

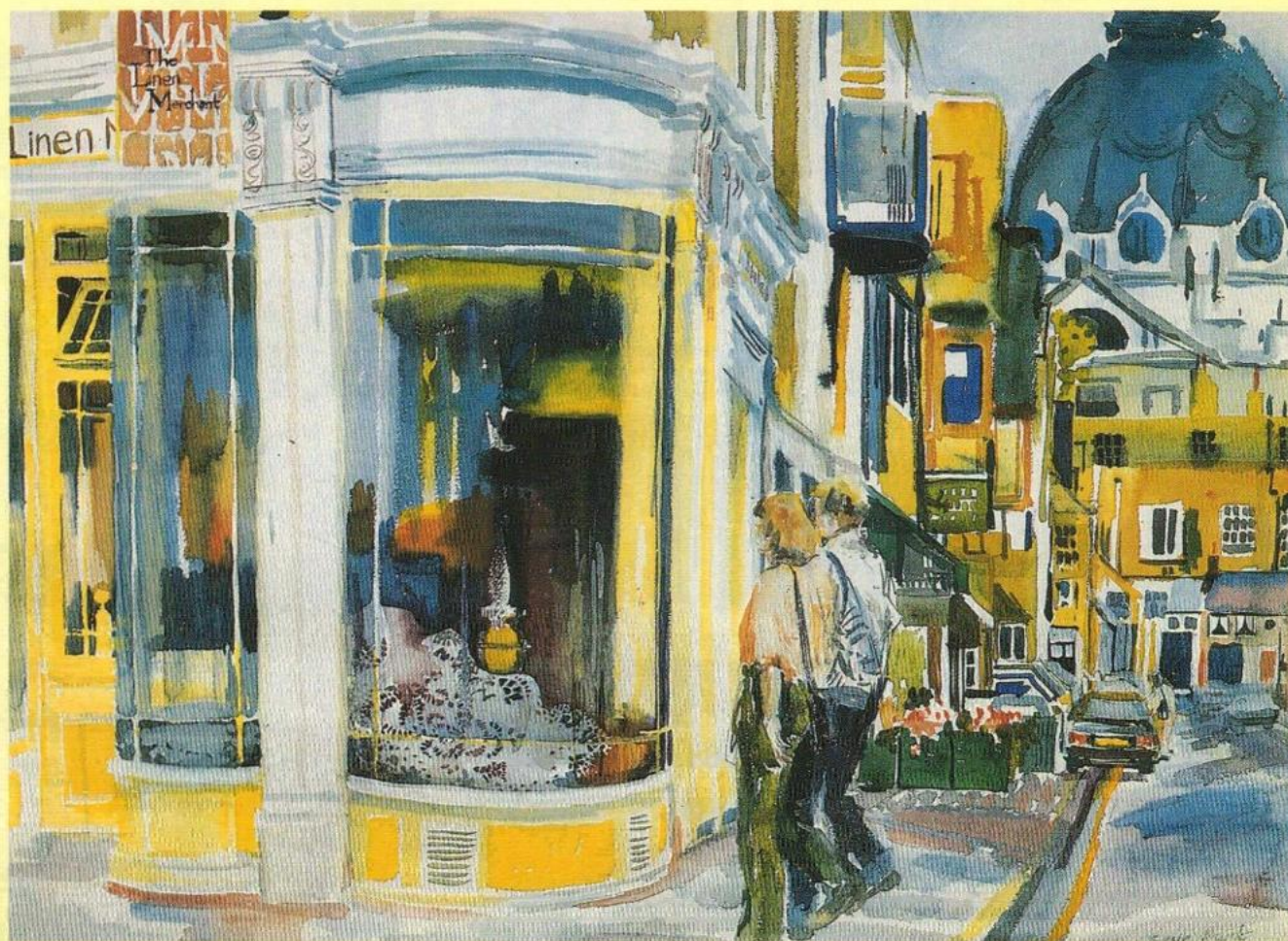
THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

35TH ANNUAL REPORT
December 1996



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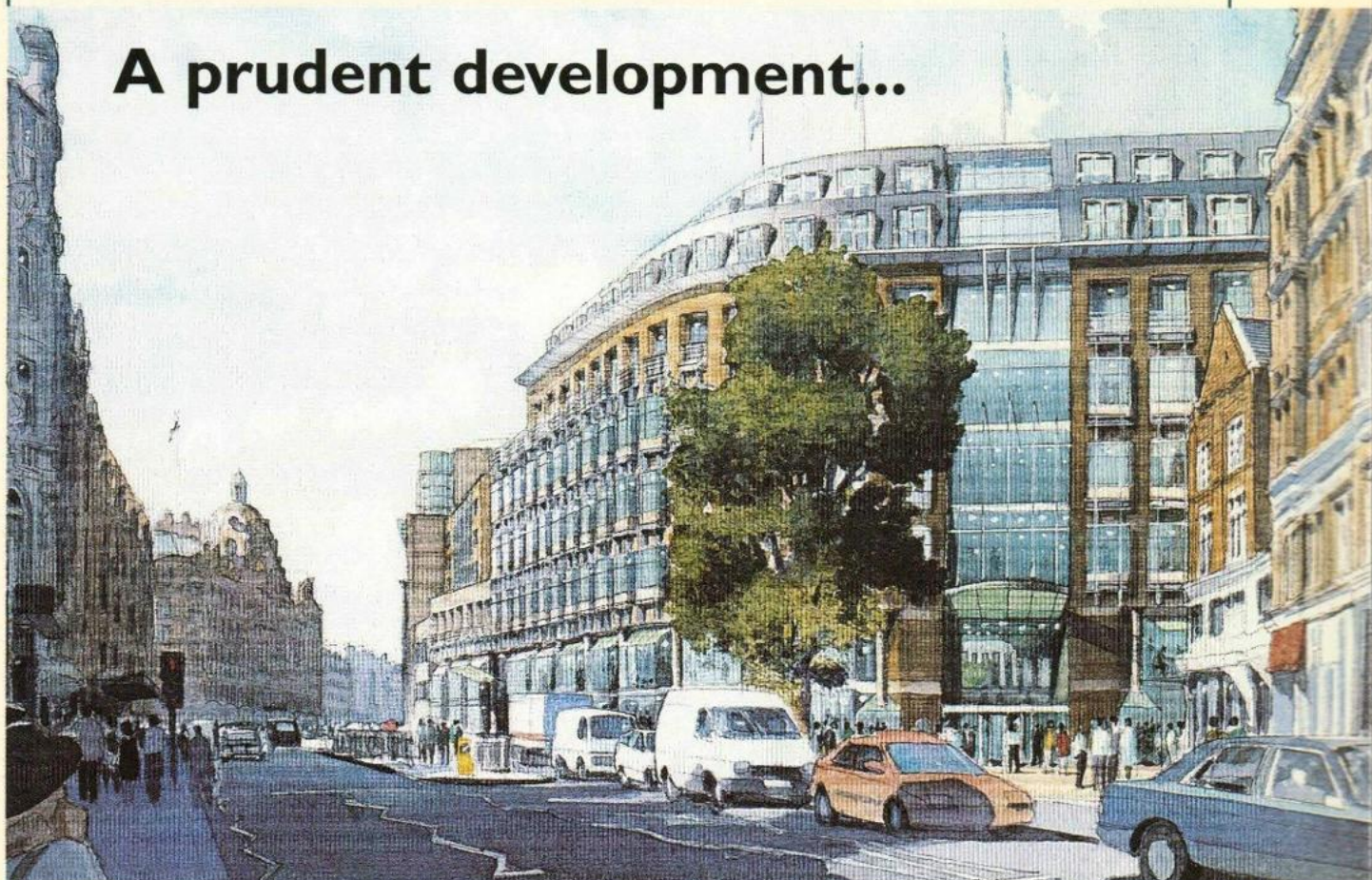
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SW1. Besides use of the garden in the square, it opens on to a shared garden at the back of the terrace. But its treat is spectacular joinery: French oak floors and deep mahogany in one bathroom. The other has

burr maple, even on the lavatory seat and the ceiling. A huge mirror emphasises the beautiful grain of the wood – and the sense of being in your own early-18th century cabinet.

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grain of
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homes with pre-

Jeremy Davidson, of
Chelsea office of De Groot
Collis, says: "In prime central
London areas, private parking
facilities add about 10% to the
value of a property and we have
seen instances where clients
have been prepared to pay up to
£50,000 for a nearby lock-up.
In the £1.5m-plus range, park-
ing is as important as the num-
ber of bedrooms." De Groot
Collis is selling one house in
Chelsea with off-street parking
for £545,000 and two in SW1,
both with their own garage, for
£400,000 and £535m.

■ Two ritzy houses in London for sale at about £5m. No land Gate, SW7 is set a freehold through De Gr (071-235 8090). It is a restored end-of-terrace views north along the from the upper floor rompton Oratory ver station, West dral and Crys he joinery e No 1 Cuml utifully

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ESTATES GAZETTE

De Groot achieve £10m from Far East buyer

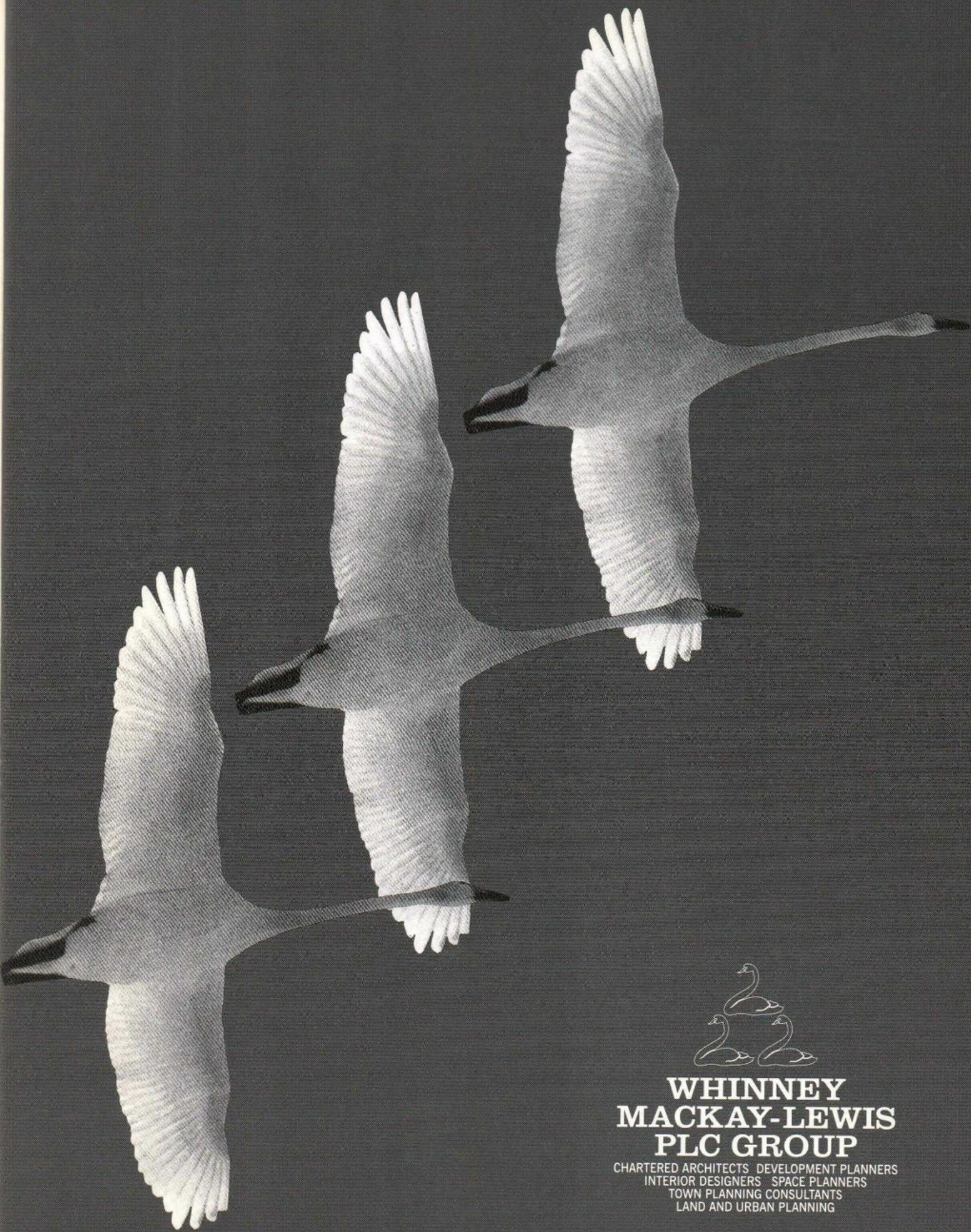
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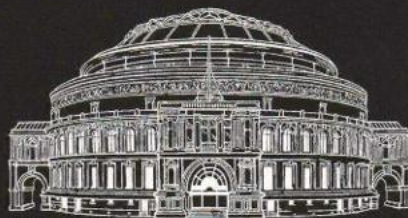
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and
Happy New Year*

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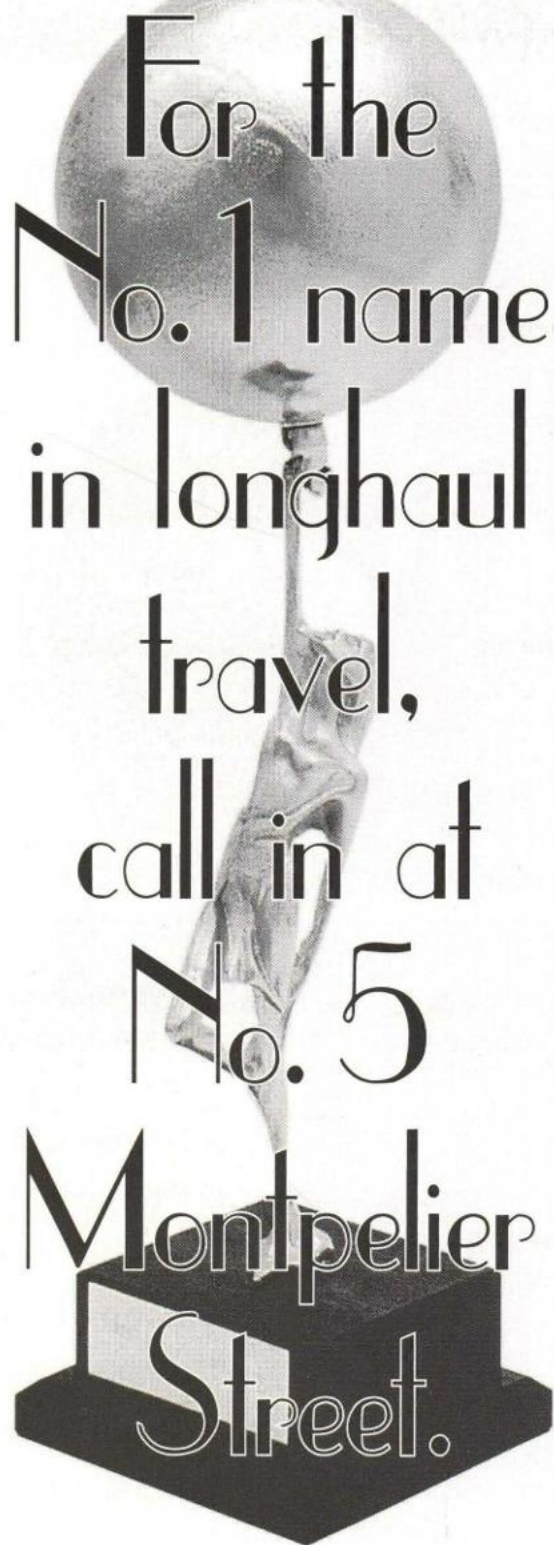
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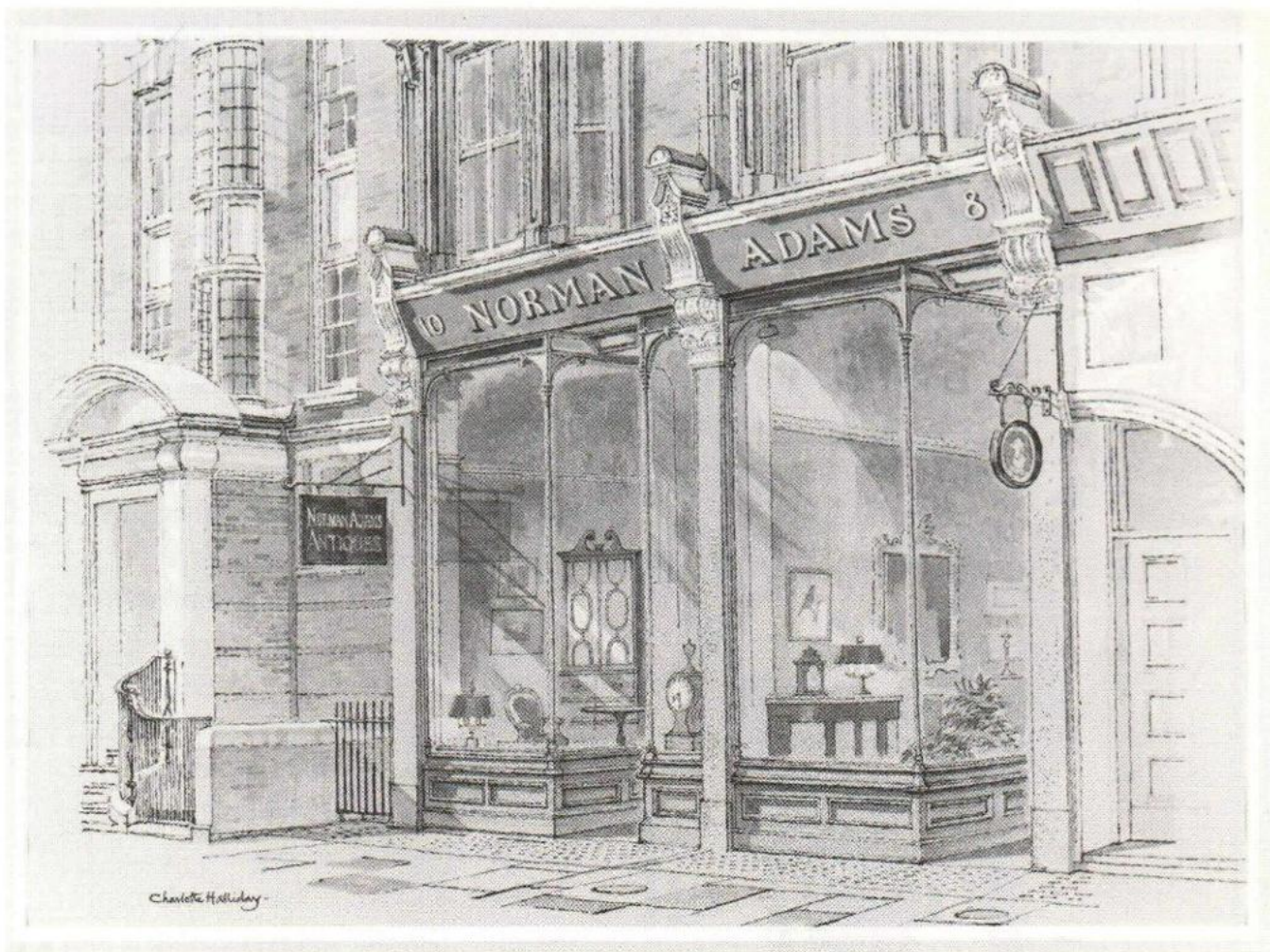
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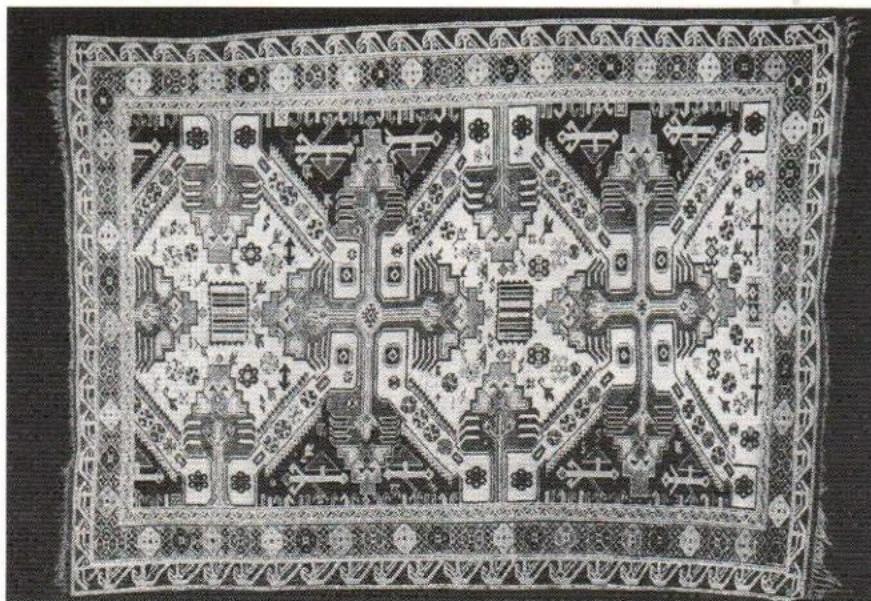
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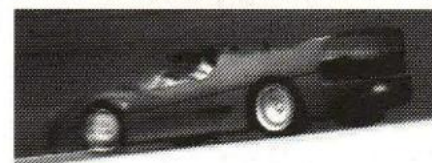


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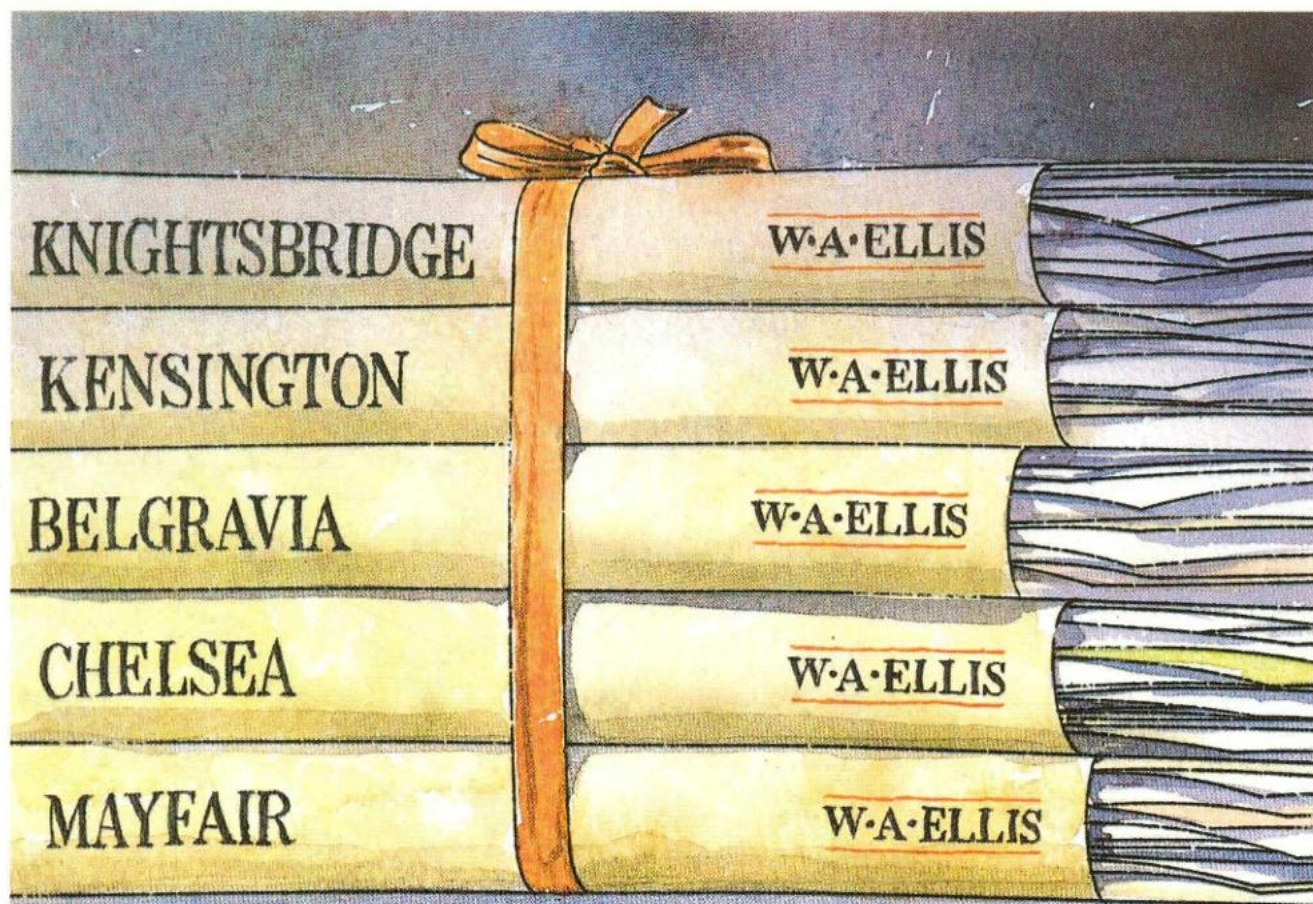
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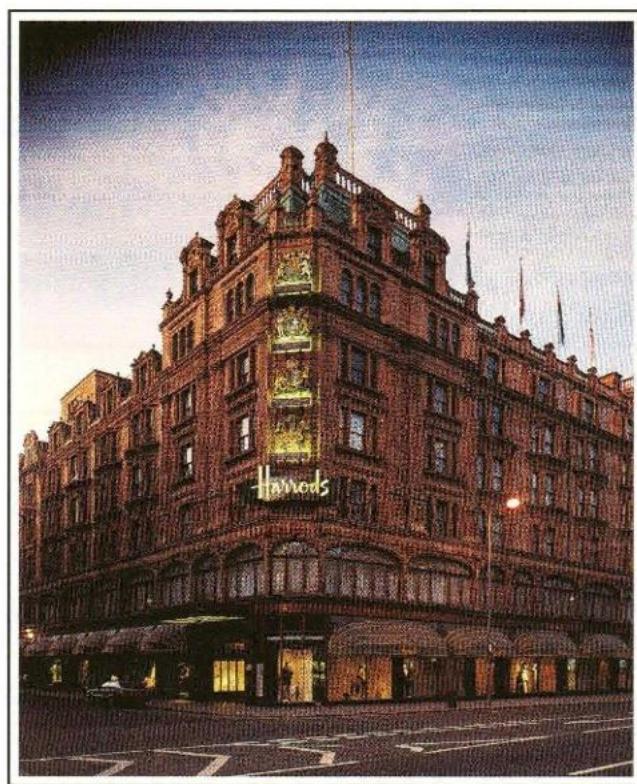
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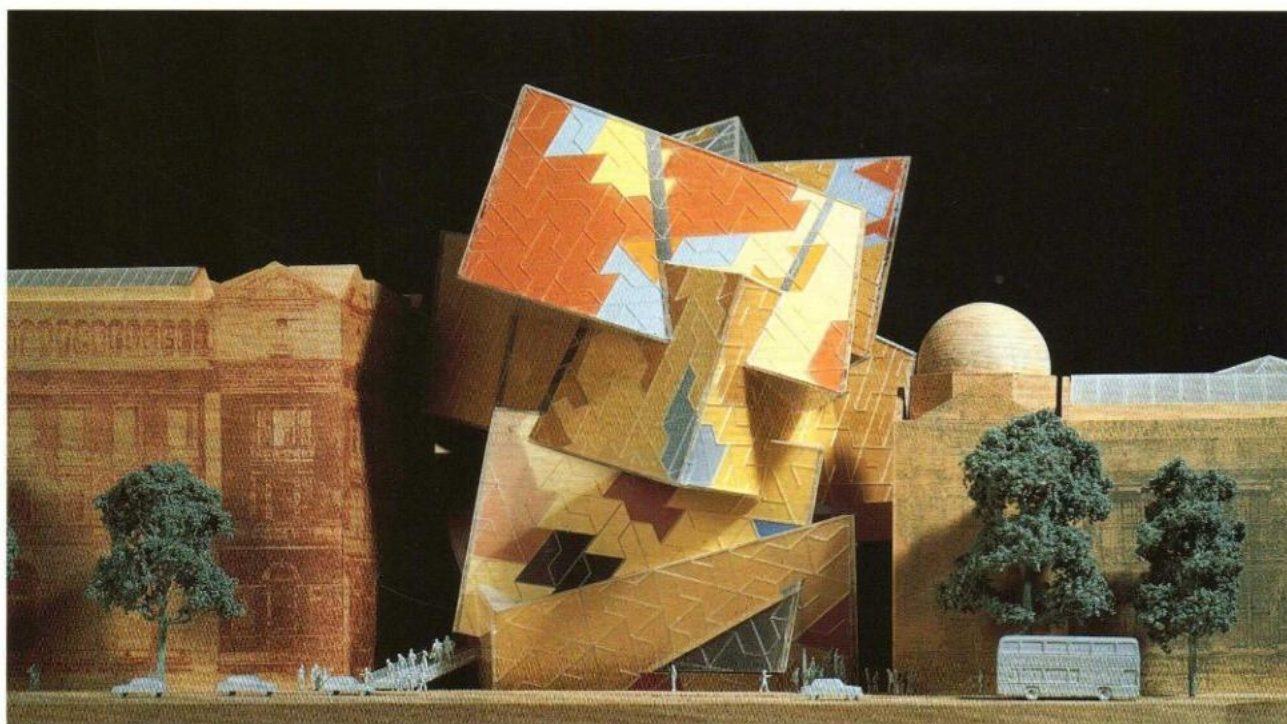
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Conceptual model for the Boilerhouse extension at the Victoria & Albert Museum, Daniel Libeskind.

CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW

The Earth is dotted with meteorites which, hundreds of thousands of years ago landed on our planet, but thankfully no great rocks have crashed amongst us for millennia, that is until quite recently!

Last May, it appeared that a massive block had crashed between the two historic buildings of the Victoria and Albert Museum and was broken and suspended in all directions. We were proudly informed that it was the maquette of a new extension for the V&A.

Before the statutory accusations of 'conventional' and 'pedantic' are levelled, it should be understood that conservationists are not per se against modern architecture. It can be beautiful and exciting. It can also be in the wrong place.

Knightbridge is still a very special place in which to live, greatly due to the early pioneers of the Knightbridge Association, which continues to protect the environment in a realistic way. Brompton Road has become an international shopping street and Sloane Street the last word in chic! Some well designed modern office buildings have been sited near to Hyde Park Corner, but as the economy improves, so does the need for vigilance.

Knightbridge is due for some very large developments beginning next year and it is important that the new buildings should blend with the old as good neighbours. There is no

doubt that there are many talented architects well able to produce what is needed, provided that this is the desire of the developers.

Fortunately, the concept of a common interest in such matters is becoming fashionable. The Knightbridge Association is not only working with the two local authorities, but also with the Knightbridge Group of Business and Commerce, to upgrade the shopping streets.

The streets of Knightbridge are already overwhelmed with people and the roads are crammed with motorcars and heavy vehicles. The overfilling of buildings and the covering of open ground are unfair and should be avoided.

So what of the extensions that the great galleries and museums want to build to display their hidden collections? This is a general problem and one that is difficult to solve with small extensions. Already there are treasures which never see the light of day. How long will it be before these extensions are themselves inadequate?

Perhaps this is the time to create another cultural centre somewhere else in London where the great galleries and museums can place their progeny with room to breath. Wonderful modern buildings, the children of their staid and sober parents, in a new home for the arts – perhaps it would be welcome at Greenwich as a memory of the Millennium. It would be reached by river boat. What a great venue for visitors.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The major developments which came to the fore towards the end of last year have begun to dominate the work of the Environment Committee. In addition to the routine work, which is in itself a large part of the Committee's every day activities, these great projects have now been presented to the Knightsbridge Association in draft form, prior to their being taken forward to the local authorities for planning permission. The members of the Committee have entered into long and detailed discussions with the developers.



The Prudential development, looking down Brompton Road towards Knightsbridge Green.

The Prudential Development

It is in the 1991 Annual Report that first mention was made of the Prudential Scheme for the re-development of the area bounded by Brompton Road, Knightsbridge, Lancelot Place and Knightsbridge Green. The Committee expressed concern that the "intensely concentrated shopping centre that is proposed to adjoin Brompton Road may change the nature of the neighbourhood". Although planning permission was obtained, work did not proceed, and changes in the economic climate caused the Prudential to re-think the whole nature of the scheme. At the end of September 1996, a revised planning application was submitted to the Westminster City Council.

The Committee has not yet studied these proposals in depth, but already the new application seems to be a considerable improvement on the earlier submission. The big shopping mall with the vast glass cover, which aroused so much concern, has been abandoned and the emphasis will be on residential accommodation with some office space south of

Raphael Street and shops along the Brompton Road frontage.

A feature of the revised plan is the pedestrianisation of Raphael Street and the provision of an open landscaped square with access from both Raphael Street and Brompton Road. In broad terms, the property north of Raphael Street will be residential and a major part of Mercury House will be retained, remodelled and extended to provide some one hundred and sixty flats, with a completely redesigned exterior. There will also be a block of sixty flats facing Lancelot Place and seven town houses near Trevor Street.

Underground parking for three hundred and sixty cars is planned to meet the demands of the flats.

The main entrance for motor vehicles will be at the east end of Knightsbridge, serving an underground service area and car park; a secondary entrance, serving the car park for the Mercury House flats will also be from Knightsbridge, towards the west end of the site.

The existing service area for Silver City house, not owned by the Prudential, will continue to be entered from Lancelot Place.



Above: Proposed elevation to Brompton Road.

Below: Prudential Development site plan.

An attractive feature of the original scheme was the subway between the Underground station and the shops on the north side of Brompton Road; this has been omitted from the new proposals. Also omitted is the original intention to retain a post office in the area, which is essential to the community. The Committee will press for their inclusion. There was also an agreement in the original scheme that some of the retail units would be let at preferential rents for small 'community' retailers, but with the very significant reduction in the number of shops in the new plan, it is not known if this concession is still to be offered.

The Environment Committee will continue an amicable discussion with Prudential and at the appropriate time will submit its views to the local authority. In the meantime, the Committee will arrange a presentation of the plans for members early in the new year.

Montpelier Square and Trevor Square Barriers

The Section 106 legal agreement, signed last year by the Prudential and the City Council, requires the installation of an experimental scheme of traffic calming measures at the bottom of Trevor Square and the north east side of Montpelier Square, to protect local residents from the pressures of additional traffic and rat running.

Progress has been made very slowly. A feasibility study has been prepared by the Council in which it is proposed that a two way traffic system with separate tracks should be adopted and a "close proximity" card reading system be used. The study draws attention to a possible difficulty with the Trevor Square barrier when the demolition work associated with Harrods Hotel takes place.

Before the scheme can be finalised, further traffic surveys need to be carried out to bring the earlier data up to date. When this has been completed the Council will set up a working group to consider design details, following which there will be further consultations with residents.



Harrods

Like a medieval nation bound upon empire, Harrods continues to grow in all directions. From 1988 to 1995, with one exception, each Annual Report contains photographs and descriptions of the proposed conversion of the Trevor Square Depository, the acquisition and proposed demolition of Trevor House in Brompton Road and the Harrods Car Park development in Brompton Place.

During the past year, Harrods has acquired the redundant Crown Court premises in Hans Crescent. Proposals for this L-shaped site, fronting both Hans Crescent and Basil Street, would retain the Hans Crescent facade.

Harrods' main aims are said to be the provision of new residential accommodation, extra retail floorspace, improved car parking and servicing and the relocation of the service yard from Hans Road to Landon Place.

The plans include 27 permanent residential apartments, ancillary offices, a clinic, a gym and other facilities for the staff. The new service yard, with access from Landon Place, would be linked beneath Basil Street to the basement of the store. There are some interesting ideas contained in the proposals including 314 car



Sketch of proposed Harrods pavement café, Hans Road.

parking spaces, with access ramps in Hans Road and Basil Street. Harrods is proposing that fifty per cent of these would be for residents, and fifty per cent for shoppers and visitors to the area, enabling street meter spaces to be removed, and pavements to be widened.

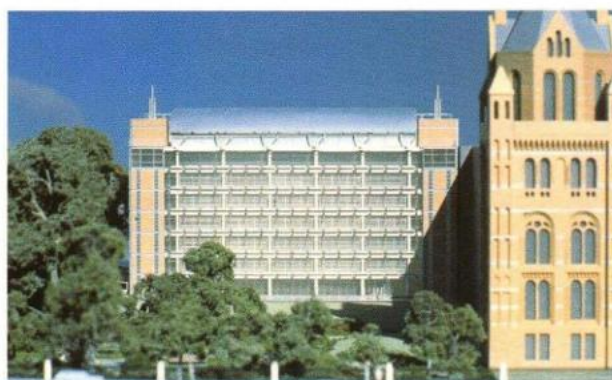
A new restaurant is proposed for the south side of Basil Street to join the existing restaurants. Space within the store released by the relocation of the Hans Road service yard would be reconverted to retail, and provide storage and a new pavement café.

The planning application has been submitted to Kensington and Chelsea Council and consultations are currently taking place. A decision is expected some time in the new year.

The latest information on Harrods Hotel is that construction will commence during the summer of 1997.

Natural History Museum

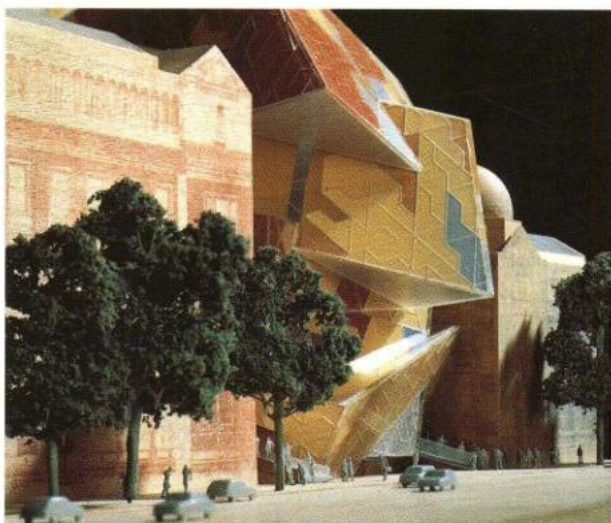
In April, members of the Committee were invited to a presentation of plans for the replacement Zoology building. Reservations were expressed about the design and its relationship to the Victorian elevations of Alfred Waterhouse. The architect's view is that the use of traditional hand-made terracotta is a strong reference to



Natural History Museum, the new Zoology building.

Waterhouse and would give the building a unique indigenous quality. It will certainly be very modern, with a great deal of glass and it is planned for the north west corner of the site, off Queen's Gate. It is set back from the Victorian building behind a lawn and will be partially hidden by trees.

The new building will house the world-class collection of fish and other soft-bodied animals, a fraction of the total of 96 million specimens of all kinds held by the museum. It will also incorporate a research laboratory. Funded jointly by the Museum and the Department of National Heritage, work should commence in 1998 and be completed in the year 2000.



The proposed extension for the V&A.

Victoria and Albert Museum

The V&A, packed as it is with precious exhibits, is in itself a jewel. It is appreciated by people the world over and no less by those on its doorstep.

The new world of opportunity for the arts and sciences that has been created by the National Lottery has stamped the heirs of Prince Albert into the modern version of the Gold Rush. For the first time there is a possibility of obtaining the hefty funds needed to improve and expand.

So, it was no surprise when the Victoria and Albert Museum arranged an architectural competition to design an addition to their buildings to be known as "the Boilerhouse Extension". The surprise came when members of the Committee first saw the winning design, which can only be described as aggressive, and is more concerned with its impact than fulfilling its function. The discordant angular planes jar with monotonous regularity and are at odds with the famous Victorian buildings into which it is slotted.

Apart from the design, there is the fundamental principle of where it stands. The onlooker does not deserve to be robbed of the view of the original buildings as seen from Exhibition Road. To the Environment Committee it represents a classic example of architectural bad manners.

The Victoria and Albert Museum has applied for Lottery funding of thirty million pounds. The V&A and the architect are working on the scheme and hope to submit a planning application to Kensington and Chelsea in the new year. The scheme will go before the Royal Fine Art Commission, English Heritage and other similar bodies for comment.

If permission is refused it will go to the Secretary of State for National Heritage for a final decision. It is hoped that the V&A will also take note of the opinion of its admirers.



The V&A building would occupy the 'Boilerhouse' courtyard.

Robin Mayes/Times Newspapers Limited.



The Wellcome Wing, Science Museum – concept design.

Science Museum

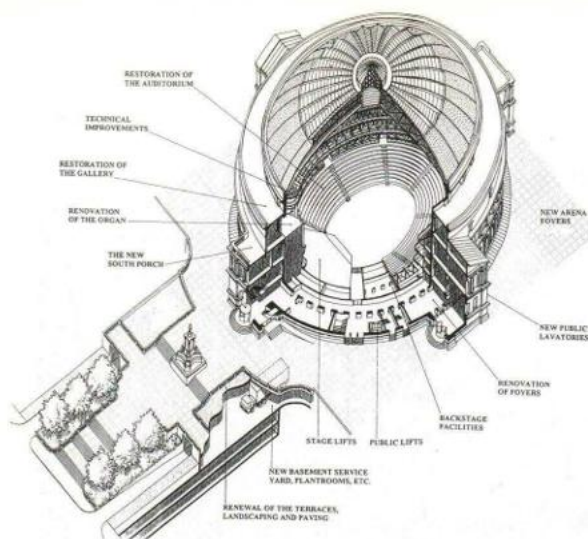
The odds on winning the Lottery are unbelievable, but not in the case of the great names of the arts and sciences which are on the receiving end.

The Science Museum was successful in its application for funds to the tune of twenty three million pounds. This money, together with the fifteen million pledged by the Wellcome Foundation, brings the fund not far short of the total needed for the new wing. This building, to be known as the "Wellcome Wing" in recognition of the Foundation's support, will be devoted to contemporary science, medicine and technology.

The building, likely to be of modern appearance, is being designed by MacCormac Jamieson Prichard who are already retained by Imperial College to work on the Princes Gardens sites.

Members of the Environment Committee were taken through the design concept by the Museum's assistant director, Professor John Durant, earlier in the year.

The new wing is expected to open in the year 2000 and will include four floors of exhibition space, a wide screen 3D IMAX cinema, a lecture theatre complex, catering and retail facilities.



Cut-away bird's eye view showing some of the improvements.

The Royal Albert Hall

The Royal Albert Hall was built by public subscription and was opened in 1871 as a memorial to the Prince Consort. It is both a monument and a forum for the nation, as well as being, with its five thousand two hundred audience capacity, a famous concert hall and, increasingly, a playhouse for all kinds of indoor entertainment.

Surprisingly for a building with such a large seating capacity there is a lack of amenities for the public and difficulty in mounting shows. The Chief Executive, Parick Deuchar, has created a scheme to provide this Grade I listed building with first class facilities for public and performers alike.

It is one thing to wish to upgrade and another to find the fifty eight million pounds with which to do it. However, in May this year, it was announced that the hall had been successful in its application for forty million pounds funding, half from the National Memorial Fund and half from the National Lottery. The balance will come from the Albert Hall's own resources.

The Chief Executive invited members of the Association and other residents, amounting to

4,700 in all, to a presentation of the plans and a discussion of the proposals. The chief worries appear to be the effect on parking of the increased number of events the proposals will permit the hall to stage, and the amount of pedestrianisation proposed in the immediate area of the hall, which might reduce access and parking for local residents.

Work has already begun on the improvements, which include a new service entrance under the Albert Steps which will enable equipment to be delivered beneath the Hall; re-building and extending the South Porch as a fourth grand entrance with a new refreshment area above it; a new restaurant at Grand Tier level and further refreshment facilities under the arena.

The controversial proposal to sink Kensington Gore and extend a piazza across the road to the Albert Memorial, which did not prove universally popular with the authorities, appears to have been dropped. English Heritage, the Royal Parks and Westminster City Council are currently working on other ideas for improving, both practically and aesthetically, pedestrian access between the Hall and the Memorial.

Planning applications on various aspects of the proposals, such as the service area beneath the Steps and the extension of the South Porch, are expected to be submitted in 1997. Work is expected to be completed by the year 2003.



The new South Porch as it will be seen from the Albert Steps.

*The tennis courts,
Princes Gardens,
proposed site for
a new sports hall and
ball of residence.*



Imperial College

Last year's Annual Report gave exhaustive coverage of the plans envisaged by Imperial College for the remaining undeveloped sites in Princes Gardens, and the inherent problems for local residents.

Imperial College is a university of great renown. It is revered by all who know its history and its achievements. Unfortunately, some years ago those who were in charge of its destiny believed that the word 'imperial' justified the occupation of large spaces and domination of the local peasants with huge unsightly buildings, packed with too many bodies to the inch, swamping the residential population.

The locals fought back and achieved a reduction in the overall numbers, but Princes Gardens was left with buildings far too big for the area in which they stand, and which are now completely out of date and in need of vastly expensive modernisation.

During the year the College bought the garden behind the swimming pool in Princes Gardens. They commissioned the famous firm of Ove Arup to create an underground sports hall with the choice of three possible sites; the newly purchased Princes Gate west garden, the garden of Princes Gardens, and the tennis court site. Of the three, the Sub-Committee preferred the tennis court site as likely to be the least disastrous for the gardens. However, the latest idea appears to be to tunnel out further than originally envisaged under Princes Gardens, causing concern for the integrity of the garden. Meanwhile, the proposals for a further hall of residence above the swimming pool have been put on hold for the time being.

After several meetings with the College, their advisors and consultants, which have concentrated on the development of the tennis court site, the Committee still has only a sketchy idea of what is proposed. To date, no elevations have been shown and indications of possible site coverage and height have been vague.

It is understood that in order to pay for the sports hall, the College is applying to the Lottery Commission for funding. In order to attract lottery money, the centre would have to be directed at non-university membership. This not only raises questions associated with the detailed impact, such as noise, traffic and parking, but also the principle of a community sports building proposed for this sensitive site in a residential area.

From the beginning, the sub-committee, under the chairmanship of Jeremy Mackay-Lewis, now assisted by the Association's independent consultant, Nigel Moor of the well respected firm RPS Nigel Moor, has stressed its continuing concerns about height, bulk, design, density, noise and car parking.

The College says that it anticipates submitting a planning application in the next few months. For the present, one can only wait to see more detailed plans. The Association would like to help to influence them towards a solution that would take into account the future of the local residents. This would include Princes Gardens being complimented by elegant buildings.

The eminent people who guide the university today, are dogged by the taste of past times. Lack of money should not stand in the way of creating a future worthy of their talents.

Consultation Papers

Deregulation: The Committee continues to be concerned at the impact of the Government's deregulation proposals in respect of public entertainment licensing and liquor licensing.

With regard to the former, the Committee has supported both Westminster City Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in arguing that the local authority should retain control of the issue of licenses for public entertainment; only thus can they use their knowledge of local conditions to ensure that licenses are not issued in sensitive areas to the detriment of the quality of life of the residents.

With regard to the latter, the Government has proposed a general extension of licensed premises and registered clubs from 11.00 pm to midnight on Friday and Saturday, and for night clubs and discotheques to remain open until 3.00am on Saturday and Sunday.

Again, the Committee has objected strongly to these proposals, pointing out that many public houses are in built-up areas in locations which, under current planning legislation, would be considered unsuitable for such use.

Protecting our Heritage: A draft green paper issued by the Department of National Heritage covers a wide range of issues affecting the listing of buildings and their conservation. Following the surprise listing of Southside and Weeks Hall in Princes Gardens in recent years, the section dealing with the listing of modern buildings, such as those less than 50 years old, is of particular interest. In commenting on this paper, the Committee agreed with the recent decision that the listing of modern buildings should continue to be subject to wide consultation and further, supported a proposal that they should have an "M" designation in recognition of the fact that judgement on their quality and suitability must, to some extent, be open to revision.

Westminster City Council Strategy for Special Events: Being at the heart of London, Westminster receives many requests to stage events on its streets, and the City Council has to be selective in granting permission. It considers that such events should either be of special interest, or relevant to the residents of Westminster and its business community.

In addition, there should be some inherent reason for the event being held in the location chosen by the organisers. Before approving any application, the City Council will consult local residents and amenity societies. Except for events which are small and local in character, they should be restricted to the Central Activities' Zone. The Committee welcomes these proposals.

Nature Conservation Strategy for Westminster:

The paper draws attention to the need for developers to take into account wildlife habitat, when preparing their development plans, and lists a number of public and private open spaces in Westminster which are of special interest for their flora and fauna. Existing controls on development on or under open spaces are strengthened.

Westminster Tourist Strategy: Westminster is the focus of the tourist industry in London – sheer numbers put pressure on the environment and can destroy the very things that the tourists come to see, quite apart from serious disruption for local residents.

Points of interest included in the paper are:

- a. Any new hotels or tourist attractions should be located in non residential parts of the Central Activities' Zone.
- b. Pedestrian facilities should be improved and the impact of coaches reduced.
- c. In partnership with the private sector, the Royal Parks Administration and the Government, the Council will explore ways in which the underground car park in Hyde Park could be adapted for coaches. This is a project that the Association has advocated for some time.
- d. The housing stock to be protected from use as temporary letting accommodation or "short lets" for tourists.

The Committee supported these initiatives, and drew attention to the serious disruption and inconvenience to holders of residents' parking permits caused by coaches which park illegally in Exhibition Road alongside the museums, and suggested that the Council should consider clamping the worst offenders.

Historic Parks and Gardens in Westminster: After a brief history of the Royal Parks, London squares and communal gardens, the paper refers to existing legislation and the extent to which it protects public and private squares and gardens from development.

The London Squares Preservation Act of 1931, lists squares – several of them in Knightsbridge – where the only structures permitted were those "necessary or convenient for, or in connection with, the use and maintenance of such squares". Unfortunately the Act makes no reference to structures under the squares, but the recently adopted Westminster Unitary Development Plan gives the City Council certain powers to control development under public and private open spaces which, it is hoped, will be sufficient to prevent the building of car parks under squares and gardens.

Leasehold Enfranchisement

In June, the Wellcome Trust wrote to all tenants of the Ellesmere Trust in Ennismore Gardens, informing them that they had acquired the freehold. Since all the houses had intervening Head Lessee companies, it appears that the tenants had no right of first refusal.

After a somewhat unfortunate beginning to their first foray into residential property in central London, with the purchase of the Smith's Charity Estate in South Kensington, Wellcome's new tenants await developments.

Marylebone Fire Station

Alarm bells rang earlier this year, not for the engines to tear out into the road, but as a consequence of a proposal to close Marylebone Fire Station, which would have left the safety of its area in the hands of other more distant stations. This would have included Basil Street, the station for Knightsbridge.

In response, the Knightsbridge Association joined with the Marylebone Association to lobby members of parliament, councils and other influential bodies, to point out the dangers of adding to the already stretched fire services of other areas. The increased journey time would make it difficult for other stations to service their own areas efficiently.

After several meetings the Associations received assurances that the closure would not take place.

Of the 4,000 calls a year to which the Marylebone Fire Station responds, 1,900 come from its own patch, and 2,100 come from adjoining areas including Knightsbridge.

South Kensington Station

It is taking a long time to find a suitable scheme for South Kensington Station which will please both the developers and the local community.

This well known and popular area could not bear an excessive increase in office accommodation and shopping space without changing the character of the neighbourhood.

Now, in today's climate, there is less demand for office accommodation, but a revised scheme by Terry Farrell and Company, whilst making certain refinements to Pelham Street and Thurloe Square elevations is still, in the Committee's view, an over development of the site and does little to solve the traffic circulation problems. Further amendments are expected.

Kensington Gore

Work to convert the Old Yugoslav Embassy at 25 Kensington Gore to a private family residence is well underway. The original application to demolish numbers 23 and 24 to build a small block of flats was refused permission by

Westminster City Council, and during the year a further application was made. The Council, however, did not take kindly to the new application, regarding the design as too grandiose for the site and out of keeping with its neighbours.

Eventually permission was granted to demolish and re-build and work began almost immediately.

Montpelier Square

Last year's Report mentioned the proposals to demolish the Old George IV pub and its neighbour, the former Omani Embassy, on the corner of Trevor Place. During the year the Committee commented on proposals to replace these buildings with single family houses. Although they may not appeal to everybody, they are certainly an improvement on the current buildings.

Rutland Gate

Park House, the magnificent residence at 24 Rutland Gate, and most recently the home of Accademia Italiana, remains empty together with its neighbour at number 26. This latter building is becoming increasingly derelict in appearance due to having been inhabited for a very small part of at least the last 15 years and the Committee has alerted Westminster City Council to its present state.

Surprisingly enough neither of these two buildings is listed although the Association has been pressing for this for some time.

13 and 15 Rutland Gate

The two storey extension just finished at 13 and 15 Rutland Gate sits uncomfortably on top of this post war building which replaced the original 19th century houses. At that time permission had been granted to demolish the two buildings whilst retaining the facade.

In those days, planning law was not so tight and the Rutland terraces had not yet been listed and so there was no recourse when the facade collapsed during construction!

The extension, though granted permission, was opposed by the Knightsbridge Association, and the realisation has confirmed its fears that the design was inappropriate.

Upper Garden – Rutland Gate

After three years, contact has at last been established with representatives of the garden's new owner.

In August, a meeting took place with Committee members, officers from Westminster Council, and the owner's representative and it is hoped that some agreement may be reached in the long run. Meanwhile, minimum maintenance

and clearing of leaves and rubbish continues to be paid for out of the funds which the Association raises from time to time.

161 Brompton Road

This building was formerly a branch of the National Westminster Bank at the junction of Brompton Road and Brompton Place and an application was made for demolition of the existing building and the erection of a six storey block.

The Committee disliked some aspects of the replacement building, but did not object in principle to the demolition. Kensington and Chelsea Council however, refused permission on the grounds that the existing building was considered to make a positive contribution to the conservation area, and that its demolition would detract from the area's character and appearance.

A revised application has been submitted for a new building similar in style to the existing one, but two storeys higher, which will combine retail and residential use.

171-173 Brompton Road

This was previously occupied by the erstwhile Bank of Credit & Commerce. A vigorous campaign by the Association some years ago prevented change of use to a restaurant which would almost certainly have resulted in another 8,000 square feet of fast food takeaway, of

which the area already has a sufficiency. It will now open shortly as a new retail outlet.

The French Embassy

The French Embassy, on the corner of Albert Gate, now stands as a constant reminder of the way in which dilapidated and neglected buildings can contribute so sadly to the degradation of an otherwise fine thoroughfare.

Impervious to the pleas of Westminster City Council, English Heritage and the Knightsbridge Association, and despite adverse comments in the press, the Embassy allows the building to continue to deteriorate; paint is peeling, the walls are cracked and the whole building is encrusted with dust and dirt.

It is impossible to enforce the law on the maintenance of listed buildings due to diplomatic immunity. It is understandable that the French Exchequer, like others, is economising, but all citizens have to meet their obligations, however short money may be, and it is upsetting to all their friends to see this as an example of "La Belle France".

Knights Arcade

Every controller of an arcade dreams of enjoying the financial returns of the famous Burlington Arcade, but like all shops it is the position that counts, with the additional requirement that the arcade must actually lead somewhere. Unfortunately, several good



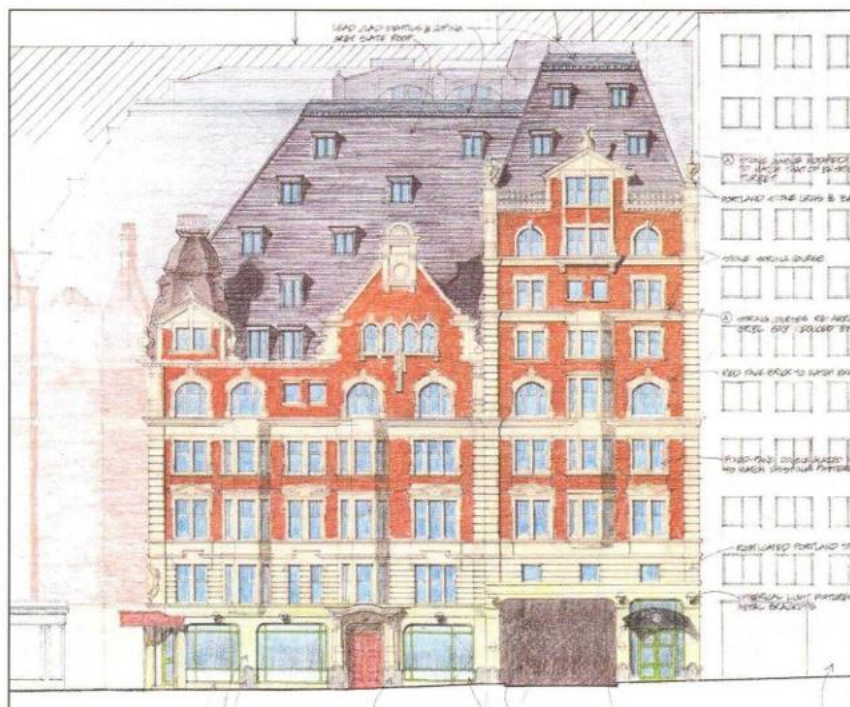
The French Embassy, still cracked and peeling – plus ça change.

The arcade was beautifully appointed, but the main entrance was far too small. The arcade runs between Brompton Road and Knightsbridge, but alongside stretches the bustling, shopping alleyway of Knightsbridge Green, and for a long time the arcade has been virtually empty. So the Committee was glad to see an application in August to extend considerably the Jaeger store on the Knightsbridge Green frontage. A second application, however, for a very large restaurant on the Knightsbridge side of Park Mansions, raised even more worries: more traffic, parking problems in the residential areas at night, lack of plans to deal with servicing the site, ventilation and noise, not to mention reservations about the elevational treatment.

Several years ago the Normandie Hotel applied for permission to expand whilst retaining its Knightsbridge facade. The Association opposed the application, on grounds of over-development, and this was accepted by Westminster Council. The Normandie appealed and permission was granted. However, since the years have passed, no work has taken place.

A photograph of a modern, multi-story brick apartment building with a curved facade and balconies, situated in an urban environment. The building is surrounded by trees and older structures. A street with parked cars and a person walking is visible in the foreground.

Below: Architect's drawing of the proposed new Normandie Hotel.



TRAFFIC AND PARKING

As Annual Reports keep repeating, the Traffic Committee finds life frustrating. Each year is filled with new problems but no new solutions.

Once more this year produced a record number of cars sold and although the Government and both local authorities have produced transport policies to reduce pollution and protect the environment, the situation appears to get worse. The implementation of the Knightsbridge/ Brompton Road Red Route and the traffic protection measures for local residents is still awaited. When this happens, it will, amongst other things, change the direction of traffic in the two roads on either side of Harrods.

Westminster City Council recently conducted a major consultation on traffic for Belgravia and many members of the Association were astonished by the severity of some of the proposed measures. Many people living in surrounding areas have expressed serious misgivings and the results of this consultation are eagerly awaited.

Harrods Hotel development is now projected to start in summer 1997 and the Association is working with the traffic consultants to try to minimise nuisance and disruption caused to residents during construction. Meanwhile, those living in Trevor Square are still subject to problems from lorries making early morning

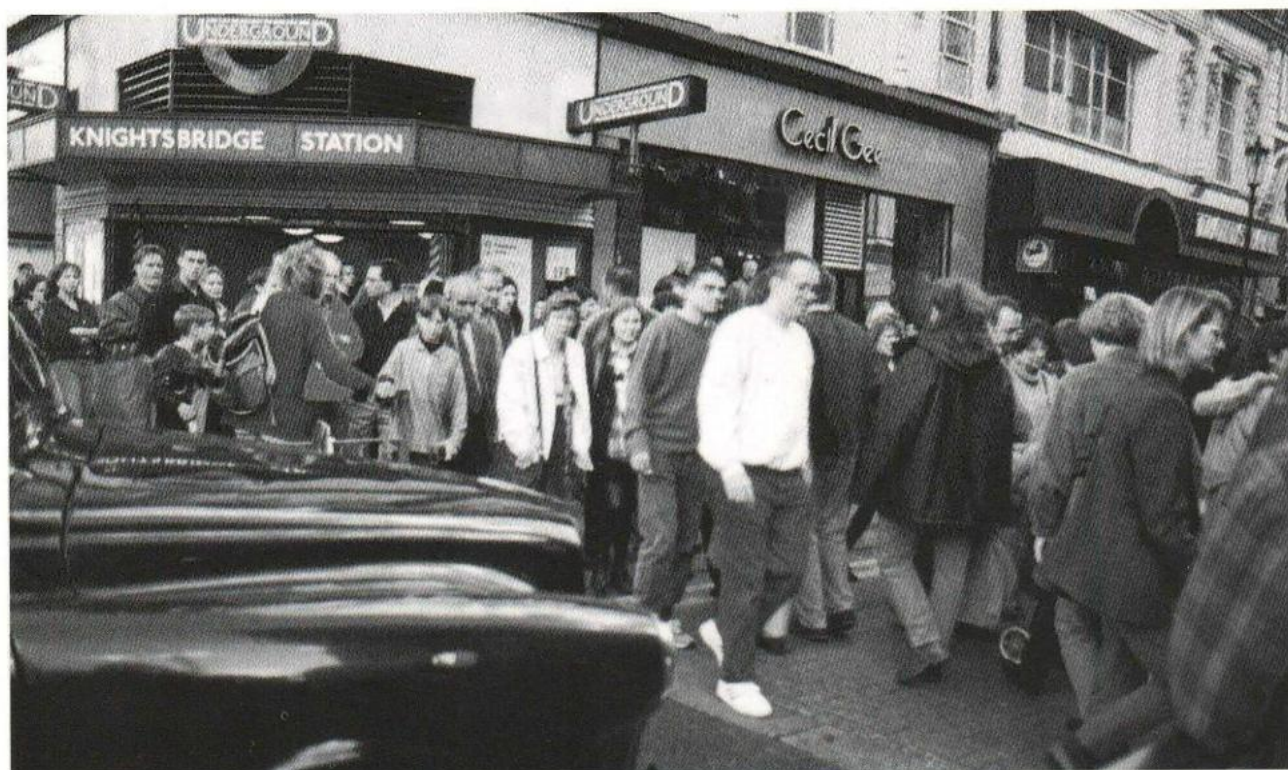
deliveries to the depository.

With the increased use of the Albert Hall, the immediate area of this famous building will present major traffic control problems.

Experience of Sunday shopping has caused serious parking problems for local residents, their friends and relations, and if Sunday shopping is to become the norm, then some solution will have to be found.

In Hyde Park, the West Carriage Drive scheme has been introduced with some in its favour and some against, but the safety of the new pedestrian crossings needs to be addressed, and the right hand turn into South Carriage Drive appears to have been dropped. The timing of journeys through the Park seemed to be little longer than before the changes were made and the Committee awaits adequate consultation before other changes are made.

The increase of vehicles and the amount of time cars have to stand in line has increased pollution in the air. Severe congestion is caused on Sundays when there are major roadworks in Brompton Road or Knightsbridge or when the underpass is closed for repair. Since projected works are known about weeks in advance, it is essential that the Parks co-operate with Westminster City Council to allow the opening of South Carriage Drive on these occasions.



Congestion outside Knightsbridge Station reflects the congestion underground.

KNIGHTSBRIDGE THOROUGHFARE and BROMPTON ROAD

Last year's Report described the initiative by the Knightsbridge Association which culminated in a joint venture involving the Knightsbridge Association, Westminster City Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea to upgrade and improve the Knightsbridge thoroughfare and the Brompton Road before the turn of the century.

The first act was to invite the Knightsbridge Group of major businesses to join in the endeavour. Several discussions have taken place and a major feasibility study has been carried out resulting in proposals for improvements and estimated costs.

The major improvements proposed are to the Edinburgh Gate and Knightsbridge Green areas as well as to the raised sections from Trevor House to Cheval Place. Ways of financing the work are being investigated and it is hoped to make appreciable progress over the next few months.

Knightsbridge Underground Station

The problems which existed between the Knightsbridge Association and London Underground regarding the state of Knightsbridge Station have long since disappeared, and both parties now enjoy a good relationship, working together to improve the area. Considerable progress has already been made.

As a short term measure, a general redecoration and cleaning scheme was undertaken during the spring and summer

months. This also incorporated extensive re-signing, including the reinstatement of many signs to their original 1930s format. These have made a significant impact in upgrading the overall environment both within and outside the station.

During the same period, a feasibility study developed a wide range of potential options for relieving the unacceptably crowded Brompton Road end of the station.

The preferred scheme involved the construction of a new, large basement-level ticket hall, with increased ticket selling facilities and enhanced staircase access to street level. The possibility of incorporating a step free access route through the station was also explored.

It is anticipated that further liaison with the landowner, as well as the Knightsbridge Association and the local council, will take place over the coming months, although current budgetary constraints are likely to delay the construction of any scheme for several years.

It is quite obvious that in order to continue to move Londoners and the ever increasing number of tourists throughout the capital, there is no alternative but to increase funding greatly.

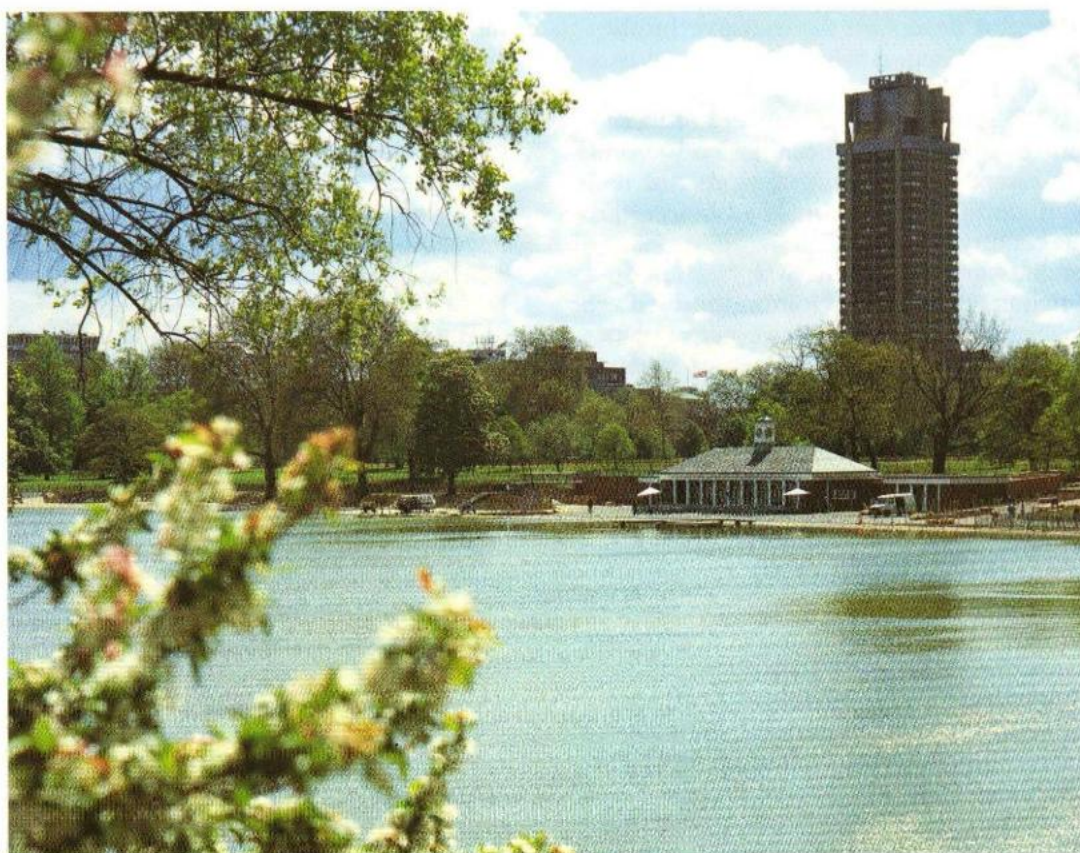
Piccadilly Line: The frequency of trains on the Piccadilly Line in central London has recently been increased in off peak times to one every two and a half minutes on week days. There has also been a dramatic increase in the frequency of Sunday trains.

*Suggested design
for more elegant railings
which would enhance the
Knightsbridge and Brompton Road
thoroughfare.*



Above: Dilapidated railings in Brompton Road.

HYDE PARK AND KENSINGTON GARDENS



The Lido.

According to the Royal Parks own 'Review of the Year' everything in the garden is rosy! Indeed, Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens do look splendid although there have been grumbles about some of the bedding-out colour schemes.

Roller-bladers are still a problem for both Parks, but they have now been allocated special areas and the results will be reviewed. One of the most obvious changes during the year has been the work taking place on West Carriage Drive. It does not seem that the new system delays traffic and, although it is good to see that the pedestrian crossings are now in place, it would be helpful if they were of uniform design. At the moment it is difficult for pedestrians to know who has the right of way. On the other hand a very good map has recently appeared at Alexandra Gate showing phase one of the West Carriage Works, with notes. However, the gravelled areas on either side of the road are ugly and excessive.

The Committee was pleased to learn in March that a right hand turn from South Carriage Drive going north was to be included as part of the West Carriage Drive scheme, something for which it had been pressing for years. It was therefore a surprise to learn later in the year that

this idea has been dropped without further consultation.

During the year the Lido underwent a major refurbishment which included opening up the south side of the Serpentine for pedestrian use and re-landscaping the areas formerly enclosed by tall iron fencing.

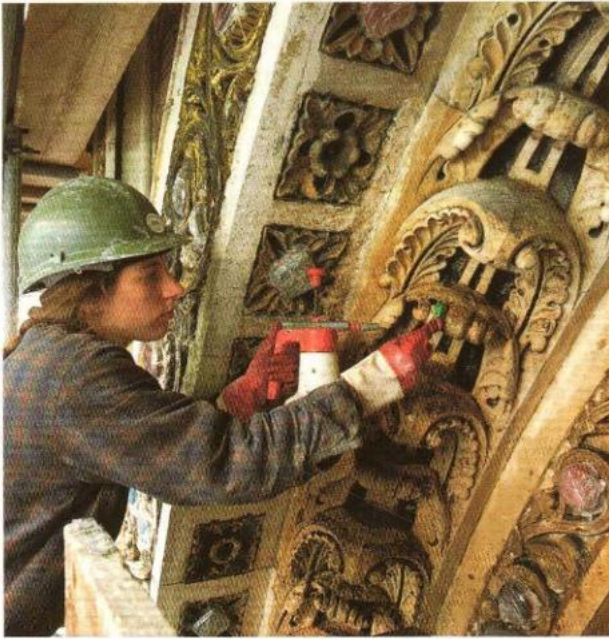
In October, Dame Jennifer Jenkins opened a new environmental centre in Hyde Park which was sponsored by the Friends of the Park.

Those who visit the Serpentine Gallery will be interested to know that renovation has begun after a successful campaign to raise four million pounds. A large part of this money came from the National Lottery.

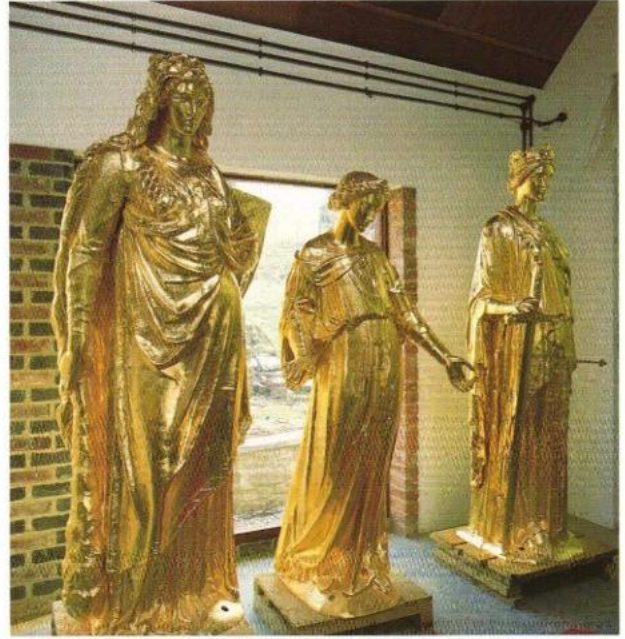
During 1996 two major events took place in Hyde Park. The pop concert started at lunch time, went on all afternoon and evening, and the noise could be heard as far away as Sloane Square and Pimlico. This has never been countenanced previously. The second event, which was connected with the last night of the Proms, was shorter and less noisy.

The Committee continues to be wary of large organised events. These should be few and far between, have some specific connection with the Parks, and be of benefit to the Parks.

THE ALBERT MEMORIAL



Work in progress.



Newly gilded statues in the workshop.



A pensive Prince Albert supervising the works.



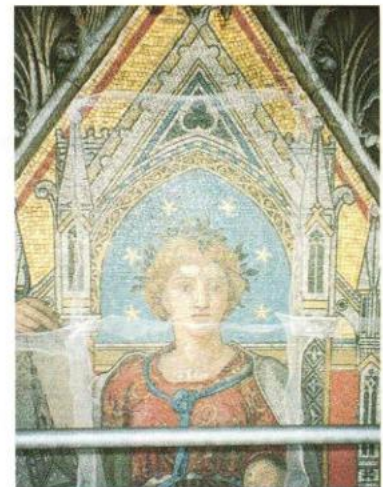
Above: Sculptures of the podium. The Architects, featuring (seated) Sir Christopher Wren.

The Albert Memorial Trust, formed in October 1994 to raise the shortfall between the Government's first tranche of four million pounds and English Heritage's contribution of two million pounds, is hard at work to raise the shortfall of three million pounds in order to meet the scheduled completion in 1999.

The Knightsbridge Association which, together with The Victorian Society, lobbied hard to have the Albert Memorial restored to its original glory, was one of the first to support the fund, and eagerly follows its progress.

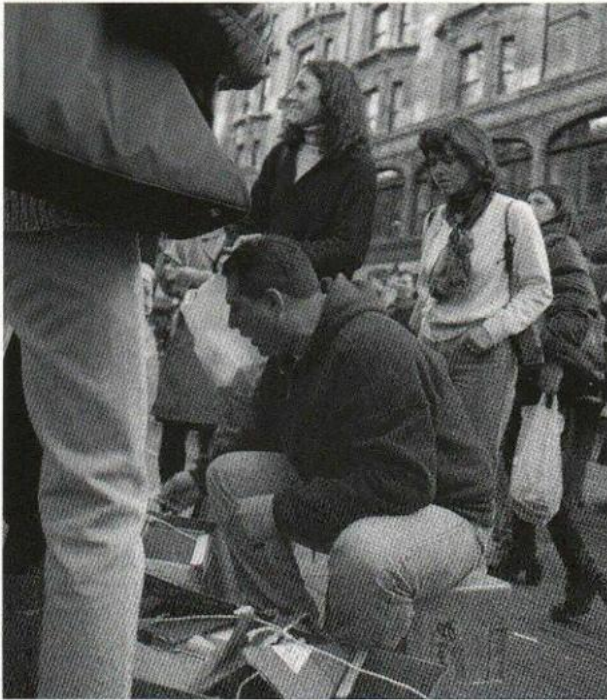
Restoration work has now been going on since the end of October 1994. It is currently in Phase 1, which includes repairs to the iron core, the bronze statues and the ornamentation on the upper levels.

This phase should be completed by mid 1998.



Right: Pediment mosaic representing Architecture.

LAW AND ORDER



The rewards of illegal street trading far outweigh the penalties.

In its seventh year of operation, the Committee certainly had its busiest year yet. It came into being because the success of Knightsbridge as a world class shopping area brought with it a large increase in crime.

There is a close relationship between the Law and Order Committee and the Belgravia and Brompton Road Police who attend the Committee's meetings and, in return, Committee members attend Police Sector Working Group assemblies.

The Committee is also represented at Westminster's Police and Community Consultative Group meetings when urgent police matters of concern to Knightsbridge residents and business houses are raised with the Metropolitan Police.

Closed Circuit Television

The Law and Order Committee continues to support the police in their efforts to install closed circuit television in the major shopping areas. The fund raising results were most encouraging and a bid was made this summer to the Home Office to allocate to the local police some of the CCTV Scheme allocation of fifteen million pounds.

Unfortunately, the bid was not successful. There were 800 applications across the UK and only 250 were successful. There is to be a further allocation of funds in the near future and the Committee has been encouraged by the

Home Office to make another bid soon. To this end efforts are being intensified to encourage all Knightsbridge businesses who have not already participated, to do so now.

House Burglary – Scaffolding

Fortunately scaffolding crime seems to be on the decrease due to police activity, but the problem still exists where householders have not followed Police guidelines. All scaffolding should be fitted with electronic surveillance from day one. If any members are in doubt about security, they should check with their local police station.

Burglary Artifice

Bogus window cleaners, gas meter readers, collectors for garden square funds and local associations, continue to circulate in the area from time to time. Under no circumstances should anyone be given admittance to a building unless they are recognised or have a bona fide identification. All genuine meter readers, for example, carry an ID card and will understand if a check is made with their head office before they are allowed to enter. Genuine associations and garden square committees do not solicit from door to door.

Illegal Street Trading

It is encouraging to know that the efforts by the police and Kensington & Chelsea Council have meant that ice cream vans around Harrods appear to be almost a thing of the past. Illegal traders are harder to dislodge. Several successful prosecutions have taken place but the traders are part of an extensive and highly organised group and the huge profits to be made far outweigh the occasional fines. This is a problem which must be faced.

The heather sellers are increasingly aggressive and demanding. Puzzled foreigners have been known to open their wallets to them unaware of the value of notes, and sellers have on occasion helped themselves to fifty pound notes.

Crime Statistics

The success of Knightsbridge means that criminals continue to be drawn towards the area to prey on its foreign visitors in particular, but also to practice the popular crimes of the day: burglary, where victims co-operate with the villains by omitting to protect their homes, and the mugging of passers-by, particularly for their Rolex watches and other valuable jewellery.

Residents can obtain advice on security from the Crime Prevention Officers who will be happy to assist.

RUBBISH AND LITTER

The Rubbish and Litter Committee is one of the most important bodies in the Association. It differs from its fellow committees in that its work never stops for 365 days in the year. In the early days of the Association, Frances Rice, the Committee's chairman, led a successful campaign to rid Knightsbridge of rubbish and litter. Only those who live in the area can appreciate the difference between then and now.

Victories in this sphere are not enough, for the campaign is endless. The local authorities battle against an increasing tide of bags, cans, boxes, wrappers and cartons, a very large number of which are discarded on the street, pushed between garden railings or left behind in the parks. There are many places, such as stations, where the litter bins have been removed as a security risk. In many of the residential streets the bins had to be removed as they were continually being filled to the brim with domestic rubbish.

Although last year's Report mentioned the concern felt by the Westminster Council's change of cleansing contractors, the result has been for the better. Onyx, the new contractor, has improved the service and, after a difficult start, has established a regular early refuse collection as well as an improved sweeping service. Compared with other parts of London, residential Knightsbridge is satisfactorily clean but the shopping streets require attention. The pressure of tourists, fast-food shops and the grazing population make it extremely difficult to keep streets clean. Also, the dumping of rubbish in the streets by residents, passing motorists and traders has not yet decreased.

Residents who see refuse being dumped on the streets or being put out at times other than collection times would greatly help keep Knightsbridge clean by telephoning the Cleansing Enforcement Hotline for Westminster on: 798-1677, or Kensington & Chelsea on: 341-5114 (weekdays) and 373-6009 (weekends).



Recycling

Westminster City Council is anxious to collect materials for recycling and recently ran experimental collections in Rutland Gate on alternative Saturdays. The trial proved unsuccessful and the collections have therefore been discontinued.

The Committee believes that it would be better if goods for recycling were collected at the same time as normal refuse, the system used by the Royal Borough, and have discussed this with the Council.

In the interim, residents are encouraged to take their recycling material to the nearest depository:

*Westminster: Relton Mews and
Linstead Hall, Imperial College*

*RBKC: Sainsbury's, Cromwell Road and
Thurloe Square, opposite the V&A*



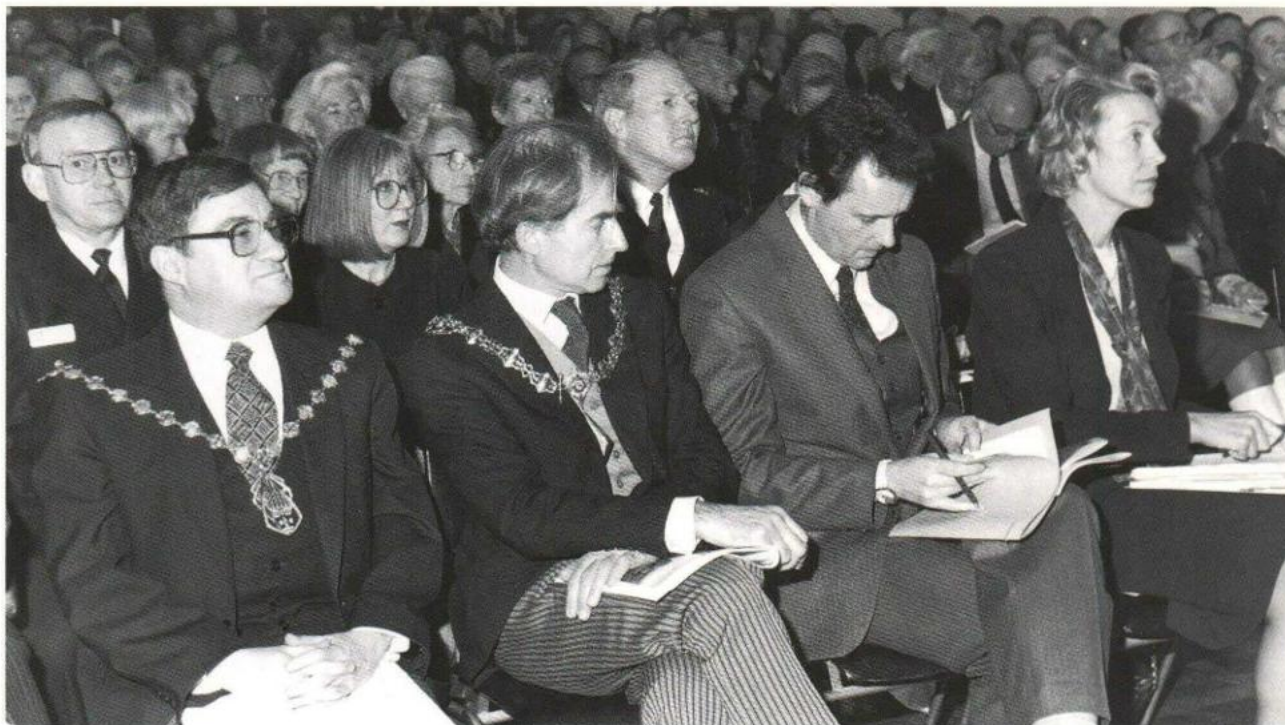
Left: Overflowing bins need more frequent emptying.

Below left: Litter pushed through the railings of Holy Trinity churchyard.

Below: Changes in the law may help to discourage the display of vice cards in phone kiosks.



SOCIAL EVENTS AND THE A.G.M.



L to R at the AGM: Cllr. Alan Bradley, Lord Mayor of Westminster; Cllr. Paul Warrick, Mayor of Kensington & Chelsea; Neville Mackay, Department of National Heritage; The Secretary of State for National Heritage, the Rt. Hon. Mrs. Virginia Bottomley MP.

The Annual General Meeting is always a full house and last year was no exception. The hall was packed with members and guests who came to hear the guest speaker, the Rt. Hon. Virginia Bottomley JP MP, who had recently been appointed Secretary of State for National Heritage. The audience listened with interest to her views on the listing of modern buildings and the application of the Lottery Fund.

The meeting was attended by the Lord Mayor of Westminster, the Mayor of Kensington & Chelsea, the Rt. Hon. Peter Brooke CH, Member of Parliament for Westminster, Councillor Robert Moreland, Chairman of the Planning and Environment Committee, and a Knightsbridge Ward Councillor, and his colleague Councillor, Simon MacDonagh. Also attending from Kensington & Chelsea were Councillor Nicholas Paget-Brown, Chairman of the Environmental Services Committee, Michael French, Executive Director of Planning and Conservation and Michael Stroud, Executive Director of Environmental Services. Representatives from the Royal Parks, including Chief Executive David Welch, and a large contingent of the Metropolitan and local police forces, also attended.

Town and Gown

The Town and Gown party, initiated by the Friends of Imperial College, has become an

annual event. This year Sir Ronald Oxburgh, Rector of Imperial College invited members of the Association to a reception in Princes Gate garden, recently acquired by the College.

It was a lovely evening and guests were able to enjoy the late sun and music, which was played by an ensemble from the College.

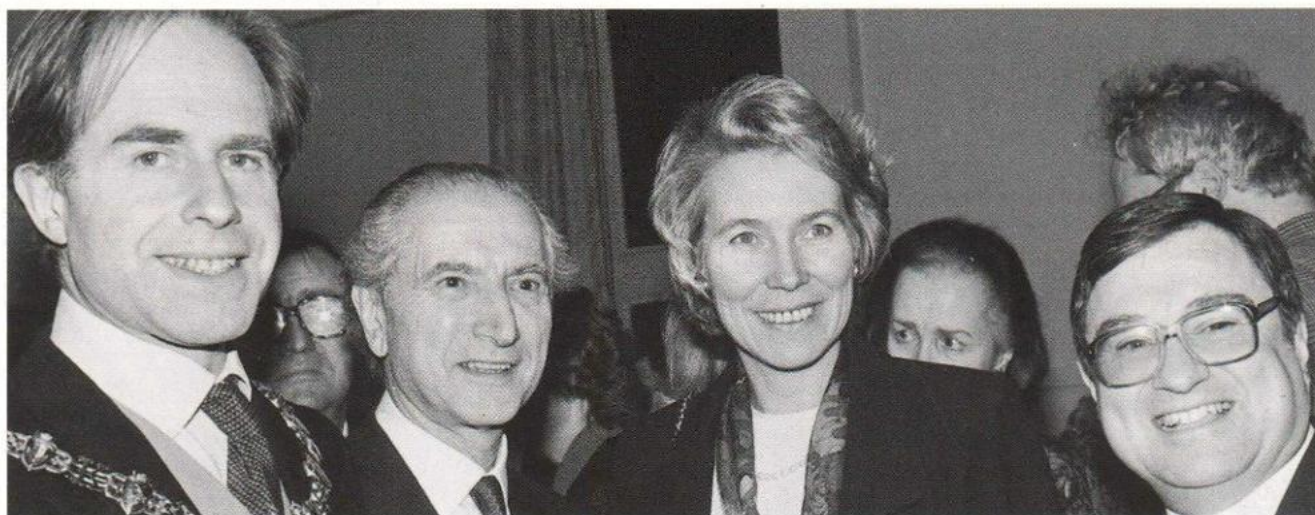
The guests had the opportunity to meet the College's University Challenge team champions, who proudly displayed their trophy.

In his address, the Rector emphasised that the gardens would be a quiet place of relaxation for the students, and strict guidelines for use would be issued. He hoped that this would allay the fears of anyone living in close proximity to the garden.

Evening At The Barracks

It is a long time since the last reception at the Barracks, which is always a popular event. This year's party was no exception and the evening was heavily oversubscribed. Colonel Toby Browne, Commanding Officer of the Household Cavalry, welcomed the guests and gave a brief outline of the history of the Cavalry and its recent tours of duty. Officers then accompanied groups on a tour of the Barracks, which included visits to the stables, the forge and the saddlery. This was followed by an enjoyable reception in the Officers' Mess.

RECEPTION BEFORE THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING DECEMBER 1995



Cllr. Paul Warrick, Mayor of Kensington & Chelsea, Neville Labovitch, the Rt. Hon. Virginia Bottomley MP, Secretary of State for National Heritage, Cllr. Alan Bradley, Lord Mayor of Westminster.



Robert Morris, Jeremy Mackay-Lewis and Frances Rice.



The Duchess of Hamilton, Stuart Corbyn and Gillian Nunn.



Elspeth Parkes, Inspector Frank White and Rosemary Hamilton.



Ian Caldwell and Lady Oxborough.



Lady Grade and Lord St. John of Fausley.



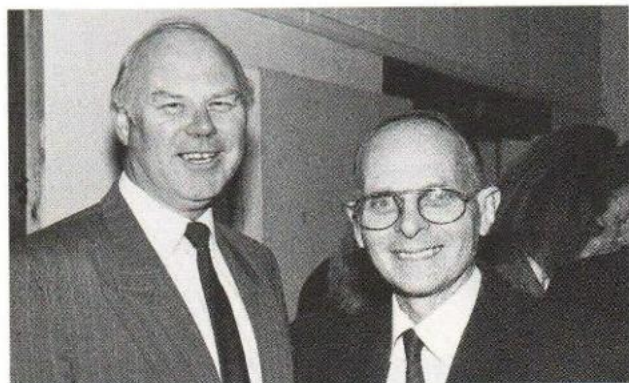
Lisa Watkins and Cllr. Melvyn Caplan, Leader of Westminster City Council.



Ian Donnell and the Rt. Hon. Peter Brooke CH MP.



Lady Richardson and Georgina Mary Greene.



Commander Walter Ross, Royal Parks' Constabulary and David Welch, Chief Executive of the Royal Parks.



Cllr. Nicholas Paget-Brown, Chairman of Kensington & Chelsea's Environmental Services Committee, and Michael Stroud, Executive Director of Environmental Services, Kensington & Chelsea.



Cllr. Simon MacDonagh and Cllr. Robert Moreland, Chairman of Westminster City Council's Planning & Environment Committee.



Ian Southward and Mavis Byzantine.



PC Simon Suter and Elizabeth Leist.



Barbarine Okumara and Lord Strathcarron.



Jeff Davis and Sandy Davis.



The Hon. Lady de Zulueta and Moira Charkham.



Lady Arbuthnot and Inge Olsdal.



Mike Freestone and Paul Akers.



Helen Croasdale and Stephen Hamilton.



Colonel Sir Julian Paget and Christopher Carlisle.



Diana Gilbey, Charles Hoxton-Duncan and Nick Butler.



Inspector Denis Laurie and Trixie Shingleton.

LOCAL AND OTHER AUTHORITIES

This year there have been no changes in the most important posts within the ministries as far as the Association is concerned. John Gummer remains Secretary of State for the Environment and Virginia Bottomley, who was the guest of honour at the AGM last year, remains Secretary of State for National Heritage and has the pleasure of controlling the National Lottery funds.

In local government, Councillor Melvyn Caplan continues to lead the City of Westminster, Robert Moreland, one of Knightsbridge's ward councillors, has become Chairman of the Planning and Environment Committee, and Frances Blois is the new Chairman of the Traffic Sub-Committee.

At the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, Councillor Joan Hanham continues as Leader, whilst Bryan Levitt succeeded Desmond Harney as Chairman of the Planning and Conservation Committee, Tony Holt succeeded John Corbet-Singleton as Chairman of Highways and Traffic, Nicholas Paget-Brown remains Chairman of Environmental Services and Daniel Moylan is Chairman of Environmental Health and Leisure. The Lord Mayor of Westminster is Councillor Robert Davis, and the Mayor of the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea is Councillor John Corbet-Singleton.

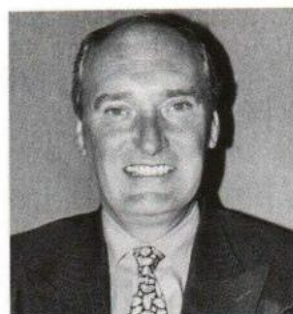
The senior officers of both local authorities, headed by Syd Sporle at Westminster and Michael French at Kensington & Chelsea, have



Cllr. Robert Moreland, Chairman of Westminster's Planning & Environment Committee.



Cllr. Bryan Levitt, Chairman of Kensington & Chelsea's Planning & Conservation Committee.



Mr. Syd. Sporle, Director of Westminster's Planning & Environment Department.



Mr. Michael French, Executive Director of Kensington & Chelsea's Planning & Conservation Department.

been as helpful as ever, and the Association is grateful for their assistance and advice.

Each year it is pleasing to be able to express appreciation of the same people because, in these two highly efficient local authorities, officers do not often leave. It has been learned with surprise and regret that Syd Sporle, the Director of Planning and Environment at Westminster City Council, is retiring next year.

Syd Sporle controls an awesome amount of work and is responsible for many innovative projects. The Knightsbridge Association is very grateful for his personal interest in its affairs and his dedication to the City Council and the residents of Westminster.

FINANCE

The financial position remains healthy in spite of increased office costs, paper and a donation to the Albert Memorial Trust. These costs were offset by an increase in membership and advertising revenue. However, it is unwise to be complacent since professional advisors are needed from time to time, and in fact this year, the Association has had to call on the services of a consultant in matters relating to the proposals by Imperial College. There may always be occasions when it is necessary to raise additional funds.

APPRECIATIONS

People who have dealings with the Association often express their amazement that so much work, in such detail, is undertaken completely by volunteers.

The secret of its success is based upon the experience of the men and women who are prepared to give their time to preserve the character of this special neighbourhood. Their only reward is their satisfaction, and a few words of appreciation in the Annual Report.

The chairmen of the committees are the lifeblood of the Association and the heaviest load is carried by the chairman of the Environmental Committee, Michael Wright, who has a life long experience as an architect and surveyor. He is supported by vice chairman Lesley MacDonagh, an expert in planning law, and two other architects, Ian Caldwell and Jeremy Mackay-Lewis, who heads a well-known practice, and is chairman of the sub-committee which is discussing the proposed expansion of Imperial College. Robert Morris, another committee member, continues to work effectively with the local authorities on the upgrading of the Knightsbridge thoroughfare and Brompton Road.

The Traffic Committee is chaired by Kevin Gardner, who brings his experience as a member of Westminster City Council.

Nevertheless, he has a difficult and aggravating task dealing with the problems of traffic and parking in Knightsbridge. He and his committee members deserve our sympathy as well as our thanks!

A lady to whom the members should be more than grateful is Frances Rice, chairman of the Rubbish and Litter Committee. This is a difficult and unenviable job and requires constant monitoring, however, as far as the residential streets and squares are concerned, it has been successful, due entirely to her efforts. Frances continues to tackle the shopping streets which have their own specific problems.

Gordon Shingleton, an expert on security matters, continues to chair the very busy Law and Order Committee. His liaison with the local police is invaluable. His deputy is Ellie Brook who was for many years, a justice of the peace.

Members who have attended the social events will know that Lady Grade chairs the Social and Events Committee. We are grateful to her for organising these most enjoyable events and look forward to the reception before the AGM.

The increase in membership is due to Klaus and Elizabeth Leist and we thank them for their enthusiasm and hard work. Christine Gilbertson, the Honorary Treasurer, has kept our finances in good order and constantly presents satisfactory figures for which we are most grateful.

This year I would again like to give special thanks to Stuart Corbyn, Chairman of the Knightsbridge Group, for the continuing support of the Knightsbridge/Brompton Road initiative.

Raymond Benardout was for many years a member of two important committees, but has now left our shores to live on the West Coast of America. We thank him for all that he did for the Association and wish him well. We are keeping his chair warm in case he has a change of heart.

All those who have been mentioned, and the other members of the committees who work so hard to improve, protect and sustain the way of life in Knightsbridge, deserve the thanks of everyone who lives or works within its boundaries.

Our Honorary Secretary, Carol Seymour-Newton, works selflessly throughout the year, as indeed she has done for a very long time. It is difficult to find adequate words to praise her efforts highly enough, suffice to say that the Association would not be the success that it is without her commitment and dedication. She has our deep gratitude.

As always, the thanks of the Association is due to the members for their constant support and encouragement.

*Neville Labovitch
December 1996*

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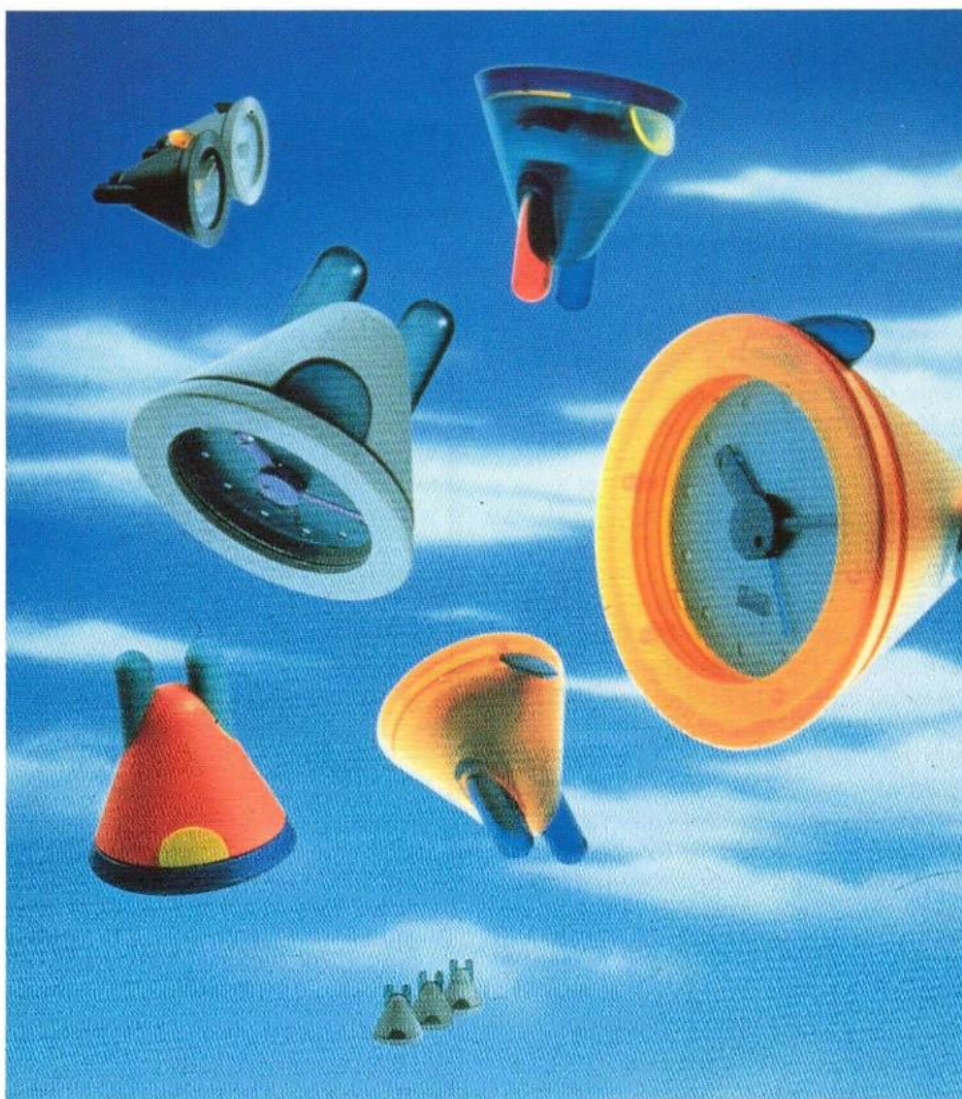
Chairman: Cllr. Kevin Gardner

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Hon. Secretary: Elizabeth Leist

SOCIAL AND EVENTS COMMITTEE

Chairman: Lady Grade



Julian Brown, Clock for Rexite, 1984.

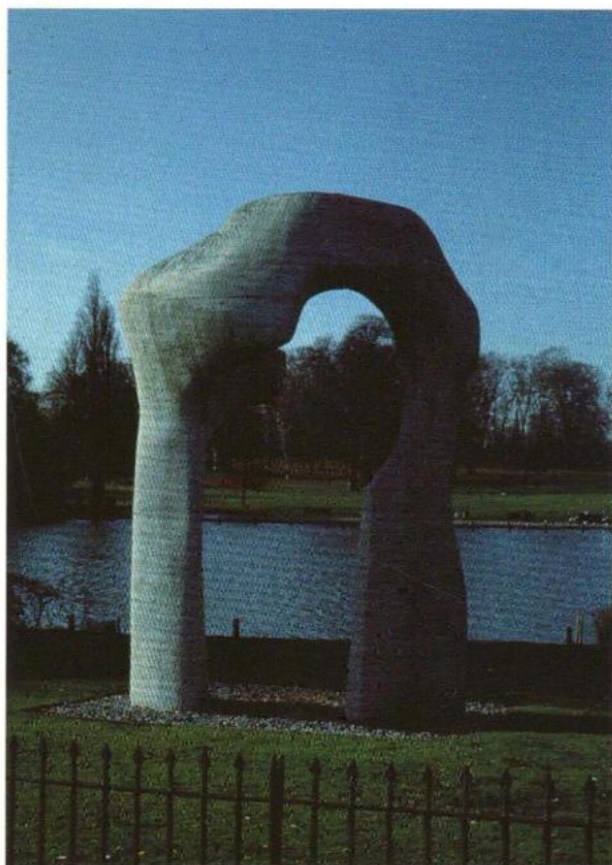
THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART

By Professor Christopher Frayling, Rector of The Royal College of Art

Every time I drive around Hyde Park Corner, which is often, I think about the Royal College of Art, its staff and students – and how the students will turn into professional artists and designers of tomorrow who will sometimes outgrow their teachers: the apprentices taking over from the sorcerers.

For on the 'island' on Hyde Park Corner, there are two sculptures – both of them memorials to the fallen in the First World War – with RCA associations. One is the sculpture of a 9.2 inch howitzer in stone, guarded by four bronze figures, on a pedestal covered with elaborate reliefs: A memorial to soldiers of the Royal Artillery. The other is of a nude male figure with his right hand on his hip and his left clutching a long sword: a memorial to soldiers of the Machine Gun Corps.

The howitzer was by Charles Sargeant Jagger, who studied 'sculpture and modelling' at the Royal College of Art between 1907 and 1911, and who then saw active service at Gallipoli and in the trenches of the Western front. The nude was by Francis Derwent Wood, who studied design at the National Art Training School (the precursor of the Royal College of Art) and who was to become Professor of Sculpture at the RCA in 1918. A recent critic has baldly – and justly – contrasted the two sculptures. The Jagger howitzer, she says, was more than just an example of uncompromising realism by a soldier who had recently seen active service (an example which proved very controversial at the time): it was also "a violent gesture of rebellion against the aesthetic cliché embodied by its neighbour, the languorous nude *David* by



The Arch, Henry Moore, Kensington Gardens.

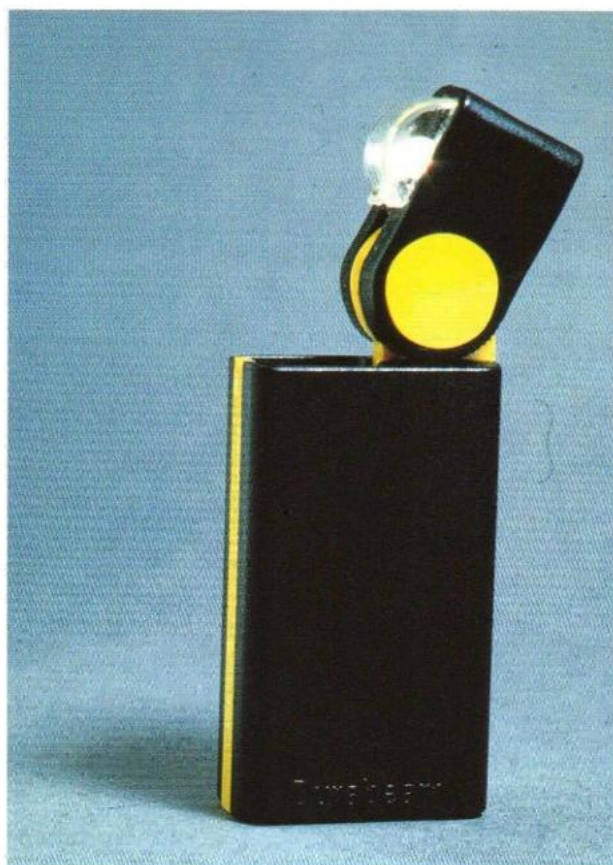
Derwent Wood, which commemorates, with sickening irrelevance, the dead of the Machine Gun Corps".

One of the great pieces of public sculpture in the realist tradition to be produced this century, next to a formulaic exercise in historical revival: the student next to the Professor. Both pieces were unveiled in 1925.

The Royal College of Art started life as the 'Government School of Design' in Somerset House, autumn 1837: after a brief period in Marlborough House, St James's, it moved to an L-shaped building north of the 'Museum of Ornamental Art' site (later the Victoria and Albert Museum) and in 1896 changed its name to 'The Royal College of Art'.

It is often said that the Museum was the mother of the College; in fact, the opposite was the case. *Copying* was the basis of art and design education in the nineteenth century, and so many objects were collected for the students to work from (plaster casts, architectural details, ceramic tiles, pieces of metalwork and so on) that the School ran out of room and a Museum had to be founded to house them. In the era of the Great Exhibition, young designers came first and the heritage came second.

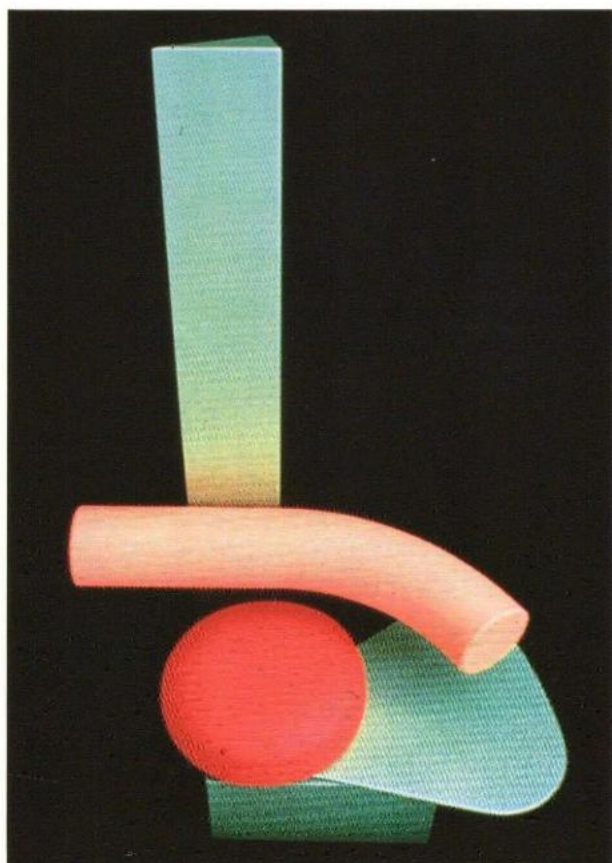
The 'Government School' had been founded in the belief that creative excellence in art and



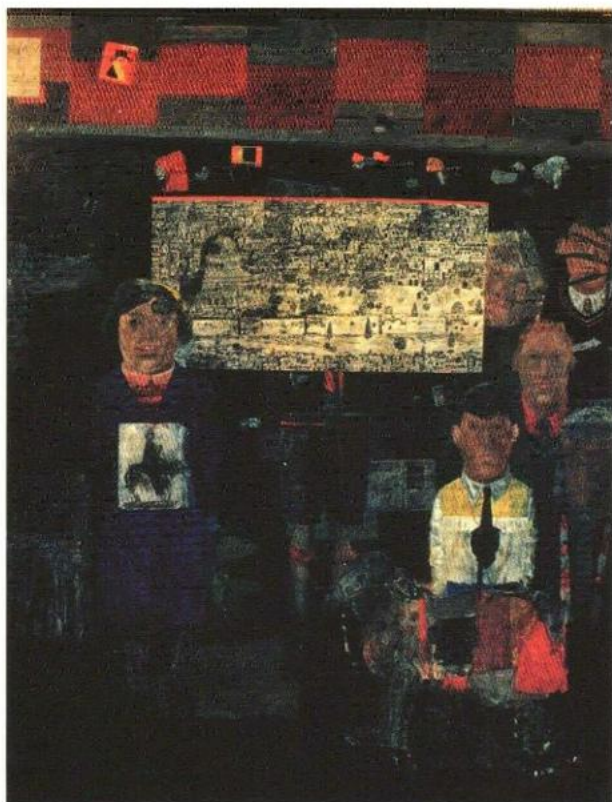
BIB Duracell Torch, John Drane/Nick Butler.

design would improve the quality of Britain's manufacturers, and enhance the visual environment (which, it was generally agreed after the first industrial revolution, needed serious enhancement). With the inauguration of the 'Government School', these had become public responsibilities in Britain for the first time. But the recognisably modern Royal College of Art – in name as well as in fact – was founded exactly one hundred years ago, in the academic year of 1896-7. In name, because during that year, the School became one of the Royal Colleges of South Kensington ("in more obvious recognition of its qualities", as a Board of Education Report put it); in fact, because from then on there were to be some important changes of approach: new emphases on making as well as copying; on technology as well as drawing; on prototyping as well as fine craftsmanship – all of which were to be combined with new industrial and commercial links and fresh educational ideas.

The Royal College of Art was to become the most enduring experiment in art and design education that has ever happened. The reforms of the 1890s were direct ancestors of the Bauhaus, of Ulm, and of Basic Design. And, give or take a few revolutions, they made possible today's Royal College of Art. It remains the only



Chair, Jane Dillor.



Peter Blake, Entry Into Jerusalem 1956, Student Work.

wholly postgraduate university of art and design in the world: the creation of art in a design environment, and of design in an art environment, remains its defining feature.

One of the many reasons the 'National Art Training School' became 'The Royal College of Art' was – it is said – because Princess Louise had studied drawing and modelling at the school. Queen Victoria had not been particularly amused by this development: so she wrote "beware of artists – they mix with all classes of society and are therefore most dangerous". But she eventually came to respect her daughter's talent as a sculptress. A statue of Queen Victoria by Princess Louise (perhaps returning the compliment) can be seen on Broad Walk in Kensington Gardens. Other landmarks by College scholars and alumni in this part of London include the classical frieze of architectural history which runs around the top of the Royal Albert Hall, various architectural details in the Hall's entrance lobbies, and – within the V & A complex – the Ceramic Staircase, window blinds (really cartoons for stained glass) for the Cast Courts, as well as countless panels of mosaic decoration.

The civil servant Henry Cole (one of the very few administrators of art and design education to have had an art training himself, and to have practised at a professional level) was keen to involve as many National Scholars as possible in the decoration of the new cultural centre of 'Albertopolis' or 'Coleville'.

Under the guidance of their instructor in Decorative Art, Francis Moody, the scholars were sent scabbling up the looming east wall of the Science School (now the Henry Cole Wing) to engrave layers of coloured cement. Moody was to have a public row with the industrial designer Christopher Dresser (another alumnus) about whether or not these decorations were politically correct. At the same time, a class in painting on porcelain was begun for women students, and this produced the painted tile decoration of the



Jaguar XK8, 1996, Geoff Lawson and Fergus Pollock.

Grill Room in the Museum's refreshment rooms, designed by Edward Poynter (the only Royal Academician so far as I know, to have created a kitchen grill for producing snacks in a Museum café). When the scaffolding around the Albert Memorial is dismantled next year, readers will be able to examine the stone reliefs at the base designed by H.H. Armstead, an early student at the 'Government School'.

More recent landmarks include Henry Moore's sculpture *The Arch* by Long Water in Kensington Gardens. Moore was a student, on an ex-serviceman's scholarship, from 1921 to 1924: his reports, written by Derwent Wood, tended to be lukewarm; "*his design might show some improvement . . . he appears to be somewhat limited in his interest of tradition in Sculpture*". For Moore was interested in what he called "direct carving", as opposed to the (then) standard student practice of preparing a model and using a pointing machine to transfer and enlarge it. After successfully completing his diploma, Henry Moore taught at the College – in the prefabricated and corrugated huts beside Queen's Gate – from 1924-31; the Principal, William Rothenstein, agreed to provide him with this 'port in a storm', while the tabloid press conducted an abusive campaign against his work: the *Morning Post* even managed to get a soundbite out of Charles Sargeant Jagger (in December 1930), who looked at a photograph of one of Moore's *Reclining Women* and observed ruefully that "like every other epidemic, it will die a natural death".

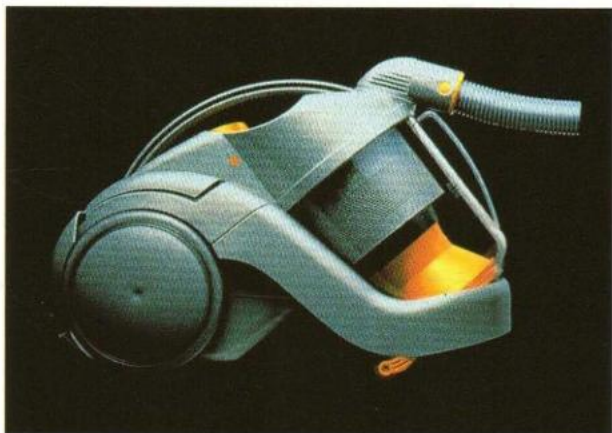
Moving from the 1920s to the 1990s, the Thames Water Tower on the Shepherd's Bush Roundabout – which is in fact the world's largest barometer – is based on a design by two Royal College of Art students who, while still at the College, won a Thames Water competition to produce a monument to commemorate the new London Ring Main.

By the 1990s, of course, the RCA had gone through several reincarnations since Henry

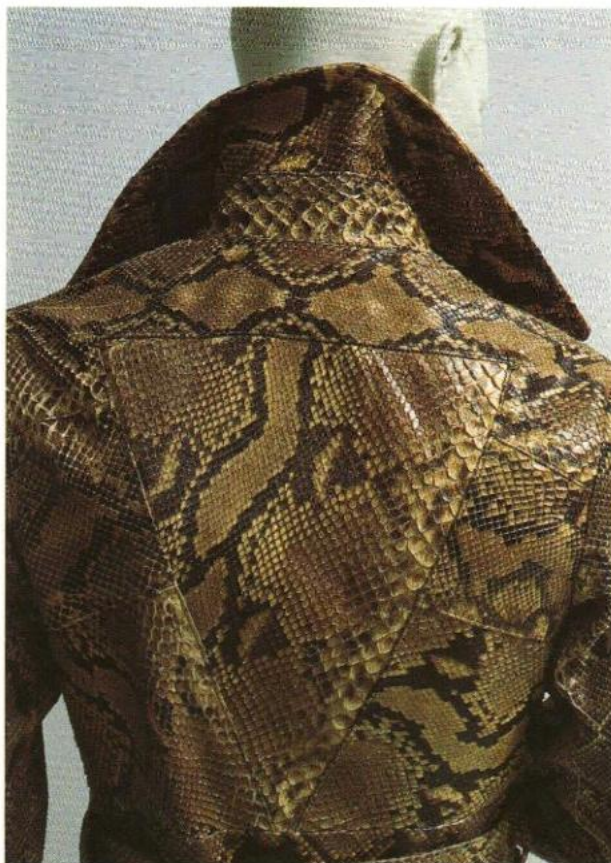
Moore's day: the post war 'Robin Darwin' era, coinciding with the rise of the consultant designer and the impact of the graphic designer; the 'pop art' era of the late 1950s/early 1960s when David Hockney, R.B. Kitaj, Patrick Caulfield and Allen Jones were all at the College together; the 'crafts explosion' of the 1970s; the new focus on the industrial and the interior designer in the 1980s, during the 'Jocelyn Stevens' era; the more thoughtful College of today. As the Japanese fashion designer Issey Miyake recently put it, "the students of the Royal College of Art are a nourishment to the world".

Meanwhile, the College as an institution has shaped the area more, I suspect, than most readers will be aware. Following Henry Cole's use of both staff and students to decorate 'South Kensington', the School continued to expand until it was decided that the top floor of Aston Webb's new Victoria and Albert Museum building would be occupied by the students. The famous tower above the Cromwell Road entrance to the Museum was specifically designed as the College Library, though by the time it was completed plans had changed. The tower remains empty to this day.

In the Edwardian period, the site opposite the Museum's main entrance – now occupied by the Ismaili Centre – was mooted as a permanent home for the College, an idea which was



Dual Cyclone Vacuum Cleaner, James Dyson.



Britt Ekland's snakeskin coat, Ossie Clark.



Ken Kiff, Untitled 1989, from Susan Kasen Summer Collection



Howitzer by Charles Sargeant Jagger, memorial to soldiers of the Royal Artillery.

discussed right up to the 1950s. By that stage, though, it had been decided to design and construct a new building on a single site – at the Kensington Gore end of Exhibition Road, next to the Royal Albert Hall – which could accommodate all the design courses and administrative offices. This would be the first ‘custom built’ accommodation since Henry Cole’s era (when the ‘Museum of Ornamental Art’ site had included the finest mural studios in London).

The ‘Darwin Building’, as it was inevitably called – after the Rector who fought for it – was designed by three members of the College staff: Professor Robert Goodden, Professor Sir Hugh Casson and H.T. Cadbury-Brown. Its main purpose was to provide flexible interior space for teaching design – a purpose it has amply fulfilled. The ‘Darwin Building’ is an austere construction of reinforced concrete, brick and glass: “without frills”, as Cadbury-Brown put it. The one expensive “frill” was its colour – black brick and black concrete fondus, to match the next-door Royal Albert Hall. Today, we are so used to seeing the polychromed wedding cake of “the nation’s village hall” in red and yellow that it is easy to forget that in the early 1960s it was black, caked with nearly 90 years of London soot. That the Hall’s exterior had not been eaten away underneath this acidic blanket of grime is a tribute to Victorian ceramic technology, but in 1961 the Royal College of Art had to blend with its immediate neighbours. By the usual perverse stroke of fate London has since been cleaned up, and surprisingly has remained clean, leaving the College stark and black amidst cream stucco, red brick and yellow terracotta. A memorial to smoke and smog.

Stark on the outside, but in 1996 – Centenary year – more lively than ever on the inside. The largest continual experiment in art and design education, ever. We like to agree with Issey Miyake: a nourishment to the world, based in Victorian S.W.7.



MuZ Skorpion, 1994, Seymour Powell.

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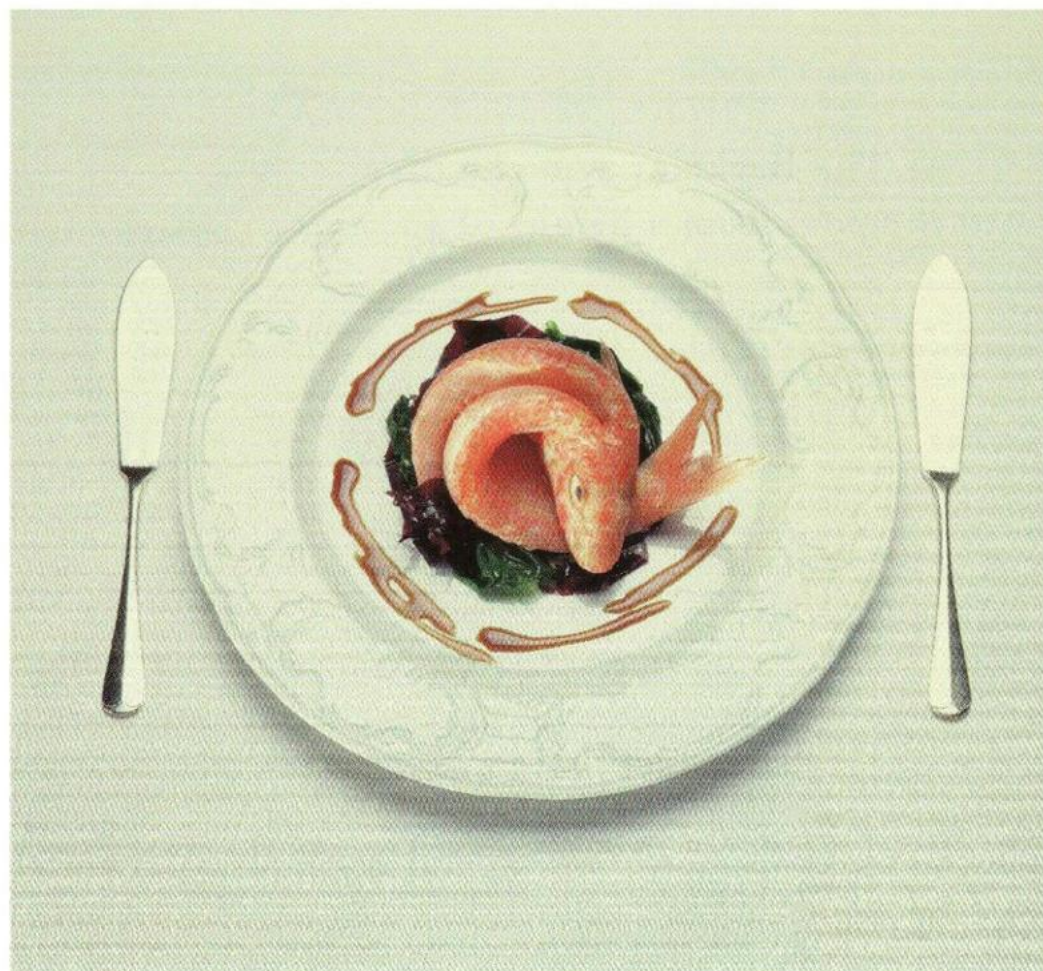
*The rooftop swimming pool
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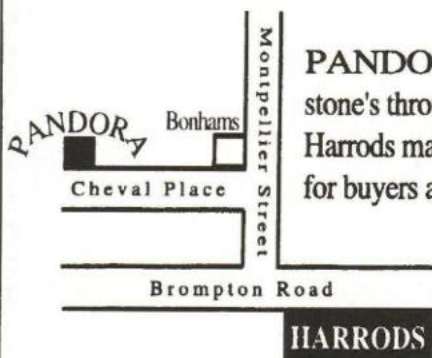
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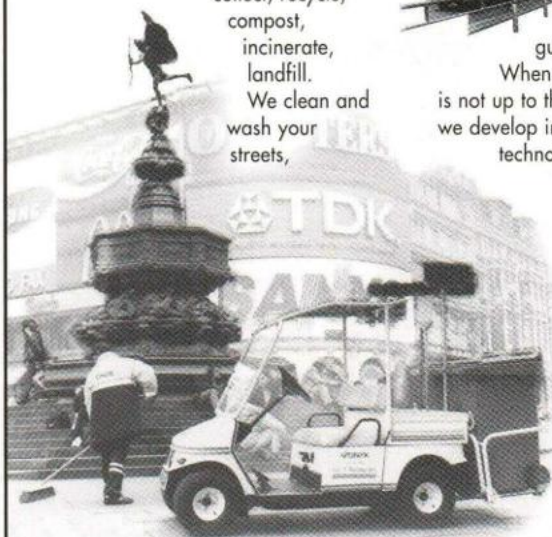
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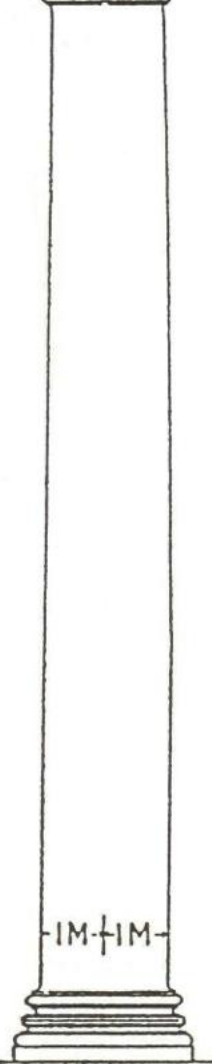
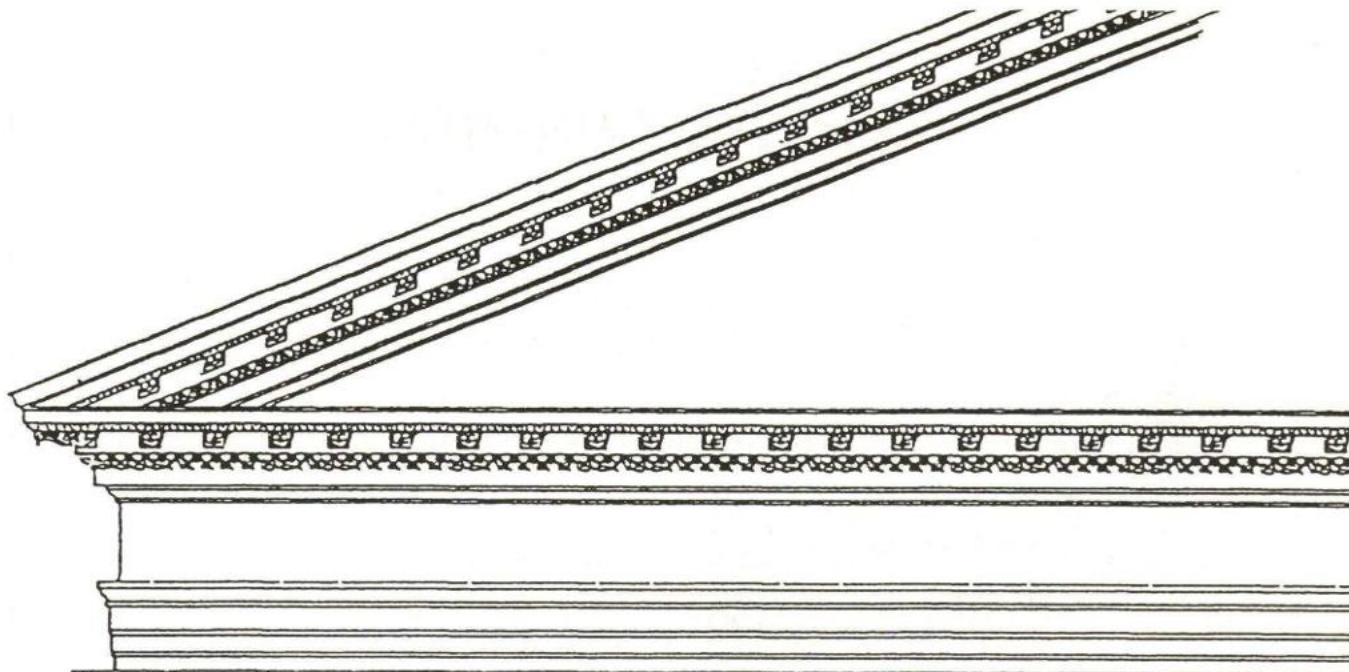
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We are active members of the Knightsbridge Group & Knightsbridge Association. (Also "Post Box" for Association's Mail)

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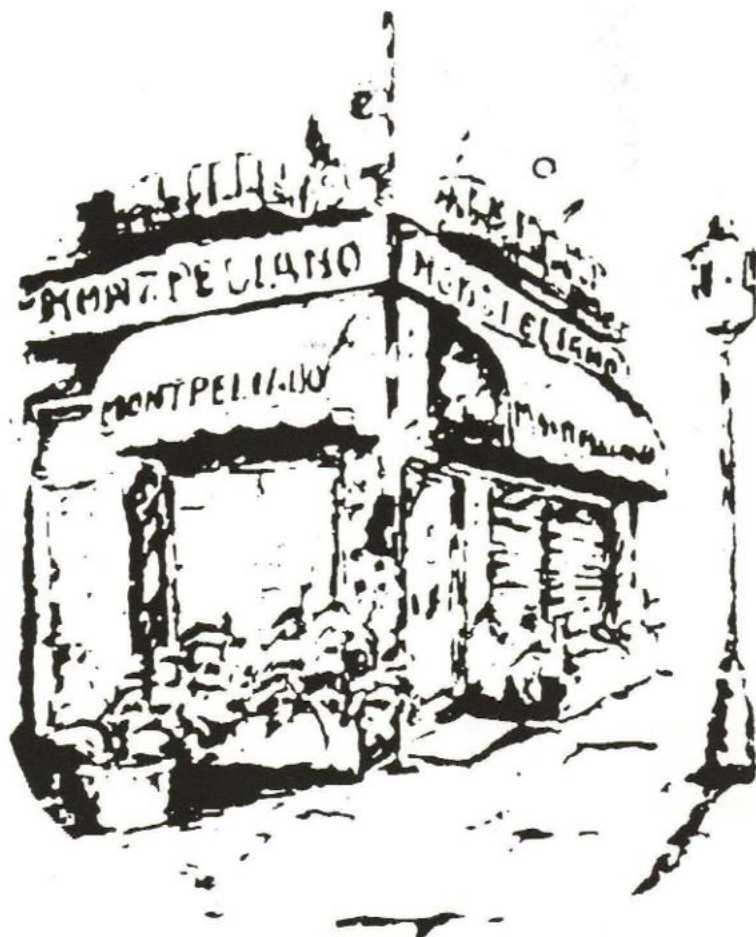
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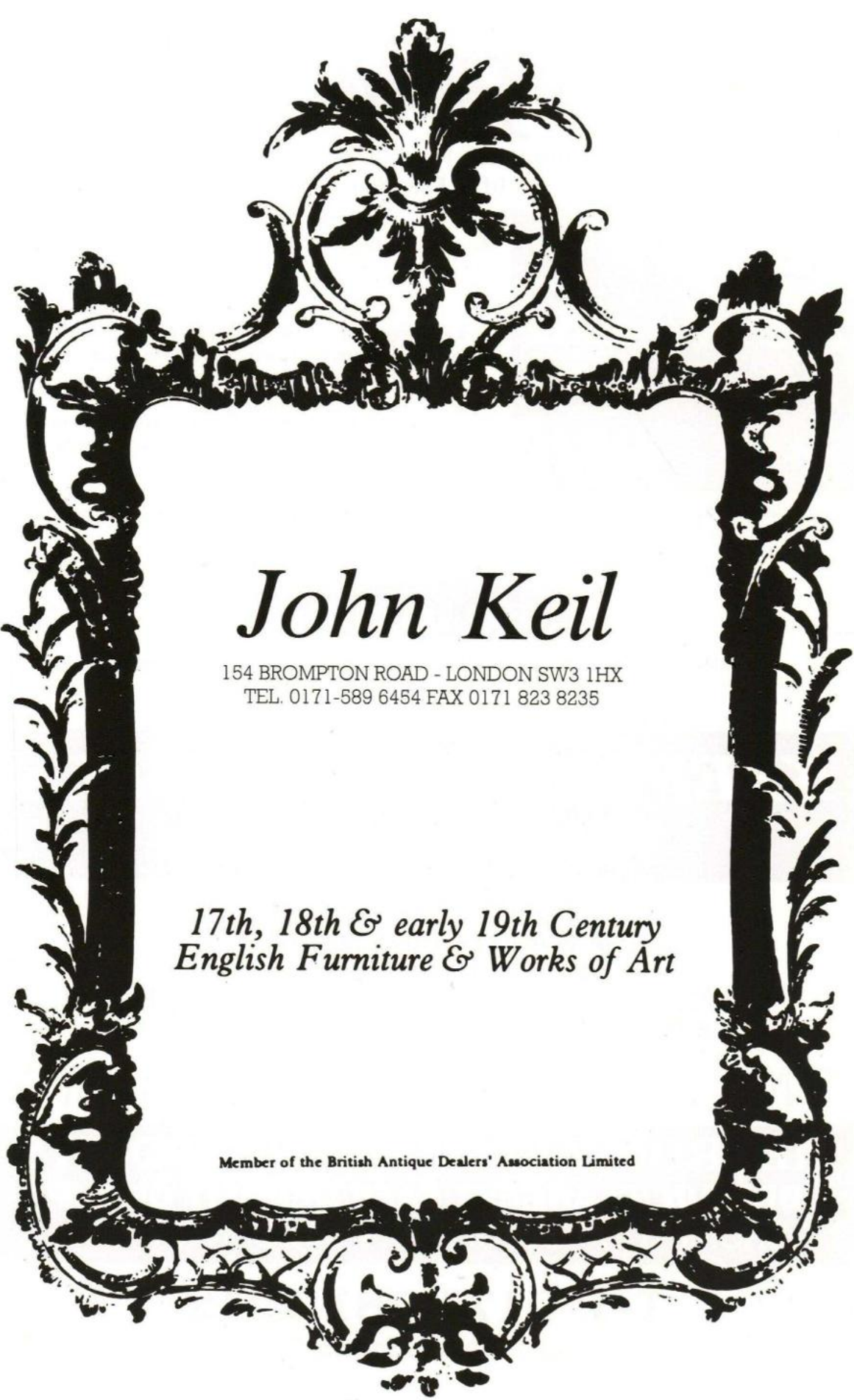
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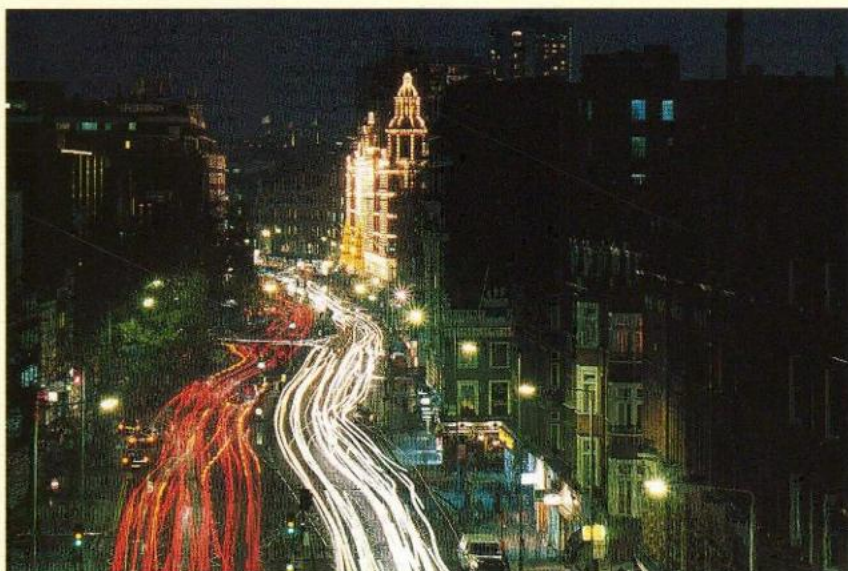
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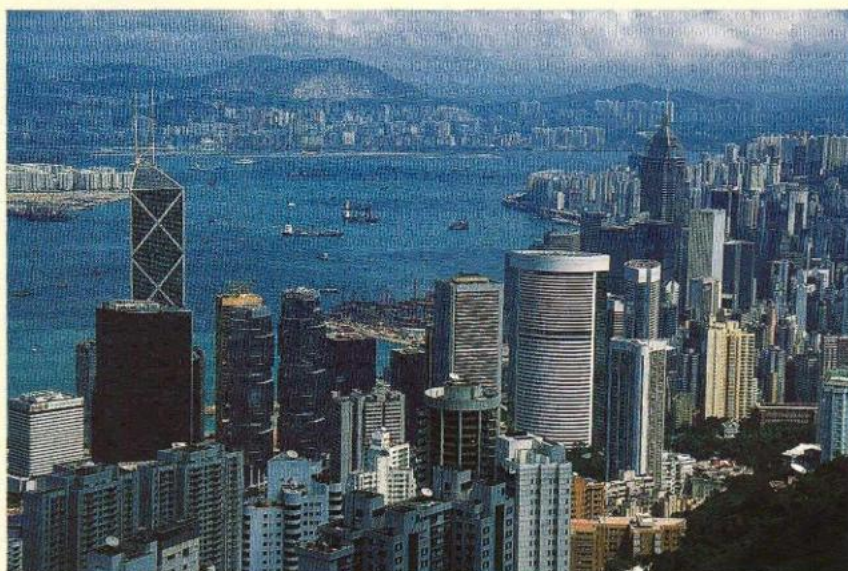
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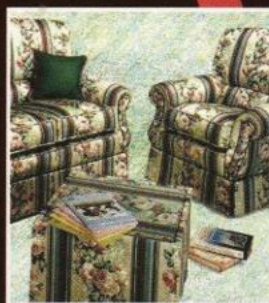


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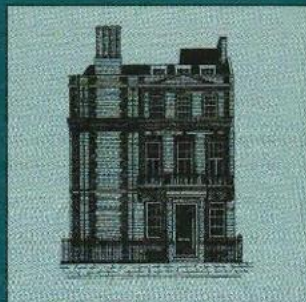


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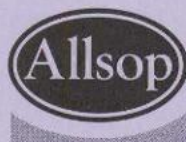
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