

# News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

AUTUMN 1987

## 1987 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - OUTGOING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The 1987 AGM took place on 24th June. The meeting proved to be extremely lively and interesting, due in large part to the presence of the Borough's Director of Planning, Mr A E Sanders, and the vice-chairman of the Town Planning Committee, Cllr Dr Brian Levitt, who were able to contribute some useful points of information to discussions of planning matters and general policy.

A most interesting discussion arose on the question of membership subscription. Although the committee had been reluctant to consider an increase in the subscription to more than £5, a large proportion of the members of the Association present at the meeting indicated that a higher subscription would be acceptable, and indeed welcomed, if it were to produce a corresponding increase in the effectiveness of the Association. This subject was touched upon in my Report in the Spring 1987 *Newsletter*. The amount of interest shown was surprising and it gave a mandate to the Committee to look very seriously at the possibility of establishing a truly professional service in furtherance of the aims of the Association.

The subject of enforcement against contraventions of planning law came up, and indications were given by the Director of Planning & Transportation that more resources would be devoted to this area of concern.

The presence of Cllr Levitt reminded me that the Town Planning Committee and Sub-Committee meetings on which he sits are open to the public, and anyone who is at all interested in particular planning applications, or even merely interested in observing the planning process at

work, is free to attend those meetings.

One subject which was not specifically raised at the AGM, but was referred to in my report in the Spring *Newsletter*, was the quality of streetscape at Notting Hill Gate. It is most encouraging to see that preparations have since been made for the planting later this year of several pavement trees in the section of Notting Hill Gate between Ladbroke Terrace and Pembridge Road. It is to be hoped that this event will mark the start of an overall improvement in the quality of the streetscape; perhaps the next step might be the replacement of the awful sheep-pen pavement railings with something more sympathetic to the area.

It was with great regret that I announced my early handing over of the Chair at the meeting. Increased pressure of work in my practice had reluctantly led me to the conclusion that the Association needed a Chairman with more time available to devote to the sometimes quite demanding job of keeping the Association on course. We were fortunate in having a Vice Chairman willing and able to take on the job, and I would like to thank those at the meeting for their unanimous endorsement of the exceptional procedure adopted in electing a new Chairman for 1987-1988.

My year as Chairman has been extremely rewarding and interesting, and there are even more interesting times ahead for the Association in this period of change and development.

*Richard Bird*

## THE COMMITTEE

The Officers and Committee for

the year 1987-1988 are: Chairman, Peter Thorold; Hon. Treasurer, Paul Bastick; Hon. Secretary, Marguerite Evers. Peter Austerfield, Richard Bird, Colin Cohen, Ian Grant, Evelyn Jacomb, Linda Kelly, Jeremy Lever, David Marshall, Robert Meadows, Thomas Pakenham.

## THE COUNCIL IN RETREAT

The pressures on the Borough Council are perhaps heavier than ever before. Last year they were faced with the possibility of having to pay enormous compensation to the owners of blocks of flats who claimed that they wanted to build on additional storeys. Happily that threat has now largely been removed, but another, more general one, has materialised.

In May Councillor Orr-Ewing, the chairman of the Town Planning Committee, felt obliged to write a letter to conservation societies which should alarm everyone interested in protecting their neighbourhood against new development. He starts with the reassurance that the views of local residents continue to be very important, but he is soon into the worrying part. National policy, he tells us, now demands a greater emphasis on economic and social factors. The government's circulars are encouraging local authorities to make development easier, and small business must be provided with premises. 'Planning permission may be refused properly only if there are sound and clear reasons for so doing, i.e. where a grant will cause "demonstrable harm".'

The letter then returns to renewed reassurances as to the Town Planning Committee's commitment to conservation and

the welcome it gives to maximum public involvement in planning, and then another sting. 'We have to bear in mind that to refuse planning permission without very good cause could lead to an unnecessary planning appeal, and so can now lead to a claim for costs against the Council.'

Elsewhere in this newsletter we discuss co-operation with the Borough, and we are not forgetful of their frequently receptive attitude to a well-argued case. It is most important that they continue to be receptive for, if they do not, if they cannot bring themselves to live by their own District Plan or to take proper account of the urgings of conservation societies and residents' associations, their contribution to the environment will be as destroyers and not as the protectors we expect them to be.

In his article Richard Bird, the retiring chairman of the Association, refers to the discussion at the AGM about the rise in subscription - now in real terms restored to its level of fifteen years ago - and the apparent readiness of members to consider a further increase if extra money would buy extra effectiveness. Councillor Orr-Ewing's letter reflects on to us some of the heat now directed on the Borough. Our arguments and representations will have to be more professionally put and better researched. The difficulty is that even as things are now our members by and large find it less easy to give the time necessary.

The challenge then is an acute one: we have Councillor Orr-Ewing's letter warning us that the Borough's stand is likely to be less robust than before, and we have more and more developers longing to get their hands on a bit of Ladbroke.

Watch this space, as they say.  
*Peter Thorold*

## PLANNING APPLICATIONS

**84-90 Holland Park Avenue** (including premises backing onto Lansdowne Mews) - Planning permission has been granted for the demolition of the old Kennings garage and car hire centre and for the erection of a new

building consisting of rental car show rooms/shop on the ground floor with garaging for 12 cars behind for the residents of 12 residential units above the entire premises. The Association did write to comment on architectural aspects of the building on the Lansdowne Mews side and also pointed out the poor size of garage spaces, as well as drawing attention to the planners that if the ground floor space were used as lock-up shops, rather than car hire showroom, then the servicing of the shops would be from Holland Park Avenue which would be highly undesirable. At the time of going to print we do know that certain conditions were placed on the permission that was granted but details are not yet available.

**Mercury Theatre** - An application to convert the existing property into a very upmarket town house with interesting enclosed garden areas and balconies; it has not yet been before the planning committee and so there is no decision yet. The Association comment to the planners was that the proposals seem unobjectionable on visual grounds except for the obtrusive treatment of the access to the roof terraces.

**7 Stanley Crescent** - The fashion for conservatories continues and this application is for a conservatory at ground floor level on to the private garden. It is hoped that the scale of the proposed conservatory will be reduced somewhat.

**15-16 Wilby Mews** - Planning application currently under consideration. This was a somewhat pompous overdevelopment on 3 floors as 4 new town houses and the Association have suggested a two storey scheme instead. We have also noted these properties appear to have been owned by the owners or developers of the **Bowley Nursing Home** in Ladbroke Terrace and Ladbroke Road, who in an earlier proposal for their overall scheme had offered as a condition for their proposals to return or provide some land for gardens or as garden use to the houses in Ladbroke Road. We feel that the Bowley Nursing Home ought not to be allowed to go back on this proposal as it was

part of their planning application. **28 Lansdowne Road** - We noted a planning application for a satellite dish near the ridge of the roof of this house. The dish was already in place i.e. ahead of permission. We have asked for the Council's policy on satellite dishes since they are likely to proliferate and become a menace. We have suggested that a system of temporary licensing might be appropriate until the technology is more stable.

**82 Ladbroke Road** (planning appeal) - A block application was originally made for an additional floor on numbers 80-82 and 84-86 which was refused. An appeal has now gone in writing to the Department of the Environment. The Association have written since the appeal relates only to number 82 and we feel that it is important that these four houses should be treated as a group.

**48 Clarendon Road** - We mention this as a major remodelling of a Victorian town house along a line of a Dynasty-type home. We have commented to the planners that the proposals at the back are somewhat brash and completely break the symmetry of this house with its neighbours. We have particularly asked that the relevant garden committee should be consulted.

**15 Kensington Park Gardens** - An application has been pending a decision for some time to modernise this property, with an apparently existing old hotel used, but which in recent years has been a rooming house, into a luxury private hotel, involving digging up the garden the entire depth to the railings of Ladbroke Square for restaurant and kitchens and leisure space at basement level. There is much local concern and well-considered opposition and the Association has registered objections very strongly with the planners. We have also said that the Association would be prepared to support the Council in the event of this matter going to appeal. The planning office are awaiting a new set of drawings from the architects before taking the matter any further.

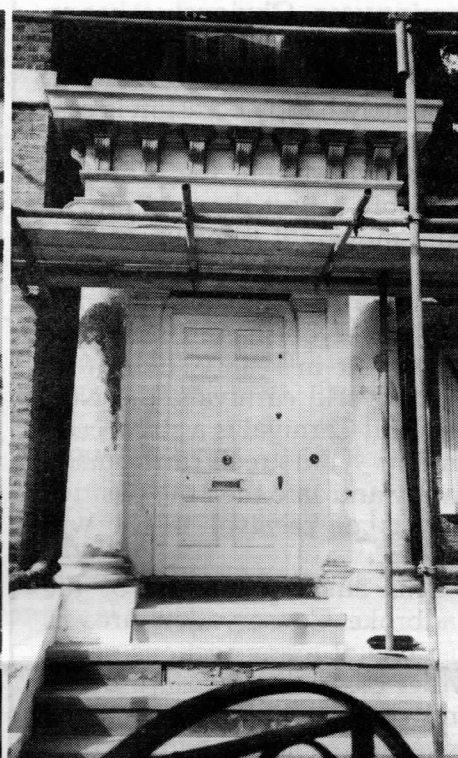
**3-5 Lansdowne Road** - As we go to press a planning application has been made for a conversion of



these two houses into 18 flats and maisonettes with an additional storey, off-street parking for 13 cars and the creation of a new private communal garden at the rear.

**121-123 Blenheim Crescent** - The Association welcomes the careful restoration of front-pillared porticos recently commissioned by the owners of these family houses. The work was carried out by Julian Grassi from Oxfordshire who works with fibreglass and plaster mouldings and has done a great deal of work in the Ladbrooke conservation area.

*In neighbouring Bayswater a satellite dish aerial sits on a porch, while in Clarendon Road restoration of the porch is thought to be preferable.*



## LIFE ON THE EASTERN FRONT

The eastern boundary of the Ladbrooke Conservation Area runs up from Notting Hill Gate to Elgin Crescent. The atmosphere is markedly more urban than further to the west, a fact that brings all the advantages and problems of city life to a sharp focus.

The boundary certainly contains some fine architecture and examples of early properties built in the area. The north-east edge, the row of houses known as Kensington Park Terrace North, dates from about 1853. While more modest in size, compared to some buildings further south or west, the Terrace, on what was the north slope of St John's Hill, represents one of the earliest developments in this part of 'Kensington Park'.

As a residential area the terrace mercifully survived any real war damage and in spite of subsequent 'bed-sit' development, it remained remarkably uniform, at least in its external appearance. It was for this reason that it was chosen by the Council for grant-aided development in 1980.

Although the level of grant aid was less than originally envisaged (the Department of the Environment and Greater London Council withdrew), many of the owners of the now largely single

family occupation houses entered into the spirit of development. While this is not complete the terrace now has a more uniform appearance and many of the missing architectural features have been replaced or repaired. The central group of houses, complete with imposing pediment and fine iron balconies, are now Grade II listed buildings and the whole terrace is protected by an Article 4 direction.

Developments such as this frequently bring people together on a wider range of issues. The Kensington Park Terrace North Residents' Association is a case in point. Originally it was formed to be a focus for the enhancement of the facades. Its interests widened and it now responds to a variety of issues relevant to the immediate locality.

This part of the conservation area illustrates the sometimes uneasy relationship between residential and commercial interests. In the more urban settings these must co-exist, but there are times when residents need to be vigilant and, if necessary, express a concern.

The terrace backs on to the rear of the Portobello Road and the 'gap' between contains small, highly individual and often luxurious gardens. They are amazing

areas of tranquility in an otherwise busy corner. Naturally threats to this environment meet with some strong objections. Threats to the residential character of the street also bring comments as there is the constant danger of 'creeping commercialism', that is, the attempt to turn the corner and allow market overspill into Kensington Park Road.

The proximity then to the Portobello Road brings its problems. As wine bars, restaurants, take-aways and other businesses proliferate and tourist numbers increase, they put a strain on essential services. Yet the density of the businesses calls for the maximum concentration of effort if litter and business refuse is to be kept to a minimum.

The residential and busy commercial section has its parking problems, and not just in the 'happy hour'. This is not unique to this particular corner but the addition of major bus routes does tend to compound the problem. Members of the Association have liaised with Council Officers and London Transport as all would ideally like to improve some of the areas of congestion.

At the time of writing the carnival is very much in many people's minds. It will no doubt be the subject of many debates in the

coming year. Obviously it has an impact on this part of the conservation area and it is sad that a genuinely happy occasion is easily marred by a minority. Residents' views on the Carnival probably reflect those of others, from moving it somewhere else, to limiting numbers or taking even more draconian action. No doubt everyone has an instant solution but in reality, like other major world carnivals, the Notting Hill Carnival is a street celebration. If the streets can be made happy and safe then the positive aspects of carnival might win through.

This small part then of the Ladbroke Conservation area is just one of many sections of the wider community. More urban and cosmopolitan than some it nevertheless has its own particular charm. Many residents have lived in their houses for a considerable time. Their individual and collective efforts, sometimes supported by the Ladbroke Association, have helped to develop and protect this border.

*Peter Austerfield*

*Peter Austerfield is the Chairman of the Kensington Park Terrace North Residents' Association. He has just retired after a number of years as the Association's Honorary Treasurer.*

## ESTATE AGENTS' BOARDS

We referred in our last issue to the proliferation of estate agents' boards and its effect on the look of some of the streets in the area. Sometimes there are several to a house. The Borough has asked the Department of the Environment for the right to restrain advertising of this sort, a move endorsed by the Association in our own letter to the Department of the Environment.

## ACCOUNTS

At the Annual General Meeting the Hon. Treasurer, Peter Austerfield, reported 1986-1987 income of £1,080.35 and expenditure of £963.11, producing a surplus of £117.24 which was added to reserves. Last year's surplus was £42.89.

## LANSDOWNE COURT

The presence at the AGM of Mr Sanders, the Borough's Director of Planning, and of the vice-chairman of the Town Planning Committee symbolised the shared interest of the Association and the Borough in so many matters of planning. It is at its most clear-cut at planning appeals where a developer appeals to the Department of Environment against a refusal of planning permission by the Borough. Recently there was the case of Lansdowne Court, the block of flats fronting on to Lansdowne Crescent and Lansdowne Rise where the rejected proposal was to add an extra two storeys. The inspector appointed by the Department gave an encouraging expression of the Department's current attitude to development in conservation areas. (But read also the article entitled 'The Council in Retreat'.)

The difficulty in defending the present structure of Lansdowne Court is that it cannot be thought of for a moment as one of the glories of Ladbroke. It is a 1930s building the style of which is in strong contrast to the neighbouring 19th century buildings, some of which are 'listed'. The inspector stated flatly that in his opinion the additional floors would not spoil the block of flats as they stand and indeed that some of the minor consequential alterations would no doubt be an improvement to the existing facade.

However, he rejected the appeal on the grounds of its effect on the skyline: 'the additional floors in relation to the size of the appeal blocks would add significantly and unduly to their mass and prominence in the street scene and on the skyline, at the expense of visual amenity and the appearance of this part of the important Conservation Area.'

## KENSINGTON TEMPLE

The saga continues! In our last Newsletter we noted that work had started again on the external works and boundary walls. We were assured that these works would be continued to completion. Alas! This has not happened for the work has stopped and remains unfinished, and there are piles of building material lying about to add to the general air of untidiness. The Notice of Completion threatened by the Council seems to have had little effect.

We are pursuing our investigation of the car parking issue. The Planning Department takes the view that there is established use for car-parking in the forecourt which cannot be limited. But we have an aerial photograph which shows the former state of the forecourt, with limited car-parking in front of the building and a garden in the triangular space. This is what we would like to see reinstated. We are now considering taking expert legal advice on this matter.



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