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The West End Railway District, London. Illustrated London News, April 9th 1859. Enlargement below shows grounds of Gordon House at high tide prior to construction of Chelsea Embankment. Summer House in South West corner of plot is prominent in this view. Courtesy MAPCO
Introduction
This document presents a brief history of Chelsea Court, a photographic record of significant elements of its fabric with an assessment of significance and a heritage impact statement addressing the proposed development.

An assessment of those parts of the Thames and Royal Hospital Conservation Areas that are considered to comprise the context of the development site is also included.

Chelsea Court and the conservation areas are understood to be of special architectural and historic character with an overall quality worthy of preservation and enhancement.

Chelsea Court is at the southern boundary of the Royal Hospital Conservation Area where it meets the Thames Conservation Area. The building is assessed with Embankment Gardens which was completed at the same time as part of the same development. The immediate context to this street is also assessed.

The nature of the proposals do not demand assessment of every part of both conservation areas as the effect of the proposals for the building and its setting will be limited with parts of the conservation areas further away, such as at Ormonde Gate, unaffected by the proposals. However the diverse character of the conservation area has been illustrated with a few photographs to place Embankment Gardens and Chelsea Court in the context of their surroundings.

It is anticipated that reference will be made to this study in finalising the design of building services.

Development Site address:
Chelsea Court
Embankment Gardens
Chelsea SW3 4LS
FMO-CCK Chelsea Court
Heritage Study
1. History

MBW/2525 Contract Drawings for Chelsea Embankment, 1869 - Plan
(extract at development site). Courtesy London Metropolitan Archives

MBW/2525 Contract Drawings for Chelsea Embankment, 1869. Sections
through mudbank then existing. Courtesy London Metropolitan Archives

MBW/2525 Contract Drawings for Chelsea Embankment, 1869. Section
through proposed roadway. Courtesy London Metropolitan Archives
Construction of the Chelsea Embankment enabled the building of Chelsea Court. The Embankment was completed by the Metropolitan Board of Works to house sewers, famously to the designs of Engineer Joseph Bazalgette with the Architect George Vulliamy. The first phase of these works as far West as the South lawn of the Royal Hospital had taken place in the 1850s. Ten years later design preparation began for its western extension which was approved by Act of Parliament in 1867. Difficulties in raising finance prevented the works commencing and it was not until 1871 that contract documents were prepared by Engineer Bazalgette and Architect Vulliamy.

The granite faced concrete wall we see today was built regularising the width of the river to 700ft. Behind it the sewer was built and covered by a tree lined roadway with footways either side. The works required demolition of two summer houses associated with Gordon House mentioned in various sources as being on the grounds of the Royal Hospital, beyond which was the mud bank of the river seen in sections 35 to 40, centre far left.

The Royal Hospital was famously designed by Sir Christopher Wren, but its grounds were designed by the lesser known but very influential George London in a formal style after Andre Le Notre, who he is reputed to have met. George London in partnership with Henry Wise, who would become Royal Gardener, ran a large horticultural enterprise covering what is now Pimlico and parts of Chelsea.

Gordon House, thought to be on the site of an earlier house, was built on land leased from the Royal Hospital by a Colonel Gordon in 1810, much to the annoyance of then Surveyor to the Royal Hospital Sir John Soane. His intention had been to use the old house as an infirmary considering its light and airy aspect suitable for convalescents. Instead, he had to build further inland, that building since lost. The grounds of Gordon House included a substantial water feature seen on the early maps in different arrangements as alterations were made. The house and grounds were undisturbed for roughly sixty years before the new embankment was built.
Completion of the Chelsea Embankment in 1874 coincided with development and redevelopment of its large estates. A series of red brick houses of fashionable design were built on the river side away from the old village of Chelsea, most notably Nos. 8 to 11 and No.17 Chelsea Embankment designed by RN Shaw and completed between 1874 and 1879. Pevsner and Cherry characterise this area as: “...one of the most interesting arrays in inner London of grand urban houses in the Queen Anne style: tall individualistic designs in red brick... challenged the supremacy of stucco” (572).

The South lawn of the Royal Hospital was the site of a major Naval Exhibition in 1891, part of it incorporating Gordon House and occupying its grounds, once again in the ownership of the Royal Hospital. Some 20 years before the Royal Horticultural Society started exhibiting there the exhibition was opened by the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII and included numerous exhibits including models of ships through the ages, full size replicas of HMS Victory and the Eddystone Lighthouse, a panorama of the Battle of Trafalgar, a large water basin where battles were re-enacted and nearby galleries and a diving exhibit. The entrance was at the corner of the grounds of Gordon House now occupied by No.23 Embankment Gardens. Featuring in the Illustrated London News and other publications the exhibition was considered a great success and referred to when the development of Embankment Gardens was first discussed by the Chelsea Vestry several years later.

As the 19th Century drew to a close the demand for large single family homes began to decline as smaller and more convenient accommodation became more popular. The mansion block typology emerged to meet this need. Early examples in this area include Godwin Court on Tite Street and Carlyle Mansions on Cheyne Walk, and, from 1895, the 18 flats of Chelsea Court as part of a development with 23 townhouses on Chelsea Embankment.

The architect was Delissa Joseph (1859-1927). Extremely successful throughout his career designing offices, hotels and other commercial premises as well as residences.
His practice was not without controversy as the site of St Matthew’s Buildings in Friday Street, no longer there, required demolition of a Wren Church. His St Olave’s Chambers was on part of the site of St Olave’s Church and Fenchurch Station Chambers was on the site of the Old Hambro Synagogue. No.10 Great St Helen’s Street required demolition of the last entirely wooden structure in the City, and redevelopment of 8 & 9 Great St Helen’s Street required demolition of 2 old houses reputedly by Inigo Jones, their stairs and mantel pieces are now in the V&A. He was criticised as a Vandal but at Chelsea Court the site was largely made ground enabled by construction of Chelsea Embankment. “I believe in brain and thought in Architecture, rather than soul,” he told The Builder’s Journal.

The Metropolitan Board of Works created a number of building plots from the land created by the new embankment and Embankment Gardens is likely one of these, though mention is made in the records of the Crown retaining ownership through the Royal Hospital, Joseph refers to a Mr H Lovatt as his client in correspondence with the LCC. While no evidence has been found to date it is possible an early arrangement for the site included the townhouses facing a shared garden, in the manner of Tedworth Square nearby, with the tree-lined embankment and the river beyond. Perhaps during the design process the changing market toward smaller and more convenient homes in mansion blocks directed the garden to receive one.

Building works began in the late Autumn of 1894 after the Vestry were notified by Builders John Allen & Sons of Kilburn of the “intention to build 20 houses on vacant land at Chelsea Embankment forming part of grounds of Gordon House with a new street and drain” (368). A further 3 houses were notified in January of 1895. In the February the design of the two closest to the corner were still being negotiated with the LCC which considered them too close to the boundary with the Royal Hospital. Joseph countered that as it was very unlikely the lawn of the Royal Hospital would ever be built on the proposed distance was acceptable. The LCC maintained its position as an alternative
scheme was proposed making minor alterations to the rear of the buildings to maximise available light and air until agreement was reached and the houses were built close to the boundary.

Initially called Gordon Court then renamed Chelsea Embankment Court before the street was formally renamed Embankment Gardens in November 1897 then finally named Chelsea Court the development of 18 flats arranged 3 per floor was carried out beyond the jurisdiction of both the Vestry and the LCC by virtue of being on Crown land, remaining in Royal Hospital ownership.

As the development progressed an application to connect the drains for the new houses was made to the Vestry and another to take over the road that had been built as a private road, perhaps the cost of its upkeep through the ground rent was found to be too high. It was designed with junctions to Chelsea Embankment only in order to avoid complications associated with the Vestry being a second approving authority. The development was supplied with electricity from the Chelsea Electric Power Supply Company in February 1895 as works progressed. The drainage connection required special works owing to the new sewer being very deep and, noted in the Vestry minutes of February 1895, “We found water in abundance, and, consequently, had a steam pump for a month” (615).

The LCC also received an application to add a porch to the front of Chelsea Court. Objections were received from the Solicitor to Lady Shelley of nearby Shelley House and its tenant Sir Arthur Charles on the grounds it would obstruct the view. It is a large porch, finally completed in 1902 after being granted permission in 1897, the drawing shows the design intent was closely followed in the construction. Shelley House was replaced in 1913. This handsome and substantial porch clearly defines the main entrance and provides a focal point for the building on the primary route.

Nos 1, 7, 17, 18 Chelsea Court were the first of its 18 flats to be occupied from in 1899. By 1904 11 flats were occupied, Nos. 2, 5 & 6 by a John
FMO-CCK Chelsea Court
Heritage Study
1. History

Gabriel. It is possible that some alterations were carried out to formally join these two though it may have been a legal arrangement only. Charles Rothschild, notable wildlife conservationist and son of the 1st Baron Rothschild occupied Nos. 5 & 6 in 1909. In that year Nos. 3, 7, 8, 15 were empty. At the outbreak of the First World War only 8 flats were occupied and at its end only four.

Perhaps indicative of changing economic conditions by the Spring of 1924 all the flats were occupied, ten years later in 1934 Nos. 5 & 6 had been separated and a Flat 1A had been created suggesting renumbering or a possible subdivision of No.1. Following the Second World War Chelsea Court was all but empty with no more than 8 people recorded in occupation until 1951 when the building was presumably empty as it is not even listed on the Electoral Register. By 1966 there are again a few people resident and it has been reported that during this post-war period the building was used as Nurses accommodation for those working at the nearby Royal Hospital. The number of voters in occupation increased until 1983 after which the building was empty between 1893 and 1989 then from 1990 there were 79 flats listed.

Embankment Gardens was also slow to sell with, in 1899, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 22 and 23, those with river views, the first to be occupied. By 1904 No.13 had been subdivided into 5 flats with others altered between the wars. By 1956 most of the houses of the street had been turned into small blocks of flats with Nos. 13-16 first combined then subdivided giving a larger flat to each floor.

To quote Delissa Joseph again “...atmosphere is the greatest friend Architecture has.” A successful late 19th Century Architect he also served on the councils of many community organisations and the RIBA Council and is deserving of a more detailed study of his work than is possible here. Chelsea Court and Embankment Gardens remain a lovely street.
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Heritage Study

1. History

1874 Ordnance Survey as surveyed 1869. Landmark Information Group

1891 Naval Exhibition plan with Site overlay on 1896 Ordnance Survey. Exhibition Plan on p3.

1896 Ordnance Survey, surveyed before completion of Chelsea Court
Landmark Information Group
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Heritage Study

1. History

1916 Ordnance Survey, showing completed development. Landmark Information Group

1950-52 Ordnance Survey. Landmark Information Group
FMO-CCK Chelsea Court
Heritage Study
1. History

Chelsea Court, West Wing & Entrance c.1990
1. History
FMO-CCK Chelsea Court
Heritage Study

2. Sources


“Chelsea Vestry Minutes 1894-1899”

“The Builder's Journal” March 3rd 1896 Men Who Build No.37 Mr Delissa Joseph FRIBA

“Chelsea Embankment 1874 Opening Commemorative Booklet” published by Metropolitan Board of Works.

“Illustrated London News” May 31st 1879

“Graphic” 16th May 1874

Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea Local Studies:

459: Naval Exhibition 1891 Plan of Grounds, supplement to “Invention” Jan 24 1891 – View of P+O Co. pavilion.


566: Royal Hospital 1892 Naval Exhibition 1892.

Chelsea Electoral Register

London Metropolitan Archives:

MBW/2525: Contract drawings for Chelsea Embankment 1871.

MBW/2447/06: Drawings by Jos. Bazalgette and Geo. Vulliamy Arch of Che Em 1865 proposal.

MBW/2447/02: Drawings by Jos. Bazalgette and Geo. Vulliamy Arch of Che Em 1866 and 1867 proposals.

GLC/AR/BR/22/BA/010640: Building Act Case File Chelsea Court


Historic England: Royal Hospital, Chelsea And Ranelagh Gardens List entry Number: 1000353

Gordon House (Hospital Quarters), Royal Hospital List entry Number: 1265844
Aerial Photograph of Chelsea Court & Embankment Gardens with Gordon House in the background, c.1990
The following photographic records describe key features of the Royal Hospital and Thames Conservation Area. Both are relevant to an assessment of the development site of Chelsea Court.

The annotated map, right, includes the boundaries of the two conservation areas and highlights the development site in red. Listed buildings and buildings that make a positive contribution identified in the draft Royal Hospital Conservation Area Appraisal are highlighted dark red and green respectively.

Part of Battersea Park is also shown as distance views of Chelsea Court are relevant to the assessment.

An assessment of every aspect of the conservation areas has not been attempted as parts are considered too distant from Chelsea Court to be affected by the alterations. Section 6 considers the Heritage Impact of the proposals.
FMO-CCK Chelsea Court
Heritage Study
3. Photographic Record: Conservation Areas

Current Ordnance Survey courtesy Promap, development site shaded red with listed and positive buildings overlay.
This conservation area has buildings from throughout the 19th Century but is dominated by the much earlier and most significant Royal Hospital. A very fine example of the work of Sir Christopher Wren on a large scale it has developed a fine patina in the centuries since its opening in 1692. Later additions to the site are of a high quality design.

The other half of the conservation area is characterised by residential streets among which is Embankment Gardens at the southern boundary.

19th Century buildings dominate, mostly in yellow stock bricks recording the passing of its various fashions in architectural language.

Parts are narrow and repetitive, others include traces a village-type collection of buildings. Then there are the large, dense red brick mansion blocks of which Chelsea Court is one.
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Heritage Study
3. Photographic Record: Conservation Areas

The Royal Hospital from Royal Hospital Road
Northern end of the conservation area.

The axis of approach laid out by Wren organises half the conservation area. Beginning with the Royal Avenue it includes Burton Court and the Royal Hospital itself as far as the gateway at Chelsea Embankment (photo 3.1.20)

Open space, hard and soft landscape in a palette of pale browns and greens.

Mostly yellow stock brick with many stucco ground storeys.

Large houses with tall narrow windows, particularly to 1st Floor. (photo 3.1.5)

Smaller terraces of houses of similar proportions emphasising the vertical but fewer and smaller windows. (photo 3.1.7)

Italianate yellow stock brick with cast stone dressings, now mostly painted white, and some entirely stucco buildings. (photo 3.1.6)

Red brick mansion blocks, taller and higher density, often gable fronted with prominent features such as bay windows and entrances toward the western boundary of the conservation area in the streets from Chelsea Bridge Road to Franklin’s Row. (photo 3.1.8)
Christchurch Street, early 19th Century terraced houses. Sloane Court West just outside the boundary of the conservation area; late 19th Century mansion block.

Gateway to Burton Court, Royal Hospital beyond. Across Burton Court to the mansion block on Franklin’s Row. In red brick with Portland stone dressings beneath a slate roof.

St Leonard’s Terrace, Georgian Chelsea. Walpole Street, the mid 19th Century Chelsea. A 4 storey terrace in yellow stock brick with cast stone dressings and stucco ground storey.

Christchurch Street, early 19th Century terraced houses. Sloane Court West just outside the boundary of the conservation area; late 19th Century mansion block.
FMO-CCK Chelsea Court
Heritage Study
3. Photographic Record: Conservation Areas

3.1 Royal Hospital Conservation Area

Examples from the middle part of the conservation area to the southern end of the conservation area.

Chelsea Physic Garden established 1673. Existing buildings and boundary 19th Century in red brick. (photo 3.1.13)

Georgian Chelsea in less in evidence with a focus at Swan Walk. Some yellow stock brick with red brick dressings. (photo 3.1.15)

Tedworth Square a London square of similar date to Embankment gardens with red brick terraces facing a central garden, square instead of triangular.

Ormonde Gate is locally distinctive. (photo 3.1.12)

Ormonde Gate, early 20th Century in the domestic revival style popular at the time. It is very suburban.

Swan Walk. Reminiscent of Twickenham, or perhaps parts of Hampstead and Highgate and other 18th Century villages of London.
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Heritage Study
3. Photographic Record: Conservation Areas

10. Tedworth Square, East side. A London square around a central garden in the manner established in the 17th Century but here at the end of the 19th Century in red brick.

11. Tedworth Square, South side

13. Chelsea Physic Garden, entrance on Royal Hospital Road

14. Chelsea Physic Garden, Grade I listed Park or Garden, gateway on Chelsea Embankment, Thames Conservation Area

16. Clover Mews

17. Paradise Walk
FMO-CCK Chelsea Court
Heritage Study
3. Photographic Record: Conservation Areas

3.1 Royal Hospital Conservation Area
Royal Hospital

A large open space extending southward from the main hospital building.

The rear of Embankment Gardens can be seen from the grounds of the Royal Hospital (photo 3.1.21)
FMO-CCK Chelsea Court
Heritage Study
3. Photographic Record: Conservation Areas

19. Royal Hospital from Chelsea Embankment

20. Stone gateway

22. As above

23. The fine memorial to the Carabiniers of the South African war
The principal characteristic of the Thames Conservation Area is open space on land and the river made possible by the Chelsea embankment, completed in 1874 when a number of building plots were also created. These were subsequently occupied by a series of innovative and influential houses and mansion blocks as well as several that followed in the wake of the architectural language rejuvenated and enhanced by RN Shaw and his contemporaries.
FMO-CCK Chelsea Court
Heritage Study
3. Photographic Record: Conservation Areas