

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

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SPRING 1984

NEW CHAIRMAN

Robert Meadows was elected chairman of the Association for a three year term at the 1983 annual general meeting. He has lived in the area for thirty years and has been a member of the Ladbroke Association almost since its inception. He is an architect (RIBA) and a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute. He was for many years Principal Lecturer in Architecture in the Polytechnic of Central London, and latterly was responsible for a post-graduate course in urban design.

Peter Austerfield was elected hon. treasurer and Kathleen Kinmonth hon. secretary. Peter Thorold, the retiring chairman, was elected vice-chairman.

SUMMER MEETING

The Association hopes to organise a visit to several of the communal gardens in the Ladbroke conservation area as its summer function. For many of us the gardens are a focal point in our lives and it would be interesting to hear and see how others cope with the everyday problems of managing their gardens as well as having an opportunity to talk about plants and trees.

The Association is approaching Garden Committees to see if they would like to support this tour. It is intended that tickets will be made available to members of the Ladbroke Association. The date fixed is 19th May, 1984 and the tour is scheduled to start at 2.30 and finish with tea at 4.30. We hope to invite a prominent member of the Landscape profession to guide us through these unique gardens.

Further information will be circulated to members later.

LOOKING FORWARD

It is customary for a new chairman to take stock of the affairs of the Association and to look to possible future developments. Clearly, there are dangers in this, for in retrospect, as with most political manifestos, it may appear that good intentions have not been realised! However, it does seem that there are certain matters which are coming to the forefront for consideration. Some of these are to do with the Association's relationships with other bodies, such as the Garden Committees in the area, neighbouring Amenity Societies, and the Council itself.

The distinctive arrangement of buildings and communal gardens is the dominant feature of the Ladbroke Conservation Area, and it is the way these two elements are related that has created a most agreeable form of urban environment. The Association has tended to be concerned with the streets and buildings, whilst the various autonomous garden committees are responsible for the management of the communal gardens. Over the years attempts have been made to bring about a more positive and creative relationship between the Association and the garden committees. Once again the executive committee of the Association has this matter on its agenda, and it is hoped that, for the general well-being of the area, it may be possible to develop a new way of relating to the garden committees. Members views and ideas on this matter would be welcome.

The Pembridge Conservation Area lies immediately to the east of Ladbroke, and the Norland Area to the west. There are also Conservation Areas north and south of our area. Most of these areas have their amenity societies, but they all tend to function in isolation, despite their shared interests and concerns. So we are beginning to explore ways in which the Association might form links with neighbouring amenity societies, perhaps by means of joint meetings and other activities.

Most important of all is our relationship with the Council of the Royal Borough. This must be open and co-operative for our mutual benefit, and in most respects this seems to work well. But perhaps the time has come to re-examine this relationship and, together, to consider ways in which it may be improved.

The main on-going task of the executive committee is monitoring change in the area and expressing views on Planning Applications. Here it has the delicate task of balancing the desire of individuals to act in their own interests with the duty to maintain and enhance the character of the area as a whole. Of course, the Council, as the Planning Authority, has the last word in such matters, but what it finds difficult to control are the minutiae of change – the removal of mouldings, cornices and other architectural features. In the present intensity of building activity in the area, it is important to see that these details are maintained or restored, for they contribute so much to the character of the buildings. Recently there have been some sad lapses in this respect. Members of the Association can all help by keeping a watching brief over such changes.

Robert Meadows

1983 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A glance at the minutes of last year's Annual General Meeting will show how many building developments carry over from one year to another. The construction of additional storeys, for example, continues in Ladbroke Gardens and Stanley Gardens. The redevelopment of Kensington Temple drags on interminably with the whole corner left in a most unsightly state. We have indeed been so concerned about this situation that we have requested the Council to impose a time-limit by which the rebuilding must be completed.

In previous years, as most members will remember, our Annual General Meetings have been held at the old Knights of St. Columba Club in Lansdowne Road. The building has been sold, and is in course of reconstruction into flats. The plans, in our view, allow for rather too many flats, but at the same time we are relieved that this important building is to be in residential use. Another planning application during the year was for the erection of an office block at the southern end of Ladbroke Grove. The Association objected strenuously and I am glad to report that permission was refused. We also successfully opposed a plan for a glazed canopy over the front of the Ladbroke Arms.

Through its newsletter and its meetings, with the printing of postcards and the like, the Association performs a useful promotional and instructive function. Nevertheless, the core of our work is in the influence we exert on planning, and over developments such as Town Schemes. Usually it is difficult to assess how decisive our intervention has been in any particular case, but there are occasions when we can justifiably feel that it has played a crucial part. One instance in the past year was in relation to an appeal to the Department of the Environment to override the Borough Council's dismissal of a proposal for a very undesirable extension at No. 1 Arundel Gardens. The Association supported the Council (as did local residents) at the Appeal – both the vice-chairman and I were present – and vigorously opposed the scheme. The Inspector rejected the appeal.

It is of course no surprise, and demonstrates no extraordinary merit on our part, that we should influence planning decisions. The legislation which established conservation areas left a gap to be filled by conservation societies. What is satisfactory is the clear evidence from our files of the increasing willingness of the Council to take conservationist arguments seriously. A few years ago, for example, infilling was not always resisted at the Town Hall; now it is very seldom permitted. We can be pleased at progress, but we cannot be complacent. Co-operation with Council Departments, and what I hope are friendly relations with their staff, do not exclude disagreement on a number of matters. Last year, you may remember, we had a fierce argument over street lights. This year we are far from happy over what we see as a casual approach towards the enforcement of certain conditions of the District Plan, not least on retrospective planning permission.

In the 1982/83 year, we held our customary pair of members' meetings. One was addressed by Ashley Barker, the GLC's chief for Historic Buildings, who looked back delightfully on old Kensington, and the other by the avant-garde architect, Peter Cooke, speaking on new styles in modern building. The Association, concerned with the former, can nevertheless not ignore the second. The preservationist movement has been accused of being more truly historicist than aesthetic, of holding a commitment more towards age than towards beauty. The charge may be exaggerated, but it does contain more than a grain of truth, and it is important in our reaction to planning proposals and in the schemes which we sponsor that we do not forget that there is a distinction between conservation and unthinking preservation.

The chairman concluded by thanking members of the committee for their support, and in particular referred to the debt owed by the Association to the hon. treasurer, Hilda Edwards, and to the hon. secretary, Muriel Cosh, both of whom were retiring at the meeting after many years of office.

PLANNING

There have been Planning Applications on two important sites on the southern boundary of the Conservation Area.

Nos 7-9 Ladbroke Grove. 'Trinity Building'

This building has been empty for many years and is in a dilapidated state. It lies between 'The Mitre' public house and the small mews with which it is physically linked. A rehabilitation or redevelopment of this building would clearly be a welcome improvement, preferably in conjunction with the adjoining mews.

A planning application was made to rebuild on the site of Trinity Building, but not including the mews. The proposal was for a building with basement, ground, first and second floors of office space, with a top floor of residential accommodation in a mansard roof. The Association opposed this proposal on the grounds that office development was inappropriate, and that the site was being over-developed. The application was refused by the Council.

More recently, a second application has been made, again for an office building, but of less bulk and with no residential accommodation. Again, the Association opposed the application, and again the Council turned it down. The applicants have now lodged notice of appeal. The Association will support the Council at the appeal hearing.

Nos. 1-7 Ladbroke Road

This well-known and prominent terrace, consisting of shops with two upper floors of what was originally residential accommodation, has been the subject of a planning application. Here, the proposal was for complete demolition and for the rebuilding in the form of a replica of what is there now. The new building would have a small extension at the east end over an enlarged entrance to Bulmer Mews, and a mansard roof with dormers. The upper floors would be partly offices and partly residential. The proposal was designed to relate to the already approved plan to build small houses in Bulmer Mews.

There was much local opposition to this proposal from existing shopkeepers and from local residents. However, from a purely visual standpoint the proposal was unobjectionable, although there was some concern that the new building might generate more traffic at an already congested junction. The Council refused this application on the grounds that an inadequate case had been made for demolishing the existing building. The Applicants appealed against this decision. The Appeal has been heard but the result is not yet known.

Kensington Temple

This very important building stands at one of the main entrances to the Conservation Area. It had a garden in front, and it was surrounded by stone boundary walls with iron gates on the frontages to Kensington Park Road and Ladbroke Road.

Since the recent alterations to the building were completed, the site has been left in a deplorable state. The boundary walls and gates are in need of repair or replacement, and the garden has been turned into a car-park entered through a wide gap in the Kensington Park Road frontage. The site is generally untidy with piles of rubble and builders' material. This is all very unsatisfactory, and for months the Association has been pressing the Council to take action to secure the reinstatement of the gardens, boundary walls and gates. The Council has now taken enforcement for the restoration of the boundary walls and gates, and the Association is pressing for similar action for the rehabilitation of the garden.

AUTUMN MEETING

Instead of the usual lecture the Association's autumn meeting for 1983 took the form of visits to Linley Sambourne House and Leighton House, conducted by Ian Grant. The first visit was oversubscribed and a second tour was necessary. Leighton House will be familiar to many residents of the area, but we thought it might be interesting to have a short description of Linley Sambourne House, at 18 Stafford Terrace, W.8.

The house is typical of many that were built in Kensington during the 19th century, but it lays claim to being unique in that it still contains an almost untouched late 19th century interior, decorated, furnished, and set out in the manner that was extremely popular in the 1880s and 90s but which has now almost completely disappeared.

After the death in 1910 of Edward Linley Sambourne, a prosperous commercial artist who moved into the house in 1874 and lived there until he died, his son Roy continued to occupy it until his own death in 1946 without bothering to modernise or change anything. When Lady Rosse, grand-daughter to Linley Sambourne and mother to Lord Snowdon, eventually took over the property in the late 1950s, it had become so remarkable that she decided it should be preserved. The house has recently been acquired by the GLC, and is administered as a house museum by the Victorian Society (01-994 1019) through whom access may be obtained; it presents an example of the kind of interior which must have existed all over the Ladbroke Area in the past, but which has disappeared almost without trace in face of the onslaughts from modernisation, fashion, lack of servants and 'good taste'.

CONGRATULATIONS

We congratulate our Hon. Vice-President — we have no President — and first Chairman of the Ladbroke Association, Angus Stirling, on his appointment as Director General of the National Trust.

Princes House, Buckingham Court and Matlock Court

These large blocks of flats occupy a considerable frontage on the east side of Kensington Park Road, and over the years there have been various proposals to add another storey to the buildings. The current proposal is for large penthouses on the roofs. We have consistently taken the view that any such proposals would increase the already high density, quite apart from their effect visually. They would also exacerbate the car-parking and traffic problems in the vicinity. The Council's decision is not yet known.

KENSINGTON'S DISTRICT PLAN

The District Plan for Kensington and Chelsea, adopted in 1982 and published at the beginning of 1983, is an impressive document. It is, in fact, a book of no less than 323 pages, complete with maps and charts, describing the Borough Council's policy on virtually everything for which it holds responsibility. The section on conservation and development is reassuring in the firmness of its language, and in the establishment of objectives and on how they should be achieved. It is disappointing then that unmistakable signs of cold feet are emerging from the Town Hall.

In making observations in the earlier part of 1983 as participators in the regular monitoring programme, the Ladbroke Association pointed out that in practice virtually no planning applications submitted to the Council conformed to the standard required by the Plan. The wording of the Planning Department's reply was worlds away from the unflinching prose of the Plan. While the Department asserts that it is "acutely conscious" of the problem it then goes on to declare how extremely difficult it would be to insist on absolute compliance in every case with what its standards are supposed to be. The question is of course very important: if planning applications fail to provide proper information on surrounding property it is much harder to visualise how well the proposed development would eventually fit in with its neighbours. The Association is not so unrealistic as to believe that perfection in planning applications can be achieved all at once, but it does ask that some progress is made, that some move towards improvement is undertaken.

The second criticism that we put is also to be taken seriously. From time to time people make alterations to their houses, or even build extensions, without first obtaining planning permission. The District Plan states . . . "The Council will take planning enforcement action when planning policies and decisions are not complied with". Most people would agree that there must be circumstances, where for example the omission was inadvertent, the modification trivial and the cost of rectification heavy, when enforcement would be unjust. That said, it must also be true that the effectiveness of planning controls depends on their being enforced. A situation where offenders could just apologise and escape untouched would be intolerable. The Association pointed out to the Council that doubts existed in the neighbourhood as to its resolve on this subject, and asked for reassurance. Again the reply is too vague to be satisfactory.

We are pressing the Council to declare itself in terms which are more in line with its policy as set out in its District Plan and will report progress in the next newsletter.

CAB-DRIVERS SHELTER

This charming little building in Kensington Park Road is one of a few of its kind surviving in London. It still serves a useful purpose as well as adding to the street scene in Kensington Park Road. Some years ago it was restored, partly as the result of representation by the Ladbroke Association. Once again the building is in need of painting and repair and the Association has drawn attention to this in the right quarters in the hope that the necessary work will be done.

COUNCIL SCHEME FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Council has funds at its disposal which it is prepared to devote to worthwhile projects for improving the environment. The Association has suggested the restoration of the wall, now very dilapidated, which stands in front of the terrace comprising Nos. 65-75 Ladbroke Grove.

THE COMMITTEE

In addition to the officers, who are separately listed, the Committee for the year 1983-1984 consists of the following: Muriel Cosh, Leslie Du Cane, Ian Grant, Linda Kelly, Jeremy Lever, David Marshall, Thomas Pakenham, June Park, David Posnett, Santa Raymond, Peter Thorold.

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