

THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT November 1980



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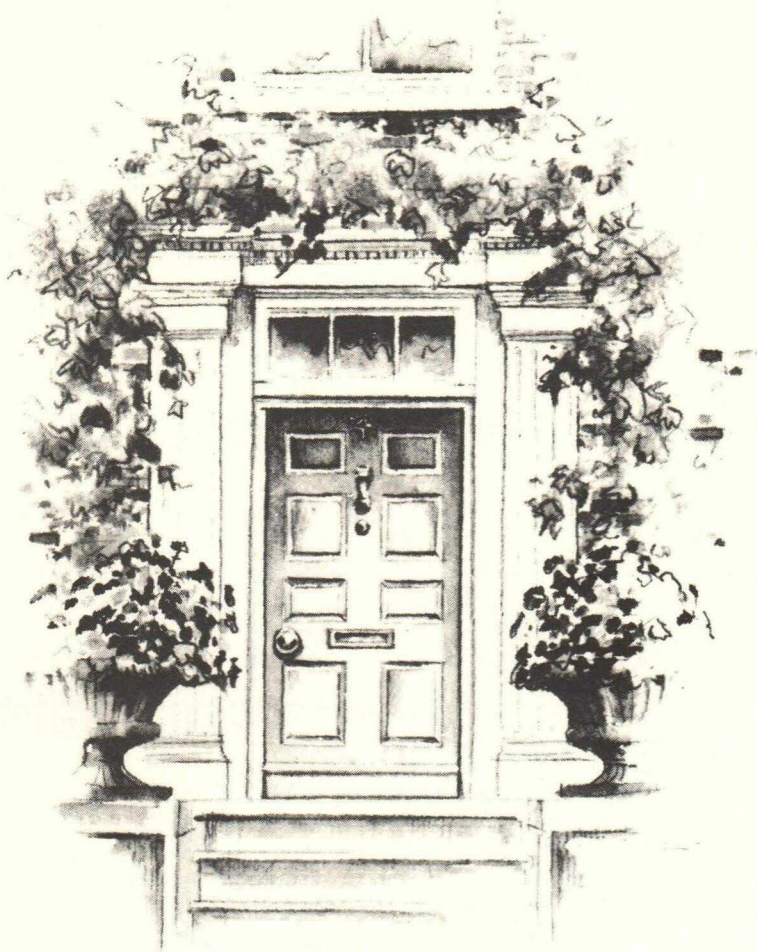
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CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW

Dear Member,

The last twelve months have been a busy time for the Knightsbridge Association. As I forecast in last year's review, there has been a resurgence in development activity creating a great deal of work for environmentalists. Although the economic climate is hardly encouraging, there seems to be a constant pressure on this neighbourhood and the surrounding areas. Other amenity problems such as traffic and parking, garbage and litter, and law and order have occupied the Association during the year.

All these matters have been dealt with by specialist Committees, and I am very grateful to the Chairmen of these Committees and their public spirited members who give up so much of their time to serve the interests of Knights-

bridge and to help to protect and enhance its amenities and architecture for the benefit of its residents and traders.

The affairs of the Association are governed by the Main Committee, whilst the Area Chairmen, Lady Gillett, Frances Mackay, Harry Aubrey, Frances Rice, Sarah Wills and Dr Stanley Steel monitor planning problems in their neighbourhoods. After the retirement of Ray Salter as Chairman of the Membership Committee, this important part of the Association's activities has been looked after entirely by the Membership Secretary Trish Mules.

The Finances are presided over by our Treasurer, Valerie de Fé, and the onerous task of Honorary Secretary is expertly discharged by Carol Seymour-Newton.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The most important work undertaken by the Association is the protection of the environment. This difficult task is performed by the Environment Committee which, since the departure of Geoffrey Challen to work overseas, has been headed by John Wallis, and is composed of a dedicated and hard working body of members.

During the year there have, as usual, been a large number of planning applications referred to the Association by the Local Authorities for our comments and although many of these were of a routine nature, they all had to be investigated and examined in detail. There were also several of a more substantial nature which required a considerable amount of attention and subsequent action. There were, in addition, two public

enquiries which had to be attended and which required professional assistance and representation.

A detailed list of recent planning applications dealt with by the Environment Committee, and showing the Council's subsequent decisions has been circulated to members as an appendix to this report.

Early in the year we conducted correspondence with Westminster City Council on the unauthorised office use of 1a Ennismore Garden Mews. Despite our protests we were unable to get the Council to agree that this building was, in fact, being used as an office. After the assassination of the titular owner outside the building it was established that the Association was right, and that the occupier had, in fact, lived in Victoria Road whilst using the house as an office. It was unfortunate that our views should be vindicated in this tragic way, but we are now assured that the dwelling will return to domestic use.

The Environment Committee were more immediately successful in preventing 48 Ennismore Gardens being used to house the offices of the Iranian Military Attaché. A petition asking that this use be denied, and that the temporary office permission that had originally been granted by the Council now be rescinded, was accepted.

Of some concern is the fact that the Saudi Arabian Embassy Guard is occupying offices at 45 Princes Gate without, it seems, planning permission. This is causing problems to

The Knightsbridge Association
21 Cheval Place, London, S.W.7.

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Neville Labovitch MBE

Hon. Secretary

Carol Seymour Newton

Hon. Treasurer

Valerie de Fé

Chairman of Environment Committee

John Wallis

*The Committee is most grateful to
Mr P L Gregor Macgregor of Albert Hall
Mansions, for allowing some of his
fine drawings to be used to illustrate this
Report.*

residents of Montrose Court who find their private road blocked with embassy cars.

A considerable amount of aggravation was caused to residents of Rutland Gate by enormous queues outside the French Consulate situated in that beautiful Square. This was apparently due to a change in the procedure for granting visas, and the waiting applicants unfortunately used the pavements and gardens for depositing litter, and for other even less salubrious purposes. After representation from the Environment Committee, dustbins were placed outside the Consulate and the waiting public were allowed to use the Consular lavatories. This greatly improved the position although much disturbance was suffered by the neighbourhood from the cars and early morning arrivals.

Representations have also been made about the state of the Libyan occupied building at 61/62 Ennismore Gardens which continues to exhibit posters in the windows.

A very happy outcome to our suggestions to the Gambian Embassy at 60 Ennismore Gardens that they might paint their building, was the friendly response which we received and the subsequent redecoration which took place, and which now enhances that part of the square.

Of great concern to the Association is the future of the Iranian Embassy building at 16 Princes Gate. This beautiful building was gutted during the siege. Although Westminster City Council has taken steps to shore up the building, there is always the danger of the structure collapsing, and it is to be hoped that the facade can be restored at an early date.

Members of the Environment Committee viewed plans and attended several site meetings to examine proposals put forward to re-develop 106/110 Brompton Road, which backs on to Montpelier Mews. Their conclusions, reported to Westminster City Council, were that the development would be architecturally unsuitable to the Brompton Road frontage, and seriously affect activities in Montpelier Mews. This objection was made with the support of businesses in Brompton Road and residents and firms in the Mews, and it is pleasing to report that the application was rejected by the Council.

There is an application still outstanding to build two houses at 17/18 Trevor Street where there are at present two garages. Apart from the fact that this plan would take ground from the Walton Day Nursery, this building of residences where none had previously stood raises an important question of principle. This is an area which is already

over-developed and cannot afford to lose the amenity of garaging for two cars. We have made our views known to the Planning Committee at Westminster City Council which has stated that it will not allow two houses on this site.

The Environment Committee supported the successful objections of local residents to a proposal for a lodge in Upper Rutland Gardens, and have been discussing several alternative plans for redevelopment in Relton Mews. They are concerned here not only for the architectural merit of buildings but that houses in Montpelier Place, which back on to the Mews, should not suffer any invasion of privacy.

Much of this work requires technical expertise, and the Committee were very sorry to lose the services of Geoffrey Challen RIBA, but I am very pleased to report that it will be considerably strengthened in the future by the addition of two other architects. Mr. Jeremy Mackay-Lewis of Montpelier Square who was previously a very active member has agreed to rejoin the Committee, and Mr A M J Wright of Montrose Court has also agreed to lend his expertise to its deliberations.

The Iranian Embassy, 16 Princes Gate, as it is today.



DIPLOMATIC MOVES & PROTESTS

There was a time when the proximity of an Embassy might perhaps have been thought to be prestigious to an area, but today as recent events have shown, they may be a positive liability to a neighbourhood. In recent years it has become a common political gesture for dissidents or opponents of a regime to attack or damage this symbol of a nation state. The number of independent countries is increasing and in each case it seems that their requirements include diplomatic representation at the Court of St. James, which seems invariably to include an embassy in Knightsbridge, Belgravia or Kensington. A further and more recent development is the number of quasi-diplomatic buildings which are ancillary to the main Embassies, Consulates and Chancelleries and these are encroaching increasingly on residential neighbourhoods. Of course, it is necessary to make provision for these estab-

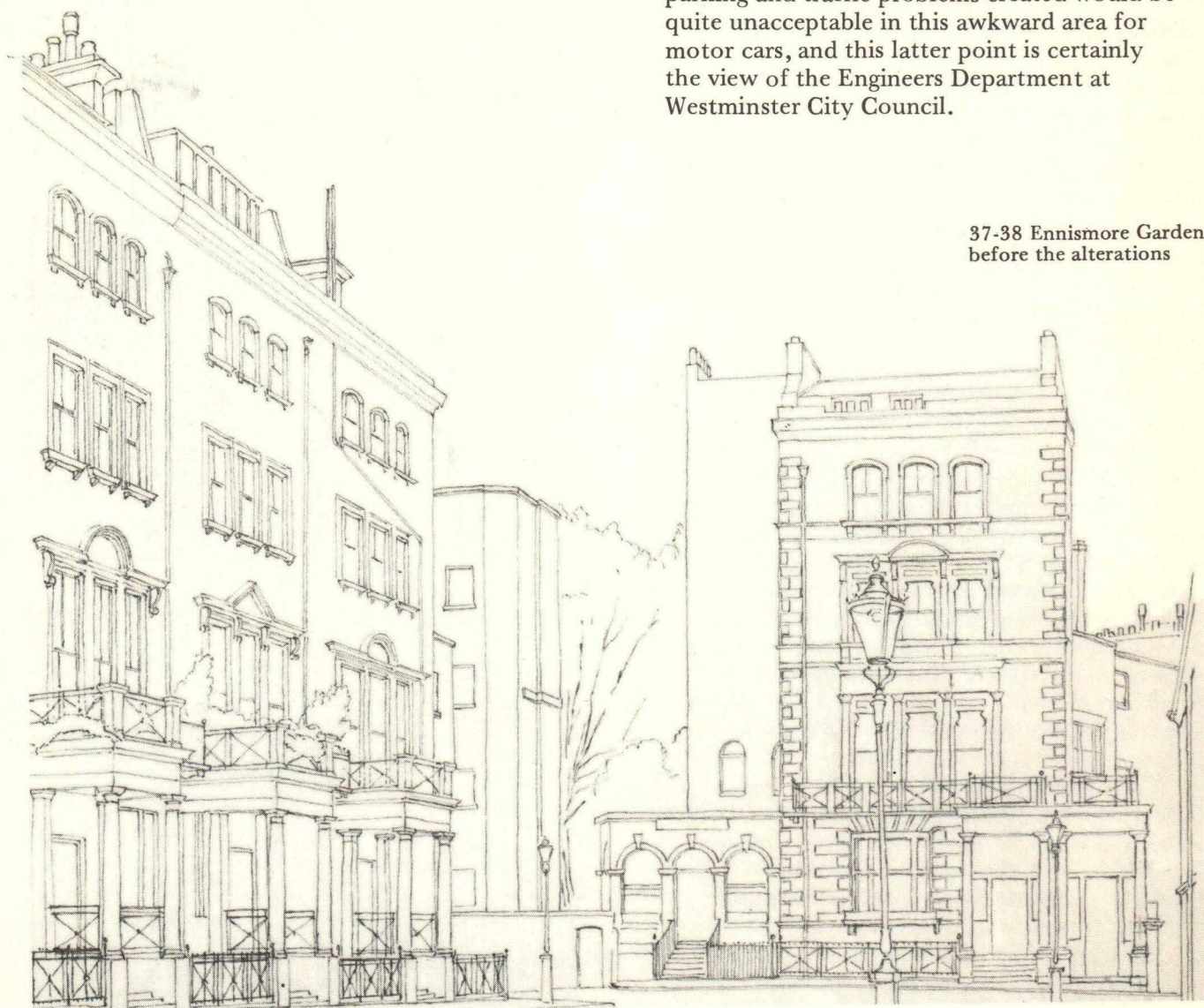
lishments, but they must be sited in appropriate places, and it is questionable whether diplomatic immunity for such matters as traffic offences should be granted even to minor officials and non-diplomatic members of foreign missions.

The most recent planning problem has come with the application to create a residence for "entertaining foreign notables" made on behalf of the Malaysian Government with regard to 37/38 Ennismore Gardens and 31A Brompton Square.

Early this year the Environment Committee gave its approval to a plan to convert this building into six flats, but after building had commenced it was discovered that a new application was to be made to change the use.

The Association found the neighbourhood unanimous in its concern at the new projected use, and the plans show the extensive activities which the building will contain, whilst the car parking and traffic problems created would be quite unacceptable in this awkward area for motor cars, and this latter point is certainly the view of the Engineers Department at Westminster City Council.

37-38 Ennismore Gardens
before the alterations



The building lies in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and it was to this body that our objection was directed, and a petition to the Mayor presented on behalf of the neighbourhood by Councillor Edward Thom of the Brompton Ward, whilst several hundred letters of protest were written by local residents. This application breached the Kensington and Chelsea District plan, and would certainly have been rejected if it had not been called in for decision by the Minister for the Environment, who is now considering the matter.

Such was the pressure by the local community, including residents of Brompton Square, an historic area so far untouched by diplomatic incursions, that the Association decided to hold a public meeting in early October.

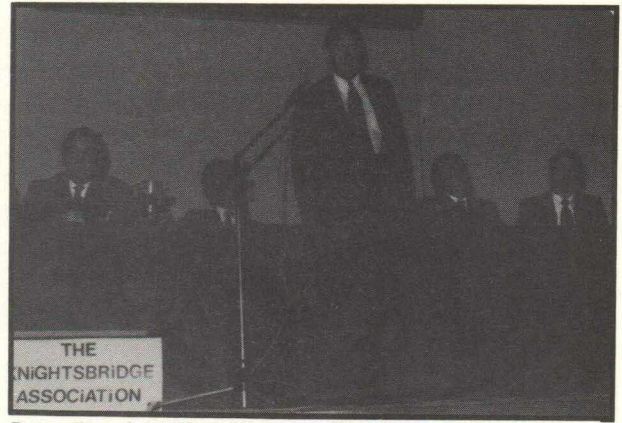
The meeting, held at the Holy Trinity Church Hall, was attended by a large crowd of members. Taking part in the proceedings were the Member of Parliament for Westminster, Mr. Peter Brooke, the leader of Kensington and Chelsea Council, Mr Nicholas Freeman, and the Chairman of the Planning Committee, Mr John Cox, and the local Councillor, Mr Edward Thom, and for Westminster City Council, the Councillors for the Knightsbridge Ward, Mr. Anthony Prendergast and Mr Patrick Gleeson. Mr Nicholas Scott, MP, although anxious to attend was unable to be present.

The meeting passed a resolution expressing the general concern, which Mr Peter Brooke, MP, undertook to pass on to the Minister.

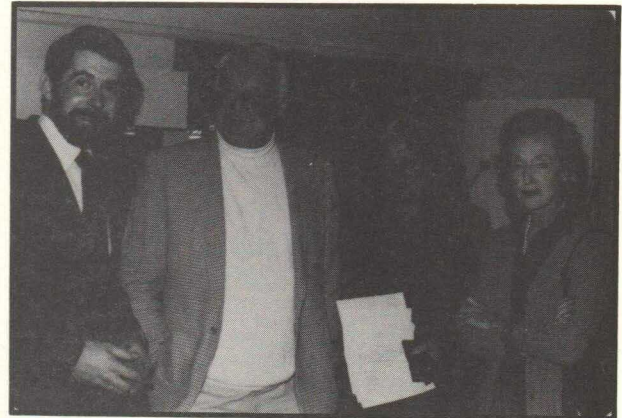
RATE REDUCTIONS

The site of the old LEB premises in Cheval Place, and which extends through to Brompton Road, has now been worked on by contractors for over a year. A great deal of nuisance has naturally been caused to residents and businesses in the area by the demolition and subsequent construction, and the Association has advised ratepayers on the need for, and method of, obtaining a rate reduction on their premises. The appeal is due to be heard on the 9th of January.

A similar appeal was made by residents of the West Side of Ennismore Gardens, and supported by the Association in relation to the loss of amenity caused by the building of the new Imperial College hall of residence in Princes Gardens. A temporary reduction of 7½% was granted to the applicants, and consideration is being given to a request for a permanent reduction.



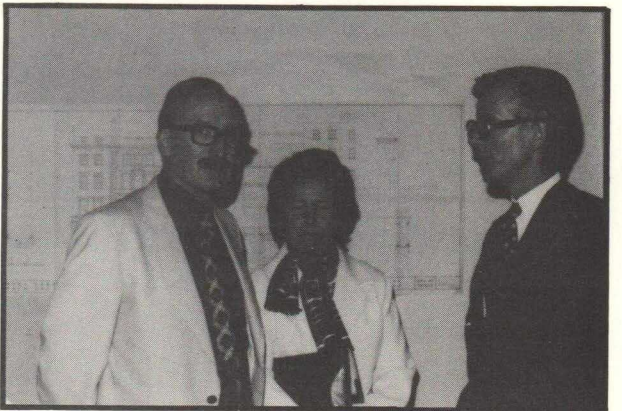
Peter Brooke M.P. addressing The Protest meeting. Left to right: Cllr. W. Freeman The Chairman, Mr Brooke, Cllr. C.A. Prendergast, Cllr. Gleeson.



Cllr. P. Gleeson, Charles Gray, Lady Gillett, Nina Wallis.



Sir Robin Gillett, Cllr. Anthony Prendergast, Lady Gillett.



Cllr. Thom & Mrs Thom, Cllr. Cox.

OVER; A view of Cheval Place by Mr Gregor McGregor.



KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA DISTRICT PLAN

The areas of Knightsbridge that lie within the borders of Kensington and Chelsea, or are affected by its Council's policy, are of increasing interest to the Association and the Committee hopes to extend and improve its contacts and relations with the Royal Borough. In this respect we are grateful for the assistance given to us on several matters by Mr Edward Thom, the Councillor for the Brompton Ward, and also for the presence of leading members of the Council at the recent protest meeting.

We have found it necessary to make several objections to the Kensington and Chelsea District Plan, and to sustain these at the recent public enquiry where the Association was represented professionally by Mr Leslie Robinson, MRTPI, a chartered town planner, and evidence was given on our behalf by Mr Mackay-Lewis.

We objected, as did nearly three hundred local residents, to the omission of 1-11 Montpelier Street, 132-188 Brompton Road

and 1-57 Cheval Place, from the Conservation Area and their being included in so called "Areas of Opportunity". Their inclusion in the Conservation Area would give the Council more control over the future of the buildings, whilst the present situation gives cause for very serious concern to the neighbourhood, as it does to many distinguished conservationists in general.

Besides commenting on mistaken applications of "Planning Gain" which can lead to over-density, our other main objection was to the absence of any initiative by the Council in designating suitable places for car parks in the Museum area. The pressure on the residential area from the overspill from visitors cars and coaches often make it quite impossible for residents to find anywhere at all to park their own cars. The Association has made suggestions that would alleviate this situation, such as a car park at the South Kensington Station site instead of the usual obligatory office block.

WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

The Association enjoyed its customary excellent relations with the Officers and Members of Westminster City Council which consults the Association on all matters of planning in the area.

The results of our objections to the Westminster City Plan which were outlined in last year's report, were announced and the

Association won some valuable concessions regarding the building of hostels in the area. We believe that these alterations have improved this mainly excellent Plan.

Early in the year, a deputation of members went to a meeting at City Hall and met with Westminster's Chairman of Planning, Mr Tom Whipham, and the Chief Planning

Part of Lady Phillip's appreciative audience at the AGM.



Officer, Mr Ian Lacey, to present a document outlining the Association's concern about the future of Knightsbridge with special regard to density. We had a sympathetic hearing, and it remains to be seen if this will be remembered when individual planning applications come before the Planning Committee.

In this, and in many other matters during

the year, we were greatly assisted by the Councillors for the Knightsbridge Ward, Mr Anthony Prendergast and Mr Patrick Gleeson. It was with great pleasure that I was able to send the Knightsbridge Association's congratulations to Mr Prendergast on his appointment as Her Majesty's High Sheriff for Greater London.

SOCIAL EVENTS

The Lord Lieutenant of Greater London, the Baroness Phillips, J.P., addressing the Annual meeting of the Knightsbridge Association.



Following the last Annual General Meeting, members were addressed by Baroness Phillips, JP, Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for Greater London. Lady Phillips delighted her audience with an interesting and witty speech, and transformed a normally formal occasion into a most enjoyable evening.

There have been no social events during 1980, and only one political gathering; the protest meeting referred to earlier in the report. In order to lighten the load of the Social Committee, the Annual Bazaar is not being held this year, although it is such a popular event that it is hoped to reinstate

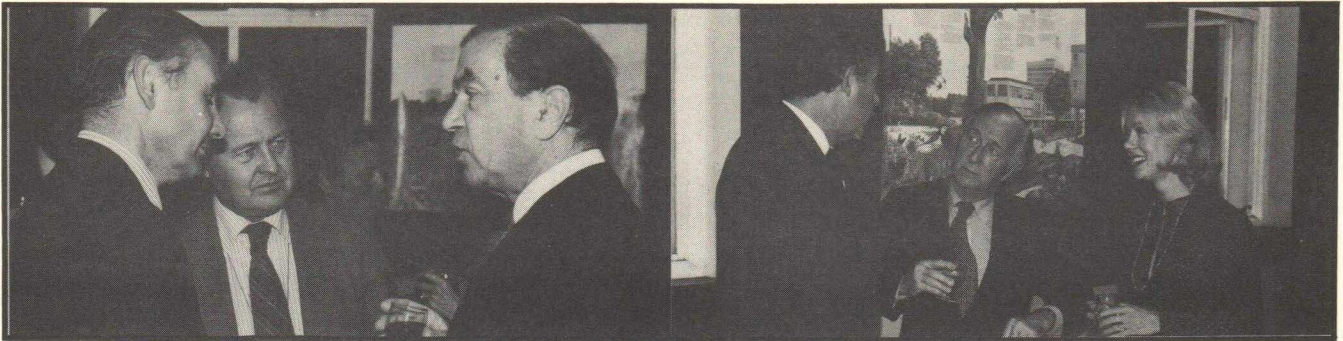
it in 1981. Last year's Christmas Party and Bazaar was a great success due mainly to the sterling work of Carol Seymour-Newton, Lady Grade, Nina Wallis, Sonia Labovitch, Frances Phillipps, Carol Mappin, Jean Bloom, Diana Jenkins, Angela Pitt, and all those others who gave up so much time to its preparations.

The Social Committee would welcome new members and suggestions for further events.

I am pleased to tell you that Sir David McNee, QPM, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has kindly agreed to address the Society on Thursday 4th June, 1981.



A question from the floor at the Annual meeting.



Members of the Association at the reception before the Annual meeting.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING

The problems of commuter traffic using the quiet squares of the neighbourhood as short cuts and the heavy vehicles passing through the Trevors is a continuing headache for which a solution must be found. The twin problem of parking is quite as serious and it has reached the stage where residents sometimes find it impossible to park their cars, and receive parking tickets even a few

yards from their homes, if they are lucky enough to find a yellow line free on which to park.

New measures, such as allowing residents to park on meter spaces will have to be found to alleviate this problem, and a stricter view taken of illegal parking by vehicles with diplomatic immunity would greatly help the situation.

LAW & ORDER

The peace and tranquility of this quiet and beautiful area of London has been savagely interrupted during the last twelve months by acts of violence unconnected with the affairs of the local population. Previously the only intrusion of the peace of the neighbourhood has been the assault from the ever increasing traffic flow, but this became a minor irritant when an assassination by shooting took place in broad daylight in Ennismore Gardens Mews. This was followed by a car bomb outside diplomatic premises in Queens Gate, and then the now famous siege of the Iranian Embassy at 16 Princes Gate.

In common with all other citizens, members of the Association have only the greatest admiration for the way the SAS and the police performed their difficult and dangerous task, and protected the neigh-

bourhood from any side effects of the conflict.

During the long vigil in the chilly nights, members of the Association were at least able to provide hot drinks to some of the police and fireman, and subsequently the Association circulated information concerning the SAS benevolent fund and the Police Commissioners Fund, and we understand that there was a tremendous response from people anxious to show their appreciation by contributing to these charities.

At midnight after the siege I sent a telegram on behalf of the Association to the Commissioner of Police, expressing the thanks of the neighbourhood for the consideration shown to residents by the officers of the Metropolitan Police during the siege, and I received an appreciative reply.

RUBBISH

Once again the brave members of the Rubbish and Litter Committee deserve the gratitude of the entire neighbourhood. They have fought an increasing battle against the modern scourge which threatens to engulf the city in a sea of garbage. If there is a marked improvement in the area it is due to their efforts.

Athena Crosse of Rutland Street, Angela Pitt of Ennismore Mews, Tek Howell of Trevor Place, Diana Jenkins of Rutland Gate and Carol Seymour-Newton and John Wallis of Ennismore Gardens have all been active throughout the year. They have liaised with

the Cleansing Departments of Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea and have written and spoken to local offenders and pointed out the correct times for rubbish collection so that the pavements can remain empty and clean at other times.

The Rubbish Committee is grateful for the help of Mr Kalman of Kalman Galleries in drawing attention to the condition of the walkway from Brompton Road to Montpelier Street, and the state of the tree containers, which led to their improvement, and for the co-operation of the Montpelier

Square Gardens Committee whom the Committee assisted in having the gardens cleared of refuse.

The Committee are most anxious that in any development of Relton Mews there shall be retention or re-siting of the Council's local Cleansing Depot.

FINANCE

The financial statement presented by our worthy Treasurer, Valerie de Fé is enclosed with this report. It shows a healthy surplus, but this can be misleading as expenses during the period were artificially low due to the lack of secretarial help, which laid a heavy burden on the Chairmen of Committees. Another point to be noted is that expenditure fluctuates according to the matters which have to be dealt with from time to time, especially with regard to planning and the protection of the environment.

I am pleased to say that Mary Elliston has joined us as regular part-time secretary and also report that there will be an increase in costs in the last few months due to the necessity of engaging professional assistance and expertise.

THE FUTURE

This year there is no guest speaker at the Annual Meeting. This is a deliberate policy to allow members more time to air their views and make suggestions for future policy and activities.

I am most grateful to the dedicated and public spirited people who have given so much of their time to work for the Association during the year and to all our members for their support for the Knightsbridge Association and its aims. I hope that more of you will come forward to help the hard pressed members of our specialist Committees in the coming months.

In particular we need help in environmental work, ideas on traffic and parking management and social and other events. We are particularly keen on restoring and improving amenities such as the replacement of the railings round the elegant squares and we would welcome help in making a survey of this possibility.

This is a fine and beautiful part of London in which we are privileged to live, but as always it requires constant vigilance to keep and preserve our heritage.

November 20th, 1980
Neville Labovitch
Chairman

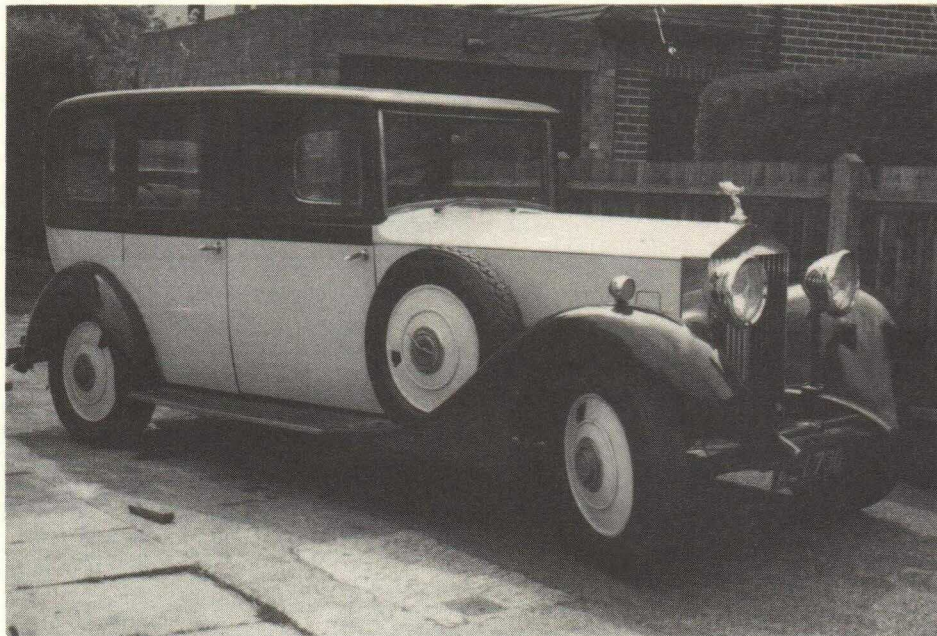


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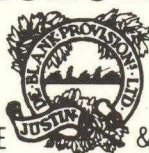


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