

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

Autumn 2015



Crescent Mansions, Elgin Crescent

MANSION BLOCKS

When the Ladbroke estate was developed between 1820 and 1870, all the houses were intended as single family homes. At that time, except for serviced “chambers” for rich bachelors and short-term stays in London, flats were regarded as for the poor. As Richard Phene Spiers, a well-known architect of the time, noted in an address to the Royal Institute of Architects in December 1871, “there seems to be a decided distaste on the part of the English public to living in flats”. In Paris, on the other hand, flats were very popular, a fact that he attributed to the French “being accustomed to be satisfied with a much smaller quantity of everything than we are. They use very little water, and do not always see the necessity for a bath at home; it is the same with regard to food and everything else. The rooms are only just as large as is necessary. They have not large families or it would be difficult to understand how

they could manage with such small accommodation.”

Flats seem to have been mistrusted on a number of counts. No doubt because they were associated with the poor, flats were seen as unsanitary and liable to spread disease. It would also be unpleasant for the upper classes to live in enforced close proximity with their servants and to have to run the risk of meeting artisans and tradesmen on the stairs. Moreover, having the bedrooms on the same floor as the living rooms could encourage immorality – a sentiment probably strengthened by the fact that the French, known for their promiscuous habits, lived in flats.

All this was about to change. By the mid-1870s, there was beginning to be a demand in London for dwellings for small middle class families which could be managed with fewer servants and which were relatively near the centre of town. Large family houses

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WINTER PARTY

We have normally held our winter party in the run-up to Christmas. We are well aware, however, that in doing so we are in competition with a large number of other social events. So we have decided that we will switch to a New Year party sometime in January. Invitations will go out to members about a month beforehand in the usual way.

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Most members of our committee have been there a very long time and we would welcome some new blood. Obviously an interest or knowledge of planning and/or architecture would be an advantage, but we also need people with a general interest in and knowledge of the area. Being a committee member is not onerous. We meet once a month at 6.30 pm for about an hour and a half, and we also hope committee members will take on the odd task such as representing the Association at some meeting or event. If you are interested, please contact Sophia Lambert at chair@ladbrokeassociation.info.



"Little Harrods"

photoBecket

were proving difficult to let or sell, and the day of the mansion flat was at hand. In the latter part of the 1870s, the architect Richard Norman Shaw designed a massive block of flats to stand next to the Albert Hall, namely the present Albert Hall Mansions. Shaw departed from the then current fashion for stucco by building his new block in red-brick. The project was a great success. For the next three decades, red-brick mansion blocks became all the rage.

The Ladbroke estate was fully built-up by the time the mansion block boom began. But nevertheless two red-brick mansion blocks were constructed around 1900, in both cases replacing earlier family houses. The first is Crescent Mansions at the west end of Elgin Crescent (see photograph on front page). Originally, as the 1863 Ordnance Survey map shows, there were two villas standing in their own large grounds, Clifton Lodge and Arundel Villa, at this end of Elgin Crescent. But in the early 1900s Clifton Villa was demolished (possibly after fire damage) and Crescent Mansions erected in its place.

Around the same time, the middle house of one of the very grand trios of stucco villas in Kensington Park Gardens was destroyed by fire. Again it was decided not to rebuild it to match its neighbours but to erect a seven-storey mansion block with

one flat per floor. It is red-brick and terracotta, considerably more ornate than Crescent Mansions, to such an extent that it has been nick-named Little Harrods by the locals. It looks

totally out of place, but it is such an extraordinary building that it has its own charm.

The Victorian and Edwardian mansion-building boom came to an end with the outbreak of the First World War. The next great era of mansion construction, at least on the Ladbroke estate, was in the 1930s. This was a highly experimental decade architecturally, and the new mansion blocks were in a bewildering variety of styles. Red-brick was still favoured by some, especially the architects of the huge blocks of flats in Kensington Park Road (below). As in the case of Crescent Mansions, these replaced a number of mid-19th century detached villas in their own grounds. We do not know why the latter were demolished, but no doubt they were in a bad state and developers saw an opportunity to make a good profit. These mansion blocks are distinctly art deco in style, as is Bowden Court in Ladbroke Road (photo opposite), built around the same time as a hostel for young shop-workers.



Kelvin Court in Kensington Park Road.

©Thomas Erskine 2006



Bowden Court on the corner of Ladbroke Road and Ladbroke Terrace.

©Thomas Erskine 2006

There is another plainer and more utilitarian red-brick block, Ladbroke Grove House, at 77 Ladbroke Grove, designed by an architect called Austin Blomfield in 1935. Only a year or two before, he had designed Lansdowne Court (below), unique among our mansion blocks in being stucco.

Occupying an enviable position at the top of the hill opposite St John's church,

The Lodge (photo on next page), again built in the mid-to-late 1930s on the site of two mid-19th century villas, goes back to a more Georgian or classical style. It is similar to Duke's Lodge in Holland Park, which the Candy brothers have acquired and propose to demolish to replace by flats disguised as pastiche classical villas. When The Lodge was built, there was considerable opposition from the

neighbours, who saw it as quite out-of-keeping with the rest of Kensington Park Gardens. This is of course true, but the building is well-proportioned and has a certain satisfying solidity. It would be a great pity if it met the fate threatened for Duke's Lodge and was replaced by something even more unsuitable.

EMAIL ADDRESSES

Hitherto, we have normally communicated with members by post. It was agreed at the AGM that there could be advantage in having an email mailing list for urgent communications. Our intention is to continue sending out this Newsletter and invitations to events such as the annual party by post. But we could send round email alerts, for instance when there is a Council consultation on issues of possible interest to members. It would also allow us to send information to (or to consult) members in particular streets when issues concerning their street came up.

If you would like to be on such a mailing list, please email editor@ladbrokeassociation.info so that we can add your address to the list.



Lansdowne Court in 2006. It has since acquired an extra floor.

©Thomas Erskine 2006



The Lodge, Kensington Park Gardens. ©Thomas Erskine 2006

however, and owing to the excellent proportions of the newcomer, this contrast is not so much startling as extremely refreshing.” Because of its importance in the development of modern architecture, it has been given a Grade II listing.

The many gaps left by World War II bombs, and the degradation of buildings during the years of Rachmanism provided fresh opportunities to build mansion blocks where family homes had previously stood. There are for instance dull but innocuous brick blocks in Elgin Crescent (Galsworthy House); St Mark’s Place (Hudson House); Lansdowne Walk (Bartok House) and 121-123 Lansdowne Road; and a rather more interesting one at 36-40 Lansdowne Road. There is a more unfortunate stucco building at 105-111 Lansdowne Road (Liddiard House). It seems to be trying unsuccessfully to be both modern and like the stucco houses in the terrace. It backs onto a communal garden, and its undecorated brick rear elevation is a particular eyesore among the elegant stucco rears of the neighbouring houses. The 1960s Arundel Court on the corner of Ladbrooke Grove and Arundel Gardens (photo top of next page), on the other hand, is frankly modern and the better for it, although the demolition of the dilapidated end of terrace houses which made way for it would not be allowed nowadays.

The most architecturally interesting of the 1930s mansion blocks is that at 65 Ladbrooke Grove, an example of what was for its period extreme modernism and an extraordinary contrast to the contemporaneous block at The Lodge on the other side of the road. It was designed by the great British modernist architect Maxwell Fry, with a helping hand, is said, from the young Walter Gropius. Although some have held it responsible for giving birth to a form of post-war Council flat that has been much criticised, it was greatly admired at the time. A 1938 article in the journal *Building*, said that: “Its light construction and elegant detail [provide] a diametric contrast to more heavily designed neighbours. In effect,



The Maxwell Fry building



*Arundel Court in 2006; it has now
been painted gunmetal grey.
©Thomas Erskine*

AWARD FOR OUR SECRETARY

We are happy to say that Anne Chorley, our long-time Secretary, has been given a “Mayor’s Award” by the Borough for her tremendous organisational work on the Brighter Kensington and Chelsea Scheme. These awards are given annually to people who have made an exceptional contribution to their local community in the Royal Borough.

AGM

The 46th Annual General Meeting of the Ladbroke Association was held on 15 July at St Peter’s Church in Kensington Park Road. It was attended by a handful of members. We are thinking of combining the AGM next year with an interesting talk so as to make the event more attractive. In his Chairman’s Report, Graham Child said that the issue of basement excavations continued to be the single issue of most concern to our members and described how the Association had been cooperating with the Council on devising rules giving better protection for neighbours. Issues raised from the floor included concern about changes in Government policy which would make it easier to get certain types of planning permission (for instance see article on page 6). We will be reporting further on this when Government intentions are clearer.

NEW CHAIRMAN

Graham Child, our chairman for the past five years, stood down at the AGM, and Sophia Lambert was elected in his place. Graham did a great job leading the Association through a period where a lot was going on as regards planning matters, and we are all grateful to him.

Sophia Lambert CB is a retired ex-diplomat and civil servant who has lived in Kensington almost all her life, and in the Ladbroke area for the past 34 years. She was for 6 years chairman of the Standards Committee of the Royal Borough (the now defunct committee that used to deal with misconduct complaints against councillors). She has been particularly active in the successful campaign to persuade the Council to adopt a more restrictive basement policy with better protection for local residents against the nuisances caused by basement construction.

CONSTRUCTION NUISANCE

We reported in our Spring/Summer newsletter on developments in RBKC policy on basements and in particular on the proposed Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which fleshes out the new general policy banning double basements etc. The Council went out to consultation on a second version of this document in the summer, but we understand is still having internal debates on some issues.

Meanwhile, the Environmental Health department of the Borough, which is responsible for noise and pollution matters, has been out to consultation on its own new “Code of Construction Practice: Minimising the Impact of Noise, Vibration and Dust”. They have held a number of meetings with interested bodies, including the Ladbroke Association, and have produced a really excellent document, setting out the standards to be followed

by contractors. While the code will not be compulsory, it will normally be possible for the Council to take legal action under pollution legislation if contractors are making undue noise and can be shown not to have followed the code. Among other things it will set maximum noise levels and more limited hours of work – for instance restricting very noisy work to certain hours of the working day and not allowing noisy work on Saturday morning. It will also deal with minimum standards of training for site managers and operatives; contact with neighbours; the machinery to be used to minimise noise; and the monitoring of noise levels. We are particularly pleased with the provision that compressors and generators should only be used in exceptional circumstances. These machines make some of the worst noise on building sites and should not be necessary as in this borough there is almost always a source of electricity that the builders can use instead. Even if the electricity to a house being “totally renovated” (e.g. rebuilt behind the façade) has been cut off, there is a well-honed procedure for builders to set up a temporary supply.

NEW RBKC PLANNING DIRECTOR

Jonathan Bore, the Executive Director of Planning, retired in the summer and his successor is Graham Stallwood, Jonathan Bore’s deputy. This followed an open competition involving a number of high-flying outside candidates, as the position is a plum one for an ambitious local authority planning expert. Graham Stallwood had experience in three other boroughs before coming to RBKC. He is younger than Jonathan Bore and has proved himself particularly strong on the organisational side, so we look forward to a more efficient planning system. We hope that he will be equally strong in protecting our wonderful Victorian heritage.

OSBERT LANCASTER CELEBRATION

The unveiling of a blue plaque to Osbert Lancaster (1908-1986), the cartoonist and garden historian, at 79 Elgin Crescent, his childhood home, took place on Friday 26 June 2015. The idea of a plaque had been put forward to English Heritage by Geoffrey Roome, a local resident, and the Association was delighted that his efforts were successful.

The actual unveiling took place in the street outside the house, and it was



James Knox, who curated an exhibition of Osbert Lancaster's works, speaking at the unveiling



followed by celebratory reception organised by the Ladbroke Association in the marquee that had been erected in communal garden behind the house for the Rosmead Garden summer party. There was a good turnout, including the Mayor, Ladbroke Association members who had applied for tickets, members of Osbert Lancaster's family, and people from English Heritage and associated organisations involved in the unveiling. There was a display of

posters in the marquee with an Osbert Lancaster theme, including some of his cartoons.

The event seems to have been enjoyed by all. We are only sorry that not more Ladbroke Association members could make it. A Friday evening in summer is never a good time, but we were unfortunately restricted by the availability of the marquee.

OFFICES TO RESIDENTIAL

In 2013, the Government temporarily relaxed the planning rules, so that offices could be changed to residential accommodation without planning permission. The idea was to remove red tape and encourage the development of new housing units because of the desperate shortage of houses. In RBKC, however, this could have damaging effects, as the price differential between residential property and office accommodation is such that we would risk soon losing a large number of our valuable businesses, as developers would snap up office accommodation and turn it into flats and houses. Over 28% of the music publishing employment in England, for instance, is in the Royal Borough, with the four major record labels based here, as well numerous small solicitors' offices, accountants, estate agents etc – although we suspect many residents would welcome the disappearance of some of the latter.

Fortunately, RBKC, together with a few similarly placed boroughs, managed to get an exemption from the relaxation of the rules, so that planning permission has continued to be required for any change from office to residential in Kensington

and Chelsea. The Government has now announced that it is making the removal of planning controls for office to residential a permanent feature. RBKC has obtained a further exemption until 2019. To ensure that planning permission is required after that, it will have to make an "Article 4 Direction" permanently removing permitted development rights in respect of change of use from office accommodation, which will have to be approved by the Government.

CONSOLIDATED LOCAL PLAN

One would be forgiven for thinking that the organisation of Council documents setting out its policy on planning issues is deliberately designed to confuse. It is not entirely RBKC's fault – the requirements for these documents are laid down by central Government, which can never resist tinkering with planning matters and is constantly changing the requirements.

First, there was something called a Unitary Development Plan which was adopted in 2002. Then there was the Core Strategy which replaced it (but not wholly) in 2010. Now, the Council have published a Consolidated Local Plan which replaces the Core Strategy and in particular incorporates

various policy amendments that have been agreed since its publication (for instance the new policy on basements). It is a massive document running to over 400 pages, weighing almost three pounds and costing £45 for those obsessive enough to want to possess a paper version. It is, however, available in the Town Hall and also online on the RBKC website under Planning Policy. Unfortunately, the online version takes the form of a number of huge pdf files, so navigating around it is cumbersome in the extreme. The Council tell us that they are working on a more user-friendly version.

Unfortunately, the consolidation has not been complete, and the document has to be read with some bits of the old Unitary Development Plan which are still extant; and a map from the old Core Strategy. Both of these are also on the website.

What does the Local Plan contain? The first part is devoted to the Council's strategic objectives and its planning and development ambitions for particular parts of the Borough, including North Kensington, Notting Hill Gate and Portobello Road. The next part contains the Council's actual planning policies on everything from housing to promoting biodiversity. The policies are all numbered: for

instance the policy on basements is CL7, that on conservation areas is CL3 and that on flooding is CE2. There is a complete list of policies (which are often quoted in planning applications) in the contents bit of the Local Plan.

Just to complicate matters still further, there is also something called the Development Plan. This is actually the term used to describe the Local Plan plus all other relevant planning documents – including the extant bits of the UDP, and any Neighbourhood Plans. So far there is only one Neighbourhood Plan in RBKC, for the Norland Conservation Area, but others are in the course of preparation. A neighbourhood plan is a planning policy document drawn up by the local community. If it is approved by the Council and a Government Inspector, it automatically becomes part of the Council's planning policies.

ANOTHER PUB CLOSURE



*Ground Floor Bar/
First Floor Restaurant*

Another Portobello Road pub has closed, the Ground Floor Bar/First Floor restaurant at No. 186 Portobello Road, on the corner of Colville Terrace. The pub used to be called the Colville and at one time had a somewhat seedy reputation. But for the past 25 years it has been a thriving pub and restaurant business. The landlord is a property company called UKI, registered in Guernsey, which owns about 10% of the Portobello Road shop frontage. We are waiting to see what plans the landlord has, but we very much hope that it will reopen as a hostelry of some sort. Historically and architecturally, it is an interesting pub as it has its original Victorian function rooms on

both the first and second floors. These were often hired out for local events and their loss would be a blow.

ST PETER'S CHURCH APPEAL

The iconic orange facade of St Peter's Church in Kensington Park Road is in a dilapidated condition and in need of restoration. The church is running a series of fund raising events to enable these works to be carried out. If you are interested in coming along to support St Peter's please go to St Peter's website where you will be able to see when the events are taking place, how to get tickets and how to donate: www.stpetersnottinghill.org.uk.



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CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

The Council has now published its "Conservation Area Appraisal" (CAA) for the Ladbroke area. This describes in considerable detail the architectural and other characteristics of the area. The Local Plan (see Article on previous page) states that the Council's overall policy is to "require development to preserve and to take opportunities to enhance the cherished and familiar local scene." The CAA is intended to inform planners and residents about what it is that should be preserved and enhanced in the Ladbroke Area. The Ladbroke Association was involved in its drafting and it contains a lot of good stuff. Anybody thinking of

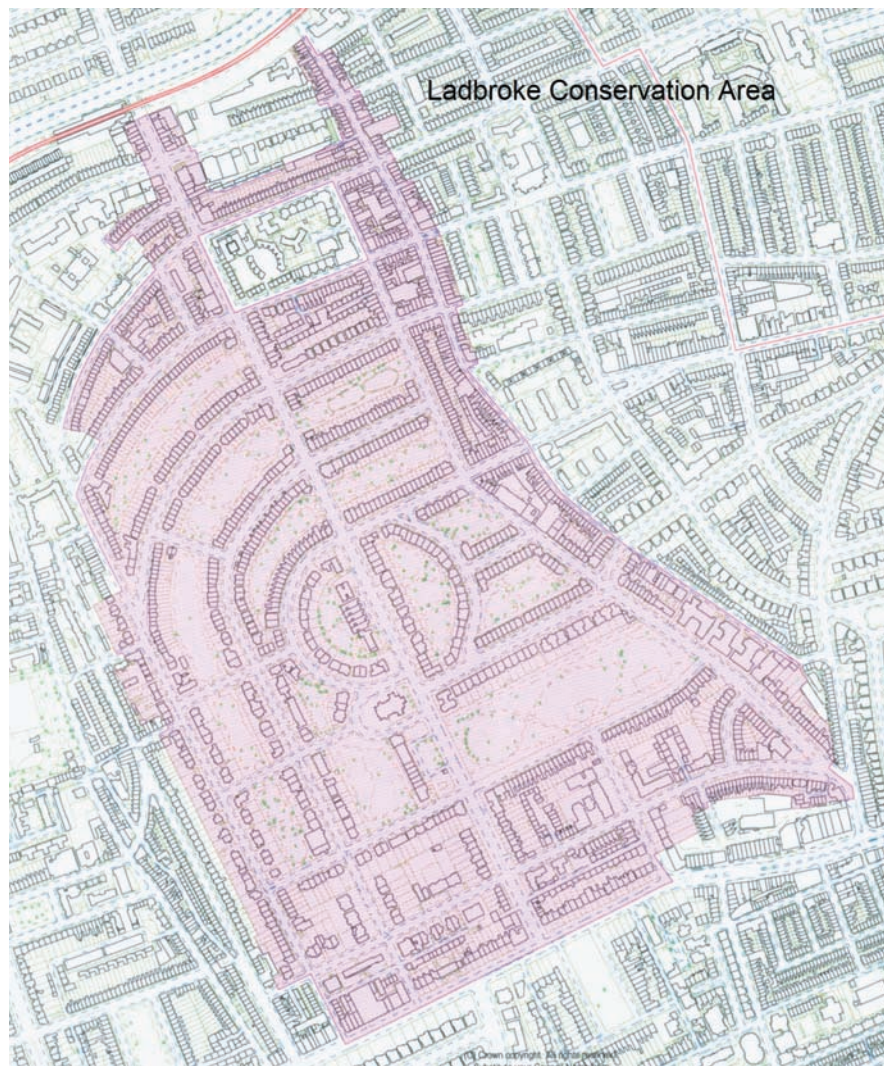
alterations to their property should have a look at it. But disappointingly, the Council ignored pleas from both the Association and English Heritage to depart from the purely descriptive and to give at least some guidance – as there was in the old Conservation Area Proposals Statement – on what is likely to be acceptable or unacceptable, so the latter has to be inferred. The CAA can be found on the Council website under Conservation Areas in the Heritage section of the Planning pages.

SILL IRONS

The Ladbroke estate has some magnificent Victorian ironwork, especially in the form of railings and balconies. There is one sort of ironwork, however, that is often overlooked, and that is sill irons or plant restrainers on window-sills, normally at ground floor level. Many houses still have these and it is normal for houses in a terrace or a series of villas to have matching sill irons. Some of these are illustrated below.

Over the years, some of these sill irons have gone missing or been replaced by unsuitable modern ones. If people are undertaking work on their house or flat, we would encourage the reinstatement of plant restrainers that match the pattern particular to that terrace or group of villas.





THE OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

Officers:

President: Thomas Pakenham
Chairman: Sophia Lambert
Vice Chairman: Peter Chapman
Hon Treasurer: Paul Bastick
Hon Secretary: Anne Chorley

Committee Members:

Kay Broadbent
 David Campion
 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 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.info

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 The London Printing Company.com in Notting Hill Gate.

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 notices 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 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.info

or apply to the Hon Treasurer:

Paul Bastick, at 75A Ladbroke Grove, W11 2PD