

A postcode by any other name...

Gone are the days when postcode snobbery hindered the London housing market, finds Eleanor Doughty. Or are they?



What's in a number? Having the right postcode makes no difference to most, but not all, buyers looking at central London property

IF you were to exit Knightsbridge station and walk to the Royal Albert Hall, you'd pass a curious sign: 'Park Close SW1'. 'SW1?' you might wonder, looking at the SW7 postcode of your destination. SW1 might sooner call up the Houses of Parliament or Horse Guards Parade than a passage near Harrods. How then can the postcode have switched so quickly?

Such is London's postcode system. In your south-London neighbourhood, Streatham High Road flips from SW2 to SW16 in a quickstep. Up in Elephant & Castle, 8, Hayles Street is in SE11—'the gateway to trendy south London,' says a friend who lives on the border—but the pub just next door, The Prince of Wales, is in SE1, one of the city's biggest postcodes.

Whether you realise it or not, you will have, when receiving directions, made a judgement about the place you're going based on the postcode. More than a century ago, when a young Evelyn Waugh lived with his parents in Golders Green, NW11, it's said that he would walk to the next postbox to acquire a fashionable NW3 postmark on his letters. But do postcodes matter any longer?

There has long been a snob-value element to parts of the city. The Bayswater/Notting Hill boundary is one such example. Property agent Simon Barnes of H. Barnes & Co (020-7499 3434) recalls a house on Hereford Road, W2, an eight-minute walk to Bayswater

station. 'It was a fantastic opportunity, designed by a famous architect, but buyers wouldn't consider it because it was in W2. The same architect had designed another house in Notting Hill, W11, which attracted serious interest. It proved that the postcode was the driver.'

‘People can get better value for money if they stop focusing on postcodes’

Hereford Road, where house prices average £1.9 million according to Zoopla, is now 'one of the most sought-after roads in W2,' adds Mr Barnes. It's natural to want to be wedded to a community, even if only by a six- or seven-character code. 'With central London becoming ever more compact, areas previously reliant on their individual identities have melded together,' says buying agent Thea Carroll (020-7193 3044). 'It's little wonder that people are keen to define their environs by postcode.'

Of course, 'boundaries have to be drawn somewhere,' says Brendan Roberts, director at Aylesford International (020-7351 2383). 'If you look at the footprint of any borough, it's a wiggly line.' Robbie Kerr, a director

at Adam Architecture (020-7841 0140) dismisses the idea that postcodes mean much today. 'If you asked 100 people in the street, one might be able to tell you where SW7 is,' he says from his office on Queen Square, WC1, a six-minute walk from Holborn station, WC2.

Attitudes are changing, adds Mr Barnes. 'People now realise that they can get better value for money if they stop focusing on postcodes and look at what the actual property offers.' Marc Schneiderman, director at Arlington Residential (020-7722 3322), agrees: 'We have dealt with buyers whose search is dictated by postcode and who are inflexible about buying within a neighbouring postcode—even if it's only one road away—but these are in the minority.' Part of his patch covers NW1, which is commonly associated with Regent's Park, but also includes Camden Town. The property values in these two areas vary: a two-bedroom flat on Nottingham Terrace, NW1, next to Madame Tussaud's, is on the market for £2.25 million (Winston Crowns, 020-3641 4737), but up on Camden Road, Marsh & Parsons (020-8128 0859) have a two-bedroom flat for sale for £700,000.

A friend who bought a house in south London last year and had always lived in a south-west postcode, ended up in Herne Hill, SE24. 'I couldn't care less which postcode I'm in,' he explains. 'SW2 or SE24,' he says. 'It doesn't matter.' 🐾