

Ladbroke News

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

WINTER 2025–6



Detailed photographs of two sections of the newly restored mural in the passage by the Ruby Hotel. The large mural is impossible to capture in one piece, owing to the narrowness of the passage, but these pictures give a flavour.

MURAL ON SIDE OF OXFAM SHOP

This mural, in the passage between the Ruby Hotel and the Oxfam building, was commissioned in 1996 by the Notting Hill Improvements Group, an organisation led by a local property developer, John Scott (now sadly deceased) dedicated to regenerating and enhancing the Notting Hill Gate area through public art, street furniture, and local infrastructure projects. A competition was held to decorate the empty wall on the side of Oxfam and it was won by Barney McMahon, a local artist. The work was completed in 1998.

The mural is both colourful and playful, with hidden touches. Along the top there are depictions of buildings in Notting Hill Gate. The main part of the mural depicts faces representing the varied community of our area – although there are some hidden faces of well-known people. The figure in the orange jacket is based on Van Gogh’s portrait of Dr Gachet, and somewhere there is the head of Lewis Hamilton, the Formula 1 driver.

Until recently, the mural was untouched by graffiti. However, about three years ago few graffiti were added. As we know, graffiti attract other graffiti, and during the 2024 carnival the graffiti artists really went

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wild (we had asked that the passage be fenced off, but this was done with such a flimsy fence that it was easily ripped out).

The original artist offered to restore the mural – not a cheap exercise, as it involved putting up scaffolding





The mural in 2024 covered in graffiti.

and a hoarding as well as paying the artist for his materials and time. The Ladbroke and Pembridge Associations both offered to contribute to the cost, as did Frogmore, the owner of the building, and the Council gave a grant to cover the remaining cost. The restored mural was officially unveiled in all its glory in the presence of the Mayor of Kensington on 17 January. It now has many coats of anti-graffiti paints, which we hope will save it from future damage.



The Mayor of Kensington, Cllr Tom Bennett, and Fiona Fleming-Brown at the cutting of the ribbon on 17 January 2026. (photoBecket)

We are happy to say that the Ruby Hotel have also improved the look of the passageway by replacing the dead plants in the window-boxes on its side of the passage.

LISTED BUILDINGS – OWNER’S RESPONSIBILITY

There are about 100 listed buildings in the Ladbroke area, mostly houses or villas listed for their architectural interest. Most occupants consider it a privilege to live in a listed building. Ownership does, however, come with responsibilities of which owners need to be aware. Current occupants are only custodians for the period of their occupation, and it is important that the building be passed on to the next occupant with its architectural and historical importance intact. That is not to say that it may not be altered, and there may be good reasons for alterations that for instance bring the building up to modern environmental standards. But any alterations must respect the heritage value of the building and need specific planning permission. Indeed, it is a crime to carry out works on a listed building without first getting consent from the Council. If unapproved works take place, both the owner and the builder will be liable and can be fined up to £20,000 for a single offence.

When a property has listed status, this typically means that the whole of the building is protected, including the interior as well as the exterior and all architectural features and structures within the grounds. Whereas most of us are free to paint our house whatever colour we choose, the owner of a listed building must obtain “listed building consent” to change the paint colour. Internal alterations also need consent and the Council will be unlikely to grant it if it affects historical features such as fireplaces or cornices. A more tolerant view will be taken where most of the interior interest of the building has already been lost as a result of earlier alterations. And the

Council normally welcomes the restoration of lost features as well as the removal of inappropriate later additions.

The Ladbroke Association does not comment on planning applications for changes to the interior of a listed building, as we normally do not have access to the inside of a property and cannot make a judgement on what is proposed. We are aware, however, that some architects and developers believe that the Council sometimes fusses unduly about interior changes. On the other hand we sometimes despair at what planning officers are prepared to accept by way of external changes. In a recent case involving a listed house in Ladbroke Gardens, officers recommended in favour of a number of alien additions to an almost untouched rear elevation facing a communal garden – changes that would have been very visible from the communal garden. This particular terrace of houses has interesting private gardens adjoining the communal garden, with rustic winding stone steps, unique on the Ladbroke estate. As they are part of the grounds of the listed terrace, they should be protected by the listing. But Council officers seem to show no interest in them and have allowed one a recent case to be replaced by a levelled-out garden with paving that would look more at home in a hotel on the Mediterranean.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEWSLETTER
We would welcome contributions to the newsletter from long-standing residents about earlier times in the Ladbroke area. Please contact the editor at info@ladbrokeassociation.org.

CASINO IN NOTTING HILL GATE

Much alarm has been raised over the prospect of a casino in the old NatWest bank building in Notting Hill Gate. Many of us had not appreciated that there is a big difference between true casinos (with gaming tables) and “Adult Gaming Centres” with only slot machines such as the one in Pembridge Road (which often call themselves casinos). There is no limit on the number of adult gaming centres that can be applied for, and where there is an accumulation of them, they can cause real problems.

The opening of new casinos on the other hand is strictly restricted. Five licences were issued for casinos in Kensington and Chelsea in the days when the last Labour government liberalised the granting of casino licences. Since then, however, the rules have been toughened up and no more casinos can be allowed in the borough. In order to open a new one, a casino operator has to obtain one of the existing licences. This is what happened in this case. A casino which was operating on Palace Gate closed down and the licence was obtained by an operator called Silvertime (who also operate the slot machine centre in Pembridge Road). They applied to transfer it to the old NatWest bank building in Notting Hill Gate, which they had purchased. This transfer of licence has now been agreed by RBKC - who in practice had little option to do otherwise under current legislation.

The experience of the other casinos in the borough (mostly attached to big hotels) is that they cause very little trouble. There are much tougher rules on the operation of casinos compared to those that apply to slot machine only establishments, and casino operators have to be very careful indeed. Nevertheless, together with the Pembridge Association and local councillors, we pressed successfully for various conditions to be

imposed on the transfer. We had previously discussed these with Silvertime who were generally amenable to our suggestions (they also gave us a fascinating tour of the old bank building).

The conditions include requirements that there should be a licensed door supervisor at all times; there should be checks on the ages of people entering the casino (only over-18s may enter); the gambling facilities must not be visible from outside the premises; and entry must be refused to customers who appear to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Unusually, as the other casinos in the borough have a 24-hour licence, the RBKC Licensing Committee accepted the objectors’ representations that a 24-hour licence in this location could put vulnerable persons at risk of being harmed or exploited by gambling. The Committee noted that there were residential streets nearby that included social housing as well as a number of short-stay hostels located within one mile of the premises. They therefore required that there should be no gambling between 4 a.m. and 10 a.m. We had suggested that gambling should cease around 2 a.m., which is when the night-clubs in Notting Hill Gate close, so the result is not ideal, but better than we had feared.

The operator will now have to go through two other hoops before they can open. They will need to obtain an alcohol licence, which we will argue should be a lot shorter than the opening times of the premises. They will also need to obtain planning permission for the various changes that they need to make to the building. The bank building is in the Pembridge conservation area and a handsome structure. We shall be arguing for minimal external signage.

MIZNON/EREV RESTAURANT

Sadly, the tensions in the Middle East are spilling out onto our streets. On the corner of Elgin Crescent and Kensington Park Road an Israeli-owned restaurant called Miznon opened in 2022, taking over from the old Kitchen and Pantry. Last year it changed its name to Erev. One of the owners is an Israeli celebrity chef and it is part of a biggish chain, with branches in Soho and around the world.

In September, pro-Palestinian groups began weekly demonstrations outside the restaurant, on the grounds that the owners were supportive of the Israeli Army (IDF) and its actions in Gaza. To begin with the demonstrations were peaceful. But rowdy groups began arriving, including pro-Israeli counter demonstrators, there have been violent incidents, and the police on at least one occasion lost control.



Miznon/Erev restaurant

“STRENGTHENING” PORTOBELLO

This has been one of the Council’s most cack-handed exercises – and a worrying one for those who wish to see the Portobello market flourish.

It began before the pandemic, when following extensive public consultation a well-received Market Action Plan was drawn up, with a list of well-defined and timetabled actions to bring improvements to Portobello Road – better facilities for stall-holders, better signage, better road surfaces etc. All action on the Plan ceased during the pandemic. After it had ended, the obvious thing would have been to pick it up, make any necessary updates (flooding or instance had not been covered) and run with it. But a new team had taken over at the Council, determined it seemed to do their own thing. They mounted a completely new (and expensive) consultation involving focus groups, consultants – the full toolkit. This infuriated much of the Portobello community and set back the actual work by at least a year.

At the end of this new consultation, proposals were produced for what can best be described as a prettification of the Portobello Road, making it look like an idealised street market in Disneyland. This was not well received, and last year revised plans were produced for the section of Portobello Road between Chepstow Villas and Westbourne Grove – as a first stage in a plan to revamp the whole road. We are awaiting the results of the consultation on these plans.

Many of the elements are generally accepted as desirable – measures to provide flood resilience; new market pitches; better lighting and electricity for traders; and tree planting where possible. However, there are still a number of elements that are uncharacteristic of the market and for which there appears to be almost no support. A widening of the pavements is proposed, even though most tourists prefer walking down the road

(which would become narrower) and stalls are increasingly turning their fronts towards the road rather than the pavement. On the western side cars would be parked on the widened pavement rather than the road, which many believe would bring road safety risks. It is also proposed to install coloured granite setts (back to Disneyland) rather than the current paving stones and tarmac road surface – at a time incidentally when Carnaby Street is by popular demand ripping up its fancy paving and reverting to old-style pavements to make the road look more like a proper street.

One of the biggest concerns of shopkeepers and stall-holders is the disruption that would be caused by the proposed works. It is accepted that some disruption is inevitable to introduce the flood reliance measures and improvements to lighting and water supplies. But there is real anger about adding to the necessary disruption for the sake of what are widely seen as unnecessary works on pavements and road surfaces. Some of the antique dealers (on whom the market depends for part of its attraction) have businesses that are already close to the edge and which could easily be driven over it by prolonged street closures and diversions. As we have seen, it is taking over six months to lay granite setts in the short section of Kensington Park Road that is being given a Council makeover. That indicates that it could take well over a year to give the same treatment to the allotted section of Portobello Road.

At a noisy meeting in January chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council, it was put forcefully to him by the Portobello community that they wanted a slimmed down version of the scheme only. We hope the Council will listen. Over the last 150 years, the Portobello market has always evolved organically to meet changing circumstances and will no doubt continue to do so. A heavy-handed top-down intervention could involve real risks of decline.

COUNCIL FINANCES

We reported in the last newsletter that the Government is making major cuts to its grants to the wealthier London Councils, in the interests of distribution to poorer parts of the country. Five inner London boroughs in particular will be facing severe cuts over the next four years: Kensington and Chelsea; Westminster; Hammersmith and Fulham; Wandsworth; and the City of London. Differing figures have been put forward by the Council and our M.P., but it seems that this is largely due to different time periods being looked at.

Local Government finance is an impenetrable expertise which your editor certainly does not have, but the cuts are particularly problematic because much of Council expenditure is required by law, e.g. on social services such as housing the homeless, so cuts would fall disproportionately on the part of the

budget that is discretionary.

All five of these boroughs have low levels of Council tax, well below the London or national average. The cuts could possibly be covered by very large increases in Council tax. Councils can raise Council tax by 5% a year; anything beyond that normally requires a local referendum. The Government has, however, removed this requirement for the five Councils over the next three years, and no doubt sees increasing its council tax as a way for Kensington and Chelsea to avoid the worst of the cuts.

The Council must now decide how far it covers the deficit through raising Council tax, and how far it will make cuts in its services to avoid big tax increases. A decision will be taken by the Leadership Team in February.

VISTAS

The architects of the Ladbroke estate were very keen on vistas – views down streets towards a church or other architectural feature. St John’s Church for instance, “closes the view” along two separate streets – Kensington Park Gardens and St John’s Gardens (see photos below). St John’s Gardens also has a vista at its other end - a symmetrical pair of villas in Clarendon Road – although the trees that have grown up on this street make it quite hard to appreciate.

Arundel Gardens also has a vista of the centre of a symmetrical terrace on Kensington Park Road, although somewhat obscured by the evergreen *magnolia grandiflora* that the Council planted in the street a few years ago.



Kensington Park Gardens, looking towards St John’s



St John’s Gardens looking towards St John’s church



St John’s Gardens, looking towards symmetrical villas in Clarendon Road

Lansdowne Rise also looks towards a handsome pair of villas in Lansdowne Crescent

Probably the best vista of all is that down Stanley Gardens towards St Peter’s Church.



Arundel Gardens “looking towards Kensington Park Road



Lansdowne Rise looking towards Lansdowne Crescent



St Peter’s from Stanley Gardens

POLICE STATION

The Mayor of London has finally decided to sell the old Notting Hill Police Station buildings. There are no details yet on when or how the sale will be organised. We believe that the borough is keen to acquire it so that the buildings can be used for various community purposes, including a doctor's surgery. However, the Mayor is required to obtain best market value for it, and it is not clear that the Council would be able to outbid a developer. The Kensington Society managed to get it designated as an "Asset of Community Value", which means that the seller must offer it first to the local community – but again at a market price, and it is pretty unrealistic to imagine that the local community could raise the sort of sum required (around £16 million was mentioned when the idea of a sale was first mooted).

There is a policy in the Local Plan (Policy SI1) covering buildings or land with an existing social or community use such as a police station requiring them to be protected for the same or another social or community use. We will be making much of this, but at the end of the day, if the owner can show that they have tried and failed to find a suitable community use, consent can be given for a change to a commercial use.

The Met Police are also planning to close the "Police Counter" next to the Design Museum in Lancaster Road in the next couple of months. This is only open

during office hours, but did at least provide people with a place where they could talk to a real police person.

Kensington and Chelsea are not alone in losing their police stations. The plan is that in future there will be only two 24-hour Police Stations in London, at Charing Cross and Lewisham. The plan – still a bit nebulous – is for 40 new "neighbourhood policing hubs" for neighbourhood police teams across London. The Met will approach local partners including councils with the aim of using existing buildings to create dedicated spaces for the local teams. These will not be open to the public, but will serve as local bases for the local teams, reducing travel time and increasing visibility in town centres (currently, some of our local teams use the old Notting Hill Police Station building as a base).

So how does one contact the Police? Well, obviously dial 999 in an emergency. The number for less urgent matters is 101. This can be used to report a crime that has already happened, e.g. stolen property or anti-social behaviour. 101 can also be used to pass information to the Police. Crimes, fraud, or anti-social behaviour can also be reported through the Metropolitan Police website, although it is somewhat cumbersome to use, as it asks an awful lot of questions.

RBKC CYBER-ATTACK

As most of our readers will be aware, the borough was subject to a major cyber-attack on 24 November 2025. This has crippled the Council website. As we understand it, no data has been lost, but some may have been copied. From the point of view of the Ladbroke Association, the chief problem is that there has been no access (either for the public or for Council officers) to any of the planning documents on the website, nor can any new planning applications be processed. So the planning system has been brought to a standstill.

The latest news is that it will be some weeks before the system is up and running. When it is, there will be a huge backlog for the planning officers to deal with. We understand that they will deal first with outstanding planning applications, and will ensure that the statutory requirements for consultation are met – so there will still be a three-week deadline for sending in comments. Pre-app advice will, however, go to the end of the queue, although officers will try to be helpful over the phone.

RETIRING COUNCILLORS

The 7 May local elections are likely to bring sweeping changes of councillor in our wards as so many of our current councillors are standing down. In Pembridge ward, neither Joanna Gardner nor Dori Schmetterling are standing for re-election. In Norland David Lindsay is retiring. In Colville ward, of the three Labour Councillors elected at the last election, two have moved to other parties: Dahabo Isse has joined the Conservative Party and Toby Benton has joined the Greens. We understand that Dahabo Isse will not be standing again in Colville. However, Toby Benton will be standing for the Green Party. The third councillor elected for Labour last time round, Mo Bakhtiar is retiring. So there will be three new Labour candidates in Colville (although one is not so new – Monica Press, the longstanding Labour Councillor for Colville whom the local Labour party deselected at the last election, is again a candidate).

Rightmove has just listed
Kensington and Chelsea
as one of the 20 happiest places
to live in the UK.

FOXES

Most of us with gardens are used to periodic visits by foxes and are fairly relaxed about them, especially as they can usually be seen off easily by cats and any but the smallest dogs. Their screeching is a nuisance during the mating season, but that usually lasts only a couple of weeks. There are, however, fox enthusiasts who positively encourage them by feeding them. A recent article in the Financial Times reported on research which indicates that urban foxes rely on humans for about a third of their diet – including scraps, but above all food deliberately provided by humans.

At the other end of the spectrum, a resident of Ladbrooke Terrace developed a phobia of them and installed electric fencing to keep them out. This was, we are told, extremely effective, but it was done without planning permission. When retrospective permission was sought, the Planning Applications Committee refused to grant it on the grounds that electric fencing had no place in a conservation area.

There is no easy way of getting rid of urban foxes. They can in limited circumstances be shot or trapped and poisoned, and some pest controllers are said to catch unwanted foxes and then release them somewhere far away in the country. However, all the evidence suggests that new foxes will just move in to replace the previous occupants. There are various ways that they can be discouraged. There are ultrasonic devices, although there are questions over their effectiveness. Foxes do not like strong smells and there are commercial repellents, but they need to be constantly reapplied.

There is a good information page about foxes on the Council website – put “urban foxes RBKC” into google or <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/environment/environmental-health/urban-foxes> (not affected by the cyber-attack).



PORTOBELLO ROAD UPPER FLOORS

Most of the buildings in Portobello Road were built in the 1860s as purpose-built shops with two floors above for the shopkeepers and their families. Over the years, many of these upper floors became storage spaces. Now, we have come full circle and most of them are sought after residential apartments. Whereas before the upper floors were accessed through the shops, separate doors have now been installed so that the residents can go straight up to their flats and there is usually no connection between the shopkeeper and the people living above.

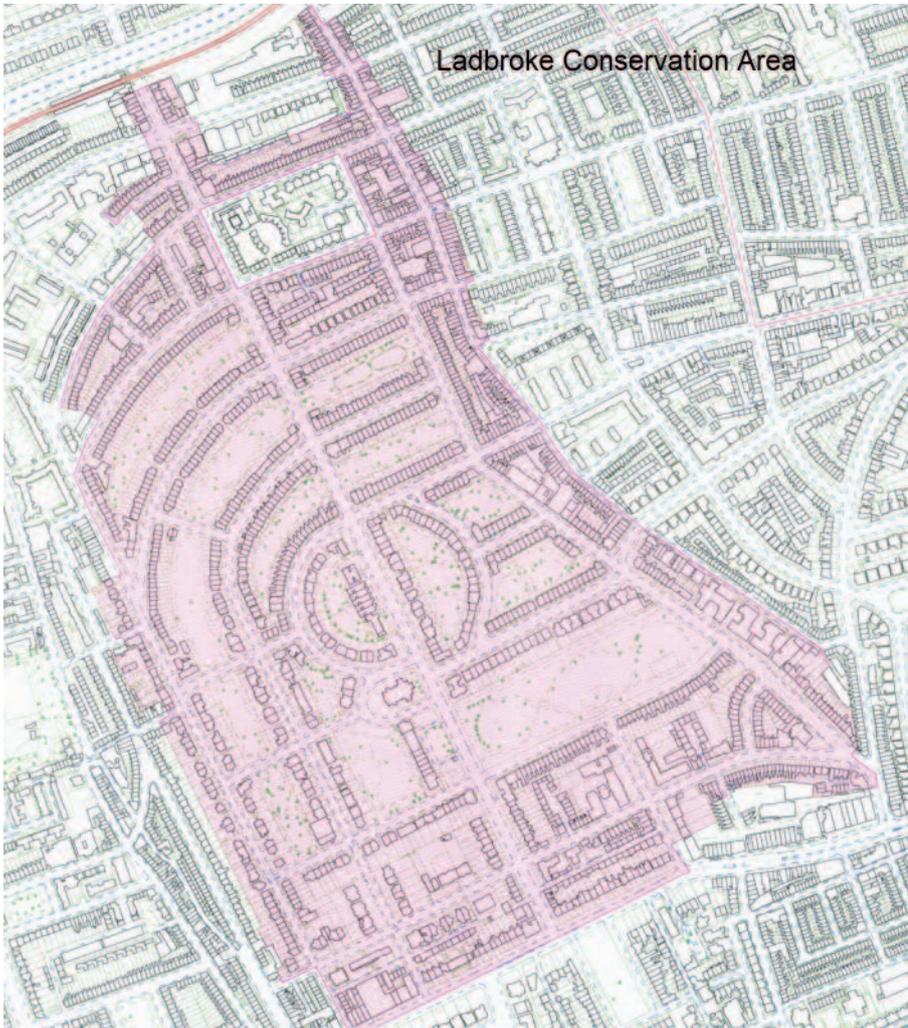
As was typical of the architecture of the time, the windows on the upper floors had stucco dressings around them. During the years of decay, most of this stucco work crumbled and many of the windows along Portobello Road just have flat white surrounds, showing where the stucco used to be. We are keen to encourage owners to restore the stucco decoration. We are happy to say that this has just been done at 240–242 Portobello Road, as could be seen from the before and after photographs below. We hope that other owners will follow suit.



240–242 Portobello Road in 2023.



240–242 Portobello Road 2026



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

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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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