

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

WINTER 1992

TREE WARDENS

Brian Ellsmoor

In order to combat the recent alarming rate at which trees, woodland and hedgerows have been disappearing from our countryside, The Tree Council, sponsored by British Gas, founded the Tree Warden scheme to help people to understand and respond to the problem, starting a few years ago in East Sussex and Leicestershire. The object was to promote improvement in the environment through tree planting and caring for trees; the initial success in rural areas has encouraged The Tree Council to start warden schemes in towns. The London Borough of Camden and our own Royal Borough, in cooperation with The Tree Council, have now established the pioneer urban schemes; that in Kensington and Chelsea was launched on 14 December 1991 at a tree planting ceremony by The Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, MP, then Secretary of State for the Environment.

A warden is, simply, any member of the local community registered as a warden by the Local Authority. At the outset enthusiasm is more important than expertise, and the first few wardens have already come forward in the Borough; many more are wanted.

Wardens work in close touch with the Borough's Principal Arboricultural Officer, Mr Derek Austin. At this early stage in the experiment it is envisaged that they will be concerned mainly with suggesting areas and individual sites for new trees in the public streets and squares and also with early detection of problems with existing trees, either from disease, bad management or damage. While most of this relates to pub-

lic trees, those private trees which are the subject of a Tree Preservation Order or which are in a Designated Conservation Area will also come within their province. There is even a 'hot' line for reporting vandalism, but in all cases wardens will only report and recommend, and the Borough Council will take such action as it thinks appropriate; wardens are by no means members of some kind of tree gestapo.

While enthusiasm is important, the work is not onerous; keeping an informed and open eye on the general tree scene is really what it amounts to. Since a certain degree of technical knowledge will obviously be helpful, a number of information meetings have been held and more are being planned for 1993, not only aimed at new recruits but designed also to recapitulate and expand this year's teaching. In addition, there have been a number of instructive and most enjoyable visits with experts to public and private gardens, parks and arboreta.

The Royal Borough hopes to recruit as many wardens as possible. If you think you might be interested, telephone Mr Derek Austin on 071-937 5464 Ext. 2767, who will gladly give you more information about the scheme and about next year's proposed activities.

GARDENS IN LADBROKE: MRS CROWTHER'S GARDEN

April Crowther has lived in Lansdowne Road on and off for more than sixty years. She talked to Henrietta Phipps and Jane Martineau about the Lansdowne Road/Clarendon Road garden

and how it has changed.

JM When did you move here?

AC Well, we moved to 27 Lansdowne Road in 1925. Before that we lived in Canning Place, and the cook, who had been with my parents for ever, wouldn't move with us because she said she had never worked north of the park and she wasn't about to start now. Ridiculous!

The garden was very formal then of course. We had a permanent gardener and boy, a very fierce gardener. I don't think he did much, but he was there being fierce and the boy wheeled the barrow about and we were not supposed to play any ball games as children. There were huge notices either end saying 'No Ball Games Allowed By Order', and we used the boards for cricket stumps.

JM What did the garden look like then?

AC Well, it was very formal, it had a central path going up to the round bed and a lot of little crescent beds where things were bedded out, as far as I remember, and

April Crowther



laurels and things and started being planted with flowers?

AC Nobody did the beds outside their railings; that was all part of the garden, the gardener was responsible. I think there were shrubs, I don't think there were many flowers planted, probably just lobelia and alyssum at the edge. I remember blue and white spots everywhere. I know years ago we planted the lavender round the middle bed because we couldn't bear the bedding out which was then done.

HP You don't have a dog problem?

AC No dogs allowed. About forty years ago when we were on the Committee, we had to make a terrible decision - dogs or children, and I am glad to say the children won because even in those days it was a frightful mess. It wasn't the dogs, it was their owners. We are about the only Square who has this rule, I think.

HP It does interest me how different they all look, some of them look very much childrens' gardens; the Committee actually discourage people from having flower beds outside their railings because it makes for too much conflict with children. The others are very much gardeners' gardens.

JM What about the May trees? weren't they rather formal?

AC They were clipped into little round balls except the 'umbrella tree'.

HP The other thing about this garden was that it originally had

lovely views into it from Lansdowne Road. Was it like that when you first came?

AC I don't remember that; as a child you don't notice those things. I remember father being furious when they built extensions. He wasn't furious because they were in-filling but because they were mostly badly built; not properly designed.

HP I suppose not until Conservation Areas came in, did they really get cracking with things like that?

AC Absolutely not. I don't think you had to ask permission for anything until recently.

HP Well, you are very lucky this area didn't become too rich and fashionable before conservation came in otherwise it would really have got wrecked wouldn't it?

AC Well, very early on at the end house, Sir Edmund Davis's, where the flats are, they built right out over the garden.

HP Another thing I meant to ask, in a lot of the gardens there is a great division between tree lovers and plant lovers. On the whole your garden isn't too shady so I imagine there isn't too much conflict.

AC Well, people plant the wrong kind of trees which makes me very cross. We have that enormous eucalyptus which is a forest tree, for heavens sake, and I now cannot see the garden from our bedroom window; I look slap into those rather boring grey leaves. The acacias are very beautiful, I

love them.

HP And they don't cast too much shade.

AC No, they're quite good, whereas the planes do.

HP There's one garden round here, which is absolutely like night. Can anyone plant anything between their railings and the path?

AC In fact they are now encouraged to do the outer bed. Some do, some don't. You are encouraged to keep it tidy even if you don't plant it. You know, we merely do the north end because from the middle of the garden you don't want a bitty end, you want a sort of sweep of all the plants or shrubs or whatever, the same with the sides, when you are walking up the garden you see a very pleasant edge.

HP If there is any new planting, does the committee decide who wants this or that tree?

AC You planted new lavender, didn't you, some time ago? Well, the bulbs go on for ever. We planted all those tulips at least twenty years ago and just left them, never touched them. Everybody had said you have to lift them but we decided that was too much like hard work and they have just multiplied.

JM When did the party on bonfire night start?

AC Oh, let me think, about twenty to thirty years ago. Before we all used to have our own little bonfire and our own nuts roasting and that was ridiculous so we decided, it was much easier to have one display.

HP I remember my son came to the bonfire party here and he said 'it was full of silver haired fathers carrying bottles of wine'.

AC I remember when I was small, there were one or two fierce people who were everlastingly coming out saying 'don't', or 'be quiet', 'stop this or that'. Well we just made fun of them; of course, that doesn't happen now, does it? No old women - well I am the old woman, of course. I have a certain little flower which any child may pick and make dolly's bouquets, its rather pleasant.

Henrietta Phipps writes:

This was one of the earliest gardens to be laid out on the Ladbroke Estate, and its design has changed

Lansdowne/Clarendon Garden: looking north



there were other round and crescent beds.

JM It was the original plan still?

AC I think so, yes.

HP Do you think that went in the War?

AC It was a total jungle during the War, you see, it all got overgrown and nobody was here at all. I came back in 1944 to look after my grandparents, who lived in No 25. Donald was away abroad and Eleanor Charlesworth and I were the only people in the garden. There wasn't a child in the whole of the garden.

HP When did it stop having bedding?

AC Just before the War. I was away, of course, I didn't come into the garden very much, but my grandparents were mad keen gardeners.

JM You described your mother and neighbours having tea parties.

AC They used to have tea parties under the plane trees. They used to have their own maids and parlour maids who used to bring little tables out with snowy cloths, and mother and friends used to come and have afternoon tea, they would ring a bell and the maid would rush out with the scones. Maybe there were three or four little parties going on.

JM And did they talk to each other, or did they keep to themselves?

AC Oh, no, no, you kept to your own little party. That stopped in the 30s. One thing I do remember, which I always thought was terribly unfair, was that nobody's maids were allowed in the garden. You were allowed a nanny with children. But I know that my father got into trouble when one or two maids came out, and sat in the sun on their afternoons off and read a book, and one of the neighbours complained that we allowed them to come out. Father was furious, he said 'anyway it is my house and I pay the garden subscription', which was all of one guinea. There is a wonderful phrase in the deeds of the gardens about servants only being allowed in attendance on their masters or something like that. Quite extraordinary, isn't it?

JM So the neighbours were rather starchy?

AC Well, things were different you see. One didn't flow in and out of everybody's houses. As a child I remember it was difficult to ask people back for tea because it might upset the cook or something nonsensical. You were awfully hampered by your staff.

And people kept themselves to themselves. I knew the children in the garden and I knew the next door neighbour, of course, who came into the house, but the other end of the garden it might have been Russia.

JM And what did the neighbours do?

AC They were bankers, stock-brokers, well-off middle class. When my father, an architect, came here, suddenly there was a rush of architects; they used to give rather nice parties. Apart from that it wasn't a smart bit of London at all. I seem to remember when I was very young they were lawyers and judges, people like that. In fact the man opposite, down Lansdowne Road, until the middle '30s had a carriage which came every afternoon and took him for a drive in the park; the horses were very gentle.

JM What kind of carriage did he have?

AC An open top. He had been factor, I think, to the Duke of Buccleuch. I remember this wonderful sight of the old gentleman being wrapped in rugs probably to drive all the way up to Hyde Park.

Sir Edmund Davis who lived at 9 Lansdowne Road was a friend. He didn't have any children so he used to have rather smart drinks parties in the garden; they used to flow out of the ballroom. He was very rich, a South African art connoisseur who was a marvellous patron to all sorts of artists. He built the studio flats at 1 Lansdowne Road. He and his wife were very generous people and his house was a little palace. My mother, who was a singer, used to go and sing at his soirées, and he had a house full of wonderful things. You know the people listed on the blue plaque at 1 Lansdowne Road? Well, he was patron to them all. Edmund Dulac lived next door, and Aston Webb lived in Ladbroke Grove, that was his own house, built to his own design. I used to

go to parties there.

HP But, to go back to the garden, apparently they didn't put flowers into public parks until the 1860s; there was much more in the way of shrubbery, grass and trees; then in the 1860s they got mad about gardening and more and more flower-minded.

AC The southern end was always a mass of laurels, rather frightening, you know.

JM Were there box hedges or anything of that kind along the central path?

AC No, it was just gravel and very neatly clipped edges; grass used to be worshipped.

HP Was the central bed always roses?

AC Yes, it had a little pergola in the middle. Later we had a statue in the middle which belonged to Lady Ashton (Madge Garland) but somebody wanted it back.

JM And did you have bulbs in the spring?

AC Yes, we did actually. I don't think we had them in the grass, I think they were in the beds.

JM You said there was a soldier's daughter who planted all the daffodils in serried ranks, at the north end.

AC Oh yes, Priscilla Harrington-Hawes was an expert gardener, she had come from a country house, and in the '50s she planted all the daffs under the main trees. She was ex-India army.

HP When do you think the banks stopped being stocked with

Lansdowne/Clarendon Garden: the west border



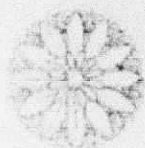
very little since the mid-1840s, as developers' plans from that date show. All but two of the gravel paths are intact and, in the centre, the circular flower-bed survives, still filled with roses as it always has been in living memory. The early Victorian edging tiles are castellated, instead of the more familiar rope pattern found in the later gardens, while original railings still mark the back of nearly all the private gardens, and in a very ornamental design form the road boundary along St John's Gardens.

Magnificent trees, however, are now the most striking feature of the garden, many of them surely original; tall planes, one of which dominates St John's Gardens, picturesquely twisted hawthorns, several limes and, in one of the private back gardens, a stupendous copper beech. A tulip tree was presented to the garden in 1977 by the Ladbroke Association, and there are many young flowering trees, notably a lovely *Magnolia kobus*.

Long since recovered from a lapse into wilderness in World War II, the garden is now beautifully kept, with many residents planting their own 'buffer zones' outside their railings. In the difficult shady stretches Victorian continuity is given with evergreens such as laurustinus, privet and Portugal laurel (although one adventurous gardener has put in raspberry canes). In Spring there are drifts of narcissi under the trees.

There is a general air of calm and

order, reminiscent of a traditional college garden. No dogs have been allowed in for forty years, and at present there are not many children. The surrounding streets are quiet, and private gardens wide, with many leafy gaps between houses, which are partly stucco and partly mellow brick at the back, in much more restrained style than the later Thomas Allom terraces, and unsullied generally by extensions and conservatories. It is not surprising that families have tended to stay for a long time in this settled place, and that generations of children have grown up making friends in the garden.



PLANNING

Robert Meadows

44 Clarendon Road This is a prominent corner house. There were proposals to alter the roof to include large 'dormer' windows on all sides. These changes would have been clearly visible, especially from the rising ground in St John's Gardens. The Application was refused by the Council. It went to Appeal and the Appeal was dismissed. It is significant that, in his report, the Planning Inspector refers to the Ladbroke Conservation Area Proposals Statement, and uses it as part of the grounds for dismissing the Appeal. This clearly enhances the status of the Ladbroke CAPS and is a welcome development.

76 Elgin Crescent This is a prominent end-of-terrace house. As well as a welcome general restoration, there are proposals for a large back and side extension at basement level, and for enlarging the bay window at the back and adding two further storeys to it. Ladbroke CAPS emphasises the importance of the gap between Nos 76 and 78, and also the importance of the backs of these terraces and this

was underlined in the Council's Unitary Development Plan published only this year, which clearly stated that extensions "diminishing" a "significant gap" were to be resisted. As this extension is quite clearly covered by this description we are very disappointed to report that despite objections from your Association at the meeting, the Planning Committee by a majority decided to abandon their recently stated policy and grant the application.

17 Kensington Park Gardens This house has been handsomely restored, but the highly unsatisfactory forecourt parking remains. We pressed, unsuccessfully, for this to be discontinued and for the reinstatement of the back-of-pavement balustrade wall. This house is part of a listed terrace and it is a great shame that it has been spoilt in this way.

36-40 Kensington Park Road - Southbank School Controversy continues over this school, its expansion and its contravention of Planning Conditions. It has already expanded into 40 Kensington Park Road, and it now wishes to extend its scope by catering for children in the six to eleven age range. This is likely to generate more traffic and parking problems.

139-151 Portobello Road This block of buildings has been under scaffolding for years, creating a terrible eyesore in the Portobello Road. So it was good news indeed that a local Housing Association has produced a scheme for the reinstatement of this block, with a market hall on the ground floor and flats on the upper floors. We hope this scheme will go ahead.

Various Listed Buildings Recently, there has been a number of Planning Applications for minor alterations to listed buildings. The drawings have been of a poor standard and not prepared by properly qualified professional persons. In all cases, but especially in dealing with listed buildings, it is important that any alterations are handled by a well-qualified architect.

If members of the Ladbroke Association know of new people in the area who might be interested in joining the Association please contact Paul Bastick, 75a Ladbroke Grove, London W11 2PD, telephone 071 229 1741, who will send them an information pack about the Association and its aims which also contains article on the conservation of buildings, on local history and a recent newsletter.