

Albany Voices

The Albany residents' newsletter



The Albany — Summer 1998

Permanent BBQ site

Diana Parker

MOST OF the people who read this will probably think I am a kill-joy. However, if you take a walk by the swimming pool and see how near some of our flats in Ulster are to the sunken garden I hope you may agree with my reasons for not wanting that to be a permanent site, particularly if there are several barbecues during any hot summer. The smell is quite obnoxious and the noise is far louder from outside in the garden than if it were inside the flats. These parties tend to go on late and children can be very noisy when allowed free use of the pool. One of the joys of a hot summer is the peace of sitting on the balcony watching the sunset.

Comments welcome. However, on going to press, I understand that a portable wheeled BBQ has been purchased so the built-up permanent site is out of the question at present. Ed

Why Albany Voices?

THE ALBANY used to have a Residents' newsletter. It was first published by the Residents' Committee which preceded the Board of Directors. It dealt with issues like families moving in to, or leaving, the Albany, babies born and people passing away. It also covered issues from nature watch to neighbourhood watch, from plants in the garden to temperature in the pool. It somehow mirrored life in the Albany. This newsletter is an attempt to reintroduce the "old" Residents' Newsletter in a modern style.

The Albany needs a newsletter, and before the next AGM, you will see two editions. This first issue deals with traditional matters, but it also includes articles written for the purpose of stimulating a debate of the Albany's future.

To help me with this initial undertaking, Brenda Lewis of 5 Ulster Court, has kindly agreed to be the Editor of these two editions. Mrs. Lewis, with years of journalistic experience, has edited many previous issues of the Albany Newsletter and will ensure professional standards are met.

Whatever comments you may have to issues raised in this newsletter, please let us know. Your opinion will be very important when the content of the next edition is planned. Please write your comments and ideas for future issues on the enclosed sheet and return it to Mrs. Lewis.

Hugo Steinnes

Anticipating the future

Peter Clarke

I HAVE been asked to express a few thoughts on the future management of The Albany and on how we might encourage more lessees to become involved either as directors or as committee members.

As I see it, some lessees who might otherwise have considered offering their services in the past may have been deterred by the feeling that only people with qualifications in Company law, accounting or business management are needed. Obviously, such skills are very welcome but are not essential prerequisites to becoming a director. Common sense and willingness to contribute to the wellbeing of the community are very acceptable alternative qualifications. Would it surprise you to know that a case came to my attention some time ago of a substantial block of flats in Greater

London, all of whose lessees, whether they liked it or not, were automatically directors of their own freehold company? My point in relating this is not to suggest that we should follow suit but to emphasise that directors do not have to be City whizz-kids.

If the prospect of accepting the responsibilities of directorship appears daunting, there is another way in which lessees could provide services to our community. Our Handbook gives details of several committees dealing with such matters as finance, gardens, buildings maintenance, swimming pool and newsletters. It would make the work of our few directors very much easier if more of the work previously undertaken directly by the Board were to be handled by the appropriate committee, leaving the Board to concern itself with running the Company rather than The Albany.

The development of our Committee structure would have several advantages. Apart from leaving the Board free to concentrate on the affairs of the Company, it would offer scope for any lessee who might be apprehensive about taking on a directorship to become involved in our affairs and to acquire an insight into what goes on behind the scenes. It would also provide a gentle introduction for anyone considering the possibility of becoming a director, but apprehensive about jumping in at the deep end. This applies especially to the relatively new arrivals who one day will have to take over the ultimate responsibility for the survival of The Albany as we know it.

Emphasis on the committee approach to running The Albany would have one further great advantage. I have often heard the criticism of our present struc-

ture that the Board appears remote and difficult to approach. Whether or not that is true, lessees would probably find it easier to go directly to one of the members of a committee dealing specifically with the area in which their particular problem or suggestion lies. If, as is suggested elsewhere, we are to resume the practice of issuing regular newsletters, these would provide an ideal medium for committees to make occasional reports on their activities. The newsletters could perhaps incorporate a *letters to the editor* column to enable questions of general interest to be raised and answered. That would help to solve what some of us regard as a communication difficulty under the present arrangements and might even render it unnecessary for lessees to resort to the practice, thoroughly abhorrent to most of us, of distributing anonymous and unhelpful communications.

One flat's garden



Jo Lines

MANY OF us know what it's like to move from a big house and garden, to a flat. My youngest son said to me "Now the garden will have to come into the flat. You could never leave it behind" and how right his feelings were. For I went buying house and balcony plants like there was no tomorrow. Where could I put them all?

First, I had to have a water feature on the balcony. A half barrel with a pump-acti-

uated flow with heather, petunias and ivy, watered when necessary, was the answer to that. My little grandchildren regard pumping it as one of the many joys of visiting me. On the opposite balcony corner are attractive white containers filled with colourful plants, one being a tall weeping pussy-willow, all floodlit at night. Two long mirrors on each wall reflect the constantly moving scene up and down the river, even from within my flat.

But there were still indoor plants to be found. I had to have tall busy ones, so chose palms, ivies and ficus, in self-watering containers illuminated at night. One corner has a vase of large white silk lilies to maintain the colour scheme permanently, while vases of fresh seasonal flowers add to the beauty. So you can, if you wish, mix and match the fresh with the silk, using your imagination. Yes, it was expensive, but I and my visiting family and friends, never cease to enjoy it. Thank goodness, most of the cost took place years ago, when a pound was almost still a pound.

Womanpower

Lesley Sirrell

A ROUGH headcount of Albany residents shows that the majority are female, approximately seventy five percent of the Albany population.

This surprising statistic is not, however, reflected in the composition of the Albany Board and the various sub-committees we hold — where womanpower is noticeable by its absence — no female Board members, three on the garden sub-committee, one on the pool sub-committee but none on the finance sub-committee.

Why this should be the case is not apparent. Do we females not have opinions on the day to day running of The Albany, its upkeep and maintenance? I think not. Is time a problem? With the vast majority of residents enjoying their 'troisième' age just six Board

meetings per year cannot be too onerous. The former management committee appears to have had its quota of female members, why should the concept of serving on the board of a registered company be less appealing? The main qualities required, those of common sense and a commitment to the Albany, are the same for Board or Committee membership, and these qualities are not exclusively male.

The opportunity to redress the balance will arise at the next AGM when three of our current directors will retire by rotation under the new rules. The recent note received from the Chairman included a nomination form for new Board directors, so come on ladies, let's have some feminine influence on our Board for the millennium, to help administer and update the Albany during the new century

Albany 2000

Hugo Steinnes

THE LAST AGM represented a most welcome change as it, rather than disagreeing about the past, discussed some future issues, and the purpose of this article is to invite residents to continue that discussion about what to do with the Albany.

The issues I list in this article are not necessarily my ideas, but what I have learnt from discussions with other residents, and all concerns seem to come from two sources: The build up of the area surrounding the Albany and the ageing of the Albany itself.

Since the mid-eighties, we have seen the completion of Albany Mews; a 12 block-flat on the corner of Richmond Road / Bank Lane; the huge development of the former British Aerospace site in Ham; a similar development of the old power station site in Canbury Gardens; the recently completed Turk site and the development of the British Gas area which has just begun.

A natural question: Is our security adequate? Many residents believe the answer to be no, and suggestions about possible solutions range from erecting gates, installing more cameras, hiring a security firm to patrol the Albany, etc. etc. One suggestion about preventing teenagers from climbing into the garden from Lower Ham Road is to replace the roses with an attractive, low and very prickly bush all along the garden fence.

A direct consequence of being surrounded by several hundred additional families, is that an increasing number of people, especially teenagers, use our garden as a short-cut to the river. In order to restore privacy a nice hedge between each block would most likely do the trick, and also make the garden more intimate.

A number of the new flats recently built, are in the same price range as the Albany flats - in other words in competition with us. Even if we have more space and better location, our three courts are looking increasingly dated and a scheme for improving the entrance area and the main (ground floor) landing could greatly improve the image of the Albany. An important step in this direction was the AGM's decision to carpet all landings.

Finally, the garden needs a facelift. Years of maintenance only has left what is arguably our greatest asset in somewhat less than mint condition. New lawn should be laid to replace areas where there is no grass left or weed only; a water irrigation system (automatic night watering) installed, etc.

Can we afford all this? No, not today or tomorrow — but we could start discussing a development plan for the Albany, and even if it might take years to complete, we would know where we are heading and the time frame for implementation. Remember, each year we set aside between £ 50,000 and £ 60,000 for repairs and new projects. Remember also that any improvement of the common areas will benefit all of us while we are here, and most certainly if or when we sell our flats.



Babies in the Albany

Linda Swanwick

THE ALBANY'S youngest resident, Louise Swanwick, has just celebrated her third birthday. Born at Queen Mary's Hospital in Roehampton in April 1995, Louise is now eagerly awaiting the arrival of a little brother or sister, due to be

born at Kingston Hospital in early July.

The first few weeks of Louise's life were spent in the company of builders and decorators as we prepared to move from Brunswick to Ulster Court. Visitors to our new home peered gingerly over the balcony and wondered whether we had made the right decision to bring up a child seven floors up.

But for us there could not be anywhere nicer to live. The disadvantages of living at The Albany are few: a lack of storage space for the incredible amount of equipment babies appear to generate, greater concern than usual about controlling the noise your child and visiting children make so as not to disturb the peace of others, and the obvious safety issues that arise from living on the top floor.

From the very early days we have taken every precaution possible to create a safe home for our child. The balcony - which obviously presents some cause for concern - is kept under lock and key. Louise is only allowed outside when accompanied by

one of her parents. The other steps we have taken to prevent accidents are quite simply the same as any other parent would employ to "baby-proof" their home.

Overall, living at The Albany has proved to be a very positive experience for us. We have made the most of our riverside location from the outset, taking long walks through the park and spending many happy hours in the garden on sunny afternoons. We enjoy using the swimming pool throughout the summer and it is perhaps not surprising that Louise has taken so happily to water, having been fortunate enough to take regular dips from the tender age of six months.

Since January, Louise has attended the Albany Park Montessori Nursery School in Albany Park Road. We have been very impressed with the activities undertaken by the children and pleased that Louise has managed to settle in so easily. She really looks forward to attending school each morning and very much appreciates the daily conversations she now has with her neighbours about her school projects on her way in and out of The Albany.

We have now spent over five happy years here and hope to stay put for many more. We sometimes wish that we had more space but find we are reluctant to move elsewhere. Attempts at property hunting have only served to drive the message home that we have already found the ideal place to live. We now look forward to introducing an even younger member to The Albany and apologise in advance for any excessive crying sounds you may hear coming from our flat over the first few weeks.

Carers need help with Alzheimers patients

THE FINANCIAL cost of caring for Alzheimer's disease, the most commonly known dementia, has been estimated at more than £1 billion per year - but this figure did not include the indirect burden of carers and families, who are shouldering more responsibility for care at home. Knowledge of the true impact on families is growing steadily, but at the *Dementia Relief Trust* we know that caring for a person with dementia at home can be devastating. We know that carers need information, services, and emotional support; and we have set up the **Admiral Nurse Service** to provide the direct support families desperately need.

Admiral Nurses are dementia specialists and work in the community directly with carers. The service is free and provides long-term support, even after the person with dementia has moved into care or died. They make a specialist assessment, arrange services and respite, provide information and give emotional support.

The **Admiral Nurse Service** started in 1990 with a pilot

project in Westminster. It was later adopted in neighbouring areas. Early funding came from *Joseph Levy Foundation* after his wife and family's own harrowing experience of caring for 'Admiral Joe' as he became ill with dementia. In 1995, the *Dementia Relief Trust* was launched to develop the service more widely. There are now twelve **Admiral Nurses** covering the areas of London.

This year, the *Dementia Relief Trust* is working with the following partners to develop Admiral Nurse Services: Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster Health Authority; Brent and Harrow Health Authority; Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow Health Authority; North West London Mental Health NHS Trust; Riverside Mental Health NHS Trust; Parkside Health NHS Trust; Jewish Care.

Please Kingston, join this wonderful and sorely needed service. Enquiries, and donations, to The *Dementia Relief Trust*, Pegasus House, 37-43 Sackville St., London W1X 1DL Ed.

Travels and trials of an expatriate

**BOOK
REVIEWED BY
THE EDITOR**

THAT IS the title of a delightful book — *The Memories of an Expat. Wife* — by one of the Albany's popular residents: Dorothy Campbell, 30 York Court.

Published last year and available at £14.99 only from her, it recently came to my notice, and I am sure many of you will find it, as I have, both interesting and easy to read. She has travelled much of the Far East and every time she takes up residence in a new and often very strange country, she quickly learns a few basic words, the customs and manners of the locality, and fits in with remarkable ease. We can learn as we read how to behave in remote places, without giving offence and at the same time making friends.

Many people have lived interesting and unusual lives, but few have the ability to put it

**FAR-EASTERN
TRAVELS AND TRIALS
Memories of an Expat. Wife**



DOROTHY CAMPBELL

all down with such clarity and truth. Life can be a trial, as hers often was, but she shows us how to grasp each nettle, how to accept and appreciate the rough with the smooth, and yet emerge both triumphant and fulfilled.

With two little daughters, she and her wonderful second husband faced riots, wars, typhoons and even earthquakes during a fascinating life few would imagine had occurred to the *Dottie* we all know and, not surprisingly, admire. Even today she has her problems and our hearts go out to them both.

Gaggles, paddlings and murmurations

Brenda Lewis

OVER THE years we have had an ever-increasing gaggle of geese in our reach of the Thames, but this past year they have been replaced by some forty mute swans, and it is enjoyable to feed them for a change. And now that it is too late for a nesting couple of swans to breed here, we shall have various herds of swans throughout the year.

Apparently, only the strongest male swans can ever mate, and as soon as they do, they chase out of their territory all the youngsters and other adult male swans not strong enough to mate, since they must ensure their cygnets have

enough to eat. They are violently territorial, and feed on water vegetation, small frogs, fish and insects.

Sometimes these large herds of swans break up into smaller numbers, a dozen or so often swimming up stream, for they can always be certain of plenty of food at Hurst Park, near Molesey Lock.

The herons of course are back, and many of our usual cormorants. It is strange that these very large birds should choose the flimsiest and top-most branches of trees to breed (herons) or dry out their wings after feeding (cormorants). Every year for many years now there have been a nesting couple of mallards in our grounds,



swimming in our pool and now and then laying eggs, though not always managing to rear them.

Plurals of birds in our extraordinarily descriptive

language, such as a "paddling of ducks" when on the water, "a train" in flight, and our winter visit of starlings to the creeper is a "murmuration of starlings".

Nice Day's Outing: Swan-Upping

ON PAGE 24 of our own Albany Riverside Handbook you should read all about this colourful annual event and about our special reach of the Thames. This year swan-upping will take place on July 20th to 24th from Sunbury to Abingdon and the best place for us to witness the beginning of this spectacular event

would be at Shepperton Lock, where there are both parking spaces and seats available.

It is a beautiful sight with many colourful boats, so get there early, say mid-morning on Monday 20th to enjoy this river splendour. Colin Day (Branch Social Secretary, River Thames Society) told me that when his boat was

coming under Sonning Bridge he witnessed the swan-upping event a year or so ago, and met a party of German tourists who had been recommended to include swan-upping in their tour. So if you have never seen it, don't miss it this year.

Colin Day (0181-224 1643) organises many inter-

esting events throughout the year. The next one, on Sunday July 26th, being a boat trip that is different. Cruise along the River Wey for two hours, the narrow boat *Iona* being drawn by one large shire horse. Leaving Godalming Wharf at 2.30 pm (parking opposite next to Sainsbury's). Cost £ 5.70 Ed.

The things they say!

- 7 year-old visit to church heard "Verily, verily I say unto you" and asked his mother: "Who is Jesus' girl friend Verily?"
- 4 year-old, on the phone to Grandma, said: "Thank you so very much. Amen."
- 6 year-old boy asked by teacher to reply to the 5 + 3 on the blackboard, said: "Do you expect me to compute this in my head?"
- Elderly lady: "If only we'd got married I could have got divorced!"



- 8 year old girl, walking along by the Thames at Chelsea: "How did they know how wide the river would be when they built the Embankment?"
- "I'm sorry, but you are standing on my foot!" (We British always apologise, even when walking into a lamp post)

The Mobile Library

HURRAH! From June 29th this valuable Council service is being resumed, after the violent condemnation of its removal last March. The Albany readers will be delighted, although the previous routes and times remain the same. Thus the next visit to Albany Park Road will be Friday July 3rd from 1130 to 1215.

I understand they will invite comments as to this service and if you wish to send me any preferences or suggestions, I will pass them on. Ed.

Letters to the Editor

THIS is extremely important to us; you will notice every magazine and newspaper has them. We need to know what you, the residents, think really important matters which should be aired; and also we would like your comments about any item in our introductory issues.