

Easter Greetings



Bye, bye Barkers

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its shopping arcade could open in late 1987.

In March 1985 House of Fraser had been bought by Mohamed Al-Fayed, and that put a stop to further changes for a few years; but when he in 1994 sold off the group (while keeping its crown jewel Harrods), the new House of Fraser management immediately started another expensive refurbishment of Barkers, this time removing all its individuality and turning it into a bland store without any personality, and, even worse, a store without caring and knowledgeable staff.

In August 2005 House of Fraser announced that Barkers would be closed forever in January 2006, together with another classic department store bought by House of Fraser: Dickins & Jones in Regent Street. The reason given by House of Fraser is that they don't believe that Kensington High Street will survive the onslaught of the White City shopping centre, which opens in early 2008 and will become the largest shopping centre in Greater London.

Congestion zone threat

Rumour has it, however, that House of Fraser will be one of the anchor tenants in White City, thus assisting in the feared killing of the High Street – although Transport for London is probably a worse culprit in this respect, as it will introduce the enlargement of the congestion zone less than a year before the opening of White City (meaning that the High Street will be inside the zone while White City will be just outside), and in addition will obligingly provide the totally private shopping centre (owned and built by Australian and German companies) with both a bus station and a new Tube station.

The second floor of the now dead department store has been taken over by Associated Newspapers, while the first, ground and basement floors (75,000 square feet in total) will become the American food chain Whole Foods Markets' first European store in early 2007. Time will tell if they can survive, as running a supermarket the size of a very large Sainsbury's or Tesco, in a high-rent building without any parking facilities, seems like a rather risky venture.

Time will also tell what will happen to the High Street when both White City and the congestion zone become realities...

Decision taken at the AGM:

Let's get a ban against estate agent boards

Some 70 members attended the Cherry Trees Residents' Amenities Association's Annual General Meeting on Monday 21 November 2005, this time held in St Mary Abbots Hall instead of Essex Church.

After having approved the accounts and accepted the proposed configuration of the CTRAA committee for 2006, the meeting agreed that we shall apply to the council that our area should be an estate-agent-board-free zone, something increasingly common throughout the borough.

It was also agreed that once again in 2006 we will have three garden parties instead of only two, following the success of last year's three parties.

The main change to the committee is that Mariju Lee has resigned, as she has moved out of our area, so Edward Buxton will take over her Neighbourhood Watch position, and Ashley McNeile will assume the role of Treasurer.

Councillor Christopher Buckmaster, who chairs the Vicarage Gate Action Group, gave a brief background to the Planning Inspectorate's recent rejection of Northacre's application for a luxury flat development on the site of the old nursing home, which improves the chances of making it a site for the care of the elderly again.

The meeting was, as usual, followed by a few glasses of wine, subsidised by Huntsworth Wine of Kensington Church Street.

No additional floor for Winchester Court

The lengthy battle between the owners of Winchester Court, Winchester Court Freehold Ltd, on one side and its neighbours, the Cherry Trees Association and several residents in Winchester Court on the other, regarding plans to build an additional floor of penthouse flats, is now appears over.



At the AGM it was agreed that we will apply to the council for making the Cherry Tree area an estate agent board free zone.

After having made several almost identical applications for the additional floor, which were all turned down by the council because the plans were regarded to be against a number of the policies in the Conservation and Development Chapter of the Unitary Development Plan, Winchester Court decided to appeal to the

The Cherry Tree

A newsletter for the Cherry Trees Residents' Amenities Association

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The Cherry Trees Residents' Amenities Association

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The aim of The Cherry Trees Residents' Amenities Association is to improve our neighbourhood and to function as our representative towards the council and other authorities in matters concerning the area. Membership is open to all residents living in Palace Gardens Terrace, Strathmore Gardens, Berkeley Gardens, Brunswick Gardens, Inverness Gardens, Vicarage Gardens, Vicarage Gate, Kensington Mall, and on the eastern side of Kensington Church Street between Kensington Mall and Vicarage Gate.

Three garden parties in 2006

Just as in 2005, the Cherry Trees Residents' Amenities Association will have three garden parties this year, held in May, June and September.

The **Spring Party** will be held on Tuesday 23 May in Inverness Gardens, starting at 6.30 pm.

The **Midsummer Party** will be in the garden of St. Mary Abbots' Vicarage, at the south end of Vicarage Gate, on Tuesday 20 June, starting at 6.30 pm.

The **Autumn Party** will be held on Sunday 10 September in Inverness Gardens, starting at 12 noon.

The two parties in Inverness Gardens are held by kind permission of the chairman and committee of Inverness Gardens Ltd.; and for allowing us to use the vicarage's garden we have to thank the vicar, Reverend Gilean Craig, and his wife Linda.

As usual, there will also be a drinks party at 9.30 pm after the our **Annual General Meeting** in the middle of November (exact date to be confirmed) in St. Mary Abbots' Hall in Vicarage Gate.

Planning Inspectorate instead of accepting the council's decision.

The Planning Inspector's hearing took place in the Town Hall in mid-December 2005, and already at the beginning of January the verdict came back: the Planning Inspectorate fully supported the council's rejection.

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Congestion charge next year despite strong opposition

London Mayor Ken Livingstone has decided that the western extension of the congestion charge zone will be implemented 19 February 2007, although the public consultation that was supposed to guide his decision showed that an overwhelming number of Londoners are against it.

The 229-page consultation report shows that 80% of businesses and 70% of the general public are against the extension.

The report also shows, interestingly enough, that those who think that the current congestion charge zone has improved traffic and environment tend to live far outside the area and seldom visit it, while those living inside the current zone more often regard it as a failure.

However, in spite of this roaring "no" to an extension, Ken Livingstone announced in September that he, after having digested the report, had decided to carry on as planned; so the extension, which will include most of Kensington, will be implemented on 19 February 2007.

In his announcement, Ken Livingstone recognised that most of the respondents were negative, but said that the Transport for London and GLA "officers" (i.e. those behind the plans) have assured him that it will be a success and that the negative impact an extension would have on businesses will be minimal; so he saw no reason to take much notice of the result of the consultation. Were we surprised? Probably not.

Ken Livingstone is now busy planning for the next extension, scheduled for 2009 and rumoured to cover a number of congested suburban districts, including Harrow, Hounslow, Kingston, Sutton, Croydon, Bromley, Ilford, Romford and Wood Green – and Transport for London is busy building a brand new Tube station and a new bus station inside the wholly privately owned White City shopping centre, thus ensuring that also those shoppers in west London who are not travelling by car will find White City more accessible than Kensington High Street.

The fight over the nursing home:

Northacre appeals to the High Court after double no from the Inspectorate

Following almost two weeks of appeal hearings in the Town Hall last July and September, regarding Northacre's plans to build luxury flats on the site of the Vicarage Gate House nursing home, the Planning Inspectorate finally delivered its verdict in early November. It was a double rejection of the appeal, but despite this Northacre has decided to appeal the decision to the High Court.

In his verdict, Planning Inspector David Wildsmith concluded that there is a well documented need for more nursing and care homes for the elderly in the borough, and that Vicarage Gate Ltd (the company set up by Northacre for the development) has failed to show convincingly that such a home would not be financially viable on the site. Consequently, he refused to grant a change of use and permission to demolish the existing building and erect a six storey residential block.

Affordable flats required

In his 20-page decision, David Wildsmith stated that even if Northacre had been able to prove clearly that a new nursing or care home wouldn't be financially viable, he would still have refused their application as the proposed building doesn't contain any affordable housing and lacks a mix of small and large apartments (the 12 proposed apartments are each the size of a whole house).

He concluded that the regulations call for more mixed-size housing and maximum usage of a building site. He found that the Vicarage Gate site could fit at least 30 apartments of various sizes. The regulations also clearly state that at least one third of the flats should be affordable, and that the affordable housing should be built on-site unless that is practically impossible. Consequently, a residential block on the Vicarage Gate House site must contain at least ten affordable flats.

However, the main issue for Inspector Wildsmith was the viability. He concluded that the borough's positive viability calculations may be somewhat uncertain, but supported the borough's criticism of Northacre's negative calculations, agreeing that these



Northacre's decision to appeal the Planning Inspectorate's no to their luxury flats project, means that the Vicarage Gate House nursing home will continue to be inaccessible for the elderly for quite some time.

have been made to support Northacre's view and thus must be regarded with scepticism. Most of all, he criticised Northacre and the seller, Elizabeth Finn Trust, for not having offered the site to care home developers first, which would have been the best way to test the viability.

Northacre appeals

Despite this double rejection by the Planning Inspectorate, Northacre announced at the beginning of February that they and their financial backer, Arcapita Bank (previously known as First Islamic Investment Bank), had decided to submit an application to the High Court "in the hope of quashing the Inspector's decision", and that they expected a High Court hearing and decision towards the end of the year.

Although Northacre's appeal is against the Planning Inspectorate (or actually the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, who controls the Planning Inspectorate), the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea has taken the unusual decision to assist the Planning Inspectorate by commissioning their legal representative

from the Inspectorate hearings, Russell Harris QC, to present the council's case against Northacre's plans at the High Court hearing. Considering that the Planning Inspectorate has a success rate of 80% in High Court appeals, even without additional help, Northacre faces a tough battle.

A win doesn't mean yes

Should the court find that the planning inspector has misinterpreted the law, or that Northacre had received unfair treatment (basically the only two reasons a planning case can be successful in the High Court), the result is normally that the court asks the Planning Inspectorate to reconsider the case, meaning that the inspectorate may very well say no again, but perhaps for other reasons. Should the court say no, its decision is usually final. Only in very rare cases will the High Court allow an applicant to take an unsuccessful planning appeal further to the Court of Appeal.

In the meantime, the need for the 50 nursing home places that were lost when Vicarage Gate House closed five years ago is becoming increasingly acute.

Bye, bye Barkers

On 2 January 2006 Barkers closed its doors for good, after 136 years. It was the last of the three classic department stores that dominated Kensington High Street during most of the 20th century. The owners, House of Fraser, have declared that they don't think Kensington High Street has any future when London's largest shopping centre opens in White City in early 2008, just outside the extended congestion charge zone that will encompass the High Street.

Barkers was the creation of John Barker, a brewer's son born in Loosem outside Maidstone on 6 April 1840.

At the age of 13 he had started as an apprentice to a Maidstone draper, and after further experience in drapery shops in Folkestone and Dover he moved to London in 1858 to join a drapery shop in Marylebone. From there he eventually advanced to department manager at London's first department store, Whiteleys.

In 1870 he was ready to start his own business. With financial backing from a wealthy City merchant he bought two shops on the south side of Kensington High Street and turned them into a drapery shop.

Quick expansion

By dealing directly with manufacturers and selling for cash he was able to keep prices low and achieve a rapid turnover. This in turn allowed the company to grow quickly, acquiring more and more shops in the area, and filling them with departments for dressmaking, men's tailoring, books, stationery, furniture, carpets, glass and china, groceries, cigars and wine and spirits. This expansion was crowned with the building of a six-storey building on the corner of the High Street and Young Street in 1889. However, although big, the building, with a food hall on the ground floor, was still only a wing in a complex of converted shops, with interior doors linking them together.

By 1892 John Barker & Co was operating one of the largest department stores in London, with over 42 departments, now also offering building, plumbing and catering. The company employed over 1,000 staff, and its huge delivery department



John Barker ended his life as a very wealthy baronet.

(with 80 horses) despatched some 2,000 parcels daily.

The following year John Barker and his investor fell out after a disagreement, so Barker bought out his partner by borrowing money from his son-in-law's father, Sir Walter Gilbey. But Sir Walter only agreed to the loan on the condition that the firm went public. The floatation made John Barker very rich, but he also lost control over his company. He was made chairman, but had to appoint outsiders to the board. As the official company history writes: "The transition from private ownership to public company was not, however, an easy one and the board was to be continually divided by disagreements, large and small."

One of the aims of the new board was to buy up the competitors. The first and obvious choice was Seaman, Little & Co, a prestigious draper who held a substantial part of the High Street frontage between King Street (today known as Derry



After 136 years Kensington High Street's last department store is closed.

Street) and Young Street, and was effectively cutting Barker's empire in half. Barkers bought the premises and stock in early 1894 and had it re-opened and interlinked with the other stores within a week. Barkers now had 33 shops with 64 departments, employing 1,500 staff.

In 1898 Barkers began buying up shops on the opposite side of Kensington High Street, and in 1905 a new building was erected there, for the furniture and other departments as well as accommodation for staff. That building, in the block between Church Street and Old Court Place, today houses Top Shop, Zara and Next.

In 1906 it was time to gobble up the next competitor, Ponting Brothers, a department store in the High Street Tube station block, which had gone

into liquidation. Barkers decided, however, to run Pontings as a separate concern under its old name.

As chairman of the company, and especially after the arrival of the energetic Sydney Skinner, there was less need for John Barker to be involved in the day-to-day operations, so he found time to pursue other interests. He bought The Grange, a 300 acre estate in Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, next to his daughter's father-in-law, Sir Walter Gilbey, who had become a close friend. There he began growing fruit trees and breeding Syrian sheep and polo ponies.

He also went into politics, serving as Liberal MP for Maidstone 1900-1901, and for Penryn and Falmouth in Cornwall 1906-1910. His contributions to business and society were in 1908 crowned with a baronetcy.

The big fire

In 1912, the food hall building in the High Street-Young Street corner was devastated by fire, and five waitresses, living in the staff dormitories on the fifth floor, were killed when they jumped from the windows. Temporary premises for the food hall were quickly constructed on the other side of the street, on an empty lot owned by the Crown Estate.

On 16 December 1914 John Barker died, 74 years old, only months after having retired. His standing in society can perhaps best be measured by the fact that a special train, with restaurant car, took the London



The Derry & Toms building still has its fantastic roof gardens.



Barkers 1905 building today houses Top Shop, Zara and Next.

guests to and from the funeral in Bishop's Stortford.

Barker was succeeded as chairman by Sydney Skinner, who had joined the company in 1889. He was immediately faced with the problems following the outbreak of the First World War. Despite some orders from the army and the Red Cross, business dropped significantly, so unprofitable departments were closed, wages were reduced and the delivery service was curtailed, especially after the sale of 100 horses to the War Office.

Derry & Toms acquired

In January 1920 the expansion plans were resumed with the acquisition of Derry & Toms, the main competitor, which occupied the block between Barkers and Pontings.

Derry & Toms had been established in 1869 by two local shop-owner families, and was undoubtedly Barkers largest competitor. However, the general slump in business during First World War had hurt Derry & Toms severely, so selling to Barkers was probably the only chance to keep the business alive.

It was decided that Derry & Toms,



The Ladymere Building is now home for Habitat and Urban Outfitters.

like Pontings, was to continue as a separate concern, and that Barkers "shall be conducted on high-class lines, whilst Pontings and Derry & Toms will cater for the multitude of good middle-class lines".

In 1924 Barkers started to build a new magnificent building on the north side of the street, where the temporary food hall had been erected after the fire. The white eight-story Portland stone building, known as the Ladymere Building, was ready in 1926 and was mainly devoted to furniture but also had two floors of men's clothing. At the same time Barkers' main block added a very popular roof garden tea room.

The big redevelopment

In 1927 the company reached an agreement with the LCC (London County Council) and the borough, allowing Barkers to close Ball Street, a cul de sac that went in between Barkers' buildings from Young Street, in return for moving both Barkers and Derry & Toms 30 feet away from the High Street curb. The deal enabled the borough and LCC to widen the congested High Street, and enabled Barkers to exchange all the houses in the Barkers and Derry & Toms blocks for two new magnificent buildings.

The plan was to do a phased re-



The Pontings building has now been replaced by the Boots building.

development of both stores during the 1930s, and work on Derry & Toms began in 1930. The architect for both projects was Bernard George, who had joined the company's building department in 1924.

The new Derry & Toms store opened in March 1933. It was an impressive six-floor building with an Art Deco inspired exterior. On the fifth floor there was an elegant restaurant, The Rainbow Room, and a fashion theatre.

In 1936 work began on Derry & Toms' now famous roof gardens, replacing the tea room garden on top of the Barkers building, as that was soon to be demolished. Ralph Hancock, a landscape architect, was commissioned to create something truly unusual, and in May 1938 the result of his hard work was opened to the public. It consisted of one and a half acres of gardens, with fountains, a stream, ducks, flamingos and 500 species of plants and shrubs.

Barkers rebuilding delayed

Meanwhile the demolition team had moved in on the Barkers block. Construction began at the western end, but the outbreak of the Second World War then halted the building works for more than 15 years.

Sydney Skinner, who had been knighted in 1922, became seriously ill in 1940 and was succeeded as chairman by Trevor Bowen, who had joined the company in 1914. The following year Skinner died.

Continuing the rebuilding of the Barkers building after the war proved very difficult. The new generation of politicians in Town Hall felt that the pre-war redevelopment agreement should be re-assessed, requiring much wrangling and persuasion on the part of Bowen before the building work could resume in April 1955.

In September 1958 the new Barkers building was finally finished. At a time when the favoured architectural design style was "brutalism", with its austere buildings in raw concrete, central Kensington was thus adorned with a new Art Deco

building, for the simple reason that the drawings were 30 years old.

House of Fraser

However, before the new building was completed, the business was taken over by House of Fraser in August 1957, and the new owners immediately started "down-sizing" the Barkers empire. Within a couple of years Fraser had closed down the two shops on the north side of High Street and sold off many of the businesses outside Kensington. In February 1971 it was time to kill off Pontings, and in January 1973 Derry & Toms was closed.

The Pontings building was eventually replaced by a new building where Boots is the main tenant today, and iconic Biba, one of the symbols of the 1960's swinging London, took over the Derry & Toms building. However, within two years "the most beautiful store in the world", as Sunday Times called Biba, was gone. It had opened just as recession struck Britain, and although "everybody" loved to go there, too few bought anything.

Today, the Derry & Toms building houses Marks & Spencer and Gap. The Rainbow Room restaurant is long gone, but the roof gardens live on, having been taken over by Richard Branson in 1981. For several years he ran it as an exclusive club, but the building in the middle of the gardens is now dominated by the Virgin run Babylon restaurant, which is open to the public

A shrinking Barkers

The main Barkers store went through several refurbishments between 1976 and 1978, and in 1982 Fraser decided to shrink it from 600,000 square feet over seven floors to 140,000 square feet on less than four floors. The three top floors were sold off as office space (mainly to Associated Press) while part of the ground floor was let to individual boutiques. This decision resulted in a new long period of refurbishment until the new "compact" Barkers with

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In 1912 Barkers was demolished by a fire, which also killed five staff.



After the fire, a temporary building was quickly erected on the north side of Kensington High Street, housing the food department.