

Philbeach Gardens Area

The development of this area, which consists of Philbeach Gardens, Cluny Mews, and the contiguous part of Warwick Road with Nos. 53–121 (odd) on the east side and Nevern Mansions and Nos. 46–68 (even) on the west side, was almost entirely the work of the Mineard family of builders and took place over some fifteen years between 1876 and 1891.

Philbeach Gardens (Plate 123a, b) was named after a property of the Edwardes family in Pembrokeshire. An initial layout plan for the street (which was originally intended to be called Philbeach Crescent) was submitted to the Metropolitan Board of Works by Lord Kensington's surveyor, Martin Joseph Stutely, as early as January 1875. This shows the crescent in approximately its present position, but the area now occupied by the communal garden was to be given over to an extensive mews. Although approved, the scheme was not implemented, and some eighteen months later an amended application was submitted showing the layout as built with the mews relegated to the north of the crescent.¹⁶⁵

The builder chosen to carry out the revised plan was George Edward Mineard, who was then engaged in building in Lexham Gardens, and whose origins and early career are described on page 294. He took the ground now occupied by the whole of Philbeach Gardens and Cluny Mews and the west side of Warwick Road, for which Lord Kensington undertook to grant leases for terms equivalent to ninety-nine years from September 1876.¹⁶⁶ A precise layout was devised with house plots and numbers demarcated, before building began at the southern end of Philbeach Gardens in December 1876.¹⁶⁷

Shortly afterwards the terrace on the west side of Warwick Road was begun,¹⁶⁸ and building proceeded steadily northwards. In both streets Mineard erected houses which were very similar to those he had been building in Lexham Gardens, of the full-blooded Italianate variety in white brick with stucco dressings and containing four full storeys above basements, with Doric porticoes and bay windows up to the first floor. The façades, while not having the crispness of detailing of the houses in Lexham Gardens, are nevertheless well articulated, with segmental pediments to the second-floor windows, a bracketed cornice and prominent strings and bandcourses. The earliest houses are arranged in mirrored pairs, but Mineard abandoned this practice in about 1879. At about the same time, in the more northerly houses in Warwick Road he replanned the interior so that the staircase would rise towards the front of the house, no doubt to provide large rooms at the rear which would face south-westwards

over the communal garden. One unfortunate by-product, however, is that on the house front a landing coincides with the first-floor window above the portico, a problem which was eventually resolved, not entirely satisfactorily, by lengthening this window and dividing it horizontally into two, with each half opening separately as casements. Nos. 71–73 (consec.) Philbeach Gardens also have this feature (fig. 128b).

By the time the census was taken in 1881 fifty-one houses in the two streets were occupied and a further ten were probably substantially finished but not yet occupied. The evidence of the returns suggests that the speculation was proceeding successfully and that the houses proved attractive to the typical South Kensington resident. The inhabitants included army and naval officers, barristers and other professional men, a stockbroker, a shipowner, several merchants (perhaps a higher proportion than was usual elsewhere in this district), and the usual large number of occupants whose income came from rents or dividends but was here substantial enough to support two or three servants.¹⁶⁹ Mineard, himself, lived at No. 57 Warwick Road with his wife, six children and two servants. He was then forty-two years old and described himself as a builder employing ninety-six men and six boys.¹⁷⁰

One of the occupants of Philbeach Gardens was Sir Henry Cole at No. 106. Then retired from his posts as Secretary of the Science and Art Department and Superintendent of the South Kensington Museum, he described himself as a 'Civil Servant Superannuated'. His diary entries record how, in the early summer of 1880, he had searched in Kensington for a house which 'must have a guarantee against escape of sewer gas'. He looked over some twenty houses before settling on No. 106 Philbeach Gardens, where the system of drainage 'appeared good'. He rented the house from Mineard for £120 per annum, and moved in at the end of June 1880. Though disturbed by the evidence of shrinkage, he thought the house well planned and convenient. The amenity of the communal garden was important to him, and, with Mineard, he established a 'Fifth of November Club' to provide an annual display of fireworks in the garden.

Soon, however, he was discussing improvements in sanitation with Mineard, and allowed his house to be used by the builder for further experiments with a system he had already introduced in houses in Warwick Road. This was designed to prevent any escape of sewer gas into the house — a matter with which Cole was somewhat obsessed at this time — and involved the building of an intercepting chamber between the house drains and the sewer and the provision of an extraction shaft with a small heating chamber at roof level through which fresh air was drawn via the soil pipe and the house drains. Cole subsequently purchased a newer house, No. 96, from Mineard, and moved there in May 1881. He encouraged the builder to patent and publicize his system, and secured for him the job of overhauling the sanitary arrangements at Sandringham for the Royal Family. In October 1881 Cole also wrote a long



Fig. 128. Nos. 48 and 72 Philbeach Gardens, elevations. No. 48, Edwin Mineard, builder, 1884-5; No. 72, George Edward Mineard, builder, 1882

letter to *The Builder* entitled 'A Victory over Sewer Gas' in which he explained Mineard's system at length with the help of plans, and an extensive correspondence ensued in the journal.¹⁷¹

Mineard consulted Cole over tree-planting in the garden and the street, and the provision of electric lighting in the garden, and in December 1881 the two men went together to a sanitary conference in Brighton. Cole also encouraged the builder William Lascelles to experiment with a new type of conservatory porch at his house, and his fertile mind returned to one of its former concerns — the use of convict labour to carry out mosaic work, this time to provide street names and house numbers — shortly before his death on 18 April 1882.¹⁷²

By the end of 1882 Mineard had built or was in the process of building 103 houses, namely Nos. 1-31, 64-73 and 89-110 (consec.) Philbeach Gardens, and Nos. 53-129

(odd) Warwick Road, Nos. 119-129 being a group of houses with ground-floor shops on either side of the entrance to Cluny Mews, of which Nos. 123-129 have since been demolished for the widening of West Cromwell Road. All of these houses are similar in appearance, but Nos. 64-70 Philbeach Gardens, which are only three-storeyed above a basement, have triple windows at second-floor level and a crowning balustrade. By this time Mineard had also built five stables in Cluny Mews, and as this was the sum total which was eventually provided for the whole development, it is a striking indication of the decline in the demand for mews accommodation by that date. He had also surrendered, for £600, his leasehold interest in the site of St. Cuthbert's Church (see page 371). Up to this stage of the development all the notices to the district surveyor of the commencement of building operations had come from Mineard himself, and he was the sole

recipient of every lease which Lord Kensington had granted.¹⁷³

At this point there was a lull in building in Philbeach Gardens while Mineard concentrated his efforts on another speculative enterprise in Brechin Place on the Day estate. He had acquired the land there with the help of a reference from Sir Henry Cole and had begun building in May 1882 (see page 164), but the houses he erected in Brechin Place, though similar in size to those in Philbeach Gardens, are in the red-brick Domestic Revival manner.

In the meantime, only one new house was started in Philbeach Gardens between August 1882 and July 1884. This was No. 88, the only double-fronted house in the whole development, which was begun in May 1883 and leased in July of the same year, not to Mineard but to the first occupant, Lewis Hall Bliss, a merchant, on Mineard's nomination.¹⁷⁴ It appears to have been completed in the following year,³⁸ and, instead of adhering to the Italianate style of its neighbours to the south, was in the idiom of Brechin Place. And when building resumed in earnest in Philbeach Gardens in July 1884 it was this style which prevailed (Plate 123a, b, fig. 128a).

The reasons for this dramatic change of style in the middle of a development, and, indeed, in the middle of a street, are not immediately apparent. There is every indication that the Italianate houses in Philbeach Gardens were successful and that few houses remained empty for more than a short period,³⁸ and the new houses were indeed basically identical to the old in plan and proportions, merely clothed in a different dress. The Domestic Revival style had been introduced on the estate in nearby Nevern Square some three years earlier and was undoubtedly favoured by Daniel Cubitt Nichols, who, after the death of his father-in-law and former partner, Martin Joseph Stutely, in 1881, was in sole charge as estate surveyor, but it seems unlikely that he would have insisted on such a change. Lewis Hall Bliss, for whom No. 88 was built, may have preferred red brick and thus precipitated a stylistic break, or Mineard, suppressing any doubts about the aesthetic propriety of his actions, may have simply decided to continue building to the same designs and with the same materials as Brechin Place.

All of the houses which were built in Philbeach Gardens after 1882 have two-tone brickwork with cut-and-moulded red-brick dressings. Some have continuous balconies carried on large brackets but are otherwise flat fronted, some have porches and bay windows on the ground floor, and others have bays up to the first floor. They display similar façade motifs, in a pleasing variety of arrangements, to the houses in Brechin Place and are clearly by the same (unknown) architect's hand.

George Edward Mineard was the builder and lessee, in 1884-6, of Nos. 74-86 (consec.) Philbeach Gardens, which closed the gap on the inside of the crescent, and of Nos. 60-63 in the outer crescent,¹⁷⁵ but the building lessee of Nos. 32-49, in 1884-5, was Edwin Mineard, who was a year younger than George Edward and probably his brother. He had doubtless already been assisting with the development, for in 1881 he was one of the occupants of the upper floors of No. 119 Warwick Road and described himself as a builder and decorator, but these were the first houses for which he had full responsibility.¹⁷⁶ Edwin Mineard also began to build Nos. 57-59 (consec.), to the north of St. Cuthbert's Church, in 1885, but apparently ran into difficulties, and these three houses were finished by, and leased to, a local builder, Walter Nash.^{177*}

When he had completed building in Philbeach Gardens, G. E. Mineard took the vacant strip of land on the east side of Warwick Road, to the west of Nevern Square, for ninety-nine years from March 1887.¹⁷⁸ On the northern part of this ground two terraces of six houses each, now Nos. 46-56 and 58-68 (even) Warwick Road, were erected in 1888-9 on either side of the opening into Nevern Square. Their building lessee was Harry Mineard, G. E. Mineard's son, then in his early twenties.¹⁷⁹ With their flat ornamentation and red and yellow brickwork, these houses recall more those of Nevern Square than the later houses of Philbeach Gardens.

The southern half of the plot was used, not for building more houses, but for the erection of the three blocks of flats called Nevern Mansions (Plate 122b). In order to build these G. E. Mineard formed a limited company in partnership with Stephen Abbott Cumming called Mineard and Cumming Limited. Cumming had previously been in partnership with Arthur Furneaux Taylor, and as such had built houses in Nevern Place in 1874-5 before moving on to large developments in De Vere Gardens, Cheniston Gardens and Wetherby Place, the last being on the same estate as Mineard's speculation in Brechin Place. The new company was incorporated in 1889 with a nominal capital of £25,000 divided into 2,500 £10 shares. Initially 232 shares were taken up, 100 each by Mineard and Cumming, 10 each by the builder William Henry Willis, a Congregational minister from Rotherham and a bookseller from Lavender Hill, and one each by a solicitor and another builder (Thomas Carter of Cheniston Gardens). G. E. Mineard was appointed Senior Managing Director and Chairman.¹⁸⁰ Construction began in 1889 and leases of the two southern blocks were granted to the company in 1889 and 1890.¹⁸¹ At this point the company was wound up voluntarily. Of the £6,430 which had been subscribed by the time of its dissolution, over £6,000 had been provided by members of the Mineard and Cumming

*There are no houses in Philbeach Gardens numbered 50-56, as the site on which these were originally intended to be built was sold for the erection of St. Cuthbert's Church, but the addresses 50 and 51 Philbeach Gardens have been adopted for the clergy house of St. Cuthbert's and Philbeach Hall in the (unnamed) roadway by the side of the church. There is also no No. 87 because No. 88 Philbeach Gardens is double-fronted.