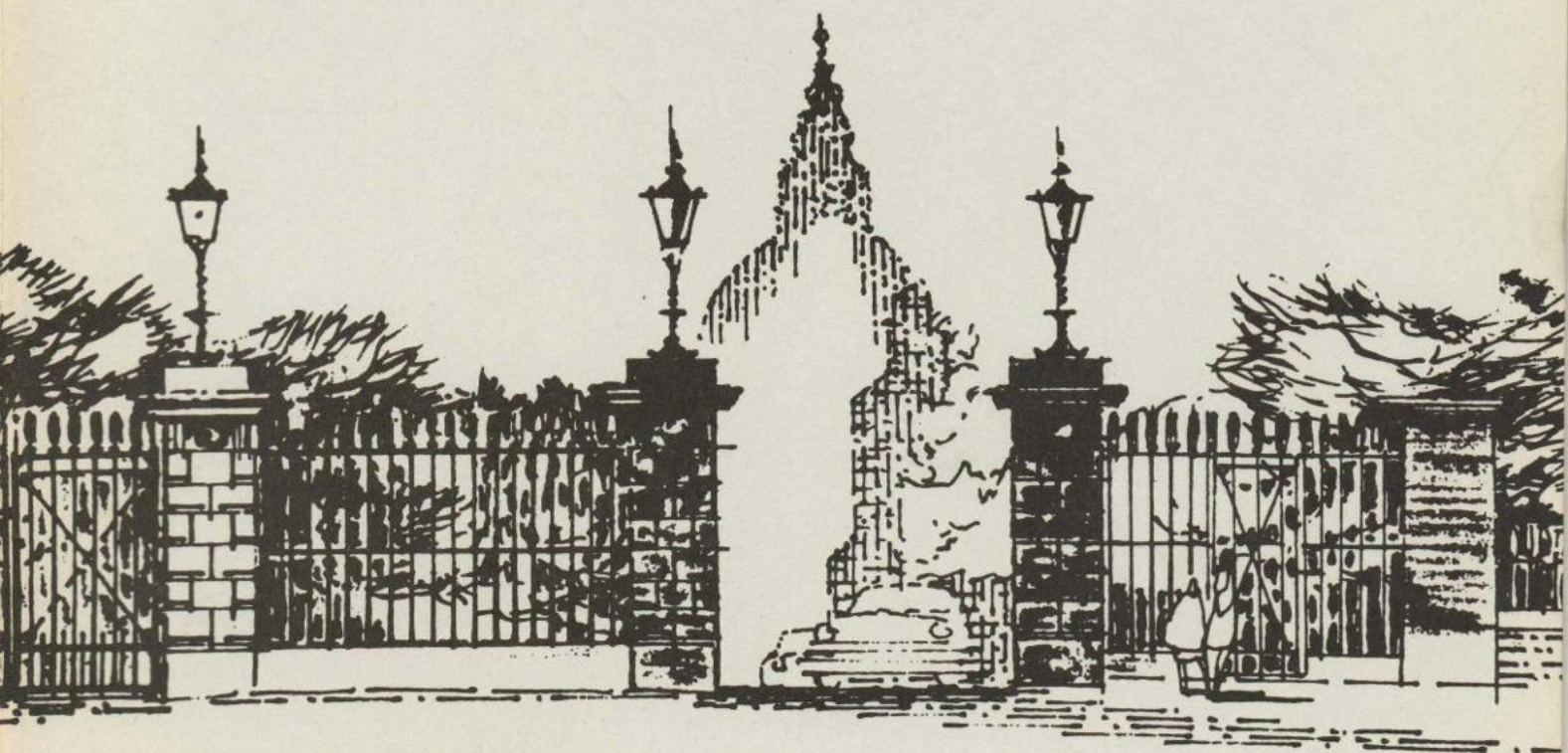


THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

29th ANNUAL REPORT **December 1990**

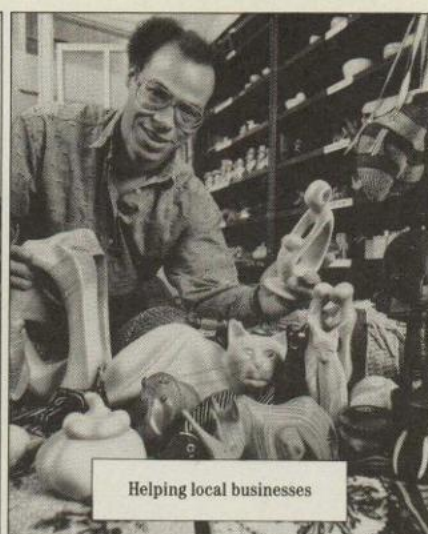




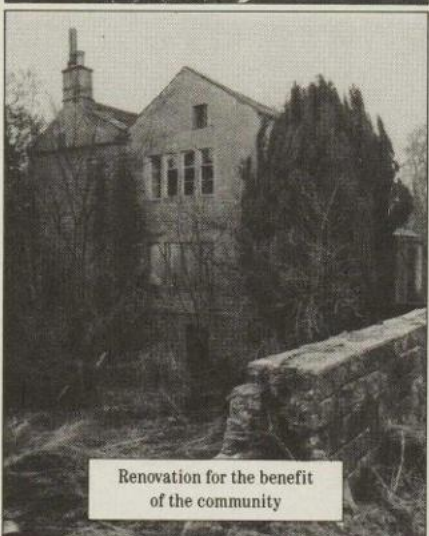
Helping the disabled



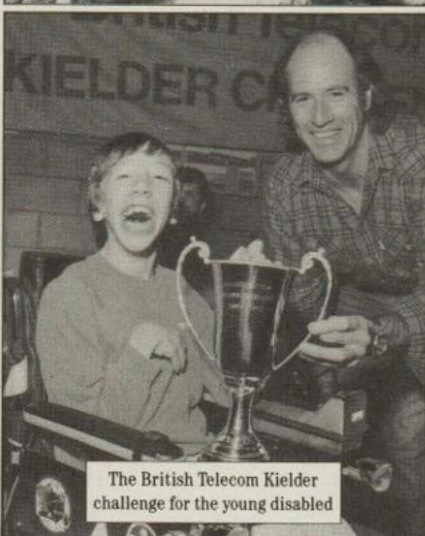
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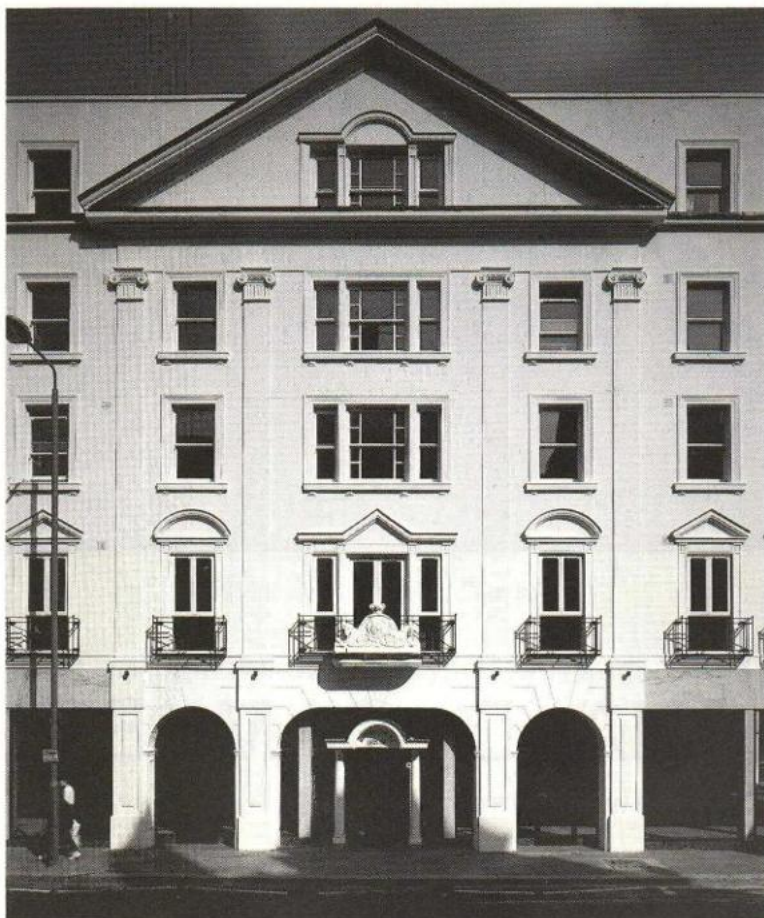


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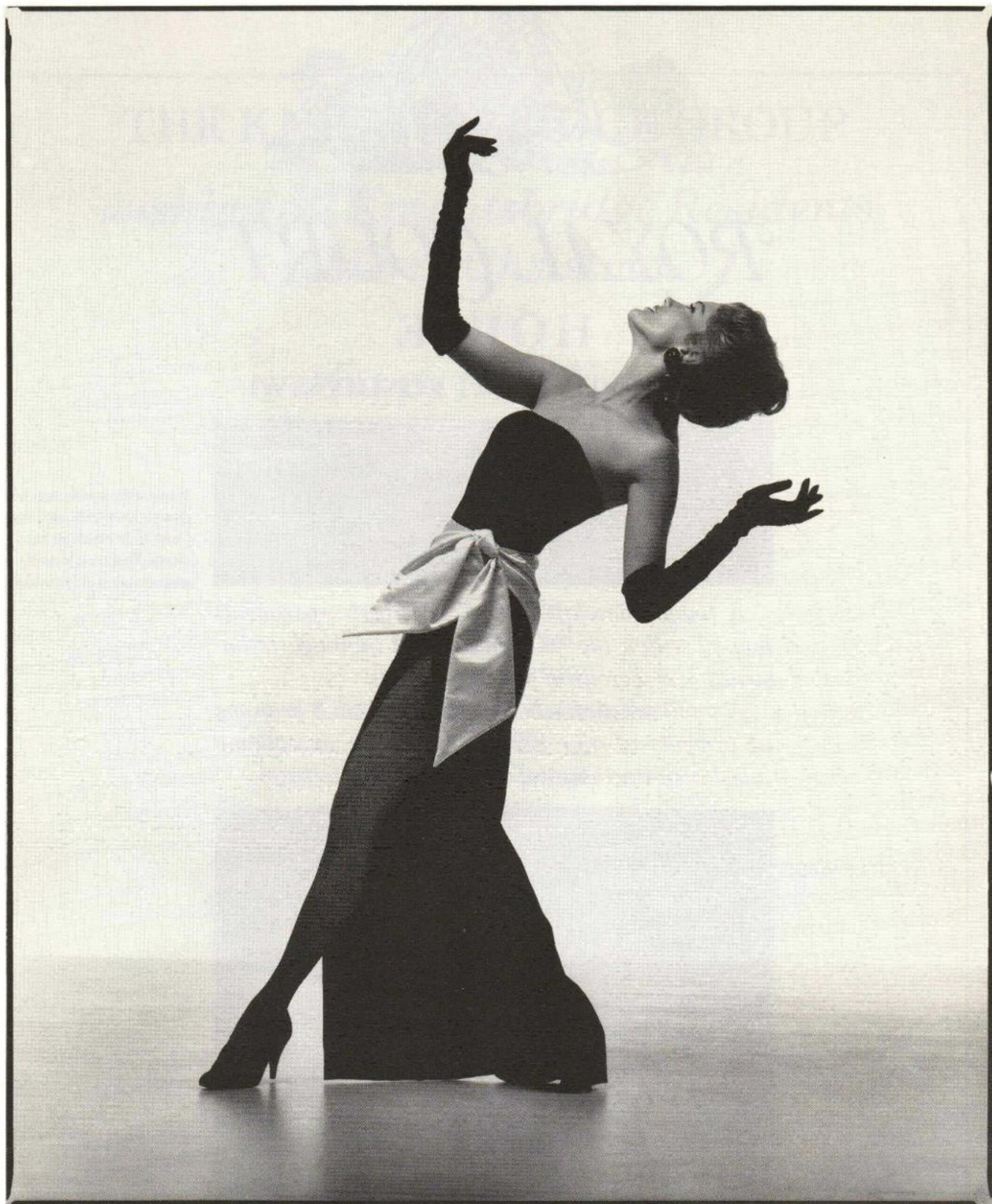
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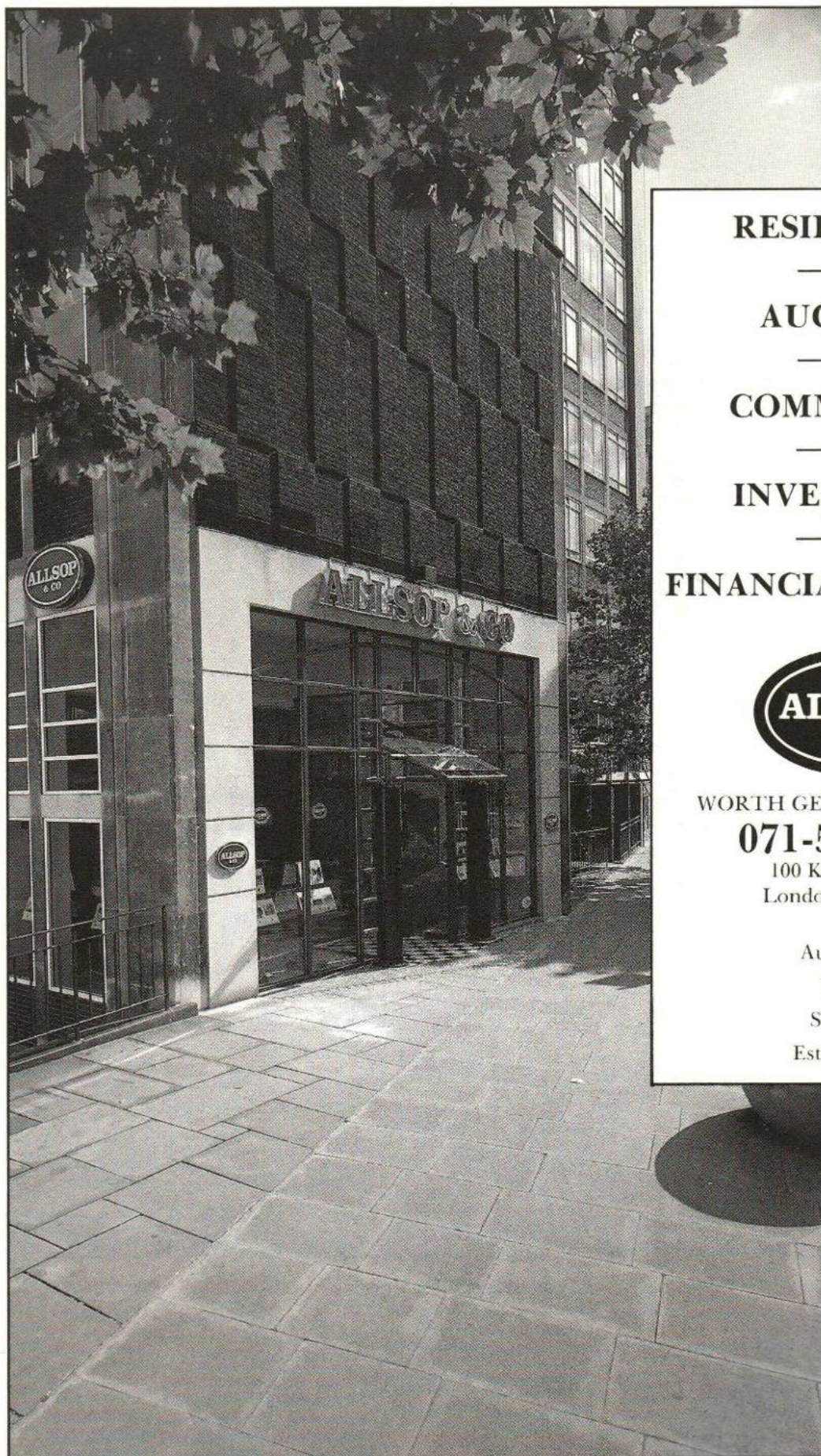
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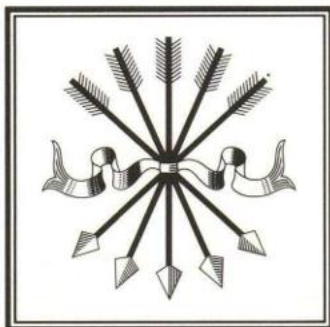
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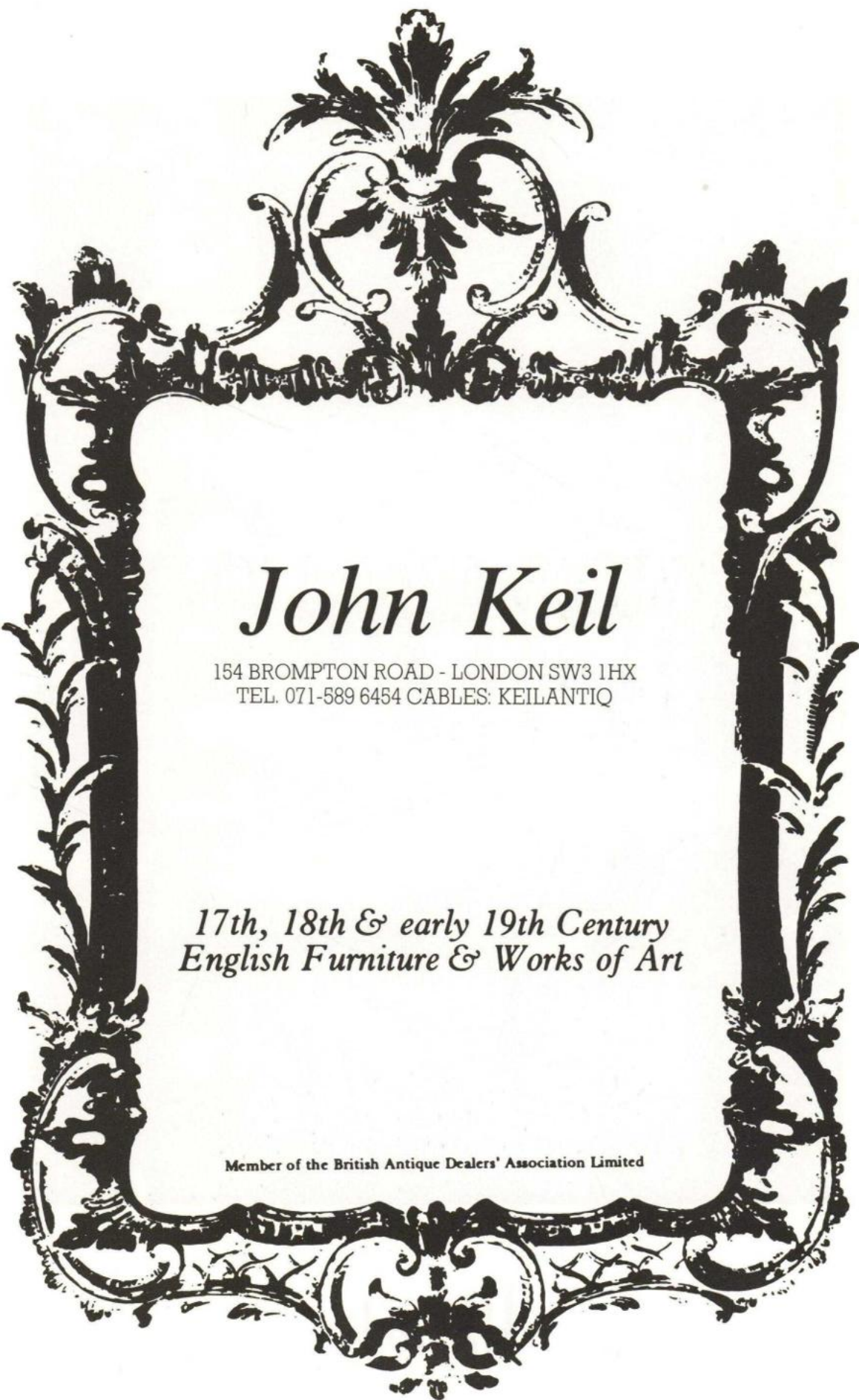
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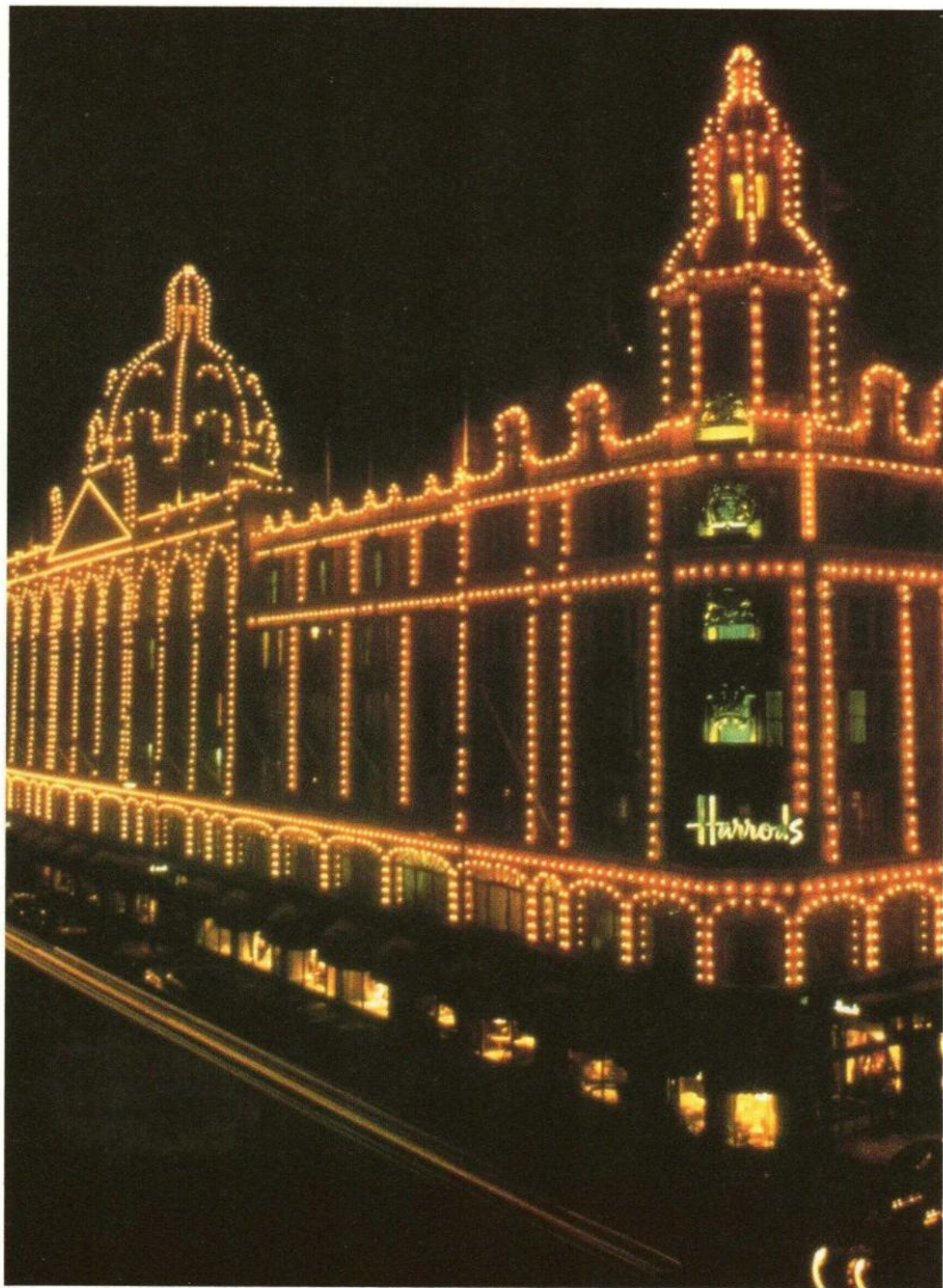
An ornate, symmetrical decorative border in a black and white woodcut style. It features a central crest at the top with a floral motif, flanked by curved scrolls. The sides are decorated with vertical panels of stylized foliage and scrolls. The bottom features a wide, symmetrical base with a central floral element and side scrolls.

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Coalbrookdale Gate, recently restored after being partially demolished in a traffic accident in 1988. It takes its name from Abraham Darby's Coalbrookdale Foundry, established in 1709.

CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW

All the euphemisms having been tried, it is now widely accepted that the economy is sliding into recession. There is no argument about this description in the property development industry and thus it might be expected that there would be a general easing of pressure for development throughout London.

This is indeed the case, but there are exceptions. In Knightsbridge, the price of residential property has steadied and the once astronomical premiums asked for shop properties have become more realistic. Even today, however, there are development proposals of major importance to the future of the area. Some of them raise fundamental issues concerning the quality of life in a place whose most agreeable characteristics are endangered by the sort of developments they attract.

In view of this situation there can be no relaxation of the efforts required from the Knightsbridge Association in its 29-year struggle to keep this part of the inner city a pleasant place in which to live. It remains true that the price of maintaining our heritage is eternal vigilance.

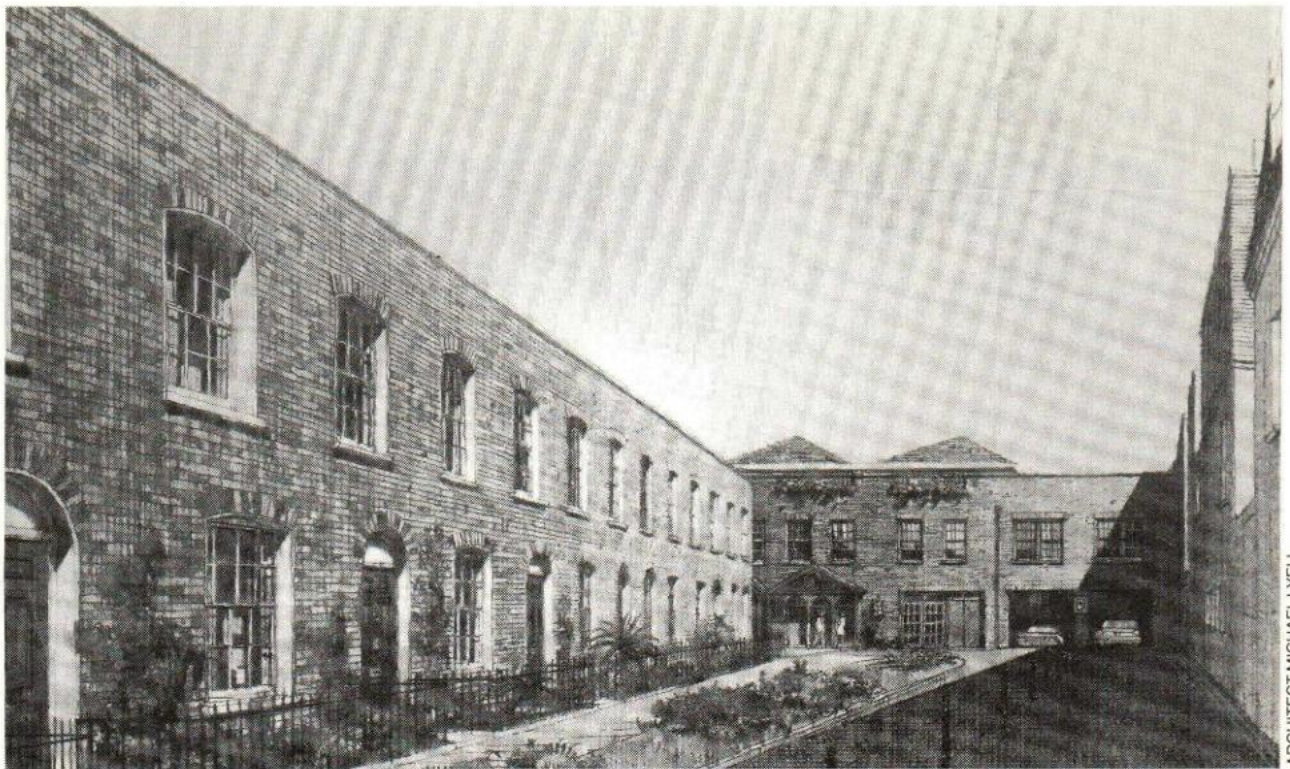
Recently we were fortunate to hear the views of the Secretary of State for the Environment, Chris Patten, on a possible code

of design for modern building.

In a speech to the Royal Fine Art Commission, the Minister suggested that architects and planners should return to basic principles. He gave examples of earlier building codes, which included the specifications for the width of streets and roof heights of medieval Sienna and more recently of Paris and London, but did not inhibit architects' innovation.

It is heartening to hear a cabinet minister speaking of the dangers inherent in an excess of density, height and bulk of buildings in an historic city. The Association has always been concerned that new buildings should be good neighbours in their environment and is encouraged by Mr Patten's agreement with this view.

It came as no surprise to hear that, amongst the buildings that the Minister disliked the most, is the headquarters of the DoE in Marsham Street. It has always mystified conservationists that the members of the department should be able to administer environmental matters happily in such ugly surroundings. Perhaps it is not too late in view of the scaling down of development projects, for the department to move to the former County Hall, where members can contemplate the river as they work.



ARCHITECT MICHAEL LYELL

The new flats, offices and entrance to the underground garage of the Harrods Car Park development in Brompton Place, flanked on the left by elegant existing terrace houses.

THE ENVIRONMENT

During the current year the Environment Committee's energies were devoted to some large and potentially controversial matters that overshadowed the many routine applications referred for comment by Westminster City Council and The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

Over the past two years, three variations of a scheme proposed by Harrods to demolish and replace its rather shabby one-storey car park in Brompton Place with a building containing an underground car park, offices and residential units, were refused by Kensington & Chelsea Council. Among the grounds for refusal were that increased traffic would result and that the granting of office use in a residential area, coupled with a loss of residential accommodation, was contrary to DoE guidelines and Council policy. The Association limited its concern to the impact of increased traffic movements on the flow of traffic in Brompton Road and possible disturbance to residents.

Harrods went to appeal on the matter and the case was heard in September by a DoE Inspector. The result, announced in November, was that Harrods will be allowed to go ahead with its development, although not to the full extent of its most ambitious proposal.

Dwarfing this case, however, is the proposal by Harrods (first mooted in the 1988 report) to convert their depository in Trevor Square into a luxury 5-star hotel. As part of its strategy, Harrods has purchased the Jaeger shop on Brompton Road, in order to obtain access to the hotel from this busy thoroughfare.

Harrods state that its intention is to create an hotel akin to the Ritz in Paris, which would be known as 'Harrods House'. The hotel would echo the appearance of the store.

The architect has, from the first, been most co-operative and anxious to consult the Association. He and his colleagues have had several meetings with representatives of the Environment Committee. During these negotiations the architect accepted many criticisms and suggestions from the Association that would greatly improve the impact of the hotel on the resident community. Amongst these changes were the removal of the principal entrance from Trevor Square and the deletion of conference and meeting facilities.

Whilst the Committee are grateful for the acceptance of their suggestions, they still have reservations about the wisdom of creating an hotel in this position. The site is outside the area deemed by the local authority to be

suitable for such use, and it has not been demonstrated that the traffic problem can be dealt with satisfactorily. All cars and coaches, including the famous Harrods coach, should be able to pull into the curtilage of the hotel, away from the pavement, which is difficult to achieve with this building. Brompton Road, being one of the major arterial routes through London, is destined to become a 'red route', denying all car parking and no mistakes should be made by being optimistic in dealing with traffic management in this location.

It should also be considered whether there are now too many hotels in Knightsbridge. Some years ago there were protests at the increasing number of embassies in the area, and now it may be salutary to question the number of hotels. Apart from those already established, there are still several in the course of construction, including the St George's Hotel at Hyde Park Corner, nearing completion, and the Normandie Hotel opposite Wellington Court on the Knightsbridge Road, which has just received permission to rebuild and expand.

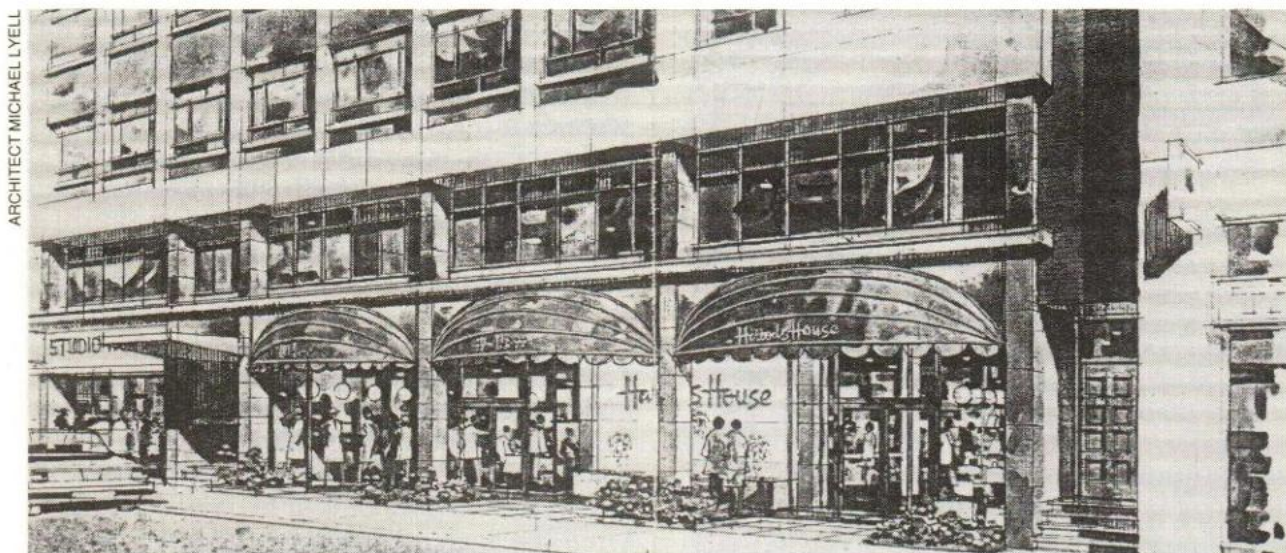
In view of the importance to the neighbourhood of this proposed development, the Association has arranged a meeting of residents from the area that would be immediately affected by the scheme.

Those members of the Association living in the Trevors will be particularly interested in this matter because they are still suffering annoyance in spite of the promise by Harrods to cease the heavy traffic caused by store suppliers delivering to the depository. There is much frustration in Trevor Square and Lancelot Place, whose inhabitants suffer the interminable arrival and departure from the

early hours of the morning, of a large assortment of vehicles clogging the streets and pavements and causing frequent damage to public and private property. During a meeting held two years ago on general matters between the Association, members of local government, the police and representatives of Harrods, it was stated that the new warehouse at Isleworth would be fully operating at the end 1989 and that all suppliers' services would be directed there. Harrods would then itself bring in goods in its own large vehicles to the depository, thus relieving the intolerable nuisance caused by their suppliers' vehicles, over which they have little control. The Committee would favour a purely residential solution for the depository conversion thereby ensuring the domestic character of the area.

Another matter that will affect Knightsbridge for some considerable time to come is the adoption of the Unitary Development Plan, outlining general development and land use policy. This plan, which is required by the Local Government Act 1985, replaces the existing district plans. Westminster City Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea are in the process of preparing their plans, and both bodies have consulted the Association.

The Environment Committee has voiced its concern that much new residential accommodation is not aimed at long term residence, but takes the form of quasi hotel use. It is suggested that the Unitary Development Plans for both councils should give both authorities some degree of control over developments to restrict this. Amongst other issues raised by the Association, over



The Brompton Road facade of the entrance to Harrods proposed hotel.

which they would like the councils to increase their authority, are control over amplified music in pubs and restaurants in residential areas; the safeguarding of private open spaces and the protection of garden squares; greater use of existing powers to serve notice on the owners of neglected buildings; and the encouragement of the provision and maintenance of those local services that support the residential character of an area.

One of the continuing concerns of the Environment Committee is to protect the essentially residential character of Knightsbridge, especially in the conservation areas. It fights hard to prevent the encroachment of office and other non-residential uses in the squares and streets. Where this has happened, it tries to have the buildings returned to residential use. As a result of this, Westminster City Council is taking enforcement action in several cases.

Some two years ago, Park House in Rutland Gate, a large and attractive building that was formerly the French Consulate, was bought for the Accademia Italiana as an art gallery and cultural centre specialising in Italian art. An extensive and sympathetic renovation has restored the building, although work remains to be done in the garden, and the institution's cultural programmes, although they bring extra visitors to the square, are of a high standard.

Since it was opened, the Accademia has been operating without the necessary planning permission for exhibition use. Westminster City Council has now insisted that it make an application for change of use and the Association will ask for protection for the residential character

of the neighbourhood.

During the year a considerable nuisance has been caused to residents both in Rutland Gate and Ennismore Gardens Mews due to pop fans having obtained the address of certain of their idols and coming even from the Continent to wait in groups for them. This is a difficult problem to solve, although the police are sympathetic to the residents. It is, however, possible to take action against public houses and bars where the music amplification is so obtrusive that it resounds abroad in residential quarters such as Sterling Street and Montpelier Place. If the owners do not agree to curb this nuisance, the Association will contest the renewal of their licences.

The state of the upper gardens in Rutland Gate still gives cause for concern. The impasse was caused because of the disappearance of the owner some years ago, when he failed to obtain planning permission to build in the gardens. In order to improve their appearance, the Council spent £14,000 on new railings and since have been trying to recover their money from the owner. Volunteers from the Knightsbridge Association have done their best during the year to keep the garden clear of litter. The developers of 2 Rutland Gate have contributed to this tidying operation. They have restored one of the missing lamps on the corner of the garden and have kindly offered to restore the other one.

The Association has convened a meeting of Rutland Gate residents to try to form a long-term maintenance plan. The Committee has been pressing Westminster City Council to clean up the garden strip in front of 26-31 Princes Gate and some action has now been taken to improve its appearance.

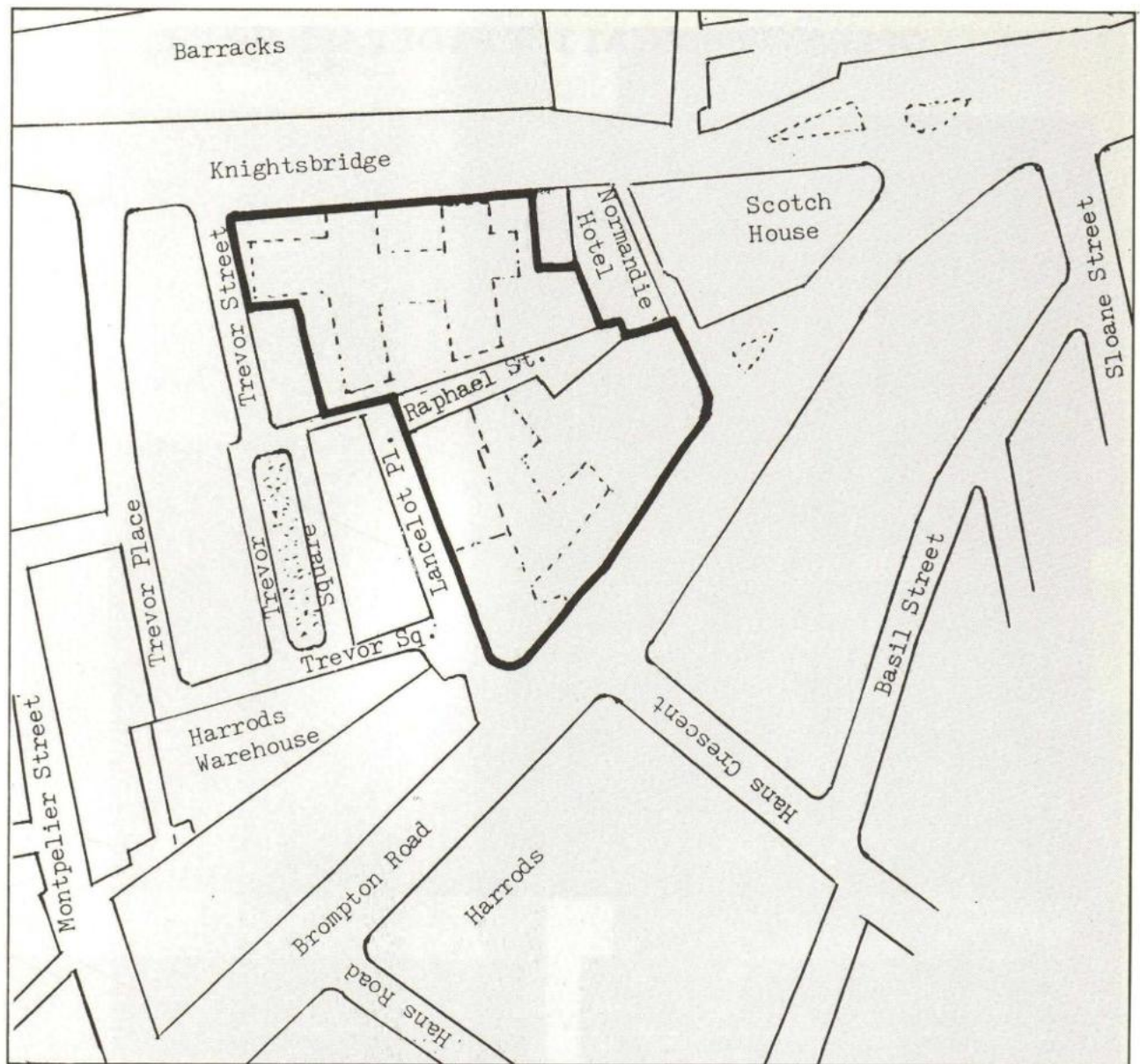
Yet another application has been made to build roof top flats on Albert Court. This is the most recent in a long line of such applications in the last 10 years. The last two applications were dismissed by the DoE after the owner had appealed against their rejection by Westminster City Council. This new one will be strongly resisted by the Albert Court residents, led by Major General Desmond Smith, with the support of the Association.

London Transport

Last year's report commented upon the concern in the neighbourhood about the deficiencies of the Knightsbridge underground station and the unhappiness and inconvenience caused to passengers. It would be encouraging to be able to report that conditions had noticeably improved, but



Park House, Rutland Gate, now occupied by the Accademia Italiana.



The area covered by Westminster's Knightsbridge/Brompton Road Planning Brief is shown encircled by the thick black line.

unfortunately this is not the case. Escalators frequently break down, and sometimes there is only one operating downwards whilst passengers have to climb up a fixed staircase.

London Underground have recently confirmed that there will not be a full service with escalators working in both directions until March 1992. The third and entirely new escalator at the Harrods entrance will take another 40 weeks after that.

Planning Brief

Over the coming years the development of the island site bounded by Knightsbridge Green, Brompton Road, Lancelot Place and Hyde Park will be the major planning issue for Knightsbridge in the nineties. The quality and bulk of the area and redevelopment would

give an opportunity for the freeholders to make a positive contribution to the neighbourhood.

It is with regard to this possibility that Westminster City Council, after much encouragement from the Environment Committee, has produced a detailed planning brief for consultation.

It is pleasing to report that the freeholder of this important site has begun consultations with the committee with the hope that a first class scheme will evolve that is both practical and in sympathy with the area. There is, in fact, an increasing tendency for applicants and developers to discuss their plans with amenity groups prior to putting in their applications, which is helpful to all parties concerned.

continued on page 22

OPERA EVENING AT THE HYDE PARK HOTEL



DERRY MOORE

Pavilion Opera performing "The Barber of Seville".



Mr and Mrs Michael Capocci.



Miss Christina Politi and Mr Mark Woloshyn.



Mrs Kai Leslie and Lady Ross.



Mr and Mrs Vickerman with Mrs Bredenkamp and Miss Sarah Bredenkamp.



Mr Cyril Seymour-Newton and Mr and Mrs Donald Birts.



Mrs Bea Green, Mrs Joyce Hunter and Mrs Lorelei Keay.



Mr and Mrs Ian Shackleton.



Mr and Mrs Kamal Ghahremani.



Mr and Mrs Robert Hobart.

Continued from p 19

All of these important matters, which were dealt with by the Environment Committee, are in addition to the large quantity of routine planning applications referred for comment by both local authorities. Apart from monthly meetings, members of the Committee made many site visits as well as meeting for consultation with officers of the councils, architects and many other interested parties. The Association is fortunate that members of the Committee are prepared to give up so much time for this onerous cycle of work. The Committee's Chairman, Richard Robinson,

leads his team with great dedication. It includes two distinguished architects, Jeremy Mackay-Lewis and Michael Wright, the Vice-Chairman, whose thorough and unceasing work is mainly responsible for the large workload achieved on planning matters. We are also fortunate to have been joined by Lesley MacDonagh, a senior planning lawyer. With the other members of the Committee, backed up by the Honorary Secretary, Carol Seymour-Newton, this makes a formidable committee. We are sorry, however, to lose the services of Raymond Henley, who is leaving the neighbourhood.

HERITAGE

It is a main aim of the Heritage Committee to encourage the restoration of railings around the garden squares from where they have been missing since the last World War. It is pleasing to report that the Montpelier Square Garden Committee has decided to replace the railings in this beautiful square and work is due to start shortly. The Association has made

a contribution from its Heritage Fund and Westminster City Council is making a grant towards the cost, the majority of which is being borne by the local residents.

The Heritage Committee welcomes the plan by the Brompton Square residents to place two small lodges, railings, pillars and lamps at the entrance to the square on Brompton Road, first suggested in the Kensington and Chelsea Council's Brompton Conservation proposals' statement of 1988, thus emphasising its role as an entrance to a residential square.

Holy Trinity Brompton, too, has plans to restore the railings that once stood round the north and east sides of the churchyard. Their architect expects to submit drawings to the Council soon, and the Church hopes to launch an appeal in due course. Naturally, it will receive enthusiastic support from the Association.

The Rotten Row Tercentenary Committee has been successful in raising £130,000 towards the restoration of the cast iron bollards that used to line the Row. Work to install the rails to the north side of the row, known in the last century as The Lady's Mile, should be completed by the end of March 1991. The Appeal needs a further £70,000 to restore the bollards on the south side and 20 gas lamps along the ride. Donations are being sought to pay for individual bollards and the Hon. Secretary is willing to pass on any enquiries. The bollard sponsored by the Association is to be situated in line with Rutland Gate.

Last year's report drew attention to the dilapidated and even dangerous state of the balustrading of the Albert Steps leading up from Prince Consort Road to The Albert Hall.



The statue of the Prince Consort on the Albert Memorial



The Albert Memorial, shrouded in scaffolding, rises above the trees.

Westminster City Council has since taken up the matter with the owners and some of the damage has been repaired.

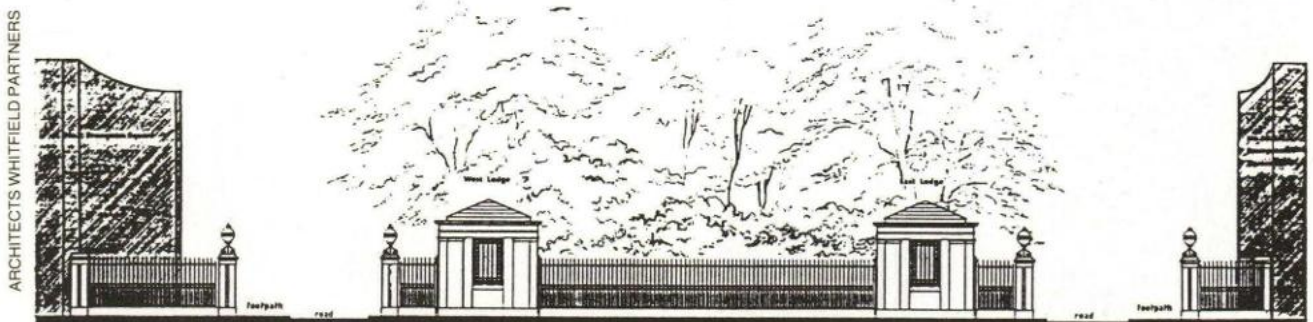
The Albert Memorial is now encased in scaffolding and is likely to remain so for several years while costly and extensive work is undertaken to repair and restore this famous landmark.

The cleaning of the Victoria and Albert Museum has been a great success. The Aston Webb building is now revealed in its true colours with some fascinating details, such as the sculptured figures of British painters, sculptors, architects and craftsmen, amongst them John Constable and Christopher Wren. The Victoria and Albert forms part of an attractive grouping of recently cleaned buildings, including its near neighbours, Alfred Waterhouse's Natural History Museum with its delicate shading of yellow and grey brick, and Herbert Gribble's Brompton Oratory.

Protection of London Squares

The information in the report of the Royal Commission of 1928, on which the London Squares Preservation Act 1931 was based, has become outdated. The protection afforded by the Act no longer seems adequate, and it appears that certain squares are at risk from directions not foreseen at that time.

The Association is co-operating with a new body, the Society for the Protection of London Squares, whose aim is to up-date the information published by the Commission. An example of the recent problems is the attempt to turn the west side of Princes Gardens into a surface car park, which was successfully resisted by the Association with the support of the Council. The Society's intention is to identify threats to the integrity of the garden squares, to bring all the information up to date, and to try to get some of the main points adopted for legislation.

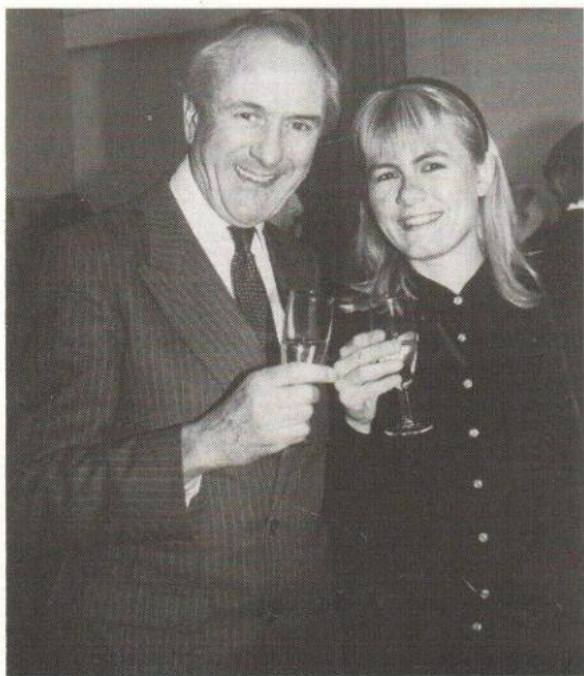


Proposed improvements to the entrance to Brompton Square from Brompton Road.

RECEPTION BEFORE THE 1989 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



Mr and Mrs Malcolm Peech.



Cllr. Desmond Harney with Cllr. Melinda Libby.



Mrs Trixie Shingleton, Mr and Mrs Clem Brown and Mr Gordon Shingleton.



Mr Jeremy Mackay-Lewis and Mr Richard Robinson in conversation with Lord Tanlaw.



Mr Colin Pilbrow deep in discussion with Mr Sid Sporle.



Miss Elspeth Parkes with Mr Alan Husher at the police exhibition stand.



The Lord Mayor of Westminster, Cllr. Simon Mabey, Dame Simone Prendergast and Mrs Carol Seymour-Newton.



Mr Michael Wright and Miss Diana Jenkins.



Mr David Rothwell and Mr Colin Temple with Mr and Mrs Raymond Benardout.



Miss Christine Gilbertson chatting with Mrs Gilbert.



Mr and Mrs Morimoto.



Cllr. Anthony Prendergast talking to Sir Robin Gillett.



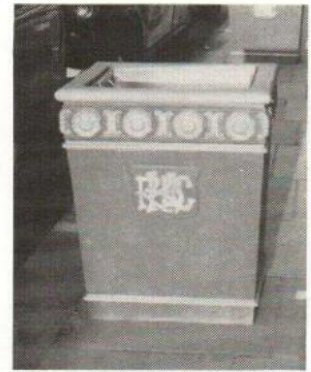
Mr Simon MacDonagh and Mrs Lesley MacDonagh.

LITTER, RUBBISH AND HIGHWAYS



New Bins: Westminster

For years, the Annual Report has paid regular homage to Frances Rice and her committee for their tireless attempts to rid Knightsbridge of litter and rubbish. Thanks to them it is possible to walk through the residential streets and squares and see only clean pavements. But not everywhere. The Committee has achieved success only by constant liaison with the contractors, the local authorities and the residents. More of our



Kensington & Chelsea

members should be involved in attempts to persuade their neighbours to co-operate in such matters as putting out refuse at the right times only.

In addition, far too many shops and offices fill the streets with rubbish that cannot be collected for hours. This unpleasant practice threatens to diminish the elegance of Brompton Road and Knightsbridge. The Local Authorities should remind owners of commercial premises, and especially restaurants, that they have a duty to house their litter until it is collected.

More difficult to eradicate is the habit of dropping litter indiscriminately, a practice made all too easy by the amount of packaging provided with goods, particularly food stuffs, and today's habit of eating on the move. Even banks' cash points contribute to litter and it should perhaps be brought to the notice of those who encourage throw-away products that they should provide litter bins near their premises. The parks, too, could profit by an increase in the number of bins in more obvious places.

Some of the articles thrown away could instead find their way into the re-cycling system. There are three bottle banks in Knightsbridge. One is behind the Albert Hall, at the junction with Bremner Road, another outside Linstead Hall and the third at the

service entrance to the Science Museum in Exhibition Road.

There is also a paper bank behind Bonhams in Relton Mews, but this really is only for paper and not plastic or other rubbish.

After many years of lobbying by the Association and other interested parties for practical measures by the government to deal with the state of the capital's streets, the committee finds it gratifying that the Environment Minister has just announced the introduction of measures to address the street cleansing problem. These measures confirm the responsibility of local councils to keep their neighbourhood clean and even enable citizens to take them to court to force the removal of garbage. There are also to be long-overdue increases in the fines for litter offenders. The difficulty, of course, is in identifying offenders and in some cases apprehending them. The Committee warmly welcomes these measures and hopes that they will be adequately enforced.

Holes in the road also contribute to the increasingly unpleasant state of the streets. Appearances apart, the traffic congestion has increased considerably, because of the holes in the road dug by statutory authorities and private industry. Repair work to the infrastructure and the laying of new cables and pipes have meant that in Westminster alone the openings in the street surfaces have topped 34,000 a year. Little of this has been co-ordinated, although this Association and others have been urging such measures for years. Now it seems that the Government is about to legislate for a proper register, which – it is hoped – will prevent the same piece of ground being continually opened for different purposes.

The committee is pleased that Montpelier Street is being resurfaced by the Council and that in recent months the road between Prince Consort Road and the Albert Hall has also been renewed.



Discarded posters and placards disfigure Brompton Road.



Overflowing bins encourage dirty streets.



Dangerous paving outside Rutland Court.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING

The Traffic Committee continues to press for improvements in the control of rat-runs through the residential areas, and is currently exploring with Westminster the possibility of installing rumble-strips (or sleeping policemen) as a method of slowing the traffic in places such as the Ennismore and Princes gardens route, which is used as a rat-run to get from Exhibition Road to Kensington Road. Another favorite short-cut where traffic can pick up speed is Trevor Place through Montpelier Square and Street to Brompton Road.

At the Committee's request signs saying 'unsuitable for long vehicles' were installed at both Knightsbridge and Brompton Road to discourage heavy vehicles from trying to navigate from Montpelier Square into and out of Trevor Place and becoming jammed. Unfortunately, the one at the Brompton Road end is so badly sited that it is virtually impossible to see it before turning into Montpelier Street: it is hoped to get this changed.

The Traffic Committee is still pressing for a narrowing of the entrance to Montpelier Street: this would enhance the access to the conservation area and give more of a sense of the approach to a residential area. It would be pleasanter, whilst still leaving adequate space to allow passage to emergency services and

for cars and lorries visiting the area.

The campaign to get Westminster to install more bollards on the pavements at the south end of Trevor Square, to protect the footways from damage by heavy goods vehicles parking and manoeuvring, has had some success. The Committee is making progress with the Royal Borough and the police to deter the illegal parking that blocks the entrance to Princes Gate Mews.

A new pedestrian crossing has been established in Brompton Road between Princes Court and Harrods, which the Association has welcomed. This is a way of relieving the dangerously congested area by the Hans Crescent entrance to Knightsbridge Tube.

As a result of repeated requests from the Association, the Parks authorities and Westminster have agreed that South Carriage Drive will not be closed on Sundays when there are major roadworks in Knightsbridge – the Hyde Park underpass excepted.

The Traffic Committee, chaired by Dr Stanley Steel and with Mrs Ellie Brook as Vice Chairman, is necessarily busy, because traffic management is one of the most intractable problems in the neighbourhood. Every major scheme – such as the Harrods Hotel proposal – has a potentially significant effect on the area.

LAW AND ORDER

Crime is a growth industry and the Association felt it necessary, a couple of years ago, to form a Law and Order Committee. Chaired by Gordon Shingleton, an expert on security, and with his Vice-Chairwoman Ellie Brook, one of the Committee's two Justices of the Peace, the Committee maintains regular liaison meetings with the police forces of Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster.

The Committee is concerned with the security of members' homes, and last year assisted the police to produce and distribute the helpful doorstep card. It encourages neighbourhood watch schemes, which it would like to see expanded.

A continuing concern is the more open crime committed in Brompton Road, where illegal traders fleece the public in front of Harrods, and where ice cream vans constantly park illegally, causing inconvenience and obstruction. The alteration to the road between the tube station and Harrods' east entrance has removed a dangerous obstruction. This initiative by Kensington and Chelsea Council was born in consultations

between the Knightsbridge Association, the Council, the police and Harrods' management, and it has been agreed to hold further meetings in the near future.

The Association is pleased that the Royal Borough has certainly begun to take active steps to deal with these illegal activities.

Reports are coming in of the return of the neighbourhood confidence trickster, who approaches residents purporting to act for the Knightsbridge Association and asking for subscriptions. He has been jailed for short periods on several occasions, but returns to his occupation upon release. Please remember that the Knightsbridge Association never asks for money in this way and, if anyone should be approached for cash payments on its behalf, the police should be informed.

Senior police officers will be present as usual at the Annual General Meeting of the Association on Monday December 3rd, and Scotland Yard is preparing a display for the occasion, which will be supervised by crime prevention officers from Rochester Row, Gerald Road and Chelsea police stations.

LOCAL AND OTHER AUTHORITIES

Much of the Association's work is done in concert with the two local authorities in the area.

At Westminster City Council, Sid Sporle, the Director of Planning and Transportation,

continues to discharge what is arguably one of the most demanding jobs in local government. Mary Dent is now settled into her key position as Director of Planning and Conservation at Kensington and Chelsea

THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

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Carol Seymour-Newton – Hon.
Secretary
Christine Gilbertson – Hon.
Treasurer
Raymond Benardout
Raymond Burton
Jonathan Charkham
Rosalie Digby-Seymour
Lady Duncan
Baroness Gardner
Jean Lyell
Frances Rice
Richard Robinson
Stanley Steel MD FRCP
Nina Wallis
John Wallis
Sarah Wills

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Michael Wright CMG FRICS RIBA –
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Diana Jenkins
Neville Labovitch MBE
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Lesley MacDonagh
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Frances Rice
Carol Seymour-Newton
Stanley Steel MD FRCP
Cynthia Thompson
John Wallis
Sarah Wills

LITTER AND RUBBISH COMMITTEE

Chairman: Frances Rice

LAW AND ORDER COMMITTEE

Chairman: Gordon Shingleton

TRAFFIC AND PARKING COMMITTEE

Chairman: Stanley Steel MD FRCP

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Hon. Secretary: Rosalie Digby-Seymour

Council. The Association is grateful to them and their colleagues for their help and encouragement during the year.

The mutual respect that exists between the officers of both councils and the members of our committees makes for an effective and productive relationship. The officers of both councils know that they can expect from the Knightsbridge Association a measured and responsible comment on current matters from the experienced and dedicated members of the operating committees.

During the year the Association has received much courtesy and consideration for its views from the chairmen of the council committees, especially David Weeks, Chairman of Planning at Westminster and Professor Sir Anthony Coates at Kensington and Chelsea.

The local elections have brought Knightsbridge two new councillors for Westminster, Robert Moreland and Robert Michaels, who have been quick to establish close relations with the Association. In Brompton ward a new councillor, Simon Ingham, joins David Hudson to represent the area in the Kensington and Chelsea Council.

It is a double task for our committees that the area covered by the Knightsbridge Association, although mainly in Westminster, also extends into the Royal Borough. This means a larger work load, but also highlights the need for the two councils to co-operate closely together where the boundaries meet.

This is now very much improved from the days when, for instance, the two councils' policies on conservation were very different.

Westminster's Member of Parliament, the Rt. Hon. Peter Brooke, despite his onerous and responsible position as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, still manages to devote a surprising amount of time to the members of his constituency. We are, as always, grateful for the interest that he continues to take in the Knightsbridge Association.



Monsieur Hercule Poirot (David Suchet) takes a break from filming in Ennismore Gardens.

SOCIAL EVENTS

Social events have been few during recent years, so it is pleasing to report the happy occasion recently at the Hyde Park Hotel when members and their guests enjoyed a performance of *The Barber of Seville* performed by Pavilion Opera.

The event was held in aid of the Association's Heritage Fund and many members who were unable to be present kindly sent donations, whilst British Telecom generously supported the performance.

The opera evening was the idea of Peggy Walmsley, who organised the entertainment and reception; whilst support for the effort came from Lady Grade and her ticket committee.

A delightful addition to London's seasonal decorations was inaugurated on Saturday, November 10 when the lights on a tree near Edinburgh Gate were switched on and the signal given for miniature trees on the lamp-

posts to be illuminated throughout the area. A reception followed at the Hyde Park Hotel for members of the Knightsbridge group of businesses and their guests.

This enchanting display of trees and lights is the work of Rayond Benardout, the chairman of the group and a member of the main committee of the Knightsbridge Association.

1990 AGM

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Monday, 3 December, at the Holy Trinity Brompton church hall. The meeting will be preceded by a reception at 6 o'clock and guests will include officers and councillors from both the Westminster City Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, members of both local police forces and others. Many of our guests are happy to answer questions from the floor, so please come along and bring your neighbours.

FINANCIAL

The finances of the Association continue at a satisfactory level presided over, as ever, by the Honorary Treasurer, Christine Gilbertson. The Heritage Fund, which enables contributions to be made to restore and improve the amenities of the area, has received a boost from the opera evening held in October. This will, for example, mean contributions to help appeals to replace railings round garden squares.

We are fortunate that due to the expertise of

members of the Committee it is not often necessary to spend money on professional advice and, thus, the expenses of the Association are very small compared to other similar organisations. However money may well be needed to counter some large threat to the neighbourhood, and resources must be husbanded against that possibility. The income of the Association comes only from its modest fees and the contributions of its supporters.

APPRECIATIONS

In expressing appreciations I always think of those founder members such as Leonard Bonham, Sir David Croom-Johnson, Lady Gillett and their friends and colleagues, who created the Association 29 years ago and saved much of historic Knightsbridge from destruction at a time when local and national authorities were not so sympathetic to conservation as they are today.

Their successors continue to work hard to preserve and enhance the quality of life in Knightsbridge. They donate a prodigious amount of time squeezed from busy lives to serve the neighbourhood, and they deserve the appreciation of the entire resident community and also the business houses of the area.

In particular, I wish to express my thanks to the Chairmen of the committees who, together with their members, carry the workload of the Association. The Environment Committee bears the greatest burden and to Richard Robinson, the Chairman, and his deputy Michael Wright, I give my grateful thanks for another year of hard and imaginative work. Also, I thank Dr Stanley Steel, Frances Rice and Gordon Shingleton, the Chairmen of the Traffic, Litter & Rubbish and Law and Order Committees and their members, for their valuable contribution to the environment during the year.

Domestically, Raymond Benardout has reinvigorated the membership committee with the help of Rosalie Digby-Seymour and the Hon. Treasurer, Christine Gilbertson has kept a beady eye of the Association's finances.

On the Main Committee, recently elected members, such as Jonathan Charkham,

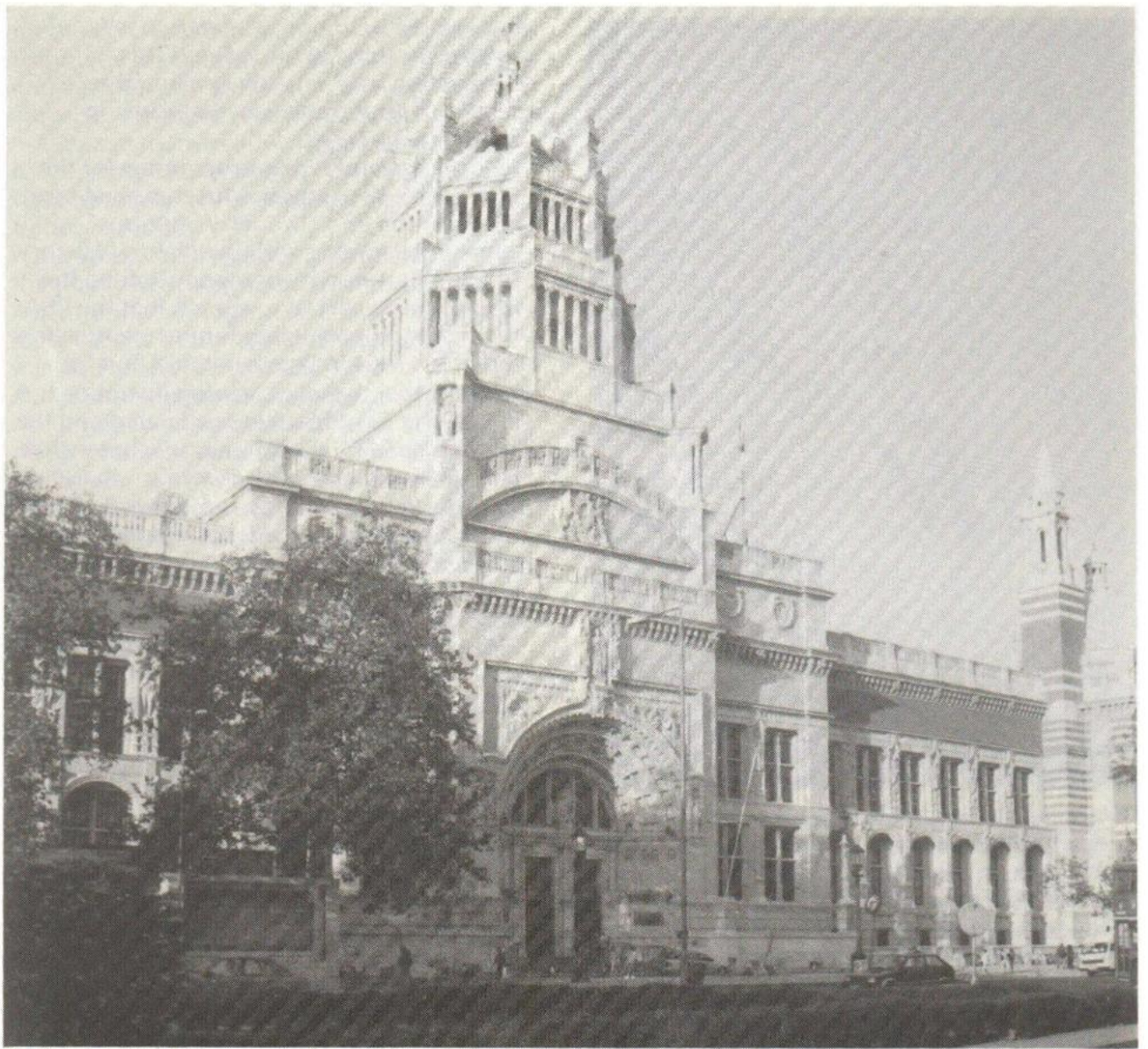
Baroness Gardiner and Raymond Benardout, have added extra strength to the deliberations of our valuable stalwarts, who include Raymond Burton, John and Nina Wallis, Diana Jenkins, Sarah Wills, and, of course, Jean Lyell, who has played an especially active part in the Association's work during the year.

My special thanks are due to Raymond Benardout for his work on the advertising pages of this report. They are a tangible expression of support for the Knightsbridge Association from the business houses of the area. The Association's work benefits the commercial community, and it is gratifying to have their support in return.

Each year I acknowledge the difficulty of finding superlatives to describe the work and devotion to the Association of our Hon. Secretary, Mrs Carol Seymour-Newton. Whether it is matters of environment, social and heritage matters or supporting the other specialist committees: whether it is helping to compose the report, or the one hundred and one other matters that crop up regularly, her time and talent are always involved. I cannot thank her adequately, but I do believe that the members of the Association join me in an expression of deep gratitude for her great contribution to the well-being of Knightsbridge.

As always, I am grateful to all our members who support the Knightsbridge Association and give it the opportunity to protect the fabric, and enhance the quality of life of our special neighbourhood.

Neville Labovitch
December 1990



The Victoria & Albert Museum emerges from scaffolding, its cleaned and restored façade gleaming in the Autumn sunshine.

A NEW FACE ON THE V&A

By Gordon Charlesworth,
Head of Buildings & Estate, Victoria & Albert Museum

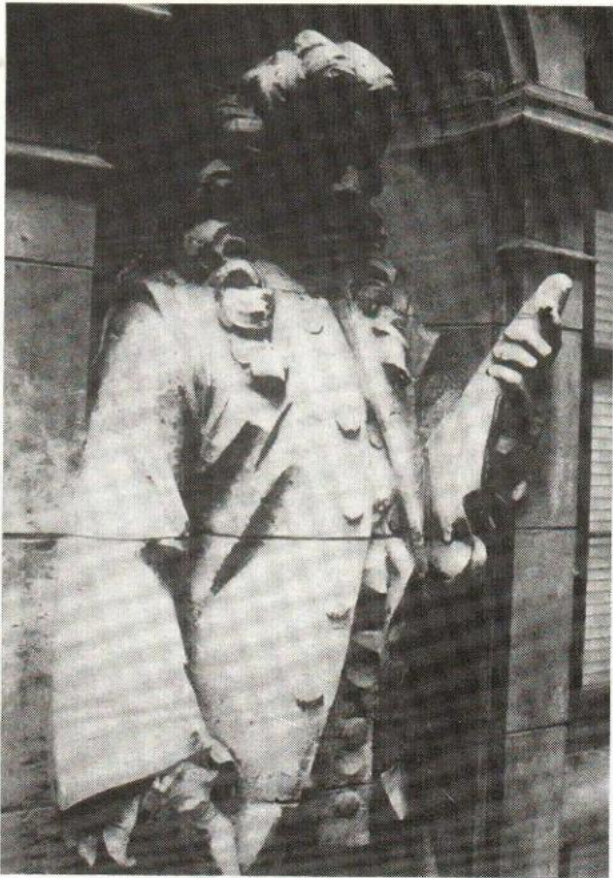
By January 1991 the operations to clean and repair the front facade of the V&A will be completed and the long frontage to Cromwell Road will be restored to the glorious condition in which our Edwardian predecessors viewed the new Museum.

Of course the Museum was not all new: the foundations had been established following the Great Exhibition of 1851 and construction of the South Kensington Museum had begun in 1856. Francis Fowke and then Henry Scott had continued the designs and works up to the 1880s, when the programme came to a halt, leaving the large area to the south up to the Cromwell Road unused.

A competition was held in 1891 for a new

building to complete the Museum. It was won by Aston Webb, whose design was described by *Building News* as combining "many of the beauties and artistic capabilities of the romanesque with the grace and playfulness of Spanish Renaissance". Work only began eight years later when, on 17 May 1899, Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone of the "Victoria and Albert Museum".

The cleaning operation had highlighted the sculpture that decorates the building. The Main Entrance is dominated by statues of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, with St George and St Michael, and "Truth" and "Beauty" completing this centrepiece.



Statues between the first-floor windows depict British painters, sculptors and architects on the Cromwell Road facade, and craftsmen on the Exhibition Road front. Students of the Royal College of Art, under Professor Edouard Lanteri, carried out the work in situ, sculpting the twice-lifesize figures from blocks of Portland stone. The crowning glory of this nationalistic pantheon was the figure of Fame, which was placed in position in 1908, to complete the new Museum.

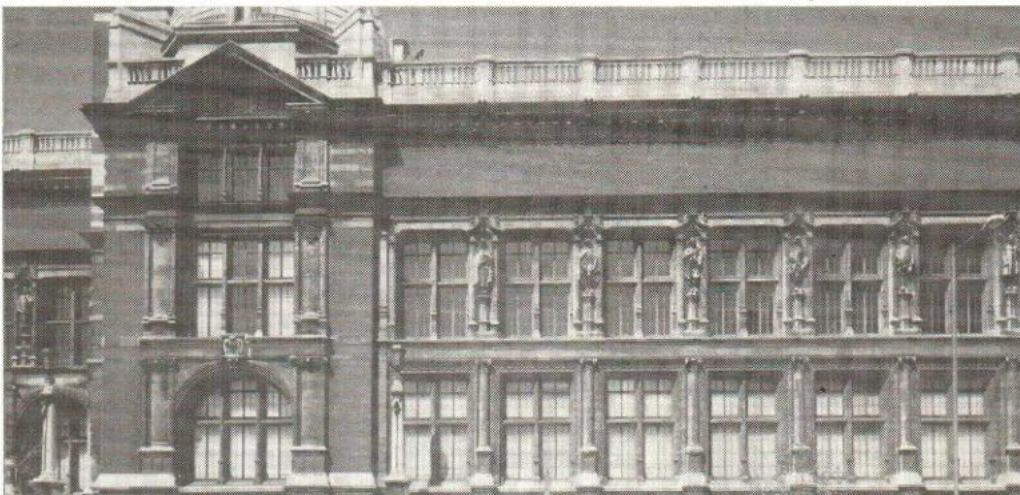
Over the following decades, the building steadily accumulated grime from London fog and smog, soot, traffic fumes and other

atmospheric pollution. Vegetation was growing on some of the ledges. This encrustation was not only spoiling the Museum's appearance but was causing damage to the fabric.

A cleaning and repair programme for the major South Kensington Museums had been started by the PSA (Property Services Agency), beginning with the Natural History Museum, but scarcity of money limited the work at the V&A. It was agreed that the PSA would take responsibility for the maintenance work if the V&A's Trustees could find the funds for the cosmetic cleaning operations. A sum of over £1 million was estimated and the Trustees came up with a unique scheme that was effectively multi-sponsorship – to use the hoarding and scaffolding for the works for advertising purposes. After conditions were imposed on the extent and type of advertising, local residents bravely supported the V&A's planning submission.

Meanwhile new Government laws had passed the Museum's freehold and maintenance responsibility to the trustees and allocated an annual building grant. The newly formed Works Department took over the PSA's contract in its development stage and confirmed the design team as: Frank Timothy Associates, architects; the Kensall Partnership, quantity surveyors, and Alan Baxter Associates, structural engineers.

Before approval could be obtained from the local authority, the method of operation had to be agreed. The architects teamed up with the V&A's Conservation Department and English Heritage to prepare a job specification which would clean but not damage the stonework. A series of trials was undertaken, with help from the equipment manufacturers, and visits were made to Paris where the big clean-up for the Bastille Day celebrations was under way. It was concluded that two



BEFORE:
Grinling Gibbons (above)
– one of the many carved
figures on the grimy
façade (left) which were
badly in need of cleaning
and restoration.

methods should be adopted: wet abrasive technique for the general areas of stonework and a simple dry technique, using finer abrasive, for the carved stonework.

Consent to proceed was granted and the management contractors, Team Services plc, were appointed to co-ordinate the specialist trades required.

Cleaning and repairing a large facade over the public highway for an institution with a large number of visitors and exceptionally high-valued contents is not a straightforward project. The working areas and administration for the operations had to be identified and prepared. Security was a major problem, since the scaffold could provide access opportunities for thieves, vagrants and anyone up to mischief. A protection fan with close circuit television cameras on top made access very difficult, and other systems of security were introduced on and above the scaffold. During this contract no intruders found their way into the Museum.

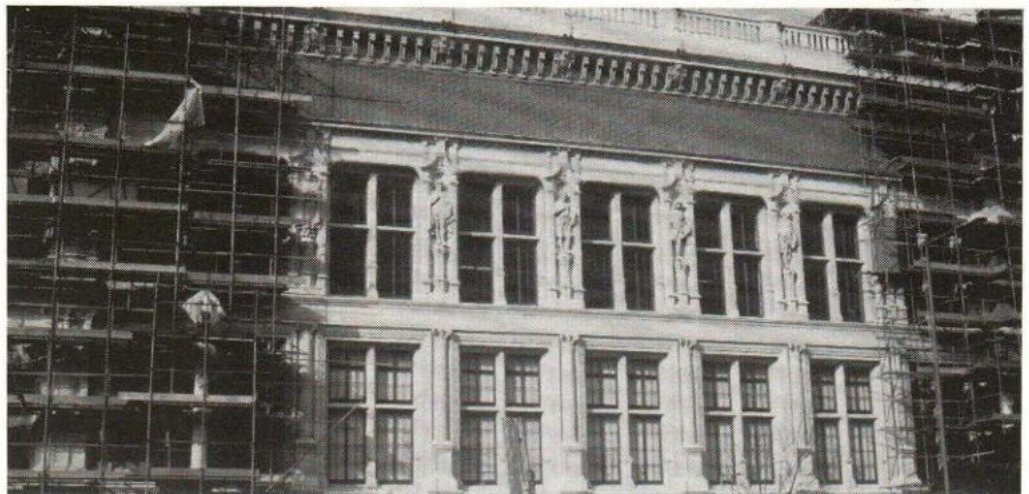
Protection and safety for the public, staff and museum collections was also a major headache. Plastic sheeting and a sheeted fan over the pavement prevented dust, tools and equipment from falling onto the walkway and road. Protection of the staff and offices proved a greater problem. The staff entrance is the only route into the Museum for delivery vans and the protective fan had to be located higher up the block. Windows and air vents had to be sealed, making offices dark, airless and very hot; even so some fine dust found its way through. The exceptionally high winds of the last year gave rise to a few, fortunately not critical, incidents and new, costlier disciplines were imposed on the operations.

The structural engineers were meanwhile investigating the necessary repairs, especially the significant cracks around the central



tower. Webb's original drawings were consulted to gain an understanding of the 19th century materials and construction techniques used. The foundations of the central tower are believed to be among the first to use the solution of a Mass Concrete Raft to bear the weight. Various constructional factors had led to problems of expanding brick panels, thermal movement and differential settlement, with resulting cracks. The engineers had to recommend a repair solution that was compatible with the materials and their movement, and would protect the structure from further deterioration. Moreover, the cleaning process

*AFTER:
The façade (right) emerges
from its carapace of
scaffolding and the figure
of Inigo Jones (above)
shows the full effect of the
clean-up operation.*



Right: A fine blasting technique was used to clean the delicate stonework of the figures. Below: Rodin's sculpture of John the Baptist beckons visitors through the new gates to the V & A in Exhibition Road, designed by the Royal College of Art and erected in 1982.

exposed far more cracked masonry than expected and also identified movement in the joints of the brickwork. At the Main Entrance the splendid archivolt was found to have moved on its seating.

All this may sound like a tale of woe, but it was in fact more preventive medicine than emergency operation. The scaffolding made it easy to inspect and resolve cracks and movements, both large and small. Other work had been carried out to replace asphalt, check the steel frame structure, decorate the windows, regild the metalwork, record the works of art, monitor the major cracks and restore damaged and defective features.

The quantity surveyors have constantly recorded the costs and estimated the final cost of the project. The financial problem has been critical. As work moved west along the facade, the deterioration, through weathering and later war damage, increased, and each new cost forecast was greater than the last. At the same time, our advertising campaign met problems. The economic boom of the mid-80s



was already in decline by the time work commenced and it was only due to a great effort by the trustees that the initial £1 million target was eventually reached.

We have had to face an increase in costs without access to more funds. Our first action was to abandon the plans for the Exhibition Road wing. Then we postponed the proposal to improve the lighting of the facade; separate sponsorship for this is being sought. The upgrade of the street furniture notice boards and paving has also had to be reduced. However, we have been able to allocate more government funding to carry out the full scope of the work on the front facade to the agreed specification. At the end of the year the wonderful design of Aston Webb in polychrome stone and brick with the stone sculptures and other decorations will once more dominate the area.

Has all the disruption, inconvenience and unsightly scaffolding been worthwhile? The Museum staff have given an overwhelming affirmation. Indeed the general opinion, even of the conservatively minded, has been that the results exceed expectation and that the V&A now stands proudly in South Kensington, a triumph of British architecture, craftsmanship and new restoration, giving a real welcome to visitors to the Museum and to London.

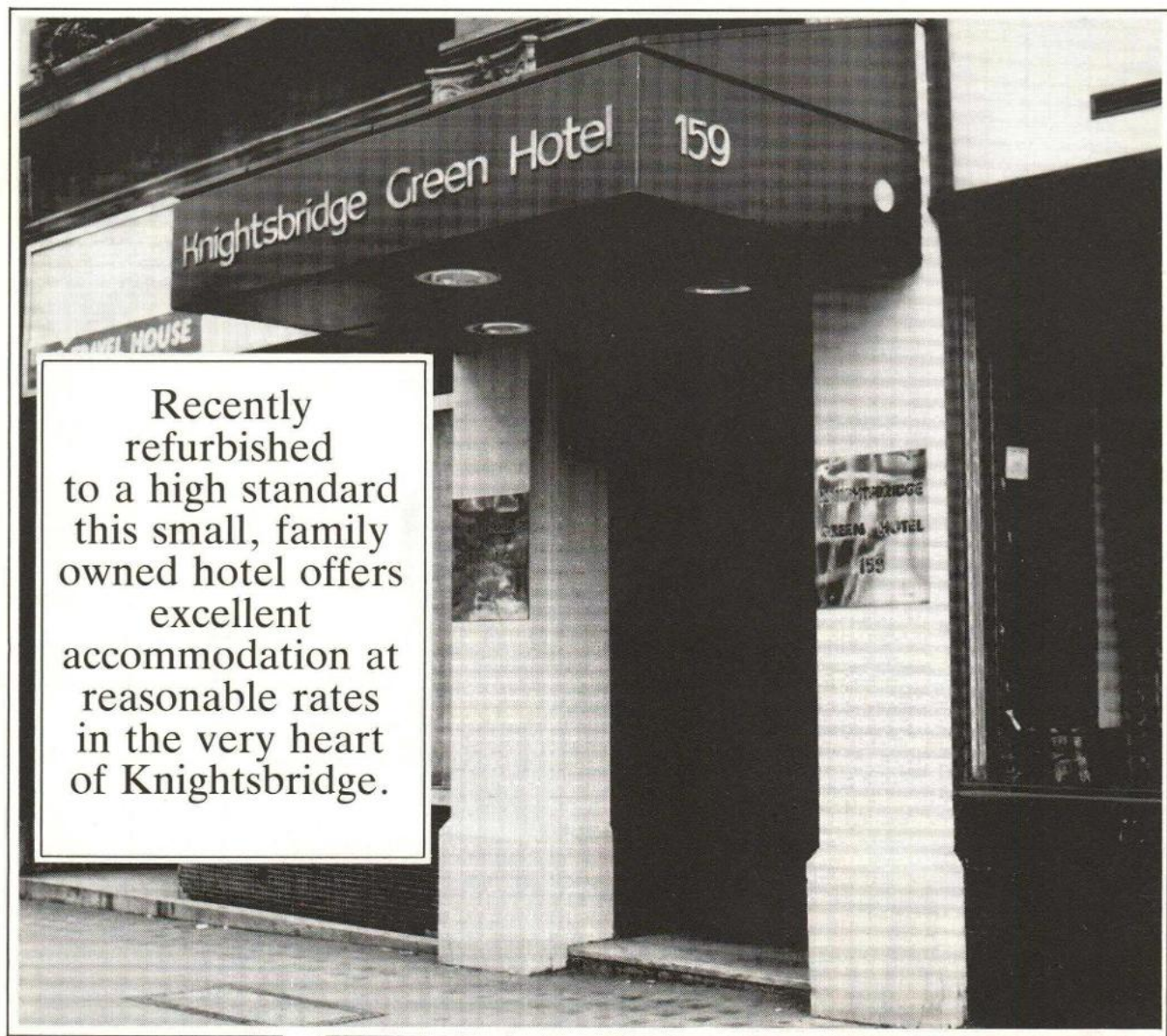




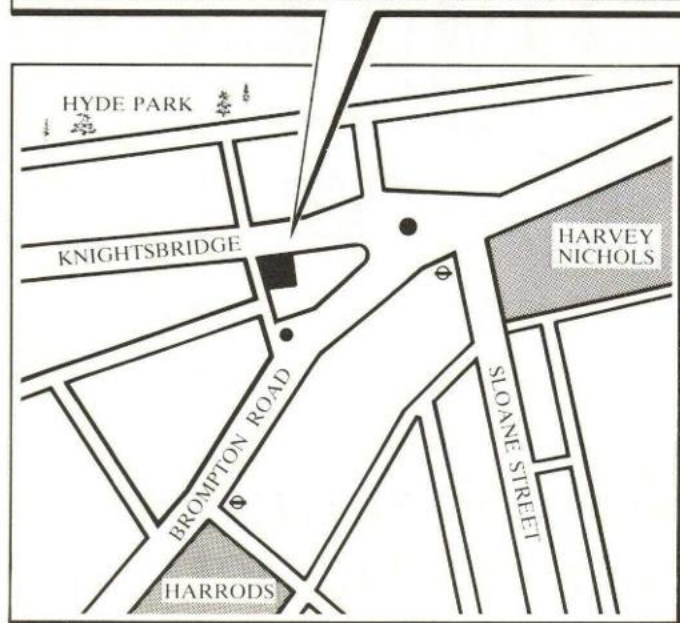
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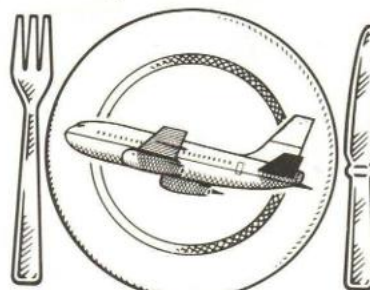
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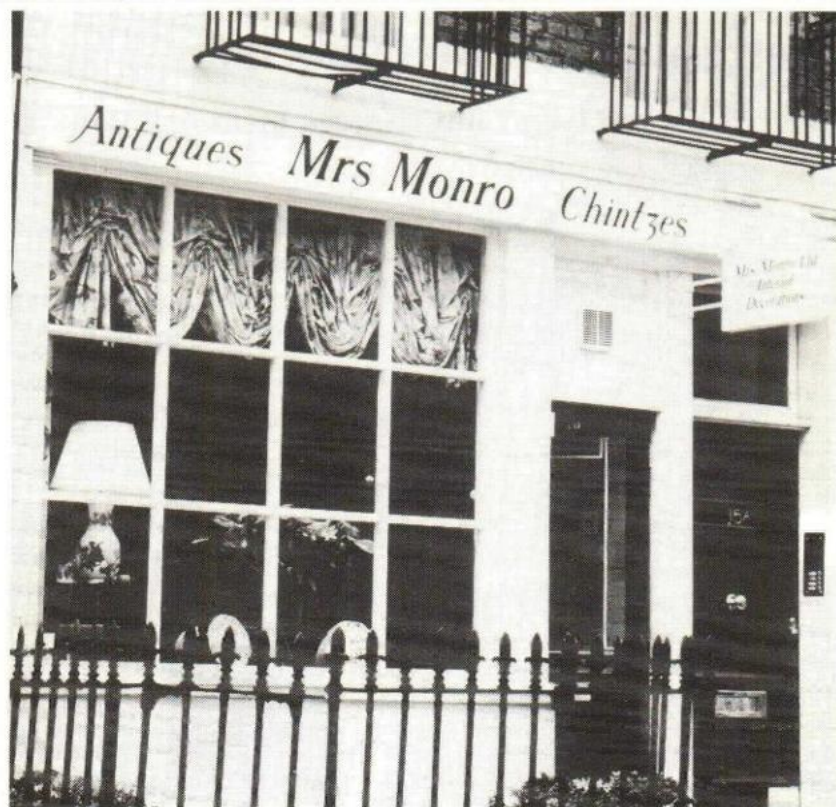
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Hyde Park Hotel

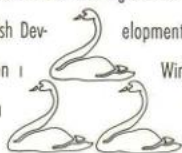
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The International haute cuisine in both its restaurants continues to receive many accolades. The oak-panelled Grill Room features traditional French & English cuisine whilst the magnificent Park Room, overlooking Hyde Park, has introduced an exciting Mediterranean cuisine where all dishes are light and delicate.

The Hyde Park Hotel looks forward to continue welcoming the Knightsbridge Association.

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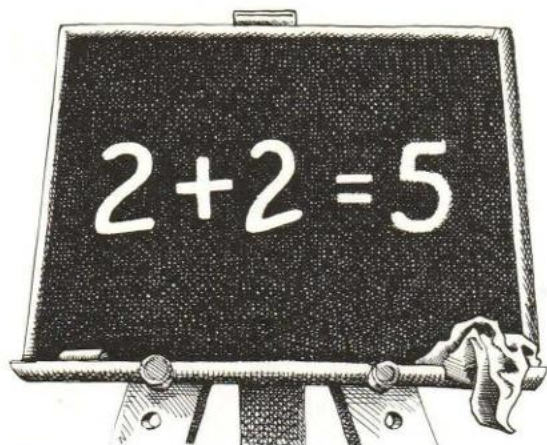
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