

SPOTLIGHT ON MAIDA VALE

A GRAND UNION

Canalside Maida Vale has gone from post-war grim to serious glamour with its restored stucco mansions, discovers **Anthea Masey**

An exclusive quarter now, the area has certainly come a long way since the Second World War when it was known for prostitution

THE view along the Grand Union Canal in Maida Vale's Little Venice is one of London's idyllic scenes. The waterway is lined with picturesque old canal boats, some overflowing with colourful window boxes and hanging baskets, others crammed with growbags sprouting tomatoes and lettuce. The creamy-coloured stucco houses overlooking the canal in Blomfield Road and Maida Avenue, and in nearby roads such as Warwick Avenue, Clifton Gardens, Clifton Villas and Bristol Gardens, can now command prices of up to £2,000 a square foot, which is approaching the value of similar houses in Holland Park and Notting Hill.

Sandwiched between Paddington to the south, Kilburn to the west and north, and St John's Wood to the east, Maida Vale is also known for its spacious mansion flats, wide avenues and secret communal gardens. It arrived at its name soon after the Battle of Maida against the French in Sicily in 1806, when a pub, The John Stuart, Count of Maida, opened in Edgware Road.

This now exclusive quarter has come a long way since the Second World War, when many of the houses were broken up into bedsits and the area gained a reputation for prostitution. This was a great embarrassment to the Church Commissioners who owned the Maida Vale estate, and in the Seventies the commissioners set about improving the area by sweeping away the bedsits and converting the houses into spacious family flats. These homes were later sold to private buyers, paving the way for the area's regeneration.

PROPERTY

The large stucco houses exude an aura of great wealth but at least 85 per cent of all Maida Vale's properties are flats, either spacious conversions or in the mansion blocks.

STAYING POWER

It's variable. Some people who progress from a one- or two-bedroom flat to a three-bedroom flat often find they can't then afford a house, and move out to Queen's Park or Chiswick when they have a family.

POSTCODES

Maida Vale is almost entirely in W9, except for the little triangle south of the canal and west of Edgware Road, which is in W2, the Bayswater postcode.

BEST STREETS

Blomfield Road and Maida Avenue, which are on opposite sides of the canal; Randolph Road and Randolph Crescent and Warwick Avenue. The most beautiful secret communal gardens are between Randolph Road and Warwick Avenue and between Randolph Crescent and Warrington Crescent. The most expensive house currently for sale is a new-build, double-fronted, seven-bedroom house in Randolph Road with access to the communal garden, which is on the market for £25 million through estate agents Ian Green (020 7586 1000).

UP-AND-COMING

Maida Hill, the area between Shirland Road and Harrow Road, west of Marylands Road, is still rough around the edges. There are fewer grand four- and five-storey houses there, mainly converted into flats. The three-bedroom ex-council maisonettes in Aldsworth Close, with wide balconies overlooking the canal, sell for between £320,000 and £360,000 and get snapped up fast.

SCHOOLS

Little Sweethearts Montessori school in St Saviour's Church hall in Warwick Avenue is a popular nursery. The two top state primary



schools are St Joseph's RC in Lanark Road and St Saviour's CofE in Shirland Road, both judged outstanding by Ofsted. Neither of the two local City Academies – Westminster Academy in Harrow Road and Paddington Academy in Marylands Road – do well on the Ofsted front, but both are now housed in new buildings; Westminster Academy's award-winning, green-striped premises were designed by architects Allford Hall Monaghan Morris. St George's RC, on the corner of Maida Vale and Lanark Road, where headmaster Philip Lawrence was stabbed to death in 1995, does slightly better. King Solomon Academy in Penfold Street, on the eastern side of Edgware Road, is a recently opened



Elgin Avenue, with its terrace of red-brick mansion blocks, is very popular

THE AREA ATTRACTS

According to estate agent Tony Gambrill of Chesterton Humberts, Maida Vale attracts mainly wealthy English buyers, although there are some foreign buyers looking for a London pied-à-terre. There is an arty, celebrity element, too, perhaps attracted by the presence of the BBC music recording studios in Delaware Road. Residents include musician Paul Weller, model Kate Moss, heavy metal rocker Ozzy Osbourne's daughter, Kelly; Earl Spencer (he bought a house from Pink Floyd frontman David Gilmour, who promptly gave away the £3.6 million proceeds to homeless charity Crisis) and Mary "Queen of Shops" Portas.