



Take It To The Bridge...

Knightsbridge, to be exact. Property expert **ROBERT BAILEY** looks back at the foundations of one of London's most exclusive neighbourhoods – and asks is there still value to be found there?

LIKE MANY PEOPLE of a certain age, my great aunt got to the point where she wanted to move to a quiet village, away from the hustle and bustle of her flat in Bloomsbury. She wanted a slower pace of life but still wanted to be close to her friends, neighbours and local shopkeepers. The village she chose? Knightsbridge.

This was the 1950s and her move was not as crazy as it first appears (OK, maybe a *little* crazy). Knightsbridge was a far cry from the metropolitan centre it is now. It was a sedate and distinctly suburban area that was also considered to be the more affordable option compared to Belgravia or Mayfair. Most of the people who lived there were British and, like my aunt, were mature in years. This was certainly not a welcoming place for *young* families.

“ Cadogan Place, Montpelier Square and Egerton Gardens still boast grand homes while smaller streets such as Cadogan Sq hold their own charms ”

My aunt would scarcely recognise the place now, of course. In her day, the Cadogan Estate – which was, and still is, the principal landowner in the area – was run by the Seventh Earl Cadogan. While well respected, he had some rather interesting ideas. Many of the buildings and homes had fallen into disrepair during the War so the estate wanted to replace them with glass and concrete tower blocks and shopping centres. Fortunately, the plans were turned down by the planning authorities and it is only the Jumeirah Tower Hotel that stands testament to these wild ideas.

By the time the eighth earl took over the estate, things began to be run on much more professional lines. The Cadogan Estate also set about making Sloane Street an international shopping destination that aimed to rival Bond Street in Mayfair.

The estate worked hard to achieve an ambitious retail mix of designer brands and services and now boasts Louis Vuitton and Chanel, among others. Nightclubs, luxury hotels and some of the capital's most fashionable restaurants began to call Knightsbridge home and foodies are spoilt for choice with One-o-One, Zuma and locals' favourite, San Lorenzo, dotted right across the London suburb.

Slowly, the area gained parity with Belgravia and Mayfair and some might even argue that it exceeded these areas in some respects. When Bahraini-owned Crown Dilmun decided to create one of the world's first developments for the super rich, it chose a former Harrods depository in Trevor Square and built apartments that truly set a new standard. Within a few short years, The Knightsbridge development was one of the first to introduce the services of a five-star hotel to residential apartments but it was One Hyde Park [pictured], by Candy & Candy, that really raised the bar.

Which is not to say that some of the period homes are to be sniffed at. My aunt would be reassured to see Cadogan Place, Montpelier Square and Egerton Gardens still boasting grand homes while smaller streets such as Cheval Place and Trevor Square hold their own charms.

The neighbourhood feel that so appealed to my aunt is still there, even if you have to search that little bit harder for it. Knightsbridge has definitely gone up in the world since my aunt lived there but its appeal has not faded. **H**

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