

The

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# BELGRAVIA SOCIETY

## Magazine

THE BELGRAVIA SOCIETY

**THE ONLY  
INDEPENDENT  
VOICE FOR  
BELGRAVIA**



Registered Charity No: 1168619

Patron: Lord Fellowes of West Stafford DL

# Welcome to The Belgravia Society magazine, covering all aspects of village life in Belgravia and beyond.

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This magazine has been independently produced by the Committee of The Belgravia Society on a voluntary basis with regular contributions from local residents and other authors in and around Belgravia.

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Front Cover: Ebury Street

# Chairman's Message



**George Waite**  
Chairman of  
The Belgravia Society  
and ESRA

## To save our Royal Parks, we must save the Parks' Police

**B**BC News reports that, “the Met Police has been urged to rule out cutting the police unit that protects the Royal Parks, as it tries to plug a £450million budget gap.”

Sir Mark Rowley (Police Commissioner) has referred to such cuts as a “worst-case scenario”, but if, as he has previously said, he could be forced to cut 2,300 police officers and 400 staff this year to meet a target of £100million in efficiency savings, it could be that the Royal Parks will suffer.

The Royal Parks Police currently protect 5,000 acres of London's green spaces. As part of the Met Police, they are responsible to ensure that events like the Changing of the Guard run safely and smoothly as well as enforcing the Parks' security policies and safety regulations.

For example, these are some of the things that we are forbidden to do in a Royal Park (you will be fined if you break the law):

- You can't barbeque anywhere or light a fire.
- You can't sell alcohol.
- You can't swim in any of the water (and that includes dogs). The exception to this is an area of the Serpentine set aside for people to use by the Serpentine Swimming Club.
- You mustn't camp overnight or stay after the park gates are locked.
- You must comply with the signs that show where you can and can't ride.

We can all well imagine what will happen to these and other rules if they are not policed.

The Royal Parks comprise of eight parks, including Hyde and St James's, as well as Brompton Cemetery and Victoria Tower Gardens.

Richmond Council, which is home to two Royal Parks (Richmond and Bushy) has put together a motion to call on the police and the Mayor of London to ensure sufficient funding. The motion added, “[The] Council believes the Royal Parks Police hold specialist knowledge, experience and expertise which would be impossible to replicate by other units within the Metropolitan Police”.

The Mayor of London recently announced increased funding for the police from City Hall and the government to help keep more officers on the streets of London. A spokesperson said, “The Mayor will continue to work closely with the new government and the Met Commissioner, in the lead up to the spending review, on the additional national investment the Met needs to ensure we can continue building a safer London for everyone.”

We understand that the Royal Parks Police will cease to be a separate entity but absorbed into the Met. The Royal Parks Police are specialist officers with detailed knowledge of the Parks' 5,000 acres and its unique problems. The outcome will mean that almost certainly less officers will be available as the need of policing the Royal Parks will be thought of less significance, and those that do attend will not have the specialist knowledge.

Our local Councillors are very much involved in this matter. Please write or email your support, because if we want to save our Royal Parks, we need to save the Royal Parks Police and they must continue as a separate part of the Met.” ▲

# Update from Rachel Blake MP

As Parliament resumes, I've been busy advocating for issues that directly affect our community. Here's a quick update on what I've been working on recently.

As part of my ongoing work to address local issues, I've called on Transport for London to bring forward the draft Pedicabs Regulations as soon as possible, in order to clamp down on the anti-social behaviour caused. I have been advocating for better regulation of e-bikes, which have become increasingly disruptive on our streets. Many residents have raised concerns about rogue e-bike riders who run red lights, cycle dangerously, and—perhaps most frustratingly—leave bikes blocking pavements and access points to buildings. This is a serious issue, not only for residents but for businesses and visitors, especially near our theatres. After working closely with Westminster City Council and the City of London Corporation, I'm pleased to share that the government has announced a new measure granting local transport authorities the power to fine e-bike riders who abandon bikes or break the rules. This development, which will be part of the English Devolution Bill, is a much needed step forward in addressing the disruptions caused by e-bikes and improving the safety and accessibility of our streets. I am committed to ensuring that these powers are implemented effectively and that local authorities are supported in enforcement efforts. This is a vital move towards creating a safer and more efficient transport system that benefits everyone.

I recently spoke in the Commons about the ongoing maintenance issues on leasehold estates, where I believe too many residents have been facing high service charges. During the questions, I called for greater transparency and accountability from managing agents. I have also brought together a group of over 80 MPs to hold

Firstport, the managing agent, to account for their poor services.

This month I will be hosting our second meeting of the Leasehold Action Group, where we will continue to discuss the challenges leaseholders face and explore ways we can work together to improve the system.

I also took the opportunity to speak with the minister responsible for negotiations with the European Union about the importance of the upcoming UK/EU summit for economic growth. I am pleased to say that he agrees with me that now is the time to move forward from the divisions of the past and the botched Brexit deal to focus on our future.

As always, feel free to reach out to me at [rachel.blake.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:rachel.blake.mp@parliament.uk). If you wish to join our next Leasehold Action Group meeting, please get in touch. ▲



*Rachel Blake MP*



## PLANNING ADVICE

If you get a notice of a planning application near you and you want advice, telephone our dedicated helpline: 07578 969509

**CAF**  
Charities Aid Foundation



If you have a CAF account, it is an easy way to donate to the Society. Please do help us to maintain our work for Belgravia and our community magazine.

## Wanted!

Writers | Historians | Storytellers

**DO YOU ENJOY WRITING?**

We would be delighted to receive articles and short stories about Belgravia/our neighbours/London and beyond – all voluntary, of course. Discuss your ideas with us at [info@belgraviasociety.com](mailto:info@belgraviasociety.com)



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## Building a strong community

**To celebrate the past,  
improve the present,  
and engage the future**

The more members we have, the louder our collective voice will be.

## JOIN US TODAY!

### Benefits include:

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Opportunity to join us at any of our monthly meetings

Have your say on local matters

Advice where possible on planning issues

Invitation to our AGM and opportunity to vote

[www.thebelgraviasociety.com/online-membership-form](http://www.thebelgraviasociety.com/online-membership-form)

Please fill in the online form by clicking on the link above link.

Alternatively, print the application form on page 31 and post your completed form to

63 Belgravia Court  
33 Ebury Street  
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*Drawing Desk at The King's Gallery*

# The King's Gallery

The building that originally stood on the site of the current King's Gallery was designed by John Nash as one of Buckingham Palace's three identical conservatories or pavilions in the form of Ionic temples. It was constructed on the south-west corner of the Palace, facing the garden, and was completed in 1831. The conservatory was converted into a private chapel for Queen Victoria in 1843, but destroyed in an air raid in 1940.

At the suggestion of the late Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh, the ruined chapel was redeveloped as a gallery for the Royal Collection in 1962.

In 1977 a competition was held for the appointment of an architect who helped create the galleries we know now. It was the most significant addition to Buckingham Palace in the last 150 years. The gallery, then

known as the Queen's Gallery, was opened by Queen Elizabeth II in May 2002 as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations. The gallery shows changing exhibitions of works from the Royal Collection, one of the largest and most important art collections in the world.

The current exhibition, this year until 9th March, displays its drawings from the Italian Renaissance. The drawings are amazing. The years between 1400 and 1600, often termed the Renaissance, saw transformation in the practice of drawing in Italy. The costs of paper fell, new materials such as chalks were introduced, and artists became increasingly adventurous in the art of drawing.

Drawing was the basis of an apprentice's training and remains central to most artists' activity. It was a means to develop a personal style, to try out new ideas, to design works of art – paintings, metalwork, architecture,

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Drawing was the basis of  
an apprentice's training and  
remains central to most  
artists' activity.

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*Bartolomeo Passarotti (1529-92)*



*Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)*

tapestry and much else – and was occasionally  
an art form in its own right.

The Royal Collection holds some of the finest  
groups of Italian Renaissance drawings in  
existence. This exhibition explores the many  
different types of drawings made across Italy  
and the range of materials in use, during this  
period of great innovation.

The galleries themselves are very beautiful  
and a wonderful backdrop for displaying  
collections. The atmosphere is very welcoming  
as are the staff around the exhibition.

There are even desks where members of the  
public who wish to do so, can sit and draw  
some of the exhibits. Paper and drawing  
materials are also available.

This is a wonderful exhibition and well worth  
visiting. In addition, visitors can visit the  
King's Gallery again free for the rest of the  
year. Again, we celebrate the benefits of living  
in central London and, of course, Belgravia.

The drawings in the Royal Collection can be  
explored on the website [www.rct.uk](http://www.rct.uk). ▲

# The Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree



*The Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree*

**T**his Christmas tree is given to the people of London by the city of Oslo in each year since 1947. It is displayed throughout the Christmas season until Twelfth Night.

Although the tradition with an annual Trafalgar Square Christmas tree began in 1947 as a token of gratitude for the British support to Norway during the Second World War, the very first Trafalgar Christmas tree from Norway arrived in 1942. A Norwegian Commando, Mons Urangavag, had arrived in London shortly before Christmas with two spruce trees felled during a raid on Hisoy, an island off the west coast of Norway. One of the trees was intended as a gift to the Norwegian King, Haakon VII, who was in exile in Britain at the time. The other tree was erected in Trafalgar Square by a group of officers from the British naval intelligence and a couple of Norwegian

commanders after dinner at the Savoy. One of the naval intelligence officers was Commander Ian Fleming and the other Lieutenant Norman Denning.

The tree provides a central focus to Trafalgar Square and its traditional carol singing programme, performed by different groups raising funds for voluntary or charitable organisations. It is generally cut in Norway sometime in November and the ceremony is attended by the British Ambassador to Norway, Mayor of Oslo and also the Lord Mayor of Westminster. After the tree is cut, it is taken aboard a UK boat to bring it to England.

The tree is decorated in a traditional Norwegian style and adorned with 500 white lights. These use low wattage halogen bulbs. At the base of the tree there is a plaque bearing the words: 'This tree is given by the city of Oslo as a token





*Christmas market at Trafalgar Square*



This tree is given by the city of Oslo as a token of the Norwegian gratitude to the people of London for their assistance during the years 1940-45



of the Norwegian gratitude to the people of London for their assistance during the years 1940-45'.

There is a ceremony to light the tree on the first Thursday in December. It is usually accompanied by a large number of people in Trafalgar Square to witness the ceremony which is led by the Lord Mayor of Westminster and includes a band and choir followed by the switching on of lights.

Carolling groups at Christmas provide a focal point in the square and, for many in London, the tree and the carolling signals the countdown to Christmas. ▲



*Christmas lights on The Strand*



*The first commercial Christmas Card commissioned in 1843*

# Farewell to Christmas 2024

**C**hristmas is over for another year. We have had the New Year celebrations too. Years ago, there was no public holiday on New Year's Day. Now the holiday season lasts a long time, from mid-November to twelfth night. Somehow, I miss the decorations and the colour that adds so much to the Christmas season and Christmas itself.

Because of the huge cost of postage, many people do not send cards anymore, often giving the cost to charity. Perhaps you may send the Christmas greeting by email instead.

So much is lost though. Christmas cards are a great way to reach out to friends and family, both near and far, during the holidays. It also helps us keep in touch with friends and distant family members. It is great to exchange cards and keep in touch.

We can exchange news of friends we have known for very many years and their children and often grandchildren as well. If it was not for the Christmas card, we would lose contact with old friends and wonderful memories.



Christmas cards have been around a long time. A Christmas card is sent as part of the traditional celebration of Christmas. The first known Christmas card was sent by Michael Maier to James I of England and his son Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales, in 1611. It was discovered in 1979 by Adam McLean in the Scottish Record Office.

The first commercially available card was commissioned by Sir Henry Cole and designed by John Callicott Horsely in 1843. Cole had helped introduce the Penny Post three years earlier. Two batches totalling 2,050 cards were printed and sold that year for a shilling each. A shilling in those days was worth something in the region of £8 in today's money, but the postal charge was one penny. The cost of sending the Christmas card would have been considerably less than it is today.

We should continue the tradition. After Christmas, the cards can be passed on to schools or good causes who can make use of them, or just be recycled. ▲



*Left: Victorian Card from 1870  
Right: A Christmas Card from 1901*

## INVITATION TO THE NEXT SOCIETY COMMITTEE MEETING

We would be delighted for you to join our next meeting in person on

**11th February at 5pm  
in The Caledonian Club**

Please let us know if you wish to attend by emailing  
[info@thebelgraviasociety.com](mailto:info@thebelgraviasociety.com)

# Chelsea Town Hall Unveils Sensational Refurbishment

By Simone De Gale



*Chelsea Town Hall reception*

Chelsea Town Hall, an iconic London landmark, has recently undergone a transformation, blending classic elegance with contemporary style. It continues to be a premier choice for couples in London. Revered for hosting the weddings of celebrities, high-profile figures, and even royalty, the venue continues to be a beloved choice for couples seeking a romantic setting. With over 2,000 weddings held here each year, Chelsea Town Hall remains synonymous with love, charm, and elegance.

The refurbishment, led by Chelsea-based Architect Simone de Gale, has breathed new life into the venue's interiors. The makeover introduces a sophisticated new colour palette, warm lighting, and chic modern touches, all while preserving the building's historic

grandeur. The ceremony rooms now feature antique mirrors, stylish wall panels, and sparkling chandeliers, creating a dreamy backdrop for a couple's big day. From the moment guests walk through the doors, they are greeted by a space that exudes timeless romance with a contemporary twist.

Part of the project's charm is its focus on sustainability. Existing chairs were lovingly reupholstered in plush velvet and accented with sleek metal details, while the addition of new chandeliers brings an elegant glow to the ceremony spaces. Every detail has been carefully considered to ensure that the atmosphere is both welcoming and refined, setting the stage for unforgettable wedding celebrations.

Cllr Kim Taylor-Smith, Deputy Leader for Economy, Culture, and Skills, expressed his delight over the project's completion: "This investment underscores our commitment to providing couples with an unforgettable experience at one of London's most iconic wedding venues. Chelsea Old Town Hall's unique blend of history and modern luxury ensures it remains the ideal venue for couples from all walks of life. It's fantastic to see such a well-loved local landmark revitalised, symbolising love and celebration for thousands of couples each year."



The marriage rooms at Chelsea Town Hall are iconic and a treasure for Chelsea's local neighbourhood.



The refurbishment was brought to life through a collaboration with Simone de Gale Architects, who expertly blended the building's Grade II listed architecture with innovative design elements. Simone says: "The marriage rooms at Chelsea Town Hall are iconic and a treasure for Chelsea's local neighbourhood. We were excited to refresh the look and feel of its ceremony rooms and associated waiting areas. We worked closely with the Head Registrars, Steven Lord, as it was important to accentuate the building's historic Grade II listed architecture and combine this with innovative and advanced materials and finishes."



"We chose Orac Decor wall panels and Armourcoat Perlata polished plasters in the ceremony rooms. We brighten the atmosphere to create a focal point for the bride and groom. We chose neutrals, caramels, and greys with bronze to create a holistic space for loved ones to enjoy their special day."

With this exquisite refurbishment, Chelsea Old Town Hall continues to be a premier choice for couples looking for a stunning, stylish, and unforgettable wedding venue. Whether you're planning an intimate ceremony or a grand celebration, the venue's fresh new look sets the perfect scene for a magical day. ▲

### Editor's Note

Simone de Gale Architects' (SGA) work consists of super-prime residential, luxury retail, and commercial projects in central London and international locations. SGA are ranked among Spear's 500 Index Top Recommended Architects 2024 and this year won 'Best Small Business of the Year' at the Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Business Awards 2024 (@simonedegale). Please contact Simone de Gale for opportunities and images. For more information, visit RBKC Marry Me in Chelsea, and follow on Instagram: @MarryMeInChelsea.

Simone is one of the leading members of our Belgravia Society Committee. Naturally, her main work for us relates to planning and we are most grateful for her contributions.





Afrim, landlord of Horse & Groom

# Horse & Groom

One of the oldest pubs in London

By Marina Kaloghirou

If you watched Lord Julian Fellowes' TV drama, *Belgravia*, you'd probably remember John Bellasis, the baddie, meeting Turton, the butler, at the pub, Horse & Groom, to secretly weave their treacherous plot.

Belgravia may not appear too interesting at first glance. Rows of similar terrace houses, foreign embassies, buildings owned offshore as investments and empty



Horse & Groom at night



It is a favourite watering hole for locals and visitors alike who come from all over the world to experience its charms and savour its fine ales.



for much of the time. However, look a bit closer and there are so many interesting little side streets and interesting buildings. The old Five Fields is just below the surface and it is still possible to trace some of the old roads and locations of the Five Fields and Ebury Farm, which have transformed into the Belgravia we see today. There is plenty more to explore.

Horse & Groom, as its name would suggest, is said to have started life in 1698 as a Coaching Inn. Shepherd Neame, its brewery supplier, started supplying pubs in that year.

By the 1800s, once the grandeur of Belgrave Square was attracting aristocracy from all over the country and from abroad, it became not only a social space for locals, but also for travellers, tradesmen and politicians, too.

Nowadays, Horse & Groom is comfortably tucked away in Groom Place, originally called Chapel Place, the charming cobbled mews that runs between Chapel Street and Chester Street, right in the heart of Belgravia. It is still a favourite watering hole for locals and for visitors alike who come from all over the world to experience its charms and savour its fine ales.

Fish and wonderful chunky chips are hard to resist but there is a full menu offering starters, mains, sandwiches and puddings, and all the choices you would expect.



*Horse & Groom by day*

The pub's landlord, Afrim, a charming man originally from continental Europe, has been running it for more than twenty years. Much liked and respected by the community at large, he was even given an award recently for his remarkable charity contributions.

Indeed, when he is not serving his very fine ales and his very decent 'pub grub', Afrim gets involved with fundraising activities. He is particularly interested in and has raised great sums for The Lily Foundation, a charity dedicated to supporting people whose lives have been affected by mitochondrial disease.

They fund research to improve diagnosis and develop treatments, always hoping to ultimately find a cure.

And yet with all of his activities, you'll still find him at his pub welcoming everyone with a big smile on his face, full of energy ready to take your order.

Cheers, to Afrim! ▲

# Lady Christabel Flight Awarded MBE



*Lady Christabel Flight*

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We are delighted to see that Lady Christabel Flight has been given an MBE. She recognised that we have Mother's Day, Father's Day, so why not Silver Sunday celebrating older people?

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**R**egular readers of this magazine will know that we are delighted that Marina Kaloghirou makes sure that there is a party each year to celebrate Silver Sunday here in Belgravia in memory of her mother. We always report on the celebration.

Silver Sunday was conceived in 2012 by Lady Christabel Flight, who at the time was a trustee of the Sir Simon Milton Foundation, and it was run by the Foundation for many years. What

started as a single idea has flowered over the years into a national celebration. Anyone can take part and there are over 1,300 events for older people across the UK.

Age UK's Silver Sunday is a day dedicated to older people which takes place every year in the first Sunday in October. Fun and free activities are held across the UK where older people can make new friends, visit new places, try new activities and connect with





*Lady Christabel Flight served as Lord Mayor of Westminster from 2011-2012*

other generations in their local communities. Simply put, it is a day for older people to have something special to look forward to and enjoy themselves.

In 2024, *Age UK* took on the campaign. Through its network of local *Age UKs* and its event expertise, the charity plans to grow Silver Sunday, which saw over 1,300 events taking place across the UK this year, and create more opportunities for older people who are feeling lonely or isolated.

We are delighted that Christabel, who served as a Councillor in Westminster as well as its Lord Mayor, has been recognised with an MBE for her service to local government and charitable causes.

Christabel served as a Warwick Ward Councillor for 16 years, dedicating a year as Lord Mayor to raising awareness and funds to tackle loneliness among older people. In 2012 she also served as the Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health.

Christabel continues to dedicate her time to supporting local communities as an Honorary Alderman of the City Council. ▲

# The Case of the Missing Planning Application



In April of last year this Society and a number of other interested parties in Belgravia objected to a planning application relating to 102-122 Ebury Street. Having studied the application, we objected to a large number of matters, including the change of roof overbearing causing noise and the outside dining on narrow pavements, difficulties for pedestrians and the effect of the development on the neighbourhood. We talked about the kitchens and all the facilities which engender great numbers of people using the facilities with an adverse effect on the amenity of neighbours, noise disturbance, loss of privacy and overshadowing, together with the exacerbation of the problem by late opening hours.

It is now January and, as we note this, there is no indication of when the planning application will be dealt with, although some have suggested next month. Given the application was in April last year, there can be no excuse for the silence, for not dealing with the matter, and for not informing the objectors as well as the community in the usual way.

We sympathise with the local community and especially with the immediate neighbours who have been held in suspense for nigh on eight months. We will ask our Councillors if they can find anything out. ▲

# Get Carman

By Karen Phillipps



George Carman QC

I am delighted to have had my book, *Get Carman*, published by Biteback Publishing. It is about the life and cases of George Carman QC, who was regarded by many as 'Britain's most feared barrister'. I wrote it as a tribute to him for a remarkable life as a leading barrister.

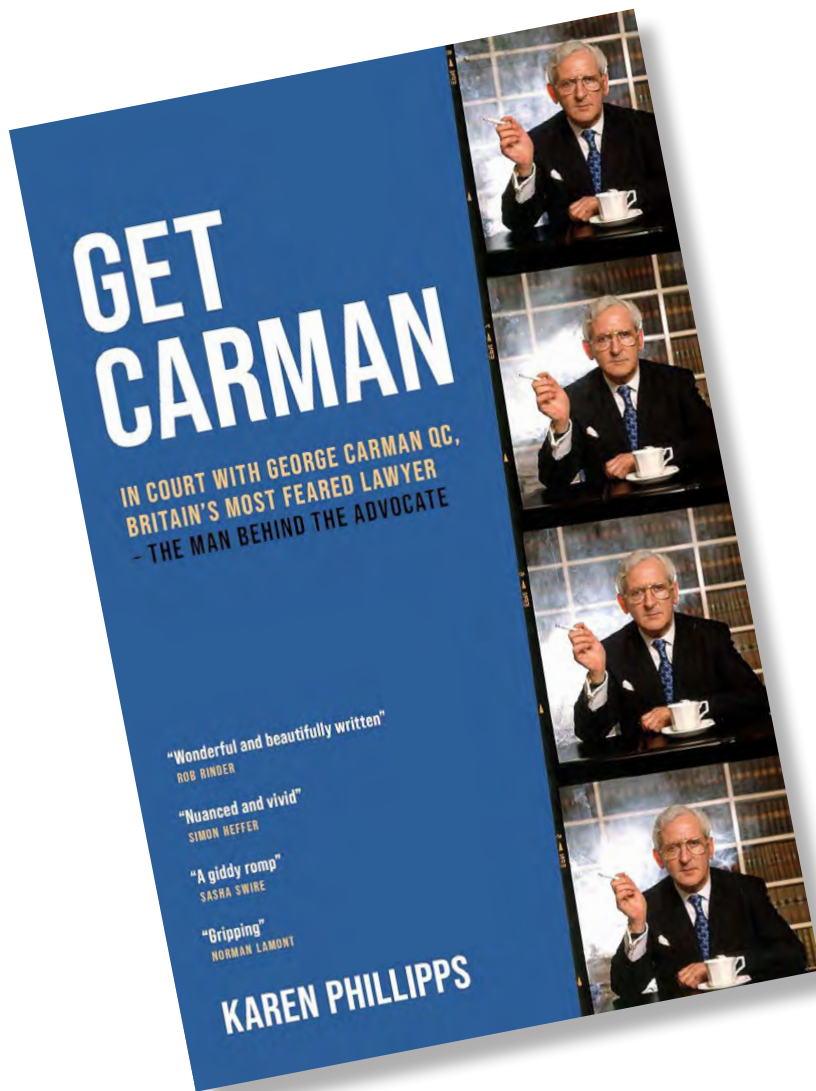
We met in the late 1980s and became close friends. When he was diagnosed with prostate cancer, he asked me to help him with his work and personally. He continued to live bravely with his condition and, upon his death five years later, left me his papers. I used the latter and researched his cases in order to write this book.

George's great asset was his ability to communicate with a jury, his training at a Roman Catholic Seminary gave him an instinctive understanding of human nature. At his height of 5 foot, 3 inches, he would be at

eye level with the jury and would address them clearly in a way they would understand. They would be transfixed by him as he spoke to them in a hushed voice, often pausing for effect.

He was known for his ability to produce 'rabbits out of hats' and for many notable acquittals. He came to the attention of the public in the defence of Jeremy Thorpe MP, the leader of the Liberal Party, upon a charge of conspiracy to murder by hiring a hitman to kill his male lover. In that case, George made a brave decision not to call his client in the hope that he could show that the prosecution had not proved their case. He succeeded and, as a result of the success of that case, was to be instructed in many high profile cases.

In the libel case where he represented *The Guardian* against Jonathan Aitken MP, who it was suggested had accepted favours from



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His principles for achieving success:  
“... a persistent determination not to be defeated by temporary setbacks; a constant review of what you have done; the achievement of deploying what talent you have in the interests of others.”

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the Saudi government, George dramatically produced evidence at the last minute that Jonathan was lying about a claim his wife had flown to Paris to pay an hotel bill, totally shattering Jonathan’s version of events.

When representing Ken Dodd, the comedian, in his tax evasion case against the Inland Revenue, George had the brilliant idea of videoing his home in Knotty Ash to illustrate his chaotic lifestyle.

He would always spend time thinking of soundbites that would attract the Press, and would constantly try his ideas out and rehearse again and again his speeches.

In the case of Neil Hamilton v. Mohammed Al Fayed, allegations were made of brown envelopes being given to the MP to ask questions in the House of Commons.

Hamilton’s behaviour whilst as a guest in the Ritz, Paris, was referred to by George as ‘on the make and on the take’.

George will be remembered as one of the best advocates of his generation. He always said his principles for achieving success are ‘a persistent determination not to be defeated by temporary setbacks, a constant review of what you have done... that this is to be the single most important thing in your life... the achievement of deploying what talent you have in the interests of others.’ ▲

### Editor’s Note

Karen Phillipps is a barrister and long time resident of Belgravia. She is also one of the leading members on the Committee of The Belgravia Society. Her book *Get Carman* is available on Amazon and in bookshops.



*St Mary's Hospital entrance*

# Funding for St Mary's Hospital Paddington delayed for at least 10 Years

**By Mary Regnier-Leigh**

**W**e understand that the Government announced on 20th January that the much needed funding for St Mary's Hospital has been delayed for at least 10 years which takes us to 2035 and may not even be until 2038.

This is an extraordinary setback for the ancient and crumbling hospital which we reported on in our last Magazine. It is a tragedy, especially for those who have the most complex of illnesses and who look to the hospital for their care.

Prof. Tim Orchard, Chief Executive of Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, has condemned this statement saying, "This is devastating news for our communities, our staff and patients, and for the whole of the capital's healthcare system." He added that he didn't believe the hospital will last until the works are now scheduled to be completed.

In our last Magazine we emphasised, "St Mary's wants to keep its position as a world-class trauma hospital and a centre

for life-saving research. With modern facilities, it will be able to care for more patients, respond faster to emergencies and new health issues and undertake more research and clinical trials to help find better treatments and ways of working. This is a major acute hospital – especially one hosting a major trauma centre – it has to offer a wide range of specialist services, 24/7. It needs to be able to care for everyone who needs it.”

We understand that the government’s New Hospital Programme must be affordable, but the simple truth is that St Mary’s Hospital in particular will not last until the 2040s.

“We run London’s busiest major trauma centre and care for more than a million patients a year. We need to digest the detail of today’s announcement, but we have to find a way to progress our schemes more quickly. This includes exploring alternative funding approaches, leveraging the value of our land that will be surplus to requirements and the significant contribution of our life science partnerships to local and national economic growth.”

The decision of the government is devastating, bearing in mind the appalling conditions of the crumbling hospital, its reputation and all that it does. We can only hope the government will reverse this devastating decision, recognising both the value of the hospital and the needs of the very diverse community. It should also take into account the world-class status of the hospital and how we must be diminished as a country in the eyes of the rest of the world. ▲

“

This is devastating news for our communities, our staff and patients, and for the whole of the capital’s healthcare system.

”



*Many parts of the Victorian hospital are showing signs of disrepair*

# News from



THE  
ROYAL  
PARKS



*Royal Park in Winter*

**W**inter in the Royal Parks is a time of quiet beauty, with wildlife slowly adapting to the season, and historic trees standing tall, their sculptural branches silhouetted against winter skies.

## Reflections on 2024

This time of year is not only for rest and reflection, but also for celebration. As the Parks prepare to bid farewell to 2024, it's the perfect moment to look back on the impact the charity has had over the past year. They have selected our favourite moments and milestones to share with you.

We've had another busy year as the charity that looks after these incredible green spaces. Below are just a few of the things we're most proud of.

After four years of incredible projects, and the hard work of their staff and their wonderful volunteers and apprentices, work was completed on the ambitious flagship project, Greenwich Park Revealed. The project involved opening the new Greenwich Park Learning Centre and re-establishing the 'Grand Ascent' – giant grass terraces.

Our Learning programme reached new heights this year. Hundreds of teenagers engaged in meaningful conservation work through the Green Futures project, supported by the Kusuma Trust. Meanwhile, free Discovery Days in Hyde Park attracted thousands of families with hands-on, nature-themed activities.

As part of our multi-year signage plan, we've installed over 1,000 new visitor boards across the Royal Parks. These signs share stories,



*A touch of frost*



including that of Hori Tribe, a Royal Parks employee killed in WWI (see above). With interpretation boards and QR codes, we invite visitors to discover the Parks' histories and hidden treasures.

## Welcome to 2025

As winter graces the Royal Parks with crisp mornings, frost-kissed grass, and the quiet beauty of nature at rest, we can't help but look forward to the year ahead. 2024 was a year of growth and achievement, but 2025 promises even more.

From new playgrounds and tranquil gardens to plans for thriving meadows and orchards,

this year will see inspiring projects take shape across your cherished green spaces. Dive in to discover what's on the horizon and how these plans will enrich your next visit.

The Royal Parks have lots of things planned for the coming year. One item is the old sheep pen transformed into a vibrant orchard. Wild flowers bloomed last summer and by adding a little yellow rattle which suppresses grass, the sooner the meadow will grow and begin to flourish there. The Royal Parks are also planting 31 apple trees, including "Newton Wonder" and "Laxton's Pippin", and they are also building a bug hotel in the centre of the orchard. We see so many of these around now in small planted areas and even on streetlights.

The Royal Parks' project to transform a disused plant nursery in Regents Park into a 2 acre garden honouring the late Queen Elizabeth II, continues to progress. Exciting new features will include a pergola and a meadow, woodland, and a vibrant flower garden with significant benefits to nature.

In another exciting and more recent piece of news, St James's Park has been chosen by the late Queen's Memorial Committee as a location for a national memorial to her. ▲

# 6 Grosvenor Place – New Club to open at last

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**Helene Oratore**, a leading member of the Belgravia Society committee, provides an update on progress of this listed building

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*Planning drawing of  
6 Grosvenor Place*

**T**he very experienced team redeveloping 6 Grosvenor Place comprises CIT, Copper Beech, BDP, Systra and Comm Comm. From the very start of the development, they have displayed a genuine willingness to consult and work with the local community to reduce the impact of this large scale development and to preserve the heritage of the building. Their consultations have been professional and extremely clear.

Full planning permission was granted in August 2019 to redevelop this Grade 2 townhouse and mews into a private members club with a publicly accessible café. Shortly, a S73 application will be presented to Westminster to amend the original 2019 planning permission to allow minor internal changes which will ensure that the building is 'more viable and operationally efficient'.

The team is extremely focused on preserving the heritage of this listed building aiming 'to secure its long term conservation and presence in Westminster'. The roof has been re-slatted, original features meticulously restored, mechanical equipment and extractors discretely screened, and tasteful decoration has commenced internally, bringing this once derelict property back to glorious existence. The opening date for the Club is Winter 2025.

The Belgravia Society will be working with the team to secure the future of Pembroke Arch in Headfort Place as the arch is connected to the rear of 6 Grosvenor Place. ▲

All building and membership queries can be addressed to:  
[info@6grosvenorplace.com](mailto:info@6grosvenorplace.com)  
0800 772 0475 | [www.6grosvenorplace.com](http://www.6grosvenorplace.com)



# The Belgravia Society meets Rachel Blake MP

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**Helene Oratore** tells us of  
The Belgravia Society's recent  
visit to the Houses of Parliament

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**T**he Westminster Amenity Society Forum (WASF) is for members of Westminster amenity groups who live and work in the area to meet to discuss local issues. They consider heritage, planning, development, transport, licensing, environment, open spaces, traffic and submitting local consultations.

The Belgravia Society is a huge supporter of the Westminster initiative and regularly attends all the meetings.

Recently, WASF members were invited to meet Rachel Blake, the Labour Member of Parliament for the Cities of London and Westminster, at the Houses of Parliament. The Belgravia Society was represented by George Waite, Jennie Rowcliffe and myself, Helene Oratore.

We met in the Pugin Room which was renamed in 1978 after Augustus Welby Pugin who had directed the interior designs of the Palace of Westminster. The large gilt brass and crystal chandelier was initially commissioned for the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury by Pugin and the shields above the door represent the coats of arms of the various architects Pugin, Barry and Gilbert Scott.

George, Jennie and myself had a delightful evening talking to other amenity societies and to Rachel Blake herself about her plans for various future projects and her areas of interest. ▲



*Above: Jennie Rowcliffe, George Waite, Helene Oratore and Rachel Blake MP  
Below: The Pugin Room, Palace of Westminster*



# Cundy Street



*Cundy Street works*

**W**ork has started on the Cundy Street development. The aim is to offer the community a new residential prospect, transforming a closed off site which is described as ‘dominated by car parking with no public amenity and tired affordable housing’. We all remember the Cundy Street flats, and know that there was a car parking area there, and we did not want to see the flats pulled down. There was a view that they could be upgraded and refurbished. The current developers are awaiting planning permission for the change of use which Grosvenor wanted for retirement homes for the elderly; we understand the now proposed change of use will be to luxury flats.

The development has been passed to Lodha who are expected to deliver the proposals. While Lohda have asked to show us a building in Grosvenor Square, there has been no real attempt to engage with us or indeed any part of the local community.



*Cundy Street flats before demolition*

We are very much aware that Cundy Street development is very substantial and will have a tremendous impact on the area. We are therefore seeking to engage with the developer Lohda, and also to persuade them to establish a community engagement committee. It can also discuss problems which arise and make sure that the local community is consulted. It has happened previously with other developers. Lohda have chosen Keltbray to carry out the work. However, it seems that Keltbray



The current developers are awaiting planning permission for the change of use ... We understand the now proposed change of use will be to luxury flats.



*Cundy Street works*

appear to think that sending out a regular newsletter is sufficient to keep the community informed. They do say in their “update” that they want the community to offer ideas. What better way than having a regular community engagement committee? We want to see that there is a community engagement committee supported by Lohda who could indeed give ideas. Community meetings should take place regularly to discuss the situation and any problems, or suggestions we might have.

At the moment, the work on site is being done by Keltbray. We understand they are a very experienced central London contractor with a large amount of experience building residential and commercial structures in Westminster and neighbouring London boroughs.

We understand from Keltbray that site activities have included earthworks being completed down to the stage 1 level to enable temporary works to be carried out, ground source heating pumps are halfway completed and drill teams on site are installing pump boards up to 240m in length. This is the main activity on site at the moment, but there is a small logistics area just constructed for the next stage dig along with site repairs.

Since writing the above, we have received a further newsletter from Keltbray. They tell us ground heat source pumps are planned to be installed into the first week of February. It is then planned to remove the articulated lorries taking the machines off site in a series of planned movements. Temporary works installation will continue into February with the waler beams being craned into position. Deliveries for steelwork will continue to operate in daytime hours but with no out of hours plant deliveries planned at this time.

Additionally, they say, “We will be undertaking some important works around the perimeter of the job, including some planned night works for sewer inspections which will occur over one shift in February only”. We hope the work does not disturb you but, of course, there is no engagement committee to learn the details and make any appropriate responses to the work which will be done at night. ▲

# News from our Councillors



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Cllr Tony Devenish  
Cllr Elizabeth Hitchcock  
Cllr Rachael Robathan

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**W**e have recently been contacted by an increasing number of residents raising complaints about reckless bike riding. While we all want to encourage more people to ride bicycles, this must be done considerately, within the law and in a way that doesn't endanger other people.

Problems such as riding on pavements, going the wrong way down streets, or jumping pedestrian crossings are increasing. While the Council doesn't have the powers to enforce the law against cyclists, as these are classified as moving vehicles which fall under the police, we regularly raise areas of concern with our local police team during our coordination meetings, so please continue to let us know of your areas of concern.



*Reckless cycling includes riding on pavements*



## E-bike parking bays



*E-bike parking bays*

A reminder that the Council will review all of the e-bike parking bays in the Spring with a view to either making them permanent or moving them to a site nearby.

We are well aware that a number of them are causing real problems, not least on Ebury Street and West Halkin Street. We have been working with local residents, amenity societies and the Neighbourhood Forums to request that a number of them across the Ward be moved, including the one in Ebury Square.

Please contact us to let us know any suggestions for better sites.

## Our local residents' associations do a fantastic job

We are fortunate to have three proactive local residents' associations: the Belgravia Society, the Belgravia Residents' Association, and the Knightsbridge Association.

The KA AGM is an ideal opportunity to catch up with over one hundred residents and for them to hold their local councillors to account. Roadworks, pavement congestion on Brompton Road, and poster boards on over-running construction sites all featured in the Q&A.

## Happy New Year from the K&B team

May we wish all of you a very happy new year.

As well as your three local Ward Councillors, our team also includes John Whelan, our Ward-specific City Inspector, and also Rishma Sangha, our Planning Enforcement Officer who works within the Ward.

We also work closely with our excellent local K&B Policing team.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us about any concerns and between us we will make sure that we do everything possible to help. ▲

*Stunning decorations in The Savoy over Christmas and New Year*





Registered Charity No: 1168619  
An amenity society recognised by the City of Westminster

# Membership Application

Membership is open to residents and non-residents and is free

Name ..... email .....

Second name (if any) ..... email .....

Address.....

.....

Telephone: Home..... Work .....

Mobile ..... Date .....

**By signing this Application I CONSENT and AGREE to The Belgravia Society sending emails to me until I unsubscribe or resign from the Society.**

Signature(s): .....

Please let us know if you have any special interests, concerns or queries:

PLEASE RETURN THIS APPLICATION FORM TO THE PERSON WHO GAVE IT TO YOU OR EMAIL TO: [info@thebelgraviasociety.com](mailto:info@thebelgraviasociety.com)  
OR POST TO: 63 BELGRAVIA COURT 33 EBURY STREET LONDON SW1W 0NY

## Gift Aid declaration – for past, present and future

Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts made:

Please tick all boxes you wish to apply.

Today       In the past 4 years       In the future



*giftaid it*

Boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 you donate. Gift Aid is reclaimed by the Charity from the tax you pay for the current tax year.

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

SIGNATURE(S) ..... DATE .....

ADDRESS .....

Please notify the charity or CASC if you:

Want to cancel this declaration     Change your name or home address     No longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

PLEASE EMAIL THIS FORM TO: [info@thebelgraviasociety.com](mailto:info@thebelgraviasociety.com) OR POST TO: 63 BELGRAVIA COURT, 33 EBURY STREET, SW1W 0NY



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