

# News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

SPRING 1999

## CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF GARDEN SQUARES ON THE LADBROKE ESTATE

Until the 1850s, the whole complex process of building in Kensington had proceeded with a minimum of public control.

Prior to 1844, there was no public supervision of building in Kensington, since the various London Building Acts had hitherto not applied there. Up to 1847 the administration of sewers had been the responsibility of the Westminster Commissioners of Sewers. As most of northern Kensington was well drained by natural watercourses, however, no great harm had come from their leisurely management.

The parish Vestry (the town version of a rural Parish Council) had not been concerned with the business of estate development, and it was not until the Kensington Improvement Act of 1851, that the paving, repairing, lighting and cleansing of the highways came under some form of control.

Following a reorganisation of the vestries and the establishment of The Metropolitan Board of Works in 1855, the Board took over the regulation of buildings and the construction of main sewers, while the vestries managed the building and maintenance of local sewers and the regulation of nuisances.

Thus, the foundations of a rational system of public administration were laid in the middle of the most rapid period of building development in northern Kensington (circa 1840-1870). A large part of the responsibility for this process was, therefore, still in the private hands of landowners and speculators.

The 1851 Kensington Improvement Act, although primarily

covering the Parish of St Mary Abbots, also provided for the management of gardens on the Ladbroke Estate; the setting up of committees and the organisation of finance.

The original members of the garden committees were required to be male resident householders, although the 1992 changes in the act now require that they should be Council tax payers. It was the Town Gardens Protection Act of 1863, however, which provided for the enactment of the Bye-laws of Garden Committees—with Section 5 stipulating imprisonment of up to 14 days for any injury to the garden!

The role of the Garden Committee, which has to be re-elected every year, is still governed by the 1851 Act, the relevant sections of which are printed below:

### Section 44: Meetings of Garden Committees

That each of such Garden Committees shall, from time to time, and as often as they shall think proper, meet at such time and place as shall be expressed in a Notice to the Effect, to be given the first instance by any Five of the Inhabitants of the Square, of which such Garden Committee shall have the Care and Management, and afterwards by any Five of the Members or by the Secretary of such Garden Committee, and to be affixed to all the Gates or at each Entrance of the Square of which such Garden Committee shall have the Care and Management, at least Seven days previous to the Meeting to be summoned by any such Notice; and at all such Meetings the Persons attending the same shall defray their own Expenses, except for the Use of the

Room where such Meeting shall be held; and no Act except the calling of Meetings of any of the said Garden Committee, shall be valid, unless done at such Meeting to be held by virtue of this act; and all the Powers and Authorities given by this Act to any such Garden Committee may from Time to Time be exercised by the major part of the Members thereof present at such Meeting not being less than Three; and at every such Meeting the First Business shall be the Election of a Chairman to preside thereat, which Chairman shall be entitled to a Casting Vote whenever the Votes, including his own, shall be equal and the Proceedings of each of the said Garden Committee at such Meetings shall be entered in a Book or Books, to be signed by the Chairman, and being so signed shall be deemed and taken to be Originals, and any such Book may be produced and read and taken as Evidence in all Courts whatsoever.

### Section 45: Garden Committees may make Bye-Laws

That each of such Garden Committees or Sub-Committees shall have Power from Time to Time to make, and after having made to alter or revoke and again to make Bye-laws for the proper Management of the said Squares under their Care, and for the Preservation of the Trees, Shrubs, Plants, Rails, Gates, Seats, Summerhouses and other Things therein, which Bye-laws shall be entered in a Book to be kept for that purpose by the said Garden Committee or Sub-Committee, and such Book shall be signed by the Chairman of the Meeting of the Garden Committee or Sub-Committee at which such Bye-laws shall be passed, and which Book, being so signed, shall and may be produced and

read and taken as Evidence in all Courts whatsoever; and that any Person or Persons offending against any of the said Bye-laws shall upon proof thereof before a Magistrate acting in the District in which such Square shall be situate, be liable for each Offence to a Penalty not exceeding Five pounds; Provided always, that such Bye-Laws shall not come into operation until the same shall have been allowed by some Judge of One of the Superior Courts, or by the Justices in Quarter Sessions; and it shall be incumbent on such Judge or Justices, on the Request of such Garden Committee or Sub-Committee, to inquire into any Bye-laws tendered to them for the purpose, and to allow or disallow the same as they think meet.

#### **Section 46: Garden Committee to determine the Sum of Money to be expended**

That the Garden Committee of every such Garden, Shrubbery, or ornamental Enclosure shall, at the First Meeting or at some Adjournment thereof, and which said First Meeting shall, in the Case of the Squares hereinbefore named, to be held within One Calendar month after the said first day of October, 1851, and in all other cases within One Calendar Month after such Application in Writing as is hereinbefore authorised to be made to the Commissioners, and so on from Time to Time in every succeeding Year, at a Meeting to be called for the purpose in manner herein directed, fix and determine the total Amount of Money which such Garden Committee shall have Power to call for in any One Year, in order to maintain and keep in order such Garden, Shrubbery, or Ornamental Enclosure, such Sum to be raised in the manner herein directed: and at such Meeting the Secretary to such Garden Committee shall produce a full and sufficient Statement in Writing, accompanied by all proper Vouchers, of all Sums of Money received and expended during the proceeding Year on account of such Garden Shrubbery, or ornamental Enclosure.

The London Square and Enclosures (Preservation) Act came into being in 1906 followed by the Royal

Commission of 1928, and the London Squares Preservation Act of 1931, which set down that the gardens should be ornamental pleasure grounds for rest and recreation; to be permanently preserved for the benefit of the health of London. In the 1931 Act, every garden is listed with ownership (when known), with details of how finances are to be organised. There are different financial structures for various gardens. In some cases, rates are levied by Garden Committees asking for a precept to be put to the Council, which pays this over in advance every year to the Garden Committee, to be used exclusively for maintaining "the ornamental enclosures" as our gardens are referred to in the Acts.

Much of the charm of the garden squares derives not only from the 'green' character they give to the area, but also the mix of trees, flowers and shrubs in a harmonious and restful setting. As David McDonald, Principle Conservation and Design Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea told the London Squares Conference, in 1995, 'Some of the activities that actually take place in squares can be quite damaging', pointing out that while an application to build a tennis court might at first seem a good idea, it soon becomes clear that tennis courts, with their artificial surface, high chain link fence and floodlights, can dramatically affect and spoil the particular quiet charm and ambience of the garden square.

Similarly, it is essential, in order to maintain the garden square's traditional character and balance, that future planting is planned to ensure that semi-mature trees are established by the time older trees have to be removed. Because the communal gardens were part of the original design of the Ladbroke Estate, architects gave front and rear elevations of many of the houses equal importance, creating a direct relationship between the gardens and the rear of adjoining houses. It is important to maintain this relationship, which is such a feature of the Ladbroke Estate.

## **HEDGEHOGS & BUTTERFLIES-ARUNDEL/ELGIN GARDENS**

In mid-summer 1993, our entire colony of hedgehogs in Arundel/Elgin Gardens fell prey to a fatal illness; at the Gardens Open Day in 1998 we met Davinia Miln of the London Wildlife Trust who kindly put us in touch with Ted Burden of the Wandle Valley Wildlife Hospitals. They care for around 500 wounded animals from deer to swans, badgers and including about 60 hedgehogs. They inspected our gardens, pronounced them ideal for hedgehogs and one summer day in 1998 the mothers and children in our gardens received 8 hedgehogs, variously missing an eye or a leg or two, who had been lovingly restored to health, and had names such as Motorhog, Gary, Gabrielle and Shirley. Hedgehog enthusiasts have helped them adjust, feeding them at night with dog food. We still have five of them, the confusing winter weather not helping them to know when to come out of hibernation.

With luck there'll be some healthy hoglets in the spring. We'll keep you posted. We also got a lot of pleasure stocking the gardens with assorted English butterflies which we got from Butterfly Connections Ltd. Some 200 were selected in 1998. We have added a good number of butterfly attracting plants to the gardens in preparation for 1999.

*Sir Michael Wilmut  
Chairman Arundel/Elgin Gardens*



## OUR FRONT GARDENS

What are front gardens for, supposing one is lucky enough to have one? Practically speaking, the space is provided to make room for outside steps to raised ground floors and basements; to create a space between the pavement and the house, in which to set off the style of the building; for the various services to the building and to store our dustbins. They also provide an ambience in which the house can 'breathe'—a small area of calm, a place of passage, not often lingered in, to be viewed from the house or flat and from the pavement, perhaps providing a new visitor a glimpse of the style of the house to come. They are therefore of psychological as well as practical importance to different people in different ways.

So when studying the gardens of the Ladbroke area on a hot August evening, it was interesting to see how these areas have been interpreted by various householders.

Many houses in our Ladbroke area have attractive railings or walls of varying heights, with or without balustrades; others wooden palisades or fences; some have railings up to the front door, and others stuccoed parapet walls. Seen from the road, a repeated progression of the same style of railings and finials

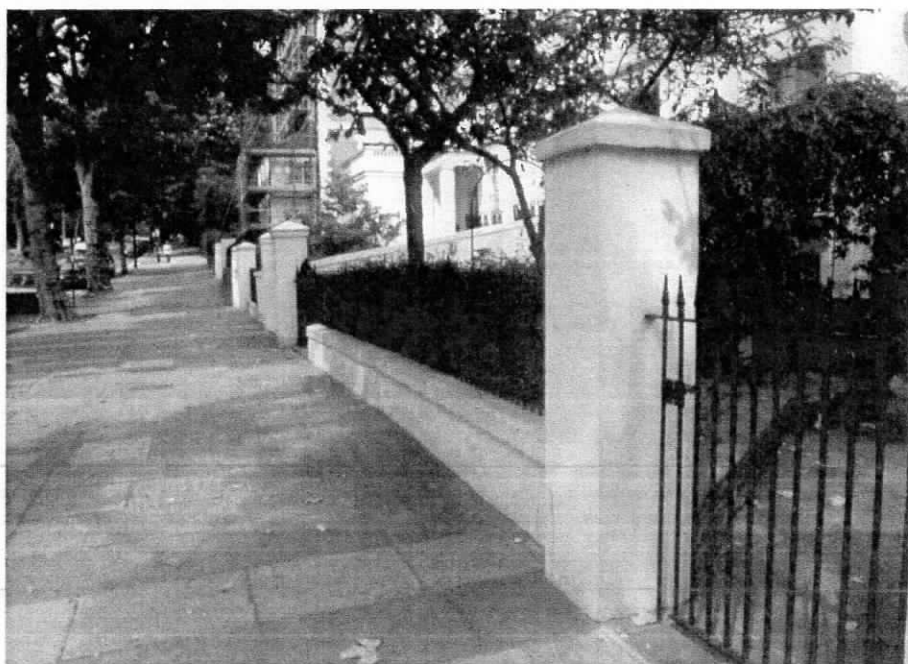
or balusters is most restful along our terraced streets. Naturally, we all want to keep our individuality, but collaboration between neighbours can work wonders, and it would restore much elegance to our neighbourhood if owners were to restore the original railings or balusters.

Ironwork has a flexibility of pattern and style, which contrasts so well with stone and brick, and bridges the contrast between buildings and plants. There are several fine examples of this in our neighbourhood which lend an air of grace and beauty to the street.



*Very attractive ironwork in Ladbroke Road*

However small a front area is, a little ingenuity and care can lift the spirit perceptibly. Most of our front gardens are simple rectangles, usually paved in brick, stone, tiles, gravel, concrete or bitumen, and they need to be functional because we have busy lives. Gently falling surfaces which drain storm water away from the building, and ease for sweeping, are essential, but an interesting design in whichever material (and preferably not more than two types) can make all the difference. A strong but simple pattern, seen through railings or balusters, a well clipped hedge



*Neighbourly co-operation—Ladbroke Grove*

above a low boundary wall, or an attractive arrangement of contrasting shrubs make an impact on passers by and the householder alike. The variety of choice is endless: there is natural York or Portland stone laid in courses; bricks laid in a herringbone, basket weave or running patterns; gravel with stone stepping stones; two sizes of pebbles creating a stream-like flow; a circle of setts, or block paving inter-laid by bricks: each creates an impact.

A change of levels provides interest, even by using edging tiles around a border, provided the thoroughfare to entrance doors or steps is level. A small-patterned black and white Victorian tile paving in one garden was particularly attractive, and when combined with bold



white flowering shrubs made a stunning effect. There are some dramatic paving patterns in brick centred by a spiky plant, or container, and brick planters can continue the theme of brick paving so that the design makes a whole picture.



*Circular sett paving & planter—Clarendon Road*

Terraced brick retaining walls between the pavement and the basement area provide an opportunity to grow gently trailing plants and are a safe and good-looking method of holding back the soil. Grass is used luxuriously in one or two gardens and its flat green plane is so restful to the eye; it does need to be fed, watered and manicured regularly to look good. Larger houses and most blocks of flats have driveways of gravel or tarmac, discretely screened by walls and shrubs. As members of this Association know only too well, there are other front gardens of much smaller proportions, which are used as sterile parking lots, and do not add any beauty to the scene.

Many houses in our area have very large trees in or close to their front gardens, and they are the glory of this part of London. Their scale contrasts well with our tall buildings, and the grace of their fine trunks and branches, especially of the plane trees and their summer shade, is delightful. Without dis-

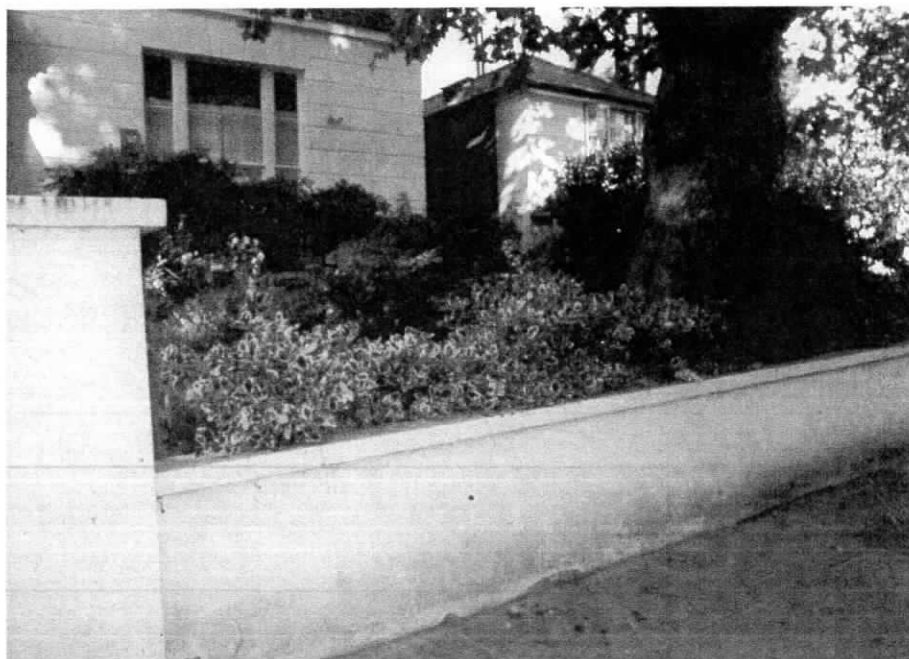
cussing whether such trees should be so close to buildings, the presence of a lime tree, with its deposit of sooty mildew on everything beneath it, and their suckers, causes many problems.

Courageous attempts are made to under-plant with shrubs, and one which does withstand the mildew well is the spotted laurel (*Aucuba japonica* varieties) often dismissed as being old-fashioned, but still one of the most good tempered and patient shrubs for a city, and not necessarily spotted. There is a long list of other shrubs which have been used, which tolerate dry shade and being dripped upon, including *Eleagnus x ebbingei*, *Cotoneaster horizontalis*, *Choisya ternata*, some privet, shrubby honeysuckle, *Lonicera nitida* 'May Green', *berberis*, and *osmanthus*. Some gardens,

not inhibited by a large tree or one very close to the boundary, have been successfully planted with smaller trees such as flowering cherry, mountain ash (*Sorbus Aucuparia* varieties), flowering crab apple, the smaller upright magnolias, hawthorns, and snake

bark and other maples. These create a happy, light effect during the changing seasons, with young spring leaf and blossom and colourful autumn leaves and berries. In these gardens, such trees provide a vertical accent, which helps to link the scale of the buildings with our human scale, and remind us of the changing seasons. The problem of probing tree roots into our drains and foundations is omnipresent, and so long as there are good footings to the strong retaining wall to the basement area, and the drains are sound, the roots of these smaller trees should not be troublesome. However, such trees do not live as long as larger trees, and flowering cherries in particular seem to have a life expectancy of 35-40 years. It is important to keep trees and shrubs in good shape all the time, as many householders do, and to feed the shrubs every spring with organic matter. It is also a lot easier, and probably more effective, to accept the conditions and plant accordingly, than to try to establish a garden more suited to the open country.

We have a variety of hedges in our area and the much-maligned privet is excellent when it is well maintained. It withstands pollution well, needs to be clipped three or four times a summer to keep its leaves small and neat, and is semi-evergreen. Box is not happy in clay



*Shady planting of Holly under Plane tree—Lansdowne Road*

soil, but looks excellent in pots or raised beds with good drainage, and sets off front entrances with much style. Yew can be kept well clipped, but can look sombre in winter. The popular *Pyracantha* has spines, shiny leaves, clusters of white scented flowers in early summer, and yellow, red or orange fruits in autumn (if it is not clipped too hard in summer). There are several hedges of *Choisya ternata* (Mexican orange blossom), which is also evergreen, has scented flowers and requires little pruning; it can suffer from wind chill in winter, but recovers in the spring. It is important to cut back the plants which overhang the pavements, so that people who cannot see well are not harmed by branches or thorns. A soft cascade of creepers, however, or an attractive shrub appearing above a wall is a delight to passers by.

Containers and window boxes can make an impact, creating splashes of colour in spring and summer. Planted wooden, terracotta or concrete containers can be placed on paved front or basement areas to marvellous effect.

I also appreciated some of the climbing plants, which have been allowed to scramble over fences and walls, particularly honeysuckle and jasmine. Is it being altruistic to suggest that we should choose



*Well trimmed privet over dwarf boundary wall—Clarendon Road*

plants which others passing our gardens would enjoy? I think not, for giving pleasure to others is surely one of the enjoyments of life. Starting in winter, the perfume from sturdy Christmas box (*Sarcococca* varieties) together with the less hardy daphnes, and winter-flowering viburnum, mahonias and *Clematis armandii* surprise one on a warmer day; later on, it is hawthorn, some magnolias, choisya, pyracantha, philadelphus, lilac, some buddleia and roses. Late summer brings the scents of lavender, cistus, rosemary, privet, certain honeysuckles and jasmine, the warm temperatures releasing the aroma from more exotic plants.

And in autumn, osmanthus comes into its own.

There are of course other shrubs for much more favoured positions. Those gardens on sunny or corner sites have a succession of colourful shrubs and flowers throughout the year, and are much appreciated by all who travel past. In most of our gardens it would be difficult to sustain colour throughout the year, and the contrasting leaves of evergreen shrubs and lesser plants can be just as subtly effective in shadier conditions. Those used include delicately-leaved ground cover plants, such as ferns, lily turf (*Liriope muscari*), small-leaved ivies, epi-medium, dead nettles or comfrey, the variegated 'stinking' iris, and *Euphorbia robbiae*, which will grow happily in dry shade.

In our particularly favoured area, with our beautiful communal gardens, we can each contribute in our own way to the enjoyment of street life. However, as a word of warning: one owner I spoke to when taking photographs complained that a lot of passers-by were stopping to stare at her most beautiful garden—so be prepared! Perhaps if we all did it, it would not be such a novelty.

*Diana Ward lived in Ladbroke Grove for 28 years and has been working as a garden designer for 15 years in and around London and in a variety of gardens in the country and abroad*



*Architectural plants set in brick—Holland Park Avenue*



## PLANNING

### Boundary Walls and Railings

Anyone who is considering making alterations to their property in the Ladbroke Conservation Area, especially external alterations, would be wise to consult the Ladbroke Conservation Area Proposals Statement. This document, which is available from the Borough Planning Department, gives an historical review and analysis of the area, and much useful guidance on how to look after the area and help to preserve its very special architectural and environmental qualities. One of the subjects discussed is the treatment of boundaries, and, in particular, the front boundary walls or railings separating properties from the pavement. The importance of these is often overlooked, but of the streetscape and, as such, should be given much more attention.

Originally the boundary walls or railings were constructed with a certain uniformity and continuity which not only gave these qualities to the street, but also complimented the adjacent buildings. Unfortunately, over the years, thoughtless alterations have been made to walls and railings, and these desirable qualities have been lost. In the worst cases the walls or railings are different for every house in the street, with unfortunate disregard for the effect on the street as a whole.

The development of forecourt car-parking has caused some undesirable breaks in the continuity of the boundary walls. Perhaps one of the worst examples of this is on the south side of Kensington Park Gardens—the grandest street in the area. Here the continuous stuccoed boundary balustrades compliment the grand houses. Unbelievably these balustrades have been broken in some places to form forecourt parking.

On the west side of Kensington Park Road there are two notable ex-

amples of boundary violations. Near the corner with Elgin Crescent there is a long gap in the metal railings which has been filled with random multi-coloured sheets of plywood. We have been pressing for action here for a very long time, so far without success.

The other example in Kensington Park Road is near the corner of Arundel Gardens. There the metal railings were replaced by a rusticated mock stone wall. This happened long ago, but more recently a wooden fence was built on top of the wall. The wooden fence has now gone and there has been a recent Planning Application to put back the metal railings. This is good news, and we look forward to this being done.

On the east side of Ladbroke Grove at the corner of Ladbroke Gardens, there are two more examples. On the south-east corner, with frontages to Ladbroke Grove and Ladbroke Gardens, there is a shameful state of affairs. There is a broken down chain link fence and overgrown trees and shrubs. We have been pressing the Council for a long time to take action here, but so far without success. At the north-east corner the large stuccoed houses have recently been restored. This has included a lot of garden works behind the houses, visible to Ladbroke Grove. These included wooden trellises above the railings on Ladbroke Grove. As a result of Council action these trellises have been suppressed.

These are just a few examples. There are very many more. But perhaps these are sufficient to draw attention to the importance of boundary walls and railings and the contribution they make to the character of the area.

*Robert Meadows*

## SPRING GARDEN WALK

Henrietta Phipps and Diana Ward have kindly agreed to lead this Spring Walk, and members are asked to meet at St John's Church at 6.30pm on Thursday, 6th May.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Ladbroke Association will be held on 1st July—details of venue to be announced later.

## 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: .....

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