

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

SUMMER 1997

THE LADBROKE FAMILY: FROM RICHES TO POVERTY IN ONE GENERATION

The modern thoroughfare of Notting Hill Gate and Holland Park Avenue follows the line of what was originally an ancient Roman road, leading from London to Uxbridge and the west country. Over the centuries a small settlement arose at the junction of the road with a narrow, twisting lane (now Kensington Church Street), leading south to another small village surrounding the church of St Mary Abbots.

At the northern end of the lane, there was virtually nothing other than extensive gravel pits, the small hamlet of Notting Hill and a dusty farm track leading north to Porto Bello Farm; the surrounding fields and meadows remaining remote and inaccessible, well into the nineteenth century.

It is not known exactly when the Ladbroke family—wealthy bankers of Lombard Street in the City—first acquired their land in Notting Hill. However, by the time of Richard Ladbroke's death in 1793, he owned estates in Middlesex, Surrey and Essex, as well as three separate parcels of land on the north of the Uxbridge Road. The largest of these amounted to 170 acres, roughly corresponding to the present Ladbroke Conservation area, bounded on the west by Portland Road and Pottery Lane, on the east by Portobello Road, with the northern boundary running along the present-day Lancaster Road.

Richard Ladbroke's fortune was eventually inherited in 1819 by his nephew, James, the surviving son of Richard Ladbroke's sister, Mary who had married the Reverend Weller. Fulfilling the provisions of his uncle's will, James Weller as-

sumed the surname of Ladbroke and settled down on his uncle's estate, at Tadworth in Surrey.

During his twenty-eight-year ownership of the Notting Hill estate, James Ladbroke appears to have lived the quiet life of a country gentleman; enjoying the income from his ground rents, and leaving the family lawyers to deal with the day-to-day business of running his estates. There is no evidence that he ever lived in Kensington, or was personally involved with the family banking business, which was taken over by Messrs Glyn & Co, in 1842.

No doubt encouraged by the building boom of the early 1820s, James Ladbroke's solicitors—acting in conjunction with a distinguished architect, Thomas Allason—obtained a private Act of Parliament to develop the Ladbroke Estate. Despite their plans being affected by the financial crash of 1825, by the time of James' death in 1847, leases had been granted to various builders and speculators, and what had orig-

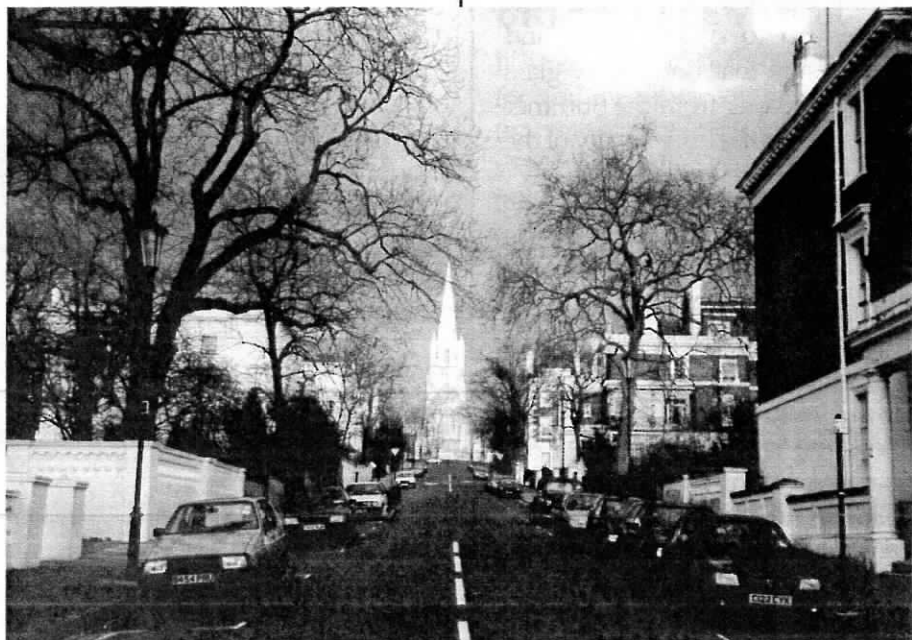
inally been meadows and pastureland, was fast disappearing beneath a sea of urban development.

Advised by his lawyers, however, James had always retained the freehold of his estate, so that, in the event of a builder or developer becoming bankrupt, the land would always revert back to him as ground landlord.

All that was to change with James' death, when his estate was inherited by a distant cousin, Felix Ladbroke of Headley, Surrey, who had clearly made his plans well in advance of receiving his inheritance. Within two weeks of James' death, he had transferred the administration of the estate to his own solicitors; sold the freehold of ten houses on the south side of Ladbroke Square, and also disposed of twenty-nine acres of land.

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St John's Church vista seen up the hill of St John's Gardens



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That was just the beginning of what was to be the complete break-up of the estate. There are very few records available about Felix Ladbroke. From the way he proceeded to handle his affairs, however, it would seem that he was not an astute businessman. By the time of his death, twenty years later, he had disposed of all his land in Notting Hill as well as his house in Surrey, and was living in 'reduced circumstances' near Victoria Station.

Unfortunately, the tantalising question as to exactly what Felix Ladbroke did with the funds raised by the sale of his large inheritance, remains unanswered. Whether it was lost through dubious City investments, or merely squandered on fast women and slow horses, the fact remains that he was a relatively poor man when he died; the two small legacies mentioned in his will not being paid until after his wife's death.

By Mary-Jo Wormell

LONDON GARDEN SQUARES COMPETITION

will be held this Summer, open to all enclosed squares in the Greater London Area.

Judging will take place during the summer, so we expect that Committees will be bringing their squares up to concert pitch and making sure that not a stray glass nor sweet paper from the Summer Parties marks the leafy beauty of the scene.

We understand that over 60 squares have entered.

INFORMATION PACKS

are available from Paul Bastick, the Hon Treasurer (see back page). These are specially designed for new owners, or those renovating buildings, and contain a wealth of information and advice on the area and on restoration of buildings in our Conservation Area.

RAILINGS AND BOUNDARY WALLS

Removed during the War for useless scrap, tumbled about by tree roots, demolished to facilitate 'off street' parking—Ladbroke's railings and boundary walls have had a bad time over the last sixty years. Yet where they still exist, or (even better) have been replaced, the importance of 'back-edge-of-pavement' definition is patently obvious.

Lord Beaverbrook's public relations exercise, though perhaps useful for bringing the seriousness of the wartime situation home to a largely unconcerned population by the removal of every non-functional piece of ironwork, did little to help the war-effort. Tanks and planes cannot be made of cast or wrought iron (though the imagination runs riot over the vision of a cast-iron fighter plane), and tradition has it that most of the lovely cast-iron that was removed lies rusting somewhere in the North Sea.

Boundary walls usually suffered a different fate, though if capped by ironwork cresting they received the standard emasculation. Unfortunately, Victorian builders seldom provided them with adequate foundations, and many of those that have not fallen over have often been removed in the interests of the worship of the motor car!

Nevertheless, boundary definition was a most important element in the design of the complete traditional dwelling, and served to identify in the strongest terms the extent of each house-owner's property. Gate posts were massive, railings strong, ornament profuse, and all added up to a firm statement of privacy whether or not they were needed for safety or security. Replacement is therefore an essential part of the conservation process, and is now well within the bounds of practicality. It is always desirable to replace in accurate replica, since the design of boundary elements formed a continuation of the architectural form of the house behind them, and even when disappearance is total, a little informed searching amongst neighbouring properties will usually yield clues as to the original forms. Even allowing for the fact that posts in a run of traditional railings were individually grouted in lead into the top of a wall or plinth, the ubiquitous bottom bar so beloved of modern ironfounders can be buried in the rendering of the wall or into a rendered plinth.

by Ian Grant

Ladbroke Grove railings and gate



PLANNING REPORT

The Ladbroke Conservation Area Proposals Statement has quite a lot to say about boundary walls and fences, stressing their importance in the street scene. Metal railings enclose the communal gardens and the front areas and gardens of many of the houses. In some cases there are grand stuccoed balustrades, as in Kensington Park Gardens. These are all important features and any break in their unity or continuity is detrimental to the character of the area.

We have been concerned recently with cases where wood fences have been built on top of walls or replaced railings in Lansdowne Rise and Kensington Park Road. There is also a notorious case of a broken down chain-link fence at the corner of Ladbroke Grove and Ladbroke Gardens. In all these cases we have urged the Planning Department to take appropriate action.

Recent important Planning Applications and decisions including the following:

The large 'listed' houses Nos 1 and 2 Ladbroke Gardens, the former Lithuanian Club, are now returning to full residential use.

An Application has been approved to convert the hotel at No 6 Ladbroke Terrace to residential use, including the building of two houses on the Ladbroke Road frontage with hard-standing for two cars. This is adjacent to the dangerous cross-roads, and we were concerned at the likely traffic hazard. We were also concerned about the possible effect on the large plane tree in the garden.

Application has been made to convert the former restaurant at No 122 Kensington Park Road at the corner of Westbourne Grove into a trendy clothing shop and showroom. We are concerned to maintain the character of this important building on both its frontages.

There is one unfortunate case to report. The former owner of the 'listed' house, 39 Kensington Park Gardens, replaced the parapet bot-

LOOKING AFTER THE BOROUGH'S TREES

Derek Austin, formerly the RBK&C Senior Arboriculturalist, recently resigned. He pioneered the urban tree warden scheme in 1992, instigating a number of informal meetings covering tree identification tree law, trees for urban living and the knowledge of tree diseases and infection by insects, together with visits to public and private gardens and arboretums. A code of practice for contractors was developed to protect tree roots from damage when the digging of trenches for TV cables

was spreading over the Borough.

A programme of pruning and replacement of old trees has been discussed with our Tree Subcommittee so that the views from the street into the communal gardens can be preserved.

Derek Austin's enthusiasm has helped with the planting of trees in Notting Hill and North Kensington, extending the leafy aerial picture of the Ladbroke Area, and helping to maintain our tree stock.

We look forward to collaborating with Chris Colwell, our new Senior Arboriculturalist.

Trees in Blenheim Crescent



THE GARDEN

alongside the Czech Embassy in Notting Hill Gate is now complete, and was opened by Alan Clark, the new MP for Kensington and Chelsea. The Ladbroke Association has supported this and other projects by the Notting Hill Improvement Group.

tle-balustrade which was an original feature of these handsome terrace houses. Alas, the new owner was given permission to remove this balustrade. This is indeed a sad loss.

by Robert Meadows

BRIAN ELLSMOOR

has resigned from the Committee for health reasons. We all regretted the news and praised his hard work, especially concerning street tree problems and ensuring the removal of estate agents' boards. We hope that old habits die hard and that he will continue to report on these problems.

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Would any LA members like to join our lively meetings on the problems of conserving our very special area?

Do please contact our Chairman.

LESS THAN 1000 DAYS BEFORE THE MILLENNIUM

We invite suggestions from members with ideas of how the LA should mark the occasion. The RBK&C have asked us to submit our plans.

PLANNING

The RBK&C is now divided into 3 areas, each of which will have a Planning Forum. The North Planning Forum will cover the area from the northern boundary down to the area between Notting Hill Gate and Kensington High Street. Robin Price, current Chairman of the Norland Conservation Society is the first Chairman of the Forum, supported by Anthony Perry of the Portland Road Residents Association. The Forum will debate planning policy in general.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Ladbroke Association was held at St Peter's Hall in Portobello Road on 2 July. A report by the Chairman on the year's activities will appear in our next Newsletter.

THE CORONET THEATRE

Notting Hill Gate will celebrate the centenary of this theatre in 1998.

The building is an outstanding local landmark and also important in British theatrical history, with an auditorium by WGR Sprague of West End theatre fame; while in 1903 Ellen Terry mounted a production there of 'Dido and Aeneas', directed by her son Edward Gordon Craig.

It is proposed to celebrate and commemorate this event; any ideas? Please contact Anna Jerome, 37 Linden Gardens, London W2 4HQ.

Jo Simmonds

TREE SUB- COMMITTEE NEWS

The Tree Sub-committee had been set up originally for close liaison with the RBKC Arboricultural Department. Recently we had proposed the planting of plane trees in Ladbroke Grove to link up with the City Challenge programme of planting in the northern part of the Borough.

Management plans for the garden squares were well under way. There had been some concern about the removal of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) but in fact it was only Area TPOs which were to be removed and replaced by Group TPOs where individual trees were listed. In the case of the Ladbroke Estate the gardens were the subject of group TPOs. The Tree Sub-committee had questioned the Council's mechanism for replacement where a private tree had been felled with permission. There is a follow-up procedure and reminders are sent out. If the tree is not replaced the Council can have the right to enter the property and plant and put a charge on the property for the costs incurred.

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

was held at the home of Allen and Charlotte Levy in Stanley Gardens last December. As always, this was a very popular event, certainly enhanced by the interesting and unusual conversion and the splendid collection of model trains we all inspected. Many thanks are due to our host and hostess.

Are there any volunteers for our 1997 Christmas venue?

THE AUTUMN LECTURE

Another look at the Ladbroke area will be taken by Ian Grant at St John's Undercroft on Monday, 13 October, 6.30pm for 7.00pm. Invitations will follow.

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; Diane Ward; Mary-Jo Wormell; Editor, Jean Ellsmoor; Hon Auditor, Guy Mayers; Minute Secretary, Janet Barton.

SUMMER MUSICAL EVENT

This was held in June and featured a programme of music by Haydn and Mozart performed by the 'Ladbroke Quartet'.

Many thanks to Helmut and Peggy Post for hosting the concert.

THE PAN-SQUARES MEETING

was held on 22 June and was very well attended. The subject was TREES, BUILDINGS and SUBSIDENCE and the speakers were Mr Nick Maclean, a Structural Engineer and Dr Giles Biddle, a member of the British Academy of Experts. A full report will follow in our next issue.

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.