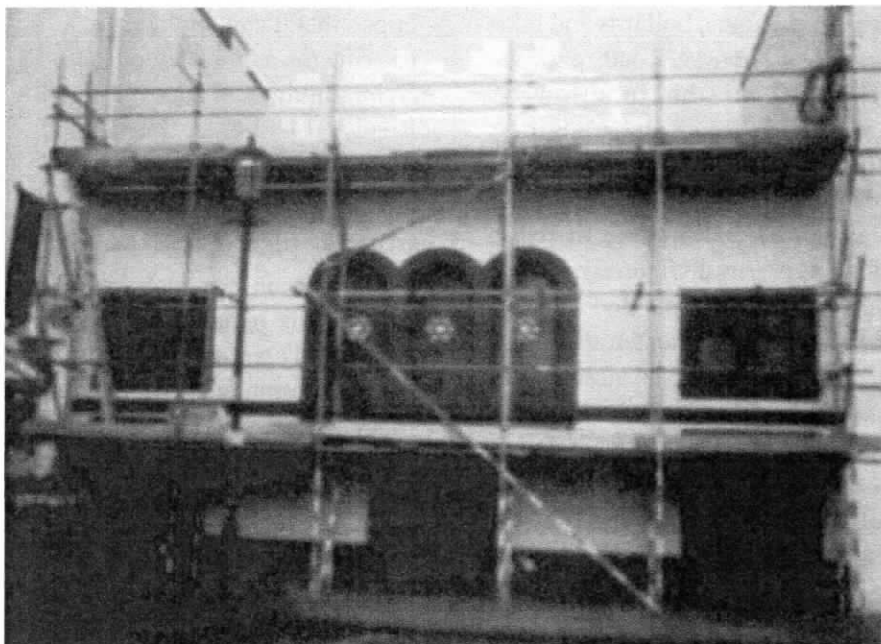
While individual borough councils retain the authority to grant or refuse planning permission, the Mayor has the power to direct a council in exceptional cases. Once the Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy has been published, local

councils' plans for their boroughs, officially known as Unitary Development plans, would have to conform to it.

Anne Chorley



4. The Electric Cinema, Portobello Road, in delapidated condition. Designed by G. S. Valentin in 1910-12, it is one of the oldest surviving purpose-built cinemas in Britain.



5. Notting Hill Synagogue, 206-208 Kensington Park Road, originally a church hall, it was consecrated as a synagogue in 1900.

THE MILLENNIUM PARTY AT THE 20TH-CENTURY THEATRE

This year the Ladbroke Association's annual party was held in the New Year rather than at Christmas. We were immensely fortunate that Sandra Kamen allowed us to hold

it in the 20th-century Theatre in Westbourne Grove.

Sandra Kamen was responsible for the recent restoration of this Grade II listed building. Built in 1863, it witnessed memorable performances by Sir Henry Irving, Marie Lloyd, Laurence Olivier, Margaret

Rutherford and Rex Harrison, among others. Late it was used by theatre repertory groups, both professional and amateur. It is hoped that it will be possible to hold live performances there again and even concerts of chamber music.

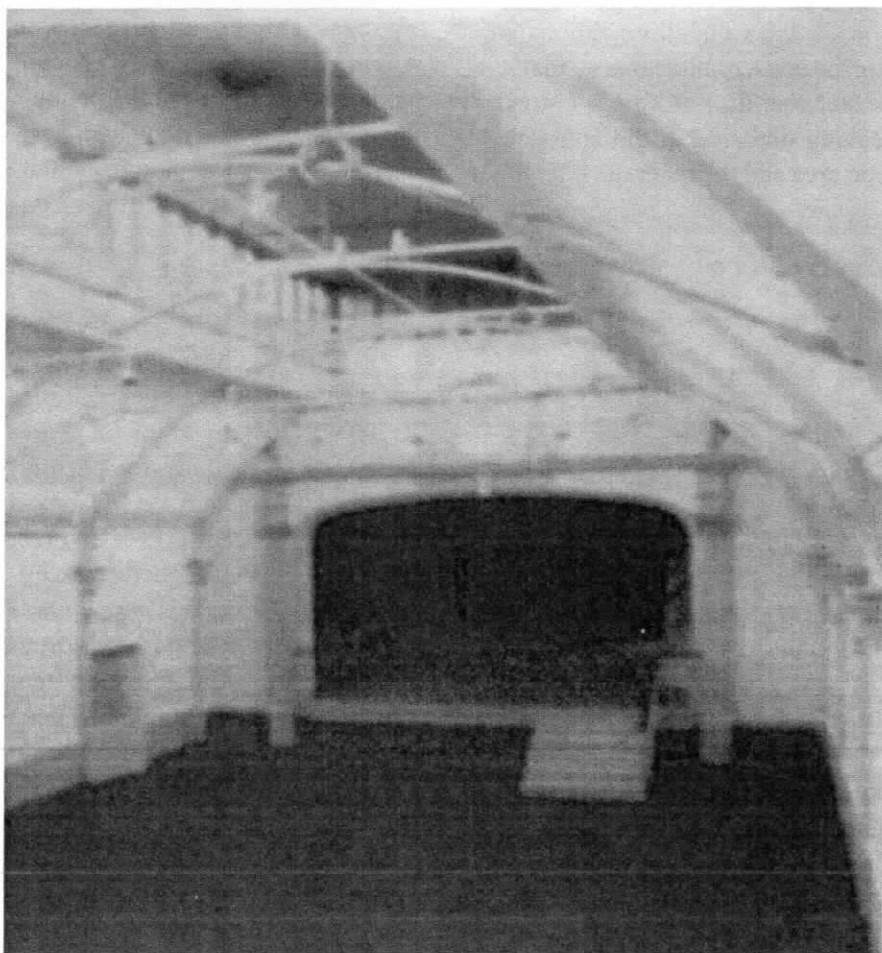
Our thanks are due to all those who contributed to the success of the party, and especially to Sandra Kamen for her great generosity.

Anne Chorley

A MILLIENNIUM GATE FOR STANLEY GARDENS SOUTH

Stanley Gardens South, which has its original iron railings, decided to mark the Millennium by commissioning a new gate for the Kensington Park Road entrance to the gardens. Architect Malcolm Pawley incorporated the shape of the original gate into his design, but made it taller to improve security. This was approved by the Gardens Committee and the RBKC Planning and Conservation Department, and the gate was installed in January. This shows that it is possible to alter original features without compromising the integrity of a design.

Anne Chorley



7. The new gate in Stanley Gardens South

6. (Left) 20-Century Theatre, 291 Westbourne Grove, built in 1863 and opened as the Victoria Hall, renamed the Bijou Theatre in 1866; later it served as a cinema.

PLANNING

Kensington Park Terrace North

This long terrace of three-storey stuccoed houses, between Westbourne Grove and Elgin Crescent, is one of the lesser-acknowledged set pieces of the Ladbroke Conservation Area. Suitably articulated, with its central pediment on the axis of Arundel Gardens and its pretty first-floor wrought-iron balconies, its importance was recognised many years ago when it was made the subject of an Article 4 Direction under current planning legislation. This Direction set out a colour-scheme based on the articulation of the terrace so that the visual unity should be maintained.



8. Kensington Park Terrace North. The two central houses are painted in different colours, contravening an Article 4 Direction

But, alas, in recent years this colour-scheme has not been observed fully, and the unity of the terrace has been disrupted. The most glaring example of this is in the central feature with its pediment, which covers two houses. These two houses have actually been painted in different colours. A more recent example was the painting of one of the houses white, and, incidentally, the fitting of an unsuitable front door.

The Association is urging the Planning Department and individual house-owners to be more vigilant

in observing the colour code, so that the unity of this splendid terrace can be restored.

21 Ladbroke Road

This is one of a symmetrical group of three houses. Somewhat unusually, the houses are in red brick with stucco dressings. A developer acquired an end house of the group and covered the whole front with stucco, thus ruining the symmetry. There were immediate protests, but it transpired that what had been done was classed as 'permitted development', and did not require planning permission – thus exposing a weakness in the legislation.

The Lodge, Kensington Park Gardens

Aerials for mobile phones have been fixed to the top of this prominent block of flats at the corner of Ladbroke Grove. We have complained about this and about the many further applications to fix yet more aerials, together with associated building work. It seems that mobile phone companies enjoy the rights of statutory undertakers. All the Planning Authority can do is to control the associated building work. A highly unsatisfactory state of affairs.

Backs of Houses

A number of recent Planning Applications have been concerned with the, sometimes extensive, alterations to the backs of houses. There seems to be the assumption that the backs do not matter so much, because they are not in the 'public domain'. But in the case of the many houses backing onto communal gardens, we take the view that the backs are as important as the fronts. In other cases we look for a reasonable control which seeks a balance between the rights of the building owners, their neighbours, and some sort of general order.

1 Kensington Park Gardens

Extensive building work is in progress, and we look forward to a welcome restoration of this important corner house.

Robert Meadows

RBK&C

Unitary Development Plan

The consultation process on the Alterations to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's Unitary Development Plan has now been completed and the Council has formally approved the proposals which will now be put forward to the Public Inquiry which is due to commence in January 2001.

The Council expects to have a pre-inquiry meeting, attended by the appointed Planning Inspector, Mr P. Robottom MA(Oxon), DipTP, MRTPI, MIMgt, in July 2000.

The Public Inquiry is expected to last two to three months depending on the number of people who indicate their wish to attend and pursue their objections.

In the mean time, Planning Inspectors dealing with planning appeals within the Borough take cognisance of the proposed Alterations.

David Campion

LADBROKE ASSOCIATION WEB SITE

The Ladbroke Association now has an Internet Site on the World-Wide Web.

While Newsletters and Leaflets are very useful as handouts they can soon become out of date; the advantage of a Web Site is that it can be altered whenever necessary so that it is always up to date.

The Ladbroke Association Web Site can be accessed using the following domain name:

www.ladbrokeassoc.org.uk

It is hoped that it will be used by local Estate Agents and those who acquire property in the area so that they can become aware of the historical importance of the conservation area.

The Ladbroke Association Web Site contains links to the Royal Borough's Web Site thus affording easy access to associated planning and conservation information such as the weekly planning applications lists and the text of the Unitary Development Plan, properties in conservation areas, listed buildings etc; additional facilities will be added in June 2000. A direct link to the Council web site is via:
www.rbkc.gov.uk

David Campion

LADBROKE GROVE LONDON PLANE TREES

The Ladbroke Association came into being as a result of a proposals to remove and then replant new London Plane Trees between Holland Park Avenue and Ladbroke Square which sparked off considerable public uproar. Needless to say, the result was that the trees were left well alone!

As part of its annual maintenance of street trees the Council's tree

contractor has recently given a "short back and sides" to three of the plane trees including the removal of every last leaf and twig.

While there could well be a potential insurance claim situation from adjacent properties it is very questionable whether such extreme butchery was really necessary.

These trees are a very real and very important amenity for the area and many residents may well take the view that such drastic action was quite inappropriate as they will now take some years to recover.



9. Plane Trees in Ladbroke Grove after official "surgery"

GARDEN WALK TUESDAY 6 JUNE at 6.30pm

Henrietta Phipps, who worked for many years as a landscape designer and who is now contributing to a history of London squares for the English Heritage London Garden Squares project, is to lead a tour of four gardens in the Ladbroke area. She is starting at the Kensington Park Road entrance of the Arundel/Elgin Gardens at 6.30pm on Tuesday 6 June, so please assemble there. Latecomers can join in at the other gardens she is visiting: The Arundel/Ladbroke Gardens, Stanley Gardens North and Stanley Gardens South, where refreshments will be served. Sensible shoes and an umbrella are advisable.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING THURSDAY 15 JUNE 2000

The Annual General Meeting of the Ladbroke Association will be held in St Peter's Church Hall, 59a Portobello Road, on 15th June at 6.30 for 7pm. It is open to both members and to those interested in the work of the Association.

THE COMMITTEE

The Officers and Committee at present are President: Sir Angus Stirling; Chairman: Niel Sebag-Montefiore (Tel 7243 4303); Hon Treasurer and Secretary: Paul Bastick (Tel 7229 1741); Anne Chorley, David Corsellis, David Marshall, Robert Meadows, Peter Mischon, Alexandra Ouroussof, Thomas Pakenham, Malcolm Pawley, Peggy Post, Robina Rose, Jean Ellsmore; Hon Auditor, Guy Mayers; Minutes Secretary: Janet Barton. Newsletter Editor, Jane Martineau.

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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