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Knightsbridge Green Area

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CHAPTER IV

Knightsbridge Green Area

Redevelopment after the Second World War robbed the Knightsbridge Green area of much of its character, substituting soulless large commercial buildings for what had been a varied mixture of mostly Victorian development (figs 22, 27). Two features remain essentially intact: the narrow passageway of Knightsbridge Green, and the enormous bulk of Park Mansions at Scotch Corner – the junction of Knightsbridge and Brompton Road. But Knightsbridge west of Park Mansions has lost its 'high street' bustle, and the seedy lodging-house quarter of Raphael Street, obscurely placed behind the main-road shops, restaurants, hotels and mansion flats of pre-war days, has been entirely destroyed. Also vanished is Tattersalls' horse-mart, one of Knightsbridge's most celebrated institutions and, with its classical-style gateway, a distinctive architectural presence on the Green.

The oldest building hereabouts is the former All Saints' School of 1875, on the north side of the Green.



downership before development

Early development in this area was concentrated along the main Kensington road (known here as the High Road) and at Knightsbridge Green itself. However, a rather fragmented landownership (fig. 21) did not encourage a very orderly or ambitious pattern of building. In the early eighteenth century Philip Moreau acquired the greater part of the land around the Green (and more extensive ground further west), but portions remained in other hands, and in any case Moreau's estate was broken up in 1759. By that time much of the area was becoming fairly densely built over, with rows of small houses filling up gaps in the frontages to the roads and the Green. However, it was not until the construction of Raphael Street from 1844 that it began to take on a distinctly urban character. Successive redevelopments have entirely transformed the scale of building since then, and few of the old property boundaries are still apparent today.

The most important line to survive is along the west side of the present-day Knightsbridge Green, dividing the historical Green – the triangle of manorial land between the two main roads, belonging formerly to Westminster Abbey – from the variously owned land to the west.

These various landholdings included a piece of ground belonging from 1719 to the Trevor family, from whose larger estate further west it was separated by a narrow strip. [\(fn. 1\)](#) The development of this ground (latterly occupied by Albert Gate Mansions and Prince's Club, its boundaries now obliterated by redevelopment) was tied up with that of the High Road generally and its history is therefore given here rather than in the chapter describing the main Trevor estate.

Philip Moreau (1656–1733) belonged to a wealthy Huguenot merchant family from Picardy, and was at the centre of a small enclave of French *émigrés* settled in Knightsbridge in the early eighteenth century. Among them was the surgeon and anatomist Paul Buisnière (or Bussière), who lived for more than twenty years until his death in 1739 in a house north of the Moreaus' own residence on the west side of Knightsbridge Green. A favourite of the royal family, Buisnière attended Queen Caroline during her last illness. His house was later owned by another *émigré*, John Larpent the elder, chief clerk in the Foreign Office. [\(fn. 2\)](#)

The Moreau estate originated as the Knightsbridge portions of a hundred-acre landholding, mostly in Kensington and Chelsea, belonging to Sir William Blake but dispersed after his death in 1630. [\(fn. 3\)](#) Moreau first acquired, in 1705, a mansion house which had been part of Blake's property. This stood just to the west of the Green at its southern end. In 1718 he obtained the rest of the former Blake ground in Knightsbridge: a large area along the north side of the Brompton road, extending northwards to include the Rose and Crown inn fronting the High Road, and the future site of Montpelier Square, together with a detached piece of land now covered by parts of Princes Gate and Ennismore Gardens. [\(fn. 4\)](#)

Over the next few years Moreau completed his local acquisitions by obtaining the tenure of most of the manorial land belonging to Westminster Abbey at the junction of the Kensington and Brompton roads, including an inn, then called the Sun, forerunner of the present-day Paxton's Head. Middle Row (North), a terrace fronting the Kensington road, was built there [y afterwards. \(fn. 5\)](#)

In 1744 Philip Moreau's son and heir, Captain James Philip Moreau, negotiated an agreement with the neighbouring landowner Arthur Trevor, guaranteeing the maintenance of a driftway (eventually to become Lancelot Place) for the use of Moreau's tenants between the Brompton road and the Rose and Crown. From Captain Moreau, who rebuilt the family house at the Green, the estate eventually descended to Charles Frederick Moreau, his grandson, who put it up for auction in several lots in 1759. (fn. 6).

The site of the Moreaus' house and garden, latterly occupied by Tattersalls' horse and carriage mart, retained its separate identity until redevelopment in the 1950s. Dr Buissière's old house, eventually to become the Pakenham Tavern, and the more extensive Rose and Crown property, each passed into separate ownership at the sale, but were eventually brought back together as part of the estate of the gunmaker Durs Egg. The ground south of the Moreaus' house (or Grosvenor House, as it became), fronting the Brompton road, was mostly built up in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Plate 5c).



Figure 21:

Landownership in central Knightsbridge in the first half of the eighteenth century

Middle Row and the Sun inn property also passed into separate ownerships at the sale, but were later reunited and ultimately redeveloped as Park Mansions.

The remaining portion of Moreau land near the Green was the World's End or Fulham Bridge inn, fronting the Brompton road on the plot between the Moreaus' garden and the driftway. The inn

itself was subsequently rebuilt, and houses and shops erected along the Brompton road frontage. The northern part of this deep plot was developed after the Moreau sale as a mews (Fulham Bridge Yard, later Tullett Place) with a ride for exercising and showing horses. In the 1830s houses were built on the east side, but extensive stabling remained. [\(fn. 8\)](#) The mews and houses were largely redeveloped with garaging before the Second World War. This site also lost its separate identity as a result of post-war redevelopment.

Besides the land belonging to the Moreaus and Westminster Abbey, there was one more estate in immediate proximity to the Green in the eighteenth century. This consisted of an irregularly shaped plot fronting the Kensington road (E on fig. 21), extending from the west side of the Green to the boundaries of the Rose and Crown property and the gardens of Dr Buisnière and the Moreaus. On it stood a house of 1688 and various small houses and outbuildings. By 1704 the ground belonged to Martin Cawfield Basil, a Lincoln's Inn barrister with estates in Ireland and Buckinghamshire, after whose death in 1735 it was partly redeveloped. [\(fn. 9\)](#) Basil's estate was later acquired by Durs Egg.

Durs Egg's estate, through which Raphael Street was ultimately to be carved, was assembled by him in 1799–1803 and amounted to about four acres. As well as Basil's old property, it consisted of the Rose and Crown and its grounds extending to the driftway, and Dr Buisnière's house, where Egg lived until his death. [\(fn. 10\)](#)

A German-Swiss by birth, Durs Egg was one of the finest gunsmiths in England, patronized by the royal family. But his latter years were clouded by mental illness, litigation and family strife. He took against his children, and towards the end of his life carried loaded pistols, believing 'all those that approached him had designs upon his life'. When he died in 1831, at the age of 82, he left a will which would have largely disinherited his family. This was successfully contested on the grounds of his insanity, but the Knightsbridge Green estate, encumbered by a £5,000 mortgage, was not disposed of for several years. A purchase agreement with William Nokes of Denton Court, Kent, made in 1833, ultimately fell through, apparently because of remaining uncertainty over the title to the property. Egg's estate was eventually sold in 1838 to Lewis Raphael of Hendon, who initiated its partial redevelopment. [\(fn. 11\)](#)

Footnotes

- [1](#). WA, WAM 52252: MDR 1719/1/181; 1719/5/202–4.
- [2](#). RB: WCA, Acc. 1188, bundle II: KLS, MS 3471: *DNB*.
- [3](#). The histories of the Blake and Moreau estates generally are given in *Survey of London*, vol.xxxviii, 1975, Chapter 1, and vol.XLI, 1983, Chapter III.
- [4](#). KLS, MS 3799: List of possessions of Sir William Blake at his death, in extra-illustrated copy of Thomas Faulkner, *History and Antiquities of Kensington*, 1820, in BL (press mark L.R. 271.c.3), b/w pp.440–1: LMA, C/96/47.
- [5](#). WA, Church Commissioners' Records, Box 441, Deed 292078, 11 March 1719/20; Register Book XXXI, ff.128v–129: MDR 1724/4/260; 1726/6/175.
- [6](#). KLS, MS 3799: WCA, Acc. 1188, bundle II. *Survey of London*, vol.XLI, 1983, p.34.

- [8](#). MDR 1760/2/153–5; 1762/3/259–61; 1778/2/328; 1793/3/226; 1793/3/229–31; 1795/3/300: RB.
- [9](#). KLS, MSS 3788, 3729–35: information provided by Victor Belcher.
- [10](#). KLS, MSS 3736–7, 3748–50, 3775–7.
- [11](#). MDR 1842/1/123–4: Claude Blair, 'The Egg Family Part 1', in *The Journal of the Arms and Armour Society*, vol.VII, nos 9–10, March–June 1973, pp.326–7.

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Knightsbridge Green Area: Scotch Corner and the High Road

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Scotch Corner and the High Road

The High Road

Until 1903, the properties along the south side of Knightsbridge between Brompton Road and Trevor Street were mostly numbered as part of the High Road, sometimes known as the High Street. At the east end, on the Brompton Road corner, a terrace of houses, then recently replaced by Park Mansions, had been separately numbered under the name Middle Row, or Middle Row North, since its construction in the 1720s (fig. 22). ([fn. 3](#)) At the other end of the road, on the corner of Trevor Street, the last few houses formed the eastern half of Trevor

Terrace, built in the early nineteenth century (see page 97). When the old names were abolished and the premises all renumbered as part of Knightsbridge, High Road was coming to the end of a period of piecemeal redevelopment, begun in the 1870s, which transformed the character of this part of Knightsbridge, socially and commercially as well as architecturally.

By the 1860s, the High Road had become one of the least salubrious parts of Knightsbridge, a centre for low pleasures in sharp contrast to the increasingly select character of the district in general. From Knightsbridge Green all along the High Road was 'a succession of music-halls, taverns, beer-stores, oyster saloons, & cheap tobacconists', that would have been 'a disgrace to any portion of London', the nightly meeting-place of disorderly men and women whose behaviour made the area 'quite as unseemly as the Haymarket'. [\(fn. 4\)](#) Not three hundred yards long, the south side of the High Road accommodated five public houses, two or three of them with purpose-built music-halls attached, while on the north side there was a concentration of shops, pubs and lodging-houses adjoining Knightsbridge Barracks in and around Park Place and Mills's Buildings.

The High Road's rambunctious nocturnal character stemmed naturally enough from the combined presence of several old inns and the cavalry barracks. The Marquis of Granby, the immediate precursor of the present-day Paxton's Head, was one of the oldest-established of these inns, dating back at least as far as 1632, when it was called the King's Arms – it was later known as the Golden Lion, the Red Lion and the Sun. [\(fn. 5\)](#) Perhaps the earliest was the Rose and Crown, formerly the Rose, a few doors along at No. 16 High Road, said in the 1850s to have been licensed more than 300 years. This establishment, reputedly used as quarters by Cromwell's troops, was called the Oliver Cromwell in the 1840s. [\(fn. 6\)](#) Further west, the King's Head or Old King's Head, No. 24 High Road, was certainly in existence by the 1790s. [\(fn. 7\)](#) Both the Rising Sun at No. 26, and the Trevor Arms in Trevor Terrace, had opened comparatively recently, the former about 1830, and the latter in 1844. [\(fn. 8\)](#)

A harbinger of things to come was Mr Neat's concert room at the Old King's Head, opened by about 1840 and conducted by Mr Paulyneo, manager or proprietor of several London concert rooms and 'himself a very good comic singer'. [\(fn. 9\)](#)

In 1849 residents of High Row, Lowndes Terrace, Trevor Terrace, Rutland Gate and elsewhere petitioned against the granting of music and dancing licences to various public houses in the district, including the Marquis of Granby, Rose and Crown, King's Head and Rising Sun, on the grounds that 'if such licences were granted immorality of all kinds in the neighbourhood already greatly abounding owing to its close proximity to the Barracks would be vastly increased'. [\(fn. 10\)](#) They referred to police action the previous year to put a stop to unlicensed music and dancing carried on in some of these pubs. But local opposition notwithstanding, the High Road enjoyed a musical heyday through the 1850s and '60s, echoes of which were still to be heard in the late 1880s.

The Rose and Crown was licensed for music and dancing from 1852 to 1876, and the King's from 1851 until 1858. [\(fn. 11\)](#) The Sun Music Hall began as a concert room built at the

back of the Rising Sun in 1851, and was rebuilt on a grander scale in the 1860s. At the rear of the Trevor Arms, the Trevor Music Hall was first licensed in 1854.

The High Road's popularity as a place of entertainment in early to mid-Victorian days does not seem to have done much to improve its general appearance, nor to have resulted in any significant rebuilding along the road frontage. Middle Row in the 1850s was 'a medley of very inferior houses' and the buildings further along were 'generally of a mean description'. [\(fn. 12\)](#). The new concert halls were obscurely placed, at the back of narrow sites.

Probably the oldest structure at this time was the Rose and Crown, which bore the date 1679, and had timberbuilt galleries at the rear, overlooking a spacious stableyard (Plate 48a). [\(fn. 13\)](#). The building then occupied as the Rising Sun was also, apparently, of seventeenth-century date. Another old house, between the Rising Sun and the King's Head, had been pulled down about 1801 and a row of three houses built on the site. [\(fn. 14\)](#).

Chatham House, No. 13A High Road, had been built in 1688 on the site of a tavern called the Grave Maurice. Adjoining Chatham House at Nos 12 and 13 was a pair of houses built in 1736–7 along with a row of small houses behind on the west side of Knightsbridge Green. [\(fn. 15\)](#). A photograph of c. 1904 shows Nos 12 and 13 as plain, rendered houses of three storeys, two windows wide, both in a state of some dilapidation. [\(fn. 16\)](#). They were then the last-surviving old buildings in the High Road.

Redevelopment of the High Road got under way in the mid-1870s, shortly before the rebuilding of the barracks and the widening of the roadway at that point. The Rose and Crown and the adjoining houses, west of Chatham House, were pulled down and rebuilt in 1874–5 on a much larger scale. The new buildings, six storeys high, were designed by Henry Pafoot Foster, architect, and erected by Thomas Elkington of Golden Lane. The Rose and Crown itself was re-created as the Rose and Crown Coffee Palace, later a 'temperance hotel'; it was 'practically rebuilt' in 1917 as the Royal Park Hotel. [\(fn. 17\)](#).



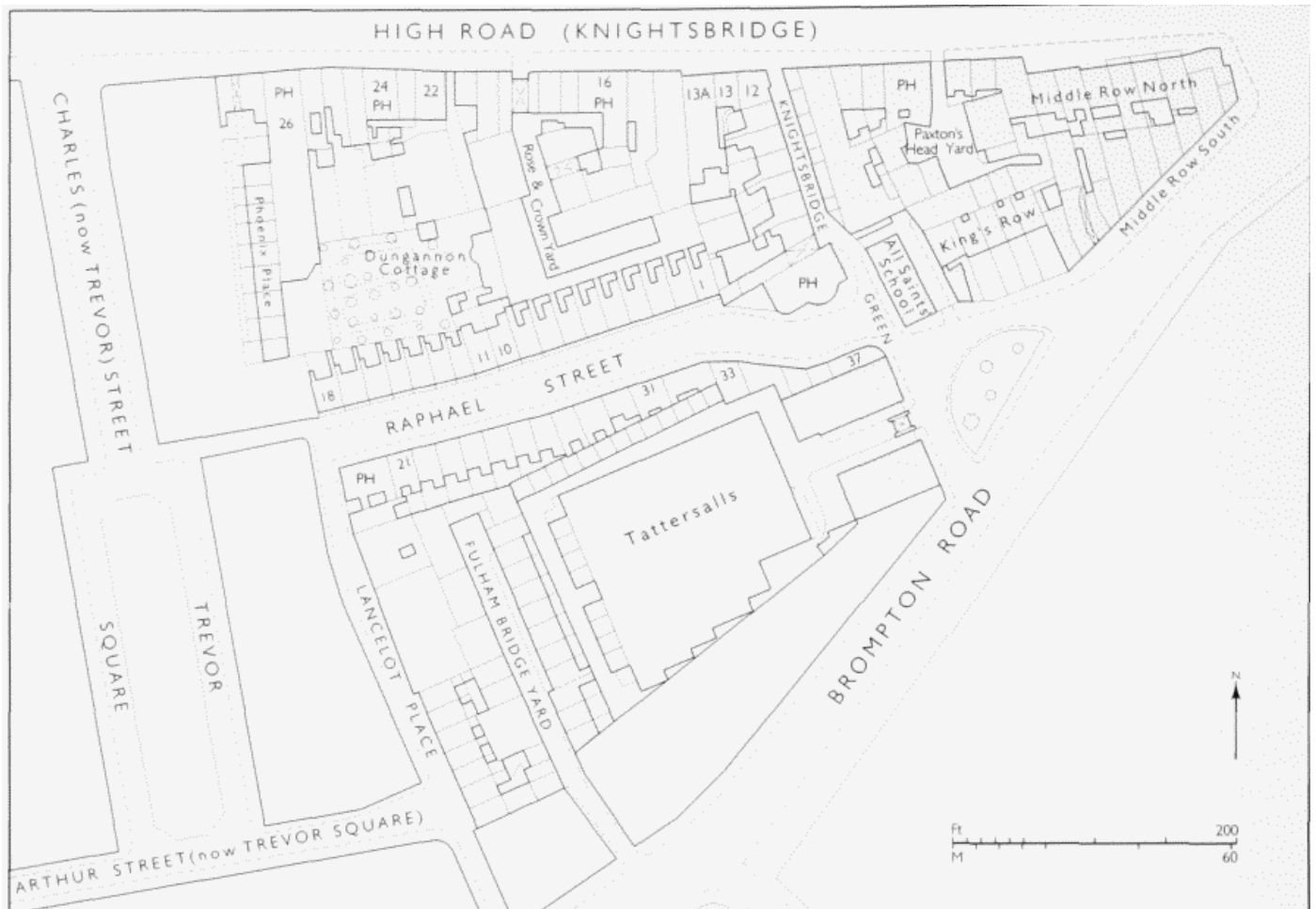


Figure 22:

Knightsbridge Green area in the mid-1860s

In 1876 Chatham House was rebuilt for Captain Charles Mercier, an artist who resided in High Row. The new Chatham House was designed by the architect Alexander Payne and constructed by Robert Lacy of Clapham. A curious building with a shaped gable of eccentric design on the street front, it apparently incorporated a top-lit studio for Captain Mercier on the second floor. Though considerably loftier than the old houses next door at Nos 12 and 13 High Road, it was nevertheless out of scale with redevelopment in the High Road generally. Foster's buildings dwarfed it, as in time did Park Mansions, on the other side of Knightsbridge Green. [\(fn. 18\)](#).

Gradually, the whole of the High Road was pulled down and largely replaced by mansion flats and shops, one of the last parts to go being the new Chatham House itself. Together with its decrepit neighbours, Chatham House was demolished a few years before the First World War for the building of the Knightsbridge Palace (later Normandie) Hotel.

Not all redevelopment, however, was of this sort, and the High Road continued to provide places of public amusement. In the 1880s Humphreys' Hall, which evolved from a former roller-skating rink on land behind the King's Head, became an important venue for high-class exhibitions and bazaars, including the famous Japanese Village, before being redeveloped as the exclusive sports centre Prince's Club.

In general, shops, restaurants, tea-rooms, hotels and residential apartments characterized the High Road until the Second World War, and a little of this character remains at the east

end today. Rutland Yard, formerly the stable-yard of the Rose and Crown, continued to be used for stabling into the twentieth century. It was latterly converted for warehousing and garaging before being obliterated in the 1950s, along with much of the rest of the High Road, for the building of Mercury House. Nos 171 and 173, part of H. P. Foster's 1870s rebuilding, survived, at least in part, into the 1990s.

The Marquis of Granby was rebuilt or remodelled in 1851 and renamed the Paxton's Head, in honour of the designer of the Crystal Palace: [\(fn. 19\)](#) it was again rebuilt in the early 1900s as part of the Park Mansions development. It is the only public house in Knightsbridge which originated as a village inn.

Statue of Lord Strathnairn (removed)

As long ago as 1836 the intersection of the Kensington and Brompton roads had been identified as an eligible spot for a public monument, [\(fn. 20\)](#) but it was not until 1895 that one was erected, and then the site was a substitute for the more prestigious one originally intended.

Hugh Rose, Field Marshal Lord Strathnairn, one of the chief suppressors of the Indian Mutiny, died in 1885 at the age of 84, and a few years later steps were taken to provide a public memorial. There was some suggestion that this should take the form of funding for some useful purpose connected with the Army, and, chairing a meeting to inaugurate the project in May 1890, the Duke of Cambridge remarked that statues were 'very expensive and not always good'. However, this idea was set aside. During that summer some £2,700 was raised in subscriptions, including 50 guineas from the Prince of Wales, and later in the year the sculptor E. Onslow Ford was commissioned to design an equestrian statue. It was hoped this would stand in Whitehall between the Horse Guards and the Admiralty. Official sanction was not forthcoming, and in due course the memorial committee settled for the Brompton Road corner site offered by Westminster Vestry. [\(fn. 21\)](#)

Ford's statue, showing Strathnairn in uniform with the helmet prescribed for Indian service, was unveiled by the Duke of Grafton on 19 June 1895 (Plates 11, 37a, 38a). It was cast by G. Broad & Son, using bronze from guns taken in 1858 by the Central India Field Force (under Strathnairn's command) and presented by the Indian Government. The Portland-stone pedestal bore panels with the names of the Field Marshal's principal battles. Much gilding was used on both horse and rider, which, in the words of the *Builder*, 'though it may be objected to as too realistic, certainly gives a better decorative effect, in London atmosphere, than a bronze statue in its ordinary state'. [\(fn. 22\)](#)

Taken down in 1931, during work on a new subway for Knightsbridge underground station, the monument languished in storage until 1964, when Westminster Council decided to give it away on condition of reasonable public access. The successful bidder was Vernon E. Northcott, on whose estate at Foley Manor in Liphook, Hampshire, it still stands. [\(fn. 23\)](#)

Park Mansions

The triangle east of Knightsbridge Green is largely occupied by Park Mansions, a block of flats and shops erected in 1897–1902. The site was assembled in 1887–90 by Frederick Yeats Edwards of Hampstead and Robert Clarke Edwards, an architect then in practice in Norfolk Street, Strand – presumably with an eye to complete redevelopment. Some of the old buildings on the corner of Brompton Road and Knightsbridge were pulled down at this time. Whatever plans the Edwardses had came to nothing, and the property – 'long disfigured by unsightly hoardings and sheds of corrugated iron' – was acquired in 1897–8 by Abram or Abraham Kellett, a contractor of Castle Bar, Ealing and Old Oak Wharf, Willesden. [\(fn. 24\)](#).

Kellett, his architect G. D. Martin, and their solicitor were originally to have undertaken the development through a specially formed company, backed by the lightopera impresario and property developer Richard D'Oyly Carte. However, this scheme seems to have fallen through, possibly because of Carte's illness early in 1897, and at least part of the project was financed by a loan to Kellett from the Bradford Commercial Joint Stock Bank, whose successor, the Knightsbridge and Bradford Estate Company Ltd, subsequently owned Park Mansions until its dissolution in the 1930s. [\(fn. 25\)](#).

The site was developed in two phases: the eastern corner in 1897–8, and the western part in 1900–2. The Paxton's Head public house was rebuilt as part of the western section. Between the two parts was built the Park Mansions Arcade, with a central octagon under a glazed cupola. The arcade was originally to have had an entrance on Knightsbridge Green, as well as on Knightsbridge and Brompton Road, but this was abandoned, along with a proposed third section on the site of All Saints' School – a plan to which the tooting of the brickwork on the south-west corner of the mansions still testifies. The old school building, however, was subsequently incorporated into the Park Mansions premises. [\(fn. 26\)](#).

The completed Park Mansions provided space for nearly forty shops, with a mezzanine for showrooms and basement stores. Well over a hundred flats of one and two bedrooms, most with an additional servant's room, were arranged on the six upper floors (fig. 23). The smaller suites, without kitchens, were intended for bachelors and clubmen, for whom a service room and a large kitchen 'fitted with every requisite' were situated on the top floor. [\(fn. 27\)](#) Among the first residents were numerous military men, a sprinkling of peers and gentlemen, and many 'Misses'. The eighteen apartments at Nos 159 and 161 Knightsbridge (on the corner of Knightsbridge Green) were known as 'Hyde Park Chambers': in the 1960s these were converted into the Knightsbridge Green Hotel.



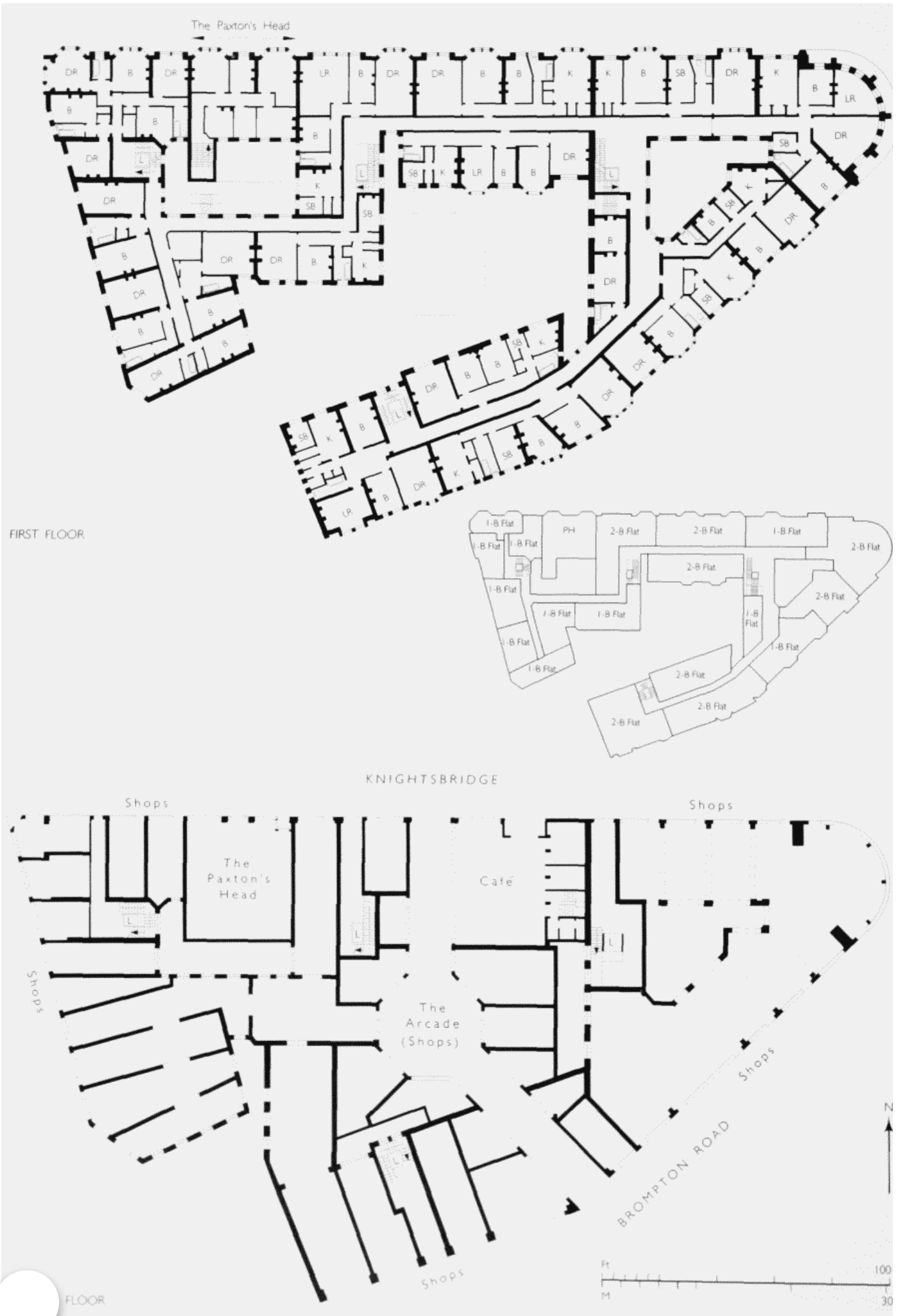


Figure 23:

(opposite). Park Mansions, ground- and first-floor plans as originally designed by G. D. Martin, c. 1897, and diagram showing arrangement of flats. The design was modified before construction, particularly by the addition of prominent corner bay windows on the first floor

G. D. Martin dealt pragmatically with the architectural and commercial requirements of the development, producing a conventionally ornamental edifice, faced in redbrick and Bath stone, with red granite pilasters, but with an abundance of glass in the ground-floor shopfronts (Plates 36b, 37a). This necessary concession to the needs of the retail trade inevitably affronted the purists, among them a correspondent to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Percy A. Johnson:

Where there should be stone, there is glass; where strength is expected, there is weakness, where lightness, an overpowering weight ... The feeling of insecurity is paramount; it is as if a mammoth were seen to be reposing on cucumber-frames. [\(fn. 28\)](#).

The first commercial tenant was the clothing firm of Gardiner & Company Ltd, which took the prime corner site at Nos 2–8 Brompton Road for its Scotch House shop, which has given the informal name Scotch Corner to the junction of Knightsbridge and Brompton Road. Among the other early business occupants were East India merchants Cursetji & Cooverji, a hat manufacturer, an art dealer, and several automobile companies. The Scotch House was modernized in 1958 with a front in the Festival of Britain style, by Charles Baker & Company Ltd of Edmonton. [\(fn. 29\)](#).

Park Mansions Arcade (latterly Knight's Arcade) was closed in the early 1990s. The octagon and southern arm have now been incorporated into the Jaeger shop on Brompton Road; the northern portion has been subsumed into the Isola restaurant on Knightsbridge.

Former Normandie Hotel, Nos 163–169 Knightsbridge

The Normandie was built as the Knightsbridge Palace Hotel in 1910–11 for the Land and Leasehold Securities Company Ltd, and leased to the West End Hotel Syndicate Ltd, which ran several London hotels. The contractors were E. G. and F. C. Simpson of Chandos Street, trading as the General Building Company. [\(fn. 30\)](#).

The hotel was designed by the Viennese-born architect Paul Hoffmann, a specialist in large office and apartment blocks, and, appropriately for Knightsbridge with its equestrian traditions, a well-known owner of hackney and show horses. [\(fn. 31\)](#) According to an early report, the building was to have been faced in 'solid English granite', but in the event red brick with stone dressings was used. The style has some flavour of Edwardian Baroque (Plate 50d). Suites of rooms for guests were arranged around a central core containing a lift and stairs, with bay-windowed sittingrooms overlooking Knightsbridge. The principal public rooms (Plate 51) were fairly richly decorated: a large dining-room with a rather overbearing Jacobethan ceiling, a colonial-looking ground-floor lounge, and in the basement a 'charming' ballroom for up to 300 dancers, decorated in rose-pink and white. Private rooms, though 'furnished in excellent style', were unpretentious. [\(fn. 32\)](#).

In 1937 the Knightsbridge Hotel ('Palace' having been dropped by 1918) was renamed the Normandie. It closed c.1977 and the upper floors were then converted to apartments for 'holiday' lets. Since 1987 the building has been awaiting redevelopment. [\(fn. 33\)](#).

Humphreys' Hall and Albert Gate Mansions (demolished)

Humphreys' Hall and Albert Gate Mansions occupied the small detached eastern portion of the Trevor estate, the mansions later expanding into the freeholds on either side. The ground was previously occupied by old houses and shops along the High Road, including the King's Head public house at No. 24, and by Dungannon Cottage (named after one of the Trevor family titles), which stood in a large garden at the rear of the High Road buildings (fig. 22).

Humphreys' Hall became well known to the late-Victorian public as the venue for a series of exhibitions: the longest-running and most remarkable of these was the Japanese Native Village of 1885–7 (see below); others included a War Exhibition, the Food Exhibition of 1882, and the Medical and Pharmaceutical and Bread Reform Exhibitions of 1884. [\(fn. 34\)](#) The original building, previously used for roller-skating, and greatly enlarged before the opening of the Japanese exhibition, was destroyed in May 1885 when the village caught fire. Both hall and village were subsequently rebuilt. After the final closure of the Japanese Village, the new Humphreys' Hall was extensively reconstructed as Prince's Racquets and Tennis Club. Albert Gate Mansions were built along the High Road frontage when the original hall was enlarged in the early 1880s; they too were later extended.

The roller-skating rink which became the first Humphreys' Hall probably originated with premises at Dungannon Cottage used for manufacturing bicycles and sports equipment. Thomas Sparrow, bicycle maker and agent for the Coventry Machinists Company Ltd, and the firm of Sparrow & Spencer, manufacturers of gymnastic apparatus and government contractors for military gymnasia, occupied these premises, known as No. 21A High Road, for several years in the early and mid-1870s (at which time they also had a shop in Piccadilly). The skating rink, known as Dungannon Rink or Dungannon Cottage Skating Rink, was set up about 1876, during a brief mania for the sport. [\(fn. 35\)](#)

Like many others, this rink had fallen out of use by 1880, when it was refitted, by Edward Witts, architect, for the United Service Provision Market Ltd. This concern, soon defunct, supplied cut-price food and general produce to its shareholders and their friends. [\(fn. 36\)](#) In 1882 Dungannon Hall, as the premises had become known, was taken over by James Charlton Humphreys, the iron-buildings manufacturer, who adapted or rebuilt it for public use. Samples of his buildings were displayed on the ground adjoining. [\(fn. 37\)](#)



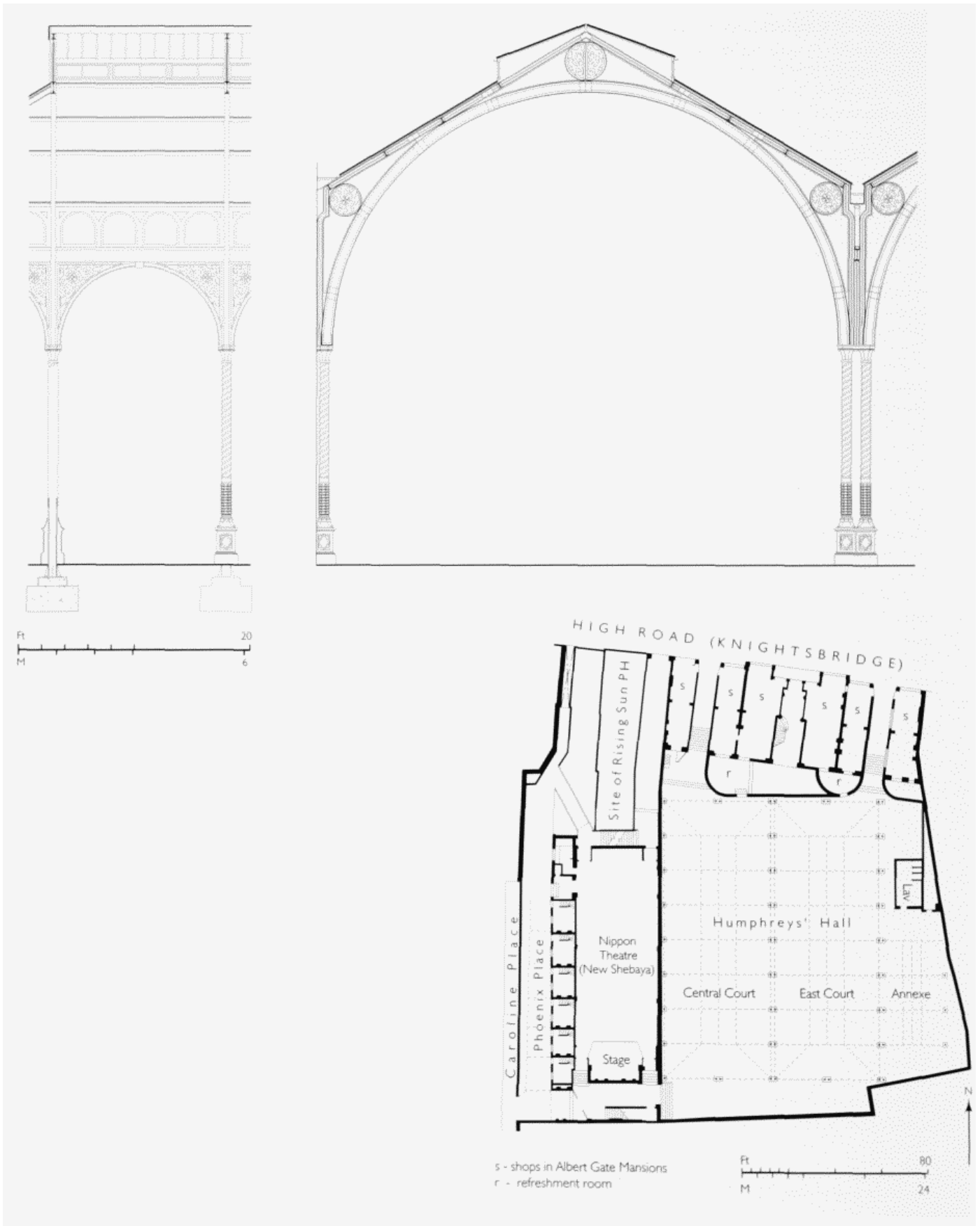


Figure 24:

Humphreys' Hall and adjoining premises belonging to J. C. Humphreys. Plan in early 1886, and part sections through Humphreys' Hall. *All demolished*

Humphreys' building was said to be 'externally, a handsome one', and internally 'very open, and exceedingly well ventilated', with a single-span arched roof, a raised skylight and a marble floor. There was a gallery at either end. One of the first functions held there, in

October 1882, was a banquet given by prominent local residents for the 1st Life Guards, recently returned from Egypt. [\(fn. 38\)](#).

The success of the hall encouraged Humphreys to build a second hall, of similar construction, alongside the old in 1883–4. The two halls were available separately or might be thrown together for large functions. As a further part of the development (carried out on long leases from Lord Trevor, the freeholder), the buildings on the High Road north of the hall were replaced with flats. These were at first known as Humphreys' Mansions or Humphreys' Hall Mansions, but soon took the more up-market name of Albert Gate Mansions. [\(fn. 39\)](#).

Designed by Romaine-Walker and Tanner in a northern Renaissance style, the flats were faced in rubbed and gauged red brick, with balconies, oriels and ornamentation of Portland stone (Plate 37c). Their construction generally was carried out by Humphreys' own workforce; the carving was by J. W. Scale of Walworth. Humphreys Ltd had offices in the building, which included a row of shops (fig. 24). On the first, second and third floors were high-class flats, offered at rentals of between £100 and £300 per annum, while the top floor (originally to have included a reception room for residents or societies) was divided into artists' studios, with large north-facing windows at the front and 'chambers' behind. Directories do not suggest that these studios found favour with artists. There was extensive provision for kitchens in the basement and an 'elaborately decorated' restaurant above, with a service lift to the other floors. [\(fn. 40\)](#).

Following the disastrous fire in May 1885, Humphreys employed the architect Spencer Chadwick to design a new hall conforming to the Metropolitan Board of Works' stringent safety regulations. The new building, with an iron roof in three arched spans, was constructed by Humphreys Ltd between June and December 1885 (fig. 24). [\(fn. 41\)](#).

Further development was carried out by Humphreys over the next few years on the ground adjoining to the west, then occupied by the Rising Sun public house and Nos 27–28 High Road, the Sun Music Hall and Phoenix Place. [\(fn. 1\)](#) He had acquired all or most of this property just before the fire. A block of apartments was built here in 1886 fronting the High Road, with a large restaurant on the ground floor occupying the site of the Rising Sun (fig. 25). These new premises were briefly run as the Princes Gate Hotel by the caterers Bertram & Company, but the apartments were later let as private flats, becoming part of Albert Gate Mansions. The restaurant and the Sun Music Hall at the rear were subsequently used as public rooms under the collective name Knightsbridge Hall (see below). [\(fn. 43\)](#).

In 1898 Nos 19–21 High Road were rebuilt as an eastern extension of Albert Gate Mansions. The architect of the new building, which was in the same style as the original block, was C. W. Stephens. [\(fn. 44\)](#).

The Japanese Native Village

The last and most ambitious show at Humphreys' Hall was the Japanese Native Village of 1885–7, a working replica of a Japanese village centre, inhabited by Japanese craftsmen and artistes and their families – more than a hundred people in all. The promoter was Tannaker Buhicrossan of Lewisham, a Japan merchant with premises in Milton Street, Finsbury, and for some years the

proprietor and director of a travelling 'Japanese Troupe'. In December 1883 Buhicrosan set up The Japanese Native Village Exhibition and Trading Company Limited with a number of associates, including Cornelius B. Pare, a Japan and China merchant in the City, Ambrose Austin, a concert agent, and John Miles, a Wardour Street printer. As managing director of the new venture, Buhicrosan was to receive a salary of at least £1,000. Although to all appearances set up as a commercial venture, the Japanese Village exhibition opened, a little under a year later, under a banner of altruism. Buhicrosan, it was reported, proposed to give the profits to his wife, a Japanese who had converted to Christianity and wanted to organize a mission to improve the social position of women in her native country. [\(fn. 45\)](#).

The exhibition was formally opened on 10 January 1885 by Sir Rutherford Alcock, former consul-general in Japan and the author of *Art and Art Industries in Japan*. [\(fn. 46\)](#) Housed in the older part of Humphreys' Hall, and built by Japanese workmen from authentic Japanese materials, the village comprised a broad street of houses and shops set against backdrops of painted scenery. These were constructed of bamboo, wood, and paper, with shingled or thatched roofs. There were further rows of smaller shops along one side, a Buddhist temple at the end, and a Japanese garden (Plate 53a). Individual shops displayed all manner of manufactures – including pottery, carvings in wood and ivory, toys, fans, cabinets, chased and inlaid metalwork and *cloisonné*, lacquer-work, textiles and embroidery. One shop was devoted to music and musical instruments.

Everything possible was done to bring the village to life: those attending could watch craftsmen at work in their shops (although the 'wares' were not actually for sale), and take refreshment Japanese-style in traditional tea-houses, where tea was served from lacquer trays by attendants in kimonos (Plate 53b). Priests officiated at the temple daily. A further attraction was in the newer part of the hall, where displays of kendo and other martial arts were staged.

The exhibition took place at the height of a vogue for Japanese arts and crafts; indeed, by this time Western demand for Japanese goods had already led to vulgarization and over-production in some manufacturing fields. An early visitor was the designer Christopher Dresser, who had been to Japan and had done much to promote appreciation of Japanese design and craftsmanship. He was generally impressed by the replica village, especially the 'manner in which the industries are carried on in the little open shops, where the goods would be sold'. [\(fn. 47\)](#).

The opportunity offered to study Japanese culture at first hand was not missed by W. S. Gilbert, whose idea for *The Mikado* coincided with the exhibition's arrival. When the new opera opened at the Savoy Theatre in March 1885 the cast had been coached in authentic deportment and use of the fan by inhabitants of the village, as the programme duly acknowledged. [\(fn. 48\)](#).

The exhibition was an immediate success, attracting 250,000 visitors in its first few months (and in time spawning 'many wretched imitations' – as Buhicrosan's publicity called them – in provincial towns). [\(fn. 49\)](#).

The Metropolitan Board of Works had been pressing for some time for structural improvements to the hall to bring it up to the required safety standards when, on 2 May 1885, the village burned down, destroying Humphreys' Hall, damaging Albert Gate Mansions, and killing a Japanese woodcarver. Buhicrosan at once announced his intention of reconstructing the village. It had earlier been arranged that the Japanese would take their exhibition to the continent, and, pending the rebuilding, they travelled to Berlin, setting up new quarters at the Exhibition Park. [\(fn. 50\)](#).

By the end of the year Humphreys' Hall had been rebuilt and a new Japanese village erected, taking up the entire space. It re-opened on 2 December. In addition to several streets of shops (where goods were now offered for sale), there were two temples and various free-standing idols, and a pool spanned by a rustic bridge. The Sun Music Hall adjoining, which had been acquired by J. C. Humphreys just before the fire, was re-opened in conjunction with the new village as the Nippon Theatre or New Shebaya [\(fn. 2\)](#) concert hall, promising 'astounding entertainments' by Japanese artistes. [\(fn. 51\)](#).

Buhicrosan's company ran into financial difficulties, however, and in February 1887 went into liquidation. The exhibition was taken over by a new company with which he seems not to have been directly involved. The Nippon Theatre was turned over in part to conventional music-hall and concert entertainers, including the comic singer Charles Coborn (writer and performer of 'Two Lovely Black Eyes') and George Bohee, 'banjoist to their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales'. The band of the Victoria Rifles and the Italian Opera Company also performed there. It was reported in May that the Japanese Village was as popular as when it first opened, but it closed soon afterwards, on 25 June. [\(fn. 52\)](#).

Prince's Racquets and Tennis Club (demolished)

In 1888–9 Humphreys' Hall was converted into a clubhouse and sports centre for Prince's, one of the most august and exclusive of English sporting clubs, which had been forced to relinquish its old grounds on the Cadogan estate in Chelsea for redevelopment. A long lease of the hall was negotiated with J. C. Humphreys, and the new club premises, designed by the architect Edward Herbert Bouchier and constructed by Peto Brothers, was formally opened by its most celebrated member, the Prince of Wales, on 18 May 1889. [\(fn. 53\)](#).

Although patronized by the prince, the club in fact took its name from the brothers George and James Prince, who seem to have founded it at their wine and cigar shop in Regent Street about 1853. Whatever its original character, Prince's was established within a few years as a sports club with spacious premises including a cricket pitch and tennis and racquets courts off Hans Place; the site is now largely covered by Lennox Gardens, Clabon Mews and part of Cadogan Square. The club was incorporated in 1864 as Prince's Racquets & Tennis Club Company Ltd by George, James and Theodore Prince and others, among them (Sir) William Hart-Dyke, a distinguished racquets player, later president of the club. In time, the range of the club's facilities was expanded to include squash racquets, lawn tennis and ice-skating. Prince's was famous not only for sports but for its snobbish exclusivity. [\(fn. 54\)](#).

By the mid-1880s Prince's Club was occupying new or greatly reduced premises in Pont Street. One of the founders, George Prince, was acting as secretary. The prime mover in the relocation to Knightsbridge, however, was Robert Hippisley Cox of the Coldstream Guards, surgeon, the vice-chairman of the club company, which was reconstituted in April 1888. [\(fn. 55\)](#)

Bourchier's adaptation of Humphreys' Hall involved cutting away many of the stanchions carrying the three arched roofs, and sub-dividing the space along new lines (Plate 53c). The principal sports facilities, designed in consultation with the tennis champion Charles Saunders, comprised two courts for racquets and one for real tennis (including the traditional 'dedans' for viewing), with a high-level gallery arranged so as to overlook play in all three.

In addition, there were grand club-rooms, comparable to those at the largest of the West End clubhouses. The entrance from Knightsbridge gave on to the Lounge, a high pillared hall with a barrel-vaulted roof. Adjoining this was the 45ft-square Oak Room, occupying the full width of one of the two main bays of the original structure of the building. This was a lofty saloon in the Elizabethan style, panelled and tapestry-hung, with a music-gallery at one end. Its coffered ceiling was designed by a member of the club, George Donaldson, who was responsible for overseeing the decoration and furnishing throughout the building, some of which was carried out by Campbell, Smith & Company.

Not the least impressive part of the clubhouse was the accommodation for bathing. As well as a range of hot and cold water baths, sitz and needle baths and a Russian vapour bath, there was a Turkish bath, 'without doubt the most elegant in London', decorated in the Pompeian style with painting and mosaic work executed by 'Signor Marolda and a staff of Italian artists', and a Roman-style plunge bath, 5ft 2ins deep throughout, lined in blue glass mosaic. Finally, there was a bath for the private use of the Prince of Wales, made entirely of marble. The contractor for the baths and other plumbing and sanitary fittings was John Smeaton of Great Queen Street (grandson of the civil engineer John Smeaton, of Eddystone Lighthouse fame).

In 1889-90 a second tennis court and a gymnasium were built, to Bourchier's designs, on the site of cottages in Phoenix Place, Caroline Place and Petwin Place, separated from the main club premises by the Sun Music Hall (figs 22, 28; Plate 57b). Later Prince's Club rented the basement of Knightsbridge Hall, as the Sun Music Hall became, for a bowling alley. [\(fn. 56\)](#)



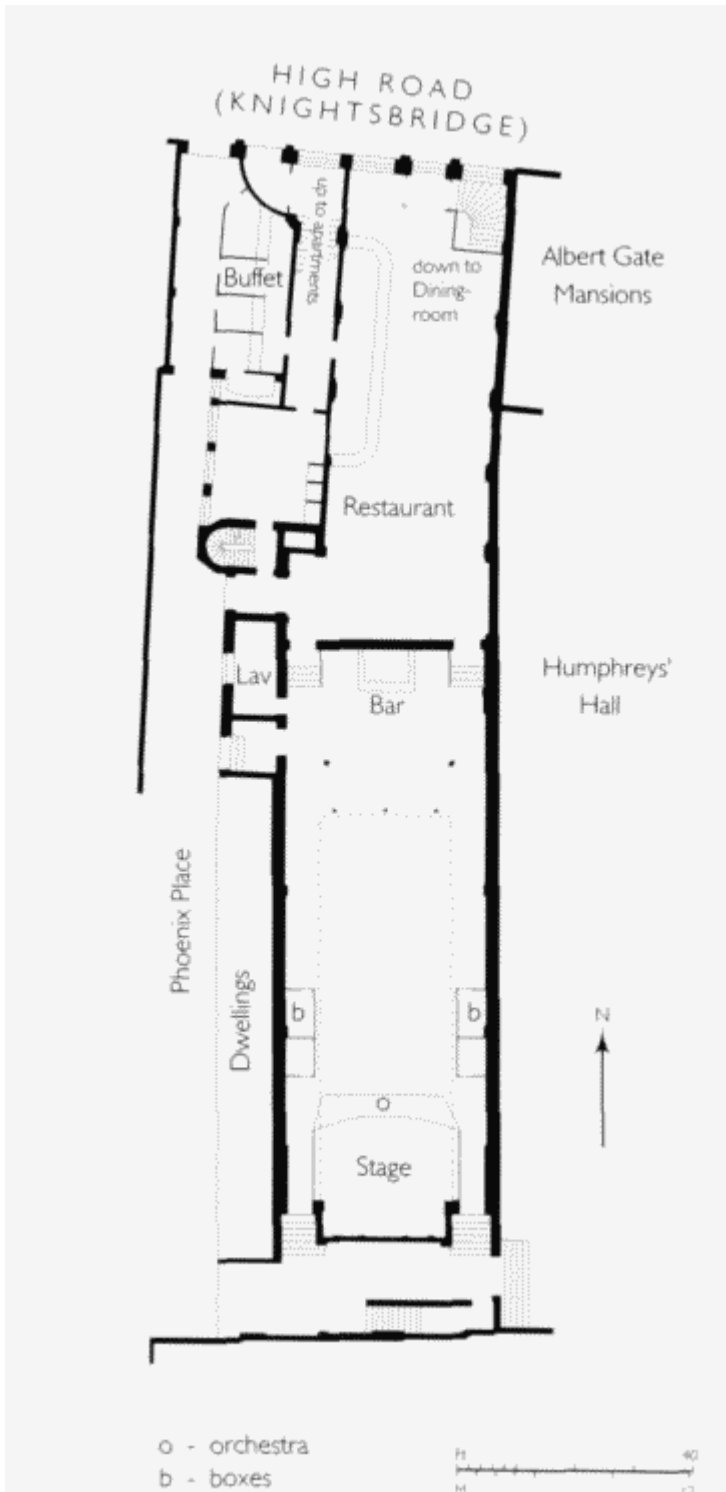


Figure 25:
Sun Music Hall, plan in 1889. *Demolished*

Prince's Club remained in existence until just before the Second World War, during which the clubhouse was requisitioned by the War Department as headquarters for the Army Post Office. It continued in use by the army until about 1952, and was subsequently pulled down for the construction of Mercury House. [\(fn. 57\)](#).

The Rising Sun, Sun Music Hall and Knightsbridge Hall (all demolished)

The Rising Sun tavern at No. 26 High Road was opened about 1830 in an old red-brick house of 'plain appearance', containing 'much carved work' and 'a plain, old-fashioned staircase'. It was

probably built in the seventeenth century – an indistinct inscription on the coping was variously interpreted as 16– or 1611: in recent years it had been occupied by Major Robert Eyre, a veteran of the American War of Independence and the founder, in 1803, of the Knightsbridge Volunteers. [\(fn. 58\)](#).

In 1851 the Rising Sun was licensed for music and dancing, and a concert room was erected at the rear of the premises. This 'Sun Music Hall' was rebuilt in 1864–6 to designs by the architects Finch Hill & Paraire. Ranking 'with the first class establishments of the metropolis', the new Sun Music Hall was 100ft long and 35ft wide with a cantilevered gallery along three sides, and ornamented with wall panels of allegorical reliefs and a decorative balcony front of *carton pierre*. It was at the Sun that George Leybourne first performed 'Champagne Charlie', in 1867, and G. H. Macdermott the great hit of 1878, 'By Jingo'. [\(fn. 59\)](#).

Extensive improvements to bring the hall up to firesafety standards were ordered by the Metropolitan Board of Works in 1884, but before they were carried out the premises were sold, in April 1885, to J. C. Humphreys, owner of Humphreys' Hall adjoining, which was destroyed a few days later, when the Japanese Village exhibition there caught fire. [\(fn. 60\)](#).

Humphreys refitted the Sun Music Hall as a concert room for 'musical entertainments of a high class'. By January 1886 the old Rising Sun had been demolished, to be replaced later in the year by a restaurant or coffee-room with apartments above – effectively a western extension to Albert Gate Mansions with which it was later united. This work seems to have been carried out by Humphreys' architect for the rebuilding of Humphreys' Hall. Spencer Chadwick, in conjunction with the theatre and restaurant architect Thomas Verity. The new apartments, together with the restaurant, were run for a time as the Princes or Princes Gate Hotel. [\(fn. 61\)](#).

With the Japanese Village exhibition recreated in the new Humphreys' Hall, the refurbished Sun Music Hall became the Nippon Theatre, or New Shebaya concert hall, used for Japanese as well as conventional Western-style musical entertainments.

Following the closure of the village in 1887 the theatre enjoyed a brief renaissance under its old name the Sun Music Hall. On Boxing Night 1888 the Great Vance, clad in judicial robes and wig, sang his last song, 'Are You Guilty?', before collapsing in the wings with a fatal heart attack. [\(fn. 62\)](#). Figure 25 shows the Sun Music Hall in its latter days, when the premises were apparently associated with the restaurant and buffet on the ground floor of the Princes Gate Hotel.

The Sun, together with the former restaurant and buffet, was subsequently hired out for receptions and meetings as Knightsbridge Hall, Humphreys having given an undertaking to the London County Council that it would never again be used as a music-hall. [\(fn. 63\)](#) Knightsbridge Hall was later taken over by the John Griffiths Cycle Corporation Ltd as a cycle-riding school and showroom, which it remained for some years. In 1905 a plan to use the building as a restaurant was abandoned when Humphreys was refused a renewal of the licence, which he had held for ten years without making use of it. [\(fn. 64\)](#).

Extension to Knightsbridge Hall, on the sites of Nos 225–229 Knightsbridge (the former Nos 1–5 Trevor Terrace), was erected in 1918 by J. C. Humphreys' firm, Humphreys Ltd. About 1921

the enlarged premises, known as the Knightsbridge Halls, were taken by the decorators and furnishers Robersons Ltd and fitted out as galleries for displaying panelled interiors salvaged from historic houses. [\(fn. 65\)](#)

By the late 1930s the Knightsbridge Halls were used for motor-trading. They were demolished after the Second World War for the building of Mercury House.

Footnotes

- [1](#). The tiny cottages in Phoenix Place (fig. 24) had been built in the early nineteenth century, at about the same time as those in Caroline Place on the adjoining Trevor estate.
- [2](#). Seemingly a conflation of the Japanese *shibai jaya*, a theatre tea-house.
- [3](#). MDR 1724/4/260; 1726/6/175.
- [4](#). *Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1867, p.4: John Elsworth, *The Knightsbridge Barracks & the Necessity for their removal*, 1867, p.9.
- [5](#). WA, Church Commissioners' Records, Dean & Chapter Estates, Box 441, Deed 292079, Fine Book 1632–1877.
- [6](#). Davis, p. 104.
- [7](#). RB: LMA, WR/LV/1798/1: MDR 1797/7/285.
- [8](#). Davis, pp.144–5.
- [9](#). KLS, cuttings (ref.266a).
- [10](#). LMA, MR/LMD/1849/4/81(b).
- [11](#). Diana Howard, *London Theatres and Music Halls 1850–1950*, 1970, pp.133, 199.
- [12](#). Davis, pp.103, 144.
- [13](#). PRO, C5/62/12: Chancellor, pp.265–6: Davis, p. 104.
- [14](#). MDR 1802/3/723.
- [15](#). MDR 1737/3/214–26; 1738/2/260–2.
- [16](#). Postcard in Brian Girling collection (W005).
- [17](#). MBW *Mins*, 4 Dec 1874, p.637; 29 Jan 1875, p. 126: DSR 1874/315–6: *POD: The Caterer and Hotel-Keeper's Gazette*, 15 Aug 1917, p.254.
- [18](#). *B*, 8 April 1876, p.350: DSR 1876/174: MBW *Mins*, 26 May 1876, p.772: postcard in Brian Girling collection (W005).
- [19](#). Davis, pp.144–5: DSR 1851/58.
- [20](#). *Architectural Magazine*, vol. III, 1836, p.327.
- [21](#). *The Times*, 23, 24 May 1890, pp.5e, 10b; 3 June 1890, p.7e; 7 Nov 1890, p.4f: PRO, CRES 35/2601.
- [22](#). *The Times*, 25 Feb 1895, p.11e; 20 June 1895, p.7a: *Daily Graphic*, 20 June 1895, p.9: *B*, 22 June 1895, p.464.
- [23](#). Westminster City Council *Mins*, 15 Oct 1931, p.542; 22 Feb 1934, pp.97–8; 22 Oct 1964, pp.208, 231: *The Times*, 22 Oct 1964, p.24a; 23 Oct 1964, p. 17e; 30 Nov 1964, p.12d.
- [24](#). *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 Dec 1899, p.10: MDR 1885/16/999; 1887/32/678–9; 1890/7/893; 1890/32/308–9; 1898/13/391.
- [25](#). WCA, Deed 85/99: MDR 1899/40/811: PRO, BT31/2672/14273; BT 31/31956/91284.
- [26](#). LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/012546; GLC/AR/BR/23/027279: *BN*, 27 May 1898, p.744: DSR 1897/123; 1900/27; 1900/148; 1902/75: *LCC Mins*, 7 Oct 1902, p. 1344.

- [27](#). *BN*, 27 May 1898, p.744.
- [28](#). *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 Dec 1899, p.10.
- [29](#). LMA, GLC/AR/BR/17/012546.
- [30](#). *The Caterer and Hotel-Keeper's Gazette*, 14 May 1910, p.211; 15 May 1911, p.213: MDR 1910/10/406: PRO, BT31/3510/21370; BT31/18494/98881; IR58/91030/679.
- [31](#). *LCC Mins*, 28 March 1911, pp.785–6: *London at the Opening of the Twentieth Century*, ed. W. T. Pike, 1905, p.490.
- [32](#). *The Caterer and Hotel-Keeper's Gazette*, 14 May 1910, p.211; 15 May 1911, p.213: NMR, photos BL 21890/1–8.
- [33](#). Information provided by Daniel Smith.
- [34](#). *BN*, 12 Sept 1884, p.424.
- [35](#). DSR 1876/135: *MBW Mins*, 22 Dec 1876, p.818: *POD*: RB.
- [36](#). MDR 1879/4/263: RB: DSR 1880/310: *B*, 18 Dec 1880, p. 740.
- [37](#). *The Times*, 4 Feb 1882, p. 4c: PRO, BT31/2637/13995: DSR 1882/216; 1882/371: *B*, 1 Sept 1883, p. 284.
- [38](#). *ILN*, 4 Nov 1882, p. 472: *B*, 1 Sept 1883, pp. 279, 284.
- [39](#). MDR 1884/2/523; 1884/6/1: *B*, 1 Sept 1883, p.284.
- [40](#). *B*, 1 Sept 1883, p. 284: *BN*, 12 Sept 1884, p. 424.
- [41](#). LMA, GLC/AR/BR/19/028; MBW 799, pp. 511–13, 593, 630–2, 659–61.
- [42](#). RB.
- [43](#). *POD*: DSR: LMA, GLC/AR/BR/19/028; MBW 802, p. 223: *Westminster and Pimlico News*, 28 April 1888, p. 5.
- [44](#). LMA, GLC/AR/BR/22/TP/025753; GLC/AR/BR/22/036230: WCA, Plan E<538>538. XLII.
- [45](#). PRO, BT31/3271/19257: *The Times*, 12 Jan 1885, p. 10c: *POD*.
- [46](#). Except where otherwise indicated, the following account is based on – *The Times*, 20 Dec 1884, p. 10e; 10 Jan 1885, p. 6d; 12 Jan 1885, p. 10c: *BN*, 16 Jan 1885, pp. 77–8: Joan Bennett, 'Japan in London, 1885 – an unusual Victorian exhibition', in *The Lady*, 25 April 1985, pp. 862–3, 874.
- [47](#). *BN*, 30 Jan 1885, p. 189.
- [48](#). *The Lady*, 19 March 1885, p. 147: Leslie Baily, *Gilbert & Sullivan and their world*, 1973, p. 86.
- [49](#). *Daily Telegraph*, 11 April 1885 (advert): KLS, cutting No. 121, 712.5 KEN/H, K60/307.
- [50](#). *The Times*, 4 May 1885, p. 10f; 6 May 1885, p. 9f; 4 June 1885, p. 5c: LMA, MBW 799, pp. 276–7, 290, 337–9, 405–6.
- [51](#). LMA, GLC/AR/BR/19/028: *The Standard*, 9 April 1886, advertisement.
- [52](#). PRO, BT31/3271/19257; BT31/3804/23840: *The Times*, 13 April 1887, p.10d; 31 May 1887, p.8c: Bennett, *op.cit.*, p.874.
- [53](#). Except where otherwise indicated, this account is based on – *The Times*, 20 May 1889, p. 10a: *B*, 15 June 1889, pp. 448–9: *BN*, 11 Oct 1889, p.484: Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert (eds), *The London Encyclopaedia*, 1983, p.621.
- [54](#). *POD*: Walford, *Old and New London*, 1897 edn, vol *N*, pp.99–100: PRO, BT31/953/1285c.
- [55](#). PRO, BT31/4117/26476.

- [56](#). MDR 1889/35/380: WCA, rolled plan E<1779>: Denbighshire RO, DD/BK/94: LMA, GLC/AR/BR/07/2408.
- [57](#). LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/046118.
- [58](#). Davis, p. 106: WCA, D.Foster, *Inns, Taverns, Alehouses, Coffee Houses, Etc. In & Around London*, c. 1900, vol. 53, p.317.
- [59](#). DSR 1851/144: Howard, *op.cit.*, p.232: BN, 7 Sept 1866, p.602: LMA, GLC/AR/BR/19/028: Christopher Pulling, *They were Singing ...*, 1952, p.178.
- [60](#). LMA, MBW 798, pp.719–23; MBW 799, pp.442, 484.
- [61](#). LMA, GLC/AR/BR/19/028; MBW 799, p.514; DSR; MBW 800, p.193: *POD: Westminster and Pimlico News*, 28 April 1888, p.5.
- [62](#). Archibald Haddon, *The Story of the Music Hall*, 1935, p.36: Pulling, *op.cit.*, p.178: *DNB*.
- [63](#). LMA, GLC/AR/BR/19/028.
- [64](#). OS: *POD: PRO*, BT31/5767/40406: *The Caterer and Hotel-Keeper's Gazette*, 15 March 1905, p.114.
- [65](#). DSR 1918/41, 1921/95: Charles L.Roberson, *Historical Rooms from the Manor Houses of England*, vol.1 (n.d.), p.3, plan facing p.4.

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Knightsbridge Green Area: Knightsbridge Green

[Survey of London: Volume 45, Knightsbridge](#). Originally published by London County Council, London, 2000.

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Knightsbridge Green

The encroachment of building over the village green at Knightsbridge (part of the manorial ground belonging to Westminster Abbey) took place over a long period, reaching approximately its present-day extent by the 1850s. Some of the old rural character of the green survived into the early nineteenth century, when a cattle-market was still held and there was even a maypole. An inn, then called the Sun, and later the Marquis of Granby, had been built on part of the green by the seventeenth century. The open land was much diminished in the 1720s by the building of Middle Row. This was later renamed Middle Row North when houses fronting the Brompton road were built over the gardens, forming Middle Row South. [\(fn. 4\)](#).

King's Row was built in 1784–5 over a garden behind the Sun, reducing the open space to little more than a broad tree-lined strip running north to the Kensington road. [\(fn. 5\)](#). Plans put forward in 1836 for a railway terminus and covered market at Knightsbridge Green having come to nothing, a piece of this strip was taken for the building of parochial schools in 1839.

By 1851 the northern part of Knightsbridge Green had been further reduced, by the erection of various wooden sheds along the east side, to the narrow footway that exists today (Plate 50c). In that year Chrisostome Mouflet, a victualler, replaced the sheds with a row of lean-to shops, at the same time building a short-lived 'Crystal Palace Hotel' adjoining, just north of All Saints' School. An attempt by the vestry to widen the passageway in 1899 failed, owing to the difficulty of obtaining the ground on either side. [\(fn. 6\)](#).

On the west side of the Green, towards the south end, formerly stood two substantial houses – the Moreaus' residence, later the site of Tattersalls, and Dr Buissière's house, converted into the Pakenham Tavern in the 1840s. Northwards of Dr Buissière's house, several houses were built in 1736–7 on the ground adjoining Martin Basil's old house (No. 13A High Road, otherwise Chatham House). [\(fn. 7\)](#) The sites of these houses (a short row fronting the Green and Nos 12 and 13 High Road), together with that of Chatham House, are now occupied by the former Normandie Hotel.

The undeveloped southern remnant of the Green was let to successive occupiers of the old Moreau residence, and in 1857 was acquired with it – on lease – by Tattersalls. Apparently treeless, the small plot was then surrounded by a wall and iron railings. Plans by Westminster Vestry to plant the 'vacant' ground with trees in 1879 met with an angry response from local traders and cabmen, who saw the improvement as likely to interfere with their business and filled in the holes dug in preparation. However, by 1908 trees had been planted on the enclosure, which was then being looked after by Tattersalls. After the Second World War Tattersalls undertook a restoration of the enclosure, creating a 'Temple Garden' with a bronze figure. Intended as a contribution to the 1951 Festival of Britain, this project was carried out by Ralph Hancock & Son, landscape architects of Park Mansions Arcade, under the direction of Tattersalls' architects, Stone, Toms & Partners. [\(fn. 8\)](#).

Today the 'Green', as popularly understood – the triangular remnant of open space off Brompton Road – is a nondescript traffic island, occupied by a couple of plane trees and a forlorn drinking fountain. There is a long tradition that this piece of ground was used for a plague pit. What is known is that from 1640 a small strip immediately to the north-east (now occupied by the shops of Nos 16–22 Brompton Road) belonged to the Knightsbridge lazarus property – also part of the Westminster Abbey estate – on the north side of Knightsbridge. It is possible that this strip, which in about 1784 was taken to provide gardens for the new houses of King's Row, was used to bury plague victims dying at the lazarus-house. Human bones found in 1808 on the site of William Street were reinterred at the Green, as this was felt to be the most appropriate place. [\(fn. 9\)](#).

Grosvenor House (demolished)

The old mansion owned by Sir William Blake (see page 77) was occupied after his death in 1630 by, among others, Katherine, Viscountess Ranelagh, the sister of the scientist Robert Boyle. About 1740 it was rebuilt by Philip Moreau's son and heir, Captain James Philip Moreau.

Originally to become known as Grosvenor House, Moreau's new house was a substantial brick building, sashed and slated, squarish in plan with four rooms and two closets to each floor, 'all

wainscotted and floored in the best Manner, and compleatly fitted up with marble and other Chimney Pieces'. There was a stable wing and outbuildings to the side and a large garden behind, laid out with gravel walks, 'Grass Plats, Seats, Espalier Hedges, Wilderness and Shrubbery, all enclosed with a Brick Wall, and well planted with Fruit Trees in great perfection'. [\(fn. 10\)](#) Salway included a view of the property in his 1811 survey of the Brompton road. [\(fn. 2\)](#)

The Moreaus seem not to have lived at the house after the death of Captain Moreau's widow in 1753, but it was purchased by a member of the family at the sale in 1759. It soon passed, however, via Admiral Thomas Broderick, to the Rev. Martin Madan. A Methodist, Madan was chaplain of the Lock Hospital in Grosvenor Place, and the author of a controversial book advocating polygamy, published in 1780. Later owners included Nathaniel Gosling, of the prominent banking family. [\(fn. 11\)](#)

In 1857 Grosvenor House and its grounds, together with a lease of the remaining part of the old Green in front of it, were bought by Tattersalls to replace their Hyde Park Corner auction yard. It had been pulled down by 1863.

Tattersalls (demolished)

For more than seventy years Knightsbridge Green was home to Tattersalls, the renowned horse and bloodstock auctioneers and one of the great institutions of the equine world. The firm moved here in 1865, to newly built premises on the west side where a stone archway, flanked by ancillary buildings, gave access to the large covered auction yard (Plates 48b, 49, fig. 26). Between 1865 and 1939 Tattersalls' yard was the scene of regular weekly, and in the season twice weekly, horse sales, events as much social as commercial where the bluest-blooded of aristocrats rubbed shoulders with the shabbiest of sporting 'characters'.

Since it was founded in the early 1770s by Richard Tattersall, a former groom and trainer to the Duke of Kingston, the firm had occupied pleasant, almost rural, premises behind St George's Hospital, close to Hyde Park Corner (see Plate 5c). But this was a leasehold property, on which the leases ran out in 1865, and the Marquess of Westminster, who owned the land, would not extend the firm's tenure because the site was required to complete the building of Grosvenor Crescent. [\(fn. 12\)](#) That Tattersalls would eventually have to move must have been apparent as far back as 1832, when the line of Grosvenor Crescent was settled. In 1853 it was reported that they were planning to open new premises on the site of the old Fishmongers' Almshouses at the Elephant and Castle; nothing came of that scheme and in 1857 Tattersalls bought Grosvenor House on Knightsbridge Green. Adjoining Fulham Bridge Yard, where horse-dealing had been a well-established tradition, and only a short distance from Hyde Park Corner and the beau monde, this was a freehold property, and at two acres at least as large as the old, if not slightly larger. [\(fn. 13\)](#)

Construction work at Knightsbridge Green began in the summer of 1863 and the new buildings were completed in the spring of 1865, the first sale there taking place on 10 April. [\(fn. 14\)](#)

Owned by the two partners, Richard and Edmund Tattersall, great-grandsons of the founder, directed under their general supervision, the new establishment was designed by the

architect Charles Freeman, who according to his obituary was 'probably best known as surveyor to the Sun Fire Assurance Company'. [\(fn. 15\)](#). He does not appear to have had any special expertise in designing buildings for equine purposes. [\(fn. 3\)](#). The contractors were Holland & Hannen.

Architectural display, of a fairly modest order, was concentrated on the street front. Here, a stone archway with iron gates, flanked by lower entrances for pedestrians, formed the centrepiece, framed by a matching pair of buildings in yellow-grey brick with stone dressings and balustrade which screened the back part of the premises from public view (Plates 48b, 49c). The *Sporting Review* was unimpressed: 'plain and unpretending enough' it might have been the front of 'a bazaar or some well-conducted manufactory'. [\(fn. 17\)](#).

The building to the south of the gateway was a subscription room for off-course betting, a long-standing custom at Tattersalls which the promoters of the 1853 Betting Act had been unwilling to disturb for fear of offending its aristocratic patrons. [\(fn. 18\)](#). Apart from providing a room, Tattersalls themselves had no direct involvement with the betting, which was under the control of the Jockey Club. The entrance, on the north side, was railed off 'so as to preserve to its frequenters the utmost privacy'. Inside, the subscription room was decorated with green and gold panelled walls, and an encaustic-tile floor worthy of 'a Genoese palace, so rich and harmonious are its colours' (Plate 49b). Two glass domes boosted the natural lighting, while a third dome contained a large gas 'sunburner'. At the west end folding doors, flanked by two stone lions from the old premises, opened on to a paved courtyard which was used for outside betting and had a telegraph-office adjoining. [\(fn. 19\)](#).

The corresponding building to the north comprised the manager's house, offices, a private room for the partners, and, on the upper floor, accommodation for the 'Rhadamanthuses of the Jockey Club'. [\(fn. 20\)](#).

Between the offices and the subscription room a granite roadway led to the auction yard, the heart of the whole complex. Enclosed within a large but plain two-storey building, this was a rectangular galleried court, 60ft by 108ft, covered by a soaring glass roof with deeply coved sides (Plate 49a, fig. 26). The roof was carried on iron girders and glazed with panes of Hartley's patent glass, which could be opened for ventilation. A fully covered yard was an innovation for Tattersalls, perhaps suggested by the iron-and-glass roofed yard at Aldridge's, a rival establishment in St Martin's Lane, rebuilt in the early 1840s. [\(fn. 21\)](#).

In the middle stood the drinking-fountain known as the Fox, which had been the centrepiece of the old yard. Housed within a classical stone cupola, the fountain was surmounted by the figure of a fox with raised paw, and the cupola by a bust of George IV. The latter was said to symbolize the firm's royal connections, the fox its links with hunting, which went back to the early days of the firm when hunters and hounds rather than racehorses were the mainstay of the business.



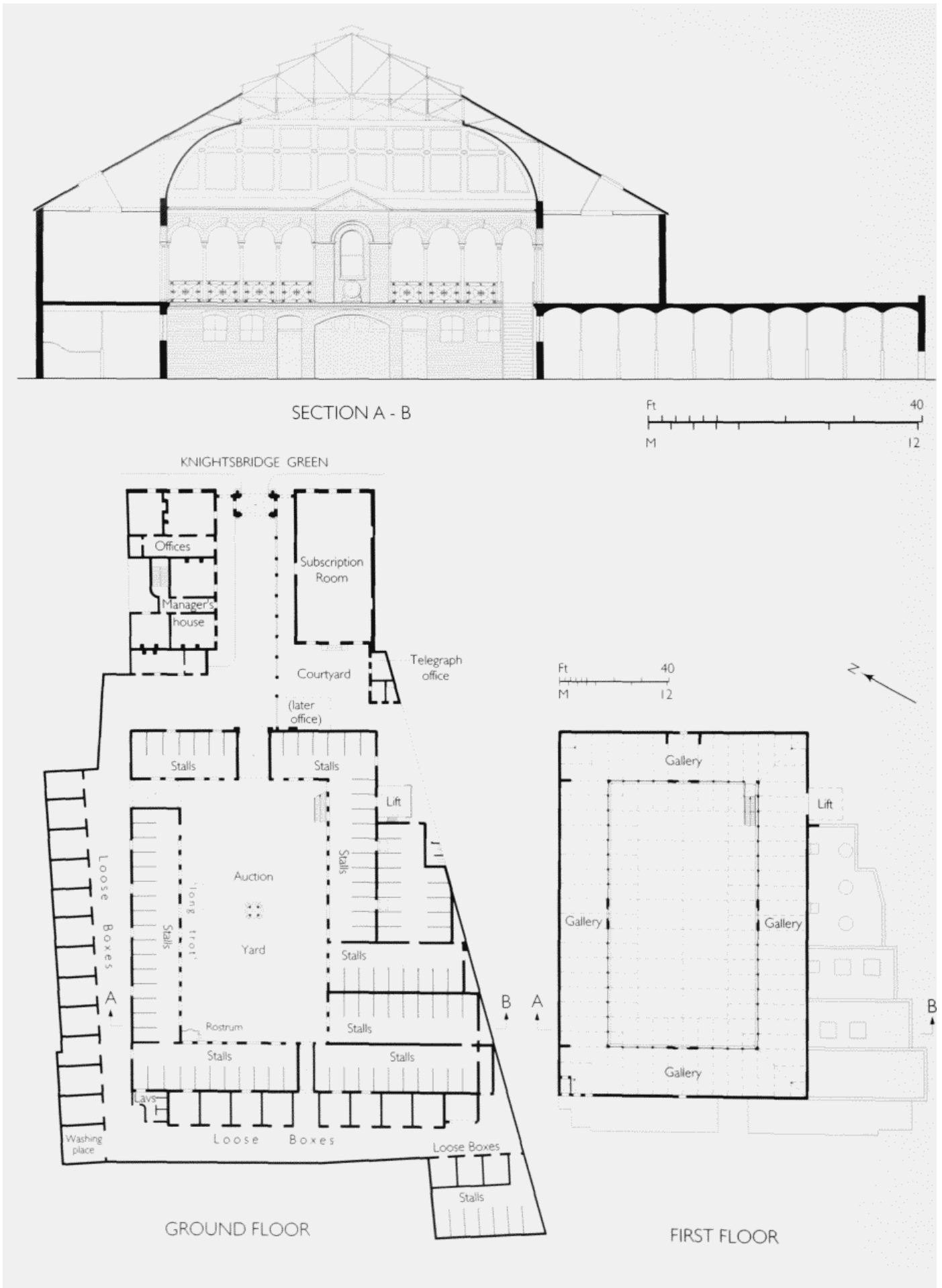


Figure 26: (site). Tattersalls, plans and section. Charles Freeman, architect, 1863–5. *Demolished*

The auctioneer conducted the horse sales from a wooden rostrum in the north-west corner facing down the ride or 'long trot', where the horses showed their paces. Carriage and harness sales were held in the arcaded gallery, another feature probably suggested by Aldridge's, where carriage sales took place in a gallery along one side of the auction yard. At Tattersalls the carriages were raised to first-floor level on a hydraulic lift supplied by Easton Amos & Sons. Popular with spectators, the gallery also provided a useful vantage point for buyers 'who do not care to encounter the busy throng below'. [\(fn. 22\)](#).

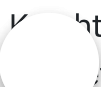
Surrounding the auction yard at ground-floor level, but only partially covered by the main roof, was the stabling – originally comprising 95 single stalls, and 20 loose-boxes for stallions and mares with foals. Spacious and properly drained, with water and gas laid on, the stalls were constructed of wood, iron and polished grey marble, and had patent asphalt floors. The generously proportioned looseboxes, top lit by ventilating louvres, occupied separate single-storey ranges on the west wall of the auction yard and the northern boundary of the site.

While there was some regret at the passing of the old 'Corner', with its lawns and gravel walks, the press found much to praise at the Green. The new yard 'is as superior to that at Hyde Park Corner as the Agricultural Hall is as a show-place to the Baker-street Bazaar' was the verdict of the *Sporting Review*, one of the more critical journals. The *Illustrated Times* was pleased to find the ambience little changed: 'still the same dealing for horses on one side and laying of wagers on the other: the same motley assemblage of characters who have made the place belonging to the firm their head-quarters for the last century'. [\(fn. 23\)](#).

Auction sales continued to be held at Knightsbridge Green up to the outbreak of war in September 1939, when they were transferred to Newmarket, never to return. The Fox too was taken to Newmarket for safe-keeping, fortunately, for in August 1944 a flying-bomb severely damaged the auction yard and stabling. After the war Tattersalls sold the buildings to Oetzmann & Company, home furnishers, who occupied the old subscription room and the patched-up auction yard as furniture galleries; Tattersalls themselves retained their offices in the north wing. When, in 1955, the old premises were demolished for redevelopment, the entrance arch was saved and, like the Fox, reerected at Newmarket. [\(fn. 24\)](#) The entire site is now covered by part of Caltex House, but the name of Tattersalls lingers on in an eponymous, though modern, public house on Knightsbridge Green.

Former All Saints' School, Knightsbridge Green

In 1839 a piece of the Green was given by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey to the Rector and Churchwardens of St Margaret's, Westminster, as the site for parochial schools. Designed by the Knightsbridge architect W. F. Pocock, these were erected in 1839–40 on what was effectively an island site, as traffic had to be free to pass round on all sides (fig. 22). Construction costs were largely met by an anonymous benefactress. [\(fn. 25\)](#)

By 1851 St Margaret's Schools had been transferred to the Ecclesiastical District of All Saints, Knightsbridge, becoming All Saints' National School. In 1875 it was rebuilt to designs by Robert , an architect with considerable experience of educational buildings, who produced a

simple red-brick 'three-decker' in the Board School manner (Plate 50a, 50b). The contractors were T. H. Adamson & Sons. [\(fn. 26\)](#).

All Saints' School closed in 1900 and narrowly escaped demolition for a proposed extension of Park Mansions. Eventually, in 1908–9, the site was purchased by the owners of Park Mansions, who converted the old building into shops, workshops, showrooms, and accommodation for servants employed in the flats, to which it was connected by a glazed iron staircase; the architects were T. H. & A. M. Watson. The building is now numbered 24–26 Brompton Road and 15–17 Knightsbridge Green. [\(fn. 27\)](#).

Footnotes

- [1](#). See *Survey of London*, volume XLI, page 5 and Plate .
- [2](#). Reproduced in *Survey of London*, volume XLI, Plate .
- [3](#). The designing of the new premises might have been kept wholly within the Tattersall family but for the premature death in 1849 of Richard's younger brother, George, a professional architect. In the 1840s George designed stables for the firm's stud-farm in Willesden and a new subscription room at Hyde Park Corner.
- [4](#). Davis, pp.144–6; Chancellor, pp.19, 78–9: MDR 1724/4/260; 1726/6/175.
- [5](#). MDR 1784/1/558; 1784/2/404–5; 1784/3/464; 1784/4/102; 1785/5/289: R. Horwood, *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster ...*, 1792–9 edn.
- [6](#). LMA, MBO/Plans/446: DSR: MDR 1853/9/474; 1856/4/478–9: *Annual Report of the United Vestry of the Parishes of St. Margaret and St John ... 1899*, pp. 15–16.
- [7](#). MDR 1737/3/214–26; 1738/2/260–2.
- [8](#). *The Times*, 20 March 1879, p.11b: CERC, Church Commissioners' file 46300: Vincent Orchard, *Tattersalls, Two Hundred Years of Sporting History*, 1953. p.304.
- [9](#). Davis, p.145.
- [10](#). RB: WCA, Acc.1188, bundle II.
- [11](#). KLS, MSS 3785, 3798: *DNB*: Davis, p.146.
- [12](#). Orchard, *op.cit.*, pp.92–6 *passim*: RB: WCA, 1049/4/50, p.72; 1049/5/14, p.410.
- [13](#). Hermione Hobhouse, *Thomas Cubitt*, 1971, p.137: *ILN*, 19 Feb 1857, p.147: MDR 1857/5/527–8.
- [14](#). *BN*, 3 July 1863, p.509: *B*, 9 Jan 1864, p.31: *ILN*, 22 April 1865, p.382.
- [15](#). *Illustrated Times*, 22 April 1865, p.245: *B*, 24 July 1869, p.590.
- [16](#). Colvin, p.958: *Sporting Review*, April 1865, p.275.
- [17](#). *Sporting Review*, April 1865, p.275.
- [18](#). *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 2 July 1869, pp.6–7.
- [19](#). *B*, 9 Jan 1864, p.31: *Illustrated Times*, 22 April 1865, p.245.
- [20](#). *Sporting Review*, Feb 1865, p.84.
- [21](#). *Survey of London*, vol.XXXIV, 1966, p.342, Pl .
- [22](#). *B*, 9 Jan 1864, p.31: *Sporting Review*, April 1865, p.277.
- [23](#). *Sporting Review*, April 1865, p.276: *Illustrated Times*, 15 April 1865, p.245.
- [24](#). Orchard, *op.cit.*, pp.302–4: Peter Willett, *The Story of Tattersalls*, 1987, pp.91–2, 95: *The Sphere*, 12 June 1948, p.340.

- [25](#). WA, Register Book LXIII, ff. 134N–5: BAL Archives, PoFam/1/4, p.32: *The Times*, 20 Feb 1841, p.5e.
- [26](#). CERC, Church Commissioners' file 46300: *The Architect*, 30 Oct 1875, p.242: DSR 1875/443.
- [27](#). CERC, National Society file no.5755: LMA, GLC/AR/BR/23/ 027279; GLC/AR/BR/22/032227.

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Knightsbridge Green Area: Raphael Street

[Survey of London: Volume 45, Knightsbridge](#). Originally published by London County Council, London, 2000.

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'Knightsbridge Green Area: Raphael Street', in *Survey of London: Volume 45, Knightsbridge*, ed. John Greenacombe (London, 2000), *British History Online* <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol45/pp91-92> [accessed 10 October 2024].

[Footnotes](#)

Raphael Street

Raphael Street was laid out on part of the former estate of the gunmaker Durs Egg by Lewis Raphael of Hendon, who bought it from Egg's heirs in 1838. A member of an affluent Roman Catholic family of Armenian descent, Raphael was a dairy farmer with a mansion and a splendid estate at Bush Hill Park, Edmonton.

In November 1843 Raphael entered into a building agreement with Edward Nangle, builder (later 'surveyor'). Nangle laid out a new road, called Raphael Street, running from Lancelot Place eastward to Knightsbridge Green, where it curved southwards to avoid Egg's former house (fig. 22). [\(fn. 1\)](#)

Nangle's building operations began in 1844, with the conversion and enlargement of the old house as the Pakenham Tavern, and the erection of terrace-houses along the north side of the new road. The Pakenham, which took the address of Knightsbridge Green not Raphael Street, was perhaps named as a compliment to the Duke of Wellington, whose wife was a Pakenham. Nangle himself became its first landlord, in 1848, when at his direction the pub was leased to the brewers Elliot & Watney of Pimlico. (This was the only house on the estate to be leased to Nangle or his nominees.)

With the exception of two houses, Nos 10 and 11, the north side of Raphael Street was completed by 1847 and mostly occupied over the next two or three years. The sites of Nos 10 and 11, somewhat larger than the rest, were probably left at the time with a view to a future

roadway as part of development on the Rose and Crown or the neighbouring Dungannon Cottage properties. [\(fn. 2\)](#).

On the south side of the street and the corner of Lancelot Place, Nangle got into difficulties, probably as a consequence of the widespread depression at that time, and development was halted, leaving six houses still only partly built. Several years later, in March 1849, Nangle gave notice that he was resuming work on two, but does not appear to have completed them: at the time he was being pursued in court for debt. [\(fn. 3\)](#).

Further activity in Raphael Street took place in 1852–3 with the erection of a row of five shops (which became Nos 33–37) on the shallow plots opposite the Pakenham. They were the work of a Kensington builder, Francis J. Attfield. Another builder, George Day of New Kent Road, was responsible for the remainder of the south side of the street, built up in 1854–5, and Nos 10 and 11 on the north side, built in 1854. Both Attfield and Day were presumably working under contract not as speculators, for in August 1853 all their houses and Nangle's (apart from the Pakenham), together with the Rose and Crown property, were leased directly by Raphael's heirs to a West End solicitor, Frederick William Dolman, to whom Nangle had mortgaged his interest in the estate in 1847. [\(fn. 4\)](#).

Nangle's houses were of three storeys over half-basements, two windows wide, with stuccoed ground-floor fronts and iron balconettes at the first-floor windows (Plate 52a). Day's houses, on shorter plots, were built close to the pavement edge, with gratings to light the basements or cellars. They had stuccoed window surrounds and roundarched entrances. The Pakenham Tavern was large and showy; its curved and fully stuccoed façade was echoed across the road by Attfield's shops (Plate 52b, 52c).

On the corner of Lancelot Place, Nos 19 and 20 were later knocked together to form the Royal Oak public house.

From the beginning the houses of Raphael Street were in multi-occupancy, the tenants including many grooms and coachmen, as well as soldiers, clerks and domestic servants. [\(fn. 5\)](#) By the early 1860s the respectability of the street was threatened by the popularity of several singing and dancing venues near by, including the Pakenham Tavern, where 'Free and Easy' musical evenings were prone to lead to disturbances and fights. Householders complained that respectable early rising workpeople were giving up their lodgings because of the noise. [\(fn. 6\)](#).

Arnold Bennett lodged in Raphael Street around 1890, in his early days in London, as did the hero of his first novel, *A Man From the North* (1898).

In the twentieth century, if not earlier, many of the houses were overcrowded, dilapidated and insanitary, attracting the attention of Westminster City Council. [\(fn. 7\)](#) Boarding- or lodging-houses continued to dominate. 'Very handy for poor but respectable gentlemen like myself,' says a character, not without irony, in a novel of 1926, 'Single ladies not taken without luggage and references. Very good address for out-of-work actors or lady typists ... Almost as good as the Old Gate, if you don't happen to have seen the cards in the windows'. [\(fn. 8\)](#) But many of the lodging-houses' were occupied by prostitutes and prosecutions for brothelkeeping in

Raphael Street were frequent. The seediness of the area was usually blamed on its proximity to the barracks.

The Pakenham and the Raphael Street houses survived the Second World War largely intact, and were pulled down about 1956–7 for office development.

Footnotes

- [1](#). MDR 1844/10/497: *POD*: LMA, WCS/P44/1457.
- [2](#). RB: DSR: MDR 1847/4/424; 1848/9/897: *POD*.
- [3](#). DSR: RB: MDR 1849/4/785.
- [4](#). DSR: WCA, E3998: RB: MDR 1847/4/424; 1854/1/338–75.
- [5](#). Censuses (1851–61).
- [6](#). LMA, MR/LMD/1862/3/57.
- [7](#). Westminster City Council *Mins*.
- [8](#). (Sir) Philip Gibbs, *Young Anarchy*, 1926, p.136.

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Knightsbridge Green Area: Post-War Redevelopment

[Survey of London: Volume 45, Knightsbridge](#). Originally published by London County Council, London, 2000.

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[Footnotes](#)

Post-War Redevelopment

Between 1955 and 1960 office-building greatly altered the appearance of the Knightsbridge Green area (fig. 27). The opportunity was taken to carry out some road-widening at this time, both in Knightsbridge and Brompton Road, but no important changes were made to the rather congested road pattern, and the overall effect of the redevelopment fell far short of complete transformation. In the late 1950s, however, plans for Knightsbridge Green were put forward which, had they been implemented, would have turned the road intersection at Scotch Corner into a roundabout comparable to those at Marble Arch and Hyde Park Corner, overlooked by some of the biggest tower-blocks in central London. The Knightsbridge Green development, it was confidently asserted in the early 1960s, reached back 'over the town planning chaos of recent years to recapture London's diverse and vital character'. [\(fn. 1\)](#) The utopian vision lingered until 1965, when it faded away in the light of changed economic conditions.

The scheme, which effectively originated with the London County Council (LCC), began to take shape during the planning of Land Securities' Bowater House a few years earlier (see page 59). [\(fn. 2\)](#) It was intimated then that the new entrance to Hyde Park under Bowater House at Edinburgh Gate (replacing that at Albert Gate) would be the first stage in a long-term plan to improve traffic circulation, the intended centrepiece being the roundabout at Scotch Corner. Subsequently the LCC Town Planning Committee liaised closely with the owner of almost all the land likely to be affected by such a scheme, Capital and Counties Property Ltd, to produce a development plan satisfactory from road-traffic, commercial, and 'civic' angles.

Early plans drawn up by Capital and Counties' architects Guy Morgan & Partners featured blocks of 116ft and 126ft, but the Committee felt that there was a strong case for a much higher building on civic grounds. The LCC, under its Architect Hubert Bennett and Senior Planning Officer Leslie W. Lane, accordingly produced a modified scheme. This proposed a colossal slab-block on a podium (320ft high in all) between Sloane Street and Brompton Road, facing Bowater House across the roundabout, where a smaller slab-block was to be sited. By 1962 the great roundabout, which was to take in the entire Park Mansions site, had been freed from buildings altogether, taking on the form of a sunken 'piazza'. Instead of the large slabblock there were to be three tower-blocks containing flats, offices, and a hotel, mounted over a shopping precinct connected by escalators to the Underground and more shops at basement level. The scale of the cluster of towers – the tallest more than 400ft high – was such as to have dwarfed Bowater House. At the new Knightsbridge Barracks, then in the planning stage, Sir Basil Spence's intended pointblock was designed to form a visually appealing group with this civilian trio.

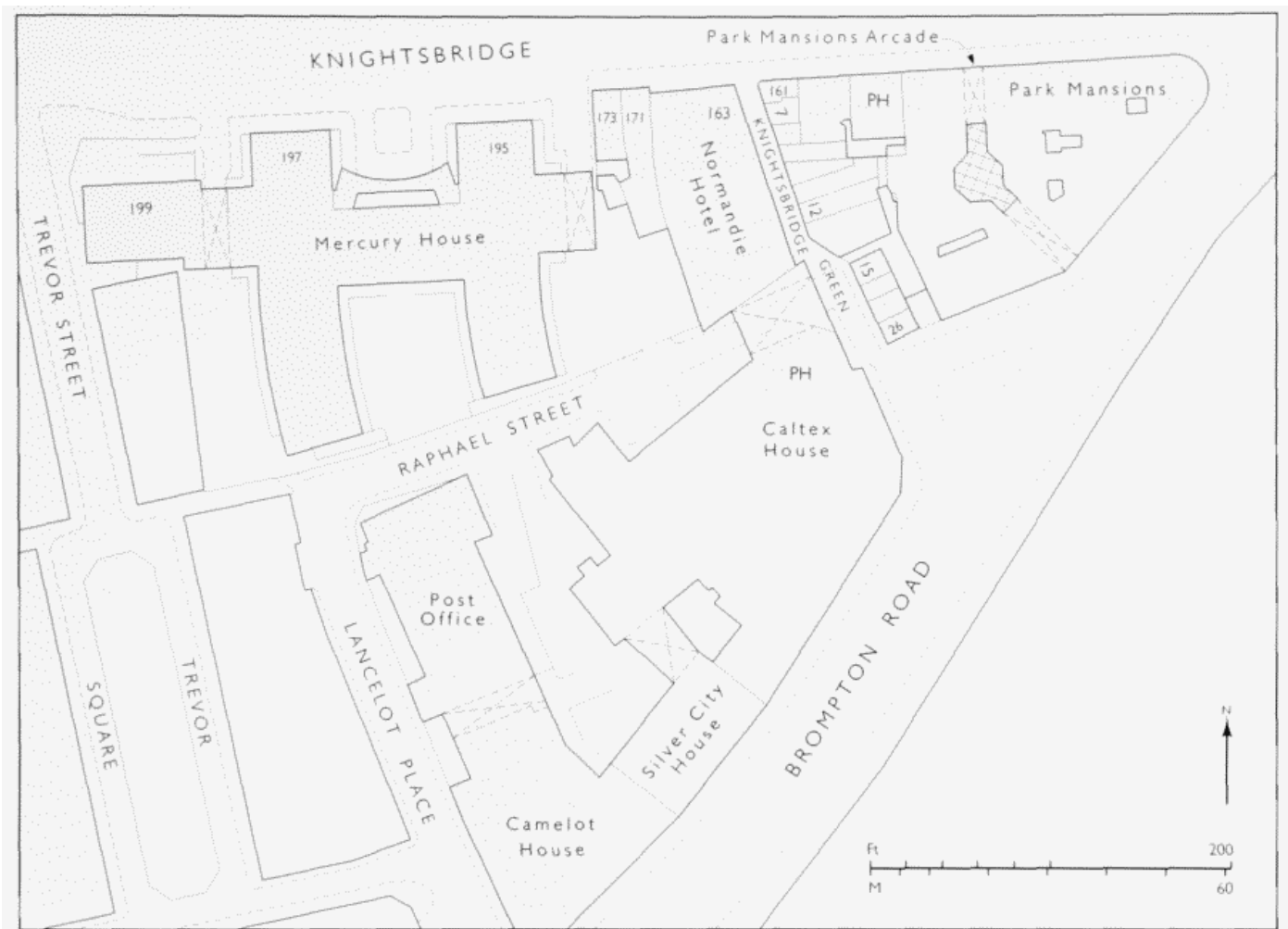


Figure 27:

Knightsbridge Green area in 1991

In July 1965, however, Capital and Counties announced that their project was unlikely to be carried out, citing a number of reasons including the increased cost of building, technical difficulties to do with the relocation of Basil Street fire-station as part of the development, and the problem posed by protected residential tenancies under the forthcoming 1965 Rent Act.

Without the associated property development, it was out of the question for the LCC to finance road improvements and the entire project fell by the wayside.

No special architectural or 'townscape' interest attaches to any of the post-war blocks already erected hereabouts when the Knightsbridge Green scheme was formulated. Caltex House (No. 1 Knightsbridge Green and Nos 44–58 Brompton Road), was designed by Stone, Toms & Partners for Edger Investments Limited (a subsidiary of the Alliance Assurance Company), and built in 1955–7 by Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons Limited. [\(fn. 3\)](#) Occupying the site of Tattersalls' auction yard and adjoining properties, the building incorporates Tattersall's Tavern, a new public house replacing the Pakenham Tavern, the demolition of which allowed the eastern end of Raphael Street to be straightened. [\(fn. 4\)](#) As a further nod to the history of the site, Caltex House is adorned with a sculpture representing horses, *Triga*, by Franta Belsky, made of reinforced concrete coated with plastic metal. [\(fn. 5\)](#)

Adjoining Caltex House to the west is Silver City House (Nos 58A–64 Brompton Road), designed by Frank Scarlett for Beaufort Estates and constructed c. 1956–8 by Harry Neal Limited. [\(fn. 6\)](#) Like Caltex House, this presents a low range of shops to Brompton Road, with taller offices behind. Also facing Brompton Road, and largely outside the old parish boundary of St Margaret's, Camelot House (Nos 66–76 Brompton Road) was designed by Gunton & Gunton and built in 1960 for the City of London Real Property Company Limited; it was originally called Lionel House. The development includes a Post Office and depot in Lancelot Place. [\(fn. 7\)](#)

To the north of Raphael Street, Mercury House (Nos 195–199 Knightsbridge) was built in 1956–9 to designs by Guy Morgan & Partners. It comprises three linked office buildings with views north over Hyde Park (Plate 18d). The inspiration for the development is said to have come from Sir Aynsley Bridgland, chairman both of Haleybridge Investment Trust Limited, the owners, and of the old Knightsbridge firm Humphreys Ltd, who built it. [\(fn. 8\)](#) In front of the buildings stands *The Seer*, a bronze figuregroup of 1957 by Gilbert Ledward (Plate 18c).

Prudential Assurance, the owner of Caltex House, bought Mercury House in 1986 and subsequently obtained the adjoining properties between Knightsbridge Green and Lancelot Place, with the exceptions of Silver City House, the Normandie Hotel and the sites of Nos 171–3 Knightsbridge. [\(fn. 9\)](#) A scheme for the complete redevelopment of this enormous site was proposed but ultimately did not go ahead, and Mercury House has since been sold off separately. At the time of writing (2000), refurbishment rather than wholesale replacement of all this property seems in prospect. [\(fn. c1\)](#)

Footnotes

- [1](#). *The Knightsbridge Item*, Christmas 1962, p.36.
 - [2](#). Account based on –*Official Architecture and Planning*, Feb 1959, pp.82–3: *AR*, Dec 1959, pp.332–6: *B*, 23 March 1962, p.623; 29 Oct 1965, p.947: *Architect & Building News*, 21 March 1962, p.407; 17 April 1963, p.573: *The Knightsbridge Item*, Christmas 1962, pp.35–7: *The Times*, 17 Jan 1959, pp.3e, 14 (ill.): *LCC Mins*, 1956–65: *GLC Mins*, 2 Nov 1965, pp.708–9.
 - [3](#). *Architect & Building News*, 5 April 1956, p.331: *B*, 4 May 1956, p.454; 14 Nov 1958, p.817; 3 Aug 1962, p.218.
- LMA, LCC/MIN/11787, 17 Jan 1957: PRO, MT78/131.

- [5](#). *B*, 14 Nov 1958, p.817.
- [6](#). *AR*, Jan 1957, p.28; *B*, 16 May 1958, pp.903–5.
- [7](#). *Survey of London*, vol.XLI, 1983, pp.35–6.
- [8](#). LMA, GLC/AR/BR/06/046118; GLC/AR/BR/22/TP/ 025753: *The Times*, 17 Feb 1969, p.13.
- [9](#). *Daily Telegraph*, 8 July 1986, p.21; 19 May 1997, p.26.
- [c1](#). Mercury House was demolished in 2002 for 'The Knightsbridge', a high-rise residential development designed by Squire & Partners, completed in 2005.

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