

## Wray House



### EXTRACT FROM COUNTRY LIFE

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#### The house designed by the man behind the TARDIS

My recent blogs for Country Life have mainly focused on 17th century farmhouses, all featuring fantastic historic features as well as all having fascinating stories going back through the centuries. However, I thought it was time to look at something a little different. Crown Lodge in Chelsea is not only built in the 20th century, but was also originally something a little unique – a police house.

Chesterton Humberts have formerly sold a number of flats in Crown Lodge and currently have one on the market, in this popular location in the centre of Chelsea. But, if the idea of a former Police house sounds a little odd, you may be persuaded by the 24 hour porter service, gym and indoor swimming pool. However, it was just over 20 years ago that this block was known as Wray House and housed police constables and their families.

Wray House was built in stages, with the first section completed in 1935 and the entire building completed by 1937 with a total of 114 flats. Wray House was designed by Metropolitan police architect and surveyor, Gilbert Mackenzie Trench, who was responsible for a number of police buildings across London during the 1930s and 40s. This now less recognised architect was not only responsible for the design of police buildings, but Trench was also the man responsible for the design of the iconic Police call box made famous as the 'Tardis' in Doctor Who.

The first call box designed by Trench was launched in 1929 and although there have been a few different designs and colours, it is the distinct blue police box by Trench that is most recognised due to its fame as The Tardis in the BBC's Dr Who. It is difficult to imagine a police force without communications systems such as two-way radio and mobile phones, but in the past the call box was the only form of communication a Bobbie had while out on his beat.

When first completed the flats in Wray House were said to be of a particularly fine type and in August 1935 The Times also said that it had "the latest labour-saving devices". Wray House, along with other similar blocks of flats, were constructed to provide accommodation for police men and women and their families that allowed them to live close to their stations in the centre of London. Wray House provided accommodation for police staff until the 1980s, but was sold in 1986 and converted into residential apartments by 1989. It was at this time that it was renamed Crown Lodge.

Today, Crown Lodge is certainly a building that stands out, with distinct exterior stair well towers combined with red brick, however, it is almost forgotten that this grand Chelsea apartment block was formerly Wray House and was the home of police Bobbies for so many years. It also appears that even less is known about the architect, Gilbert Mackenzie Trench who was responsible for the designs of so many police buildings, particularly the most famous of all, the blue police call box.