

## **BULMER MEWS**

The entrance to this tiny mews is a few yards to the right of the Prince Albert pub in Pembridge Road. It runs down the backs of numbers 1-7 (odds) Ladbroke Road and presumably served as stabling for these and for the pub. It was probably first built up in the 1850s. It has undergone a number of changes of name since then.

Early census returns suggest that its original name was Victoria Mews, although it is shown as a nameless alley on the 1862 Ordnance Survey map. By the time of the 1881 census, it had become Prince Albert Mews or Albert Mews, a name it retained until into the 1930s, presumably because of its proximity to the Prince Albert pub. It seems then to have been renamed Bulmer Mews by association with nearby Bulmer Place, a road of picturesque Victorian cottages that ran behind the shops on the north-west side of Notting Hill Gate and that disappeared in the great redevelopment of Notting Hill Gate at the end of the 1950s, to be replaced by the present scruffy service road\*.

The original buildings in the mews consisted of stables with living premises above. The 19<sup>th</sup> century census returns list seven or eight dwellings in the mews, mostly occupied by people associated with horses in one way or another – there were for instance several grooms and coachmen; an omnibus horsekeeper; a dealer in horses; and in 1901 a fruiterer's carman and a draper's carman.

As the motor-car replaced horse-drawn transport, the mews probably lost some of its residents, and became a fairly scruffy place. By the 1930s it appears to have been considered ripe for redevelopment, as in 1936 a planning application was made to develop both the Mews and 1-7 Ladbroke Road as a theatre. The application was granted, but the scheme did not go ahead. During the Second World War, an overground air raid shelter was erected in the mews, and after the war Kensington Public Library used this structure for a local branch, the Bulmer Mews Library. The library remained there until 1955, when the old air raid shelter was demolished and the branch library moved to its present location at 1 Pembridge Square.

Any buildings that remained were by this time probably in a pretty parlous condition. Already in 1946, when the brewery that owned the Prince Albert applied to Kensington Borough Council for planning permission to use part of the mews for offices and warehouses, a Council planning officer commented that it would involve pulling down “three or four very dilapidated stables with flats over, which are at present unfit for habitation”. Ownership of the mews seems to have been shared by then between the brewery (which owned the entrance to the Mews) and the playwright Ashley Duke of the Mercury Theatre (he was the husband of Dame Marie Rambert, whose eponymous ballet company was based at the Mercury). Duke had another go in 1975 at obtaining planning permission for a theatre, this time as part of a six-story office block. But his application was refused and for much of the next nine years a garden centre occupied the Mews.

The Mercury Theatre finally sold the mews “to alleviate financial pressures”, and in 1984 the new owner finally obtained permission to build the current matching mews houses, of which the two end ones are illustrated below.

\*The original Bulmer Place had two entrances, both through archways. One was in Pembridge Road south of the Prince Albert (where the lorries now turn in to service the shops on the north-west side of Notting Hill Gate); there was then another entrance in Notting Hill Gate roughly where the current tower block is.



Nos. 1 and 2, two of the matching mews houses built in Bulmer Mews in the 1980s.  
(*Photo 2008*)

### **The Prince Albert**

The Prince Albert public house in Pembridge Road is just within the Ladbroke Conservation Area. It was opened a year or so after Queen Victoria married Prince Albert in 1840. The builder was William Chadwick. The then owner of the Ladbroke Estate, James Weller Ladbroke, had signed an agreement in 1840 with Chadwick to develop the area at the intersection between Ladbroke Road and Kensington Park Road. As developers often did, he began by building a pub, where his workers could spend their wages to his benefit. The pub was also close to the entrance to the Hippodrome race-course and Chadwick no doubt hoped that it would pick up race-going customers. If so, he was not in luck, as the race-course closed in 1841, probably about the time that the pub was opening. The Prince Albert has nevertheless flourished ever since.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was a hotel as well as a public house and the census returns show a number of barmaids and other servants resident on the premises. From the 1850s to the 1870s there was a brewery conveniently situated next door to the pub, possibly in the same ownership.

When the Chartist Leader Feargus O'Connor died in poverty in Notting Hill in 1855, the *Kensington Gazette* reported that “the friends and admirers of the deceased in his early political movements, mustered in strong force at the Prince Albert, Notting Hill, and followed the corpse two abreast to the cemetery [at Kensal Green] where an oration was delivered over the deceased’s body by a working man”.

In 1979 Lou Stein founded the Gate Theatre in an upstairs room at the Prince Albert. It is now one of London’s best known pub theatres, with a reputation for putting on interesting lesser known works.



The Prince Albert pub at 11 Pembridge Road, with the Gate Theatre (the low rise part of the building on the left). Pembridge Road was the beginning of the old lane to Portobello Farm, and this bit of Pembridge Road was originally called Portobello Terrace. (Photo copyright Thomas Erskine 2006.)



The Prince Albert Hotel, probably around 1900. Above the door it says “LUNCHEON BAR”; and under the middle window there is a sign saying “WATER FOR HORSES”. The left hand door offers “BILLIARDS”. (*Photograph by courtesy of RBKC.*)

*Sources:*

*Notting Hill in Bygone Days, by Florence Gladstone and Ashley Barker, originally published in 1924 by T. Fisher Unwin and republished in 1969 by Anne Bingley.*

*Notting Hill & Holland Park Past, by Barbara Denny, published by Historical Publications 1993.*

*RBKC archives: planning history of Bulmer Mews.*

*1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 census returns.*

*1862-5 Ordnance Survey map.*