

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

Autumn 1994

OUR TREE INHERITANCE

Brian Ellsmore

One of the main features of our double heritage in Ladbroke is the superb architectural character and grouping of its Victorian Houses, the other is the gift from the developers of our wonderful trees. The Ladbroke Association committee has been involved, perhaps naturally, rather more with the former, assessing the acceptability of every proposal for building alteration or development, time consuming, urgent and vital work, though unavoidably negative and restrictive. In support of this we are also engaged, in collaboration with the committees of the other Conservation Areas, in trying to get planning law itself amended for such Areas so that there are more teeth with which to control undesirable work.

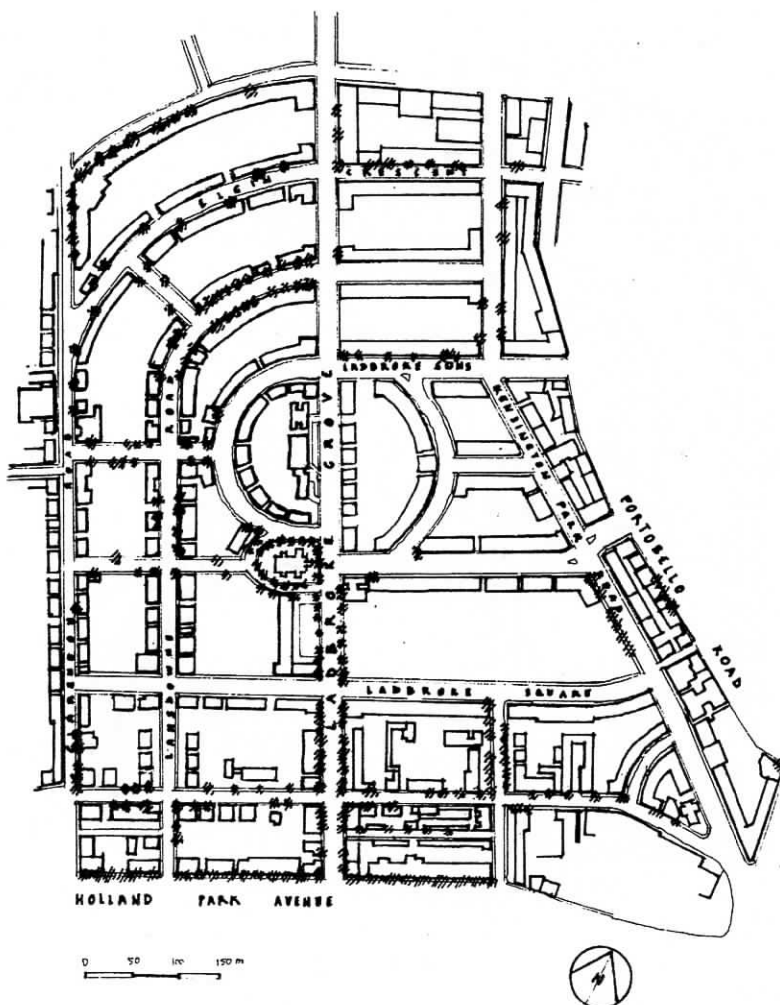
Changes in the planted landscape tend to be more gradual and often more subtle in their effect, but changes do take place and, if not controlled, they very seldom add up to improvement. It may be that the wrong tree in the wrong place is the problem, very

often the need for action arises from a tree being felled for one of many valid reasons, but then not replaced. Many trees have been lost in the last few years though their going has been gradual and not at first noticed.

As long ago as February of last year the situation regarding the trees in our neighbourhood was reviewed and it was suggested that the committee should establish closer contact with the Council's Chief Arboricultural Officer, Derek Austin. Our approach to him resulted in the splendid illustrated talk on the Area's trees that he gave us later that year and also in

LADBROKE CONSERVATION AREA

The Council's street trees



offers to help when needed. Mr Austin now receives our Newsletter regularly.

Recently the subject of the trees in our streets has resurfaced and a sub-committee has been formed with its initial aim to develop a policy for such trees covering their selection, siting and so on, and to discuss our ideas with the Council so that any differences can be ironed out. These ideas, for example, might be concerned with such questions as:

Is the character of a particular tree or group of trees compatible with

nearby buildings and with other trees in the vicinity?

How far is the Victorian heritage to be regarded as sacrosanct?

Is there a desirable density for public trees in a given street?

How long is the expected span of a tree's life and what is the best way to establish a replanting program?

When such problems were mentioned informally to Mr Austin he again welcomed the idea of collaboration and, in spite of dealing with the

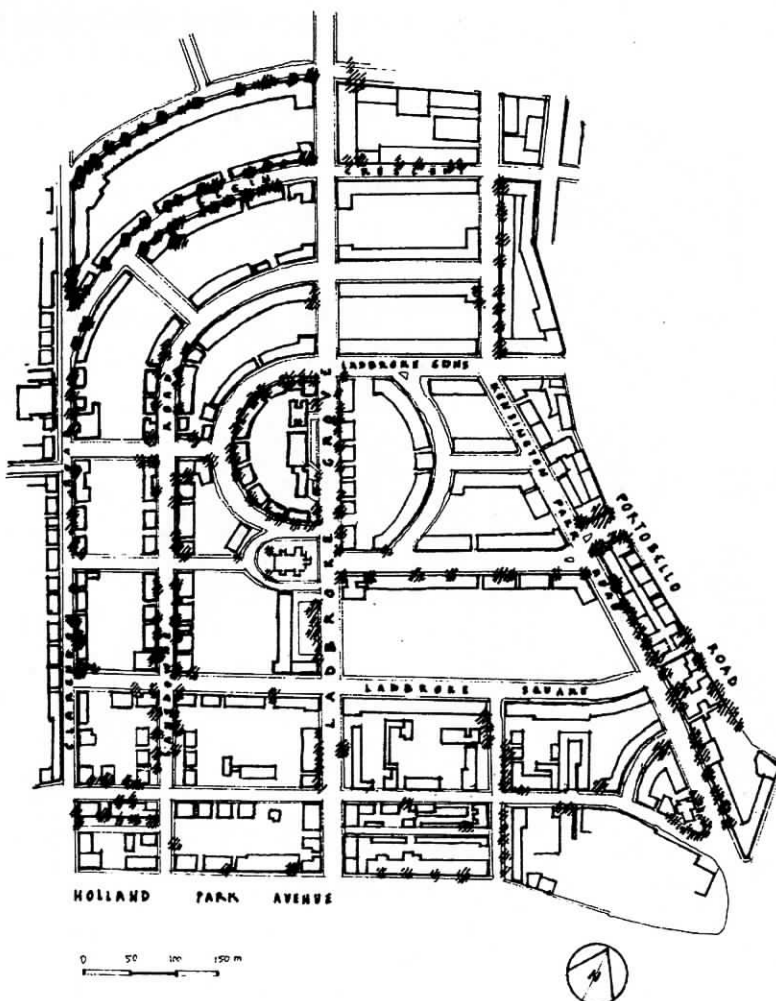
whole of Kensington & Chelsea, he generously offered to sit on our sub-committee meetings in a non-voting role if we thought he could be of help.

The sub-committee has been in existence for only a few weeks but already it has found, to the great surprise of its members, that there are far fewer street trees, owned and maintained by the Council, than the general scene leads one to suppose. The majority, giving the leafy character to the neighbourhood that we all enjoy, are growing in private forecourts or looking over the railings of communal gardens. Rather than the common suburban ribbons of continuous green, this results in the clumps of leaves among buildings that are so characteristic of our Area. Such avenues as there are remain short and provide contrast.

The slow reduction in the size of clumps is more difficult to spot than, say, a tree missing from a row, but it has become apparent that the tragic loss of trees in recent years has been taking place among privately owned trees as well as among the rows of street trees. The tree sub-committee can only act in dealing with public trees but the Council, aware of the cost of replacing trees lost, has introduced its scheme whereby private owners can buy new trees through the Council providing they are in full view of the passing public.

LADBROKE CONSERVATION AREA

Trees in private forecourts



The scheme was described in detail in the Newsletter for the spring of 1993. Briefly a suitable species of tree is agreed with the Council's Arboricultural Officer and the council then provides the tree, plants it in the proper soil and looks after it until the roots have taken, all for a fixed contribution from the owner of £60.00

The Ladbroke Association fully realises that it has no powers over private trees but, concerned as it is with the protection of the Estate, we most strongly urge private owners and secretaries of communal gardens who have lost trees to avail themselves of the Council's scheme.

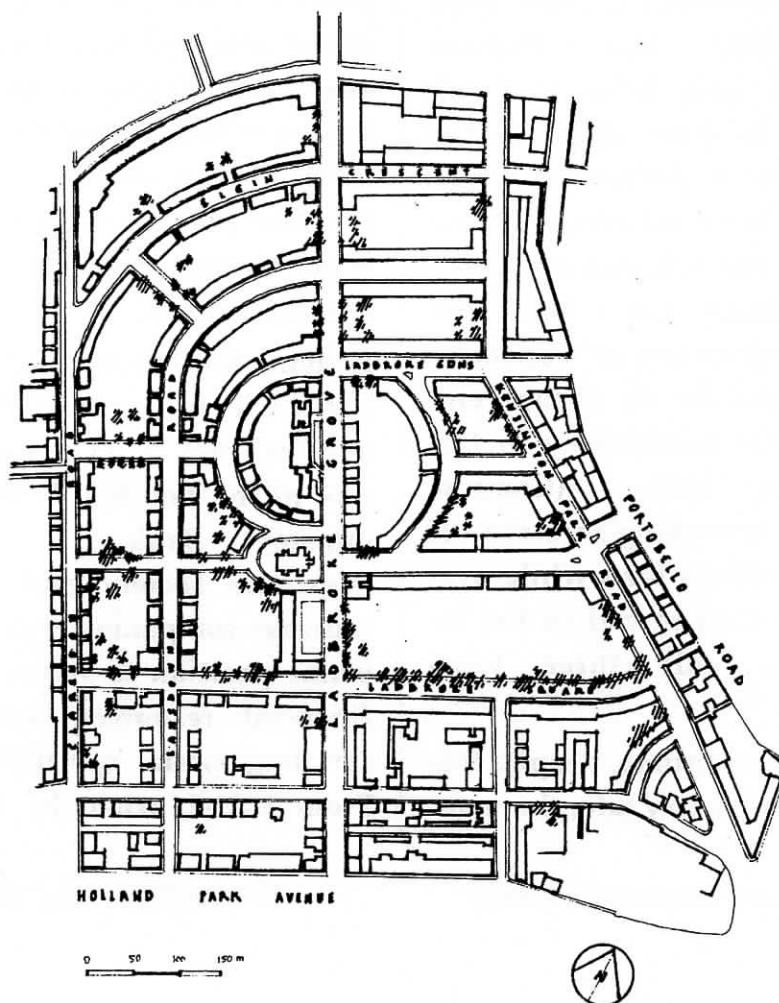
Hopefully, with the encouragement the scheme provides to private owners and the closer collaboration with the council over public trees that the tree sub-committee has been led to anticipate, the slow decline in quantity and quality that our trees have suffered in recent years will be reversed.



THE CHELTENHAM CONNECTION

Mary-Jo Wormell

It has been suggested that the use of 'Lansdowne' for street names on the Ladbroke estate, was intended to complement the Dowager



LADBROKE CONSERVATION AREA

Trees in communal gardens

Marchioness of Lansdowne (Mistress of the Robes to Queen Victoria at the beginning of her reign), then living at the summit of Campden Hill. However, on closer investigation, it seems that the true origin lies in Cheltenham.

Almost from the date of its inception, John Whyte's Hippodrome Racecourse was in deep financial trouble. Saddled with debts which he had no hope of paying, Whyte assigned his lease on the 140 acres to his solicitor, John Duncan, who promptly re-sold half of the land, on

the east of what is now Ladbroke Grove, to a Mr Connop; a thoroughly unsavoury character, who had been a gold prospector in Australia and was also a declared bankrupt.

While the race-course was still, on paper at least, a going concern, Duncan and Connop somehow managed to persuade James Ladbroke that they were capable of developing a large part of his estate; their leases corresponding very closely to the present-day boundary of the Ladbroke Conservation Area.

Unfortunately, it very soon transpired that Duncan would have been well advised to have stuck to the law as a profession. An inept businessman, borrowing to the hilt and scattering promissory notes like confetti, his career as a speculator came to an abrupt end with his bankruptcy in December 1842. (Connop, while managing to stave off his creditors for a while, was also forced to call in the receivers only three years later.)

In the meantime, despite this sad cautionary tale, there ap-

pears to have been no shortage of potential investors, all eager and willing to join in the great land speculation of the Ladbroke estate. And, it is at this point that Duncan's legal partner, Richard Roy, enters the story.

Richard Roy, from his office in the City of London (where his firm also acted as solicitors to the London & Westminster Bank, a life insurance society and two railways companies) was in a prime position to secure the financial resources needed for large-scale speculation. From 1841-2, when he took

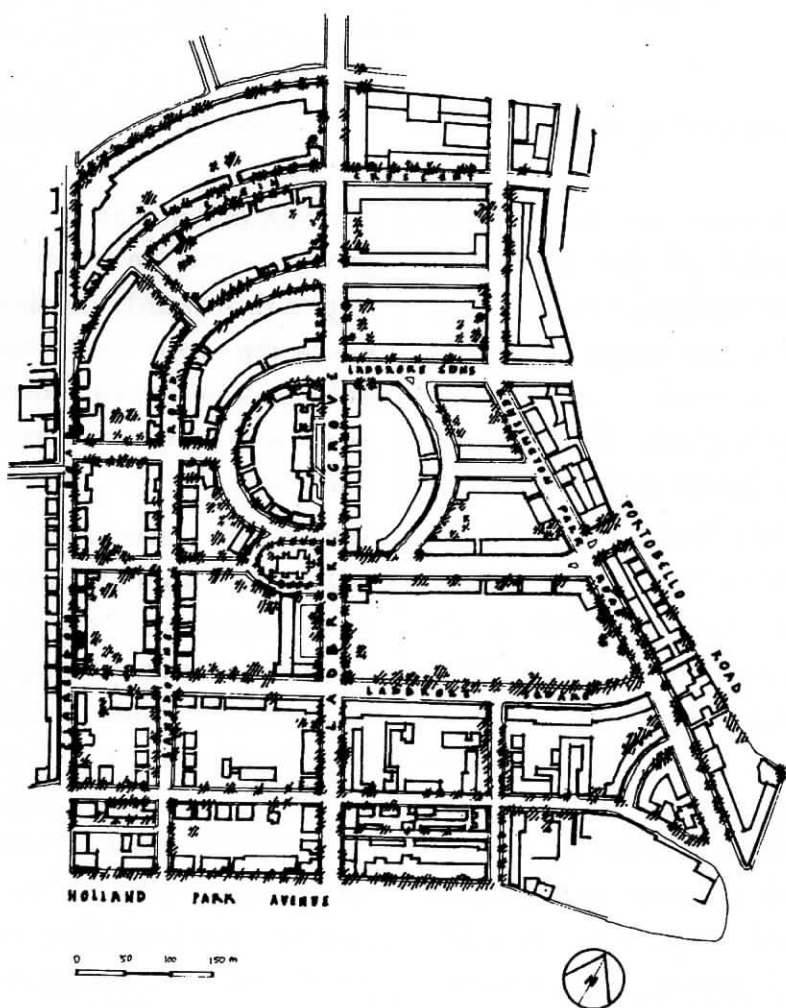
over Duncan's property on behalf of a bevy of creditors, Roy - acting either on behalf of himself or his clients - seems to have been behind virtually all of the labyrinthine agreements and complex, speculative deals on the Ladbroke estate. This is perhaps not surprising, since he already had a long track record as an experienced and successful estate developer, in Cheltenham.

He was originally drawn to the town by his friendship with another City solicitor, Pearson Thompson, who had left London for Cheltenham after inheriting the large Montpellier estate from his father. Roy and Thompson, with the architect J.B. Papworth, soon became involved in the layout and development of land on the Montpellier estate, as well as the wealthy Lansdowne district of Cheltenham. Both Thompson and Roy, founder members of a local joint-stock bank in the town, had also been concerned with the promotion of a railway to Cheltenham. There seems no doubt that by 1841, they were interested in extending their field of operations to the new suburbs of London.

In 1843, after some complicated wheeling and dealing, Roy and Thompson had gained full control of building development over land to the west of Ladbroke Grove. It was under their

LADBROKE CONSERVATION AREA

All trees furnishing streets



management, therefore, that this part of the estate acquired such a highly distinctive style.

There is no firm evidence that Roy and Pearson Thompson's Cheltenham architect, J.B. Papworth, ever worked on the Ladbroke estate. However, he was an old friend and colleague of Thomas Allason, the distinguished architect, surveyor and specialist in landscape design. It was Allason who, in 1823, had drawn up for James Ladbroke the first outline scheme for the development of the estate. His original design of a circus, with large 'paddocks' surrounded by houses, was revolutionary in its day, and although the circus was never built, Allason's plan remained the basis for building throughout the first stage of the Ladbroke estate.

Papworth also undoubtedly influenced his one-time pupil, James Thomson, who subsequently presented to Roy and his partner a revised scheme for the new estate, whose general layout and character are very similar to that of the Montpellier estate in Cheltenham. The juxtaposition of crescents and long straight roads, often lined with trees; the large gardens and open spaces, as well as the mixture of house types and architectural styles, provide obvious similarities between the two es-

tates, which surely cannot be regarded as just a coincidence.

Indeed, as the Survey of Northern Kensington points out, 'the use of Lansdowne (which Cheltenham had previously borrowed from Bath) and Montpelier* as street-names in Notting Hill, even indicates an element of conscious and deliberate imitation.'

** Until 1937, Lansdowne Rise was called Montpelier Road.*



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

ON 20TH JUNE 1994

Stephen Enthoven
Chairman

The objects of our Association as stated in our constitution are:

- a) To encourage and promote high standards of architecture and town planning within the Ladbroke Estate Conservation Area
- b) To stimulate and promote public interest in, and care for the beauty, history, and character of the neighbourhood
- c) To encourage the preservation, development

and improvement of features of general public amenity or historic interest.

I feel that it is valuable to remind ourselves of these each year and I try to give an account of our activities under each heading so that members can see how their committee has pursued them on their behalf. Naturally I can do this at greater length verbally at the AGM as well as answering questions, but we thought it would be useful to give a brief report in this newsletter for the benefit of those unable to attend, and I would be happy to go into greater detail by phone or in writing if anyone wants to contact me on any point.

a) ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

London Conservation Areas Conference. Progress is slow and frustrating and we are once again awaiting a consultation paper from the DoE, as we were a year ago.

McCoy Report. The Council commissioned a report on features in our area to be protected by additional Article 4 directions, including some walls and railings in communal gardens. We worked hard to help with this as such protection will be needed if the Government fail to give the additional statutory protection against the damage from "permitted development" sought by the above Conference.

Liaison with the Council. We have attended a number of meetings promoted by the Council on protection of conservation areas and the environment and have liaised about lamp posts, parking enforcement, trees, traffic calming, estate agents' boards and many other matters. While there have been no major campaigns this year, we have also commented in detail as usual on all planning applications within our Area.

b) STIMULATING AND PROMOTING PUBLIC INTEREST

Events. We had just had another well-attended garden walk under the able tutelage of Henrietta Phipps. A winter talk by Hermione Hobhouse had also been well received and the turnout for the AGM no doubt owed much to the lecture on Victorian interiors by Ian Grant which was to follow it. Our Christmas party, held this year in the beautiful home of Mr & Mrs Charles Levison, had once again been a great success, and suggestions for further such venues and events were sought by Peggy Post, our events secretary.

Newsletter. Jane Martineau had given up editorship owing to pressure of other work and Colin Cohen, who has been responsible for design and production, is leaving the Area. We owe them both much for making it so interesting and readable. Roderick Orr-Ewing has

nobly taken on both tasks and we hope to resume punctual biannual publication.

c) ENCOURAGING PRESERVATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Notting Hill Gate Improvement Scheme. You will probably have seen the posters explaining the proposed improvements. We have been a keen member of the committee liaising with the Council and have promised some financial support.

Trees. The Council have agreed at our suggestion to require at least two days' notice of any work to trees so that officers may supervise it.

Road Layouts. The head of Highways and Traffic and the Chairman of the Committee had visited your committee and a number of important issues had been raised.

Although this has been a quiet year by recent standards, I hope you will feel we have been active on your behalf, and will not hesitate to raise with me or with any committee member issues on which you feel we should be active.



IMPROVEMENTS IN NOTTING HILL GATE

Members will probably have noticed some quite striking improvements to our hither-

to rather depressing local shopping centre; large new trees, smart black railings and 53 new litter bins have all appeared over the summer. This is just the start of a bold initiative, originated by members of the Pembridge Association but supported by this Association from a very early stage, which is described in the enclosed leaflet. Many improvements require outside funding. The Council have agreed to meet most of the cost of the improvements to the street scene but much must be raised by the Group, of which about £80,000 has already been assured. Many landlords and retailers have given substantial support, but contributions are also needed from local residents, who will benefit from the improvements too. We hope that our members will respond generously to the enclosed appeal and will also support the various fund-raising events which are planned.



AUTUMN EVENT

On 9th November, a Tour of the recently rebuilt undercroft of St John's Church, which will be conducted by Royd Barker on 9th November.

Meet 6:00 for 6:30 pm.