

## Property Mail

## A capital investment

With gorgeous green space, glitzy boutiques and an art house cinema, it's no wonder everyone's talking about Kensal Rise, says Caroline Philips

**W**HEN we moved to London's Kensal Rise in 2003, I hated it. I disparagingly referred to it as 'The Suburbs'.

We'd lived in Holland Park and Kensington. I loved the Royal Borough's stucco houses, gracious parks, cafes and shops.

But we'd sold our duplex in Kensington during the rise of the property market and, sitting smug, waited in a rented house in Holland Park for the market to crash. And waited. And waited.

Soon, we couldn't afford a Notting Hill bike shed. Instead we bought a late Victorian red-brick family house in Kensal Rise, North London. Rapidly it became clear that the Royal Borough could keep its stucco splendour.

What we'd gained in 'The Rise' was somewhere up-and-coming, with unique attractions, edginess and community spirit. Plus a house with a 100ft garden, set in a quiet, tree-lined street near Queen's Park — the area's great attraction.

In June, erstwhile Arsenal footballer-turned-media personality Ian Wright (step-father of England player Shaun Wright-Phillips) moved into Kensal Rise with his family. The up-and-coming has come.

Indeed, Matthew Crichton-Brown, a property developer who recently relocated from Fulham, proclaims the area 'one of the fastest appreciating areas in London. Yet still good value'.

'Despite the recession, there's huge demand and a shortage of property here now,' says Richard Harris, owner of local estate agents Queen's Park Partnership.



Kensal Risen: An elegant terrace and local resident Thandie Newton

'While prices elsewhere in London dropped around 15 per cent last year, Kensal Rise increased. Houses now range from £800,000 (unrenovated) to £1.5million. It's the hottest place to buy in the capital.'

Which is why Foxtons is opening in the area next month.

A few clever souls spotted its merits a while ago. Residents of the wider Kensal Rise area (including Queen's Park to its east) include actress Thandie Newton, singer Lily Allen, model-turned-author Sophie Dahl, author Zadie Smith, handbag designer Bill Amberg and David Cameron's strategy guru Steve Hilton — the man behind the infamous 'New Labour, New Danger' demon eyes poster campaign.

Kensal Rise is also known locally as Media Vale — in a nod to nearby Maida Vale. This is where you will join BBC folk and Vogue's grande dame, Alexandra Shulman.

Fortunately, the area retains its authenticity. Some Irish immigrants — once the area's biggest ethnic group — and Afro-Caribbeans remain.

And there are affordable housing association rental properties.

So what makes the area so appealing? Transport is excellent — London Overground at Kensal Rise, the Tube at Queen's Park (20 minutes to the West End) and buses aplenty.

**T**HE local state schools — from Princess Frederica CofE School, Kensal Rise Primary School, Malores and Queen's Park Community School — have been improving with the middle-class influx into the area. (As far back as 2001, the census showed a high level of educational attainment among residents.)

But let's wind back a little. In December 2006, many houses were rendered uninhabitable by the North London tornado. In true Kensal Rise spirit, we held a street party to celebrate everyone's return after re-building — a tradition that has carried on every year since.

The tornado spurred one local, Sally Wilton, into realising a life-long dream. She opened The Lexi Cinema

ences at one of its film clubs. It offers 'live by satellite' from the Met in New York, intimate theatre and, in the car park, the Big Lunch with a free movie. There have been Q&A screenings with David Baddiel and Stephen Poliakoff. And this month sees its first foray into outdoor cinema in Roundwood and Queen's Parks.

Alongside this, local resident Yusuf Islam — aka singer Cat Stevens — is just finishing building an Islamic community centre.

Akashia Hoosein, an entrepreneur and founder of London Talent (providing hospitality industry solutions) is raising the finance for '70', a Soho House-style outpost, next spring.

It will have a restaurant and a (family-focused) members' club for 1,000 people. It has an undisclosed team of 'multi-award-winning London restaurateurs' behind it. It's all very secretive. 'We don't want to arm the competition.'

Why here?

'It's the new Notting Hill.' The biggest changes have been in Chamberlayne Road — the main drag that joins 'The Rise' to nearby Notting Hill. Recently, Vogue dubbed it 'one of London's coolest streets'.

**L**OCALS call it the New Portobello. Think vintage clothes to eccentric antiques. Even in the recession, designer home and bespoke kitchen shops have opened faster than paint pots.

'In two years, many shop rents have doubled,' says Harry True, chair of the Kensal Rise Business Association.

The area has real character. There's Gee Barber (an original Sixties gents' barber, £10 for trim and shave) and Gorgeous hair salon, where Annie Lennox is a client.

There's Scarlet & Violet, a florist — more of a flower gallery, really — selling natural arrangements, often in one-off vintage vases. Niche offers fashionable shabby chic French and English pieces. There's a poodle parlour and boutiques instead of awful High Street chains. There are even pound shops.

And it has wine bars, gastro pubs and delicatessens opening faster than you can say 'bruschetta'.

Italian-owned LAngolo is a superb old-fashioned grocers. There's Gracelands, a buzzing cafe, which is an exhibition space and therapists' collective. Just opened is Shake It, a groovy milkshake bar.

Soon coming are a whoopie pie shop — cupcakes are so last year — and an organic butcher. Delightfully, there's a tea shop that has live bands. There's also a local weekly farmers' market.

And it's not without soul. There's the Special Yoga Centre — a charity offering yoga to special needs children (Samantha Cameron took her late son, Ivan).

Locals hope to help dispossessed youth by raising £100,000 and turning the dilapidated tennis courts of Tiverton Green into a multi-use games area.

I've yet to find any downsides. Spencer Jacobs, agent at Queen's Park Partnership, now refers to Notting Hill as 'Lower Kensal Rise'.

'We're achieving prices of more than we were getting at the height of the market in 2007,' says Paul Weldon, director of local agents Harris & Company.

'We've even got one client buying neighbouring houses.'

Ian Wright was right: forget the gated mansion with six cars in the drive, Kensal Rise has risen.

## ON THE MARKET ... in London's 'new' Notting Hill



## Kenslake Road, NW6, £1,295,000

THIS Victorian terrace house has four bedrooms, a through reception room and kitchen/diner. There is a good-sized, south-facing garden and a loft conversion. The house is close to a park, transport and shops.

QUEEN'S Park Partnership: 020 7328 2828, queensparkpartnership.co.uk

## Wakeman Road, NW10, £650,000

A BRIGHT and spacious four-bedroom house set on a quiet tree-lined street. There is a large eat-in kitchen and reception room. Close to Kensal Green Station and local amenities in Ladbroke Grove.

FOXTONS: 020 7616 7000, foxtons.co.uk



## Linden Avenue, NW10, £825,000

A PERIOD-style, mid-terrace house close to shops and transport links. There are three double bedrooms, a through lounge, kitchen/diner, back garden and family bathroom.

QUEEN'S Park Partnership, as before

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