

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

AUTUMN 1998

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT-30TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our AGM was held this year in St Peter's Hall, Portobello Road on Wednesday, 23rd June. The Chairman, Stephen Enthoven, reviewed the past year under the headings of the three objectives for our area, stated in our constitution.

1 To encourage & promote high standards of architecture

Article 4-2 Direction. The first part of this, which covers alterations to people's houses, has been implemented and now the other half of the report—originally drawn up four years ago under previous legislation, authorised by the Secretary of State—gathers up parts formerly left out. This specifically deals with items relating to individual properties and boundary features of the square gardens, as these were not protected before.

We have an energetic Council who take notice of legislation and give us appropriate protection.

Railings at 17 Elgin Crescent. We have tried to bring pressure on the residents of the house to do something to improve the appearance of these railings, which is disgraceful. Any progress made to date, is entirely due to David Marshall.

52 Arundel Gardens. The owner is trying to appropriate some part of the communal garden which is in public ownership. Land Registry should make the decision on legal grounds. It has been expensive for the garden and they have our support, together with a donation of £1000.

122 Kensington Park Road. The owner wished to install a large aquarium on the site. The Association and residents objected and the Council refused the application; a compromise eventually being reached.

LEB site, Victoria Gardens. For reasons of finance the LEB intend to retain ownership of the site until the year 2000. The problem lies in what should be done with the site in the meantime. Although the American School, wishing to expand, has applied for Change of Use of the site; we have objected as we do not think it suitable for educational purposes. We would prefer it to be properly developed with houses and parking. In the interim, a car park might be possible, provided that this does not cause a nuisance.

6 Ladbroke Terrace. We are not happy with the result here: the removal of an established tree and two ugly houses being constructed in the original garden. But we and many residents did complain; the result being a compromise, somewhat modified from the original drawings.

Off street parking. Answering a query from the floor, the Chairman explained that if this already existed, nothing can be done about it, but permission would not be granted now for any new applications.

2 To stimulate public interest in the character of the neighbourhood

A Christmas party was held at 8 Kensington Park Gardens, our hostess being Elfin Lady Ebury. In April, there was a visit to the Thomas Allom exhibition, and on the 3rd June, members of the association enjoyed the garden walk.

There was no Pan Squares meeting this year as charges for marquee and chairs had mounted and it was thought garden committees could organise their own meetings.

It was hoped to have a meeting in the autumn with Alan Clark to discuss legislation about protection of trees and gardens in our conservation area with a member of English Heritage in attendance.

The newsletter is now being edited by Mary Jo Wormell and Anne Chorley.

3 To encourage the preservation and improvement of features of amenity or historic interest

The Notting Hill Gate Improvements Group have done a lot to change and improve the appearance of Notting Hill. The water feature has been installed in Newcombe Piazza as well as planting and benches. The vagrants are being discouraged and some shops have agreed not to sell them alcohol.

Underground loos at Notting Hill. The latest proposal to get round the problem of a disabled loo is to have it incorporated in a bus shelter outside what was once Patachoux. The advertising thereon would generate some income. In the meantime, we are trying to get the Council to redevelop the loos in the underground; John Scott is being helpful here, and the addition of some shops would help with the cost.

Amendments to the Constitution. We should like to join the Civic Trust, which requires amending our Constitution concerning conflict of interest. (This resolution was passed later in the meeting.)

Bankers' orders. This method of payment is less expensive to administer than annual cheques which will no longer be acceptable.

A vote of thanks was expressed for the Chairman's hard work over the previous year.

IAN DAWSON GRANT FRIBA 1925–1998

An Appreciation by Ashley Barker OBE FSA FRIBA

Members of the Ladbroke Society will be sadly aware of the death of Ian Grant which took place on Thursday 25 August 1998. It occurred, as he had always hoped it would, at the house in Notting Hill which had been the centre of his life for the last four decades. He was a past Chairman of the Ladbroke Society and Vice Chairman of the Kensington Society.

Ian Grant was born in London in 1925, the only son of James Grant, a painter and etcher of considerable ability and reputation. Apart from a short period in France as a child, where he received some of his early schooling, Kensington was his life-long home. Even his later education took him no further away than Westminster School. "London", he would say, "is all I know". But in another sense that was very far from the truth because he was a great traveller, in diligent search of first-hand architectural experience across the world.

Nevertheless, any attempt to characterise Ian Grant can only begin by describing him as an 'architect' and a 'Londoner'. His death deprives both his profession and his fellow citizens of one of the most civilised and discerning of their fellows. He was an architect of a quite exceptional kind and ability and a Londoner with a total devotion to the fabric and life of his native city.

The experience of a visit to Ian Grant's home and office, which were combined in a tall house facing one of the gardens of Notting Hill, will remain vividly in the memory of all those who ever had the good fortune to be his guest there. It was an experience which brought after it a dream-like recollection; could it really have been true? One went from the familiar pavements and railings of the Square with its uniform house-fronts, through the handsome but unrevealing front door, grained by Ian's own hand, into a secure private world strongly expressive of his personal tastes and learning.

The fruits of a lifetime's involvement with the arts of architecture and decoration were all contained there, in his furniture, in his pictures and library and in the deeply shadowed, highly enriched rooms in which they were deployed. The unique interiors, created with a standard London shell, were a work of art akin to the houses of Sir John Soane in Lincoln's Inn Fields or Linley Sambourne in Stafford Terrace, and it is by no means fanciful to bracket it with them.

I first met Ian in student days at the Architectural Association in Bedford Square where he qualified as an architect in 1949. Those were the years when architecture in this country was coming alive again after the war years and the buzz at the Architectural Association was with the preparations for the 1951 exhibition and the building of the Festival Hall. Ian joined the office of Bryan Peake in Dover Street—one of the small but exciting offices where in 1949 work was underway for the festival buildings on the South Bank under the inspirational leadership of Hugh Casson.

But while Ian's talents could be briefly engaged in such ephemeral things—and to very good effect—his real interests went far deeper than the fashions of the day. His sympathies and understanding were in the fundamental Classical traditions of architecture to which the

architects of the 1950s had almost entirely closed their minds. While clever young men followed the Miessian tenet of 'less is more', Ian was one of the very few not tempted to jettison architectural tradition and learning. He next worked for a while with the old-established City practice of Campbell-Jones in Dowgate Hill but still had not found his true architectural metier which was to be in the field of historic buildings, and approached by another professional route.

About the time of his leaving the Architectural Association he had begun what was to be his life-long connection with the evolving field of 'amenity societies'. He joined the Georgian Group in the late 1940s and was a devoted supporter of its sorties to Italy and elsewhere in the early post-war years. The desire for first-hand contact with great buildings was to make him an enthusiastic traveller for the rest of his life. He loved travelling, particularly in company with his many friends who shared his interests.

His concern for real architecture rather than the fashion of the day led him in the 1950s and 60s to discover for himself the Victorian achievements in art and architecture which were then still widely despised by those with pretensions to fashionable good taste. With his quick perception he was able to seek out and collect pictures and



furniture which in later years would become inaccessible to all but institutions and the very wealthy. In February 1958 when the first meeting of the founders of the Victorian Society took place at Lady Rosse's house in Stafford Terrace (now 'Linley Sambourne House'), Ian Grant was inevitably amongst those present. He became the first secretary of the new society, nursing it through its critical formative years, and later becoming its Vice Chairman from 1976 to 1986. This involvement with the Victorian Society and the growth of the local amenity societies which followed the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 brought him into collaboration and friendship with such noted fellow enthusiasts and authorities as Sir John Betjeman, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner and Alec Clifton-Taylor—although I believe he secretly regarded them all as belonging to a literary rather than an architectural world!

Meanwhile, also in 1958, he moved from Drayton Gardens in South Kensington further north to Notting Hill, finding for himself a house which had remained untouched for many years by its former elderly occupants. A large billiard room extension, built over the former back garden, had a big glazed roof-lantern and this proved ideal for the dual functions of library and office and it remained so for the whole of his occupancy—a term which he at once decided would be for the rest of his life.

His professional work had by now turned firmly towards the care of historic buildings. For a few years I had the great pleasure of working in partnership with him. Our first works were essentially small scale and domestic, largely alterations and additions to minor country houses which sometimes resulted in virtually new country houses. Our architectural collaboration ceased in the early 1960s when I joined the London County Council Historic Buildings Section and Ian continued to conduct his practice from the office behind the house in Notting Hill, working quite alone

without assistants or even a secretary: a manner of practice which is no longer, I suppose, to be found anywhere in the land. In this way he completed a surprising range of work on some buildings of the greatest importance. Since his stated approach was generally to leave a building 'looking as if he had never been there' it is not easy now to point to the results of all his endeavours. Nevertheless he did substantial works at the Reform Club, the Travellers Club, the Royal Automobile Club and very extensive work at the Wallace Collection in Manchester Square. He was consultant for works at the Albert Hall and he did a good deal of work on the properties of the Crown Estate Commissioners, including those in Kensington Palace Gardens. In Regent's Park, he provided schemes for the interiors of the new villas by Quinlan Terry. Church work did not interest him greatly, although he served for some years on the Diocesan Advisory Committee for Southwark and did sensitive work at All Saints Margaret Street and the Tuelon church of All Saints, Denhilton.

As the years passed Ian became more and more devoted to the study of interiors, decoration and furniture. Given the choice between a visit to a great cathedral or an expedition to see a set of great country house interiors or state rooms, the latter would always be the more likely to win his attention. He was a keen member of the Furniture History Society and his knowledge of furniture and decoration was encyclopaedic, precise and widely respected. His advice on such matters was consequently sought and offered internationally and he was therefore an ideal chairman of the Committee of Linley Sambourne House when the Victorian Society took over its management in 1980. He held that chairmanship for the next 17 years.

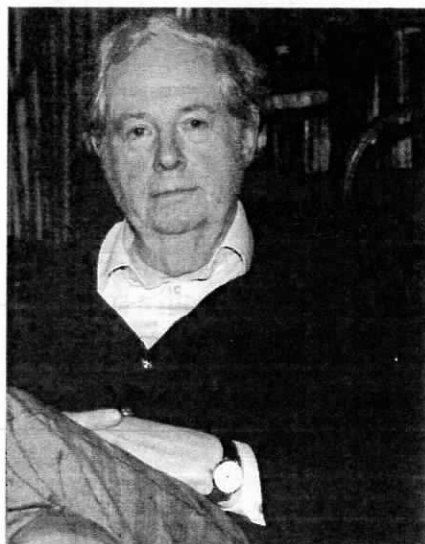
He lectured engagingly and recently gave a series of radio talks in the intervals of the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts on the architecture of South Kensington, but for

all his undoubted eminence in his field he shunned publicity of any kind and he wrote and published little. (Although he edited a volume of essays and photographs under the title of 'Great Interiors' published by Weidenfeld and Nicholson in 1967.)

In our student days together he told me of his view that "One should always try to keep out of the papers". He did! And with such remarkable success that it is now very difficult to find any published reference to his valuable life's contribution to London's architecture and the growth of the amenity societies.

In spite of his work on three of the great London club-houses Ian was not himself a clubman, preferring to entertain his wide circle of friends in the Notting Hill house, which in any case offered many of the facilities and much of the character of a club. He was, however, a member of the Surveyors' Club—a professional dining club founded in 1795, of which he was President in 1987.

Ian was the last of his line. He leaves no relatives and he had given instructions that there should be no funeral or memorial service. His death has deprived us of that ready source of wisdom and judgement in architectural matters upon which we had come to rely so heavily. It will sadden his wide circle of friends, including all those devotees of classical and Victorian architecture and furnishing who owed him so much.



PLANNING

Listed buildings. The Ladbroke Conservation Area is fortunate in having a large number of 'listed' buildings—that is, buildings which are considered to be of a high enough architectural standard or historic importance to be preserved without alteration. This applies to the exterior of the building. Usually there is some freedom to change to interior to suit modern requirements, although this should be done with sensitivity. Changes to the exterior are not allowed except in very special cases, such as the correction of previous 'mistakes' or inappropriate changes made in the past. Yet, from time to time, applications are made to change the exterior of listed buildings. Owners of such buildings should realise that in principle no changes are allowed. *122 Kensington Park Road.* We wrote previously about the long-running saga relating to this building—its refurbishment and the proposed changes in adapting it for use as a clothing showroom. The work is now complete and the building is in use. Most people will consider that this saga has had a happy ending. *61-63 Portobello Road.* The original Application for a pair of new three and a half storey houses was felt to be too bulky for the site. A new Application in which the height was reduced appeared to meet the main earlier objections. Seldom are there Applications for completely new buildings in the area, so this case was unusual and the outcome will be watched with special interest. *Arundel Gardens.* This street has continuous, fairly uniform terraces both sides. There is a regular flow of Applications for extra stories on top of the terraces on both sides of the street. A number have been built already. These are usually arranged in a mansard roof with dormer windows; sometimes with a small roof terrace on one side. The importance here is for a certain uniformity in the roofline and the design of the dorm-

ers etc which is sympathetic to the uniformity of these terrace houses. *'Tree' House.* An unusual recent Application was for a 'tree' house at the end of a rather small garden. Alas! It was felt that such a proposal would infringe the privacy of the neighbours.

Roof Terraces. A number of applications include proposals to create or bring into use roof terraces at various levels. An important factor in judging these proposals is the extent to which they might infringe the privacy of the neighbours.

LEB Site, Victoria Gardens. See Chairman's Report.

Robert Meadows

GARDEN WALK

Again this summer Henrietta Phipps took us on another of her delightful garden walks through three of the gardens on the Ladbroke Estate: the Lansdowne-Clarendon Gardens and Ladbroke Square. Both the Lansdowne Gardens are wonderfully secluded and although similar in layout are very different in character. It was a joy to visit Ladbroke Square again and see the new planting really starting to take shape with the introduction of many interesting varieties of plants along the borders of the long walk.

Thanks to Peggy Post again for having entertained us so generously at the end of the evening.

Perhaps we are due for another walk through Stanley Gardens South? Having won first prize last year in the Brighter Kensington and Chelsea Gardens competition, this year they were awarded the Silver Certificate in the London Garden Squares competition.

The garden squares and Royal Parks of Kensington and Chelsea are such an important feature of the everyday lives of residents of the Borough and visitors alike and anyone wishing to voice their objection to the proposed Diana Memorial Gardens should write to Gordon Brown MP, Treasury Chambers,

Parliament Street, London SW1 3AG with copies of their letters to Alan Clark MP, Mrs Iain Hanham, Chairman of RBKC at the Town Hall and Mrs Ethne Rudd JP, The Kensington Society, 15 Kensington Square W8 5HH.

SAGA CONTINUES

The Saga of the Disputed Structure in Arundel/Elgin Garden continues unresolved, with further representations having been made to the Land Registry by the Arundel/Elgin Garden Committee and the owner of No 52 Arundel Gardens who is claiming adverse possession of a strip of the communal Garden.

THE COMMITTEE

The Officers and Committee at present are President, Sir Angus Stirling; Chairman, Stephen Enthoven (tel. 221 5167); Hon Treasurer and Secretary, Paul Bastick (tel. 229 1741); Anne Chorley; David Marshall; Robert Meadows; Peter Mishcon; Thomas Pakenham; Peggy Post; Robina Rose; Diana Ward; Mary-Jo Wormell; Jean Ellsmoor; Hon Auditor, Guy Mayers; Minute Secretary, Janet Barton.

JOIN THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

.....
I would like to join the Ladbroke Association. I enclose a cheque/postal order for £5.00, payable to the Ladbroke Association.

Name:

Address:

.....
To Paul Bastick, Hon Treasurer, The Ladbroke Association, 75A Ladbroke Grove, W11 2PD.