

## A brief history of 49 Belgrave Square

### **Original owners**

The area of Belgravia originally belonged almost entirely to Richard Grosvenor, 2nd Marquess of Westminster, styled Earl Grosvenor and Viscount of Belgrave. It is, to this day, owned by the family property company called the 'Duke of Westminster's Grosvenor Group'. The area has been one of London's most fashionable residential districts from its beginnings.

### **Thomas Cubitt (1788 – 1855)**

The masterplan for Belgravia was laid out by the property contractor Thomas Cubitt in 1824 at the commission of Richard Grosvenor. He is considered to be one of the leading master builders in London during the second quarter of the XIX century. His first major building was the London Institution in Finsbury Circus (1815). From then on, he worked on housing in Camden Town, Islington and at Highbury Park. From the 1820's he began developments in areas such as Bloomsbury and Tavistock Sq. He was also responsible for the east front of Buckingham Palace, he also worked on the Thames Embankment and helped organise the Battersea Park Scheme. However, the creation and building of Belgravia is considered to be one of his most notable achievements in London, which best exemplify Cubitt's style of building and design.



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### **The House's Floorplan**

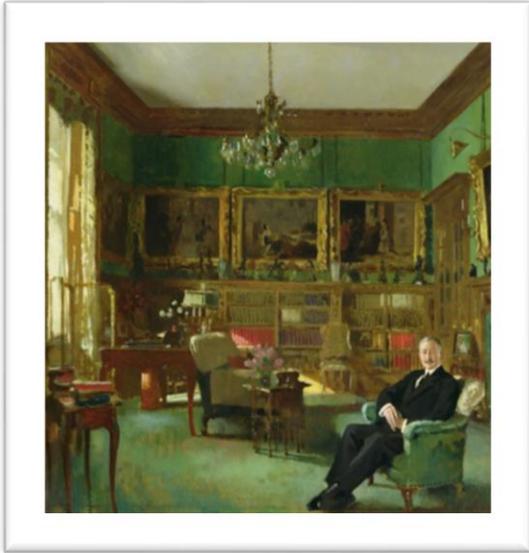
The original scheme consisted of four terraces, designed by George Basevi, each made up of eleven grand white stuccoed houses; three detached mansions in the corners, individually designed and at the centre, one of the grandest and largest XIX century square. The numbering was anti-clockwise from the north. By 1840 most of the houses were built and occupied.

No. 49 Belgrave Square, a detached four storey mansion sitting at the northern corner, was built in 1851 for Sidney Herbert. The house was commissioned to Thomas Cubitt. Because of its unique position between Halkin Street and Grosvenor Crescent, it was originally known as the "Independent North Mansion" or "Belgrave Villa". In 1859 the practice Mayhew and Knight added the room above the octagonal hall. It is now a Grade II listed building.

The house was built in Cubitt's "later manner" quoined (brick detail at the corners) and astylar (without columns or similar vertical features) and with a canted bow on its side. In total the house has six floors, two for entertainment, two for bedrooms and two for the kitchen and the household staff. In 1914 the interiors were modified by the firm Mewes & Davis. They have for the most part been kept to this day in its original state.

The entrance hall has an ornate fireplace with bas-relief sculptures. The adjoining Salmon and Green Rooms have panelled walls and grand fireplaces. These rooms lead into a spacious dining room with cream panelled walls and a dark pink marble fireplace. The grand marble staircase, now positioned at the end of the main hallway, has black-painted wrought iron ornamentation and a brass rail. The main ballroom—on the first floor—has Ionic columns and cornice and is decorated in gold and full-length mirrors. Lighting is provided throughout by chandeliers.

## ***The Herbert family history: Cabinet Office, Crimean War and Florence Nightingale***



The first owner of 49 Belgrave Square, Sidney Herbert, 1st Baron Herbert of Lea, (1810 – 1861) was the younger son of George Herbert, 11th Earl of Pembroke. He was educated at Harrow and Oriel College in Oxford where he made a reputation at the Oxford Union as a speaker.

In 1832 Herbert entered the House of Commons as a Conservative MP. Under Prime Minister Peel he held minor offices, and in 1845 was included in the cabinet as Secretary at War, and again held this office (1852-55), being responsible for the War Office during the Crimean War, and again in 1859.

Herbert, together with Florence Nightingale, led the movement for Army Health and War Office reform after the war. It was from 49 Belgrave Sq. that they organised the expedition to Scutari and even selected the 38 nurses that were to be part of the expedition.

On the 21st of October 1854, Nightingale left for Crimea after a stirring speech by Secretary Herbert in the Residence's dining room.

In 1846 Herbert married Elizabeth, only daughter of Lieutenant General Charles Ash à Court-Repington. She was a philanthropist, author and translator. They lived at 49 Belgrave Sq. with their seven children. Their first son, George Robert Charles Herbert (1850–95), succeeded in the title and after his uncle's death, became the 13th Earl of Pembroke. Their second son Sidney (1853–1913), also a Member of Parliament, followed his brother as the 14th Earl of Pembroke.

### ***Duke of Richmond***

Upon the death of Sidney Herbert in 1861, the house succeeded to Charles Henry Gordon-Lennox, 6th Duke of Richmond, 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Lennox, and 1st Duke of Gordon (1818 – 1903), styled Lord Settrington until 1819 and Earl of March between 1819 and 1860. The 6th Duke of Richmond married Frances Harriett Greville, daughter of Algernon Greville in 1843. They had six children. Their first son was Charles Gordon-Lennox, 7th Duke of Richmond (1845–1928).

### ***Alfred Beit***

At the beginning of the XX century, the house was acquired by the German-born British gold & diamond magnate in South Africa, Alfred Beit (1853–1906). Upon his death, his younger brother, Sir Otto Beit (1865–1930), inherited the property. He worked in South Africa for many years with his brother, and later came to London as a philanthropist and art connoisseur. He married Lilian Carter, the daughter of Thomas Lane Carter of New Orleans (US). They had four children: the elder son died in 1917 and the younger was Alfred Lane Beit (1903–94).

### ***Outstanding events at 49 Belgrave under the ownership of Argentina (1936-2017)***

Sir Alfred Beit sold the house to Argentina in 1936. Since then, the house has been used as the Ambassador's Official London residence. Significant events throughout the last 80 years include the creation of the emblem of Argentine Volunteer Squadron (WWII), the lodging of a young John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the reception in 1990 for the restitution of diplomatic relations between Argentina and the UK, and the official visits of three Argentine Presidents.