

No. 41 Ovington Square

French and British royal connections

No. 41 Ovington Square is Grade II listed and has been the home of many remarkable residents. Built in the early 1850s, the house was the home of Countess de Narbonne, who was directly linked to the Comte de Narbonne, illegitimate son of Louis XV, and later Minister of War for Louis XVI, as well as aide-de-camp to Napoleon. The house was later also home to another resident with royal connections, Henry Edward Fitz-Clarence, grandson of King William IV, along with a catalogue of other noteworthy residents, including a number of military heroes.

Market gardens to exclusive new homes

By the early 19th century much of the area around Brompton Road was still covered in market gardens and fields. During the 1820s building began to spread rapidly across the area, but the land where Ovington Square is located today was still open for development. It was owned by Baroness Von Zandt, daughter of John Standerwicke of Ovington House in Hampshire, where the name Ovington originates. By the 1840s the Baroness oversaw the development of her lands with the help of architect, William Wilmer Pocock.

William Pocock

William Pocock was the son of William Fuller Pocock, one of the founding members of the Royal Institute of British Architects and who wrote a number of books on building design and architecture. His son, William followed after his father and became a successful architect, responsible for building in Brompton Road, Lowndes Street and was later responsible for the Metropolitan Tabernacle for renowned minister, Charles Spurgeon, in 1861.

Vincent Street

Pocock designed all the grand stucco terraces of Ovington Gardens (first known as Ovington Terrace) and Ovington Square. Building began in 1844 but was not completed until 1852. However, the house now known as No. 41 Ovington Square was in fact part of the last section to be developed, originally named Vincent Street. Vincent Street was completed in the early years of the 1850s and first numbered 1 to 8, with No. 41 formerly No. 3 Vincent Street. Early parish rate books do not list Vincent Street until after 1855 when it is difficult to identify names. However, by the late 1850s it is clear that Vincent Street was the home of many French émigrés.

Countess du Narbonne and the French royal family

In 1860 the parish rate book shows the owner of No. 3 Vincent Street was Madam Duchean and the occupant was a Mr. Van Diepenham. However, the 1861 census shows the house was home to Louise de Narbonne, Countess de Narbonne. The Countess was connected to the Comte de Narbonne-Lara, illegitimate son of King Louis XV of France. The Comte de Narbonne was brought up in Versailles and later created Minister of War for King Louis XVI. During the French Revolution the Comte de Narbonne escaped to England and spent a large amount of time with fellow aristocratic émigrés, in particular at Juniper Hall in Surrey with others such as Talleyrand, General D'Arblay and Fanny Burney and with his mistress, Madame de Stael. The Comte de Narbonne-Lara returned to France in 1801 and subsequently became aide-de-camp to Napoleon. He died fighting in Germany in 1813.

The young Countess in the 1860s

In the 1861 census the Countess de Narbonne was recorded at No. 3 Vincent Street as married and 24 years old, with only one servant. It is unclear of the direct relationship to the Comte de Narbonne-Lara; however, she is most likely to have been the wife of the Comte's grandson, the third Comte du Narbonne and walked in illustrious circles within the French aristocracy. The young countess only stayed in the house for a short time, as within a few years the house had become the home of Joseph and Mary Perrin. The 1860s and 70s saw a number of wealthy residents, with the 1871 census showing most residents, including Joseph Perrin, were receiving an annuity or income from investments or property.



Officially renamed and Captain Wynter moves in

Vincent Street was officially renamed and numbered in 1881, at which point the house became No. 41 Ovington Square. The occupant of the house at this time was Captain Philip Wynter. The 1881 census and the parish rate books show army Captain Wynter aged 41 living with his wife, Constance and their one year old son Philip, as well as four live-in servants. Philip's father was Fellow and President of St. John's College, the Rev. Philip Wynter.

James Fortescue Harrison - MP for Kilmarnock

The next resident to move into No.41 Ovington Square was James Fortescue Harrison, Barrister and MP for Kilmarnock between 1874 and 1880. The 1891 census shows James, aged 72 and widowed, with his two daughters, Agnes, aged 51 and also widowed, and Mary, aged 40, along with three live-in servants. Interestingly, at this time James' neighbour in Ovington Square was Lord and Lady Kilmarnock. Alongside his work as a Barrister and MP he was also a prolific investor. *The Times* newspaper records him as Director and Chairman of many companies, including the 'Victoria Hansom Cab Company', 'The Mexican General Land Mortgage & Investment Co.' and 'The Permanent Wall Hangings Company'.

Henry Fitz-Clarence - grandson of William IV

By 1895, No. 41 Ovington Square became the home of another notable resident, but instead of the French royal family, this resident was directly linked to the British royal family. Henry Edward Fitz-Clarence was the grandson of King William IV. Henry's father was Lord Augustus Fitz-Clarence, the ninth son of William IV and his mistress, actress, Dorothea Bland. Sources show Henry living with his wife, Mary in Ovington Square with their son, Augustus and daughter, Cynthia.

Augustus Fitz-Clarence – sporting and military hero

Henry and Mary Fitz-Clarence lived at No.41 Ovington Square for almost 40 years, until Henry passed away in 1930 and Mary passed away in 1932. Their son, Augustus distinguished himself in both military and sports pursuits. He took part in the sabre contest in the 1912 Olympic Games, rowed at Henley in 1896-8, including as Captain in 1898, along with a number of other sporting pursuits. Augustus joined the army at the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899 and was commissioned to the Royal Fusiliers, receiving the Queens Medal with four clasps. He later fought in Nigeria, but died fighting in the Dardanelles during World War I, in 1915.

Squadron Leader Philip Lee-Warner

After 1932 No. 41 Ovington Square became the home of more military heroes. Philip and Mary Lee-Warner moved in during 1932-3 with their three children, Henry, Eleanor and Isobel. Henry Lee-Warner fought as a pilot with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve during World War II, taking part in a number of significant operations over Germany during 1944. Promoted to Squadron Leader in January 1944 he was shot down over Germany in August 1944.

Lieutenant-Colonel Romer

By 1948 the house had become the home of Malcolm and Cecilia Romer. Malcolm's father was Colonel Nigel Romer M.B.E of the Scots Guards. Malcolm followed his father into the Scots Guards and fought in Italy during World War II. He also rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and was awarded an M.B.E. The Romer's moved out of No. 41 Ovington Square sometime during the early 1960s, when it became the home of another military man, Major Harold Stanley Cayzer and his wife, Pamela.