

GENERAL HISTORY

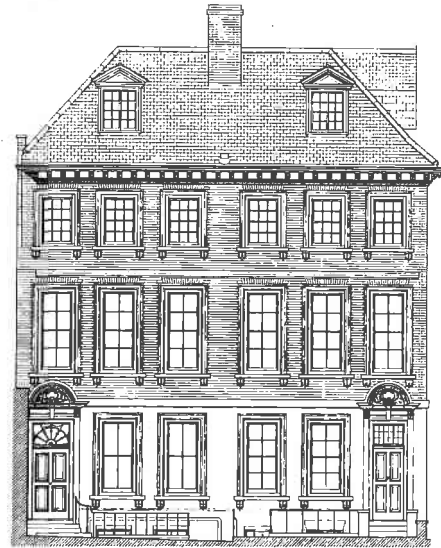
Background

The original village of Kensington was settled in early medieval times; the parish church of St Mary Abbots stood on the main highway to the west of England, exactly four miles from Temple Bar, the western gateway to the City of London. From Elizabethan times the area had a reputation as a healthy place to live, with spas and extensive market and nursery gardens. The introduction of stage coaches in the latter part of the 17th century gave the little village more importance as a staging post.

With its pleasant position and proximity to London, Kensington gradually became popular with those who wished to get away from the thickly-populated and occasionally plague-ridden city. Proclamations from 1580 onwards and throughout the next century prohibited all new buildings within specified distances of London but these proved hard to enforce. Pressure for accommodation was met by a modest expansion of the village northwards to Holland Street, the construction of a number of houses for the gentry along the south side of Kensington Road and the building of Kensington Square. The desirability of the area received a tremendous boost when Nottingham House, enlarged and improved by Wren for the Earl of Nottingham and later to become Kensington Palace, was purchased as a country seat by William III in 1689.

The Building of the Square

Several acres of land to the south of the High Street were leased in 1682 to Thomas Young, a builder and Sergeant Carpenter and Joiner to Charles II. Young first laid out a new street leading south off High Street, east of the stocks which stood before the Parish Church. This new street, completed in 1685 and named after the builder, consisted of 40 simple terraced houses copied from the style of house evolved by Nicholas Barbon for his various developments in the growing West End. Barbon had already laid out several squares in these suburbs and Young probably conceived his idea of a new square in Kensington Village from Barbon's schemes. The development of the Square also began in 1685, and it was called King's Square after James II who had been crowned in February of that year. Certainly Kensington Square was the first square to be built out of town and it is the sixth oldest square in the capital, after Bloomsbury, Leicester, Red Lion and Soho Squares and Lincoln's Inn Fields.



11 and 12 Kensington Square

The first mention of the Square in other records is dated 27 March 1687, when Thomas Young bought "a plott of land neere Kyng's Sq. in ye parish of Kensyngtoun". The title deeds of the "Greyhound Tavern", 1 Kensington Square, date from Lady Day 1686, and there is evidence that the east side of the Square was completed in 1690, and the whole square by c1700. The earliest houses to have survived in anything like their original condition are nos. 11 and 12 at the south-east corner, though they have been subsequently altered both inside and out.

With the arrival of the Court at Kensington Palace the Square became one of the most fashionable places of residence in England, "there being upward of 40 carriages kept there", according to Faulkner. However, George III abandoned Kensington Palace: after 1760 the Square was deserted by the aristocracy and was practically unoccupied until about 1803.

The gardens of nos. 11-23 on the south side of the Square extended to a small group of cottages known as South End. At the south-east corner there was a short, curved street (now Ansdell Street, originally called James Street after the King), connecting with a footpath which joined up with Hogmire Lane, now Gloucester Road. At the south-west corner a grassy lane led into the fields.

On the west side of the Square the gardens of nos. 24 and 25 extended to Barrows Lane, a twisting track which ran from the High Street across the fields to the Manor House at Earls Court. On the north the Square was bordered by the gardens of High Street properties and to the east by the house and grounds of the Imperial Russian Embassy.



The Greyhound Inn before rebuilding

The 19th Century

This scene of rural placidity continued up to the second quarter of the last century. Most of the present buildings of the Square were erected, rebuilt or refronted by 1850.

The Square and its surrounding streets were first paved and lit early in the century, when the parish authorities were empowered to pave, repair, light, watch and otherwise improve Kensington Square, Young Street and James Street. The whole district was further affected by the Kensington Improvement Act 1861. In 1870 a new road (Ball Street) was built to connect Young Street and Derry Street, parallel to the High Street and the north side of the Square, but this was lost in the subsequent development of High Street properties. The story of the 'improvement' of the High Street and its stores is considered below in greater detail.

In 1873 some of the houses to the north-east of the Square, together with other land nearby, were purchased by Baron Albert Grant, MP, who erected on the seven acre site a house designed in the Italianate manner to be the grandest in London. The project foundered only seven years later on Grant's bankruptcy. The unfinished house was demolished and the site used for the construction of Kensington Court.

The 20th Century

The major changes in this century have been the construction and further development of the large department stores on the High Street.

A number of bombs fell around Kensington Square in the Second World War, but only Ansdell Terrace suffered serious damage. Modern replacements have since been built on this site. A 1,000 lb bomb landed on the Derry and Toms roof garden in 1941 but failed to explode.

Other changes have generally been in the use of buildings. Although the Area has always contained some uses other than residential, larger

commercial schemes have occasionally been proposed. In 1923 some of the householders in the Square entered into a covenant binding themselves not to sell their properties except for use as another residence. Later, inexplicably, the London County Council zoned the Square as a special business area and, as a result, pressure built up for commercial redevelopment. The residents sought the help of Kensington Borough Council, but in 1946 the town planning sub-committee adopted a report expressing the view that "there is no substantial claim for the preservation of the buildings on architectural or historic grounds". They recommended no alteration in the zoning. However, as a result of public pressure, the full Council reversed this view and a change to the London County Council policy was put in train.

INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES IN KENSINGTON SQUARE

East Side

No. 1 "The Greyhound" was totally rebuilt in 1899, the date on the pediment being confirmed by the District Surveyor's returns of new buildings for that year; the architect is unknown. It is an attractive building with copious decoration. The most prominent features are the first floor splayed window bays and the urn finials and central cartouche on the parapet. The front was restored after being extensively damaged by a gas explosion in 1977, and the quality of the project was recognised by an Environment Award from the Royal Borough.

No. 3, originally nos. 2 and 3, was erected in 1874 as part of the extensive stable buildings associated with Baron Albert Grant's huge mansion. The entrance to the stables was through the arch: the rest of the building was a coachman's house. The architect of the stables was presumably James Knowles junior, the architect of the mansion. Alexis Benoit Soyer (1809-1858), the famous nutritionalist and cook, lived here for one year in 1857.

No. 4 was probably rebuilt in 1838; both a large rise in the rateable value between 1837 and 1838 and the style of the building itself support this. The top storey was added in 1875 or 1883.

According to the District Surveyor's returns and the building press **no. 5** was refronted rather than rebuilt in 1876 (date in pediment) but an inspection of the property has suggested that a virtual rebuilding took place. The architects of this lively Flemish-style recasting were Goldie and Child: the builders were Lucas and Son of Kensington

Square. The monogram H P on the facade is that of the freehold owner, Horne Payne. **No. 6** was wholly rebuilt in 1877, also by Lucas and Son to the designs of Goldie and Child.

No. 7 is basically a Regency house having been rebuilt in about 1808-9: inside, it retains several original features including a fine staircase. The front has been rendered, probably in the latter half of the 19th century. The Marquis of Powis (1617-1696), a companion of James II in exile, lived in the original house on this site. General Sir Thomas Gore Browne (1807-1887), former colonial governor, lived here from 1876. **Nos. 8-10** appear to have been erected c.1902-3 but the architect is not known.

South Side

Nos. 11 and 12 lie outside the limits of the Square laid out by Thomas Young and were built some years after the first houses in the Square itself; the precise date is not known but can be tied down to between 1693 and 1702. These well-preserved houses retain a handsome modillion eaves cornice but have undergone minor alterations; parts of the interior of no. 11 were evidently remodelled in the early 19th century. The carved segmental hood over the door to no. 12 is a modern copy of that at no. 11. Concerning the illustrious names painted on the door hood of no. 11, it is perhaps proper to point out that while Talleyrand certainly lived in the Square, this could only have been from October 1792 to February 1793 at the outside. It is also impossible to be precise as to which house he stayed in: if he was drawn to stay with a compatriot, one of several French residents in the Square - a Monsieur Defoeu - occupied no. 11 during that period. Turning to the Duchesse de Mazarin, a mistress of Charles II, while there is no evidence of her residence in the Square there is complete consecutive evidence of her residence elsewhere (Arthur, Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede: Records of Kensington Square 1936: Kensington Society 1986), although the Register of Deaths for 27 June 1792 lists the demise of a companion of the Duchesse in a lodging-house in the Square.

The original house at **no. 13**, the largest in the Square, was rebuilt as a pair on a mirrored plan by William Brass and Son of the City, builders. The architect is not known. A plaque on the front gives the date 1850 and the initials of the freehold owner, John Ebenezer Davis. Thomas Crampton, the railway engineer, received Garibaldi here in 1864.

Although refronted in stucco, probably in the late 18th or early 19th centuries, **no. 14** is basically the original house erected under a long lease of June



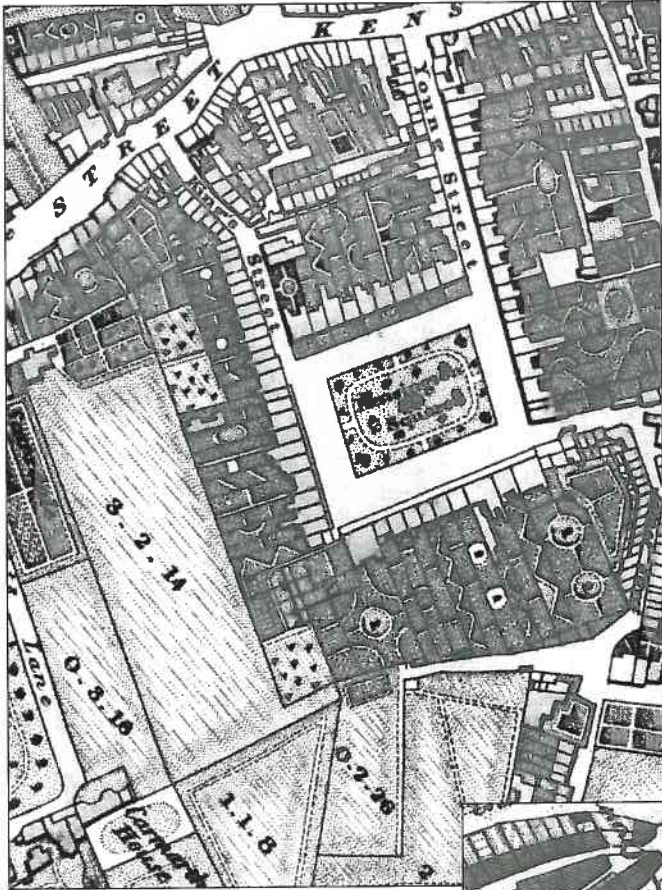
The staircase at 17 Kensington Square

1685 to one William Cross. It has been much altered inside but nevertheless retains its original staircase. John Richard Green (1837-1883), the historian, spent the last four years of his life here.

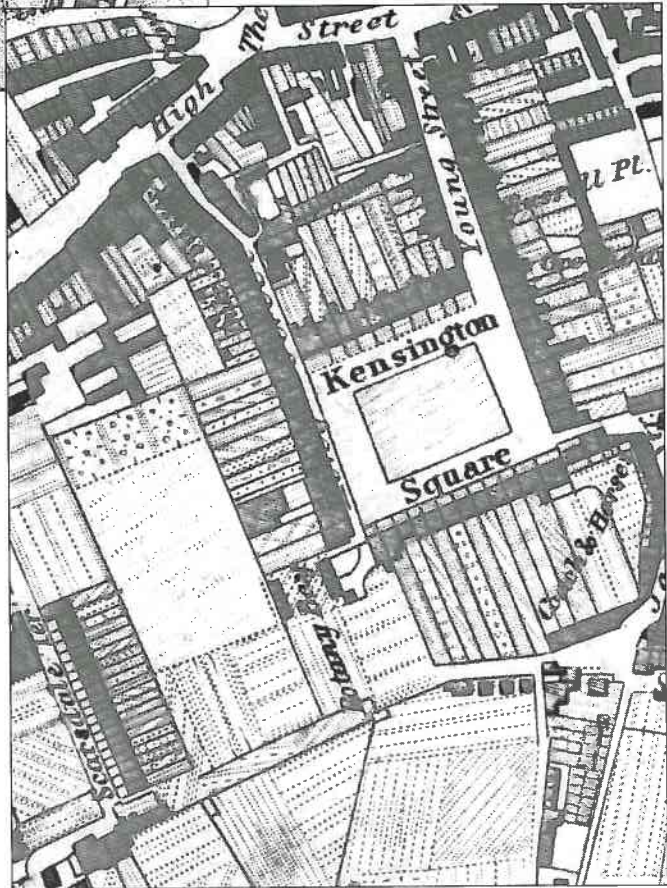
No. 15 is similarly the original house erected under a long lease to Henry Margetts, plasterer, dated June 1685, to which a rather crude 'Queen Anne' front in red brick has been added, perhaps in 1883 when the builders H Toten and Sons carried out unspecified alterations. The sculptor Frederick William Pomeroy (1856-1924) lived here from 1907 until his death.

No. 16 was rebuilt in the Flemish style in 1876 (date in pediment) for Mrs Horne Payne by Lucas and Son to the designs of Goldie and Child. Major John Samuel Torriano, commanding officer of the Kensington Volunteers in 1798, lived here as did Lady Anne Ritchie (1837-1919), the novelist, a century later.

No. 17 was built in the mid-1680s by Thomas Young himself and has a good interior with a fine staircase. It has almost certainly been heightened and a stucco facing applied to its front elevation, probably in the late 18th century. Sir Hubert Parry, Bt, (1848-1918), the composer, lived here for the last 32 years of his life. **No. 18**, also of three storeys plus an attic, was erected in the late 1680s and is not known to have been rebuilt, but the present appearance of the house suggests that it was extensively altered or remodelled in the mid to late 18th century. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), the philosopher, lived here from 1837 to 1851.

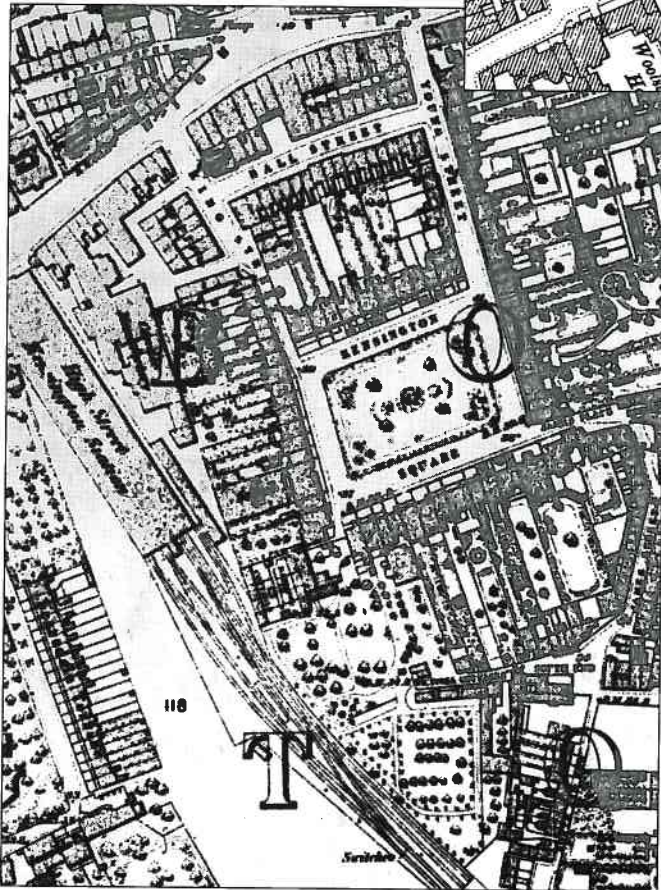
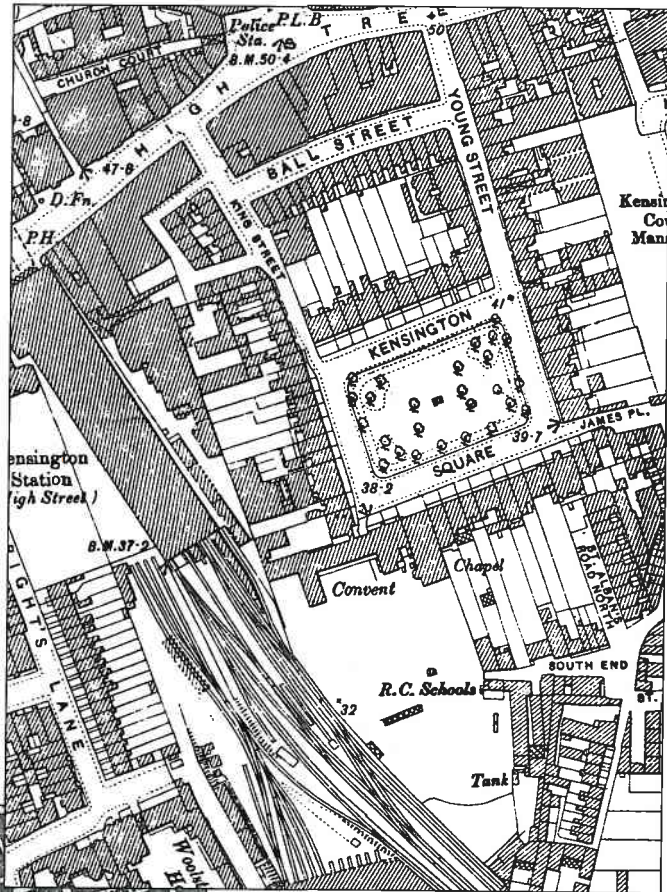


Starling
1822



Daw
1852

**Ordnance Survey
1894**



**Ordnance Survey
1860's**

Here he wrote his *Logic and Political Economy*. This house saw the founding of the Kensington Society and was visited on many occasions by Her Royal Highness Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone.

No. 19 also was erected in the late 1680s and is not known to have been rebuilt, but its present appearance suggests that an extensive remodelling took place in the late 18th century. It retains a good doorcase of about 1780 with Ionic pilasters and a frieze carved with swags, and has an admirable interior of around 1800. **No. 20**, a stucco-fronted mid-Victorian house, appears to be a complete rebuilding of 1850-1. There are original sashes in the windows of the top two floors, but those below and the door are later.

The Chapel of the Convent of the Assumption, **nos. 21 and 22**, was built in 1870-1 to the designs in Gothic style of Goldie and Child by Messrs Jackson and Shaw. The interior is aisleless with a coved barrel vault. There were frescoes by Westlake until the building was badly damaged by fire in 1957. **No. 23**, the main building of the Convent, consists of two early Victorian houses for which George Goldie designed additional buildings in 1875. The single-storey gallery stretching across the front of the two houses and containing the main entrance is thought to have been added in 1925.

West Side

No. 24 was completely remodelled in the 1950s preserving only the facade of the old house, probably a late 18th century feature, which has fine first floor windows with good iron window guards.

No. 25 dates from the 1690s. Although not known to have been rebuilt, the house is now mid-18th century in character with a stuccoed front of late 18th or early 19th century date. The principal rooms on the ground floor were destroyed when a cartway was opened through the house, probably at the end of the 19th century when Derry and Toms took over the former Grammar School which occupied nos. 25-29 until the 1880s.

No. 26 was originally erected in the mid 1690s by John Kemp of St Martin-in-the-Fields, woodmonger. There is no record of its having been rebuilt but it was at least refronted around 1790. It has an attractive doorcase with an entablature on small fluted brackets. Internally there have been many changes.

No. 27, the biggest house on the west side of the Square, was entirely rebuilt in 1833-4 by George



"A Glimpse of Kensington Square" from the Kensington Borough Guide, 1935

Todd of Chelsea, builder, as premises for the Kensington Proprietary Grammar School.

Like no. 26, **no. 28** was originally erected by John Kemp in the mid 1690s. It has been extensively reworked particularly in the early part of the 19th century and again in this century when its ground and first floor windows were altered. **No. 29** is the best preserved of this group of houses by Kemp and has a fine stair and panelling inside. The building has certainly been raised a storey or two and the front entrance has possibly been moved to its present central position from the left. The handsome pilastered doorcase with feathered capitals dates from about 1790. Richard Redgrave (1804-1888) lived here from 1838 to 1841, as did his elder brother Samuel (1802-1876), the writer on art. The Eton Fives courts erected in the rear gardens of nos. 28 and 29 for the Grammar School survived the acquisition of the group by Derry and Toms and were still in use in the early years of this century.

No. 30 was erected between 1697 and 1703 but was extensively remodelled in the early 19th century, evidently for C A Hoare who bought the property in 1820 and whose coat of arms, a double-headed eagle, appears on the front doorcase and elsewhere inside the house. **No. 31** dates from the same period. Some original and later 18th century interior features remain. In 1836-37 the house was 'partly rebuilt' by Isaac T Couchman of Kensington, builder, and the stuccoed parts of the front elevation doubtless date from this period. The tile-hung upper storeys and gable are later and perhaps date from 1882 when works of an unknown extent were carried out here by a builder, Samuel Parmenter. Dame Emma Albani (1852-1930), the singer, lived here from 1877 to 1879.