

Albany Voices

The Albany residents' newsletter



The Albany — Autumn 1998

Our gardens that hosted a Royal

The Albany's glorious past
by Linda Swanwick

IN 1871, Queen Victoria's newly married daughter, Princess Louise, made her first public appearance after her wedding with her bridegroom, the Marquis of Lorne, at a garden fete organised by Sir Charles and Lady Freake, close friends of the royal family and of the then prime minister, Mr. William Gladstone. Sheltered from the sun by the shade of two cedar trees, the royal guests were attending just one of many magnificent social events that were held throughout the year at Bank Grove, a classical 14 bedroom villa that once stood in 16 acres of grounds on the site where The Albany now stands.

Bank Grove, or Point Pleasant as it was also known in its early days, was built in 1797 by Regency architect John Nash for Major General Henry St John, son of the Viscount St. John and MP for Wootton Bassett. The villa – which replaced a small farm (the Bank Farm Estate) – was approached via an entrance lodge and gates, at the exact spot where the Four Seasons Garage now stands in the Albany Park Road. The property, which was soon to gain fame as the “scene of some of the most brilliant gatherings of the best society people in London” (“Old Kingston” – George William Ayliffe/1914), was noted for its grounds, which were originally landscaped by Humphrey Repton and which contained a collection of internationally famous azaleas, camellias, rhododendrons and exotics, complete with elaborate walks, rose gardens, peach houses, two wineries and a temple overlooking the Thames. “No written description can adequately convey a full idea of the magnificence of the grounds”, wrote a visitor to Bank Grove.

In 1821, Bank Grove was sold for £1,000 to Kingston celebrity Sir John Delves Broughton, a rather flamboyant character who reportedly used to ride in a splendid coach and four with four liveried grooms to All Saints church in Kingston – that is, until he quarrelled with the church wardens over the

repositioning of his regular pew and refused to worship there ever again.

Upon his death, the estate was purchased by William Byam Martin, known throughout Kingston as “Squire Martin” for his opulent lifestyle, which included entertaining guests on a lavish scale, with a major annual event for nobility – Squire Martin's Rose Feast. Reports of the Rose Feast mentioned sumptuous food and wine, with thousands of roses decorating the rooms, garlanding the tables and adorning each lady's plate.

Sir Charles and Lady Freake were next to own the estate, from 1870 through to 1888, when 14 acres of the grounds were divided into lots and sold off by auction as building plots, the bidders receiving a luncheon from a marquee erected in the grounds. The house with the remaining two acres survived until 1907, opening in 1890 as a high class members' establishment, the Albany Club, which in 1907 was mysteriously destroyed by fire.

Grosvenor Gardens, Albany Park Road and the Albany flats have all replaced Bank Grove. The private properties that remained on the site of the Albany were purchased by builders for redevelopment in the late 1950s, with an application put through in 1960 to build the 90 flats we now live in. Registers for the time show that by 1961 Brunswick Court had been completed and the first few occupants had already moved in, in fact, two or three are still here. Today, parts of the old boundary wall still survive on the Lower Ham Road, together of course with our splendid cedars which once shaded the royal guests at Lady Freake's garden parties.

(With grateful thanks to staff at the Kingston Local History Room for their assistance in researching material for this article)



[During the early years of our flats, we continued the delightful custom of hiring a marquee for exquisite garden parties under the cedars, residents serving wine and various fruit drinks, and bringing platters of interesting snacks. Many people were in evening dress, mingling and entertaining the new residents and of course their own guests. Perhaps this was the forerunner of the friendliness that exists here, since long after we discarded hiring a marquee we continued having garden parties; and now, with our own wheeled barbecue, also have the occasional BBQ party for a change when the weather is perfect. Ed.]

Directors resigning



George Newman

AT the next AGM, George Newman, Frank Armstrong and Alan Spong will resign as directors of the Albany Riverside Company. We must express our gratitude for the thankless task they have performed over the years, in spite occasional criticism and attack. We

have to acknowledge that these unpaid officers have worked tirelessly on our behalf, not only at meetings but most of the time taking their worries back home. **Albany Voices** conducted the following interview with the Chairman, George Newman.

AV: Have you enjoyed your work as Chairman of Board?

GN: *I have enjoyed it most of the time. However, as I get older I do think that it gets very much of a chore because I am not only Chairman of the Company, I am also the Administrative Officer and that is where all the work is. One has to remember that since the old days of the Albany Association the workload changed dramatically once we purchased the freehold and became the Landlord, and consequently responsible for all the leases.*

AV: A number of difficult issues have been dealt with during your

Chairmanship. What did you find most challenging?

GN: *The most time consuming and worrying job was the proposal to extend the leases. From start to finish, it took three years - from 1994 to 1997 - when I was finally able to deliver new deeds to all our residents (87 out of 90 as three were not interested). During those years, I distributed letters and reports together with copies of a draft lease and a Declaration of Trust Deed relative to every residents financial interest in the Freehold. This involved me taking some 10.000 sheets from the copiers. I also acted for each resident in order to save them having to deal with their own solicitors, this of course saved me time but also saved the residents having to pay solicitors fees.*

AV: What kind of money has been spent on all this work and where does it come from?

GN: *The total cost of all these works, and others, has amounted to some £ 400.000 all of which has been funded from our annual reserves, thus avoiding a levy raised on each resident. During these past years the Board has, so far, managed to keep our budgets in line with annual inflation figures.*

AV: Were you able to delegate much of your consuming chores ?

GN: *The nature of most of the undertakings require a certain expertise which very few residents had. Thus delegation was indeed a problem.*

AV: Any regrets?

GN: *With the wisdom of hindsight, perhaps I have been too close to everyone of the Albany when I should have passed more of the minor problems to the Managing Agent.*

A Winter's Dream

by Susie Banks

LIVING on the Island at Henley during the war and daily rowing across the river to post letters and shop, a deep and abiding love of the Thames was born. Later as our family grew up and we were living on Coombe Hill we decided to buy a boat to sail up and down at our leisure.

Starting with a 25ft. 4 berth Cabin Cruiser was a great success and we even holidayed up river that year. Several near disasters were lived through, such as the engine packing up on the edge of a weir with us clinging on to poles for safety; then running aground outside Hampton Court lock which ended with someone jumping in the water to free us. On another occasion the boat caught fire by Walton Bridge due to faulty wiring. That was an awful scare attempting to get to the shore and jump off whilst still holding the ropes to secure the craft.

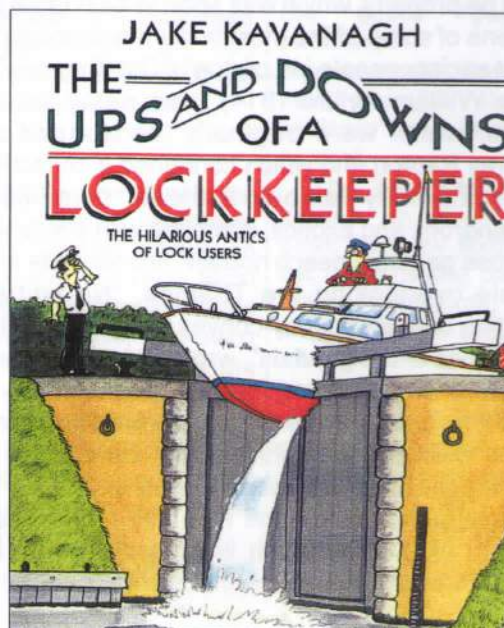
Strangely enough, this cruiser was followed by six others, larger each time, ending up with the "Show Boat" in the Pool at Earls Court. Boat Show. (For inexperienced sailors, it is so easy to buy at the boat show, which of course is viewing boats on dry land. However, delivery is on the river!). My advice to anyone even thinking of buying is "BEWARE", it is a hole in the water into which you pore your money. I call it a "Winter's Dream", you spend all winter dreaming of the wonderful trips you will make next summer.

A joyous dream indeed, but sadly when it comes and you have faced the enormous cost of mooring, the leaks and motor faults, they are nothing compared to the wet, windy, cold days making it impossible to take the boat out. Then the social functions, weddings and parties turn up on the few fine weekends you might have enjoyed.

Finally, you get all the gear in the car and find your beautiful cruiser is so thick with dirt and dust you have to set to it with buckets of river water and clean from top to bottom before you take it for a run to charge the battery, taking a nice little trip to

the next lock before gingerly parking it back between two other craft like parking a car without steering or brakes - great ingenuity needed here.

So would-be boat owners, enjoy your flat and beautiful view and look out wondering what awful problems all those super Cruisers are experiencing, petrol shortage, damp, dirt, leaks, engine faults, searching for somewhere one is permitted to empty the loo, to fill up with fresh water, to buy food, so dream on I say, dream on, and watch how often all those parked boats venture out on the river.



Comings and Goings at the Albany

We are happy to welcome new residents, some of whom have been with us a year or two, but there was no magazine then to say 'hello'.

AT Brunswick Court, Mr. D L Hammon, No. 27, has currently let his flat; and Dr & Mrs Mario Credo have moved from Ulster Court to Penthouse No. 30.

Ulster Court's new residents are already fairly well known to many of us. They are Mr & Mrs Michael Lewis (no relations to the editor) at No. 1; Miss Ann Rowe at No. 4; Mrs. M L Ingram at No. 11 and Miss Moyra Lyle at No. 13.



And of course there is the new baby girl, Amy, shown here at three days old, now she is nearly four months and a real joy to elder sister Louise.

In York Court we must mention

the twin boy and girl Drusilla and Donnachaidh, born to Anne-Luc and Duncan Cunynghame-Robertson, who live at No. 8. New residents here are Mrs M V Adamson at No. 14; Mrs. M G Gibbens at No. 17; Mr & Mrs D H MacArthur at No. 25; and Mr & Mrs J Vogel at No. 26. Halcyon Services Ltd are at No. 29 although the flat is not yet occupied.

We are sorry to learn that Mrs. Joe Lyons is moving away in November, but welcome back previous residents Mr. & Mrs. Paul Rich who will be moving in there.

Deaths: We are sad to record the deaths of Mr. Ken Campbell of 30 York Court on 16 September, and of Mrs. Margaret Waight of 26 Brunswick Court on 14 October 1998.

Social events: In the few months since our previous "Voices" there have been three "happenings" in the Albany. On one of the few sunny Saturdays, we held a jolly BBQ with Gary and Suzanne Gilmour (21 Brunswick) making sure we were all well fed and enjoying ourselves.

On the same evening, the barbecuers rushed to the waterside at the beautiful Mississippi paddle steamer "Southern Belle" which had been hired by Yvonne and George Robertson (12 Ulster) to entertain their family and some 40 guests, many from Europe, on the occasion of their 55th wedding anniversary and 80th birthdays. It sailed passed us on its way to Richmond, where on board a grand dinner was held before its return in the dark to Kingston via Hampton Court.

Many residents also watched the departure on October 3rd from outside Ulster Court for the wedding of Andrea, in her lovely wedding dress. She is the youngest daughter of Michael and Valerie Lewis. The family included her older brother and sister, who all drove to Chessington where Andrea was married to Stephen Christmas at St. Mary's Church there. Valerie's creamy soft yellow suit was also much admired.



The Sub-Committees

The Gardens Sub-Committee by Lesley Sirrell



THE Gardens Sub-Committee is the largest of the Board sub-committees. Until recently Frank Armstrong acted as chairman, but this post has recently been taken over by Lesley Sirrell and the committee is now made up of Frank Armstrong, Joe Davies, Valerie and Michael Lewis, Pam Smith and Hugo Steinnes.

Most of the work is done by our gardeners, Eugene and Lee, who are on site for one day during the summer and half a day during the winter, so their time is precious. In order to make the most of this, can we ask residents to contact a member of the Gardens committee with complaints or suggestions rather than the gardeners themselves. These can be resolved immediately or considered by the committee at their next meeting and incorporated into the gardeners' timetable.

The committee meets every two months to consider all garden issues. The meeting is usually preceded by a tour of the gardens and a task list is drawn up for the gardeners' attention. In addition, it considers budgets, suggestions for planting, and any problems which the gardeners may have identified. The Albany

gardens have been well maintained for many years on a comparatively small budget which has paid only for upkeep rather than development, and residents may now feel that it is time for a little more money to be spent on enhancing and improving one of our main assets. Rosebeds need replacing, shrubberies have gaps, and the sunken garden deserves a facelift for the millenium, and of course the creeper needs annual trimming.

The Gardens committee is always happy to receive suggestions for garden improvements from residents, and would particularly invite ideas for improving the sunken garden during the coming year. Please remember, however, that we have to work to a budget, so bedding rather than building schemes are more in order. Additional help is always needed in a garden, so assistance of any size from residents willing to adopt a rosebed for deadheading or a few pots for watering during the summer, to joining the committee would be warmly welcomed.



The Finance Sub-Committee by Peter Clarke

The Finance Sub-Committee has existed in one form or the other since the birth of

The Albany. Before 1988, its main functions were to check the landlord's accounts and to dampen his enthusiasm for indulging in extravagant expenditure. It now advises the Board on all financial matters and recommends the level of service charges.

Before the commencement of each accounting year, the Committee assesses the foreseeable outgo over the next few years, adding a margin to cover unexpected items. This total estimated cost, spread over the relevant period, determines the annual service charge. This method of assessment ensures that even substantial anticipated changes in long-term expenditure have only a gradual impact on the service charge.

Although day-to-day management costs are relatively stable, building works and maintenance (which account for about two fifths of our total outgo) can vary substantially from year to year. The Committee determines what reserve fund is necessary not only to iron out these fluctuations but also to avoid, if possible, the imposition of levies to finance major projects.

The Committee endeavours to contain increases in the service charge broadly in line with inflation. Despite the ever-increasing cost of maintaining ageing buildings, the service charge has in fact fallen (in real terms) in each of the last five years.

The present members of the Finance Sub-Committee are George Newman (Chairman), Gary Gilmour and Peter Clarke.



The Pool Sub-Committee by Hugo Steinnes

Weather permitting, the swimming season starts in May and lasts until the end of September, sometimes even into the first part of October. The pool is normally managed by the Janitor, but members of this committee share his tasks on his days off and his holidays. That is why we need extra help.

Every morning and evening in the summer, the chemical levels must be checked and adjusted to ensure the pool water is clean and safe. In order to understand how the pool works, committee members must learn to operate the system, including filter, pump, boiler and fountain.

At least twice a week, an underwater robot called "the dolphin", is used to remove sand particles, leaves and algae etc. from the bottom and sides of the pool. This duty is usually undertaken by the Janitor.

The pool is covered every night, partly to conserve heat, partly to keep the pool free of debris and also to prevent uninvited late night visitors from taking a dip.

The present Sub-Committee members are Alan Spong (Chairman), Maureen Abel and Hugo Steinnes, but this committee is badly undermanned and residents who would like to join should contact any of the above members. In particular, those who enjoy the pool a lot, and are young or strong enough to help, ought to pull their weight in this matter.



Letters to the Editor

Although everyone told us that no one gets more than 1% back from any forms to be filled out, we received dozens of these forms back within a few days, and they still arrived months later. Most of these merely ticked the third question "I like this mixture of articles" etc. and signed their name and address. Of these many forms we have selected a few of those who included comments:

"I think that hedges between the courts would ruin the garden. A hedge where the roses are might grow too tall and obscure our view of the river from the ground floor."

Mrs. M. Brooking, (4 York)

"In my opinion, this is an excellent Newsletter as it offers an opportunity for views to be exchanged in a fair manner as opposed to anonymous letters which I personally abhor."

Miss Ann Rowe
(4 Ulster)

"Congratulations for the production of the latest Newsletter. For me, the articles were just right. I think it is a means of communicating with each other – getting to know our neighbours; and I am sure welcomed by new residents."

Mrs. Pam Smith (23 York)

"Following on from Albany 2000 – we obviously cannot compete with new luxury flats built today, but each of us copes with our own flat. What I personally feel we should make sure is that both outside and inside the buildings should be maintained to the highest standards, even if necessary painting before the terms laid down."

Mrs. Diana Parker (7 Ulster)

"I would like to see proposals for developing committee structure in Peter Clarke's article, and I would suggest the editorial team include phone numbers."

Mrs. Helen Sandford
(22 Brunswick)

"The Newsletter has always been fun to receive and I do not care if any of the articles are not approved of. I have always enjoyed reading them and thank people for contributing."

Mr. Alan Spong (14 Ulster)

"Congratulations on the new Albany Voices. Very professional, but I disapprove of articles dealing with personal and family affairs. I should like more about the committees' activities and I am very interested in article 2000 and "Anticipating the Future".

Miss Dolly Lee (10 York)

"I think the idea of replacing the Residents' Newsletter which we had initially, an excellent one. Most residents will be interested in local events, and being kept up-to-date with the names of new residents and those leaving. Perhaps a few amusing little anecdotes relating to the residents, but not losing the main theme of a "Newsletter".

Mrs. Dottie Campbell
(30 York)

"It was so reassuring to see that the creeper was trimmed back this winter to keep it away from the windows. But already on my Ulster Court east wall, it is creeping so quickly that the new shoots will reach all our windows this summer.

I am so disappointed, please can they come back to put it right?"

Mrs. Esmé Layton
(6 Ulster)

"I was very interested in your article about wild life. I loved the quote "gaggles, paddlings and murmurations". There are many more like "plump of wildfowl" and "siege of herons".

The yew tree in our garden, on which I look down from my sixth floor flat, is the nesting place for robins, blackbirds, water wagtails and a wren. The blackbirds, with their beautiful song, have given us all great joy. Congratulations on the Albany Voices. May it prosper."

Mrs. Mary Palmer
(27 York)

Please keep on sending your comments – Ed.