# THE CHELSEA SOCIETY REPORT

1984

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# THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

*founded by Reginald Blunt in 1927*
*to protect and foster the amenities of Chelsea*

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SIR MARCUS WORSLEY, BT, J.P., D.L.,

*Vice-Presidents*
THE WORSHIPFUL THE MAYOR OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA
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*Hon. Auditor*
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*Hon. Editor*
TOM POCOCK, ESQ.

THE CHELSEA SOCIETY
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SW3 4QX.
Registered Charity 276264

# CONSTITUTION

1. (1) The Chelsea Society shall be regulated by the Rules contained in this Constitution.
(2) These Rules shall come into force when the Society has adopted this constitution at a General Meeting.
(3) In these Rules the expression "existing" means existing before the Rules come into force.

## OBJECTS

2. The Objects of the Society shall be to preserve and improve the amenities of Chelsea particularly —
(a) stimulating interest in the history, character and traditions of Chelsea,
(b) encouraging good architecture, town planning and civil design, the planting and care of trees, and the conservation and property maintenance of open spaces,
(c) seeking the abatement of nuisances;
(d) making representations to the proper authorities on these subjects.

## MEMBERSHIP

3. Subject to the provisions of Rule 7, membership of the Society shall be open to all who are interested in furthering the Objects of the Society.

## THE COUNCIL

4. (1) There shall be a Council of the Society which shall be constituted in accordance with these Rules.
(2) The Society shall elect not more than twelve members of the Society to be members of the Council.
(3) The members of the Council so elected may co-opt not more than four other persons to be members of the Council.
(4) The Officers to be appointed under Rule 5 shall also be members of the Council.
(5) In the choice of persons for membership of the Council, regard shall be had, amongst other things, to the importance of including persons known to have expert knowledge and experience of matters relevant to Objects of the Society.
(6) The Council shall be responsible for the day-to-day work of the Society, and shall have power to take any action on behalf of the Society which the Council thinks fit to take for the purpose of furthering the Objects of the Society and shall make and publish every year a Report of the activities of the Society during the previous year.
(7) The Council shall meet at least four times in each calendar year.
(8) A member of the Council who is absent from two successive meetings of the Council without an explanation which the Council approves shall cease to be a member of the Council.
(9) Three of the elected members of the Council shall retire every second year, but may offer themselves for re-election by the Society.
(10) Retirement under the last-preceding paragraph shall be in rotation according to seniority of election. Provided that the first nine members to retire after these Rules come into force shall be chosen by agreement or, in default of agreement, by lot.
(11) Casual vacancies among the elected members may be filled as soon as practicable by election by the Society.
(12) One of the co-opted members shall retire every second year, but may be again co-opted.

## OFFICERS

5. (1) The Council shall appoint the following officers of the Society, namely—
(a) a Chairman of the Council,
(b) a Vice-Chairman of the Council,
(c) an Honorary Secretary or Joint Honorary Secretaries,
(d) an Honorary Treasurer and
(e) persons to fill such other posts as may be established by the Council.
(2) The terms of office of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman shall be three years and those of the other Officers five years from the date of appointment respectively. Provided nevertheless that the appointment of the Chairman shall be deemed to terminate immediately after the third Annual General Meeting after his appointment.
(3) The Officers shall be eligible for further appointments to their respective offices.
(4) Nothing herein contained shall detract from the Officers' right to resign during their current term.
(5) By Resolution of a majority of its members the Council may rescind the appointment of an Officer during his term of office for reasons deemed substantial.

5A. As a Transitional Provision for the purpose of carrying out Rule 5(2) the existing Officers shall continue to serve within the provisions of this sub rule.

## PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENTS

6. (1) The Council may appoint a member of the Society to be President of the Society for a term of three years, and may re-appoint him for a further term of three years.
(2) The Council may appoint persons, who need not be members of the Society, to be Vice-Presidents.



## SUBSCRIPTIONS

7. (1) The Council shall prescribe the amount of the subscriptions to be paid by members of the Society and the date on which they are due, and the period in respect of which they are payable.
(2) Membership of the Society shall lapse if the member's subscription is unpaid for six months after it is due, but may be restored by the Council.
(3) Until otherwise prescribed under this Rule, the annual subscription and the amount payable for life membership shall continue to be payable at the existing rates*.
(4) Members are invited to pay more than the prescribed minimum, if possible.
(5) Members who pay annual subscriptions are requested to pay by banker's order, unless they are unwilling to give banker's orders.

## GENERAL MEETINGS

8. (1) In these Rules "General Meeting" means a meeting of the Society which all members of the Society may attend.
(2) The Council shall arrange at least one General Meeting every year, to be called the Annual General Meeting, and may arrange as many other General Meetings, in these Rules referred to as Special General Meetings, as the Council may think fit.
(3) General Meetings shall take place at such times and places as the Council may arrange.
(4) The President shall preside at any General Meeting at which he is present, and if he is not present the Chairman of the Council or some person nominated by the Chairman of the Council shall preside as Acting President.
(5) Any election to the Council shall be held at a General Meeting.
(6) No person shall be eligible for the Council unless —
(i) he or she has been proposed and seconded by other members of the Society, and has consented to serve, and
(ii) the names of the three persons concerned and the fact of the consent have reached the Hon. Secretary in writing at least two weeks before the General Meeting.
(7) If the Hon. Secretary duly receives more names for election than there are vacancies, he shall prepare voting papers for use at the General Meeting, and those persons who receive most votes shall be declared elected.
(8) The agenda for the Annual General Meeting shall include –
(a) receiving the Annual Report; and
(b) receiving the Annual Accounts.
(9) At the Annual General Meeting any member of the Society may comment on any matter mentioned in the Report or Accounts, and may, after having given at least a week's notice in writing to the Hon. Secretary, raise any matter not mentioned in the report, if it is within the Objects of the Society.
(10) The President or Acting President may limit the duration of speeches.
(11) During a speech on any question any member of the Society may move that the question be now put, without making a speech, and any other member may second that motion, without making a speech, and if the motion is carried, the President or Acting President shall put the question forthwith.
(12) If any 20 members of the Society apply to the Council in writing for a special Meeting of the Society, the Council shall consider the application, and may make it a condition of granting it that the expense should be defrayed by the applicants.

## TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS

9. (1) The existing Council shall continue to act for the Society until a Council is formed under Rule 4.
(2) Within five months of the adoption of the constitution the existing council shall arrange an Annual or a special General Meeting at which the first election to the Council shall be held.
(3) The existing Officers of the Society shall continue to serve until Officers are appointed under Rule 5.

## AMENDMENTS

10. (1) These Rules may be amended by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting at an Annual or Special General Meeting, if a notice in writing of the proposed amendment has reached the Hon. Secretary at least two weeks before the General Meeting. Provided that nothing herein contained shall authorise any amendment the effect of which would be to cause the Society at any time to cease to be a Charity in Law.
(2) The Hon. Secretary shall send notices of any such amendment to the members of the Society before the General Meeting.

## WINDING-UP

11. In the event of the winding-up of the Society the available funds of the Society shall be transferred to such one or more charitable institutions having objects reasonably similar to those herein before declared as shall be chosen by the Council of the Society and approved by the Meeting of the Society at which the decision to dissolve the Society is confirmed.

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**The existing rate is £5 annually payable on the 1st January. The annual husband-and-wife rate is £7.*

# *The Annual General Meeting*

**of the Chelsea Society**

**was held at Chelsea College, Manresa Road,**

**(by kind permission of the Principal)**

**on Tuesday, 6th November, 1984**

**at 8 p.m.**

The Lord Chalfont, P.C., O.B.E., M.C., President of the Society, took the Chair.

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on the 24th November, 1983, were approved and signed by the Chairman.

Lord Chalfont then said that, unfortunately, it was his sad duty to announce his retirement as President of the Chelsea Society, an association he had greatly enjoyed, and he considered it to be one of the most distinguished amenity societies in the country. He had made a number of good friends among members of the Society and had watched it fight many battles, most of which had been successful. Lord Chalfont thanked everyone for allowing him to hold office as President and said it gave him great pleasure to announce that Sir Marcus Worsley was to succeed him in an office he would fill with great distinction. He added that it had been an inspiration to work with Mrs. Lesley Lewis, who did not allow the President to do any work!

Lord Chalfont said that as there were only three nominees to fill the three vacancies on the Council a ballot was not necessary. The candidates, who had been proposed and seconded, were:

> The Lady Glenkinglas, who is well known to the Society for her help in organising guides at the Chelsea Physic Garden.
>
> Mr. Jeffrey Frost, a co-opted member now proposed for election who had done very good work in monitoring the building development in Paradise Walk.
>
> Mr. David Sagar, a solicitor whose special interest was the history of Chelsea.

The Meeting approved with acclamation that all the nominees should be elected.

Lord Chalfont asked the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. William Haynes, to present

the accounts for 1983, and he reported these as being in a very healthy state. On the proposal of the Treasurer, seconded by the Vice-Chairman, Colonel Rubens, these were adopted with thanks to Mr. Haynes and those who had helped him.

Lord Chalfont said it was a pleasure to welcome the Mayor of Kensington and Chelsea to the meeting, adding that all the indications were that his heart was really in Chelsea.

The Chairman's Report was given by Mrs. Lewis, at the end of which Lord Chalfont thanked her for an extremely amusing and relevant one.

Mr. Quentin Morgan Edwards remarked that he was Chairman of the Society when Lord Chalfont became its President. He echoed Mrs. Lewis' tribute to him and wished to thank the President very much indeed.

In thanking Mrs. Lewis and Mr. Morgan Edwards for their kind remarks Lord Chalfont said he would always be prepared to help the Society, willingly and wholeheartedly.

Before the Meeting was brought to a close Mrs. Lewis announced the following lectures for next year:

Wednesday, 20th February, 1985 — Mr. John Schofield on "Crosby Hall in its City setting".

Wednesday, 20th March, 1985 — Mr. James Compton on current aspects of the Chelsea Physic Garden.

The numbers present were in the region of 100. The Meeting ended at 9 p.m. when members and guests adjourned to the back of the hall for wine and conversation until about 10 p.m.



# *Chairman's Report*

We heartily welcome Lord and Lady Chalfont and regret that, as you see from the Agenda, this is the last year he will take the Chair for us, having come to the end of his term of office. We have all immensely appreciated his expertise and warmth in presiding and we thank him too for his constructive help in our affairs. I feel sure however that we can continue to count on him if there is a question to be asked in the House of Lords, or some matter of national importance which requires his advice.

I am pleased to announce that another Life Member and old friend of the Society, Sir Marcus Worsley, has agreed to become our President for the next term of three years, and no one could be more welcome. As Member of Parliament for Chelsea, and on the Society's Council, he did sterling work for us, not least in that long drawn-out battle, the West Cross Route Public Inquiry of 1972.

This is the alternate year in which three of the longest-serving members of Council have to retire, according to the constitution, and it is a wrench to lose Jonathan Wheeler, Ian Frazer and Bill Reid. Jonathan, as Chairman of the Town Planning Committee, brought valuable experience to our deliberations; Ian has helped us especially in supervising the accounts, arranging for the advertisements in the Annual Report, and getting our Minutes photocopied in his office. Most generously he has agreed to continue this help. Bill Reid, as Director of the National Army Museum, has given us the lustre of his name and a most valuable liaison with the Museum, where we have been able to hold our annual lectures. We warmly thank them all, while welcoming their successors.

Our officers have unobtrusively carried out their tasks and as Chairman I have particular reason to know how much they do for us. Barbara Towle as Membership Secretary deserves a special tribute. In addition to enrolling new members and keeping records she and a devoted band of helpers have delivered many of our communications by hand, thus saving the Society a lot of postage and creating much goodwill. The Society's finances will now allow us to post all the Reports and other notices and I feel sure you will approve the Council's decision to relieve her of this heavy additional task. The Editor, Tom Pocock, must be congratulated on his excellent 1983 Report, and we look forward to the 1984 one which we feel sure will be of the same high standard. Sascha Rubens' support as Vice-Chairman has been invaluable to me, and Mary Fisher, as administrative Secretary, has organised the smooth running of our activities which we have so much appreciated.

Among the sad deaths of members we note particularly those of Lord Adeane and Sir John Betjeman, both prominent in public life and much valued in their Chelsea context.

The membership stands at 765, a slight increase on last year, but we continue to invite applications and to urge recruitment.

1. *Planning Matters*

*Whitelands House, Cheltenham Terrace, SW3.* The major concern is the permission given by the Borough Council for the building of four penthouse flats making an eleventh storey to the ten-storey Whitelands House, Cheltenham Terrace, SW3, in the face of strong local opposition. The case falls within the rule whereby in certain circumstances compensation can be claimed by applicants when permission is refused for an addition of less than ten per cent to the volume of an existing building. As a tenant in Whitelands House I share in objections outside the scope of the general environmental ones which concern the Chelsea Society, but I attach a letter authorised by our Council and signed by the Vice-Chairman and Planning Secretary as expressing the official views of the Chelsea Society.

Dear Mr. Freeman,

*Whitelands House, Cheltenham Terrace SW3. Penthouse flats.*

This Society views with concern and astonishment the executive decision of the Policy and Resources Committee under your chairmanship to grant planning permission to Renslade Securities (Housing) Ltd. for the construction of four luxury penthouses, forming a new storey on the above ten-storey block of flats which is already unsuitably high for the area.

A similar though slightly less overbearing plan was refused by the Royal Borough in 1978 and, on appeal, this refusal was upheld (20 Sept. 1979) by the Department of the Environment after a public local inquiry on 17, 18, 19 July, 1979. The Borough at that time faced the risk, if not the certainty, of having to pay compensation under the "ten per cent rule", but the applicants did not proceed with the claim.

On 27 May 1983 the decision of the Court of Appeal on a parallel case between the London Borough of Camden and Peaktop Properties (Hampstead) Ltd. established that compensation could be successfully claimed, and the application to build on Whitelands House was renewed in Feb. 1984.

In the Chelsea News of 9 Mar. 1984 (with the Whitelands House application already in the pipeline) the Chairman of the Planning Committee, Councillor Jonathan Wheeler, was reported as saying "the Borough would not be bullied into approving developments because of the threat of compensation", and it was also reported that the Council had put aside £1 million to meet such compensation claims.

The present application went before the Planning Committee, under the chairmanship of Councillor Mrs. Iain Hanham, on 1 October and, it appears, refusal was unanimously recommended. Owing to the question of compensation, however, the final decision was passed (2 Oct.) to Policy and Resources Committee, under your chairmanship, and planning permission was granted on the issue of compensation.

The proceedings of both Committees passed behind doors closed to the public, and we must question whether the Policy and Resources committee has power to overrule in closed session a planning decision of such weight, and ignore the Borough's publicly announced resolve to pay compensation if necessary out of funds set aside for the purpose. (One may note in passing that the applicants' estimate of £500,000 is probably much exaggerated).

We urge that all constitutional means should be used to rescind the Policy and Resources Committee's decision, although already given to the applicants, since it is out of line with the Borough's previously declared views, and potentially disastrous for the environment.

*Signed by Alexander Rubens and Eileen Harris*



Before this matter came before a full Council Meeting on 17th October the facts had emerged that compensation was estimated at £100,000 (not £500,000) and that its payment would represent .14 of a penny rate. At least fourteen members of the Chelsea Society and residents' associations concerned were in the Public Gallery of the Town Hall to hear debate on the item which was No. 18 in the Report of the Policy and Resources Committee. We made several prior enquiries from the Town Clerk's office and were even told on the very day that Policy and Resources were habitually taken first on the Agenda and that we should be there from about 7.30 pm. On arrival we found however that the Town Planning Report was to be taken first and afterwards were told that the change was made at the last moment to suit the personal commitments of the Chairman of the Town Planning Committee, although the Deputy Chairman was available to act. This Report took unexpectedly long but the power to vary the order of items within a Report was not invoked and the Whitelands House matter was left to very end of Policy and Resources. It was reached at 10.45 by which time most Councillors and the Press had left, and only six of us remained in the Public Gallery. Objections to the grant of planning permission were made from the minority party and by Miss Massy, Councillor for Royal Hospital Ward, but there was no real debate. We know the decision would not have been reversed but it was a matter of considerable public interest on which we know the majority party was not unanimous. The Borough Council acted technically according to its rules but many residents whose interests are vitally concerned labour under a sense of injustice. The Chelsea Society regards with dismay the over-ruling of good planning principles on purely financial grounds though we recognise the difficulties of the Council, faced with several similar cases in the Borough.

*49A Elystan Place, SW3.* In making additions to the front, side and rear of these premises the applicants substantially exceeded the building for which permission had been granted. Immediate neighbours objected strongly to the encroachment in a densely packed area, and feared overlooking. The Borough very properly served an enforcement notice on 27th September, 1983, against which there was an Appeal to the Department of the Environment. The Inspector, 21st August, 1984, upheld the enforcement and allowed three months for compliance, expiring 22nd November, 1984. The objectors are however unhappy about works on the site and fear that compliance will be incomplete. Such a situation would involve further legal action by the Borough and, whatever the outcome of this case may be, it is evident that the Borough's legal powers, however correctly exercised, are too slow, too weak and too expensive to deter really resolute operators. We must hope for the best.

*3 Clover Mews, SW3.* Last year we hoped that more suitable plans would be approved in place of the grossly excessive development for Paradise Walk and Dilke Street which had been defeated by the efforts of residents. This has been the case but a new threat has arisen nearby, to Clover Mews. Many Chelsea dwellers will not know this charming little mews tucked away off

Dilke Street and surviving in remarkably unaltered form. It was particularly recommended for preservation and care in the Royal Hospital Conservation Area proposals now in draft. Despite this, an applicant got planning permission not only to alter the character of the ground floor and the second floor attic of No. 3 but also to excavate a basement, highly unsuitable in a mews. The next step was a surprise even to the hardened Chelsea Society monitors. The developer applied for Listed Building Consent (fortunately refused) to demolish the house because otherwise he could not make his basement. To apply for demolition in a conservation area in order to effect already grossly unsympathetic alterations is a new twist in the evasion of planning controls. What will developers think of next?

*Royal Avenue.* In response to complaints from Royal Avenue residents about the abuse of their areas and doorways by the "Punk" element, the Borough decided after much deliberation to remove all the seats from the paved recess on the King's Road. The Punks then took to assembling near the Duke of York's barracks, but many shoppers missed the seats which on weekdays were much used by the ordinary public. There was a strong movement to get them returned, countered by a petition against this from Royal Avenue. Members of the Chelsea Society, who had closely observed the whole problem, supported the Royal Avenue residents. While sympathising with those who like to sit and chat in a place specially designed for this purpose, we felt that the gathering of Punks near shops and under observation was preferable to their encroachments on peoples' homes. The Drug Store, which attracted these youngsters in the first place, is being converted to orthodox uses which might be less attractive to them. We hope that when Charringtons' new premises are fully operative the seats can be reinstated.

*Dovehouse Green.* The Society's long association with this, our Jubilee scheme, has now happily ended as planned, with the garden fully adopted by the Borough. We handed over to them the £300 or so still remaining in the fund under Patricia Gelley's patient stewardship, to pay for some planting and improvements. Mr. Grenfell's gift from the Joyce Grenfell Memorial Fund again provided an even better show of bulbs to delight us in the Spring. There has been a truce between the Society and the Chelsea Farmers' Market, and the Borough's introduction of planters has both adorned the garden and discouraged motor traffic along our paths. Dovehouse Green looks so established now that one might think it had always been there, but we in the Society shall not forget the enterprise of our former Chairman, Quentin Morgan-Edwards, in promoting this very rewarding scheme.

Eileen Harris and Mark Dorman have continued to monitor planning applications, and Hugh Krall's architectural advice has as usual been invaluable. Most matters were comparatively minor and several important ones, such as Chelsea Rectory, the development of the site at 77 King's Road, and sheltered housing in Caversham Street appear to be temporarily in abeyance.



2. *Activities*

*Lectures.* Arthur Grimwade again organised two delightful evenings at the National Army Museum by kind permission of the Director. On 22nd February Dr. Charles Avery, formerly of the Victoria and Albert Museum, speaking on "The Sculpture of Chelsea", illustrated by slides, showed us many features on buildings which we had hitherto taken for granted or missed, and described in detail monuments in Chelsea Old Church. Mr. David Le Lay, well known to us, an architect, and the designer of Dovehouse Green, described "Chelsea before 1700". We all came away with a far better idea of what Chelsea was like in the days of the palaces and great houses, and of what they looked like, through his admirable slides of old pictures and of reconstructions. I must add here that we hope to arrange lectures in 1985 and the Honorary Secretary, Mary Fisher, helped by Joan Hayes, have undertaken to organise them.

Last year we reported that Arthur "expected" to be Prime Warden of the Goldsmiths' Company, and as this expectation has been duly fulfilled he is far too busy this year to arrange anything for us. I must however take this opportunity of saying that much as we miss his help we do bask in the reflected glory of this glamorous position. We congratulate him, and hope that he and Helen are deriving great enjoyment from his year of office.

*The Summer Meeting.* This was held on 11th July in the Roof Garden Club, Kensington High Street, remembered by some of us as having been formerly part of Derry and Toms' store. Those who had not seen it for a long time were much impressed by its air of maturity, while those who had never seen it were astonished by its big shady trees, and its pool with flamingoes and ducks. About a hundred and fifty members and guests assembled high above the noise of any traffic, looking across from the formal part of the garden to the splendid spire of St. Mary Abbots, gleaming in the sunshine of a superb summer evening. Friendly service and a welcoming atmosphere added greatly to our pleasure, and it was like a country garden party at a friend's house except for one welcome touch of ceremonial — the arrival of the Mayor accompanied by Councillor Mrs. Fitzwilliams.

3. *The proposed "trunking" of Road A3220*

I concluded my report last year on a cheerful note, expecting better enforcement of night bans on heavy lorries and even the introduction of weekend bans. These hopes however appeared to be dashed by the release of a Government consultation paper entitled "Reallocation of Transport responsibilities in London following the Abolition of the GLC". The proposals included the designation of the A3220 (the one-way system from Shepherds Bush to Cheyne Walk and over Battersea Bridge) as a Trunk Road under the Department of Transport. The Chelsea Society, individually and as an affiliate of West London Traffic Reform (WLTR), strongly opposed this, and we put forward our objections through meetings, and letters to the Department. It was apparent to us that such a designation might in the future involve such measures as the widening of road junctions, removal of parking facilities and suppression of lorry-bans for the purpose of

speeding-up through-traffic rather than benefiting residents. In any case a road running almost entirely through residential areas was totally unsuitable for trunk road status.

To our surprise and disappointment the Royal Borough, instead of categorically rejecting "trunking" merely expressed "severe reservations". Apparently they thought it might facilitate the introduction of the West London Relief Road or, as they sometimes call it, the Earls' Court Bypass, to which they are committed in principle. We thought "trunking" was more likely to defeat rather than further a relief road as the Department of Transport would attain its own end by making the A3220 more convenient for through-traffic, the latter being its proper concern. Moreover, we thought the effects of the M25, now so nearly completed, should be thoroughly assessed before any radical local changes were planned.

These objections were vigorously pressed by WLTR, and the guidance of Mrs. Betty Woolf in this should be particularly noted. Among the activities organised was a demonstration march from Earls' Court to Battersea Bridge on 5th April with a ten-minute rally and speeches in Roper Gardens, Cheyne Walk. Meanwhile householders along the river formed a new group, to be known as "Friends of Chelsea Riverside", and came up with the brilliant idea of a mass "paint-in". They circularised artists, art societies and art schools with invitations to enter a competition for painting Whistler's Reach, to demonstrate the picturesque values still surviving there. On Sunday, 8th April, a cold grey Whistlerian morning, about a hundred and fifty artists, Sir Hugh Casson, President of the Royal Academy prominent among them, were drawing, painting and even modelling aspects of the river. On and about the houseboats, along the parapet of Battersea Bridge and the river wall, muffled and in some cases very colourful figures were busy with drawing boards and easels. Slogans and posters bedecked the scene, and welcome refreshments were served. Many excellent works, some by well-known artists, were subsequently exhibited in Chelsea Old Town Hall, 3rd-11th May and judged by a panel. The first prize went to Elizabeth Butler while Susan Miles, Ronald Morgan, E. J. Playford and Laura Pocock were among those who received prizes and commendations at the hands of Sir Hugh Casson. National and local press coverage was good, and people who were not too busy painting saw something of the scene on television. The exhibition went on to the Chelsea Wharf Restaurant 15th-20th May and altogether many paintings were sold with artists contributing generously to the fund out of their receipts. It was all a tremendous success and great fun.

What was not fun however was the heated counter-propaganda of the Department of Transport and the Royal Borough, representing that our statements were misleading and our fears baseless. The Minister for Transport, Mrs. Lynda Chalker, insisted that the proposed designation meant no more than that the Department would take responsibility for the road while intending no changes to it whatever. We did not question her good faith but Ministers can change, governments can change while the Department's power to do more or less what it liked with its trunk roads would permanently threaten the residents of Earl's Court and Chelsea along



the route. We continued the struggle.

On 10th May, with the kind assistance of Sir Brandon Rhys-Williams MP, Mrs. Woolf, Dr. May Maguire, Mr. Lingard, Miss Lowrey-Corry, Mr. A. Brown and myself, respresenting views from Kensington, Chelsea, Wandsworth and Fulham, had a meeting with Mrs. Chalker at the Department of Transport. She listened with courtesy and great attention to what we had to say and in particular she denied that "trunking" was a necessary pre-requisite for a relief road in the future. It appeared too that although the Department would take all financial responsibility for a trunk road, the Borough would receive grants for all or nearly all the costs of such a road under their own control. It was announced in July that the A3220 would not be taken over by the Department of Transport but on the abolition of the GLC would become the responsibility of the Royal Borough.

This is a successful outcome of one phase in the long-drawn-out struggle to obtain relief *for* West London through-traffic, and relief *from* it for the residents of Kensington and Chelsea. Whether a relief road is eventually decided on or whether the orbital M25 will have reduced the problem so that it is rendered unnecessary remains to be seen, but the Chelsea Society, with its long experience, hopes to play a useful part in consultations. Meanwhile we are truly delighted with the result which was rewarded the concerted efforts of so many groups. We particularly commend the contribution of Dr. and Mrs. Paul Harlow and their riverside colleagues. Their seriousness of purpose was never in doubt notwithstanding the cheerful ribaldry of their slogans and Edward Coleridge's send-up of the establishment in a hilarious parody of Botticelli's Birth of Venus. Chelsea is still Chelsea and thank goodness for that.

4. *Exhibitions*

The National Army Museum held an excellent exhibition of Military Fashion — two centuries of drawings — from July to December, and another of Military Portraits in November. There is also now on view Gainsborough's portrait of the Duke of Gloucester, 1770, showing him in the uniform of the First Foot Guards. It has been purchased with the help of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and is a notable acquisition for the Museum. The Chelsea Art Society's annual exhibition in October was a great success, with work of high quality and a record number of sales. At the Alpine Gallery Michel Bryan showed a beautiful selection of paintings, many by famous artists, illustrating bygone Chelsea. Its title, "In Cheyne Walk and Thereabout" aptly suggested how informative and nostalgic it was. A very different type of contribution was the Festival of Architecture Exhibition in Sloane Square 21st-26th May, organised by the West London Architectural Society as one of the celebrations of the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Royal Institute of British Architects. They erected a marquee and showed by models, photographs and slides what architects had done or could do in Chelsea. Hugh Krall suitably made our flesh creep with forecasts of how Cheyne Walk would look if some of the horrendous road proposals went through. We welcome the opening of the attractive Gallery Lingard

in the Old Registry, 250 King's Road. Its special purpose is to reveal the excellence of architectural drawings of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. If the exhibition of Horatio Walter Lonsdale's (1844-1919) drawings and water-colours for stained glass and other interior details are anything to go by we can look forward to some treats here.

5. *Some news items*

*Chelsea Methodist Church, 155 King's Road.* In 1982 we reported the laying, by the Speaker, Mr. George Thomas, of the foundation stone of the new church, pastoral centre and flats for the elderly. This year we saw the official opening, by His Eminence Cardinal Hume, of this truly oecumenical undertaking, and we must congratulate the Rev. David Horton and his colleagues on a wonderful achievement. It was inspiring to be present at these two ceremonies, each in its way equally impressive, performed by two exceptional christian leaders.

*The Chelsea Physic Garden.* A Garden Party was held on 14th June for the official handing-over from the Trustees of the City Parochial Charities to the new Trustees who will administer it as an independent charity, The Chelsea Physic Garden Company. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales was present and spent much time in thoroughly exploring the Garden with trustees and staff before making an admirable speech and planting a tree. He has since consented to become an Honorary Fellow so with Her Majesty the Queen Mother as Patron the Garden has got off to a right royal start. An Appeal has now been launched to raise the £900,000 or so still needed for the Endownment Fund. In my capacity as your Chairman I am a member of the Appeals Committee and shall be most grateful for suggestions as to benefactors to be approached.

A Curator, Mr. Duncan Donald, has been appointed and, with his wife, has taken up residence at the Garden. Lady Harriot Tennant has succeeded Mr. Philip Briant as Administrator and we shall hope to be in touch with them both. The Open Days have been a great success, with a total of about 13,000 visitors. As before, the Chelsea Gardens Guild has taken the leading part in organising guides and volunteer gardeners, Miss Esther Darlington being responsible for this with the help of Mrs. Jacobsen for group visits. It occurred to the supporters of Christ Church that there were no local facilities for tea on Sundays and through them and the Gardens Guild, Mrs. Anthony Post, with about six helpers each time, has been serving an average of a hundred and fifty teas, with a biscuit, at 20p a time. She would like more volunteers for next season, if they will apply to her at 1/15 Cheyne Place, SW3. Volunteers for other tasks should contact the Administrator at 66 Royal Hospital Road, SW6. One necessary job is to take care of the shop which sells guidebooks, postcards, lavender bags and the Garden's own special mulberry jam in due season.

Many visitors will have noticed the absence of Rysbrack's statue of Sir Hans Sloane from the centre of the Garden. Like many eighteenth century sculptures which have been out of doors for a long time, it had suffered



badly from weathering and pollution. It is now being expertly treated in the British Museum and may remain on loan there while a resin replica will in due course be made for the Garden.

*Ashburnham Old School Centenary.* The building, at which some present residents were pupils seventy years ago, was handed over to the Ashburnham Community Association in 1972. A pleasant Open Day, with exhibitions and entertainments, celebrated the anniversary on 11th September. The activities of the centre are multifarious and colourful, serving a district now much improved by the new open spaces, West Field and Cremorne Garden. Fortunately there is space in the building for that renowned institution, the Heatherley School of Fine Art.

*Laffeatys' Toy Shop, late of 345 King's Road.* Children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and godparents heard with sorrow of the closing down of this famous 98-year-old toy-shop. The premises are owned by the Borough Council and it was allegedly a huge rise in rent and rates which made it impossible for the family to carry on their business. Given that the Council's powers over shops are limited it seems strange that somewhere among the provisions of the District Plan (p.220) some way could not have been found to save this exceptional shop.

6. *Rubbish Collection*

I generally try to end my Report with something nice, but this time it is going to be something thoroughly nasty. Many of our members have complained at the sheer mess which now invades Chelsea streets. The following points have been made and might be worthy of study:

(a) Shops and traders who do not pay for having their rubbish collected stuff it into nooks and crannies off the main routes, and there it remains, sometimes for years. Should it not be compulsory for shops etc. either to pay the Borough's rate or produce proof that they have paid someone else for the service?

(b) Rubbish, even if intended for regular collection, is missed if it is only slightly off the contractors' route. For instance dumps often get left for days at the junction of Anderson Street and Elystan Place, in the bushes under Albert Bridge and, until recently at the NW corner of Dovehouse Green, to name only a few.

(c) Laws or bye-laws framed on the assumption that most people do not want to foul their own nests are hopelessly out of date. If it pays to foul the nest, the nest will be fouled. New regulations are needed to enforce removal of unsightly rubbish which is now not actionable unless as a health or a fire risk, and far more summary procedures should be applicable.

(d) Could there not be more inspections and reprimands leading to action? I have myself got dumps cleared by moving them a few feet to where the contractors can reach them without unduly exerting themselves, or have traced a source by pulling an address out of a bag, and then telephoned it. The effect is magical.

And on this fragrant thought I end my Report for 1984.

# *The Visitor*

## by Anne Sharpley

I live in Chelsea? Oh dear me, no: far too exciting! The trick of living in London is always to have somewhere delicious to go to. Hampstead, Soho, Greenwich, but most of all Chelsea, are there for delight, difference, and a cure against dullness. But you mustn't live in them, I reasoned when I first came to London after the war, choosing staid Marylebone in a fit of common sense I have not since equalled. Even as a teenager I could see that Chelsea was short on parks, public transport and choice of libraries. It was there for wickedness, a sort of Paris on tap. You could escape to it, but you mustn't stay.

The very layout was enthralling — for quick trips. The two parallel streams of the Thames and the King's Road meant an idyllic, idling, drifting feeling took over. You could just float on and on. Wonderful for weekends, but maddening on a weekday when you were struggling to work and you were the wrong end of the King's Road. My brief and only attempt to combine Chelsea with working life was in 1947 when I took a room in Bramerton Street with absolutely no heating in it for 2 guineas a week. I soon left for somewhere more geographically useful.

But every Saturday would see me drifting about through Chelsea, dazzled and charmed.

As I'd just given up being an art student to become a journalist, it was easy to get into the arty side of Chelsea by way of the pubs. That was the Bohemian world of bearded, sandalled men with a penchant for corduroys and girls with very long hair and bulky, home-made gathered skirts of hopsack. But Chelsea seemed really to be dominated then by a marvellous breed of middle-aged women with gin-abraded voices and blonde pageboy hairstyles held back by velvet bandeau. They were in every pub, wearing their black dresses and single strings of pearls, and most particularly were they to be found in the little bars of the large, pre-war blocks of luxury flats.

Surrounded by worshipping war heroes, their provocatively crossed legs in the wicked new nylons (nylons were a proclamation of lost virtue) and Kay Hammond drawls set an example of unattainable elegance to a teenager. Of course they were ancient, at least thirty years old. I couldn't wait to wear black dresses and single rows of pearls, too. It was to be the harsh fate of my postwar generation that we were overstepped, as it were, by the youth cult. No sooner had we left off being too young than we were too old. We never got to be enthroned on a high stool in our velvet bandeaux, indeed I've never worn one.

But these disquieting challenges to my self-esteem only came during the pauses for refreshment, mostly I just drifted about the streets seeking out the shadowy outlines of Chelsea's seductive past. Perhaps the young are



all chameleons and to see a street, a chimney or a stretch of river that must be much as Oscar Wilde, say, or Rossetti, or even more thrillingly, Turner, must have seen it, is in a sense to become part them. I could imagine myself being any one of a stirring range of figures from Sir Thomas More to Jimmy Whistler only by reminding myself that *this* (a cloud in the sky would serve if I couldn't find masonry) must be just as so-and-so experienced it. In Chelsea the choice is limitless.

And drifting around so much I became aware of the first signs of the environmental narcissism that was to grip Chelsea as the postwar recovery took place. Not only were there the streets that turned shiny white and cream, but in such streets, good heavens, one could see pink doors, yellow doors and even purple doors anything but the black, green or brown doors they had always been. In the more cottagey streets you could see windows painted eau-de-nil and pink-washed walls. Window-boxes, unimaginable during the war, appeared everywhere as the kind of people who have mostly gone off to live in the shires or Portugal, a sort of urban gentry, declared their standards of taste and love of a little pain-free gardening.

Another portent of the postwar period was the return of the Chelsea Arts Ball. By the time I got to Nathan's they were practically out of everything — and you still couldn't get stuffs to make your own fancy dress — so I went as a Yugoslav peasant girl in a mightily embroidered bodice and a velvet skirt with a heavy helping of free-floating ribbons everywhere so that I looked as though the paper streamers had already started. All I can remember is the feeling of vast excitement to be in that perspiring, palpitating mass of people, everyone a spectacle — and being chased along one of the arcaded galleries of the Albert Hall by a heavenly young man in a light-up bow-tie who became one of my dearest boyfriends.

You can't ask more of a ball than that.

To augment my visiting rights to Chelsea I had a suitably mad friend in Walpole Street, Barbara. Barbara got on with being thoroughly Chelsea, wore eyeliner before anyone else and those luridly-coloured stockings that were regarded as signals of depravity, in her case rightly. Like me, she was another fugitive from art school with a niche in journalism -- hers was layout and graphics; she seemed the embodiment of young Chelsea then. Fine art was yielding to commercial work and Barbara took up bright living with enthusiasm. She painted her room that relentless pink called Shocking and on her floor, impatient for an effect there were no materials to achieve otherwise, she painted black and white lozenges to give a harlequin look.

From this lurid headquarters we conducted our raids on Chelsea. Coffee bars were becoming more important than the pubs from the youthful point of view as meeting places. They provided strange modern decors against which to pose and you could talk forever over a cup of coffee. We were a dangerously liberated pair. We never wasted a second on anyone or anything we didn't find amusing. Chelsea never let us down.

About this time my career took off and that, and her motherhood, brought an end to the partnership. I was busy dashing round the world

reporting news for the *Evening Standard*. Now I could examine the sources, as it were, of the lovely new designs from Italy and Scandinavia that were always to be found somewhere in Chelsea. But there was to be more to Chelsea than mere emulation. Looking back now, it is no wonder this was the bit of London that first started to swing. It was ready-made for the exhibitonism of the sixties. That long, slow dawdle down King's Road was a parade of people examining and exciting one another in a way that hadn't been seen in London since the Edwardians in Hyde Park. Along those pavements, revered by me because one bright afternoon in the '40s I had seen a young man with bare feet and hair dyed magenta, now poured a never-ending spectacle. Flower children and hippies pre-empted the solitary Chelsea eccentrics. They were still there, I suppose, but imperceptible in the flow of robes, beads and hair which, alas, was never a true eccentricity but a terrible conventionality. But there were always those others who were individual in their clothes, bearing and make-up, making a separate statement and they were the ones you came to watch; the new generation of Barbaras. The King's Road was transformed, taken over and, to some I suppose, ruined.

Again I was glad never to have felt I belonged to Chelsea, I didn't have to be indignant as the world came to goggle. I could goggle along with the rest.

So from time to time I return, still unsure about which side of the King's Road I like to walk along, but upholding the view generally that it's best to go down the left side and up the other. Now it's the punks, and I was thrilled to see a group in Coco-the-clown make-up, orange stand-up hair and tartan kilts with bondage chains stalking like visionary beings along the pavements where I'd seen nearly forty years earlier my first Chelsea vision with the bare feet and magenta hair.

Whereas he did it alone, shooting like a comet along the grey vista of the King's Road, now punks have to virtually jostle each other on the pavements. It would be annoying for them to realise just how charming and rather touching they look in their efforts to compete and outrage. I think I catch a trace in myself of the sort of reaction that Barbara and I, even at our worst, used to get; a sort of amused, affectionate sufferance.

Either side of the King's Road the tempting side-streets still draw one's feet. They have a special quality, a sort of gracefulness that you don't find in the grandiose stucco areas of Kensington, or the palatial parts of Regent's Park. The proportions in Chelsea seem to be about right, so complain as you may about the changes, they have not been devastating.

Certainly for me it keeps its old holiday, carefree quality. I'm sure it's important to take Chelsea seriously and many do. But not me.

*Anne Sharpley was for many years a special writer and reporter for the* Evening Standard. *She lives in Marylebone and is working on a book.*



# *St. Luke's: problems, promise and possibilities*

*In December, 1982, the Rev. Derek Watson arrived at the parish church of Chelsea to succeed Prebendary Harold Loasby as rector of St. Luke's. Then aged 44, his experience was already wide. The son of a Leicestershire country solicitor, he had followed national service in the 3rd. Carabineers by going up to Selwyn College, Cambridge, to read Law but abandoned this to study for priesthood. After ordination in Southwark Cathedral, he became a curate at New Eltham in the south-east suburbs of London and then Chaplain to Christ's College, Cambridge, before being chosen by Dr. Mervyn Stockwood, Bishop of Southwark, as his domestic chaplain.*

*He was vicar of Surbiton for five years, then returned to Southwark as Residential Canon and Director of Ordinands and Post Ordination Training. It was then that his name was suggested as a possible successor to Prebendary Loasby. Two years after his arrival in Chelsea, he talked to the Editor about the challenges, rewards and problems he has encountered.*

"When somebody asked whether I would be interested in going to St. Luke's, my first reaction was to say that I was not available; I had plenty to do in Southwark. But I was persuaded to visit the church and the parish and, when I looked around, it was obvious that this would be a great challenge. I was struck by the variety of people and of work for the church; there was clearly a great deal to do. I felt ready for a biggish job and thought that I ought to accept. I knew I was taking on a lot and proceeded in fear and trembling.

"Although St. Luke's has been the parish church of Chelsea since it was built in 1824, I am not rector of Chelsea. The original parish has been carved up between the other churches within the Deanery of Chelsea — the Area Dean is John Collins at Holy Trinity Brompton. There are thirteen of these — not counting Christian churches of other denominations, of course — and the problem facing us all is not so much shrinking congregations but falling population. The census of 1971 showed that the population of the parish of St. Luke's was 8,223; ten years later it had fallen to 6,300. It is the same everywhere in Chelsea: the figures for the Old Church parish were 5,372 and 3,892 and for Christ Church, 4,622 and 3,504. Overall, the population decreased by about a quarter over ten years.

"Another factor in my parish is that a large and increasing proportion of the more well-to-do leave London for weekends so that I am unlikely to see them in church on Sunday and get to know them there. So the numbers those thirteen churches were built to serve are no longer here. Looking ahead, some amalgamations of parishes would seem inevitable; there has already been talk about this but no firm proposals have yet been made.

"You might expect the population of the parish to be exceptionally affluent and, of course, much of it is. But a third of my parishioners live in charitable trust housing. I come across the problems of poverty as much as those of affluence and such problems as loneliness are common to all. I encounter the usual human conditions of anxiety, ill health, bereavement, marriage difficulties, rootlessness, the worries of single-parent families and, drink.

"In trying to help, I take part in local activities and visit people but, particularly, I want to make the church itself a focal point, to see it well-used and not only on Sundays. This is one reason why we are creating a parish office in the crypt. The church is a place of worship but it also has a fine acoustic. What a pity to waste it. So we have held a number of concerts and recitals at St. Luke's; three Henry Wood Promenade Concerts and several by the Chelsea Symphony Orchestra. We have also been approached by a record company who want to use St Luke's for a recording. All this is part of an effort to give the Church 'high visibility'.

"It is a remarkable building by any standards. While it may not have so long and rich a history as the Old Church, it was designed by James Savage as the first Gothic Revival church in London. The first rector was the brother of the Duke of Wellington; one of his successors was the father of the Victorian novelist Charles Kingsley, and another, the father of Reginald Blunt, the historian of Chelsea and the founder of the Chelsea Society. Perhaps its greatest single claim to fame was that Charles Dickens was married here.

"But it is the church itself that is presenting the most massive problem facing us. When I came here I knew that the structure was not entirely sound and, just by looking at it, it was obvious that a lot of money needed to be spent on restoration and redecoration. But, a few months after I arrived, the architect, Donald Insall, carried out a survey and came up with some frightening figures.

"The main problem is the Bath stone in which the church was built. This looks beautiful when clean and undecayed, but ours was not only blackened by the smoke of London but eroded by wind, weather and atmospheric pollution. Some of it was unstable and unsafe and a great deal in urgent need of repair, let alone cleaning. The tower, for example, was secured by metal tie-rods but these had almost rusted through and had to be replaced. A lot of damp was coming through the walls and roof and the whole place needed re-wiring.

"St. Luke's needs redecoration throughout and, to make use of its potential, we need to utilize all that it has to offer. The vestry, for example, is a lovely Gothic room but it has fallen on hard times. If restored it would make a wonderful room for meetings, or entertaining or, perhaps, as a gallery from time to time.

"So the estimate for the repair and restoration work we need is £800,000. We have been allocated £200,000 from the sale of the Old Rectory but the balance must be raised and we are planning a major appeal.



"We have already made a start. We have built a ramp for wheel-chairs up to the west door and have ordered plate-glass doors for the arch between the porch and the lobby so that the outer wooden doors can stand open and the interior can be seen. There has been discussion about possible improvements to the interior. Some people find the stained glass of the east window rather too garish and others think that the altarpiece of *The Deposition of Christ* is too sombre — He looks a very dead man and that, surely, is not what Christianity is about. But the picture was painted specifically for the church by James Northcote and many would like to see it cleaned. If we can restore the vestry we might well make a new one beneath the gallery on the north side. All this provides a very practical challenge that runs parallel with the human and spiritual challenges.

"I was right when I noted the variety of the parish on my first visit. We have a very mixed congregation and this variety has proved one of the delights. But it does mean that we have to try to meet a very wide spread of needs and tastes. For example, the young in their twenties are attracted by informal study-groups, discussing such subjects as healing and prayer. Then there is our music — both in services and in concerts — and in this we are lucky in our curate, Niall Weir, who has a fine singing voice and musical connections which are helping to build up our concert programme.

"This is what I like about being here. There is so much variety that you can feel pulled apart — but I thrive on it."

# *Down on the riverside*

## by Guy Topham

In the beginning, the river created Chelsea. A bank of shingle on the north bank of the Thames, it lay above flood-level and offered the nearest firm building-land westward of London. The river was, of course, the fastest means of transport but it was beautiful, too, so that it was here that the rich and powerful chose to build their houses: close to the capital, but standing clear of its fogs and plagues.

Tudor Chelsea was remarkable for the Manor House and Beaufort House, residences of King Henry VIII and Sir Thomas Moore, standing a few hundred yards apart on the river-bank amongst the other mansions and gardens. Georgian Chelsea had become a sizeable town and the middle classes occupied new terraces of brick houses near the river in what had become a "garden suburb"; Tobias Smollett was a typical arrival, choosing Chelsea because its fresh air might be good for his delicate daughter. Then, the private gardens of large houses ran down to the shore to either side of the village, within which the buildings were separated from it by the narrow lane of Cheyne Walk; or, immediately to the west of the Old Church, stood directly on the bank and overhung the water at high tide.

Chelsea became the artists' quarter in the mid-Victorian period, because of the river. Turner was amongst the first and, although he painted no recognisable view of the Thames, he painted the sky — particularly the sunsets; Whistler followed to paint his nocturnes, inspired by the changing light over the wide curve of the river opposite his house at the western end of Cheyne Walk. It was not only painters; writers came, too, amongst them Carlyle, who chose to live in Cheyne Row because of the view of the busy river scene at the bottom of the street: "a most artificial, green-painted, yet lively, fresh, almost operatic-looking business."

The building of Battersea Bridge in 1771, gave Chelsea its main industry: transport. Here, road and river transport met and could trans-ship their loads and, by the end of the century, the population stood at around 11,000, with many hundreds of horses stabled near the river. But roads were rough and narrow and those unable to afford horse-drawn transport were reluctant to walk to London more than necessary because of the consequent damage to their shoes. So, after the Regency years of town-planning and urban expansion, it was natural that, sooner or later, Chelsea would be included in such grandiose plans. In 1839, Thomas Cubitt, having built his gleaming stucco terraces in Belgravia and Pimlico, proposed the embankment of the north shore of the river between Vauxhall and Battersea bridges for the extension of his works.

Once the idea of an embankment had been suggested and proved feasible it was bound to recur. During the next thirty years — covering the period when Turner and Whistler were painting on the Chelsea foreshore — several



plans were considered and some remarkable architects' drawings survive. The most extraordinary came from the imagination of H. H. Burnill in 1851 and was presumably for submission to the heirs of Sir Hans Sloane, the principal landowners. This showed not only the embanking of the whole Chelsea riverside but the rebuilding of all Cheyne Walk with stucco-fronted, mock-Palladian terraces and the Old Church replaced by an Italianate one with a campanile.

The purpose of the embanking was not only to provide a setting for riverside development such as this, but for hygiene. The sewers of London and the riverside towns discharged directly into the Thames, then wider than it is now and about a thousand feet across at Chelsea and raw sewage drifted up and down and settled on the shore and mudbanks, which stank in summer and were thought responsible for the epidemics which plagued the riverside. So an embankment would not only narrow the river and produce a faster flow but main sewers, running east and west could be built beneath it to intercept the existing north — south sewers before they reached the Thames. The final plans for such an undertaking were drawn up by Sir James Bazalgette, the civil engineer, who had designed the main drainage system for London. This was completed by 1874 to general approval, including that of Carlyle, who described it as "a handsome terrace" that would offer "a *coup d'oeil* that would not then be surpassed in any city of Europe."

There were others, however, who mourned the passing of the old riverside. All the old houses along the southern side of Duke Street, which overhung the shore, were swept away, as was the famous Old Swan tavern at what is now the river end of Royal Hospital Road; instead, there stretched a noble granite terrace bearing a road, far wider than was necessary for the carts and hansom cabs that used it, lined by gas-lamps. Behind this, most of Old Chelsea survived, but the developers' eyes were now upon it and Victorian terraces joined, and sometimes replaced, the Georgian; some, like Oakley Street, were built across the gardens towards Chelsea Embankment and the new Albert Bridge.

But the Embankment stopped at Battersea Bridge, leaving the western end of Cheyne Walk as it had been when Whistler and Turner had lived there. Inevitably, the urban improvers tried to complete the grand design and, in 1897, the London County Council presented its Improvements Bill to extend the Embankment westward. This would have involved the reclamation of three and a half acres from the river, into which the shore-line would be advanced two hundred feet. There was an outcry and amongst the protesters were the painters Sir Edward Poynter, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Sir David Murray, G. F. Watts, Alfred Waterhouse, W. S. Frith, John MacWhirter and G. P. Jacomb-Hood; the sculptor, Thomas Stirling Lee; the architect C. R. Ashbee and Sir Walter Besant, the historian of London, who proclaimed that the embanking was "unnecessary, either in the interest of the immediate locality, or of the inhabitants of the county of London generally" and that it would "for ever destroy one of the most characteristic and picturesque portions of the foreshore and bank of the river Thames."

Fleet Street joined the debate, taking the protesters' side, the leader-writers making play with their most purple prose. *The Westminster Gazette*, however, was briskly practical, declaring, "the view from Battersea Bridge, looking west, is certainly without equal of its kind in London. The river describes a wide curve to the north and, at high tide, there is no broader expanse of water from Kew to Greenwich . . . It is across this curve that the County Council propose to draw remorseless chord by prolonging the existing Chelsea Embankment in a straight line . . . The river would then be straightened, the old shore would go." It concluded that a Parliamentary Committee should carefully consider "whether it is necessary to destroy this beautiful reach of old river." The protesters won and the Embankment remained halted at Battersea Bridge.

By the end of the century some distinguished new houses had arisen along the Embankment to either side of the Physic Garden, which itself narrowly escaped the builder. To the west of Albert Bridge, C. R. Ashbee designed several new houses; three of them on and beside the site of the famous riverside inn, the Magpie and Stump, which had been destroyed by fire in 1886, and, farther east, on the site of the present Roper's Garden, No. 74 Cheyne Walk, where both Whistler and Laurence Olivier were to live. Then the stretch of Cheyne Walk between Lawrence Street and Cheyne Row — with the exception of the King's Head and Eight Bells tavern — was demolished to make way for one of the first, vast blocks of flats to be built in London, Carlyle Mansions, which was completed in 1886. Houses to the east of Beaufort Street went and were replaced by the More's Garden flats and Crosby Hall, which More himself had once owned, was brought from the City in 1910 and rebuilt as part of the new quarters for the British Federation of University Women.

There was little opposition to such changes and not until after the First World War that was it realised that Chelsea's inheritance of beautiful and historic buildings was exhaustible. This anxiety came to a head in 1927 when Lombard Terrace, the surviving north side of Duke Street was threatened with demolition and redevelopment by Major Sloane Stanley, one of the Sloane heirs. The painter, Sir William Orpen, wrote to *The Times*, "I pass up the river every morning on my way to work and I always stop and look across from the riverside at Lombard Terrace, the Old Church and the two houses in Cheyne Walk on its right. At any time of year and in all lights this scene is beautiful. Of course, if the little terrace is pulled down, the church itself will lose all the dignity and size this little terrace gives it. Can nothing be done to save this most beautiful spot of Old Chelsea that is left to us?"

A petition was signed by four hundred and fifty people, including the painters Wilson Steer, Henry Poole and Algernon Talmage; the sculptor Adrian Jones; the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams and the actresses Ellen Terry and Sybil Thorndike. They pleaded that "this little reach of riverside Chelsea is not merely a local treasure but a national possession, which can very easily be destroyed, but cannot possibly be replaced." But it was to no avail. Major Sloane Stanley replied that he "could not see his way" to



comply and the terrace was demolished, except for the two houses nearest to the Old Church — including the famous Lombard café-restaurant — which were reprieved. But only for a decade; just before the Second World War, the surviving fragment was demolished, too, its owner still deaf to pleading; the only consolation being that the houses would not have survived the bombing of the Old Church in 1941.

The destruction of Lombard Terrace had one beneficial effect. Among the protesters had been Reginald Blunt, the historian of Chelsea and the son of one of its rectors, and, in expression of his anger, he founded the Chelsea Society, which has since prevented some of the worst excesses by private and public landowners and developers.

But the conservationists were to suffer two more defeats on adjoining battlefields in Cheyne Walk. The first was the long, ultimately hopeless, attempt to save the oldest house in Chelsea, the wing of the 16th century Shrewsbury House, which survived as Terrey's fruit shop until demolished, despite protests, together with its easterly neighbours in 1931, although the Chelsea Society managed to save the two fine Queen Anne houses to the west. On the site, a new 42 Cheyne Walk was built for Lord Revelstoke; a remarkable detached mansion, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. But this, too, joined other Chelsea mansions in legend, since it was demolished in 1936 to be replaced by the block of flats that stands there today.

The second was a few yards to the east, on the corner of Cheyne Walk and Oakley Street, where the site surrounding the Pier Hotel was sold by the Cadogan Estate to a developer in 1962. A Public Enquiry was held three years later but to no avail, beyond the saving of two of the group of three C. R. Ashbee houses that stood on the site of the Magpie and Stump; and decision to condemn one of them was taken by Mr. Richard Crossman, then Minister for Housing, who visited the site himself. With the Pier Hotel went a stretch of Oakley Street, and the row of Georgian houses that included the famous Blue Cockatoo restaurant, in what was probably the greatest environmental disaster to befall Chelsea since the demolition in 1906, of Paradise Row, also owned by the Cadogan Estate. In their place reared the elephantine block of flats, Pier House, which disfigures the riverside today.

These defeats could be set against two triumphs: the rebuilding of the Old Church in 1952, after opposition from the Diocese of London had been overcome and, a decade later, the decision by the borough council to continue the tradition of growing flowers in the ruins of the bombed houses to the west of the Old Church by converting them into the sunken Roper's Garden.

Since the 1930s, the Chelsea Society had been concerned about the increase of traffic along Cheyne Walk but this, by present standards, was acceptable and, on summer evenings, the riverside was a favourite promenade. But traffic increased far beyond the nightmares of Sir James Bazalgette and, in the early 1970s, plans for an inner ring-road for London — "the motorway box" — were proposed by the Greater London Council with Cheyne Walk and Chelsea Embankment forming its south side. Realising that this would finally separate Chelsea from the Thames and destroy its riverside, the Chelsea Society led the fight against it and, at

considerable cost, shared the triumph when the scheme was dropped. A powerful ally in this campaign was the Planning Committee of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, so it was with dismay that it was heard a decade later that this same Committee favoured a plan for a north-to-south relief road along the line of the railway from Kensington to the Thames, which would then turn east on to Cheyne Walk. This would involve the widening of the Embankment, as had been planned in 1897, to carry heavy traffic, so destroying the sweep of what had come to be known as Whistler's Reach.

There the matter stands. As the Chairman has reported, the Government has heeded protests from the Society and other groups and exempted the Chelsea riverside from its plans to declare it a trunk route when the GLC is disbanded, but the Borough Council's intentions still, apparently, stand. Meanwhile, the tranquility that attracted many generations to the riverside is a faint memory as the continuous avalanche of traffic defiles it with noise, fumes and vibration. The restoration of peace to the shore of the Thames at Chelsea is a daunting, but inspiring, crusade.

# *Chelsea in Hansard*

The murder of the policewoman outside the Lybian People's Bureau in St. James's Square on 17th April and the prolonged siege of the building, which then began, had an unpleasant echo in Chelsea. In 1979, the former Kingsley School, in Glebe Place, had been sold to the Libyan Government, under remarkably secretive circumstances, by the Inner London Education Authority. As the murder of Libyan residents of London for political motives had then begun, there were understandable worries among those living in Old Chelsea. These have been voiced in Parliament by Lord Chalfont, the President of the Chelsea Society, as this extract from the Hansard report of a House of Lords debate on 25th April, 1984, will show.

**Lord Chalfont:** *The noble Lord mentioned certain installations in London which are recognised as being installations occupied by Libyans and representatives of the Libyan Government. Do Her Majesty's Government intend to do anything about an educational establishment in Chelsea which is thought by most people to be (if I may put it this way) not exactly what it seems to be? Are Her Majesty's Government planning to take any action about the people who occupy those premises in Chelsea?*

**Lord Elton:** *My Lords, I know the school which the noble Lord has in mind. We do not have such suspicious views, as perhaps does the noble Lord, but there is a discreet police presence outside the school to make sure that nothing untoward goes on.*

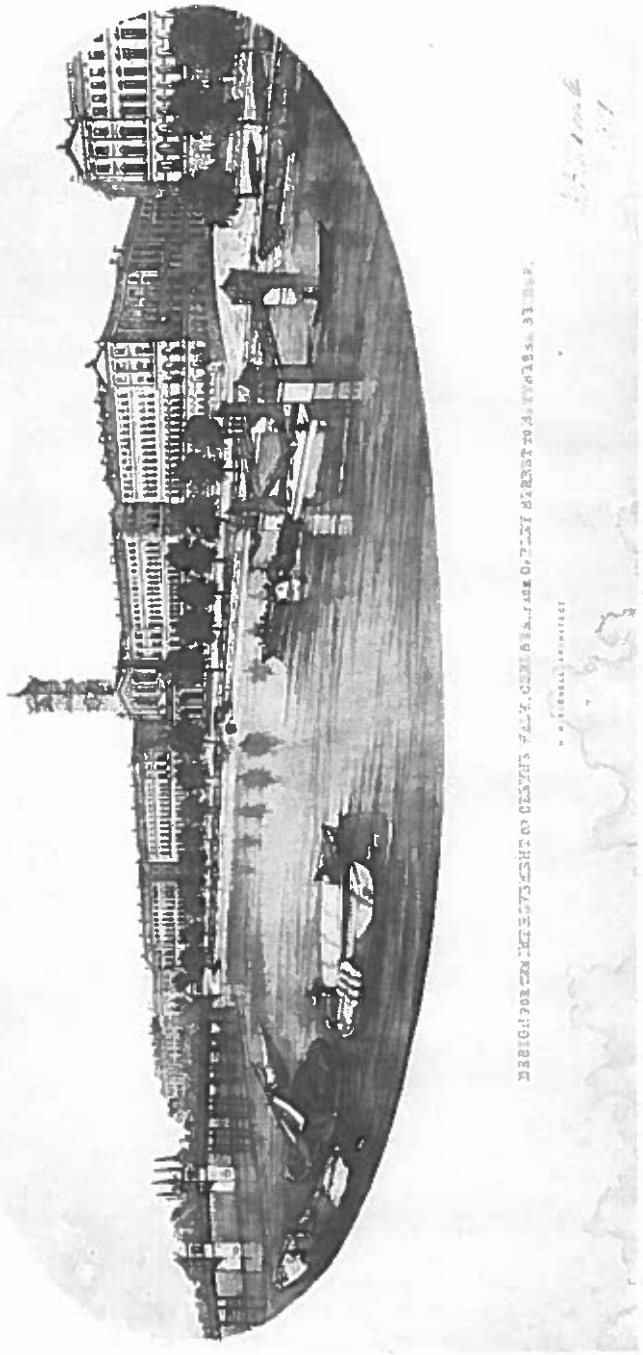


*Artist at work: Sir Hugh Casson, the President of the Royal Academy, painting the waterfront scene on Cheyne Walk last summer. (See Chairman's Report and pages 28-32).*

*Future threats: a rally in Roper's Garden to protest about the proposed "trunking" of Cheyne Walk is addressed by Mrs. Betty Woolf of the West London Traffic Reform movement. (See Chairman's Report).*

*Present threat: a lorry spills its load of timber at the intersection of Cheyne Walk and Oakley Street early this year. The camber of the road here is a danger to speeding juggernauts — and to everybody else.*

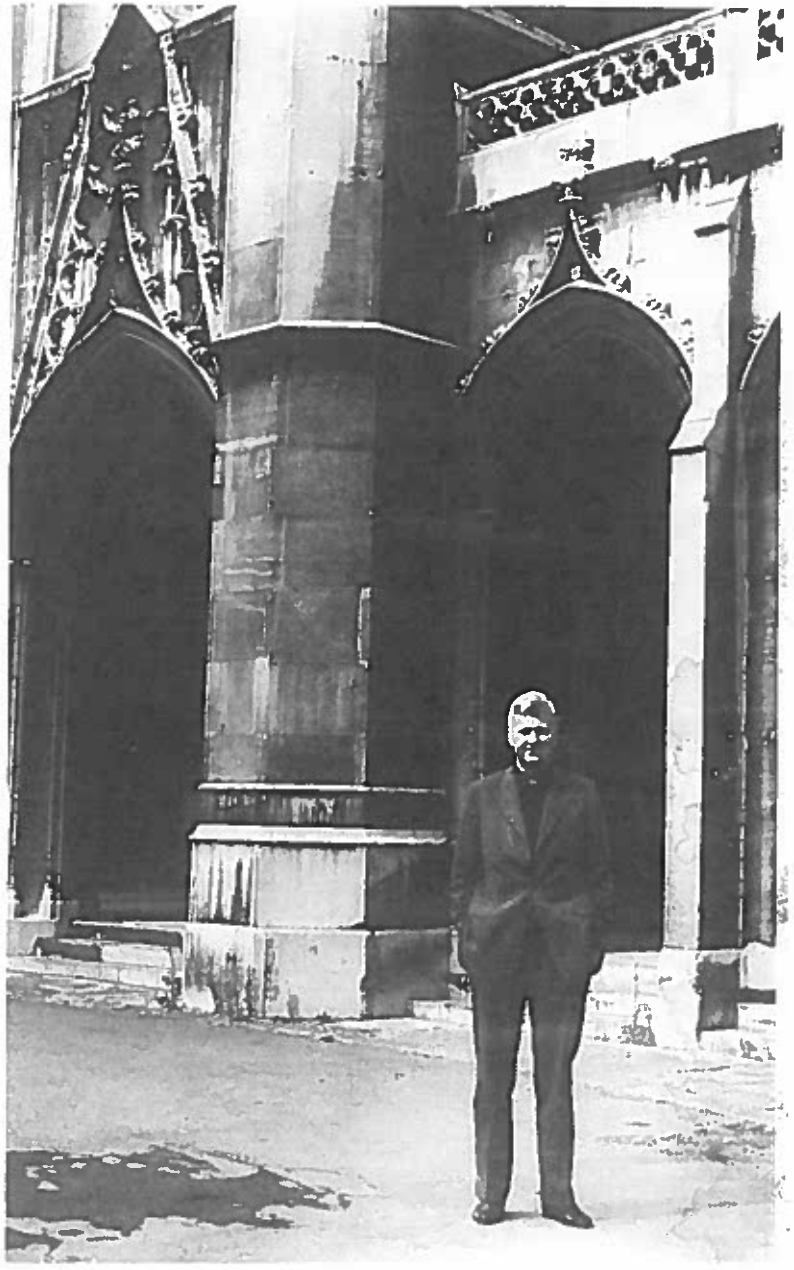




*Past threat: a plan to rebuild Cheyne Walk by the architect H. H. Burnell in 1851 that was never, of course, implemented. His drawing shows Cadogan Pier by the entrance to Oakley Street and the campanile of the rebuilt Old Church. The engraving is at the Museum of London.* *See pages 28-32).*

*The dreaming spire of Kensington. The strange scene last July, as members of the Chelsea Society gathered beneath palm trees for the 1984 Summer Meeting. The setting could only be The Roof Garden, originally planted on top of the Derry and Toms department store half a century ago.*





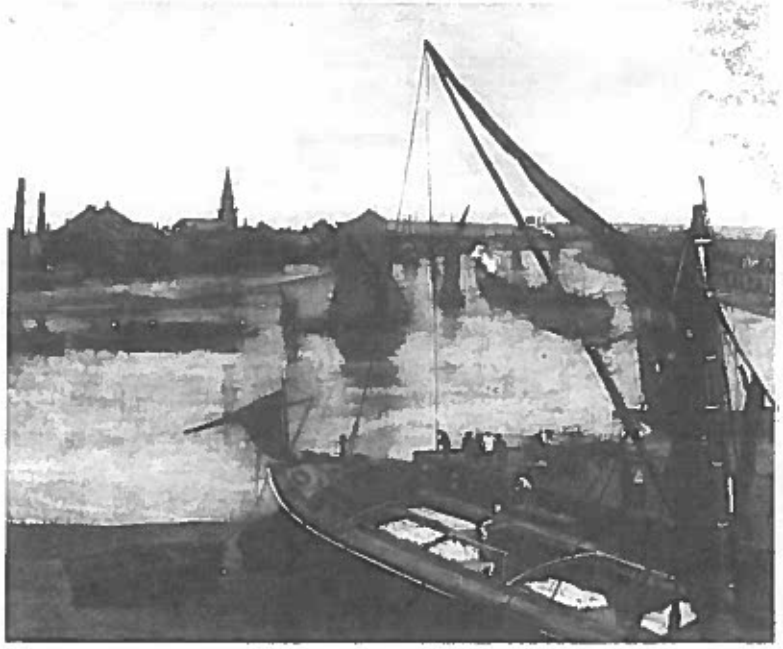
*Facing the challenge: the Rev. Derek Watson outside St. Luke's, the parish church of Chelsea, for which he must raise £800,000. He gives his views on the church, its work and its future on pages 25-27.*

*Familiar faces: James McNeill Whistler and Walter Greaves by the river at Chelsea as portrayed by the actors Jon Pertwee and Trevor Wedlock. They were playing the parts in the* Omnibus *television programme commemorating the 150th anniversary of Whistler's birth, which was shown by BBC1 on 8th July. Directed by Alex Marengo, many of the scenes were filmed on the streets of Chelsea.*



*Chelsea sailor: Mr. Ernest Flint photographed on the Thames in 1935. He writes about his voyaging from Cheyne Walk on pages 55-57.*

*Below: the river Mr. Flint remembers. Thames sailing barges on the foreshore of Cheyne Walk and, under sail in Battersea Reach, painted by Walter Greaves in the 1870s. The scene had changed little when Ernest Flint sailed in them half a century later.*




*The Chelsea submariner. The only known protrait of Captain Tom Johnstone, discovered in a collection of old drawings about twenty-five years ago by the author of the article on the opposite page. Better remembered as a smuggler, a Channel pilot and a spy, new documentary evidence suggests that he was also an early pioneer of submarines.*



# *The Chelsea submarine*

## by Tom Pocock

Captain Tom Johnstone belongs to the shadows between history and legend, amongst the heroes and villains — and sometimes composites of the two — in the underworld of the late 18th and early 19th centuries: the pirates and highwaymen, the smugglers and spies. He was not, so far as I know, celebrated enough to become the subject of ballads or Staffordshire china figures, but biographical sketches of him — whether fact or fiction, or a mixture of the two — still crop up from time to time. This is one of them, but it differs in two ways. One is that it offers some original documentary evidence. The other is that it finds Captain Johnstone in Chelsea.

Studies of Johnstone, who was always known as "The Famous Smuggler" but who was, as will be seen, much more, have been modest in their claims to sources. An historical novel about him, written in the manner of a biography, by James Cleugh and published in 1955, named a few books about smuggling but laid particular stress on "a number of memoirs, pamphlets, newspaper articles and correspondence of the first half of the 19th century" without being more specific. An article about him by Cyril Bracegirdle, published in *Country Life* two years ago, offered some splendidly romantic stories about Johnstone's love-life but without giving their sources. This is not to say that these, or other, accounts should be dismissed as imaginary; some, or all of them, might prove to be true but they need to be taken with salt. Indeed, the very saltiness of Tom Johnstone and his mythology is part of his charm.

The most reliable evidence of the hero's early activities is — pending the discovery of more documentary evidence — a book entitled *The Historical Gallery of Criminal Portraitures* by John Brown, published in 1823. Setting this beside four works on smuggling, published in the 1920s and 1930s, it is possible to put together a life story that may be somewhere near the truth and is certainly exciting.

Thomas Johnstone was born in 1772, probably into a Hampshire family with seafaring connections, and trained as a pilot in the English Channel. This led to some smuggling and, on the outbreak of war with Revolutionary France, profitable and perfectly legal piracy as a privateer preying on French shipping. He was captured on one of these forays and expected to be hanged but, instead, was apparently invited to become a spy for the French. He accepted, returned to England but at once reported the circumstances to the Admiralty and thereupon became a double-agent.

At this point, Mr. Bracegirdle's entertaining article has him involved in his first love affair with a Dutch girl — "a wild-natured young redhead married to a 60-year-old colonel and yearning for excitement" — and living

in Berkeley Square. It is not easy to imagine the smuggler and privateer in Mayfair, any more than to see him involved with an actress a few years later, but all is possible for legendary characters and it is more amusing to accept the possibilities than dismiss them.

It seems fairly certain, however, that Johnstone combined his work as a pilot with smuggling and a little espionage and that this got him into trouble on both sides of the Channel. There is some evidence that he was imprisoned in the New Prison in the Borough and in the Fleet Prison for debt and escaped from both. These and other offences were apparently pardoned in recognition of his services as a pilot during the British landings on Walcheren in 1809 and, it is said, he later volunteered to change his ways so completely that he was appointed to command the revenue cutter *Fox*.

But by far the most intriguing of Captain Johnstone's adventures began with his involvement with the American engineer, Robert Fulton. An inventor of startling originality, Fulton was, at the beginning of the 19th century, trying to interest the British or French governments — it did not matter which — in a practicable submarine. Many designs for submersibles had been evolved over the years, particularly in the 18th century, but all had failed because they lacked feasible means of propulsion. Fulton had in mind the use of clockwork machinery.

As is known, the Royal Navy regarded the very idea of the submarine as unsporting and not to be encouraged, but in 1804, it appears, William Pitt, the Prime Minister, was able to persuade Admiral Lord St. Vincent, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and the Duke of York, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, to support him in offering a possible £50,000 to Fulton for the successful development of "sub-marine torpedoes." What now follows comes from John Brown's *Historical Gallery of Criminal Portraiture* but I have yet to see documentary evidence to support it.

It seems that while Fulton was working on his submarine, the *Nautilus*, at Dover, he met Johnstone, who agreed to work with him, although the victory at Trafalgar, the following year, lessened the interest in submarines and torpedoes. It is also claimed that Johnstone was at sea with Lord St. Vincent off Brest in 1806, the latter writing to Lord Howick, his successor as First Lord of the Admiralty, that "The vigilance of the enemy alone prevented Tom Johnstone from doing what he professed." Tantalizingly, there is no hint as to what this might have been.

In 1812, Brown claims, Johnstone — now working on his own — had completed a clockwork model of a submarine and, after a demonstration, the Cabinet offered him £100,000 "if he could construct a submarine boat capable of being steered, elevated and depressed at pleasure under water and, at the same time, affix the torpedo under bottoms of ships. A celebrated civil engineer, then resident in High Holborn, undertook to make the boat, whose hull was formed of sheet-iron; her figure that of a salmon swimming; her length, about twenty feet; and her space in the inner chamber, about six feet square. This was formed in an inside boat, formed of cork and wood."



Two years later, the building of the submarine began in secret on the bank of the Thames near Wallingford. Johnstone had been given "letters of safeguard addressed to the magistracy and military commanders of Berkshire and Oxfordshire, signed by the Duke of York, as Commander-in-Chief, the Earl of Liverpool and Lord Sidmouth, stating that Johnstone was employed on an experiment that had the sanction of the Government and desiring that he might not be interrupted."

About £11,000 was spent on the work, apparently, and the hull was completed, held together by 11,000 screws. The torpedo — more of a limpet mine than a self-propelling torpedo — seems to have been tested, because Brown wrote, "So intense was the force of the torpedo when discharged that it acted in all directions with equal force." He speculated on the danger to London should such a weapon be used against it: "By loading a single engine against the main pier of each of the bridges over the Thames in London and setting the torpedo accordingly, he could toss the whole into the air just as the park and Tower guns were being discharged!"

But interest in the "secret weapon" seems to have flagged again and, Brown claims, French agents made contact with Johnstone and he listened to what offers they had to make. This was reported to "Mr. Becket, the Under-Secretary of State" and Johnstone was arrested, questioned but released. His work seems to have continued and the submarine ran trials off Woolwich in 1813 with such success that it was declared that "there may reasonably be expected a final termination of naval combats between fleets of men-of-war and frigates, for no vessel can be secured, by any vigilance, which lies afloat in any water, against sub-marine assaults."

The United States Government appears to have been interested and John Brown claimed to have met John Quincy Adams, the ambassador to London and a future President, in Harley Street and asked how "such a mode of warfare" could be even considered. Adams's reply could well have been recalled during the debate over the use of nuclear weapons in 1945; he defended the use of submarines and "instanced the Congreve rockets, fired from a British fleet into a crowded and almost defenceless metropolis [Copenhagen in 1806] as being equally destructive. He also observed, the more destructive were the instruments, the shorter would be the duration of the wars. It may therefore be anticipated, whenever the Republic of the United States and the monarchy of Great Britain shall be next at war, that this tremendous instrument of destruction, as well as steam batteries, will be brought into action."

British interest in submarines finally ended with victory over France in 1815 but Captain Johnstone's did not. Rumours abounded that he was building a submarine for the King of Denmark, or for the salvage of a treasure-ship wrecked off the Texel, or of another in the Caribbean. The most bizarre of all was that Bonapartists had arrived from France to offer him an initial sum of £40,000 to build a submarine that could be towed to the South Atlantic for the rescue of the exiled Emperor Napoleon from St. Helena, with a large reward if he were successful. It was even said that Tom Johnstone had started work on this project when the death of the Emperor in 1820 put an end to it.

Even then, it is said by others, Johnstone did not lose interest in submarines; that he built one for the Spanish Government and ran diving trials off Blackwall, which almost ended in disaster when the boat fouled some cables and he was lucky to be rescued. Then he retired, happily married, to live in the Vauxhall Bridge Road and died in his sleep at the age of 67 in 1839.

It has always seemed to me that the stories of Tom Johnstone might repay some research but that this would demand too great an investment in time spent searching the files of Government correspondence at the Public Record Office and the files of old newspapers in the British Library at Colindale. Although I had done no original research, I was delighted to find, by chance, amongst a pile of old drawings in an antique shop, a portait of a sea-captain with a rascally gleam in his eye, beneath which was written in a contemporary hand, "Capt. Johnstone, the famous smuggler." So far as I know, this is the only portrait of him that has come to light (see illustration, page 40).

More recently, an equally remarkable piece of evidence came my way. As the biographer of the Chelsea waterman-artist and disciple of Whistler, Walter Greaves, I had been involved in the acquisition of a quantity of documents, relating to him, by the Tate Gallery from the heirs of his patron William Marchant, the gallery-owner. Amongst these, I discovered Greaves's autobiographical notes, written in his own hand, for use by Marchant in the preface to the catalogue of an exhibition of his work. Only part of this material had been published and, amongst that which had not, were some fascinating memories and sketches of life in Chelsea as recalled by Walter Greaves and his family.

Amongst these I came across the page reproduced opposite. For those finding Greaves's hand-writing difficult to follow, the relevant passage reads: "Also my father said that there was a mysterious boat built on the Chelsea Meadows that was intended to go under-water, having air-pipes above for the purpose of getting Napoleon off the island of St. Helena. So on one dark night in November, she was launched and proceeded down the river (not being able to sink as the water not being deep enough). Anyhow she managed to get below London Bridge, the officers boarding her, Capt. Johnson in the meantime threatening to shoot them. But they payed no attention to his threats, seized her and, taking her to Blackwall, destroyed her."

Charles Greaves, Walter's father, would have been a child aged nearly ten at this time, so would have been able to remember the excitement. Indeed, he might even have seen "The Famous Smuggler" in the garden of The Old Swan, or on the balcony of The Adam and Eve, on the Chelsea riverside. It is just possible that, sitting in his own father's boat and being rowed upstream past the mouth of Chelsea Creek, he saw amongst the tall trees of the north bank some activity that roused comment but which none could explain. Could he, indeed, have actually seen the Chelsea submarine? Whatever the truth, it is fun to speculate.



Also my Father said that there was a mysterious boat built on the Chelsea Meadows that was intended to go under-water, having air-pipes above for the purpose of getting Napoleon off the Island of St. Helena. So on one dark Night in November, she was launched, & proceeded down the river, (not being Able to sink, As the water Not Being deep enough,) Anyhow She Managed to get Below London Bridge, the officers boarding her Capt. Johnson in the Meantime Threatening to Shoot them, but they payed No attention to his Threats, & ~~seizing~~ seized her & taking her to Blackwall destroyed Her.

In those days there was no Victoria or Albert Bridges to get Across to "Battersea" only the ferry, and Battersea Bridge People wanting to get over to "Battersea" had to use the ferry or the Bridge, in those days it had a Toll, the bridge was very Narrow, & the Traffic being great, there was a great many quarells & fights.

*The Walter Greaves manuscript.*

# *New at the Library*

The annual list of acquisitions drawn up for us by the Librarian at the Old Town Hall.

***Book and Pamphlets***

| | |
|---|---|
| ALPINE GALLERY | *In Cheyne Walk and Thereabout;* catalogue of an exhibition presented by Michael Bryan . . . 31st January — 18th February, 1984. |
| BERNARD, Philippa | *Chelsea, a Visitor's Guide.* Chelsea Rare Books, 1983. |
| MAAS, Jeremy | *The Victorian Art World in Photographs.* Barrie and Jenkins, 1984. Includes many well-known artists connected with Chelsea, and some less well-known such, as Henry Treffry Dunn, studio assistant to Rossetti. |
| MUSEUM OF LONDON | *The Favour of Your Company:* tickets and invitations to London events and places of interest c.1750 — c.1850, 1980 (includes some Chelsea items). |
| NORRINGTON, Ruth | *In the Shadow of a Saint:* Lady Alice More. Kylin Press, 1983. |
| SURVEY OF LONDON | Volume 41, *Southern Kensington: Brompton.* Athlone Press, 1983. |
| WHEWAY, Edna | *Edna's Story: Word and Action,* 1984 (a story of life in domestic service including a period spent in Chelsea in the '20s). |
| WOODSTOCK, D. and SANDS, V. | *Chelsea.* (small pamphlet guide to Chelsea). |

***Additions to the Picture Collection***

| | |
|---|---|
| GREAVES, Walter | 19 assorted etchings and sketches purchased from Michael Parkin. |
| MAITLAND, Paul | Lindsey Row. (this painting was donated anonymously, it will be hung on the stairs in Chelsea Library). |

***Other Additions***

| | |
|---|---|
| CHELSEA METHODIST CHURCH | The records of the Methodist Church have been deposited at Chelsea Library. |



# *The first Chelsea flower shows*

## by E. J. Willson

Chelsea's most abiding claim to fame, with a history even longer than its connection with the visual arts, must be its gardens. Today, the Physic Garden is enjoying a new lease of life; private gardens flourish, encouraged by competitions and by the Chelsea Gardens Guild, and two "garden centres" prosper off the King's Road. The latter belong to a great tradition for, at many periods over the past three centuries, Chelsea was a place to visit for a particular purpose: to see its nursery gardens.

Some nurseries are known to have been trading in the cities of London and Westminster as early as the 13th century but as the land became more valuable they ceased to exist; when new nursery gardens were founded they were on the fringes, chiefly to the east and the west. Some very important nurseries were located in the east at Hackney, Mile End and Hoxton; in the west they were founded in Chelsea, Kensington, Fulham and Hammersmith, as well as in Westminster, with Chelsea becoming pre-eminent as the fashionable place; here the heath lands and the gardens of great houses were found to be suitable sites. The earliest nursery of importance to be founded in the west was the Brompton Park Nursery, Kensington, in 1681, and its decline, after the death of George London and the retirement of Henry Wise in 1727, left the way clear for other nurseries to flourish.

By the 18th and early 19th centuries the flood of new plants being introduced from abroad made plant collecting a fashionable hobby for the wealthy and led to improvements in methods of housing and heating to preserve exotic plants: the trade of nursery gardening became profitable. For the first time the cultivation of flowers, previously left to women who used them in medicine and for the decoration of churches and homes, became important.

Why the King's Road should have become the fashionable place for nurseries, rather than, say, Kensington Road with its close proximity to Kensington Palace, is not easy to discover but it is probable that it owed something to the fame of the Chelsea Physic Garden and to the fact that, until 1830, the King's Road was the King's Private Road and from 1731 a small metal ticket was issued to those entitled to use it.

The Chelsea Physic Garden, particularly when it was under Philip Miller, from 1722 to 1770, would have been a magnet to draw people interested in plants to Chelsea. Philip Miller was the chief among a group of the most important gardeners and nurserymen of London who founded a Society of Gardeners and, in 1730, issued *Catalogus Plantarum* listing the trees, shrubs,

plants and flowers "which are propagated for sale in the Gardens near London." This was the first attempt to describe, illustrate and give correct names to the plants newly imported from America. Miller was the author of a number of books, his *Gardener's Dictionary* which went through eight editions between 1731 and 1768, being the most important. To be trained by Miller was the ambition of every aspiring gardener.

It is possible that some Huguenots had settled in the district bringing their gardening skills with them. Rolls, who had a nursery garden in the King's Road before 1797, is said to have been a member of a Huguenot family, who spelt their name "Rolle", and John Rubergall, a Frenchman, who is said to have been the first person to grow lettuce successfully on a large scale in England, had his garden in nearby Selwood Terrace, Kensington (in his day called "Salad Lane") from before 1754.

The importance of the King's Road for nurserymen is evidenced by the fact that a number of them who had their main gardens elsewhere found it profitable to have a show nursery in the King's Road. For example: John Mackay of Hackney, a nurseryman who sent out his own collectors to Australia and South Africa, had a show nursery in the King's Road as did John Thomas Willmer, "Florist to Her Majesty"; his main nursery was at Sunbury and he was celebrated as a grower of flowers, especially of carnations. The Waterers of the Knap Hill Nursery, Woking, held an annual exhibition in the King's Road from 1841; in 1856, the exhibition was held in the gardens of Ashburnham House in a tent 365ft by 96ft where music played and members of the Royal Family were among the visitors. The Knap Hill Nursery was famous for its rhododendrons and, of one display, *The Gardeners' Chronicle* declared, "There is nothing near London so beautiful as this just now."

Two of the earliest known nurserymen in Chelsea were members of a Society of Gardeners — John Alston of "near Chelsea College" and John Thompson at The Rose. Of Alston nothing more is known. A little more is known about Thompson. The Rose public house stood at the junction of the King's Road with Old Church Street (the site of the present Cadogan Arms). Thompson is rated from 1721 but he seems to have fallen on evil times as in 1750 he is marked "poor" in the Rate Book and excused rates; this continues until 1758 when Mrs Thompson is listed as "poor" and his land is in the hands of John Williamson. Williamson had recently inherited the Kensington Nursery from Robert Furber.

Information about the lives and businesses of nurserymen is difficult to come by; details have to be gleaned from casual references, directories, rate books, wills and the like, eked out with suppositions and guesses. Elsewhere I have gathered together all I could discover about Chelsea nurserymen, even the least important, and here it will be more appropriate to deal with two outstanding nurseries which made contributions to horticulture: the nurseries of Colvill and the Royal Exotic Nursery.

James Colvill founded his nursery in 1783, when he was about thirty-seven years old; nothing is known of his early life or how he received his training. He had one son, also James, born in 1777, who became his partner.



He had two grounds in the King's Road, one on the corner of Blacklands Lane and one further east beyond Sloane Square, known as his Grosvenor Nursery. Colvill's nurseries became famous for the many new plants introduced and for the vast areas of glass maintained. By 1811 they were specializing in rare exotics and forced flowers for sale in their shop and had between thirty and forty thousand square feet under glass. In 1869, George Bryan wrote of Colvill, "His display of flowers excited general admiration, and consequently an immense number of the gentry generally paid him a daily visit during the summer season." Colvill had the first chrysanthemum from China in 1795; it became known as "the old purple." He numbered many of the nobility among his customers, including the Duke of Newcastle, the Earls of Liverpool and Northampton, the Marquis of Blandford, the Marchioness of Lansdowne and Lord Ranelagh.

From 1819 to 1826, Robert Sweet was in charge of the exotic plants at Colvill's nurseries. He was born in Devonshire in 1782 and had had a wide experience before coming to Colvill including service on private estates, a partnership in a nursery at Stockwell and as foreman to Whitley, Brames and Milne of the Fulham Nursery. He was not only a fine practical gardener but the author of a number of books, among them illustrated volumes issued in monthly parts. These included *Geraniaceae, Cistineae, Florist's Guide,* and *Flora Australasica,* the parts cost three shillings each, with coloured plates; and usually Sweet had several publications running at the same time. Their publication added to the reputation of the Colvill nurseries and during his time their collection of plants was increased ten-fold. In 1826, when he was at the height of his success, a terrible blow fell. He was arrested for "Feloniously receiving . . . seven plants value £7 and seven pots, value 6d, the goods of our Lord the King", which has been stolen from Kew Gardens. This was a capital charge.

Reading the account of his trial it is impossible not to conclude that it was a deliberate attempt to ruin him, so many questions are left unanswered. How out of the thousands of plants at Kew were seven plants, of no particular rarity, missed at eight o'clock in the morning following their disappearance? Why was no attempt made to arrest the employee of Kew, named as the thief, who had absconded the day after Sweet's arrest? Why was the charge brought against Sweet, who worked on the cultivation side of the business and could make no profit from the plants, rather than his employer? Because of his publications, Sweet received many plants, some anonymously, from people who hoped that if they were mentioned by him a demand would be created, hence the arrival of plants from an unknown source would have caused no surprise. Many people eminent in the world of gardening testified to Sweet's character and honesty; one name is conspicuous by its absence: that of Colvill, his employer. The elder Colvill was dead but was the younger Colvill jealous of the reputation of his employee, or was he afraid to testify? In spite of a rather hostile summing-up by the judge, the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty."

Sweet was aquitted but his life was ruined and he began to suffer from fits of madness. He left Colvill and moved from Chelsea to Parsons Green, Fulham, and then back to Chelsea, he lingered on until 1835 and died on

January 20th. Colvill had died three years before and the magnificent collections at the nurseries had been dispersed.

The Exotic Nursery, later to become The Royal Exotic Nursery, stood on a site with frontages on the King's Road and Fulham Road next to St. Mark's Chapel, opposite the West London Cemetery; it was founded by Joseph Knight in 1808. Knight had been gardener to George Hibbert, himself a keen collector of plants and owner of a celebrated garden at Clapham. Hibbert gave Knight every help and encouragement in the founding of his nursery and when he died in 1837 Knight acquired all his plants. In 1820 Knight married Mary, the only daughter of John Powell Lorymer, both were Roman Catholics; she was then thirty-eight and he forty-three. Knight seems to have been a strict but benevolent employer, interested in the education of his employees. In 1837 he issued a *Catalogue of Coniferae.* His wife died in 1845 and he took his nephew by marriage, Thomas Aloysius Perry, into partnership, Perry had been working in the nursery with him since at least 1841. In 1850 they published a *Synopsis of Coniferous Plants grown in Great Britain and Sold by Knight and Perry, Chelsea* of which *The Cottage Gardener* said it "is, without exception the best book on the Cypress and Fir tribes that has been published in England. "About this time Knight retired from an active part in the business and in 1853 the nursery was sold to James Veitch. Knight died in 1855.

The Exotic Nursery, as run by Knight, was an important and successful one but in the hands of the Veitch family it became outstanding, possibly the greatest ever seen in this country. It did everything that nurseries had done before it, but on a larger scale and usually better. Whether one considers the breeding of new varieties, the sending out of collectors, the publication of catalogues, the winning of awards, the training of gardeners or the number of different grounds, in each field the Veitches were successful to a superlative degree.

The first of the family to establish a nursery was John Veitch who came from Scotland to engage in landscape gardening in Devonshire and Somerset in the 1780s; in 1808 he established a nursery at Budlake, near Killerton and, in 1832, purchased land at Mount Radford, Exeter, as a nursery to be run by his son James. James had two sons to help him in his nursery, James, born in 1815 and Robert Toswill, born in 1822. In 1853 James, senior, purchased the Exotic Nursery and sent his son James to Chelsea to manage it. James, junior, had already h d experience in London nurseries at Chandler's of Vauxhall and at Rollinsson's of Tooting. At Tooting he lived with the Rollinsson family and when they refused to accept any payment his father told him to purchase plants by way of thanks; James chose orchids and these laid the foundation of the famous Veitch collection of orchids. At Chelsea James found that since Knight's retirement the nursery had been neglected and he began to make improvements, extending the area under glass and establishing houses for different kinds of plants such as orchids, ferns, acquatic plants and plants from Australia.

In 1856 Veitch took over grounds at Coombe Wood, near Kingston-on-Thames, to form a nursery for shrubs and he added more land in King's



Road to his grounds in Chelsea. When, in 1863, his father died he severed all connection with the Exeter nursery. He was a man of enormous skill and energy whose influence was felt throughout the gardening world. He was a member of the Council of the Royal Horticultural Society and helped to organise the Great International Exhibition of 1866; shortly after this his health began to fail and he died on September 10th, 1869, at Stanley House, Chelsea. He had been so outstanding as an introducer of new plants, as an exhibitor and as a cultivator that it was felt some memorial to him should be established. Money was collected and the Veitch Memorial Trust set up to make awards to "those who have helped in the advancement and improvement of the science and practice of horticulture". The Royal Horticultural Society, to whom the Trust was transferred in 1922, still awards Veitch Memorial Medals.

James's eldest son, John Gould Veitch, had worked in the nursery with his father for a time but what he really wanted to do was to travel; in 1860 he made a journey to Japan, China and the Phillippine Islands collecting new plants for the nursery. He was fortunate in that Japan was only just being opened up to foreigners and he was the first collector to arrive there; although he was only permitted to travel within a ten mile radius of Nagasaki he managed to collect many new plants before getting himself attached to the staff of the British Consul in Tokyo to collect more plants and seeds.

Between 1864 and 1866, he visited Australia and the South Sea islands; on his return he married Jane Hodge but he began to have trouble with his lungs which made it necessary for him to spend winters in southern Europe. He died in August, 1870, leaving his widow with two sons, James Herbert, aged two and John Gould a year younger.

James Veitch's second son, Harry James, was probably the most outstanding member of his family. He was born in 1840 and when he was fourteen was sent to Germany for sixteen months to learn the language; this was followed by a year in the famous nursery of Vilmorin in Paris. He returned home to the nursery to gain general experience and then worked in the seed department. The death of his father in 1869, and that of his brother the following year left him in sole charge although his younger brother, Arthur, who had been working in Rothschild's city office, joined him as a partner; Arthur died in 1880.

In 1867, Harry Veitch married Louisa Mary Johnson but they had no children. The firm sent out many collectors to all parts of the world; probably the most famous of these was Ernest Henry Wilson who collected in China. One of the plants he sent back was *Lilium regale* which flowered for the first time in England in 1905. James Herbert Veitch, the son of James Gould, like his father, travelled to collect plants; between 1891 and 1893 he went round the world. He married Lucy Elizabeth Wood, they had no children. Like his father he suffered from poor health and he died in 1907. It was as well, perhaps, that Harry Veitch had enough vitality not only to carry on the nurseries but to expand them. His other nephew, John Gould, junior, also suffered from poor Health and died in 1914, aged forty-five. Harry Veitch rented ground in Fulham (now South Park) and later acquired sixty

acres at Feltham. In 1870, he purchased Middle Green Farm in Langley, near Slough and the next year the last remaining four acres of what had been the Fulham Nursery.

He not only sent out collectors to find orchids, then the most expensive and fashionable plant to grow, but produced new ones; the first known man-made hybrid orchid was produced for Veitch by John Dominy, and Veitch became, with Sander of St. Albans and Bull of Chelsea, the greatest orchid suppliers.

Harry Veitch was a popular man with his staff. To work in his nurseries was regarded as a privilege and the passport to promotion so that a young gardener would be willing to work for a very low wage for him, so as to be able to tell a prospective employer that he had worked for Veitch. Any young gardener considered suitable would be given ten shillings (50p) a week and his board and lodging and, if his work and character came up to Veitch's standard, could be certain of being found a place in private service. More than four hundred gardeners a year passed through the nurseries on their way to and from appointments.

The foremen wore frock coats and top hats so as to be suitably dressed to escort customers round the nursery; the Prince Consort was among regular visitors. Unfortunately, as far as is known, no business records of the Royal Exotic Nursery have been preserved. The firm did, however, issue a splendid volume to record its achievements: *Hortus Veitchii*. This was nominally the work of James Herbert Veitch but was in fact written by Herman Spooner, botanical assistant to the nursery; it was published in 1906. A small glimpse of the volume of business and the quantities of plants handled can be got from the records of another celebrated nursery, Knap Hill, Woking. This nursery specialized in rhododendrons and hardy trees and shrubs and on January 22nd, 1895, supplied Veitch with 4,000 alder trees, 4,000 ash trees, 1,000 privet plants, 500 spruce and 13 Caucasian laurels. Between February 1894 and March 1895, Knap Hill supplied twenty-eight orders to Veitch, all of them for trees and shrubs. It is interesting that, in spite of its own extensive growing grounds, the Royal Exotic Nursery bought in so many plants from this one nursery. Lack of records makes it impossible to be sure but it seems unlikely that this was the only nursery from which plants were purchased.

The Royal Exotic Nursery not only issued catalogues of its stock but also published two books which became standard works on their subjects: *A Manual of the Coniferae* (based on the book that Knight and Perry had issued) and *A Manual of Orchidaceae*, both were written by A. H. Kent who was employed by Veitch for thirty-five years and was his private secretary.

In 1900, Harry Veitch decided to retire, leaving his nephew James Gould in charge; when James Gould became ill, in 1906, he came out of retirement to resume control. Six years later he played an important part in the organization of the International Horticultural Exhibition, for which he was knighted. Honours were showered on him but the one he said he valued most was the Victoria Medal of Honour awarded to him by the Royal



Horticultural Society in 1906. In 1914, he was seventy-four and decided to retire finally; he had no family to carry on the business so, instead of selling the good-will, he closed his nurseries. No nursery like the Royal Exotic Nursery has existed since, or is ever likely to do so.

Sir Harry's services to horticulture were not yet over; he was Treasurer of the Royal Horticultural Society for the year 1918 and continued to serve on its Council and Committees as well as being a generous patron of the Gardener's Royal Benevolent Institution. His wife died in 1921 and three years later, on July 6th, he died. *The Gardeners' Chronicle* summed up his career, "Sir Harry Veitch may be regarded as the most outstanding figure in contemporary horticulture, and during the last fifty years no one has exercised so great an influence on all things pertaining to gardening."

**E. J. Willson is the author of** *West London Nursery Gardens* **and** *James Lee and the Vineyard Nursery, Hammersmith.*

# *The Chelsea Gardens Guild*

*The Chelsea Gardens Guild was founded in 1926, a year before the Chelsea Society. There are now about three hundred members and meetings are held monthly from November to April at St. Luke's Church Hall; there are talks with slides and a Gardeners' Question Time with a panel of experts, spring and summer competitions and an annual garden party and prize-giving, followed by visits to the prize-winning gardens; and an outing by coach to a notable country garden on which friends can be invited. Several local nurseries offer discounts to Guild members. The annual subscription is £2 minimum (50p for OAPs). The membership secretary is Mrs. Pamela Sheridan, 24 Paultons Square, Chelsea S.W.3.*

# *Whistler's 150th birthday*

This year 10th July fell on a Tuesday and the morning rush-hour in south-west London was heavy. Among the buses, lorries and commuters' cars, rode a cyclist carrying a posy of flowers from Chelsea, through Fulham and Hammersmith and along the tow-path to Chiswick parish church. It was a member of the Chelsea Society carrying flowers from the garden of Chelsea Old Church to decorate the grave of James McNeill Whistler on the 150th anniversary of his birth.

The handsome bronze monument, standing by the old brick wall of the churchyard, was found to be in good order, although the guardian angels, which adorned each corner, were stolen several years ago. The maintenance of Whistler's tomb has, since then, been the self-imposed and unsung task of Michael Parkin, the gallery-owner and authority on Whistler and his circle.

It was appropriate, therefore, that at the beginning of the year he should have presented, at the Parkin Gallery, a delightful exhibition of the work of Whistler's first pupil, Walter Greaves. The 179 pictures on his walls covered much of the Chelsea waterman-artist's surprisingly wide range, including water-colours, drawings, etchings and a few oils. Most of the works were exhibited for the first time, since Michael Parkin had acquired a large collection from the Marchant family, descendants of Greaves's great-hearted patrol, William Marchant, proprietor of the Goupil Gallery, at which his first, sensational exhibition was held in 1911. This latest exhibition was called *Walter Greaves (A Pupil of Whistler) and the Goupil Gallery* and its catalogue was of the same format as those printed for Marchant and Greaves.

On 8th July, the *Omnibus* programme on BBC1 devoted half its time to a commemoration of Whistler's years in Chelsea. Produced with originality and style by Alex Marengo, this was entertaining and informative. The art lecturer Douglas Skeggs talked about Whistler's art and then demonstrated his technique of painting "nocturnes". The actor Jon Pertwee played Whistler himself with splendid swagger and a properly mannered delivery of his pronouncements, even if his make-up was a trifle over-extravagant. One could carp here and there; as when Whistler leaned on the river-wall beside Walter Greaves (played by Trevor Wedlock) and recited the sequence of tones and shapes that he would paint as a nocturne — but did so in broad daylight! (See illustration, page 38) But there were lovely scenes on the river; one of them, both beautiful and touching, showing Greaves rowing Whistler on the Thames of 1984 in the evening light, past the shore where the lights and fireworks of Cremorne had enchanted them.

It was a year to remember all Whistler's clever and amusing friends and one of them was recalled by an odd coincidence. That member of the Chelsea Society was returning from the pilgrimage at Whistler's grave, along Lillie Road in Fulham, where Walter Greaves had lived for a time. Seeing a solid traffic-jam at the junction with Warwick Road, he took a short-cut through Brompton Cemetery. There his eye was caught by a handsome, but curious sarcophagus; copper-green and charmingly decorated with wrought-iron. Approaching for a closer look, he was surprised to find that it was the tomb of Whistler's generous, cultivated and tolerant friend and patron, Frederick Leyland. This chance-encounter was, he said later, like a tap on the shoulder.

T.P.



# *Under sail to Cremorne*

## by Ernest Flint

**Older Chelsea people can remember the beautiful sight of sailing barges at their moorings in Battersea Reach and their tan sails passing the trees of Battersea Park. As a young man, Ernest Flint worked on these barges and here recalls memories of a time now half a century past (*Illustrations, page 39*). Mr. Flint is the younger brother of Rose Gamble, whose book *Chelsea Child* — a brilliant evocation of their childhood in Godfrey Street, Manor Street and the Guinness Estate, when resilience and humour overcame poverty and hardship — was published in 1979 (now available in Ariel Books paperback, price £3.95). Ernest Flint now lives in Pimlico but often visits his old haunts in Chelsea.**

As a sailing barge man, I traded to Cremorne Wharf in the 'Thirties. It was owned and run by "Mr. Harry" Covington, with most of the hands on Christian name terms with "the guv'nor". The wharf at Chelsea owned seven well-found barges, whose topmasts and sprits fitted in with the landscape of the countryside. There was also a fleet of dumb barges, or lighters, towed by an old steam kettle of a tug. She often gave us a snatch "down through" the bridges, when we were bound away, and saved us a lot of oar and anchor drill.

To keep the barges in shape, there were three shipwrights, a sailmaker, whose loft was like a museum, and a blacksmith, who was an artist at bending wrought-iron. The sailmaker marking out a topsail in his loft, and a shipwright swinging his adze on a windlass barrel, were all part of the everyday scene.

However, the main purpose of the wharf was the landing of goods, wares and merchandise to be transported away, mostly by horse and cart. Occasionally there would be a Dutch motor-barge alongside with the wife of the skipper taking an active part on deck, or in the wheelhouse. Dutch motor vessels were not popular on the river, mostly because they never employed a waterman as a pilot and, as a result, always seemed to be in everybody's way. However, there was some bartering for gin and tabac.

Nearby was the Chelsea Vestry wharf, which handled household refuse from the dustbins of Chelsea and Kensington. Usually it was tipped into lighters, which were towed down to the Essex marshes and there dumped. At the time there was a firm of brickmakers, which had a large fleet of sailing barges, usually employed in the carriage of bricks. When the trade fell off, which was all too regular, the barges were used for the rubbish run, then termed "rough stuff". It meant that two skilled men, living in the after cabin of a barge, had to put up with 50 tons of rubbish, with all the stench, flies and rats that went with it, for a passage that could take three days before it was cleared. For this kind of freight, the pay was poor, but the attitude was "take it or leave it". The alternative was tying up to the "Starvation Buoy" and waiting for orders, at your own expense. "Rough stuff" was

never touched by the elite fleet of Cremorne Wharf — our freights were cement and sand, all very proper, most of it going to the Earl's Court Exhibition, then being built.

Opposite the wharf gate stood a coffee shop. The grub was a bit rough and ready but I was always impressed by the impeccable table manners of the customers. They looked so different with their caps off; grey hair abounded, one or two looked like snowballs, which gave them dignity but did not impair their physical ability. They cry was, "Keep your hat on — they're sacking all the old 'uns." The standard fare was "tea and two of drip" (bread and dripping) and, at midday, a "baby's head" — a small steak pudding with veg., followed by treacle duff. This was a docker's banquet, price one shilling and sixpence with no cover charge!

A regular in the shop was a character with a basket of horse-meat, cut into squares, impaled on wooden skewers and sold at a penny-a-go to cat-owners. He was called "Old Meaty" and, when on his rounds, he was stalked by every cat in the district. If he had been fool enough to put the basket down and turn his back, he would have been put out of business by free enterprise in a matter of minutes.

Life in the sailing barges was hard but healthy. A barge would carry 100 tons of freight, relying on sail alone, trading from various wharves on the Thames from Brentford to the estuary, the Medway and ports in Essex. Owing to the economic situation at the time, the barge could only be made to pay with a crew of two. The handling of her was made possible with winches to handle the mainsail, and the main windlass at the fore-end to heave up the anchor and gear, known as "Armstrong's Patent Mankiller". When the handles were shipped and turned, the barrel would revolve to heave in the cable and there would be, to me, a charming musical sound as the four iron pawls dropped into their slots to prevent the barrel running back. A lasting memory is a grey dawn breaking in the estuary and the windlass sounds of barges getting under weigh in a quiet, still and lonely atmosphere, with only this sound coming over the water, like bells.

With the anchor up, the paraffin riding-light was lowered, put out and stowed in the fore-peak. This was a storage space at the fore-end for paraffin, spare sails, coal and Stockholm tar — the odour of this lot, all mixed up, is another lasting memory. The crew's space was a small cabin right aft, panelled and neat with a brass hanging-lamp, table, lockers, and an open grate. Carved on a deck beam was "Certified accommodation for Master" and, on another, "Certified accommodation for one seaman."

Although times were hard, care was taken to prepare proper meals — "You can't heave anchors up on bread and bloody jam." In the cabin right aft was a sliding panel enclosing the grub locker called the "Yarmouth Roads", where the food — known as "Tommy" — was kept in white linen bags. A shortage of grub was known as a "southerly wind" and was prevalent in my barging days. One skipper I was with used to insist on a boiled suet duff with gravy before the roast and, afterwards, a slice of duff with treacle or jam, to round things off. I don't know what a diet crank would think of that mixture, but it kept us fit and full of fight to earn a living.



A few bargemen were paid a weekly wage but it was a share arrangement with most firms. An empty barge going to a loading wharf earned nothing. Having loaded and arrived at her destination and the cargo discharged "in good order and condition", payment was made. This money went three ways. The owners took half, the skipper kept two-thirds of the remainder and the mate the third. So that if the barge earned £12, the owners claimed £6, the skiper £4 and the mate £2. Freight payments varied according to the distance that had to be covered and the nature of the cargo. Some barges made water during the stress and strain of a passage and this had to be pumped out by a contraption invented and proved by Noah. Once set up, it was very efficient but it meant slogging on the up-and-down beam. The lore was "shiny pump handles and rusty saucepan lid handles." A dry barge came first, especially with a cargo of cement or carbides, if only to save a row with a wharf foreman, or shipworker, over the square-up, for a clear signature at the receiving end was essential for payment.

I started my barging days working from Chelsea and that meant that the mast, and all that went with it, had to be lowered down on deck in order to get under the bridges between there and the Tower. The motive power for this part of the trip was the flood, or ebb, tide; the steering gear, an oar, and the anchor as an emergency stop. Getting through Westminster Bridge always seemed to us most trouble. Arriving at Chelsea, the barge had to be moved up, the hatches removed and the cargo (usually bags of cement) discharged. This was achieved by a wheezy old steam crane and two dockers (father and son), the old man explaining the best way to do it and how clever he was at knowing how.

I was seventeen at this time and had never heard of "job satisfaction", but watching the stuff come ashore and feeling that I was responsible for its safe transit — anyway, one-third responsible in terms of hard cash — was satisfying. Barging was a hard way to earn a living, relying on the tides and the wind of heaven, or hell, to get us there. I can't remember how many hours there were to a working week, but it did not seem to matter at the time. Summing up, the life taught me how to swear, splice, scull, to start a fire without paper or paraffin, a taste for beer, to be wide awake at a touch and a lack of patience, no time for sport or energy for girl friends.

The Chelsea riverfront has changed now and the men gone. The Port of London is reduced to a puddle, dockland is now concrete blocks, twenty floors high and no "knees-up" at Christmas in case the floors give way. I am not sorry to be on the way out.

# *Memories of Betjeman*

*When Sir John Betjeman, the Poet Laureate, died on 19th May at the age of 77, his life was so fully recalled in obituaries that further recounting of his wide range of achievements seems superfluous. But Sir John spent his last years in Chelsea — and was a member of the Chelsea Society — so we invited an old friend, Samuel Carr, and a new one, Lady Ewart-Biggs, to write about their memories of him.*

'I never really liked the Chelsea house', wrote John Betjeman in *Summoned by Bells*. The house was 53 Old Church Street and it was one to which the Betjeman family had moved from Highgate when John was a schoolboy. Towards the end of his life, Sir John came back to Chelsea, to 29 Radnor Walk, but it must be doubted whether he liked our Borough any better then than he had done half a century earlier.

Whatever may have been his feelings about Chelsea as a whole, his affection for many of its buildings is certain. To walk with him from, say, the King's Road to the Chelsea Arts Club was to become aware for the first time of buildings that one had passed unseeing on hundreds of previous occasions. The house on the corner of Mallord Street, he would point out, was by Ralph Knott, the chap who is better remembered as the architect of County Hall; and, a little further on, another house (No. 117) was by Halsey Ricardo. (No Comment would be made on the two more recent buildings on the opposite side of Old Church Street.) Ever since then one would look anew at these hitherto neglected houses and in doing so would be reminded of the perceptive and loving eye through which attention had been drawn to them.

John Betjeman's enjoyment of architecture was not merely passive and personal, nor was it concerned only with grandiose buildings and national monuments. Whatever was threatened and that was worthy of preservation John would strive to preserve, however local the interest and modest the scale. It was characteristic , in this connexion, that Lady Elizabeth Cavendish and he should have been the founders of a very local amenity society, The Radnor Walk Association.

More than anything else, John Betjeman was known for his love of old churches. If any other reviewer had stated that the excitement of reading Basil Clarke's substantial 324-page quarto, *The Parish Churches of London,* had kept him up all night, the claim would have been regarded as fanciful. In Sir John's case it was transparently true. So when, some years ago, there was a threat to demolish Holy Trinity, Sloane Street, and to develop the site, it surprised no one that John Betjeman should have been foremost in its defence. J. D. Sedding's 'cathedral of the arts and crafts movement', as John called it, was a church unlike any other in England, its glass and decoration a unique manifestation of the varied talents shared by the



craftsmen of the Art Workers Guild. In the event Holy Trinity was, of course, preserved, thanks more than anything else to Sir John's efforts. He himself used regularly to worship there, and one of his finest poems is *Holy Trinity, Sloane Street.*

In the course of the last few years John's sad illness prevented him from being so overtly a preservationist as he was formerly, but he continued to be highly influential as an *eminence grise.* So far as our own district was concerned, he worked largely through that fearless and indefatigable body, the Friends of Chelsea, whose President he was. Lady Wynne-Jones, the moving spirit of the Friends, found John's help invaluable, both morally and as a source of suggestions for ways in which offialdom could be influenced, or if not influenced, circumvented. The St Mark and St Luke campaign, in which our own Society was so concerned, was a case in point. At a time when, it seemed, the battle had already been lost and the College was to be given over to a developer, the Friends organised a small clandestine party, under the guise of horticultural enthusiasts, to visit the gardens which were not then open to the public. A television film was shot in which Sir John played the leading role. Ths film was shown at a closed session to members of the GLC and also on one of the public channels. As a result of this and other pressures (and additionally, it was said, because of the support of the Queen Mother) the grounds and buildings of the College of St Mark and St John were, as we know, made over to Chelsea College.

Two other occasions on which John Betjeman's behind-the-scenes activity was important were the proposal to demolish Christchurch Street and to replace it with a high-rise development, and the long-running Pheasantry affair. In both the risk was less the loss of the not particularly distinguished existing buildings as the plan to put in their place constructions which would be disproportionately tall for their neighbourhood. In neither case was the part John played for the defence a public one, but because he was so fertile a fount of ideas as to who should be approached and how the campaigns should be organised, it was no less vital to the success of each.

It has often been remarked that John Betjeman's interest was always in architecture as a human activity: houses as homes were what concerned him, churches as places of worship through the centuries. He would sometimes surprise his friends by an outburst against those architectural historians who seemed — perhaps out of a lack of familiarity with the English social scene — to be able to write only in terms of the inaminate stone, wood or metal out of which buildings are made, and of the desiccated technical jargon in which they may be analysed. It has also been said that if Chelsea has so far been saved from the de-humanising fate of a district like Croydon, that is because of the key victories in the battles of Christchurch Street and, to a lesser extent, The Pheasantry. Things could well have gone otherwise on this and other occasions had it not been for the inconspicuous but essential contribution of Sir John Betjeman.

**Samuel Carr**

The wistaria growing in John Betjeman's back yard launched itself over the party wall some years' ago and its tendrils firmly embrace our window ledges, drain pipes and railings. And now that the poet is no longer there, I draw comfort from maintaining the link between him and us in such a tangible way.

But our first encounter did not reflect the same sense of harmony. It happened one day in the late summer of 1976 soon after we — the children and I — returned to re-occupy our house at 31 Radnor Walk after a long absence abroad. Inadvertently, I had locked my daughter's spaniel puppy out in the yard before leaving for work and on my return found a note pushed through the letter box. It contained the following cryptic message; as near as I can remember it: "Dear Sir/Madam, Your dog has been barking incessantly throughout the day disturbing me at my work which is of a very exacting nature. If you are unable to make other arrangements, perhaps you would like to leave it with me when you go out. Yours faithfully (signed) John Betjeman."

My first reaction was indignation at his failure to convey any spirit of neighbourliness. Surely, I thought, at least he could have discovered, before writing, whether we were a "Sir" or a "Madam"; but, with future relations in mind, I quickly despatched a conciliatory reply through his door: "Dear Sir John, I am so sorry Henrietta's little dog disturbed you . . . it was purely by mistake she got locked out . . . I will take care it never occurs again, etc. etc. Yours sincerely (signed) Jane Ewart-Biggs." Within minutes, back came an answer, "Dear Mrs. Ewart-Biggs. Thank you so much for your letter. The true intention of my original note was, in fact, to entice both dog and her owner round for a glass of champagne. Yours most sincerely (signed) John Betjeman."

Since then each meeting in the street, in the local restaurant or anywhere in the neighbourhood has been a joy and a pleasure and I have boasted so often of being his neighbour. And how I only have too look at the wistaria peering in at our back windows for those encounters to be brought alive.

**Jane Ewart-Biggs**

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# *Lord Adeane*

The Rt. Hon. Lord Adeane, GCB, GCVO, who died on 30th April at the age of 73, was Private Secretary to the Queen and Keeper of Her Majesty's Archives from 1953 to 1972. He took over the position soon after the Queen's accession, and was a considerable influence in the first two decades of her reign.

Michael Edward Adeane was born on 10th September, 1910, the son of Captain Henry Adeane of the Coldstream Guards (killed in action in 1914 at the First Battle of Ypres) and of the Hon. Victoria Eugenie Bigge, daughter of Lord Stamfordham, who was himself a highly regarded Private Secretary



to Queen Victoria and George V. Adeane was educated at Eton and at Magdalene College, Cambridge, where he took First Class Honours in the Historical Tripos, Part II. In 1931, he was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in his father's old regiment and three years later became ADC to Lord Tweedsmuir, then Governor-General of Canada.

On Adeane's return to England, King George VI appointed him an Assistant Private Secretary on the recommendation of Lord Wigram, but on the outbreak of war he returned to active service with the Coldstream Guards, serving first with the 2nd Battalion in North Africa — where in one engagement, owing to casualties, he found himself commanding his battalion — until 1942 when he was seconded to the British Staff Mission in Washington for a year. He then joined the 5th Battalion, with whom he fought with distinction through the North-Western Europe campaign, in the course of which he was both wounded and mentioned in despatches.

At the conclusion of hostilities in 1945 Adeane returned to Buckingham Palace as Assistant Private Secretary first to King George VI and later to Queen Elizabeth II, and so continued until 1953 when he succeeded Sir Alan Lascelles as Private Secretary to The Queen and Keeper of the Royal Archives.

He married Helen Chetwynd-Stapylton in 1939. They had a daughter, who died in childhood, and a son, Edward.

Lord Adeane lived in Chelsea Square and was a life member of the Chelsea Society.

# *The Earl of Glasgow*

The Earl of Glasgow, 9th Earl who has died at the age of 73 had a distinguished naval career as Viscount of Kelburn, culminating in his appointment as Flag Officer Malta from 1961 to 1963. On succeeding his father in 1963 he became a noted speaker in the House of Lords on matters of naval strategy.

Born the eldest son of the 8th Earl on 24th July, 1910, he was the first godson of Queen Mary after the accession of King George V. During the Second World War he served in the Battle of the Atlantic, on Arctic convoys and in the Far East and was present in the cruiser *Norfolk* in the operations which led to the sinking of the Bismarck in 1941. Lord Kelburn ended the war as a commander and was subsequently Captain of the Home Fleet from 1957 to 1959 and Commodore of the RN Barracks at Portsmouth from 1959 to 1961.

He was married firstly in 1937 to Dorothea, daughter of Sir Archibald Lyle, 2nd Bt. This marriage of which there were a son and two daughters, was dissolved in 1962 and he married in that year Vanda, the Hon Lady Wrixon-Becher, second daughter of the 4th Baron Vivian.

The Earl of Glasgow had a house in Cheyne Walk and was a life member of the Chelsea Society.
Details from *The Times*.

# *Treasurer's Report*

The accounts for year ending 31st December 1983, which you have before you, show an excess of income over expenditure for the year of £1,469.46, an increase of £252.85 compared to the surplus for 1982. This is a most satisfactory state of affairs and has been brought about mainly as a result of the reduction in costs of the Summer Meeting borne by the Society from £262.08 to £78.45. The River Boat Trip in 1983 was virtually self-supporting and the Society accounts bore the cost of sending out the notices to members for this meeting. We have also made a small profit on other meetings, such as the lectures and the Annual General Meeting as against the loss in the previous year of £45.00.

Donations for the year are down slightly, but we have not made any direct appeal to life members during the year.

Yet again, I make a special "thank you" to the Trustees of Mrs. L. Smiley's charity trust for making a further donation of £500.00 to us in 1983 and indeed yet again in 1984. We much appreciate their kindness to us over recent years in sending these donations.

At the end of 1983, the Jubilee Garden Fund was wound up and the balance paid to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea for improvements to Dovehouse Green, about which the Chairman will say more in her Annual Report. I am most grateful to Patricia Gelley for continuing the administration of this fund to its successful conclusion.

The Society acts as "Banker" for the cost of the bulbs, so generously provided by the Joyce Grenfell Memorial Trust on Dovehouse Green and this cost is shown as a straight "in and out" in the accounts.

Turning now to subscriptions, I am hardly likely to be announcing an increase with the Society's accounts in their present healthy state. When I presented the accounts to the Council of the Society, one member jokingly wondered for a moment whether he would hear the Treasurer recommend a reduction in the annual subscription! Whilst that would be very pleasant, it would not be wise as alas inflation is still with us and we only need donations or the advertising in the Report to drop dramatically, where upon the Society's accounts would paint a very different picture. It is therefore not proposed to raise the subscriptions at the present time and I would hope to be able to hold them at their present level for a year or so.

Yet again, I ask all members who pay their subscriptions to me annually to do so as soon as possible. In April 1984 I had to send out over 70 "final reminders" at great cost in time and money, which with your co-operation could be avoided.

I have recently written to members whose Banker's Orders are still at the old subscription rates, asking them to make out new Banker's Order instructions. I have received many replies, and, in some cases, members have made up the shortfall in their subscriptions over the previous years. Please ensure that your Banker's Orders are up to date.



I now come to "thank you's" to people without whom my task would be well-nigh impossible. First Robert Dove who has prepared the accounts for me again and albeit once more is prevented from attending the Annual General Meeting due to business. I would like to thank him on the Societys' behalf for his assistance to me.

I now come to our Honorary Auditors, Frazer Whiting & Co. On behalf of the Council, the Society and myself I wish to record a very big thank you to them for carrying out the audit of the accounts and printing copies of them for the Annual General Meeting.

Finally, at the expense of being too personal, I must refer to Ian Frazer whose term on the Council is now ending and record my personal thanks to him for being such a help to me over the years on financial matters and I trust that he will continue to give advice in this field to the Society in the future. Thank you very much Ian.

WILLIAM HAYNES
*Hon. Treasurer*

# THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

## ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 1983

*Income and Expenditure Account — General Fund*

| | | *1983* | | *1982* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | £ | £ | £ |
| *Income* | | | | |
| Annual subscriptions | | | 1,797.05 | 1,658.10 |
| Donations received | | | 546.71 | 601.50 |
| Donation received from Jubilee Fund | | | 1,000.00 | — |
| Donation received from Joyce Grenfell memorial trust | | | 250.00 | 230.00 |
| Surplus of receipts from meetings over costs of meetings | | | 9.00 | — |
| Income tax recovered on covenants | | | 111.85 | 97.71 |
| Advertising revenue in 1983 annual report | | | 787.50 | 660.00 |
| Deposit interest recieved | | | 227.65 | 228.68 |
| Sundry sales | | | — | 13.28 |
| | | | 4,729.76 | 3,489.27 |
| *Less:* | | | | |
| *Expenditure* | | | | |
| Cost of annual report | | 1,479.67 | | 1,475.22 |
| Stationery, postage and miscellaneous expenses | | 261.67 | | 88.25 |
| Cost of annual general meeting | | 176.51 | | 159.11 |
| Donations to other organisations | | 14.00 | | 13.00 |
| Cost of summer meeting | | 78.45 | | 262.08 |
| Payment to Borough for works on Dovehouse Green | | 1,000.00 | | — |
| Donation towards bulbs on Dovehouse Green | | 250.00 | | 230.00 |
| Deficit of receipts from meetings over costs of meetings | | — | | 45.00 |
| | | | 3,260.30 | 2,272.66 |
| Excess of Income over expenditure for the year | | | 1,469.46 | 1,216.61 |

*Income and Expenditure Account — Live Membership Fund*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Balance of fund 1st January 1983 | 2,111.31 | 1,776.56 |
| *Income* National Savings Bank account interest | 308.53 | 334.75 |
| *Balance of fund* 31st December 1983 | 2,419.84 | 2,111.31 |



## BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31st DECEMBER 1983

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Current assets* | | | | |
| Debtors | | | 824.52 | 588.89 |
| Balance in National Savings Bank accounts | | | 2,917.12 | 2,582.37 |
| Balance at bank — current account | | | 2,298.79 | 1,916.16 |
| — deposit account | | | 4,091.86 | 2,864.21 |
| | | | 10,132.29 | 7,951.63 |
| *Less: current liabilities* | | | | |
| Creditors | 1,884.89 | | | 1,475.22 |
| Subscriptions received in advance | 126.00 | | | 133.00 |
| | | | 2,010.89 | 1,608.22 |
| Net assets | | | 8,121.40 | 6,343.41 |
| *Represented by:* | | | | |
| Balance of Life Membership Fund | | | 2,419.84 | 2,111.31 |
| *Add:* Balance of General Fund | | | | |
| 1st January 1983 | 4,232.10 | | | 3,105.49 |
| Surplus for the year | 1,469.46 | | | 1,216.61 |
| | | | 5,701.56 | 4,232.10 |
| | | | 8,121.40 | 6,343.41 |

W.S. Haynes, *Hon. Treasurer*

### REPORT OF THE HONORARY AUDITORS to the members of THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

We have examined the above Balance Sheet and Accounts and we certify them to be in accordance with the books and vouchers of the Society.

Dated: 1984
London EC2A 1EP

Frazer Whiting & Co
*Chartered Accountants*

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