

ECSRA HISTORY WALKS ON SUNDAY 6TH MARCH 2022

Escorted by Sue Lupton ECSRA Exec Committee

South Side of the Square going west to east

Langham Mansions - Jacobean revival style

Built in 1894-6 Langham Mansions has a French influence. It's a very handsome building outside with an elegant foyer. You can see the architects' initials on the portico, a common practice in those days.

It originally had a billiard room and a reading room / smoking room and a manual lift that a porter would operate. He would take you up by pulling on ropes. In the early days there was a kitchen in the basement that would feed the occupants. Many were professional gentlemen who had a main home out of town, so would be there from Monday to Thursday. There was a laundry service too.

There are five floors and a basement, and these days there are 42 flats. This building still has a porter today. The only one in Earl's Court Square.

For the mansion block's centenary, a pictorial book was put together about the building by the late Miss Deyes and Sue Lupton interviewed her for the newsletter at the time.

Douglas Eaton who we have recognised with the commemorative plaque on the building lived in Langham Mansions since 1953. When he moved into flat 7 there was a front door for his flat and a corridor that lead to another apartment. So those occupants would need to walk through his flat to get to theirs. They became the best of friends. No. 15 where elderly parents lived, was a small flat before it was converted, that had no real kitchen. This was in the corridor. To get to the bedroom, you would have to go through the sitting room. So many configurations before conversions were done in the 60's to organise today's layout.

The School St. Cuthbert with St. Matthias

This site had the high Anglican Church of St Matthias built in 1869-72.

Two Schools were built south of the church for infant and primary in 1873 but proved too small. The present school named St. Cuthbert with St. Matthias, was built in 1898-9 and a new wing added in 1977.

There were three terrace houses on the south corner facing onto Warwick Road which were bombed in WWII, along with the Church of St Matthias. The story Martin Lloyd-Elliot grew up with was that a V-1 flying bomb hit the church and it never reopened. This was demolished in 1958 and made space for the school caretaker's bungalow and garden built in 1962. It is now an open play area for school children and a children's centre which opened in 2009.

No. 69 was The Admiral Hotel, later Admiral House

I can't find any information earlier, but in 1984 the name of the building changed to the Admiral Hotel. it was painted sky blue and had red lettering. The hotel bought no. 12 Earl's Court Square from the Whitehouse hotel for staff accommodation. When the hotel was sold a couple of years later and converted into private flats, it got cut up by developers mercilessly. For example, the basement had three flats. Totally overdeveloped and it got very run down. The balcony was deemed unsafe at the turn of the 20th century, 22 years ago and had to be removed, leaving two column stumps. Then a survey showed the roadway on the eastern side could fall into the basement. They had strong management of the building and it had a happy outcome.

The Section 106 monies from the Nicholson Estates gave the Association £5,000 as a goodwill gesture for inconvenience caused by the redevelopment of Matière Place. This paid for the reinstatement of the balcony, portico and Corinthians to its original decorative style and features in 2002. (*Section 106 money is intended to be used for social and community projects.*)

Two Way Driving and Herringbone parking

The two-way driving around the garden was introduced to ease the traffic flow while the Matière Place development was underway. This stayed in place, but as it was difficult to park, ECSRA Executive committee pushed for the herringbone configuration, so that section became one way.

The Council kept saying no, but persistence paid off and in 2014 we effectively doubled the parking spaces in this section.

The ‘Dutch’ or ‘Flemish’ Houses on the south side of the Square

Jacobean Revival style was influenced by French and Flemish architecture

Half the big houses around the Square that had been built in the 1870's, were unoccupied 15 years later. The market had shifted, so smaller ones were built in the Flemish style.

We refer to these as the ‘Dutch houses.’ Built in 1888-1890.

There are 12 in number, all at first glance appear the same. But in detail they vary; for instance, some have square bay windows on the ground floor instead of *canted* bays on the ground and first floors; You will see there are different gables, depending on who built them. Numbers 30 to 38 have three stories above a basement, the topmost storey being with a mansard roof whereas numbers 40-52 have an attic storey within the gable. The roof lines are slightly different. Some have a small flat roof space and others have a hot water tank.

These very much smaller houses built by Edward Francis were far more successful in selling than elsewhere in the Square. Starting in 1888, they seem to have attracted occupants as soon as they were finished and had all been taken by 1895. The first person to buy into a house in this terrace was a stock broker - Frank Gielgud, father of Sir John Gielgud. He lived at No 36 from 1890 until 1904. Unlike most of his peers, this builder, John Douglas, did not become bankrupt – he had no need to, he was successful!

There are sunken gardens at the back 18 x 12 ft. a patio and a second smaller three ft. patio around the back of the building. They don't get a lot of sun, but nice outdoor space.

After the War the area was very run down, many of the houses sat empty for years. In 1970's conversions into flats were done. Typically, 5 per house.

No. 42 was burned down by squatters in 1967, there is a number missing above the front door. It was seen first-hand that a fireman's jet knocked it off and into the street. This building sat for nearly ten years until a Mrs Bryson next door in No. 40 died and a housing trust bought it along with 42 next door. The housing trust also bought No's. 46 - 52 for affordable housing and conversions into the flats were done in 1976. The central stairs of No's 40 – 42 were taken away and lateral flats built from left to right. They did such a bad job of the conversions, destroying beautiful internal features of these elegant buildings, that in 1989 they were all listed Grade II by the Greater London Council.

Besides No. 52, who did their ‘right to buy in the 1990's No's 40 - 42 and 46 – 48 are owned by Octavia Housing Association. The ECSRA Executive Committee used the Matière Place ‘money pot’ to pay for the steps as they were all broken up. It would have been near impossible for a housing association to upgrade a Grade II listed building.

Sadly, Octavia Housing say ‘it's not our place to gentrify our properties.’

A wonderful character lived in No. 32, she was a white Russian, who escaped as a child in 1917. She had acrophobia and never left the house in thirty years. No. 36 was owned by an eccentric character called Mrs Finley, who ran it as an old people home.

In 38, Sheila Lloyd-Elliott another wonderful character lived from the 1960's, her son Martin, only sold the place some five years ago. Sheila was on the garden committee from inception and oversaw the neighbourhood watch for some 15 years. Sheila had upwards of 20 co-ordinators, volunteering with her. One of the largest organisations of its kind in the area. She couldn't get anyone to relieve her, so she stuck tenaciously to the post, with a great view of the Square from her front window and front steps where she sat on good weather days till she died. Sheila had a smile that was very welcoming, and people would pass and chat to her on the front steps. She tried to know everyone in the Square.

Today, No's. 34, 36 and 38 are restored to a full house. Look through the windows and you will still see the moulded castings, marble Adams' fireplaces and wood panelling.

There is Rich Lane at the back of the houses. This used to have access for all the houses, but with basement flat conversions, this has closed for exiting via the back access.

Some of the houses have painted sections white. This is 'a no' in a conservation area and one can get terracotta paint to restore this kind of thing now.

The Wetherby Mansions – Victorian Cathedral architecture.

Built in 1892-4 the Wetherby Mansions were left out of the conservation area initially, but as the gradual re-approval of the Victorian Cathedral architecture was getting more historical, it had survived the War, and was worth preserving, it became part of the ECSRA Conservation area in 1997.

Wetherby Mansions is formed of five separate blocks in the south-east arm of the Square which was made a cul-de-sac in 2004.

Four of the Mansion blocks were built at the same time, by different builders, but 13 – 35 in the centre, wasn't built till 1895 – 97, so there was a gap in the middle for a few years. This and The Richmond Mansions were developed at the same time. So there was a hole for a few years. The colour of the buildings is known as 'London Red.' There are nice Terracotta mouldings featured on each building.

You can see that one side has a little garden and the other side directly onto the street. The railings with the finials on top were part of the design of the time.

37 – 59 Wetherby Mansions

This block was built with 12 lateral flats, front to back on both sides with a lightwell in between. They are 2,300Sq Ft. The basement flats were converted into two in the 1970's and Frasier the 'live in' porter was asked to leave. We have arguably the longest living person in Earl's Court Square still in this block.

No children were allowed to live in the block, but Julie Cooper's father who owned 18 Earl's Court Square made sure his daughter Julia Cooper, a trained concert pianist and granddaughter Francis dressed beautifully for the interview. Frances who aged three at the time was a sensible little girl, presented well so they were allowed to live in 45. Since WWII no one had lived in no. 45 for many years, and it was full of mildew. The estate agent was so mortified at the state of the place, he gave Julie Cooper £100 to do it up.

When Frasier the porter left, squatters had a field day. It was the transvestites that adopted a ground floor flat in this block. They would hang out at the Bolton pub by day, and by night squatted in the flat. Tracey (who still lives here) and Lisa, younger sisters of Francis, thought they were the most glamorous people they had ever seen, fully made up, colourful and wore many diamonds, the two of them plus Mandy a friend (whose parents still live in Richmond Mansions today) were totally fascinated and would make lots of excuses to pop down and chat to them. Squatting had become such a problem that a security firm was brought in with Alsatian dogs to be on watch. They broke one of the panes of glass in the door of a

ground floor flat so they could see from that vantage point, who was going in and out for over a year until there was order in the block.

Margo Boyd lived here from the 1950's. She played Mrs Pemberton in the Archers for years till her death in fact well into her 90's, and her very glamorous mother lived there too in her day. Her father started the Pickford's Removals business. Lotti Henley lived in flat 51 from 1964 till her death a year ago, her husband was MI5 and Lotti a translator with them. Lotti started the charity Plan Zheroes, that has prevented hundreds of tonnes of excess food from going to landfill. Lotti was a London Leader in 2011. Fuad Rouhani who we have celebrated with a commemorative plaque in 2021 was here in the 1990's.

The freeholders aim to keep the flats whole. None of the other Wetherby Mansions have managed to do this.

13 – 35 Wetherby Mansions

This had brick plinth stumps at its entrance. It was decided in the 1990's to add ball finials to them. The ball diameters were too small, but they have been replaced with the right dimensions.

The flats in this block have been converted and there are now two on each side of the central 'lightwell' with one exception where a resident has kept the full-length flat front to back. This is where Duggie Fields the 'pop artist' lived since 1968 till his passing a year ago and where Syd Barrett of Pink Floyd shared with him too for a while. Rosamond Pike lived here, and her parents still do. Her mother a classical violinist.

A – L Wetherby Mansions

This is the only block without a lift. It has lovely mosaic flooring (as do the others) and a beautiful stained glass feature covering the whole entrance as you go inside. This building was a brothel in its heydays of the 60's. Today it's a beautifully kept building.

A - L own the alleyway down the side of the building. It did have a wooden gate that passed its 'sell- by date', and was replaced by Metal gates, with a gold decoration, around 2011. This can now be locked to prevent the dumping ground it used to be.

2 – 24 and 26 – 48 Wetherby Mansions

These purpose-built apartment blocks have gone through conversions and the flats split into two in the 50's and 60's. I have no insights into the lives of people who lived in these, but we do have some very long-term residents of some 40 years in the 26 – 48 Wetherby Mansions block. Cathy Burnaby-Atkins being one of them. No 2- 24 had the original Victorian step to their frontage replaced, as the concrete was cracked and as a result the steel structure below wasn't sound. A specialist restoration company corrected all this and laid new mosaics reproducing the original 'fan' design in 2009.

Cul-de-sac in the Southeast arm

This section was closed off in 2004. The Bollards were painted black with the Council's monogram in gold. Rodney Brangwyn, the Chairman of the RA for 12 years, lobbied for this closure as it was a rat-run between the Earl's Court Road and Warwick Road. Lorries would go round and round the Square looking for parking to drop off their goods.

Now the peace and quiet of this area has been enhanced with the introduction of the planters by ECSRA which act as a deterrent to motor bikes, E scooters and bicycles.

Herbert Court Mansions

Is a development on the south side, built before the Wetherby Mansions in 1891-2. It has six apartments. The top one has arguably the best view in the Square. This building has won an award for beautiful architecture.

Farnell Mews

The mews was built around 1880, to support the houses for Farnell Road, but the houses which were planned to line the road, were never started. The road was to be an extension of Kempsford Gardens and run to join Rich Lane. But there was a complete change of plan. The original cobbles are preserved and there are 10 houses and one within and at the back of no. 26 Earl's Court Square.

Garry Glitter lived in this Mews, there was an artist studio, a house full of 'roadies' and the properties all had garages, with flats above. Over time it has been gentrified and the garages have been incorporated into living space.

One of the long-term residents Mike Laslett – O'Brian who was 'a roadie' for 25 years and drove over 5,000 gigs, knew and worked for many of the musicians. He knew some notables performing at the Troubadour like Dylan, Led Zeplin, Pink Floyd, the Stones. His mother Rhuane Laslett started the Notting Hill Festival and is recognised as sowing the seeds of what became the Notting Hill Carnival. When he moved in some 30 years ago, he remembers there was still a working garage on the corner.

No. 9 in the mews was elegantly restored in 2015. It was a workshop thirty years ago and when bought, they put another story onto it. It took a long time to get planning permission, as they had to do 'party wall agreements with Herbert Court Mansions and 26 - 48 Wetherby Mansions.

Snippets

The Earl's Court underground was a dairy farm. The Cemetery was way outside in a field and they tried to make it grand.

The Square Garden

The garden had no railings, they were removed for the war effort, and some areas had wire. It was a dumping ground for rubbish. There were effectively two lawns. Days when Chelsea was playing football, the garden had visitors who would bring drinks and start their own game up.

Kevin Colgan tells me there was a path diagonally across the garden for some time. The garden always seemed to have 'big trees.' In the big storm of 1987, one huge one came down.

Merging flats

In the Mansion blocks, one can't reinstate the flats into one anymore as it reduces the housing stock in RBKC.

Sue Lupton

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