Ladbroke News

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association WINTER 24/25

Sasha Alfille, winner of the Ladbroke Association Art Competition 2024, in front of her drawing of Stanley Crescent.

ART COMPETITION

Members will recall that, at the beginning of 2024, we invited entries to a competition of pictures of the Ladbroke area. One of our constitutional objectives is "to stimulate and promote public interest in, and care for, the beauty, history and character of the neighbourhood", and this seemed a good way of achieving this, using some of the money we receive from film companies to offer really generous prizes. We had categories for both adults and children, with a top prize of £1,000 for the adult category.

Rather disappointingly, we only received 17 entries from adults – although they were all interesting and many of a high quality. There was a variety of mediums – oils, water-colours, both pencil and ink drawings, collages, a fascinating etching and a work done on screen (following the example of David Hockney). Quite a few were from accredited artists, but a significant number came from amateurs. Sasha Alfille, who won the top prize, is doing a master's degree in drawing. But the second and third prize-winners were both amateurs who had never done anything like this before. All the adult entries can be seen on our website www.ladbrokeassociation.org.

The art teachers from the local state primary schools were enthusiastic about the competition and the teachers from Colville, St Clement and St James, and Thomas Jones Primary Schools made the competition into a project for their pupils, so we received a lot of entries from schools and ended up with over 50 entries in total.

All the entries were judged by a distinguished local artist, Nigel Hall RA, and a long-standing local architect, Malcolm Pawley. We then had an exhibition extending over three days in the Notting Hill Community Church (formerly the Peniel Chapel) in

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Kensington Park Road, with a prize-giving on the first day. All those who participated seemed to have enjoyed it and quite a few people suggested but we should make this an annual event. We are not convinced that that makes sense, partly because of the paucity of adult entries, but also because organising it involved an enormous amount of work on the behalf of committee members, the majority of whom have a number of other commitments and could ill-afford the time. We propose, therefore, that we will put off considering any further competition for at least couple of years.

We asked people attending the exhibition to vote for the pictures that they liked the best. The most popular of the adult entries was a work done on screen and transferred on to metal panel, called *Binman on Ladbroke Grove*. The works receiving most votes from visitors can be seen on our website.

The Postbox: a winner in the 5–11 years category (also a favourite with visitors to the exhibition)

Binman on Ladbroke Grove, by Sean Griffin

GRAFFITI

Sadly there were the usual tragic incidents at Carnival. But one thing that has improved are the graffiti. Thanks to the Council's policy on rapid removal of graffiti, there were fewer examples this year and they were mostly on the temporary hoardings rather than on walls. The graffiti artists are well organised. Hoardings that were put up two days before Carnival were already covered by graffiti by the following morning. Some were actually quite clever – see for example the one below in Kensington Park Gardens. We have heard that there is a now market for hoardings with interesting graffiti, no doubt among those who cannot afford a Banksy.

Sadly, however, the mural on the wall of the passage between the Ruby Hotel and the Oxfam Shop also acquired extra graffiti during Carnival. The passage belongs to the landowners, and the Council asked them to close off the passage during Carnival. They did so, but used such a flimsy barrier that it was torn down. The mural (which was originally commissioned by the Notting Hill Improvements Group with funds from local businesses) is now unfortunately a complete mess. The artist, Barney McMahon, has offered to restore it, provided that it can be made graffiti-proof. But this will be a long and not inexpensive job. Pembridge Councillor Joanna Gardner is taking the lead in trying to raise funds, including from the Ruby Hotel whose guests look out onto the mural. The Ladbroke Association hopes to contribute.

Graffito on Kensington Park Gardens

THE SHEPPARD TRUST: END OF AN ERA

In 1855, a philanthropic Victorian lady, Miss Elizabeth Sheppard, used an inheritance to set up a trust to provide low-cost accommodation for elderly gentlewomen living on small fixed incomes or "ladies of reduced means". Its original name was "Miss Sheppard's Annuitants Homes". Only ladies aged 65 and over, who were of limited means and abided by the Christian faith, were eligible to be housed by the Trust (in Miss Sheppard's day only Anglicans were accepted; later the occupants could be of any Christan faith approved by the Trust).

The Trust has always been based in the Bayswater and Kensington Area (its first building was in Ossington Street). In the mid-1930s, the Trust began acquiring property in Lansdowne Road. It ended up owning two sets of adjoining houses, Nos. 2, 3 and 4; and nos. 12 and 14 (which originally had a gap between them that was filled in by the Trust). Both sets of buildings were first used to provide bed-sits for elderly ladies with a resident warden. In the 1980s, the accommodation was converted into 29 tiny self-contained flats (16 in Nos. 2–4 and 13 in Nos. 12–14). Many were too small to meet modern building standards, but most of the old ladies loved being in the area, especially as the gardens of the two blocks of houses were converted by the Trust into mini-communal gardens.

When the Trust acquired the properties, they were not particularly valuable. But these are handsome Victorian terrace houses which by the end of the 20th century had become very valuable indeed. The Sheppard trustees decided in their wisdom that it would make sense to sell these houses and to build a new building near Hampton Court, where they could afford to house some 50 old ladies in better accommodation. There was deep concern among the residents about the prospect of being moved – and indeed moving elderly people against their will always carries some risks. This sheltered housing in the heart of our area was also in our view an important local asset. Both the Ladbroke Association and the Kensington Society urged the Trust to think again and to renovate the existing buildings, but to no avail. Last year all of the Sheppard Trust houses were acquired by a local developer.

At his request (but before he had gained possession), the Trust applied in 2023 for permission to amalgamate pairs of flats at Nos. 12–14 so as to create half as many bigger flats. This was granted and seemed to us a sensible compromise, as it would retain a number of units while bringing them up to standard. But late last year the developer obtained another planning permission, this time to turn all the Trust buildings in Lansdowne Walk back into single family houses plus two flats. Because of the acute shortage of housing, Council policy is to resist the loss of housing units. Permission was nevertheless granted, although subject to the developer paying £3.85 million to the Council to provide affordable housing elsewhere.

The Ladbroke Association objected to the application, as we took the view that we already have enough large family houses (which are too often purchased by people who occupy them only part of the year and do not contribute much to the community). We argued in favour of turning the buildings into flats – as was already consented under the earlier planning permission for Nos. 12–14 – so as to provide more accommodation for single people and couples and for instance the elderly looking to downsize. We would also have liked some more affordable housing in the area. As flats in this area go for pretty large sums, it seemed to us that the developer would still make a fair profit. The Council decision was therefore a disappointment.

Meanwhile, the old ladies moved out in October 2024. A few have found accommodation elsewhere, but the majority have moved to temporary premises rented by the Trust in Mill Hill, as the new building near Hampton Court is far from ready. They are therefore being subjected to a double move.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

We would like to remind members to notify us if they change their address; and also to tell us if they are moving out of the area and would like to end their Ladbroke membership. Although we are gratified to note that quite a few people moving away like to retain their membership, there are about a dozen people on our membership list who have moved without giving us any alternative address and without cancelling their subscription. This means that we are still receiving annual payouts from their standing orders, but have no means of contacting them or of sending them newsletters and other literature.

MP AND COUNCILLOR NEWSLETTERS

Both our new MP Joe Powell and our Norland and Pembridge Councillors have e-newsletters, to which one can subscribe by following the links below. Inevitably these newsletters make political points, but they can be of general interest.

www.joepowell.org.uk/signup
www.kcfc.org.uk/norland
pembridge@kcfc.org.uk

EMAIL ALERT LIST

Are you signed up to our email alert list? It allows us to send members emails about developments of interest between newsletters. If you would like to add your name, please email **info@ladbrokeassociation.org.**

WOMEN'S PIONEER HOUSING

Some of the grandest houses in our area are owned by a housing association, Women's Pioneer Housing. It was founded in 1920 by a group of women in various fields of public life (many connected with the suffragette movement), with the intention of providing pleasant housing accommodation at a reasonable rent for women who wished to lead independent working lives. During the First World War, many women who had never before worked took on jobs done by men who had gone to war. As a result they became a lot more independent. The carnage in the trenches also meant that many women of that generation could not find husbands, so there was a new demand for accommodation for working women living alone.

The majority of the founders of Women's Pioneer Housing lived or worked in the Royal Borough, and Women's Pioneer grew up in two centres of the borough – the Ladbroke area and Earl's Court. In the 1920s and 1930s there was a surplus of large family houses in what were then unfashionable areas that could be acquired at reasonable cost and converted into self-contained one-room flats. The first house to be purchased (in 1921) was No. 67 Holland Park Avenue. In the 1920s, the organisation acquired Nos. 11, 14, 15 and 34 Ladbroke Gardens (adding No. 12 in 1946); Nos. 21 and 22 Stanley Crescent (acquiring No. 16 in 1934); No. 2 Horbury Crescent and No. 62 Ladbroke Grove (acquiring No. 67 in 1930). Later acquisitions included Nos. 26–29 Stanley Gardens and No. 79 Ladbroke Road. Most of these it still owns.

26–29 Stanley Gardens, which provide 35 housing units for single women.

Today, Women's Pioneer has expanded enormously and the houses in the Ladbroke area are only a small part of its operation. But its aims remain the same – to provide for less well-off single women. Most tenants are nominated by local authorities or other agencies and are women who do not have access to social housing through other routes. They must be earning less than £40,000 a year and having savings of less than £16,000. Unlike the Sheppard Trust, which caters only for the elderly, Women's Pioneer takes all able-bodied women over 18 (although they do also have some sheltered housing).

Several of the Women's Pioneer houses have gardens backing onto communal gardens and these can be recognised by the fact that they are usually a lot untidier than the gardens of their wealthy neighbours in single occupancy houses, as the tenants are not necessarily keen gardeners. Housing Trusts are also always short of funds and unfortunately things such as repairing a garden railing seem to be a low priority. The tenants have access to the communal gardens, although most make limited use of them.

A Women's Pioneer tenant at her 100th birthday party in Stanley Gardens South

HOLLAND PARK ROUNDABOUT CYCLEWAY

We reported in our last newsletter on the TfL plans for a cycleway along one of the lanes around the Holland Park Roundabout, about which there is considerable concern. Our initial worry was that it would increase congestion on the roundabout and in Holland Park Avenue. TfL dismissed this on the grounds that, although there would initially be congestion, it would dissipate as motor traffic learnt to divert onto other routes, including Ladbroke Grove, St Anne's Villas and Abbotsbury Road. This is not much comfort, however, to those living on these largely residential streets, where it would be likely to increase pollution and noise as well the risk to the cyclists who already use these streets to avoid Holland Park Avenue.

The more we looked at the scheme, the more we became convinced that it also would carry real risks for cyclists, and especially for the more cautious ones (as opposed to the "men in lycra"). Cyclists would need to make a journey on unsegregated paths across the roundabout to get to the cycle lane. These would be controlled by lights, but given the propensity of both cyclists and some other traffic to jumped lights, it could be quite dangerous. It is worth noting that – whereas the roundabout is pretty dangerous for other traffic, especially motor-cycles – there have been almost no

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accidents involving cyclists: over a recent three year period only one minor accident involving a cyclist was recorded). It would also encourage cyclists onto Holland Park Avenue, at present reasonably safe for cyclists apart from a black spot by Royal Crescent. If the volume of cyclists increases, this may not remain the case.

Moreover, there are already some badly marked cycle lanes around the perimeter of the roundabout which could easily be upgraded to take cyclists safely round the roundabout, without the risks and congestion that the TfL scheme would cause. These could, moreover, be linked to the cycleway across Shepherd's Bush Green that has already been agreed. The local residents' associations therefore put together a paper showing how these cycle lanes could be turned into user-friendly cycleways, with the advantage of encouraging cyclists to use the various quietways which lead off them, rather than Holland Park Avenue. Thanks to the good offices of our MP, Joe Powell, we had a meeting with TfL's cycling Tsar, Will Norman, at which we outlined our proposals and suggested that the TfL roundabout proposal should be delayed until it could be seen how the upgraded infrastructure worked. He was sympathetic to the idea of upgrading the existing infrastructure. However, he made clear in a subsequent letter that he regarded this as an add-on and that he remained determined to press ahead with the cycleway across the roundabout as soon as possible.

We remain unsure about why he wishes to press ahead in such a hurry rather than accepting at least a short delay. Even among cyclists there was limited support for the scheme and there are many more dangerous junctions which would seem more obvious priorities (the roundabout does not figure, for instance, in the London Cycling Campaign's list of the ten most dangerous junctions). We know that TfL's ultimate ambition is to have three east-west segregated cycleways across the borough – along Holland Park Avenue, High Street Kensington and the Embankment. If there were a segregated cycleway along Holland Park Avenue, a direct way across the roundabout might make a bit more sense. A sensible solution, therefore, would be to wait until that scheme is nearer reality and carry out the two schemes in tandem. It is clear, however, that the creation of a Holland Park Avenue cycleway is not likely to be in the foreseeable future. TfL have said that they have no current plans for it (not least no doubt because the road belongs to the borough, who remain resolutely opposed). Their current priority seems to be High Street Kensington, which would make a lot more sense given its much greater width.

Some have expressed a more cynical view of Will Norman's intentions: either that he hopes that the roundabout scheme will, by increasing the number of cyclists in Holland Park Avenue (rather than encouraging the use of neighbouring quietways), increase the pressure on the Council to allow the revival of the Avenue scheme that was seen off before the pandemic; or that he is determined to create as many miles of cycleway as possible during his tenure, regardless of risk-benefit ratio, and sees this as a low hanging fruit. We hope that neither is the case.

HALLOWEEN

Since the pandemic, fewer people seem to be decorating their houses for Halloween. But there were still some good ones this year. Large black spiders were trending – see the photos below.

Spiders in Clarendon Road

Ghosts in Kensington Park Road

Kensington Park Gardens

ST JOHN'S CHURCH

The church of St John the Evangelist at the top of Ladbroke Grove was deliberately sited to form the centrepiece of the Ladbroke estate. It was built in 1845, just when the second great wave of building on the estate was beginning, and the developers no doubt hoped that the proximity of this handsome Victorian gothic building would enhance property values in the area. It is on the highest point of Notting Hill, on a site which had previously served as a natural grandstand for the race-goers on the ill-fated Hippodrome race-course.

At first, the church stood in relative isolation in open fields, the only buildings nearby being the first few houses of Lansdowne Crescent and a terrace on Ladbroke Grove. It was locally known as the Hippodrome Church or St John's in the Hayfields. Fears that the church had been placed too far out in the country proved unfounded, however, and within a very few years nearly all of the houses to the south and west of the church had been built. If our area can be said to have a central point, this is it. The church was listed Grade II in 1969.

The Church has since its opening served the local Anglican community. But in recent years, while retaining its Anglican mission, it has transformed itself into an important community centre both for Christians of other denominations and for the community at large. It hosts for instance services in Tagalog and Farsi for Filipino and Persian Christians in London. The Filipino Chaplaincy also offers informal socio-pastoral advice on the many issues facing Filipinos in the UK.

In 1994 a purpose-designed area was built under the western end of the church to provide a parish centre. This now houses a nursery, the Acorn, from Monday to Friday and hosts various church groups on Sunday (and on Saturday can be hired for children's parties or other purposes). The church (which is open every day) also has its own café, to which all are welcome. Modern facilities have been installed, including disabled toilets, and spaces within the church are regularly hired by a wide variety of non-religious groups for everything from art exhibitions and concerts to children's dance classes and local police liaison meetings.

There is now a major structural problem with the west wall, that needs to be shored up. The Church last year mounted an appeal to raise £1.45 million to cover essential structural works, to reduce its environmental footprint by *inter alia* installing a new carbon-neutral heating and lighting system, and to restore some of the Victorian internal features that have been lost or damaged over the years – for instance, the ceiling beams originally had gorgeous Victorian paintwork featuring bold colours, patterns and lines from a psalm, which were at some point covered over in brown paint.

The Ladbroke Association "does not do religion" as one of Tony Blair's staff once famously said. But we recognise the church as both an important architectural monument central to the Ladbroke area, and a building that continues to perform a useful community function, and not just for the religious. We are considering making our own contribution to the Appeal (although probably restricting it to works that do not have religious connotations – we made a similar donation to St Peter's when it mounted a similar appeal, asking that it be used to repair the clock). If any of our members would like to make a donation to the appeal, the website is

https://stjohnsnottinghill.com/2024-appeal.

The church is a registered charity.

LIGHT POLLUTION

The new RBKC Local Plan (which sets out the policies the Council will follow in deciding planning applications) has a new policy (Policy GB 10) on light pollution: *"Development must not create an unacceptable impact from light glare and light spill on local residential amenity including neighbouring properties and communal gardens, biodiversity, highway and waterway users"*. We pressed for this and welcome it. We are particularly concerned at the number of applications on communal gardens that involve rear extensions with large areas of glazing. These can create glare that can be seen from many vantage points in the garden and affect the wildlife. It is not only light from windows; in communal gardens security lights and floodlights to illuminate buildings and rear gardens can be intensely irritating and spoil the intended rural character

Even in terraces, neighbouring houses may suffer from light pollution if the house next door builds an extension with a roof light shining upwards. Quite apart from the glare problem, rooflights (in particularly on dormer floors) and big areas of glazing facing south can cause overheating, prompting applications for air conditioning – which may cool the individual house, but adds to the urban heat effect. We do urge all residents thinking of building extensions with extensive glazing or installing new rooflights to think hard about the possible effect on their neighbours and wildlife.

PAINT COLOUR

There have been a couple of occasions recently when people in the Ladbroke area have applied to change the paint colour of their house even though there was no need to do so. Generally, planning permission to change the paint colour of a house is necessary only if the building is listed or there is a so-called Article 4 direction specifying that planning permission is needed to change the paint colour. The only Article 4 direction in the Ladbroke area applying to paint colour is on Nos. 126–184 (evens) in Kensington Park Road. A range of specific pastel shades is specified for these houses. Otherwise, if your house is not listed, you can paint the stucco (but not the brickwork) any colour you want and the Council can do little about it, as it discovered in the case of the woman who painted her house in red and white stripes a few years ago in one of the streets south of Kensington High Street, to spite the Council for having refused her planning permission for something she wished to do.

If you do apply to change the paint colour of your house even when no permission is needed, the Council will not tell you or refund the planning fee, but will process your application in the normal way. The planning department relies heavily on planning fees to fund itself, but we are nonetheless not too happy with the current approach. That argument is that people may have specific reasons for seeking planning permission and it is not for the Council to question the applicant's intentions. We are not convinced by this.

The Ladbroke area has become known to tourists for its "coloured houses", especially on Lansdowne Road, Elgin Crescent and parts of Portobello Road. In Victorian times, our stucco was covered in a stone-coloured wash, so these multi-coloured terraces are not at all authentic. Nevertheless, they add to the interest of the area. We do think, however, that it is best to stick to pastel colours.

Coloured houses in Elgin Crescent

Houses in Clarendon Road with black painted windows

Colour of window frames

When applications are made for extensions or alterations, the Council normally specifies that all timber-framed windows should be painted white. Again, this does not necessarily correspond to the paint colours used by the Victorians. We cannot be sure what colours were used on the Ladbroke estate, but especially for houses built in the early part of the period, the Victorians tended to use dark colours, either dark green, brown or black, with cream and off-white becoming popular in the later 19th century. White paint only became really popular, however, in the early 20th century with the use of paint containing titanium dioxide. Until then, white paint had been thin and did not last long. The new "brilliant white" paint was more opaque and gave a brighter finish with fewer layers. It also had the advantage of not being toxic, whereas the white paint used in Victorian times tended to contain pigments such as lead carbonate which carried health risks. It is fair to say that titanium dioxide revolutionised the painting of both stucco and window frames and accounts for the current prevalence of white and pastel shades on buildings.

We have recently seen more people in the area painting their window frames black, perhaps because they see this colour as more authentic for a Victorian house. The issue recently came up in a planning case which went to the Planning Inspectorate. The owners of 38 Clarendon Road applied to make various alterations to their doors and windows, including changing the paint colour from white to black. The council agreed to the alterations, but subject to a condition requiring the window frames to be painted white. The applicant appealed this condition. The inspector allowed the appeal, noting that black paint was used for houses built in the 1840s (like this one) and that a number of nearby houses had black window frames.

The Ladbroke Association has taken the view that both white and black are acceptable for window frames. However, we do feel that it makes sense for there to be consistency on individual buildings, with all windows being painted the same colour, whether white or black.

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 notice 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 and planning 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 and cares about the 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.org** or apply to the Hon Treasurer: **Kay Broadbent, kay@broadbentassociates.co.uk or 9 Kensington Park Gardens, W11 3HB.**

THE OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

President: Thomas Pakenham
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info@ladbrokeassociation.org

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

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