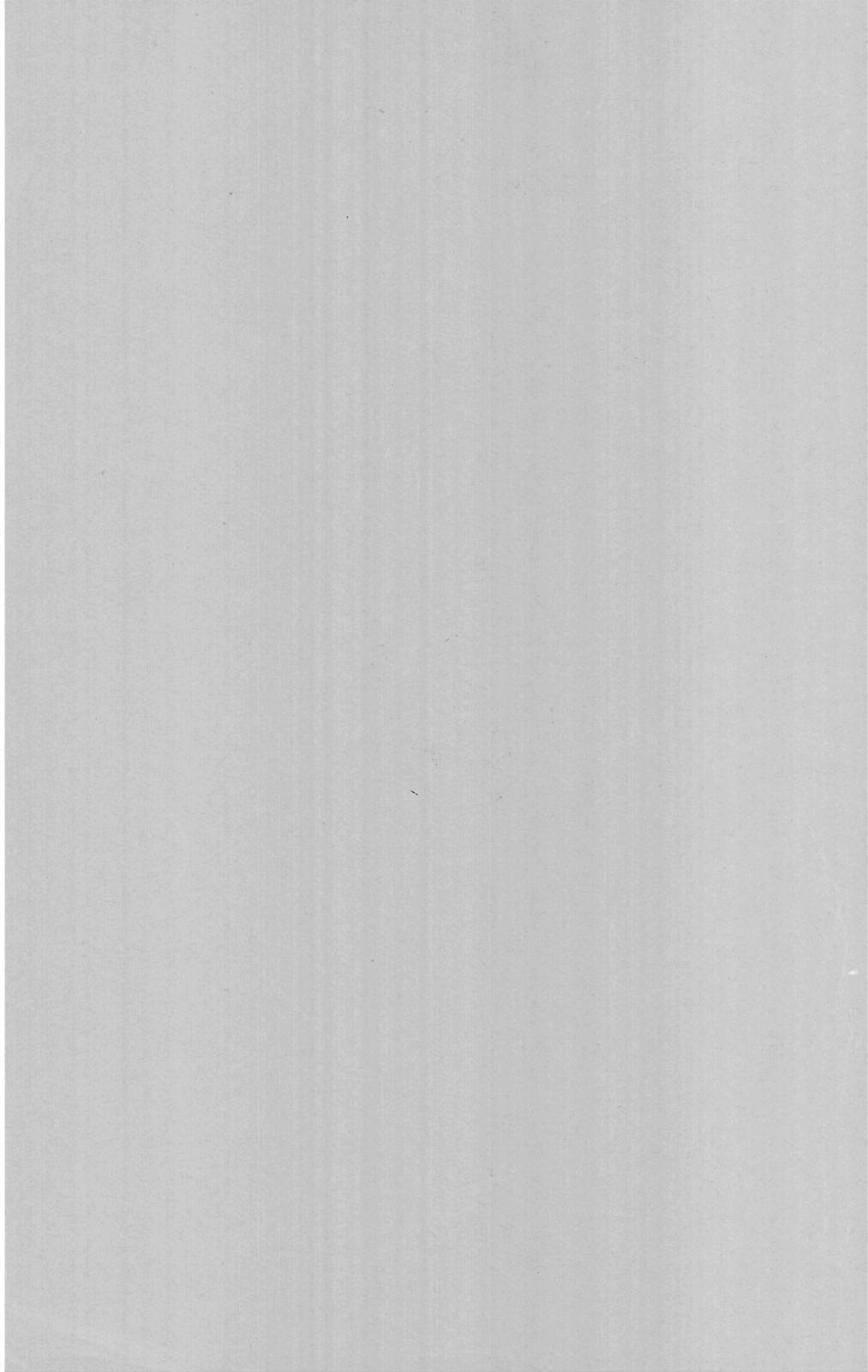


THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

THE ANNUAL REPORT 1964





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Price Seven Shillings and Sixpence



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THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

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

President THE LORD NORMANBROOK, P.C., G.C.B.

Vice-President MISS DOROTHY MACNAMARA, O.B.E.

Council

Chairman VICE-ADMIRAL J. W. DURNFORD, C.B.

FRANCIS BADEN-POWELL, ESQ.

GILES BEST, ESQ.

NOEL BLAKISTON, ESQ., O.B.E.

THE DOWAGER DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE, G.C.V.O., C.B.E.

CAPTAIN RICHARD EDWARDS, R.N.

JAMES ELLIS, ESQ., A.R.I.B.A., A.A.DIPL.

T. H. H. HANCOCK, ESQ., F.R.I.B.A., M.T.P.I.

JAMES KNOWLES, ESQ., F.R.I.B.A., A.M.T.P.I.

MISS HILDA REID

J. M. RICHARDS, ESQ., C.B.E., A.R.I.B.A.

SIR ANTHONY WAGNER, K.C.V.O., D.LITT.

JOHN YEOMAN, ESQ.

Hon. Treasurer

R. D. CLARKE, ESQ., F.I.A.

Joint Hon. Secretaries

THE HON. MRS. KNOWLES

MISS IRIS MEDLICOTT

THE CHELSEA SOCIETY,
9 ST. LEONARD'S TERRACE, CHELSEA, S.W.3
SLOane 7086

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 by all available means, and particularly:—
 - (a) by stimulating interest in the history, character and traditions of Chelsea;
 - (b) by encouraging good architecture, town planning and civic design, the planting and care of trees, and the conservation and proper maintenance of open spaces;
 - (c) by seeking the abatement of nuisances;
 - (d) by promoting the interests of residents and practitioners of the fine arts, especially in regard to their enjoyment of their homes, studios and surroundings; and
 - (e) by 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 the 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. The Council shall appoint the following Officers of the Society, namely
 - (a) a Chairman of the Council,
 - (b) an Hon. Secretary or Joint Hon. Secretaries,
 - (c) an Hon. Treasurer, and
 - (d) persons to fill such other posts as may be established by the Council.

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.
- (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 a winding-up of the Society, the disposal of the funds shall be decided by a majority vote at a General Meeting.

**The existing rates are (i) for persons (other than life members) who became members before 1st July, 1961, ten shillings annually, and (ii) for persons who became members after 30th June, 1961, £1 annually payable on the 1st February or a lump sum of £10 10s. for life membership.*

THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

Report for the year 1964

1. *The Name of the New Borough*

The letter on this subject sent to the Minister of Housing and Local Government and published in our Annual Report for 1963, together with the dignified motion brought forward that year at our Annual General Meeting by Mr. Graham Kerr, did not go unheeded.

We, and our Member of Parliament, and the Borough Council, and many other organisations and individuals in Chelsea achieved that for which we had all worked so hard: the name of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

2. *The Kensington Society*

A satisfactory meeting was held with the Council of the Kensington Society at which it was agreed that while the two Societies would deal separately with matters in their respective territories, they would co-operate on those affecting the whole of the new Borough.

Both Societies have hitherto enjoyed considerable help from the architects belonging to the Town Planning Department of the L.C.C. It is not yet clear whether the new Borough will have a Chief Officer at the head of a similar Department. To vest his functions in the head of the Borough Surveyor's Department seems a retrograde step. Surely an area with a population of over 200,000 needs, and deserves, a separate department under an architect versed in town and landscape planning who can co-ordinate the plans, not only of private developers, but also of the other departments of the Local Authority (Health, Welfare, Housing and so forth), all of them competing for space. The complexity of the problems that confront us, as regards Traffic alone, is illustrated in Professor Buchanan's address reported on page 20.

3. *The Greater London Council*

Members will have noted that Mr. Bernard Collins has been appointed Chief Planning Officer of the Greater London

Council and that he has expressed the hope that, when the demarcation of powers between the Greater London Council and the new Boroughs has been worked out, the result will be good and that a great new chapter in London's history will begin. He has defined his ambitions for London as a city with the charm of Paris, the elegance of Vienna, the modernity of Stockholm and the enterprise of New York, and with history breathing from its stones as it does from those of Rome. He visualizes working in unison with the Director of Highways and Transportation. We are confident that the Council of the new Royal Borough, where obviously much will happen in the coming years, will match these aspirations.

4. The King's Road Improvement Scheme

Mr. T. H. H. Hancock, who was nominated as our Council's representative on the Committee of the King's Road Improvement Scheme, found the hours of meeting hard to reconcile with his own working hours and Admiral Durnford was invited to replace him. Besides the many recommendations concerning the removal or improvement of such clutter as direction signs, old railings, overhead wires and unsightly litter bins, the Committee advocated the planting of clusters of trees in the King's Road. This proposal has been taken up by the Committee organising the Memorial Appeal for our late Chairman, Mr. Marsden-Smedley, and the King's Road will figure prominently among the sites in Chelsea where trees are planted as a tribute to his memory.

5. The Widening of the King's Road

Work on the widening of the King's Road between Chelsea Manor Street and Dovehouse Street will be undertaken in the near future. It will mean the temporary loss of two trees on the north side, but will improve what is at present a bad traffic bottleneck.

6. The Winchester Palace Site

The Borough Council received revised plans for this development but deferred comment until it had been settled whether No. 37 Cheyne Walk, a C. R. Ashbee house, was to be included. They objected to its inclusion because it is on the list of buildings of special historic and architectural interest. They wished, moreover, that the plans should be referred to the Royal Fine Arts Commission. The Council of the Chelsea

Society supported their objection. They felt that if these plans were carried out the character of Cheyne Walk would be altered since too little attention had been paid to relating the proposed new buildings in scale and design to existing houses in Cheyne Walk and Oakley Street. They were anxious that the east and west crescents at the bottom of Oakley Street should present a reasonably balanced appearance at the approach to Chelsea over Albert Bridge. They were also concerned for the preservation of the Tudor wall, formerly the garden wall of Old Shrewsbury House.

7. *Albert Bridge*

The Albert Bridge tidal flow scheme had apparently been a success and the gantry was much less objectionable than seemed likely when it was first proposed. Improvements, however, were still required at Battersea Bridge and at the junction of Royal Hospital Road and the Embankment to relieve congestion at these points.

8. *Cadogan Place Gardens North and the Car Park*

The Council of the Society was so much divided on this subject—a division of opinion doubtless shared among members generally—that it was decided not to intervene at the public enquiry of which the outcome is still awaited.

9. *Chelsea Old Church Memorial Gate*

A sum of £219, part of it subscribed for a memorial to the late Reginald Blunt, Chelsea historian and founder of the Society, and part of it donated to the Society for the restoration of the Church, was handed over to the Vicar and Churchwardens. It will be used for a gate, designed by Mr. Paul Paget, the Church architect, and set up at the bottom of the steps leading to the choir gallery. Reginald Blunt's name will be commemorated here.

10. *King's Road "S" Bend*

The Council of the Society concluded that a high block would not be an objectionable feature on this corner and that the development would greatly improve the hitherto difficult traffic conditions.

11. *West Chelsea Development Scheme*

The architect, Mr. Eric Lyons, has put forward an amended plan with positive advantages, including an increase in

underground garage space, as well as a reduction in the height of the tall blocks to 124 feet which should meet the L.C.C.'s objections to the danger from sulphur dioxide fumes from the Lots Road chimneys. The new design gives a satisfactory environment with about $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres of open space out of a total of 11 acres.

It looks as though most of the Society's criticisms have been met, except that density still remains at 200 persons per acre. The new plan has excellent features and makes good use of the open space.

In a report on an earlier West Chelsea Development Scheme—that which produced the Cremorne Estate—Richard Stewart Jones declared “there is every indication that the Borough Council . . . will succeed in reconciling the claims of vital slum clearance with those of a historic Borough”. These words were published in the Annual Report for 1948. Echoing them today, your Council proposes to support the new scheme.

12. *The Supplementary List*

Members were informed at the Annual General Meeting last December that the L.C.C. wanted information about possible threats to buildings of historic and architectural interest in Chelsea, especially those on the Supplementary List which are not safeguarded by the Town and Country Planning Act, 1962, Section 32. This list is too long to be included in the Annual Report, but the Hon. Secretary has a copy at No. 9 St. Leonard's Terrace, and it can be seen there. Any member who has reason to believe that a building of the kind may be threatened is asked to tell her, and she will communicate with the appropriate Division of the Greater London Authority.

The Annual General Meeting

of the Chelsea Society was held at
The Chelsea College of Science and Technology
(by kind permission of the Principal)
on Saturday, 5th December, 1964

The President, Lord Normanbrook, took the Chair in the Hall of the College of Science and Technology. Welcoming a large gathering of members, he thanked Mr. Hentschel, the Principal, and his staff for showing us the new building and for providing an excellent tea.

The Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting, held on 26th October, 1963, were approved.

The President and Lord Conesford then paid tribute to the memory of our late Chairman, Mr. Basil Marsden-Smedley. (See page 16).

Elections to the Council

The President announced that three nominations had been received to fill the three vacancies on the Council. The candidates were Mr. Baden-Powell, proposed by Mr. J. M. Richards and seconded by Mr. Best; Sir Anthony Wagner, proposed by the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire and seconded by Admiral Durnford; and Mr. John Yeoman, proposed by Mr. Hancock and seconded by Mr. Knowles. The three were duly elected.

Presentation of the Report and Accounts for 1963

The President then called on the Chairman, Admiral Durnford, to move the adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts for 1963. In so doing Admiral Durnford gave the meeting a brief résumé of the activities of the Society since the end of 1963 (see the Chairman's Report, page 8).

The Hon. Treasurer, Mr. Roland Clarke, seconding the motion, referred to the Society's financial position. In 1963 the Society had a deficit of £94, and in the previous year of

£62- a total of £156 in two years. The chief reason for this was the high cost of producing the Annual Report. In 1963 it was £315, or rather more than the total subscription income.

The Council had therefore decided to reduce the size of the Report. The Report for 1963 had accordingly only 48 pages, as against the 80 pages of the 1962 Report, and (though figures were not yet available) the cost had probably been cut by about £100. Next year there might have to be a further reduction in size, though they hoped to maintain the quality of the Report at the high level on which it had been produced year by year by the late Chairman.

Another means of improving our finances was by improving our income; and to achieve this Mr. Clarke exhorted those present to persuade their friends and neighbours to join the Society. Now that the Borough of Chelsea was coming to an end, the Chelsea Society had an added responsibility to sustain the integrity and character of Chelsea as a distinctive neighbourhood. The more support we got the better should we be equipped to discharge this function.

The motion was put to the Meeting and the Report and Accounts were adopted.

Mr. Lidderdale, referring to the Chairman's speech, thanked the Society for its vigorous action regarding the Winchester Palace Site at the bottom of Oakley Street. He hoped that Nos. 37, 38 and 39 Cheyne Walk would not be pulled down and was particularly anxious about the fate of No. 37.

Mr. Hancock, replying to Mr. Lidderdale, said that No. 37 was on the Statutory List in company with Nos. 38 and 39. There had been grave objections to the first scheme of development. The revised scheme had been rejected by the Planning Authority because: -

- (a) it did not accord with the regulations on density.
- (b) No. 37 Cheyne Walk would shortly be protected by a preservation order.
- (c) The plans for the proposed buildings were quite out of harmony, in height and design, with the houses on the East side of the quadrant and other listed buildings in the vicinity; and the Oakley Street frontage did not comply with day lighting standards.

The developers were appealing against the Preservation Order on No. 37 and the decision of the Planning Authority, so there would be a Public Enquiry, and local residents would be well advised to form a Residents' Association which would represent them.

Mr. Adam asked if Margrie & Thurston's premises could not be included in the Scheduled List. Mr. Hancock thought this unlikely; but the Historic Division of the L.C.C. was examining the possibility of listing houses and shops next to the Pier Hotel. Regrettably the Pier Hotel itself was not considered of sufficient architectural importance to be preserved; but the crescent on the east side of the Quadrant was on the Supplementary List.

The Rev. C. E. Leighton Thompson thanked the Society for the sum of £219, collected or donated for the repair of the Old Church and for a memorial to Reginald Blunt, our founder, which had been handed over to the Vicar and Churchwardens.

The President, then introduced our Guest Speaker, Professor Buchanan, Chairman of a Committee set up by the Minister of Transport which had produced *Traffic in Towns*, a magnificent work discussed at some length in our Annual Report for 1963. Here members would find set forth ideas and principles which had always been cherished by the Society. He had great pleasure in welcoming its author.

A résumé of Professor Buchanan's address is given on page 20.

Obituary

The Rev. Gordon Walter Arrowsmith

Gordon Walter Arrowsmith, 21 years Rector of Chelsea and Freeman of the Borough, died in June 1964. A. A. Martineau said of him, "If ever a saint walked on earth it was Gordon Arrowsmith."

If indeed he were a saint, and many Chelsea neighbours will echo his one-time Churchwarden's remark, he walked this earth with a very human tread. He was kindly but he was firm. He was a forceful preacher and a witty conversationalist. He could praise and he could chide. He loved the beauty of his house and garden and the history of his predecessors, but he looked for a better future for parish and parishioners in material as well as spiritual things.

He was, for a time, an Alderman of the Borough of Chelsea but steered clear of party politics though he expressed his opinion strongly especially when he thought wrong decisions had been taken.

He was morally and physically brave. His stand in public matters showed the first and his physical courage shone amid the horror of bombing.

His gentle smile and boyish appearance will long be remembered. His name takes an honoured place among the great Rectors of Chelsea.

H.M.-S.

T. S. Eliot, O.M.

Thomas Stearns Eliot, O.M., who died on the 4th January, 1965, was a life member of the Chelsea Society and for many years lived in Carlyle Mansions in Cheyne Walk. It is worth noting that earlier in this century Carlyle Mansions was the home of another great writer, Henry James, who like Eliot was American by birth but English by adoption.

Eliot was born in 1888 at St. Louis, Missouri. He came to England in 1913 and for a short time taught at Highgate Junior School where John Betjeman was among his pupils. His first poems were published in 1915 and *Prufrock* followed

in 1917. In 1922 *The Waste Land* established him as a major poet, although today it is perhaps for his later, more mature work and particularly for the *Four Quartets*, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* that he is honoured as one of the great writers of the century. He was also the author of several volumes of literary criticism of great perceptiveness. In 1948 he was appointed to the Order of Merit.

Other writers in other places have appraised Eliot's literary achievements. Here we remember him with affection as formerly a familiar figure in the Chelsea scene. In 1957 he married for the second time (his first wife having died ten years earlier) and moved to Kensington.

Apart from his writing, Eliot was an active director of the publishing house of Faber and Faber, a devoted Churchwarden at St. Stephen's, Gloucester Road, and a most distinguished President of the London Library.

On the 4th February, 1965, Westminster Abbey was packed to the doors by people from all walks of life who had come to pay tribute to a great poet and an outstanding man of our time.

R.D.C.

Tributes paid to Basil Marsden-Smedley at the Annual General Meeting

Lord Normanbrook said:---

We in the Chelsea Society had suffered a grievous loss by the death of our late Chairman, Basil Marsden-Smedley. In the wide circle of his friends, and indeed in Chelsea as a whole, it had left a gap hard to fill.

The social life of this country had been based for many generations on the principle of voluntary public service, and Basil was a shining example of the application of this principle. The greater part of his adult life was devoted to the service of the community in which he lived. He loved Chelsea deeply, but he was not content to live in it and enjoy it. He worked actively and ceaselessly to keep it as a place in which we could all be proud and happy to live. This was an absorbing interest in his life and he pursued it with selfless devotion. To

further the interests of Chelsea and to preserve its amenities he was always ready to undertake any duty however laborious, any task however tedious, any research however meticulous or detailed, any negotiation however difficult or delicate. No time was too long for him to spend, no trouble too great for him to take so long as he was working for the good of Chelsea as he saw it.

As members of the Society, we owed him a great debt. He was tireless in his work for it. Indeed it was not too much to say that he became in himself a personification of the Society. And he would long be remembered in Chelsea, not only for his record of public service to the community, but also as a well-loved and loyal friend. A gentle and a kindly man, unmoved by personal ambition or private interest, he was always ready to help others and to give his advice or assistance in the furtherance of a good cause.



PLANE TREES IN TEDWORTH SQUARE PRUNED UNDER THE SUPERVISION
OF BASIL MARSDEN-SMEDLEY

Photograph by John Bignell

Lord Conesford said:—

The Chelsea Society is 37 years old. I do not know any Civic or Amenity Society which has had a more precious place to serve or protect, or which has fought harder to serve and protect it. Sometimes it has succeeded and sometimes it has failed. Whatever follies the vandals have committed, this, I think, is certain: but for the work of the Chelsea Society, one of the most beautiful and far famed parts of our capital would today be incomparably poorer. Such success as we have had we owe to a few devoted and remarkable men, Reginald Blunt, our founder, St. John Hornby, our Chairman for 16 years, Richard Stewart Jones and Basil Marsden-Smedley.

Of all these great servants of the Society, Basil served it longest. He was a member of the Council for 30 years and its Chairman for the last 19, with the exception of the two years when he was Mayor of Chelsea, during which I served as Chairman. I served on the Council from 1946 to 1962, with the exception of the years when I was a Minister, and I thus had the experience of working with him for twelve years.

What were his qualities, as I see them? First, an immense love of Chelsea and the most intimate knowledge of it. He knew its architecture, its trees, its squares and terraces, its history, its industries, past and present, and its arts. Secondly, he was vigilant, well informed and immensely hard-working. Aided by a large number of friends in all sections of Chelsea society, he frequently had the earliest intimation of possible threats to the things he loved and took timely and appropriate action. Let me quote, and apply to Basil, a few sentences from St. John Hornby's beautiful tribute to Reginald Blunt.

"As the years went by he could not help looking with a sad eye on the passing away of many an ancient land-mark and cherished building. For to him Chelsea was something almost sacred, and though he realised that changes must come and that some destruction of what was old was inevitable—for he was in no sense narrow-minded—he was, so far as Chelsea was concerned, like a jealous lover with his mistress, and could not bear to see wanton hands laid upon her. Like a knight of old he sprang at once to arms when she was threatened and waged a doughty fight for her deliverance."

Thirdly, Basil was indefatigable in attending public enquiries and the like and representing our views.

Fourthly, he was very good at writing a timely letter to the Press, where needed, and in giving information to friends of Chelsea in Parliament, when it seemed that a Parliamentary Question or Parliamentary action might help.

Lastly, he produced a series of admirable and attractive Annual Reports, which I believe members greatly value, and which are among the rewards of membership.

None of these things, I know, can convey the man we knew. Many of his qualities would be rare in themselves; they are rarer still in such happy combination.

The other day I was reading Thucydides and came to a passage which I had almost forgotten. Early in the Funeral Oration, Pericles said: "It is difficult to say neither too little nor too much; and even moderation is apt not to give the impression of truthfulness. The friend of the dead who knows the facts is likely to think the words of the speaker fall short of his knowledge and of his wishes; another who is not so well informed, when he hears of anything which surpasses his own powers, will be envious and will suspect exaggeration."

Today, in describing Basil's work, I have not exaggerated. I would say this in conclusion. If a man can be as widely known as Basil was in an area as small as Chelsea, where he has long lived and worked, and if he can there command such general respect and affection, he has achieved one of the rarest of honours that our present civilisation can bestow.

Professor Buchanan's Address

Professor Buchanan began by confessing that, though he could claim to be a resident of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, he could not live here under existing traffic conditions without some sort of bolt hole outside London.

His *Traffic in Towns* was just over a year old, and he was not dissatisfied with its reception. He had not advanced many positive recommendations--he was too old a civil servant for that. His aim had been to set in motion a series of ideas to start people thinking, and his arguments had not in the main been seriously disputed, even by the economists; but no one had begun to work upon them.

The essence of his Report, the main conclusion on which it was based, was that cars were here to stay because of their value in moving goods as well as people, and that their number would continue to increase. He thought that we must expect 40 million cars (most of them private ones) in the not very distant future instead of the 11 million on the roads at present.

There were two aspects to this problem as it affected towns. On the one hand the car was an asset in door-to-door accessibility. On the other hand it was a destructive force. The accident rate in Britain was already 7,000 deaths a year and 300,000 injuries, the noise problem was only beginning to build up and the fumes were ever present--though, to be fair, their connection with lung cancer was not yet established. Moreover one had to consider the damage done to the town itself as well as to the health and safety of its inhabitants.

The solution lay in a new approach to the whole subject. We must think in terms of Environmental Management instead of Traffic Management; for traffic and its requirements should be considered as subordinate to the needs of the environment instead of vice versa as at present. A well designed network of roads must serve the environment as a corridor serves the needs of rooms in a building. In practice it was very difficult to contrive such networks, let alone to adapt them to existing towns; and the difficulty was greater in large cities, especially in London, the biggest generator of traffic in the world.

What we had to do was to consider the adverse effects of traffic in conjunction with the amount of traffic we had

to expect and the amount of money we were prepared to spend in adapting our present road networks to it. And we had to remember that, however much money we had in hand for the purpose, the volume of traffic was increasing and would increase very much faster than we could provide facilities for it. The answer was to impose a ceiling for traffic in cities; a ceiling that could be raised as these facilities improved. Traffic must be squeezed into existing road networks and its volume cut down by pricing the road space or cutting out the less essential cars. The axe would fall on the commuters' car; which meant that public transport must be improved.



PLANE TREES IN TEDWORTH SQUARE

Photograph by John Bignell

We must rebel against the universal penetration of through traffic; people in cars should not be allowed to wreck established amenities. There was a distinction between the thoroughfare and the residential street. We must reject the idea that our streets are mere channels for traffic; they have other uses, and we must protect them by planting trees or setting up bollards so as to keep through traffic out of them. No one had attempted as yet to implement his Report; but he felt that it could and should be taken up by the Amenity Society. Societies like ours should steadfastly refuse to have their environment sacrificed to heavy transport and the commuters.

Basil Marsden-Smedley and The Chelsea Society

by Hilda Reid

Dropping in on Basil Marsden-Smedley one bitter cold spring day last year, I found him as usual sitting over the fire, books and papers strewn around him ankle deep. In the course of conversation he remarked:

"My kind children wanted to send me on a sunshine cruise in tropic seas."

"Why didn't you go?"

"I don't want tropic seas. All my interests lie here in Chelsea. But perhaps it was rather a pity in a way; my doctor has forbidden me to swim, and I should have had a lot of lovely swimming."

"What do you mean?"

"The ship was the *Laconia*."

He was entitled to his grim little jest; he was out of hospital for the moment, but we all knew he would be back there. Yet looking round that casual, spacious, hospitable room and thinking of the people who had so often gathered there, people of all ages and professions, all races, nations and languages, and of their talk, eager and informed, about every subject under the sun, it seemed to me preposterous for Basil to claim that *all* his interests lay in Chelsea.

The answer, like the answers to so many of the questions which one brought to him, could probably be found in that enormous bookcase, and it might well lie in those three bound volumes of the *Annual Reports of the Chelsea Society*—the records of a war which had lasted for thirty-seven years and is not yet finished; a local war with more than local implications, fought to establish the right of every citizen to live in a town with his family, near his work and his friends, exercising through study and argument some control over his surroundings. This was "the good life" as Basil saw it, a full, happy integrated life which should be within the reach of every thinking man. The enemy was Bad Town Planning, which could only be defeated by spreading the gospel of Good Town Planning and by defending every sector of the

battle front. Chelsea was his sector and he defended it with passionate tenacity.

He was born in Chelsea in 1901 at Wilbraham Place, but he left it at a very early age and most of his childhood was spent at Lee Green in Derbyshire. Educated first at Horris Hill and then at Harrow, he wanted to be an architect; but when he was sixteen a sharp attack of polio, which left him with a paralysed right arm, made that idea impracticable. After his illness he visited the Eastern seaboard of the U.S.A. and then went to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where he read History. He then returned to Chelsea and lived for some years at 30 Royal Avenue while he ate his dinners at the Inner Temple. In 1927 he married Hester Pinney of Racedown, Dorset. They lived for a time at Rossetti Gardens Mansions and were soon involved in local affairs. He was elected to the Borough Council in 1928 and he became a Poor Man's Lawyer, giving free legal advice with a group of other young barristers to anyone in need of it—a service much in demand before the Citizens' Advice Bureau came into being in the second world war. In 1932 he joined the London County Council as one of Chelsea's representatives and the next year he was put on the Committee of the Chelsea Housing Improvement Society. By this time he and Hester were established at 34 Tedworth Square with friends all over the Borough. As these friends included Reginald Blunt and other members of the Chelsea Society he was naturally conversant with its affairs. But he did not join it till 1933.

At that time the Chelsea Society was engaged in a war over the siting of the Chelsea Bridge. The then existing Chelsea Suspension Bridge, built in 1858, was found insufficient for the needs of modern traffic, and in 1930 we learnt that it was to be demolished and a new bridge built some 40 yards up the river. The new bridge would be approached by a roundabout, entailing the requisition of about an acre of Ranelagh Gardens and the destruction of many fine trees on this side of the river, with a similar area of devastation in Battersea Park. Reginald Blunt gave us warning of this scheme in his Annual Report. The Commissioners of the Royal Hospital could be trusted to protect their own property "as far as possible"; but we were concerned too because we were pledged to defend Chelsea's trees and its open spaces; so he asked, on behalf of the Society, why a roundabout was necessary and why the

new bridge had to be sited out of alignment with existing approach roads. The Royal Hospital entered a firm and formal protest, and the scheme was dropped for three years on account of financial stringency.

In 1933 it was taken up again, and Blunt approached Basil Marsden-Smedley, who was now on the L.C.C. Improvements Committee, to suggest that advice should be taken from the Royal Fine Arts Commission on the design of the bridge and its siting. Basil once told me that the engineers who had prepared the plans opposed this idea on the ground that "these architects" would insist on adding a lot of expensive ornament; and were much surprised when the architects knocked £30,000 worth of ornament off their design. The Committee was favourably impressed, and the new bridge went up on the site of the old one.

Blunt was delighted with it when it was finished; it was admirably simple in design and, an engineer himself, he particularly liked "the novel and interesting feature" presented by the pivoting of the upright girders which carry the suspension chains. Meanwhile Basil had, of course, been recruited into the Society and given a seat on the Council.

A word about the founder of the Chelsea Society. Reginald Blunt was a remarkable man. A connoisseur and an antiquarian, the author of many popular books on the history of Chelsea, he was no mere ivory-tower scholar. A product of Haileybury and King's College, London, he served his engineering apprenticeship with the London and South Western Railway. When poor health put an end to his engineering career as early as 1887, he gained practical experience in other fields, first as General Manager to William de Morgan's pottery in Fulham and later, from 1902 to 1919, as Superintendent to the Managers of the Stock Exchange. Moreover he was for very many years on the governing body of the Chelsea Park Dwellings Co. Ltd., one of several early housing experiments in Chelsea designed to provide accommodation for poor people at rents they could afford. From 1887 to 1902, he was Secretary to the Cheyne Hospital, founded in 1875 by a handful of philanthropic people for children excluded as chronic or incurable cases from the General Hospitals of that day. His first great loan exhibition of Chelsea China was held in aid of the Hospital funds and he remained on its governing body, serving as Chairman of the Finance

Committee from 1926 until his death. As a son of the Rectory he never forgot that his Wonderful Village was a Parish, and he always felt a genuine concern for the welfare of his poorer neighbours.

He was also deeply concerned for the preservation "of all features of Chelsea having beauty or historical interest". Much had been swept away in his own lifetime, and in 1927 what remained was threatened. It was in an effort to preserve these remnants that he founded in that year his Chelsea Society, modelled on the London Society as "a local focus and stimulus" for the expression of a growing interest in "the preservation of the historic past, the betterment of the present, and the wise provision for the future".

He was not optimistic about the outcome. In *Red Anchor Pieces* (1928) he assessed the chances of his few surviving treasures. He did not rate those chances high. The very fame of Chelsea (to which his own writings had contributed) as a place of exceptional charm and romantic interest, made it a target for the developers. And one could not ignore the facts: property owners would continue to look for increasing rentals, borough councillors for larger rateable values, builders for profitable sites. It was useless to shout, "Vandal!"; but by means of sweet reasonableness and persuasive argument, plans that could not be negatived could sometimes be modified or improved so as to conserve the good that need not be destroyed. He believed that "the immense inert mass of ordinary intelligent folk"—the vast majority of the population—"cared for none of these things"; but his new Society could count on support from similar bodies, such as the London Society and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, as well as from enlightened individuals. Individuals who happened to be Borough or County Councillors were among his most valuable recruits.

By 1933 he could feel that the Society had justified its existence. We had had our losses. We had not been able to save Katherine Lodge in Trafalgar Square (now Chelsea Square), or Lombard Terrace in Cheyne Walk, or Terry's little fruit shop, also in Cheyne Walk, which embodied the last fragments of Old Shrewsbury House. But, in collaboration with the Borough Council and other allies, we had prevented the demolition of two Queen Anne houses in Cheyne Walk (Nos. 16 and 18), had thwarted a scheme of the Treasury

to sell the Duke of York's School and its Ground for full economic development, and had secured restrictions against smoke and sulphur pollution from the Battersea and Fulham Power Stations, compelling them to instal a "cleansing apparatus" which had never been employed on such a scale before. We had also persuaded the Cadogan Estate to "sterilize" most of Chelsea Square as an open space, had saved a number of Chelsea trees there and elsewhere from ill-treatment and destruction, and had helped to solve the problem of Sloane Square (lately converted from a cross-roads to a roundabout) by inducing the Borough Council to refer the layout of that large new traffic island to the Royal Fine Arts Commission.

Already before Basil joined the Society co-operation with the Borough had been close and fruitful. This co-operation continued. It is difficult to disentangle exactly the part that he played in it during the next ten years, but the Annual Reports provide clues. At the Annual General Meeting in May 1933, seconding the adoption of the current Report, he spoke on the care and proper treatment of trees, a subject as near to Blunt's heart as it was to his own. Next year he spoke again, this time about a Town Planning Act for London which was being prepared by the L.C.C. The Borough Council had been asked to forward suggestions for that part of the scheme which concerned Chelsea and had set up a Town Planning Sub-Committee with Basil as its Chairman. The Sub-Committee now asked the Society for suggestions.

At this time Town Planning was much to the fore in the minds of our own Council. In 1929 we had learnt that the fourteen acres lying between Milner Street and Elystan Street, King's Road and Brompton Road had been bought for improvement by Sir John Ellerman. This area, formerly comprising the Marlborough Cricket Ground and the eastern half of the Chelsea Common, had been covered by Victorian speculative builders with what Beaver describes as "a network of streets, most of them narrow and squalid". Improvement was certainly desirable; and at first Blunt dared to hope that Sir John and his architects might produce some grand comprehensive scheme which would be a credit to Chelsea. These hopes were disappointed; Sir John's improvements took the form of demolishing 600 small, working-class houses and selling the land piecemeal for the erection of large blocks of "luxury" flats or flatlets. The architectural consequences we

can all see in Sloane and Draycott Avenues. The social ones are even more depressing; at meeting after meeting our members deplored the loss to Chelsea of her own working-class people, for whom alternative accommodation in the neighbourhood was far from adequate.

It is against this background of planless private development that we must set the Society's *Suggestions in Regard to a Plan for Chelsea* prepared by a special Sub-Committee and forwarded to the Town Clerk in November 1934.

Coming from a preservationist Society, it is a remarkable document; for while it lists as worthy of protection some dozen buildings or groups of buildings not previously scheduled, the main contention is that Chelsea itself must be preserved as a residential area with a long tradition of neighbourliness, the resort of men of letters, Members of Parliament, artists, actors, students and people engaged in work of all kinds. No class of its residents should be forced by development to leave the Borough, the work of Housing Authorities and Associations in providing accommodation for people displaced by such development is welcomed and the segregation of classes is condemned. All sections of the community should be able to live in all wards of the Borough, "so far as available area, density of population and due provision of open spaces and playgrounds allow".

For it was not enough that people should be able to go on living in Chelsea; Chelsea must remain a pleasant place to live in. Fine trees and groups of trees should be scheduled for protection. More trees should be planted and a survey made to find suitable sites for them. Advertisements must be controlled, and so must the height of new buildings, which should not be allowed to dwarf protected buildings or rob other buildings of light and air. Open spaces must be preserved and so must the residential character of squares and gardens. Through-traffic should be diverted along main arteries away from residential areas, which must not be used as public parking places. The proprietors of traffic magnets (such as large commercial stores) should provide for the parking or garaging of the traffic they attract. Chelsea is not suited for industrial development; new factories, likely to create such nuisances as fumes, smoke and noise, must be excluded from any future schemes for the Borough, and such development should be controlled in surrounding districts. (This

clause refers to complaints of noxious fumes emanating from factories in Battersea.)

Commercial development without planning permission should be allowed only in Sloane Street, Knightsbridge, Fulham Road and the King's Road. Elsewhere the erection of commercial building should only be permitted with the consent of the Planning Authority on through-traffic routes, though small useful shops might be allowed in residential areas.

Some of these *Suggestions* are now a commonplace of good Town Planning; others point forward to the Abercrombie Report of 1943 and the Buchanan Report of 1963. How far we influenced the authors of these Reports it is of course impossible to say; but at least we may claim that we gave currency to, and provided a down-to-earth framework for, certain advanced ideas that were floating in the air thirty years ago; for our *Suggestions* were circulated among town planners outside Chelsea. Copies were sent to interested bodies, including the London Society (through whom they reached other Boroughs coming under the L.C.C. scheme); and the Planning Sub-Committee of the Chelsea Borough Council had them printed to give them wider publicity. They are very scarce now, but can be studied in the Chelsea Public Library. It is also impossible to say what part, if any, Basil played in drawing them up. What we do know is that he adopted them as his terms of reference, using his position on the Borough Council as on our own Council to get them implemented.

The process began at once, Borough and Society working together harmoniously. For example, when the proprietors of Nell Gwynne House and new blocks of flats filed a petition against a compulsory purchase order in respect of the present site of Wiltshire Close, we gave evidence at the ensuing Public Enquiry in support of the Borough Council, pointing out that in other parts of Chelsea the erection of working-class dwellings had not led to the depreciation of adjacent property.

Again, we collaborated with the Borough Council in an effort to divert or (when that proved impossible) at least to control the heavy fast traffic which was already spoiling the amenities of Chelsea's only large public open space, the Embankment. We demanded pedestrian crossings several years before we got them, instituted an enquiry into common

types of mechanical fault (defective gears, tyres, exhausts and load adjustment) long before any Minister of Transport took this matter up, and urged the police to enforce existing regulations against speeding and excessive noise only to find they had too few powers and insufficient personnel.

We had better luck in supporting the protests of residents who objected to their streets (Old Church Street, for example) being converted into one-way traffic thoroughfares; but were less successful in protecting Inner Cheyne Walk from the same fate. The fight we put up is witnessed by that bulge in the pavement outside the Old Church, constructed to discourage heavy traffic from thundering past the Cheyne Hospital for Children. A similar bulge at the east side of Oakley Street was flattened out by the Traffic Authorities, to the distress of the residents.

1939 brought the Bressey Report, a Highway Development Survey for Greater London, designed to improve the flow of traffic to the virtual exclusion of all other interests. But what else that year brought gave Chelsea a breathing space from the assaults of traffic and private building development; on those two fronts, the war years were years of peace.

In other respects they were years of disaster; and our most spectacular disaster was the destruction of the Old Church on the night of April 16th-17th, 1941. Blunt was in the country staying with Hester Marsden-Smedley and her children when the news reached him. It was a heavy blow, for the old Church with its monuments was his greatest treasure; but it did not kill him, it stirred him to action. Little of the fabric remained, but the monuments were recovered almost intact from under the rubble, and the Old Church must be rebuilt to contain them on its historic site.

He knew who would obstruct this project; not Hitler (he discounted Hitler) but the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who would certainly find other uses for the war damage insurance money. So, at the age of 84, he launched his final campaign, rousing against them educated opinion all over the country; for the splendid policies of his 1941-42 Report were echoed in a leading article in *The Times*.

He lived till October 1944, long enough to welcome the Abercrombie Report which, with its ring roads and classified areas, embodied so many of our *Suggestions*. He could not

praise it unreservedly; for one thing those ring roads ran down the Royal Hospital Road to treat the Embankment as a Parkway. Still, judged as a whole, he proclaimed it to be a great and admirable plan, presenting much food for constructive thought.

Blunt's death was followed by the resignation of St. John Hornby, our Chairman since 1928. Blunt himself, besides producing all the Annual Reports, had been Hon. Treasurer as well as Hon. Secretary since 1928. When a steadily increasing membership made the routine work too heavy even for him, he had in 1932 enlisted the help of Miss Daphne Sanger as Assistant Hon. Secretary. The war had swept her away to Cambridge as billeting officer to evacuated London children there, and he had eventually secured the help of Miss Esther Darlington as Joint Hon. Secretary.

Miss Darlington now became Acting Hon. Secretary while Wilfred Elliston, for many years Secretary to the Cheyne Hospital, accepted the post of Hon. Treasurer. Basil succeeded St. John Hornby as Chairman. Several members of the Council had served on it for longer than he, sharing Blunt's labours and his ideas; but Basil had worked very closely with him, he was prepared to devote his time and his energies to the Society; and when he undertook the compilation of the Reports he, in effect, succeeded Blunt.

For the moment, his work with the Control Commission took him often to Germany and our Report for 1945 was compiled by another member of the Council, Frederick Adam.

The next Report was Basil's; and by the time it was published Richard Stewart Jones was Hon. Secretary. Richard had earned the lasting gratitude of Chelsea at the age of 21, spending a legacy in saving Lindsey House from demolition. Blunt had rewarded him by 1938 with a seat on the Council, and during the war, on leave from the forces, he had been a prime mover in getting the shattered fragments of the Old Church, with its monuments, protected from vandals and the weather. For five years, till work for the National Trust took him away from Chelsea, his gaiety, scholarship and enthusiasm made him an invaluable assistant to Basil. They were both of them pupils of Reginald Blunt and they were determined to carry on his work.

Their first task was to ensure the rebuilding of the Old Church. The Diocesan Authorities were obdurate. Their reorganisation proposals ruled out any possibility of building

any church on the site and they had abolished the office of minister-in-charge. But the pressure put upon them did not relax, either inside Chelsea (where the congregation continued to meet) or outside it. A forceful letter to *The Times* (June 12th, 1946) was signed by Lord Esher, Lord Harewood, John Summerson, the Presidents of the Royal Academy, the Archæological Institute, the Society of Antiquaries and the Architectural Association, and the Director of the National Gallery. The Chelsea Society with the support of St. Luke's Parochial Church Council produced a memorandum claiming, among other things, that this Church was "a store-house of history" and the most remarkable collection of memorials in London, second only to Westminster Abbey. This memorandum, submitted to twelve learned societies and approved by them, was sent to the Borough Council which took up the case so energetically that the Diocesan Committee gave in at last. The site would be retained and a Church built on it "when conditions permitted" capable of containing the salvaged monuments and of providing a worthy setting for them. And financial provision was made for the Minister-in-Charge.

This was not good enough for the congregation, or for the Society either; it was felt that the matter was being shelved. From the ecclesiastical point of view the Old Church had no status; for more than a century it had been a Chapel of Ease. If it were a Parish Church its future would be more secure. So while the congregation and their friends were clearing away debris, procuring bricks and rebuilding the vestry with their own hands among crowds of admiring supporters, other people were working to get it converted into a Parish Church. This was more quickly achieved than the rebuilding, for shortage of building material and of skilled labour imposed long delays. However, it proceeded in stages and was finished at last by May 13th, 1958, when the Old Church now a Parish Church was reconsecrated in the presence of H.M. Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. A very happy occasion.

Chelsea had another church which though it too had been destroyed by bombing and condemned by the Diocesan Authorities still refused to die. But St. John's at World's End was less fortunate than the Old Church; it had no architectural beauty, no historic interest, no important monuments and no powerful friends.

Basil and Richard, busy with their plans for the Old Church could not forget St. John's. When the Borough Council decided to celebrate the return of peace with a week of festivity in 1948 and asked the Society to make a contribution, this took the form of an Exhibition of Old Chelsea at St. John's Mission Hall, lent for the purpose by the Vicar.

The hall, with blasted windows and a damaged ceiling, was in a sad state; but the project was immensely popular in West Chelsea. Neighbours volunteered to paint and scrub, disguising the scars of war with such poor materials as were then available. There were tableaux (with wax figures lent by Peter Jones) of Old Cremorne and the Chelsea Bun House, there was Nell Gwynn, with her oranges, there were models of new housing projects, and pictures and prints by Turner, Whistler and Greaves, and cases of Chelsea China, including seven pieces lent by Queen Mary who visited the exhibition on its opening day.

In Blunt's time the Society had held many exhibitions of pictures and china. He loved Chelsea china; the anchor, printed on every cover of the Annual Reports since 1929, is the mark that distinguished its greatest period. Basil and Hester shared his enthusiasm—Hester is very knowledgeable—and they were to organise other exhibitions of Chelsea china, larger and more important than this one. But this, held in war-battered World's End, lingers in the memory.

As for St. John's, after its brief flash of glory, when the seven thousand visitors had gone their way, the small congregation continued to meet in the Mission Hall under a vicar self-condemned to poverty. The ruins of the church were cleared away and grass was planted on the site; but there was no money for railings, so it suffered the usual shabby fate of unprotected open spaces. The trees round it flourished, to be cut down eventually in order to make room for garages. Basil, that lover of trees, turned a blind eye. The garages brought in revenue which the trees had never done. All his life he had twinges of conscience about St. John's; he could do so little for it and he always felt that he ought to do more. It was with real pleasure that, discussing the West Chelsea Development Scheme in his report for 1963, he congratulated the Borough Council on including a site for the eventual rebuilding of St. John's Church.

It was in 1939 that we first heard of a proposal to replace Albert Bridge with a structure able to carry heavy traffic.

Blunt was of the opinion that the disappearance of Albert Bridge would "evoke no tears". For him beloved Albert was an intruder and an ugly one. Still he thought the project needed the most watchful consideration; there might have to be a roundabout at the bottom of Oakley Street, and this could perhaps be formed in part over the waterside to avoid the demolition of houses in Cheyne Row and the Crescent.

In 1956, when the proposal was again brought forward, there were, if not tears, at least indignant cries. Those delicate Gothic traceries were now high fashion. Basil admired them, and he did not favour a bulge in the river bank at this point, spoiling the noble sweep of the Embankment. Besides, it was clear by then how much we owe to Albert's delicate constitution. If the massive Behemoths now on the roads could thunder over the river at this point, turning east down inner Cheyne Walk, they would do worse than annoy the residents; they would crack the foundations of the Cheyne Walk houses. Our objective is to stave off this disaster till a new ring road diverts heavy through-traffic to the Docks across a new bridge somewhere near Black Point. The present tidal flow represents a compromise between the Borough Council and the Traffic Authorities. Albert takes a quantity of commuter traffic (relatively light and harmless), relieving the congestion of stouter bridges. But will his constitution stand up to even this until the ring road is constructed?

The harbour to the west of Battersea Bridge with its boats and the old posts and rails was very dear to Blunt; it was all that remained of the old river front he had known as a boy. A suggestion made in 1930 that a playground could be made for the West Chelsea children by erecting a timber staging over the bay did not strike him as a happy one. The playground would be dangerous and probably insanitary. The little children would be run over by the traffic and the bigger ones were much better off in the wide green enclosures of Battersea Park. The money would be more wisely spent in buying playgrounds for the smaller children near their own homes.

Basil too loved this reach of the river, haunted by Turner, Whistler and Greaves. In 1951 it was threatened again. The Borough Council had to rebuild the river wall, and it put forward several alternative suggestions in order to test public opinion. One was a new embankment built across the bay

and the boat beach to the Cremorne Arms. This idea was opposed by the Society, which was supported by the National Trust, the London Society, the Chelsea Arts Club, the Sea Cadets, the Boy Scouts' Association, the residents of Cheyne Walk and the inhabitants of the houseboats. So the Borough built along the old alignment the wall which we have today; a pretentious imitation in concrete, Basil complained, of the Victorian granite embankment on the far side of Battersea Bridge.

Long before the Old Church was rebuilt, amateur gardeners were planting flowers among the debris. This was revolutionary in the mid forties; wild flowers relieved the ugliness of bomb sites and vegetables were sometimes grown on them, but planting for pleasure was a new idea then and it caught on.

Ambitious eyes were cast on the ugly scar stretching westward from Old Church Street which laid bare the foundations of what had once been Lombard Terrace and the cellars of two houses in Danvers Street. The Rupert Gleadows consulted Basil about the possibility of getting a plot here, and in 1948 he persuaded the Borough Council to make arrangements with the Sloane Stanley Estate so as to allow volunteers chosen by the Society to turn what was fast becoming a rubbish dump into flower gardens.

Children had adopted the place as their playground and they were allowed to keep the part near the church while the gardeners had the western half, including the Danvers Street cellars which made wonderful wall gardens. They occupied it for fourteen years, giving delight to a great many people at no expense to the ratepayers, while the future of the site was being debated.

Meanwhile building land in this part of Chelsea rose in value to £200,000 an acre. But the public had grown accustomed to the notion that there would always be a garden here, and Basil was determined that there should be. It was he who insisted that the new garden must be laid out by Peter Shepherd, the landscape architect who addressed us on the subject of trees at our Annual General Meeting in 1956.

Basil had always taken a great interest in the Bombsite Gardens; he enjoyed their variety reflecting the tastes of different plot holders. This particular pleasure could not be reproduced in a public garden; but others could, the pleasure

of leaning over a parapet and looking down into a garden, and the pleasure of going down into a garden and hearing the roar of the Embankment traffic subside to a relatively gentle buzz.

In 1960 we received protests against proposals by the Housing Committee of the Borough Council to build on the Rectory garden and the playgrounds of Wiltshire Close. Basil supported these protests. He took his stand on the Plan for Chelsea of 1934. The playgrounds were not too large for the needs of the children in Wiltshire Close; and as for the Rectory garden, an open space once built over is lost for ever. Besides, this garden is the only large, wild, beautiful garden that Chelsea children can play in; and the children of St. Luke's parish, with many older parishioners, use it constantly. So the Chelsea Society sent its own protest to the L.C.C.

The L.C.C. refused planning permission for the Wiltshire Close Scheme, and the Borough Council dropped the idea of building on the Rectory garden for the time being.

In 1946 the Chelsea Society was consulted by the Borough Council as to whether Turner's house (119 Cheyne Walk), which had been severely blasted, was worth preserving.



ST. LEONARD'S TERRACE

Drawing by Basil Marsden-Smedley

Our Council reached the conclusion that while there was no legitimate ground for preserving the interior (which had

been much altered before the bombing), the exterior ought to be preserved since part of it remained as it had been in Turner's time.

Later, when during discussions on the various West Chelsea improvement schemes, Turner's house seemed again in danger, Basil warmly defended it.

To Basil, every studio in Chelsea was of historic interest because it was part of the Chelsea tradition. Artists had lived and worked here for centuries, and a Chelsea without artists was something he did not choose to contemplate.

But artists had congregated in Chelsea largely because it was picturesque, unfashionable and cheap. The fame they brought it made it fashionable, and in every decade of the twentieth century Chelsea has grown more expensive and less picturesque. By the nineteen-twenties studios had become particularly fashionable, for studio parties were in vogue. Artists, squeezed out of their spacious studios in the more celebrated parts of the Borough, took refuge in the shabbier terraces where at least they had room to work. As time went on these were condemned as sub-standard and pulled down for development.

It was in vain that the Chelsea Society protested against the eviction of artists from King's Parade and Manresa Road; though we had better luck in winning support for the potters in Radnor Walk because they worked for the export market.

Basil felt that something positive should be done; the Housing Authorities should provide for displaced artists as they already did for the displaced working classes. But artists could not work in the small rooms of Council flats; studios must be built for them. The Borough must be empowered to build new studios, construct others in existing buildings and acquire existing ones.

Legislation was needed for this, so an electors' meeting was called to approve the inclusion of a relevant clause in the L.C.C. General Powers Bill. It was well attended by artists and members of the Society, and in 1949 Chelsea among all the London Boroughs was given the requisite powers.

In his Report for 1952 Basil was able to announce that the studios on the Council's Lucan Estate were nearly finished

and that six others were to be built on the Cremorne Estate, besides nine more on other sites. But in 1961 he had to warn us that too little was still being done to stem the steady exodus of Chelsea artists deprived of their homes and studios by Public Institutions, developers, speculators and lessors.

In 1952 the Society was represented at a meeting of interested Associations held at County Hall to consider how to arrest the decay of Old Swan House, an outstanding example of the work of Norman Shaw. As it needed an army of servants to run it and could not be converted into flats, on account of its interior design, it had been empty since 1931. The architects' report was encouraging, the house could be saved if it was occupied, and eventually the problem was solved: planning permission was given to convert it into offices.

After the war Regency came into fashion and Paulton's Square, completed between 1840 and 1847 in a delightfully uniform style, was so much admired that at the suggestion of Richard Stewart Jones the Residents' Association agreed to paint the facades of their houses the same colour to emphasise their architectural unity.

This is only marred by a block of shops and flats put up before the war at the north-east corner. Fronting the King's Road at the opposite corner is a terrace of six houses, Stanley Terrace, dated 1840 and obviously part of the original Paulton's Square development. In 1960 Basil learnt of a proposal to demolish this terrace and build shops with flats over them on the site. The Society protested and the L.C.C., supported by Chelsea Borough Council, made a Building Preservation Order covering the whole Square and Stanley Terrace. The developers appealed against the Order and there was a public inquiry at which Basil advanced our views. Before the inquiry members had been asked to write to the Minister of Housing supporting the Order, and many did so. The Order was upheld and Stanley Terrace is now leased by the Sloane Stanley Estate to the Chelsea Housing Improvement Society.

By 1959 Sydney Street south of St. Luke's Church was disappearing. The L.C.C. Education Department expanding its Aeronautical College and the L.C.C. Welfare Department extending its Old People's Home, had been buying freeholds and pulling down houses as soon as the leases fell in. But the neat Georgian Terraces north of St. Luke's Church and St. Luke's Hospital were still intact. Now those on the east

side were threatened, together with Guthrie Street and Stewart's Grove. The Oratory School, backed by the L.C.C. Education Department, proposed to acquire the site for playgrounds under a compulsory purchase order. So 76 houses in excellent repair (many of them freehold) were to be demolished, and more than 300 men, women and children would have to find somewhere else to live.

They refused to consider the idea, conducting their defence with a spirit and energy that won them widespread support. The press, local and national, and the B.B.C. gave welcome publicity; all our Borough Councillors and our M.P. were sympathetic, and Basil made the cause so much his own that he was afterwards elected President of the Sydney Street and District Ratepayers' Association. He agreed that the school needed playgrounds, but believed that these could be found elsewhere.

Eventually the L.C.C. Planning Committee was persuaded to remove the scheme from their Five Year Review.

The King's Road has attained some degree of celebrity. More important to Chelsea people is the fact that they are still able to cross it in the course of their daily business and can still take a bus to Sloane Square.

We took these amenities for granted till 1961 when in the interest of commuters the Ministry of Transport proposed to convert the King's Road into a west-bound, one-way thoroughfare and the Fulham Road into an east-bound one. Meeting by chance with a high official of the Ministry, Basil indignantly demanded an explanation. The official (himself a commuter) was astonished; he had no idea that people still lived in Central London.

Protests from the Boroughs affected, as well as from the Chelsea and Putney Societies, presently convinced his Department that they did and the proposal was dropped.

Along with the successes of Basil and the Chelsea Society, it must be remembered that there were failures. Battersea Park was an L.C.C. park, not a municipal one, and twenty years ago the lawns and meadows behind the river walk were the traditional playground of Chelsea children.

Unhappily, this was the site selected for the Festival Gardens and Fun Fair constructed in connection with the Festival of

Britain. The arrangement was supposed to be temporary, for one summer only; but the cost of construction was very high and the takings that first summer were small; so the authorities resolved to open the Gardens again the next summer, and then the next after that, hoping to recoup themselves to some extent. Finally the whole thing was leased to a commercial firm, Festival Gardens Co., to make what could be made out of it till 1967.

Basil was outraged. He knew the value of those meadows to local children for his own children had played there; and he hated to see them covered over with booths and sideshows. Pintables had always seemed to him a poor exchange for playing fields; and as a citizen he deeply disapproved when land set aside for the free enjoyment of the public was handed over to a profit making concern.

He had a chance to say so in 1956 at a public inquiry held in connection with a proposal of the lessors to erect a graceless scaffold tower 162 feet high with a circular car holding 42 people, which would revolve on reaching the top and be lighted up like a Piccadilly sky sign. The objectors were ourselves led by Basil, the Chelsea Borough Council, Cheyne Walk residents, and the Friends of Battersea Park. We did not fancy this proposed addition to our skyline, and we were all afraid that if Festival Gardens Co. were allowed to embark on expensive projects they were likely to get a renewal of their lease in 1967.

We lost; but a random question from one of our delegates, on the subject of Capital Issues, proved unexpectedly relevant and the project was postponed.

Royal Terrace, the splendid Victorian row of houses on the east side of Royal Avenue, which gave its name to the Avenue, is being replaced in stages by a row of attenuated, pseudo-Regency houses. The first stage is almost complete. The next will have to wait for some 35 years when existing leases fall in. With the Borough Council, the London Society, the Royal Fine Arts Commission, the Residents' Association, the Chelsea Liberal Association and other allies, we fought this transformation fiercely through two public enquiries.

We won; but in 1963 the developers went over our heads to the then Minister of Transport who allowed their scheme to go through.



KING'S PARADE

From a painting by Miss Josephine Oakman

King's Parade consisted of two very beautiful Georgian terraces standing back from the King's Road between Dovehouse Street and Carlyle Square. They were very plain; their beauty lay in their perfect proportions, and they were almost unnoticed in the twenties and thirties when they were allowed to run down. In the mid-thirties several houses at the Dovehouse Street end were condemned. But even these stood up all through the bombing, to be pulled down at the end of the war by L.C.C. demolition squads. The site had been earmarked for a Fire Station.

Such sad scars were then common enough and the place became known (even in some of our own Reports) as the Dovehouse Street bombsite. For the next fifteen years it was an eyesore, a perpetual source of complaint, first as a bombsite, then as an advertisement station and then as a car mart. We protested continually; but a fire station it was one day to be, and meanwhile an eyesore it remained.

The rest of King's Parade, now wholly condemned, grew steadily shabbier. Like so many other terraces it had lost its

garden railings in that disastrous railings-for-scrap campaign which did more to promote the lasting squalor of post-war London than all the bombs which were dropped.

The site of the whole Parade is covered now, partly by the fire station and partly by that new technical college which finds itself too much cramped here.

The King's Parade affair, so long drawn out, made a deep impression on Basil. It taught him that the Planning Department of the L.C.C., such a staunch and powerful ally in the face of undesirable private development, was helpless in cases where other departments were involved. He realised why. He had discovered in the course of his war work with the Ministry of Economic Warfare that in the Civil Service status tends to be linked with seniority. The Planning Department was new and its jurisdiction was not recognised by old established L.C.C. Departments like those concerned with fire, education and finance.

Several events reinforced the lesson; the hard struggle to save the north end of Sydney Street and the sad fate of its southern terraces, the proposal to make the King's Road a one-way thoroughfare and the decision of the London Transport Board to convert Lots Road Power Station from coal to oil, exchanging the four black chimneys which Blunt had disapproved of so deeply for two much taller ones which would emit every day more than eight and a half tons of carbon dioxide to spread a poisonous canopy over the Borough Council's proposed new housing estate in West Chelsea.

Besides all this, the Minister of Health without consulting either the Borough Council or even the L.C.C. announced that he intended to move seven specialist teaching hospitals into Chelsea from other parts of London and that Chelsea would have the honour of being known as the Hospital Borough.

Basil now saw not only Chelsea but the whole of London as a battle ground of land-hungry Planning Authorities, all armed with powers of compulsory purchase and each intent on furthering its own admirable schemes without looking at the neighbourhood as a whole, or considering how the lives of its inhabitants might be affected.

The result must be chaos unless a remedy could be found, and there was only one possible remedy; there must be a

single authority—a Town Planning Authority—with power to say what buildings, including government buildings, should or should not be sited in any given locality. This authority must be able to act judicially between one department and another, and it must be entirely separate from any influence of a department with responsibilities for building projects.

This was Basil's conviction, hammered out on the anvil of experience. He felt it so deeply that at a meeting of the Council of the new Borough (then still known as Borough 12) he voted with the opposition against the proposal of his own party that, for the time being at any rate, the architects and planners of the new Borough should sit in the Borough Surveyor's Office. There was nothing personal in this nor any narrow professionalism (he himself was a barrister, Reginald Blunt had been an engineer); he voted against the proposal because it seemed to him retrograde and anachronistic, alien to the spirit of Good Town Planning.

When the new Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea was being formed, Basil remarked, "The Chelsea Society will now be more important than ever. Chelsea will have no other voice with which to speak."

Balance Sheet as at 31st December, 1964

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General Fund: Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31st December, 1964

INCOME	£ s. d.		EXPENDITURE	£ s. d.	
	£	s. d.		£	s. d.
Annual subscriptions	...	215 9 0	Annual Report	...	170 18 0
Transfer from Life Membership Fund	...	10 17 6	Clerical assistance	...	7 4 0
Donations	...	18 0	Printing, stationery, postage, etc.	...	78 16 1
Sales of Annual Report	...	12 12 5	Surplus for year carried to Balance Sheet	...	5 3 10
Net profit on Annual General Meeting	...	4 15 0			
Interest on 3½% War Stock	...	17 10 0			
		<u>£262 1 11</u>			<u>£262 1 11</u>

Life Membership Fund Account for the year ended 31st December, 1964

INCOME	£ s. d.		EXPENDITURE	£ s. d.	
	£	s. d.		£	s. d.
Transfer from General Fund at 1.1.64	75	12 0	Transfer to General Fund towards current year's expenses	...	10 17 6
Life membership fees in 1964	31	10 0	Life Membership Fund at 31.12.64	...	97 17 1
Interest on Post Office Account	...	1 12 7			
		<u>£108 14 7</u>			<u>£108 14 7</u>

R. D. CLARKE,
Hon. Treasurer.

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

R. G. EDWARDS, A.C.A.,
Hon. Auditor.

NOTE—The certificates for £500 3½% War Stock in the name of the Chelsea Society are deposited with Messrs. Barclays Bank Limited, 348 King's Road, S.W.3.

CHELSEA OLD CHURCH RESTORATION FUND ACCOUNT

Statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31st December, 1964

INCOME			EXPENDITURE		
	£	s. d.		£	s. d.
Balance 1.1.64	...	157 10 0	Payment to Chelsea Old Church	...	160 9 1
Interest in 1964	...	2 19 1	Balance 31.12.64	...	— — —
		<u>£160 9 1</u>			<u>£160 9 1</u>

R. D. CLARKE,
Hon. Treasurer.

Audited and found correct

R. G. EDWARDS,
Hon. Auditor.

REGINALD BLUNT MEMORIAL FUND ACCOUNT

Statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31st December, 1964

INCOME			EXPENDITURE		
	£	s. d.		£	s. d.
Balance 1.1.64	...	58 3 11	Payment to Chelsea Old Church	...	59 5 9
Interest on 1964	...	1 1 10	Balance 31.12.64	...	— — —
		<u>£59 5 9</u>			<u>£59 5 9</u>

R. D. CLARKE,
Hon. Treasurer.

Audited and found correct

R. G. EDWARDS,
Hon. Auditor.

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An asterisk denotes a life member. The Hon. Secretary should be informed of correction or changes in name, title or address.

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 *THE HON. MRS. GEOFFREY JAMESON
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 MRS. LAWSON DICK
 *GEORGE LAYTON, ESQ.
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 THE RT. HON. EARL OF LISTOWEL
 CAPTAIN JOHN LITCHFIELD,
 O.B.E., R.N., M.P.

MRS. JOHN LITCHFIELD
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 *MISS C. F. N. MACKAY, M.B.E.
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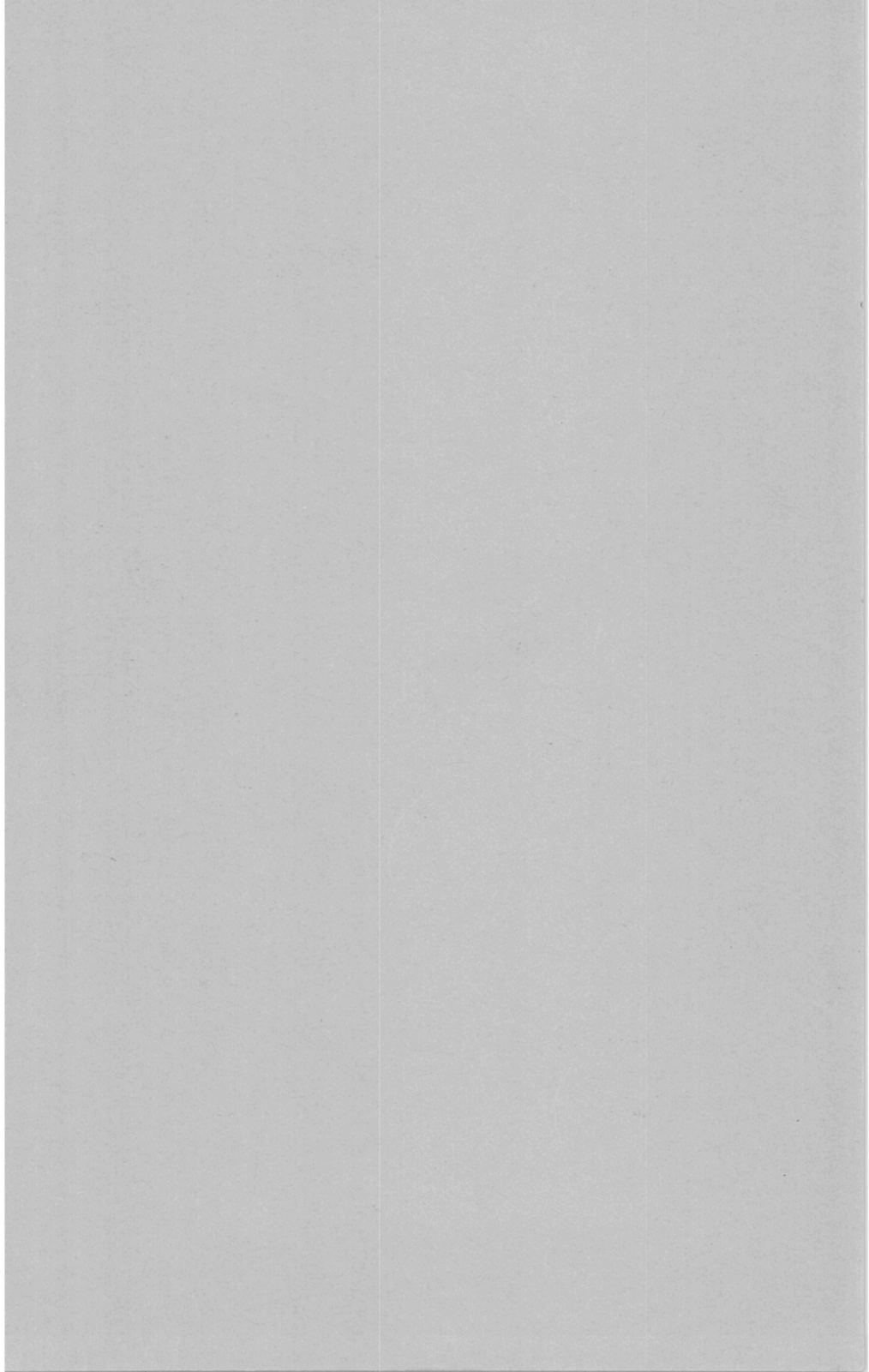
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