

Gentleman player

Amanda Constance talks to Damian Greenish about his passion for cricket and London's estates – and why he's sponsoring The Resident Business Awards

Damian Greenish is a man who works hard and plays hard. A cricket fanatic – he's about to jet off for a game in Barbados – his consuming passion is architecture. "I love property," he says. "It fascinates me. The history, the design, the people who use it." Greenish remains indignant that "people don't look up enough when walking in London". To prove his point, I'm taken to see the gargoyles that crown some of the buildings on Pont Street, near Greenish's office. And there they are, fearsome, gruesome and utterly fantastic and yet I've walked past them countless times in the past.

Greenish makes his living out of his love of buildings. As senior partner at solicitors firm, Pemberton Greenish, the 53-year-old works closely with some of London's biggest landowners. "I'm very lucky," he admits. Pemberton Greenish is sole solicitor for two of Chelsea's biggest landowners, Cadogan Estates and Sloane Stanley Estates, so Greenish is often party to major decisions. He is a trustee for Sloane Stanley, for example, a position he relishes because, he says, "I like to be involved in the decision-making process."

Pemberton Greenish has existed in its current guise since 2000, but the firm has been operating as a business since 1775, providing legal services for London's landed estates. Greenish joined the then Lee & Pembertons in 1974 when it was still based at Gray's Inn and the company moved to Pont Street the following year. Following the "extraordinarily civilised demerger" of a few years ago, the firm has become increasingly specialist; more than 60% of the firm's business is now landed estates. Not only do they look after Cadogan and Sloane Stanley, they also act for the Crown Estates, Holland Park's Ilchester Estate and the Eyre Estate in St John's Wood.

Greenish says he felt the company's future lay in specialising. "There is nobody else who does what we do", he says, "who knows the way the estates work. We know the people, the families and their feelings for an area." The estates are, he freely admits, his "particular passion".


The biggest challenge facing the landed estates today, says Greenish, are the changes brought about by the Leasehold Reform Act, which enables tenants to buy the



freehold to their property. "Whether the landowners like it or not, the fact is that their estates won't be around for much longer," he says. The "money-making machine" of short-term leases, long-relied on by the estates, is no longer an option, so they must "adapt or die". It is part of Greenish's job to advise his clients what options lie ahead of them.

The changes could affect the landscape of Chelsea enormously. The estates are already moving back into residential accommodation above shops, such as the flats Sloane Stanley are building at Mulberry Court on the King's Road. Another, grander example, is Cadogan's development of Duke of York Square. "Whether you like it or not," says Greenish, "you can't doubt the commitment of Cadogan to the area." It is the landowners, he says, who have been prepared to "get down and get their hands dirty, who've been most successful".

Far from being moribund, Greenish believes the landowners can still play an important role in the community. "I feel very strongly about what the estates can contribute to Chelsea," he says. The hot potato of high-street chains on the King's Road is a good example. Shops such as McDonald's, Starbucks and Gap are Greenish's pet hate. "The King's Road is a unique part of London," he says, "the chains just shouldn't be there." They are now "in retreat", he says, and this is partly down to the estates who have actively encouraged traditional retailers, whilst discouraging the coffee bars.

Pemberton Greenish already sponsors a "mixture of fun stuff" in the art and sport worlds – such as cricket's Surrey County Youth Academy. But why the Resident Business Awards? "They are a very interesting thing to be involved with," says Greenish. They are a "positive and fun thing to do for the area". He has just one rider, though. "If Starbucks wins Business of the Year, I will resign!" 

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