

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

AUTUMN 1979

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 11th Annual General Meeting of the Association was held at the Knights of St. Colomba Hall, 11 Lansdowne Road, on Monday, June 25th. The Chairman of the Association, Mr. Ian Grant, presented the following review of some of the main events and activities in Ladbroke in the preceding twelve months.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It is very agreeable for me to be able to report on the completion of a project of very long standing in the Ladbroke Area, namely the replacement of the railings round St. John's Church. The church occupies a key site at the top of the hill in Ladbroke Grove, and the broken chain-link fencing (which dated from the removal of the original railings during the war) did nothing to enhance its setting. The new railings, though not so massive as the originals, are correctly set into the original kerb stones, and give the proper complement to this important building. I understand however that funds have fallen somewhat short of costs, and that any financial contributions would be most welcome. The Association has, for its part, given a further £50, making a total contribution of £100.

I can also report the Association's great pleasure at the restoration of No. 63 Ladbroke Grove and its boundary wall, as this house and its neighbour at 2 Lansdowne Crescent are a vital foil to the church. Their construction of matching Kentish ragstone links them visually to St. John's, and they also occupy key sites on the crest of the rise. The demolition of these houses, which has been proposed at various times in the past, has always been strongly opposed by the Association, and it is very satisfactory to see that this now appears to be increasingly unlikely.

Another matter which ended satisfactorily was the proposal to occupy one of the houses in Stanley Crescent as a foreign embassy. There was considerable opposition from other householders in the street, which was strongly supported by the Association, and the Council restated their desire to keep embassies out of the Ladbroke Area to the government concerned. The proposal was eventually dropped.

Our photographic survey of original mouldings and details in the Ladbroke Area is now of impressive size, and has been supplemented by some more wonderfully atmospheric photographs taken by our member Mr. David Cavanaugh. (These pictures were displayed at the AGM and were later on show at the Kensington Public Library and are highly attractive.)

Finally, the continuing deterioration of the cabmen's shelter at the south end of Kensington Park Road has been causing the Committee some concern, as the members feel that this piece of local history should not be allowed to disappear. Unfortunately we have so far met with no success in establishing who actually owns the shelter (which is now unoccupied), or who is responsible for its upkeep; neither the Council nor the GLC seem to feel much concern about its fate. Should any member be able to throw any light on this matter, such help would be greatly appreciated.

HON. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Hon. Treasurer reported that, despite increased costs of unavoidable expenditure on postage, stationery and printing, there was an excess of income over expenditure during the year

ended 31st March 1979 of £54. Covenants provided a clawback of £52 from the Income Tax authorities, and bank interest accounted for a further £43 on the credit side. A donation of £50 was made to the St. John's Church Restoration Appeal. At the end of the financial year the Association was in the black to the tune of £774.

Membership numbers seem to be locked obstinately in the range of 220 to 230, and the introduction of friends and neighbours to the Association by existing members would be welcome.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The Chairman, Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary were re-elected. There were five vacancies on the committee, one member having left the district and four were eligible for re-election. Of these Mr. D. Simson did not wish to stand again. Mrs. Bingham and Mr. Herring were re-elected, and Messrs J. Lever and P. Thorold were elected. One place is at present vacant, as it may be necessary to co-opt for some special project. There was then discussion on subsidence, possibly caused by trees, and a question was raised about Ladbroke Grove traffic. The Chairman said that this would be looked into.

Permission had kindly been granted to use the adjoining gardens for drinks following the meeting, but unfortunately it was a cold evening, so some members adjourned to the bar.

AUTUMN MEMBERS' MEETING

The Autumn meeting for members this year took the form of a walk, conducted by the Chairman Mr. Ian Grant F.R.I.B.A. Members were asked to apply for tickets as numbers had to be limited. The walk was held on Sunday afternoon October 21st, starting from the K.S.C. Club, 11 Lansdowne Road.

The first visit was to Academy House, 24 Kensington Park Gardens where the large salon on the first floor is an example of Victorian decoration in the most elaborate style, sadly in need of refurbishment. The University of Syracuse, New York, is shortly to take over this house, and it is hoped it will be restored to its former grandeur. Two representatives of the London side of the transfer, the Architect and the Secretary, were present and later joined in the walk.

The Rector of St. John's Church kindly showed members round the church, and the new railings were admired. Two Garden Squares were then visited, Stanley Crescent, usually hidden from the view of non-residents, and the large Ladbroke Square Gardens, said to be the largest square in London. Next followed a visit to St. Peter's Church, where members were shown the church by the Vicar, Mr. Myles.

The Rector of St. John's Church, Rev. Randolph Wise, joined members for tea at the K.S.C. Club. Mr. T. Pakenham thanked Mr. Grant for the interesting walk, and members of the committee for the tea. Fortunately it was a fine autumn afternoon with a slight nip in the air, which was ideal for a walk.

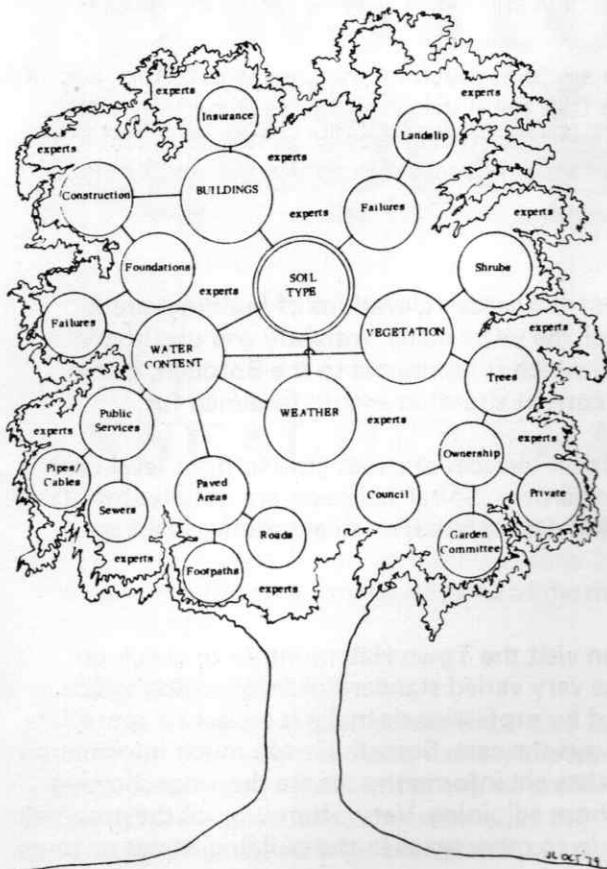
JAPANESE MEMORIES

The Secretary of the Association has received an interesting letter from Mrs. Nosawa, who is now living in Tokyo. Mrs. Nosawa lived in the Ladbroke area, first at 20, Kensington Park Gardens, and later at 1, Stanley Crescent, between the years 1923 and 1934, during her father's tenure of office at the then Japanese Embassy. She attended Norland Place School. She writes that many of her happiest memories are those connected with the enjoyment of Ladbroke Square and Stanley Gardens.

Mrs. Nosawa has since visited London and walked round the vicinity of her old home. She writes how pleased she was to find the neighbourhood "quiet and refined" as she remembered it. She wonders if there are any old residents who remember the Matsuyama family.

Mrs. Nosawa has taken out a seven year subscription to the Association, as a token, she says "of my appreciation of your work". The Secretary has written to thank Mrs. Nosawa. Should any residents have any memories of the family would they kindly contact Miss Muriel Cosh, 20, Kensington Park Gardens, W11.

TREES IN LADBROKE — 2



The Spring Newsletter gave a general introduction to the problem of trees in the Ladbroke area and posed the question as to whether they are a threat to buildings or an amenity. To answer this question it is important to explore several points — exemplified in the diagram (left) — of which the most crucial arises from the nature of the soil. It appears from the National Geological Survey that the whole of our area is underlain by London clay which lies very close to the surface except in the south-eastern corner where Ladbroke Road joins Kensington Park Road. Detailed information is scanty, but a borehole at the junction of Elgin Crescent and Clarendon Road indicates that London clay starts from the surface, and another borehole in Holland Park suggests that there is 18 feet of made-up ground, sand and gravel above the clay strata. From general observations it seems that the clay strata are within two feet of the surface to as far south as Holland Park Avenue. Thus the majority of houses have foundations bearing on clay.

Why should London clay present any problems? It is an unhappy characteristic of this material that it shrinks when dried out and

expands when wet. However, if allowed to remain continually moist it does achieve a relative stability. The natural water table below ground surface, fed by rain, helps to maintain this state of damp equilibrium. Between the water table level (which can vary) and the surface there is a zone that, for several reasons, is subject to changes in water content. The main factor, of course, is weather and periods of drought with high evaporation and low rainfall are especially significant. The Bracknell Weather Centre has tabulated the ten worst droughts in England and Wales since their records began and, though the drought of 1975-6 was the most severe, that of 1853-4 came a very close second. Since most of the buildings in the northern half of the Ladbroke area were built after this date, they are not affected, but those in the south were. Further severe droughts in 1862-3, 1873, 1887, 1920-1 and 1932-3 could well explain the building settlement problems (cracks and deflections) that beset our area before the most recent drought.

In the next Newsletter other important factors, highlighted in the diagram will be examined.

PLANNING

PLANNING CONTROL

During the past few months there has been considerable feeling amongst many members regarding certain alterations including the construction of two new windows on a front facade. It has transpired that although the Ladbroke Area is of course a Conservation Area, which in many instances gives the Borough greater controls than it would otherwise have, nevertheless where a house is in single occupancy these powers are greatly reduced. The Association is urging the Borough and the DOE to do all they are able to improve the situation, but at this time it is very much up to individual householders to look after their properties in the manner which these properties deserve.

REPAIRS

Money is always a problem, and the recent damage caused by the hot summer of 1976 and last winter's long period of cold, means that many buildings are in urgent need of repair. Certain of the damage does require immediate attention if the fabric is not to deteriorate to a state where the works become so serious as to be totally prohibitive in cost. This especially relates to stucco work.

The Association continues to urge that care should be taken when carrying out repair or new work to ensure that this is in keeping with that which exists.

BUILDING INTERIORS

Many of the interiors of buildings in the area are of as much interest as the exteriors, and in certain instances more so. It is therefore unfortunate that the Borough Planning Department has only limited control regarding the irreparable damaging of cornices, fireplaces, staircases and so on. Such damage can be caused particularly where single family houses are converted to small flats, with internal bathrooms.

REAR ELEVATIONS

It is always rather unclear as to how important the garden elevations of buildings are in relation to the Conservation Area as a whole, and over the years many unsightly and unsuitable additions have been built. The Association's attitude, which it represents to the Borough, is that precedent is not enough, and that a bettering of the current situation should be aimed for.

For example, there is a current tendency to form terraces at street ground floor level over the rear garden, with spiral staircases leading into the gardens. Spiral staircases are usually unsuitable in this context, and their design should be very carefully considered, or an alternative staircase shape be used.

DRAWINGS

Members of the committee of the Association visit the Town Hall monthly to check on planning applications, and it is interesting to note the very varied standard of information which is presented. Although generally the drawings presented by professionals make it easiest to appreciate the full extent of the works proposed, this is not always the case. Sometimes too much information is less helpful than too little. Photographs of what exists are informative, as are drawings showing not only the area to which the proposals relate, but those adjoining. Very often it is not the proposals in isolation which are important, but their relationship to other areas in the building, street or town.

When submitting planning applications it should always be remembered that the Council officers have in all probability little knowledge of the particular property, and they, like the Association's representatives, need the proposals clearly and fully explained. The scale of drawings should not be so small as to be illegible.

TREES

It is now obligatory to obtain permission to lop, prune or fell any tree in the area. Planning approval must be obtained in the same way as for building works, and these applications are listed by the Borough and checked by committee members.

HOLLAND PARK UNDERGROUND STATION

Some time ago a proposal to build offices over the station was refused by the Borough. Now there are proposals to refurbish the station by its owners. It is considered to be a building of unusual interest as it contains many original features. However, as the work envisaged is of an internal and cosmetic nature, the Borough have stated that planning permission is not required. The Association remain concerned and is pressing the architect for detailed information.

KENSINGTON TEMPLE

During the Summer an application was submitted for the conversion of the church, together with the construction of a side addition. Although the general proposals were reasonable, and would reorganise the forecourt in a way which would be advantageous, the Association believed the side addition would seriously detract from the whole complex, this despite it being in the same stone as the church. The Borough has, however, given approval to this scheme.