

A guest blog about the British Empire Exhibition's Palace of Arts, from "Wembley Matters":-
<http://wembleymatters.blogspot.co.uk/2017/10/of-little-word-makes-big-difference.html> .

OF – a little word makes a big difference.

A couple of months ago I was walking along Empire Way, for the first time in a while, when a new street name caught my eye:



Many people, new to the Wembley Park area, might wonder who or what "Palace Arts" is or was, and why a road should be called that. As someone with an interest in local history, I realised that the road is by the site of the former 1924 British Empire Exhibition Palace of Arts building, so why was the "OF" missing from its name?

I wrote a joint email to Quintain's Wembley Park company and to Brent Council's street names department, asking whether there was a mistake on the sign, and if not, why the "OF" was missing from the name. Brent replied promptly, saying that Quintain had submitted the naming application in 2015, and that all proposed names are subject to consultation with the emergency services (they sent me a copy of the London Fire Brigade guidelines on street names) before being approved.

It was a couple of months before I received a full response from Quintain, but when I did it was clear that they had asked for the street to be called "Palace of Arts Way". Brent had declined to accept that name, and they thought this was because "OF" was not permitted as a word in street names. Having checked the L.F.B. guidelines, there is no mention of "OF", although it does say that new street names should not begin with "The". It appears that the reason the name was shortened may be because the guidelines suggest that names of more than three syllables (before the suffix "Road", "Street" or "Way" etc.) should be avoided.

Guidelines should be respected, but they are not strict rules. No doubt I am biased over this particular name, but surely common sense and respect for the heritage of Wembley Park should allow an extra, two-letter, syllable in this case? Just speak the names out loud. "Palace of Arts Way" has a soft flow to it, and would take no longer to say in a 999 call than "Palace Arts Way", which has a hard sound between the first two words that forces you to take a short break in speaking them.

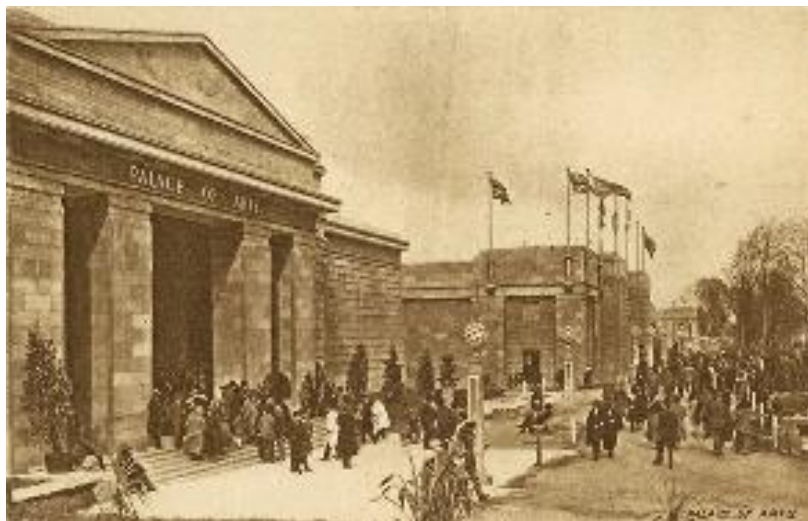
Why all this fuss over a little word? What is special about the Palace of Arts which means that it should be remembered in a street name? Let me share a bit more Wembley history with you.

As with much of Wembley Park's story, it involves the British Empire Exhibition, which was held in 1924 and 1925. Like its larger neighbours, the Palaces of Industry and Engineering, the

Palace of Arts (seen here in a postcard from the time) was one of the big reinforced concrete buildings showing off the best that Britain had to offer.

A 1924 postcard of the Palace of Arts.

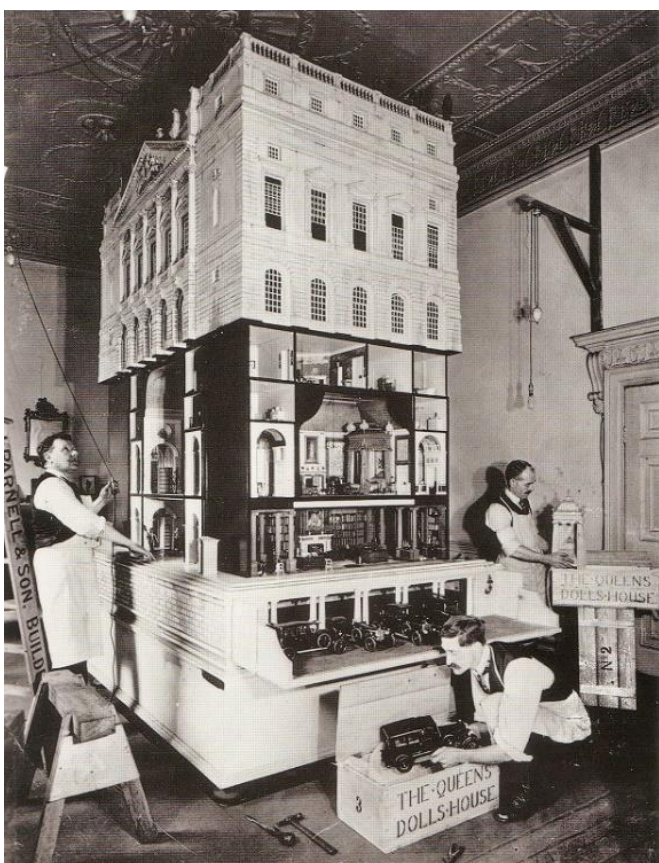
[Source: Brent Archives – Wembley History Society Collection]



A full range of arts and crafts were on show in the building's many galleries, including paintings by leading British artists from the 18th century onwards, and furniture in room settings from the same period up to the 1920's. There was a sculpture gallery, and rooms displaying works by artists from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India and Burma. Other exhibits showed the development of architecture, pottery, paper-making, printing and bookbinding. One room sold works by current artists and craftspeople, with nothing costing more than half a guinea (now 52.5 pence, but worth rather more then), showing that art could be affordable to the general public.

One of the main attractions was Queen Mary's Dolls House, which visitors had to pay an extra 6d (2.5 pence) to see - more than 1.6 million did so in 1924, with all the money going to charities nominated by the Queen. The project to make this was begun in 1921, with the 8ft 6in x 5ft x 5ft high mansion designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Hundreds of companies donated 1/12th scale working models of their products (including piano-makers Broadwoods, who had a works in Kingsbury at the time). Leading artists created miniature paintings to decorate the rooms, and

top authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling hand-wrote short stories and poems in tiny books for the dolls house's library.



Packing up Queen Mary's Dolls House in the 1920's.

[Source: Google images]

After the Exhibition, the Dolls House was moved to Windsor Castle (where it can be seen today), with money from visitors to see it still going to charity. Although some of the Exhibition's buildings were demolished after it ended, the Palace of Arts survived. It was used mainly as storage space for Wembley Stadium, and especially for the Empire Pool / Wembley Arena after that was built across the road in 1934 (you need somewhere to put the sections of the banked timber track, that you use for your annual six-day cycle race, for the other 359 days!).

The Palace of Arts as the BBC's Broadcasting Centre, with the queue for Olympic Games tickets at the Empire Pool in the foreground.

[Source: BBC 1948 Olympic Games webpage]



The building got a new lease of life in 1948, when the facilities at Wembley were used to host the Olympic Games. The BBC took over the building to provide the broadcasting centre for radio presenters and journalists from around the world who came to cover the Games. It continued to be used as the main base for the BBC's outside broadcast unit until the Television Centre in Shepherd's Bush opened in the 1960's. After that, the ageing structure began to fall into disrepair and, although it was a "listed building", permission was given to demolish it in the early 2000's.



The Palace of Arts building awaiting demolition, November 2002.

[Photo courtesy of Joyce Ip]

The former Basilica of the Palace of Arts, with Raglan Court (Empire Way) in the background, November 2004.

[Photo courtesy of Joyce Ip]



For a number of years the site remained derelict, and many local residents will remember the last, forlorn surviving part of the “Palace” alongside Empire Way. The Basilica had been a wing of the original building devoted to religious art. Before this part of the building was finally demolished, several beautiful mosaics were carefully removed, and one of these can now be seen in Brent Museum.



Cedar House, Emerald Gardens, on the site of the Palace of Arts in Engineers Way.

[Source: Google images]

Quintain finally got round to developing this area of their Wembley Park estate around 2013. The blocks of apartments on the site are now called Emerald Gardens, fronting onto Engineers Way opposite the Arena. I admit that “Palace of Engineering Way” would have been too much of a mouthful, but I still think the little road along the back of Emerald Gardens should have been called “Palace OF Arts Way”.

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