

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

WINTER 1991

THE HEALTH CARE CORPORATION

'A Cancer in our Midst'?

A personal assessment by Stephen Enthoven

Ever since the Autumn 1986 edition, each succeeding issue of this newsletter has carried items about some fresh horror perpetrated in the rectangle bounded by Ladbroke Road, Square and Terrace and Wilby Mews.

The Ladbroke Estate is a unique and priceless triumph of planning which has been progressively eroded over the years as greedy speculators have ruined vistas by closing vital gaps, redeveloped irreplaceable buildings with insensitive blots and destroyed skylines with extra storeys. The function of your Association is to struggle to guard what remains against further inroads, and recent years have seen a depressing record of failure as planning policy has dealt all the strong cards to the developers.

It is clear that the houses in Ladbroke Terrace, which were mostly built in the 1830s, were seen by Thomas Allason when he laid out the Estate as a stately avenue of large villas providing a suitably grandiose approach to Ladbroke Square, the largest garden square in London and the crowning glory of his plan. Until about three years ago the Terrace remained much as it had always been, apart from a block of 1930s flats on the corner and some insensitive modifications to the two original villas which then comprised the Bowley Clinic. The intervening period has, however, witnessed complete devastation on both sides of the northern part of the Terrace. Number 8 has been demolished without permission and is being rebuilt along similar lines but, it appears, with different and rather oddly proportioned detailing; number 9 has been almost com-

pletely rebuilt except for the facade. But worst of all, the Bowley Clinic has emerged from its chrysalis as The Goldsbrough Close Care Retirement Apartments, an insensitively designed block of 32 flats painted cream and green when all around it is black and white and constructed from strange beige bricks which are presumably an unsuccessful attempt to imitate the old London stocks of its surroundings without incurring the expense. Those who saw what the Health Care Corporation had done previously in Ladbroke Road and Wilby Mews will not have been surprised by this, however, and even the Council, to its credit, refused permission, which was only granted by the DoE on appeal.

In the last newsletter I wrote a personal piece, warning of the Health Care Corporation's equally insensitive plans to redevelop number 10, now the last unspoilt house at this end of the Terrace, as a speculative office building to house at least fifty workers, and to alter the Masonic hall behind it. Since that time two alternative applications, one to use the hall as offices for a further perhaps 100 workers and the other to replace it with four inaccessible but intrusive houses, have been refused by the Council (despite being recommended by the planning officers) after energetic lobbying by your Association with the assistance of a paid consultant. These applications have now gone to the DoE on appeal by written representations. At the same time as this was notified to objectors, however, a fresh application has been submitted by the Health Care Corporation (who are not, I should point out, the owners of the property), once again proposing turning the house into an office and the hall into four houses, which could confuse neighbours who

Below: 10 Ladbroke Terrace - dwarfed by the Goldsbrough Apartments.



may not realise that they must write afresh to the Council if they wish to resist it.

Nor is this all! Not content with building an enormous structure over what used to be the gardens of the old Clinic and replacing the neighbouring houses in Ladbroke Road with unconvincing imitations to house a nurses' home, the Health Care Corporation have now bought numbers 44 and 46 and have applied to change their use from residential to hostel use, which will presumably be accompanied by equally insensitive rebuilding. Clearly they will only be satisfied when the whole of this large site is in their hands and has become a commercial enclave in the middle of this key part of our Conservation Area.

All is not yet lost, however. Since the DoE allowed their appeal for the flats a number of things have changed. First and most important is the 'Steinberg Case' where two residents wishing to resist a development were able even to have an Inspector's ruling overturned by pointing out that the Act required the authorities to 'preserve or enhance' a Conservation area. Secondly, the Council has now issued its excellent draft 'Conservation Area Policy Statement', which states clearly their intention to resist in future depredations of the kind we have recently suffered. Thirdly, there is evidence of a change of heart at the DoE and a willingness to assist councils who try to preserve Conservation Areas from the inroads of developers.

The Council alone cannot protect us, however. They need to be shown that local opinion is on their side. In order to convince the Health Care Corporation that further incursions will not be tolerated, it would be very helpful if all who feel concern would write to the planning department, quoting the addresses above and stressing that any further expansion of commercial activity in our Conservation Area is unacceptable and that the threatened properties must remain in or be returned to private residential use and their appearance and character left unaltered.

TO PARADISE BY WAY OF KENSAL GREEN

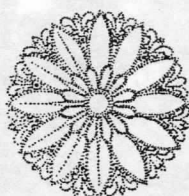
Report on the Association's Winter Meeting by Sally Kingston

The first burials at Kensal Green were in 1833; the last will be in 2000. Brent Elliott's talk to the Ladbroke Association in November was a timely reminder of the fund of architectural and social history that has been accumulating in the cemetery across the canal from Sainsburys.

The gateway and lodges, the two chapels and the catacombs are original, and with grant aid from English Heritage are now being restored. The tombs are a copy-book of Victorian style in all its variety. They are aged and weathered but thankfully not badly vandalised, though there have been some thefts: Hood's tomb, for example, has lost its surmounting bust.

Here are buried a son and daughter of George III; the cartoonist George Cruickshank; Dickens' biographer John Forster, original of Mr Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend*; Hardwick, the architect of Euston Station; the novelist Thackeray, a resident of Kensington; the Brunels, father and son; J C Loudon, garden writer par excellence; the American impresario who built White City... and so on through a catalogue of worthies.

Brent Elliott is the Royal Horticultural Society's Librarian, was chairman of the Victorian Society's subcommittee on cemeteries, and is a member of the Advisory Committee set up by Kensal Green's owners, the General Cemetery Company, for the continuing conservation of this unique landscape. He reports that The Friends of Kensal Green is to be launched in July.



GARDENS IN LADBROKE - 1

This is the first of a series of articles on the gardens of Ladbroke Conservation Area.

Ladbroke Square Gardens

No-one who has strolled through this garden can fail to be impressed by its scenic effect: the strong directional flow of the paths, the sweep of the lawns, the broad walk, the tree and shrub borders and the scale which matches the neighbouring buildings superbly. This was designed by the architect and landscape painter, Thomas Allom, in 1849, for the most successful developer of the Ladbroke Estate, CH Blake, who built the houses on the south side of Kensington Park Gardens, and it has hardly changed since then. His plan shows the double figures of eight of the paths, punctuated by a central fountain and two octagonal summer-houses, borders flowing and linking each other with the outer boundaries and along the paths, and a cross axis with Stanley Gardens at the beautiful ornamental gates with an arch on either side of Kensington Park Gardens: no record exists of the trees and shrubs planted then.

Positioned at the top of Notting Hill, the land slopes down gently to the south, and at six acres, two roods and 22 perches, is believed to be the largest privately owned garden in London (apart from Buckingham Palace). It has a gardener's cottage, the home of our only gardener, who works miracles keeping the garden well groomed. The soil is neutral to acid clay (pH 7 to 6.5) which has helped to overcome drought.

Committee meeting minutes, begun in 1896, provide a history of the changes: the 'small lawn' on the west and east lawns were well rolled and marked out in chalk alternately for tennis: previously they had been marked with tapes which were 'most dangerous'. The rock garden at the east end was laid out and extended in 1913-14. Every year £30 was spent on bedding plants. There were,

until 1940, always a gardener and two under gardeners. During the First World War, the east end of the Garden was dug up to grow potatoes, but because the soil is so heavy, the cost of production deterred a repetition during the Second World War. Then, the RAF commandeered a site for barrage balloons on the central lawn, three trees being felled to provide sufficient space. The Home Guard D Company were given permission to use another part of the Garden for drilling, bomb throwing and bayonet practice! The Borough Engineer asked for leave to remove the iron railings to sell them for scrap, but it was refused for security reasons. There used to be cricket nets for bowling practice but these were removed in the 1950s.

In 1963 the hard tennis court was built from subscriptions by the shareholders and members, and similarly two children's playgrounds in 1979 and 1988. In 1974 the fountain was vandalised, so it was turned off, and filled with earth and herbaceous plants and bulbs for perennial interest; a great loss of a major element in the garden. In 1972 and 1973, Dutch elm disease struck and about 80 trees were felled over the next two to three years: not only elms, but sycamore, maples, amelanchier, Lombardy poplars, and planes, perhaps part of the original planting which became over mature or unsafe. As a result of this disaster, Miles Kington, then a committee member, approached Dame Sylvia Crowe, one of our foremost Landscape Architects who lives close by, to make a report on the Garden and suggest replacement trees and any other improvements. At her suggestion, a tree survey was made and every large tree was checked and numbered: regular checks are made by a tree surgeon to ensure their safety. Dame Sylvia also suggested the replanting of shrubberies with more interesting and colourful shrubs and ground cover, and a selection of trees.

Several generous donations of trees were made by the Kensington Society, the Royal Borough, the Ladbroke Association which

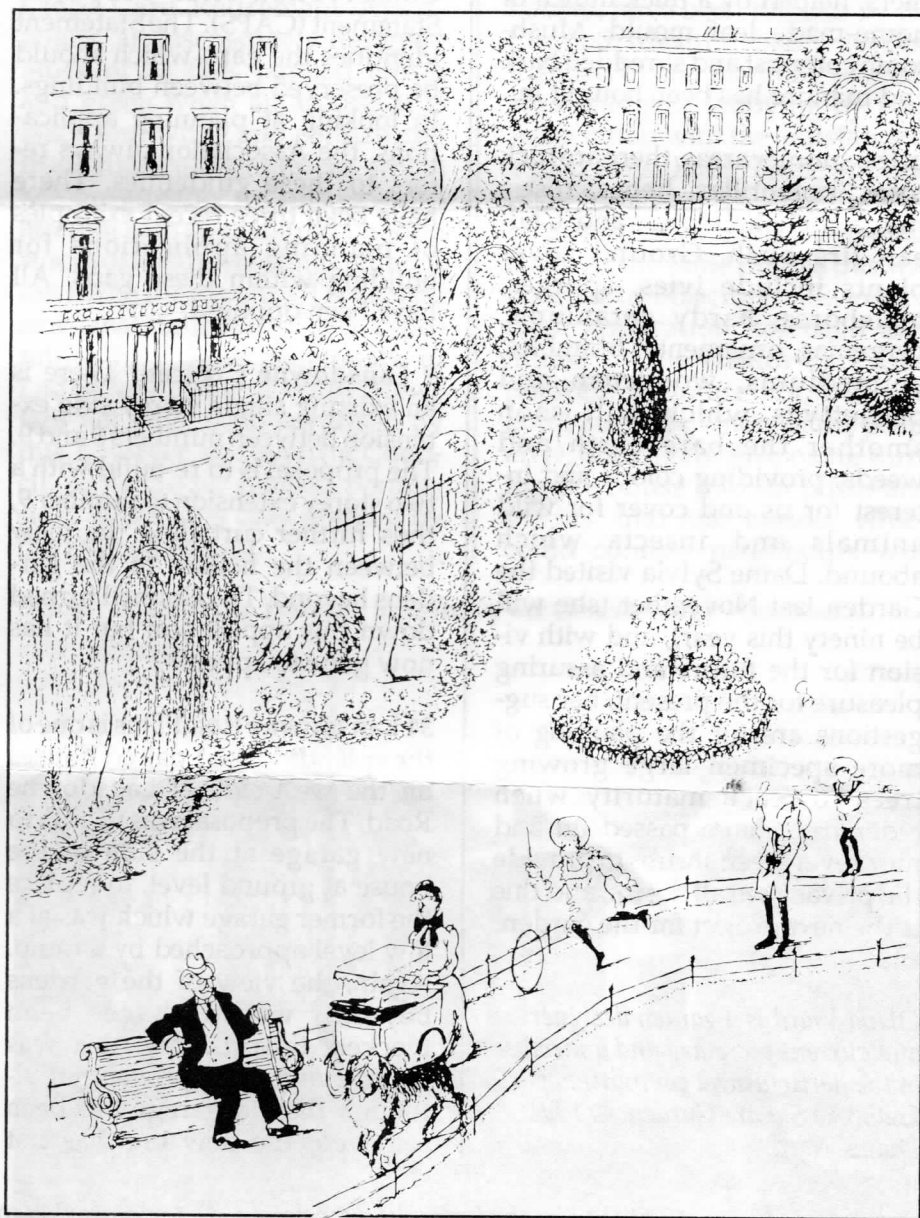
presented a mulberry, and some private donations; a Silver Jubilee fund raised money from members. Details of other plantings were not recorded but a number of limes, maples, poplars and beech now thrusting their branches above the shrubs must have been planted then. We lost four trees in the 1987 storm, and two over-mature plums in January 1990.

The finest feature of the Garden must be the magnificent specimen trees which have survived, probably for 150 years. The oaks include Turkish, Luccombe, cork, evergreen and English bringing attendant wildlife. There are several magnificent beech along the broad walk; pink and white horse- and Indian chestnuts. Only

one black poplar remains, its partner having become unsafe in 1988. Slender Lombardy poplars, some now mature, and three younger ones, act as sentinels. There are two or three oriental, and many London planes, emphasising the sweep of the paths. The pair of weeping ash are now fully mature: they were high-grafted, and the scion of common ash is breaking out on one of them.

Smaller trees include cherries, purple leaved plum, whitebeams, yews, hollies of many varieties, flowering crabs, a beautiful Judas tree, laburnum (in profusion), figs and some interesting maples, including the silver and paperbark. While slow growing specimen trees have been planted, there are also smaller birch and white-

From The Pleasure Garden by Anne Scott-James and Osbert Lancaster with grateful acknowledgements to John Murray.



beams, partly as nurse trees, but also providing berries for the birds and for colour.

Many of the shrubberies were planted with *Euonymus robusta*, privet, snowberry, aucubas, rhododendrons and laurels, now over-mature, some of which respond to hard pruning, and will in the next few years re-grow to become beautiful specimens; others have now grown eight or ten feet from their roots, and died back: sadly, hard pruning and shrub removal had to be carried out. Because of the dense upper canopy, shrubs and ground cover which will tolerate dry shade have been chosen, including mahonias, shrubby honeysuckle, viburnums, camellias, mock orange, Christmas box and snowy mespilus. These have survived remarkably during the last two exceptionally hot dry summers, helped by a thick mulch of home-made leaf mould. Mushroom compost and shredded bark and manure has been bought in.

In the sunnier areas, there are rock roses, potentillas, hebes, roses, rue, red chokeberries, and Chilean fire bush. Ground cover plants include ivies, spurge, hellebores, hardy geraniums, bergenias, ornamental brambles, epimediums, woodrush and pernettyas which will soon smother the bare earth and weeds, providing colour and interest for us and cover for wild animals and insects which abound. Dame Sylvia visited the Garden last November (she will be ninety this year), and with vision for the future and assuring pleasure for the present, her suggestions are for the planting of more specimen large growing trees to reach maturity when older trees have passed on and more evergreen shrubs to provide the privacy we all desire, and this is the next project for the garden.

Diana Ward is a garden designer and current secretary and a member of the horticultural committee of Ladbroke Square Garden. © 1991 Diana Ward.

PLANNING

Gaps between buildings

'The Ladbroke Estate is characterised by the presence of mature gardens containing parkland trees and luxuriant shrubbery to the rear of many properties... The presence of this vegetation softens the dense urban development and provides relief when viewed through the gaps between buildings. These gaps and views are a crucial part of the character of Ladbroke Conservation Area and constitute a planned feature of the original Victorian layout. Additionally, within parts of the conservation area, the gaps between buildings contribute to the quality of the streetscape providing a rhythm of alternating buildings and spaces.' This is a quotation from the Ladbroke Conservation Area Proposals Statement (CAPS). The Statement identifies the gaps which should be preserved between buildings. In looking at planning applications, the Association always refers to these guidelines. There have been three recent examples of planning applications for building within these gaps. All have been opposed.

9 Lansdowne Crescent There is an existing single storey side extension between numbers 8 and 9. The proposal is to re-build with a two storey extension to number 9, thus further curtailing the view between the houses to the gardens beyond. The Council turned down this application but it has now gone to appeal.

31 Lansdowne Road This is one of the splendid listed paired houses on the west side of Lansdowne Road. The proposal was to build a new garage at the side of the house at ground level, to replace the former garage which was at a low level approached by a ramp. Again, the view of the gardens beyond would have been blocked. Surprisingly, this was given planning approval, but although the old garage has been removed, the new one has not

been built. We hope it will never be built.

53 Clarendon Road A number of planning applications have been made for side extensions incorporating a garage and other accommodation. These have not been approved by the Council.

The Raj Public House

This is the public house at the busy corner of Ladbroke Grove and Holland Park Avenue. An application was made for a fish and chip shop opening on to Ladbroke Grove. The Association opposed this on the grounds of the generation of smells and litter, and traffic at an already congested corner. But the application has been approved by the Council.

The Kensington Temple

This listed building, which stands at one of the entrances to the Ladbroke area, has been a constant concern. We opposed the use of the forecourt as a car park, and we have urged a more sensitive approach to the treatment of the building and more regard for the local environment. The latest aberration is the erection of two external metal fire escapes, built without planning or listed building approval. These are still the subject of negotiation.

63 Ladbroke Grove

This large house and former vicarage has been empty for some years. It stands on an important corner site adjacent to St John's Church. Its front garden is surrounded by a six foot high stone wall in which there are two sets of double gates on to Ladbroke Grove. An application has been made for work in the garden, including a continuous three foot high metal railing on top of the existing wall. We opposed this on the grounds of its formidable fortress-like appearance. It also proposed to use only the southern gates near the junction with Lansdowne Crescent. This could cause a potential traffic danger.