

(It rhymes with kennel)

'This property is owned by GOLDEN MANDARIN DEVELOPMENT CO LIMITED.' The notice on the boarded-up front door threatens TRESPASSERS with ARREST. Underneath is a door-scraper which vibrated to the moderately priced but elegant footwear of Alice Meynell (it rhymes with kennel), the slender Victorian / Edwardian poet, essayist, suffragist, disliker of Jane Austen and Catholic convert. She suffered from dentistry of the era and migraine – possibly connected – and was, like this Grade II-listed Queen Anne Revival house bearing her blue plaque, lofty and rather beautiful.

Ping-pong, concerts, Aubrey Beardsley – all departed. 47 Palace Court, Bayswater, is being converted to four luxury flats. Its barred basement windows, of the type Alice called 'London guillotine sash', opened at the start of redevelop-

ment, let out a mouse-tinged reek of damp.

Alice and her husband Wilfrid commissioned the house from architect Leonard Stokes in 1889, when speculative builders' stucco was rife. In her essay *Cloud* she wrote:

It [cloud] is always great: above the street, above the suburbs, above the gas-works and the stucco, above the faces of painted white houses – the painted surfaces that have been devised as the only things able to vulgarise light, as they catch it and reflect it grotesquely from their importunate gloss. This is to be well seen on a sunny evening in Regent Street.

They chose decorative red brick instead, in a broad road which Pevsner called a 'haven of the Aesthetic Movement'. From the listing description: 'Irregular composition. Crowned by full width stepped gable. Polychrome bands to ground floor. Round headed entrance to left, recessed panelled doors. Canted bay window to first floor centre with continuous mulioned window and parapet.' And so on.

The memoir by Alice's daughter Viola says the drawing-room 'was beautifully proportioned; it was panelled with old Japanese gold-thread embroideries, and a little collection of Venetian glass was bestowed on an inlaid Spanish table that had belonged to Lord Leighton.'

Palace Court leads to Bayswater Road where nowadays a Westminster City Council street sign saying KYIV ROAD confronts the Russian embassy. Further along is the business end of Kensington Gardens: coach park, dogs' toilet and Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Playground, where

a friend once glimpsed two men apportioning white powder inside a nicely built wooden cabin on stilts.

In the house's heyday, architecture students came to admire it. Others came to admire Mrs Meynell, including laudanum-addled poet Francis Thompson ('Wilfrid, the Palace Court food is shocking') and importunate Coventry Patmore, acknowledged by Alice as her greatest friend, who called her body 'Soft as a rope of silk' and got barred.

In 1905 the Meynells moved to a flat and rented out the house, which later sheltered some of their descendants until, according to family lore, two members concluded after WW2 that there was no future in London property. The house was sold to Catholic missionary orders more concerned with expediency, glue and wholesale remodelling than with preserving original features. The developer acquired it in 2021 for £6,373,000.

Superfans will enjoy the house's planning and heritage statement on the council's website.  IW

47 Palace Court, London W2 4LS; Selected Poems and Essays by Alice Meynell (Carcanet Classics, 2025; £16.99)