NEWS LETTER

THE ALBANY - SUMMER 1995

From the Editor

Hugo Steinnes

Not since people started to move in to The Albany in the early 60s have we seen so many flats change ownership. This newsletter has been written especially with our new neighbours in mind, and we hope you will all enjoy living here. Furthermore, we happen to be a very international and well travelled collection of people, representing some 10 different countries.

You will most certainly already have learnt that there are two items which are very important to Albany residents; security and noise. To fully understand and appreciate why this is so, the following will hopefully explain:

By virtue of the age of the property it is appreciated that newcomers and possibly existing residents, will need to carry out certain improvements in their flats. Such as updating bathrooms and kitchens, installing new windows, central heating etc. Over the past year residents have been subjected to very long periods of noise from electric drills and hammers and the general untidiness of workmen in the lifts and on the landings.

The majority of residents are elderly and some none too well so continuing noise is most distressing to them. At the request of several residents the directors have given thought to setting out in greater detail to that shown in the Handbook, some regulations regarding such works, in particular a time scale for completion to be agreed with the company. A copy is attached which it is suggested should be inserted in the Handbook next to page 9.

In this issue of our newsletter, the Chairman deals with an issue which has been on the Albany agenda for about a year - the extension of our leases. Helen Sandford's piece about Neighbourhood Watch points out how to save money on your insurance; Alan Spong talks about one of our great assets, the Swimming Pool, and Frank Armstrong gives an historic overview of our lovely garden. Finally, Brenda Lewis has found out who the newcomers are, and she also remembers those who have passed away in recent months. And to give you newcomers the scoop on one of the most hotly debated Albany issues - the creeper - well, Brenda's "Creeping in the Night" story should fill you in.

From the Chairman

George Newman

The Lease Extension

As you know my last letter to you all in March stated that the Inland Revenue now wished to involve the legal eagles of their Solicitors Department in something, which to us, seemed a comparatively simple matter of giving a decision as to whether or not there was a tax implication should we decide to extend our lease by a period of years.

Government Departments - as is their wont, tend to make a great meal out of such matters and they have now requested me, via our own solicitors, to provide them with a copy of every letter, report etc. regarding our purchase of the freehold which I circulated to each lessee during 1986/87 (surprisingly this amounted to some 25 pages).

Our solicitor, Mr. Tim Stranack, sent these to the Revenue at the end of May together with a very long letter, couched in complicated legal terms which could not possibly be reproduced in this Newsletter, but stating categorically that in his opinion there should be no tax payable for an extension of leases at The Albany.

Now we await the Revenue's reply. I have no doubt that you all think this is a very longwinded process, but on the other hand I would remind you that there is no desperate hurry for a decision, for we still have 86 years to the expiry of our present lease. But it would be nice to know that we have an official decision as regards tax once and for all.

Major Works

Each summer, as we begin to enjoy our garden and the swimming pool, we seem to have the good old British workmen descend upon us in force to do something or other in order to maintain the high standard of maintenance of our premises at the Albany. Last year it was to carry out repairs to the cracks in the brickwork at the corners of the three courts. When this was completed it looked a very professional and workman like job.

The work was recently approved by the consulting engineers when they carried out their half yearly appraisal. They also reported, when examining the other external elevations that no further remedial work is required at this stage. At our request they further confirmed that they found nothing to suggest that the recent demolition work at the nearby Power Station site following the use of explosives had affected our buildings.

This year, we have a gang of asphalters climbing over York Court roof to remove the existing asphalt covering and insulation board and renew the whole. This is the last of the three Courts to be re-roofed according to our previously planned maintenance schedule, having completed Brunswick in 1990 and Ulster in 1993. As you will have seen from the notice on the boards this is an expensive operation but a very necessary one. A motorised hoist will have to be erected on the south elevation for materials to be lifted and removed, whilst visitors car park area between Ulster and York will need to be given over exclusively for the contractors use. There will of course be a certain amount of noise and inconvenience which the workmen will be asked to keep to a minimum where possible.

Neighbourhood Watch

By Mrs. Helen Sandford

As many residents are already aware, The Albany is within a Neighbourhood Watch area. By registering as a member, residents can benefit in many ways, including reduced contents insurance premium, the availability of property marking equipment and free advice on all forms of security.

However, when Insurance Companies are asked for premium discounts due to membership of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme, they do carry out checks as to whether people are registered or not. Most residents are already registered but, in view of the recent "turn-over" of occupants in all three blocks, there may be newcomers who would wish to contact the representative for their particular block, in order to complete the necessary formalities. Newcomers who are renting can also take advantage of the scheme.

In return, members are asked to keep their eyes and ears open, in and around the Albany buildings and grounds. One of the simplest security precautions, frequently overlooked, is to keep the entry doors to the three blocks shut. This is particularly difficult when workmen are in and out but they should be asked to close the doors (and re-bolt if necessary) once finished loading/unloading, rather than leaving everything open and with no-one in attendance.

Another simple precaution is not to let strangers into the buildings, either when arriving at the door at the same time as yourself or when receiving requests for entry through the entryphone. Anyone perceived to be experiencing problems gaining entry should be referred to the Janitor.

Your Neighbourhood Watch representatives are:

· Mrs. H. Sandford, 22 Brunswick Court, Tel: 546 2643

· Mr. P. Temple, 16 Ulster Court, Tel: 549 4715

· Mr. F. Pountney, 25 York Court, Tel: 549 9155

The Swimming Pool

An update by Alan Spong

Last year we experienced a fair amount of wet weather in early May which prevented the pool being given the usual two coats of paint until the week-end of 27/28th May. A few days then elapsed to allow for (1) the paint to dry out properly, (2) fill up with water and (3) heat the water up to proper temperature.

In the meantime it was found during maintenance of the sixteen year old heater that it was defective to a degree that it was too costly to repair with any guarantee of future satisfactory service, so a new high performance heater of American make (recommended by the Company with which we have had dealings for many years) was installed.

The new heater has proved to be excellent in operation, the water kept at a higher temperature, for a lower cost, over a longer period. In fact, an absolute boon to all of us who have regularly used the pool in the past and for quite a few who decided for the first time to have a swim, or even just a dip

Never before have so many residents been seen using the pool - one of the Albany's best assets - and we were also fortunate in having some decent weather from late June until early October, at which time we experienced an "Indian Summer". For example, on the 10th October it is recorded that the air temperature reached 70 degrees Fahrenheit with sunshine throughout the day; and a rather good season was brought to a close on the week-end of 15/16th October. To my knowledge, this is the longest time for the pool to be open.

There was every intention to have the pool open at the beginning of May this year, but after emptying it on the 6th May it was found that the existing paint was in a very bad condition (no explanation could be found for this) and therefore necessary for it to be completely removed. It had to be brushed down to the original surface, which obviously should not be carried out if it rained. And - of course it rained, so the job, dirty and dusty, but valiantly carried out by Peter Reeves, was not finished until the 19th May.

Meanwhile discussions took place about what type of paint should next be used, because obviously the previous type was not as suitable as first thought. It was decided to try a Johnstones protective coating consisting of a first coat of chlorinated rubber, pigmented with micaceous iron oxide, and this was done on Saturday 20th May. A second coat followed the next day, and with fairly good weather continuing the first top coat of Fjord Blue was painted on Monday with the final coat the following day, Tuesday the 23rd.

This new type of covering requires seven days to dry out properly before filling the pool , and so as I write this on Bank Holiday Monday, I am very disappointed to tell you that the official opening will not be until Friday 2nd. June at the earliest.

Somewhat fortunately the weather has not been very kind to us these last few days but right now we have a fairly sunny though cloudy day and it would have been grand to have had the pool fully functional by now. It is odd that this should be almost exactly the same timing as last year, but as has often been said: "Man proposes but God disposes".

Take care when entering and leaving the pool as the new paint appears to be more slippery then the water based paint used in previous years.

The Albany Gardens

A historic overview by Frank Armstrong

The year 1795, George III was King, there were no railways or sanitation's when John Nash, the famous Regency architect was commissioned to build a villa on the Thames at Kingston. Humphrey Repton, possibly the first "landscape gardener", and at that time a partner of Nash, designed the garden for the house. I have been lucky to obtain a copy of Repton's "Red Book" for Point Pleasant, the first of many names of the site now called The Albany.

Repton's "Red Book" (the original is in Virginia, USA) records his first visit on December 9th, 1795 (200 years ago this year) and confirms that The Albany is on the site of this original garden.

Half a century later, the name changed to "Bank Grove", the gardens appear internationally famous and are recorded in detail in "The Beauties of Surrey" published in 1849.

25 years later, we find Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise, visiting our gardens after her marriage to the Marquis of Lorne, who was, I believe, a son of the duke of Argyll, living not far away at Whitton Park. Cedars were planted at Whitton Park as far back as 1725 and some, with other trees, were later moved to Kew Gardens. It seems probable that our cedars also came from this source.

The 1897 map shows that Albany Park Road had split the estate which had been carved up for development. Now known as the Albany Club, the house is still shown but was later destroyed by fire.

Wimpeys developed the present "Albany" in early 1960s and later several Association Garden Committees planned successive improvements. I have few records of early names, but Claire Poupart, Basil Gurney and Frances Roberts with others appear to have been very active. It could be helpful if one of our older residents could write more details of these early days.

The new Thames Landscape Strategy launched last year provides exciting plans to enhance the River Thames from Kew to Hampton Court and The Albany gardens are somewhere in the middle. Although we are not necessarily involved your present committee are desirous to further improve our gardens which, apart from being a source of pleasure to residents, add considerably to the value of our property.

To all members of the Garden Sub-Committee, and those who look after the foyers and help by donations or in other ways, my sincere thanks for your kind co-operation.

Our Newcomers and Sad Losses

By Brenda Lewis

In Brunswick Court there are four new residents, two of whom, at the time of writing, have not yet moved in. They are Mrs F.A.C. Piazza at no. 7, and Mr & Mrs Cumming at the Penthouse No. 29. Many of us knew the late Charles Bowra, and it is his son and daughter-in-law, Dr & Mrs G.T. Bowra, who are living in his former home at No. 2. In No. 5 (formerly let to Nevil Davidson, who has moved to No. 8) we welcome Mr H.J. Davies.

In Ulster Court we also have four new residents. George & Yvonne Robertson have moved into No. 12 and at No. 17 we welcome JO (after his initials) and Betty Barnard, who travel to and from their holiday home, but expect to spend most of the summer here. At the moment, since the sad recent death of Norman Pearson (No. 11) it is expected that his son Iain and daughter-in-law Valerie are considering letting. We also remember Mrs Muriel Reed who was marvellously plucky during her long illness and we were very sad to learn of her death. Mrs. Sylvie Cole now lives at No. 27 and the owner, Mrs E.Y.S. Shipman lives in Hong Kong. We must give a special welcome to the Albany's youngest new arrival, baby Louise, whose parents Linda & Mark Swanwick will shortly move in to the Penthouse No. 29 from their former flat at No. 9 Brunswick.

York Court has not had any new residents, but we wish to record our sorrow at the recent death of Bill Ruff from No. 18.

To all newcomers: One of the attractive features of living at The Albany is its general friendliness. This may be partly due to the fact that a third of our residents have been here for more than 20 years; but it is also due to our delightful impromptu summer garden parties and of course the pool, where neighbours meet and enjoy a convivial atmosphere in the sunshine. Now we gladly welcome all our new residents and hope they will enjoy living here too.

A Bone of Contention, or

(Creeping in the Night)?....by Brenda Lewis

Yes, it's the Virginia Creeper. Love it or loathe it, it's here to stay, having been planted when the buildings were first occupied, with the assurance that this type did no damage to the walls. That, incidentally, is one of the many reasons, or that it causes damp, mentioned by those who object to it. Others fear it brings insects into their homes and harbours wasps; it is difficult to keep out of the windows and some even find it claustrophobic.

Those who love it are thrilled by its spectacular beauty, hiding great stretches of brick walls, watching the first pale shoots in early spring change colour as the leaves grow into a rich green and finally, in the autumn, to a brilliant scarlet. So, for six months the creeper makes the rather unattractive buildings blend in perfectly with the wonderful Albany garden.

The Albany Handbook

(This is well worth re-reading from time to time)

Peter Clarke has kindly enclosed a number of amendments for you to make in this book. Plus the additional schedule of regulations in respect of works in the flats to be inserted next to page 9 (pls. see separate story on page 1 of this Newsletter).

Prompt Payment of Service Charges

Regrettably, it is found necessary to introduce a somewhat sombre note into this Newsletter. There are some residents who, despite regular reminders are several months behind in the payment of the Service Charges. On occasion it has been necessary to employ a solicitor to threaten legal proceedings if the amount remains unpaid. All very unpleasant.

Payments become due half yearly, on the 1st April and 1st October for expenditure incurred in the previous six months. Accounts are sent out about a month prior to the due date so everyone has plenty of notice. Would the offenders in future please ensure their accounts are paid on the due dates.