

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

Autumn 1978

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 10th Annual General Meeting of the Association was held at the Knights of St. Columba Club, 11 Lansdowne Road, on June 29th 1978. After the meeting members took advantage of the Club's bar facilities, but unfortunately poor weather prevented use of the adjoining gardens (which the Gardens Committee would kindly have made available to members).

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Looking through my last Report, a year ago, I see that many of the matters which were referred to have progressed but little! The photographic survey of original mouldings and details for the Ladbroke Area is still proceeding, with the invaluable help of the GLC Photographic Department; our sub-committee is still in contact with the Borough Engineer on the matter of more appropriate replacement street lamps; St John's Church still has no railings (though the appeal fund, discussed later in the Newsletter, is making progress). I can however report one major triumph, albeit slightly tangential to our actual area, and this is the scrapping of the proposals for the new Russian Embassy.

A packed meeting at the Kensington Town Hall, called by the Kensington Society in April of this year, voted unanimously against the building of the Embassy, either on the Kensington Barracks site in Church Street or on the site at the top end of Kensington Palace Gardens, on the Bayswater Road. The Foreign Secretary informed the Russians shortly afterwards that "There was no way in which the proposals could be made acceptable. The conclusion was that there was no alternative but to drop the site from consideration. The Foreign Office therefore proposes to offer an alternative site . . . (and) it would help if the Soviet Authorities would consider a site outside the Borough of Kensington". The continuing proliferation of "Embassies" in Kensington has caused grave concern on many levels over many years, and these are now even beginning to appear in North Kensington and the Ladbroke Area.

Diplomatic use has many disadvantages and burdens for established residents — the sterilisation of residential property into semi-office use, the artificial inflation of rents and values, the indiscriminate parking of cars claiming diplomatic immunity, and even the danger of violence related to political unrest. It is most strongly to be hoped that the top-level decision over the Russians will help to reverse the trend that has been steadily increasing over the last twenty years, and that it will encourage foreign governments to seek properties in areas of London which might actually benefit from their presence.

Now I should like to quote you some statistics which have recently given me food for thought, although without my being able to reach any satisfactory conclusion as to a suitable course of action. There are, I understand, 6000 people living in the Ladbroke Conservation Area, and these form, roughly, some 3000 households, one member of which is a ratepayer. The Ladbroke Association, which endeavours to protect the Ladbroke Area and to preserve its unique character, has 220 members!

I think that it is generally agreed by those who live in it, as well as by those who view it enviously from outside, that this area is one of the pleasantest urban places in London in which to live, if not in the whole of Britain; why then is our membership so ludicrously small? Is it that most people don't care about where they live? I do not believe it. Is it that most people do not know about the Ladbroke Association? Then we must improve our publicity. Are the locals too mean to pay the £1.00 annual subscription? Even if we allow that the middle-classes are "impoverished", this hardly seems likely. Perhaps most people do not like the Ladbroke Area, and are secretly longing to move out to Basildon, Brightlingsea, Esher or Egham?

Personally, I have no satisfactory answer to any of these speculative questions, but I know that if the Ladbroke Association is to perform its function properly, we need a large, enthusiastic and concerned membership, and we should try to achieve this before any crisis takes place. May I ask you all to get at least one more member between now and Christmas?

I must also mention the recent departure of the Revd. Douglas Richardson from St Peter's Church to another living. He was the Chairman of the Pembridge Association for many years, and I should like to record our gratitude for the close and successful relationship that the Ladbroke Association enjoyed with Pembridge under his cheerful guidance.

Finally, Peter Chapman is now editing the Newsletter, and I would like to take this opportunity of expressing most grateful thanks on behalf of the Association to Madame Pilsudski for so nobly performing this task for so long.

HON. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Association's balance at the end of March 1978 was £719, a fall of £28 compared with the position in March 1977. Expenditure for the year totalled £431, against income of £403. The increase in expenditure compared with the previous year's total of £290 was due mainly to the Association's gift of a tree to each of the Gardens within the Ladbroke Area in celebration of the Queen's Silver Jubilee. In addition, a donation of £50 was made in support of the scheme to save the Silchester Road Baths (discussed later in the Newsletter).

As members will be aware, the due date for subscriptions is 1st April, and it will considerably reduce my clerical work if this date is kept in mind! Perhaps those who do not already pay by banker's order would be kind enough to consider doing so as from next April?

About one in every four of our members make covenanted payments. Last year we reclaimed £58 from the Income Tax authorities, and it is a pity that more members do not use this simple and painless means of adding to the value of their subscriptions. Forms for the purpose can always be obtained from the Treasurer or Secretary.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

The Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary were all re-elected at the Annual General Meeting on Monday, June 29th.

Three of the committee were due to retire, and of these Mr B Thompson-McCausland did not wish to stand again. Miss Santa Raymond and Mr R Meadows were re-elected and Mr Martin Evans, who was proposed by Mr Angus Stirling, was elected.

PLANNING

ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATION

Representatives of the Committee of the Association visit the Town Hall at monthly intervals and look at all planning applications which are either within the Ladbroke Conservation Area or relate closely to it. The applications are considered from an amenity and aesthetic point of view, and also in the light of members' particular concerns.

DECREASE IN FAMILY HOUSES

During the past year there have been an increasing number of applications to convert houses into flats, which tend to result in a loss of family accommodation in an area uniquely suitable for family living. In addition, each conversion destroys a proportion of the original internal detailing, and since many houses have previously been converted to flats and then re-converted to single family houses, there is a real danger of eventually losing all original interiors.

SHOPS

There are, of course, quite a number of shops and public houses within the Area, particularly on Holland Park Avenue, and the Association is encouraging the Borough to treat these with the same design standard applicable to private housing.

WORK PRIOR TO PLANNING APPROVAL

Building work is not infrequently started on properties before planning permission has been obtained or indeed applied for. Consequently the Committee, with the aid of members, needs to – and does – monitor building work, and reports to the Borough where necessary.

INFORMATION ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Frequently planning applications are submitted with only minimal information, which makes consideration of proposals very difficult, especially since there are often indications that not very much thought on the detailing of proposals has been given. In an area where detailing is of such importance, it is excellent to find the Borough now tending to insist on adequate information being included on applications.

CAR PARKING SPACES

There are frequent proposals to turn forecourts into off-street car parking areas, and whilst the convenience and monetary savings are apparent, it is believed that placing cars in such close juxtaposition to building of architectural merit is detrimental to them, and frequently results in a loss of planted front gardens. The Borough also take this view and have refused those recent applications put before them.

22 HOLLAND PARK AVENUE

Appeal against refusal of planning permission was dismissed. The Association had strongly opposed the applicants proposals which related to a major extension in a small garden, and which would have resulted not only in severe overlooking, but also in a building with stylistically alien features.

16 and 22 KENSINGTON PARK ROAD

The Association strongly opposed the proposal to build roof extensions on two of the central houses of this most exceptional terrace block.

WALMER ROAD KILN

Approval has now been given and work is going ahead on restoration work to the kiln, and its incorporation as a dining room into the curtilage of a Hippodrome Mews house. Whilst the Association is not convinced that this is quite the right answer to this type of conservation problem it is delighted that the kiln now has an assured future.

2 LANSDOWNE CRESCENT

Earlier in the year excellent proposals were put forward for converting, vertically, the rear half of the Vicarage to provide two self-contained dwelling units together with Parish rooms. It is hoped that equally excellent proposals will shortly be forthcoming for the Ladbroke Grove half of the building and that the work will soon be carried out.

THE SILCHESTER BATHS

Just beyond the northern boundary of the Ladbroke Estate stands the Silchester Baths. Designed by Thomas Verity, architect of the Criterion, Piccadilly, it marks Kensington Vestry's first and only positive venture in the field of public health. Although outside our Estate, it has the most intimate connection with it. At least until the First World War, all our dirty linen would have been

washed there. Previously the washerwomen of Notting Dale – then nicknamed Laundry Land – would have boiled and washed our clothes in the basements of their little houses and dried them on the floor above (it was too risky to dry them outside because of the constant fogs).

In return for our starched and goffered linen, we provided the laundresses with a subsistence wage on which to keep their families (women outnumbered men, who were mostly itinerant casual labourers, by about two to one in Notting Dale), but our washing left their houses running with damp as the steam from the coppers condensed. In the winter, the ice might freeze an inch thick on the inside of the windows.

Dr Dudfield became Kensington's Medical Officer of Health in 1871, and made it his chief objective to improve their living conditions. When eventually the Washhouse opened, laundresses found their costs slashed, their productivity dramatically increased as the dryers reduced the time of a wash from three days to three hours, and the sodden walls of their houses at last able to dry out. Professional washerwomen were restricted to Tuesdays and Thursdays only. Even so, the Vestry was providing and subsidising the means of employment to the poorest section of society for well over 1,000 hours a week – a claim no other Local Authority then or since could probably make.

Kensington Council applied for consent to demolish the Baths as soon as the building was listed. Permission was refused by the Department of the Environment after a Public Inquiry, with the dual recommendation that the Baths should be made weatherproof and its conversion to community use explored. The Council ignored both recommendations, waited 18 months and applied for consent to demolish again. It says it intends to build shops, a sports hall and a community centre on the site at an approximate cost of £2 million. The Baths could be converted to provide the same facilities, better, at half the cost. There is to be another Public Inquiry, probably next January, and it will cost the Silchester Baths Committee at least £500 in legal fees to fight it. We have raised £300 but would be profoundly grateful for help from any member of the Ladbroke Association who thinks this building worth saving. (Cheques should be made out to the Silchester Baths Company and sent to Mrs W R Craine, 142 Kensington Park Road.)

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH APPEAL

As reported in the Spring Newsletter, the Association subscribed £50 towards the Appeal. Since then Ian Grant met the Vicar and members of the Appeal Committee at the site and gave his advice on the most suitable types of railing and their emplacement. It was hoped that the work would by now have been started, but this was not possible until the Department of the Environment made its decision as to whether the scheme would qualify for a grant. The Department required detailed drawings, plan and specification together with two estimates, and these have now been submitted to them. The Parochial Church Council earnestly hopes that a grant will be forthcoming, and work will then proceed as far as finances allow. It is anticipated that the total cost for the Ladbroke Grove frontage and the north and south sides as far as the two porches – the west slope is to be left open – will be in the region of £6,000 at current prices. The balance in the Appeal Fund, now that the repairs to the masonry have been completed and paid for, stands at just over £2,000.

MEMBERS MEETING

A Members' Meeting will be held on Monday 4th December at the Knights of St. Columba Club, 11 Lansdowne Road, W11, at 8.30pm. Professor R R Worskett, Chief Architect and Planning Officer to Bath City Council, has kindly agreed to give a talk on "Setting up Preservation Schemes in areas of historic interest".

It is hoped that members of the Ladbroke Association will make a note of this date in their diaries, and that there will be large attendance to hear Professor Worskett, an acknowledged expert in the field of urban conservation.

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