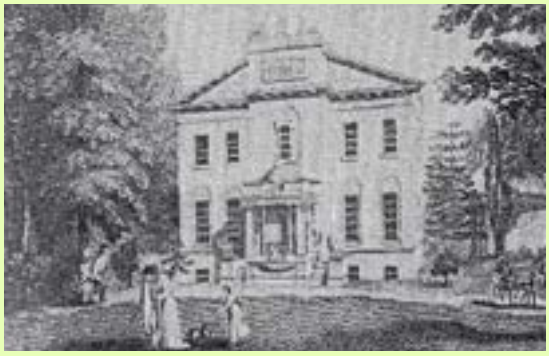
Murray Road

The History

The road was formed when the late 18th Century Greek Revival Wimbledon Lodge (below), owned by Miss Gertrude Murray, granddaughter of Gerard de Visme (his pyramid tomb is in St. Mary's churchyard) was sold. In his will he left money for bread to be distributed to the poor in the winter months. When she died the house was demolished and the land auctioned off in lots at the Dog and Fox. The two stone lions which flanked the steps are now outside the Stone Lion vets. The half crescent was the drive of the original house and the cedar tree would have been centred in front of the house. Behind was a very large garden down to The Ridgway, with stables, coach house and greenhouses, while over The Ridgway were two fields, grazed by sheep with a hedge running down what is now the centre of the road. A builder bought four lots in the South and three in the North, employing the architect Sydney William Neighbour (he spent many years being involved in the building of Liverpool Cathedral) to design the houses in the Queen Anne Revival style, a very popular style then with huge swathes in Kensington and Chelsea for instance.



The Houses

The first house to be built by Neighbour was **No. 29** (top right). A recent roundel records the architect, the house name Ambleside, the date, 1908 and the quote 'Sweetness and Light' by cultural critic and poet Matthew Arnold who said that these virtues should be cultivated. Characteristics include steep red tiled roofs, gables and chimneys, casement or leaded light windows, white joinery, red brick or pebble dash (the latter is very practical as rain just bounces off the walls), asymmetry, classicism, including Palladio windows (widespread in Venice, of course, and originating in India), seen on **Nos. 27 and 20** (left). The latter has beautiful Tuscan columns, an arched porch, with keystone, necessary for stability. **No.8** (symmetric front but asymetric back) is an outstanding example by Walter Hewitt, a Wimbledon architect, and the famous Merton Park architect, J.S. Brocklesby. **No.4** also excellent is by Brocklesby too. **Nos. 35-41** were designed and built by Alfred Bird the great grandfather of Katharine, the current owner of **No.39**, 1907 (shown right). It still has its original features including a manhole cover with Bird's name and details.

Arts & Crafts Style

The Arts and Crafts style is very much in evidence. Characteristics: Cottagey and cosy, even if large, going back to the vernacular buildings of the 17th century, exposed intricate brick work, or rendering, steep roofs and chimneys, leaded light casement windows, or multi-pained, craftsmanship, totally espoused by William Morris, who hated anything machine made. **No. 16** (below) 1908, by the Hunt Brothers is an excellent example, admiringly written about by contemporary professionals, note the door of wide oak planks, iron work, the brickwork plus two wooden carved pineapples on pillars at the entrance. **No. 10,** (right) 1911, has a wonderfully ornate chimney, cat slide roof to the left very similar to Lutyen's Folly Farm addition, 1912. Unfortunately, unlike Folly Farm, it does not have an outdoor sleeping chamber! At this time there was no cure for TB other than fresh air, hence the sleeping chamber.

Compiled by members of St John's Area Residents' Association (SJARA)