

# THE STUDIO-HOUSES OF THE 'HOLLAND PARK CIRCLE'

When Leighton's house was first completed in 1866, the view from his dining room was onto open parkland stretching to the north. While never entirely losing this semi-rural character, the outlook changed dramatically over the 30 years that Leighton lived here, as a unique colony of artists' houses grew up around him.

In 1875 Melbury Road was laid out across the back of the garden. Following Leighton's example in Holland Park Road, many of the plots along it were bought by up-and-coming artists who then commissioned leading architects to design houses that combined studio space with domestic quarters for them and their families. Built on a grand scale and to the artists' exacting requirements, these houses were investments, designed to further the reputation and standing of their occupants. Ultimately the painters and sculptors living in 'Paradise Row' became the backbone of the artistic establishment enjoying great wealth and fame. All but one were made full Royal Academicians (Watts resigned following Leighton's death), with numerous public honours and titles bestowed upon them.

Although the reputation of many of these artists has faded, all but two of their houses still remain, allowing us an insight into the wealth, tastes and social standing of successful artists in late Victorian London. The houses that can be viewed from this window are as follows:

## The house immediately to the left:

**Artist:** Valentine Prinsep  
(1838 – 1904)  
**Architect:** Philip Webb  
(1831 – 1915)  
**Built:** 1865/6

Prinsep and Leighton built their houses at virtually the same time and remained firm friends until Leighton's death. However, Prinsep then objected strongly to the idea that Leighton's house should become a museum and even more so to the proposal that Holland Park Road might be re-named 'Leighton Road', making his views known in letters to The Times.

Prinsep's architect, Philip Webb, had designed Red House in Bexleyheath for William Morris in 1859 and was a leading architect of the Arts and Crafts movement. Initially built on a modest scale, the house was greatly extended in the early 1890s following Prinsep's marriage to the shipping heiress Florence Leyland.

## The house immediately to the right:

**Artist:** James Jebusa Shannon  
(1862 – 1923)  
**Architect:** W.E.F. Brown  
**Built:** 1892-4

Shannon's was the last of the studio-houses to be built along Melbury Road and Holland Park Road. Constructed on the site of what had been a farmhouse, this final addition encroached ever closer to Leighton's own home and was composed of two distinct blocks – one containing the family home and the second the working studio.

Born in the United States, Shannon's fortune came from his success as a fashionable portrait painter.

**The house directly across the back of the garden:**

**Artist:** Marcus Stone  
(1840 – 1921)  
**Architect:** Richard Norman Shaw  
(1831 – 1912)  
**Built:** 1875-7

At the time Melbury Road was being laid out, Leighton extended his garden to ensure that any new building would not come too close. The plot directly to the rear was secured by Marcus Stone and the resultant house is one of two in Melbury Road designed by the architect Norman Shaw in the 'Queen Anne' style. At the artist's request, a glass winter painting studio was built on the first floor. Many of Stone's very successful paintings of romantic trysts and troubled courtships were set in his garden.

On Leighton's death, it was Stone who took the news to the Royal Academy.

**Diagonally to the left, now occupied by the large block of flats in dark brown brick:**

**Artist:** George Frederic Watts  
(1817 – 1903)  
**Architect:** Frederick Pepys Cockerell  
(1833 – 1878) completed by  
George Aitchison  
(1825 – 1910)  
**Built:** 1875-6 with later additions.  
**Demolished:** 1964

Leighton and Watts were the two artists at the heart of the 'Holland Park Circle'. They were close friends and would often call on each other using a gate that connected their gardens. The house contained four studios, Watts also built a large gallery extension to display his work designed by the architect of this house, George Aitchison. Following a planning hearing at which few objections were raised, Watts's house was demolished in 1964 to make way for a block of 30 flats designed by Austin Blomfield. It is the only one of the Holland Park Circle houses to have been wilfully destroyed.

The other houses of the group are not visible from Leighton's house. The complete list of artists is as follows and includes a single architect, William Burges, who built the extraordinary Tower House for his own use in Melbury Road.

**Note:**

P.R.A. President of the Royal Academy  
R.A. Royal Academician  
A.R.A. Associate of the Royal Academy  
O.M. Order of Merit

**THE ARTISTS OF THE 'HOLLAND PARK CIRCLE'**

**Frederic, Lord Leighton P.R.A (1830 – 1896)**

**Valentine Prinsep R.A. (1838 – 1904)**

**George Frederic Watts O.M. (1817 – 1904)**

**Sir Luke Fildes R.A. (1843 – 1918)**

**Marcus Stone R.A. (1840 – 1921)**

**Sir Hamo Thornycroft R.A. (1850 – 1925)**

**Colin Hunter A.R.A (1841 – 1904)**

**Sir James Jebusa Shannon R.A. (1862 – 1923)**

**William Burges (1827-1881)**