



The Cherry Tree

A newsletter for the Cherry Trees Residents' Amenities Association

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The Cherry Trees Residents' Amenities Association

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The aim of The Cherry Trees Residents' Amenities Association is to improve our neighbourhood and to function as our representative towards the Council and other authorities in matters concerning the area.

Membership is open to all residents living in Palace Gardens Terrace, Strathmore Gardens, Berkeley Gardens, Brunswick Gardens, Inverness Gardens, Vicarage Gardens, Vicarage Gate, on the southern side of Kensington Mall, and on the eastern side of Kensington Church Street between Vicarage Gate and Kensington Mall.

Neighbourhood Watch News

Support officers

friendly but firm uniformed presence on the streets is something for which Kensington and Chelsea residents have been waiting a very long time. Employed by the Metropolitan Police and working closely with the Council, the Police Community Support Officers will hopefully lead to a new relationship between the police, the public and the Council. Since the end of April pilot schemes are running in Earl's Court, the Colville Ward and the Campden Ward. If the initial schemes are successful the aim is to have PCSOs at work in every part of the Royal Borough.

Burglaries

There have been a number of recorded burglaries during the daytime while people are at work. Your front door needs to be secure – if it has several locks and a key should be spaced out, and e door should, of course, be checked at all times. This includes unlocked doors to blocks of flats. A number of burglars has gained

access through front door letterboxes, as many houses still have poorly protected letterboxes. Don't leave any keys within reach of your letterbox or cat flap, and consider having a letterbox protector fitted.

For advice contact Andy Booth, our new Crime Prevention Officer, on 8246 0169

Bogus callers

Be aware of unknown callers. They usually ask for money or to use your telephone because they are have lost their house keys, locked themselves out, lost their wallet, etc. There have been reports that such people are still operating in our area. Sometimes they pose as utility meter readers. Be vigilant, and if you have any suspicions don't let these men into your home. Check with the relevant utility company to see if the callers are genuine. Call the police immediately if in any doubt.

Street robberies

Due to a proactive operation currently in place, street crime has declined, although crime persists

in the Notting Hill area. There have been a few distraction thefts at ATM's and in cafes on Notting Hill Gate. Be especially vigilant when withdrawing cash at ATM's and be aware of what's going on around you.

"Shred the evidence"

Identity theft soared by 40% last year. Most victims don't realise what has happened until they suddenly receive demands for payment for goods or services that they haven't purchased. Rooting through dustbins is not an uncommon method to get hold of an identity, so think twice before your personal information goes into the dustbin, and shred bank/credit card statements, bills and any other documents containing personal information.

Voice-Connect

Receive up-to-date news of crime trends in your area. The Voice-Connect facility is a computerised early warning system that enables you to receive the latest information about crimes in our area via telephone, fax or e-mail free of

charge. To apply contact Lorna Clarke, Borough NHH Co-ordinator, Community Safety Team on 8246 0824 or 7795 6660

Please help out

We need help from residents to keep the Neighbourhood Watch scheme running in our area. If you're interested, please contact Mariju Lee (7727 0205) or Ashley McNeile (7229 3239).



Some 40 children and their parents attended this year's CTRAA children's party, held in St Mary Abbots Church Hall in Vicarage Gate on Sunday the 11th of May. As usual, they thoroughly enjoyed themselves with games, martial arts training and refreshments. As many of the parents didn't live here when the association conceived the "windfall" that made this new CTRAA tradition possible, it's worth pointing out that through the children's parties are the result of a lot of hard work from a few dedicated mothers, the parties probably wouldn't

Thank you, Dodie Smith!

have existed if it hadn't been for Dodie Smith. Because if Dodie Smith hadn't written "The Hundred and One Dalmatians" in 1956, Disney would never have made the original "One Hundred and One Dalmatians" in 1961. Without that film the modernised live action remake "101 Dalmatians" (1996) would never have been made; and then Kirsten Buckley, Brian Regan, Bob Tzudiker and Noni White would never have been asked to write the follow-up "102

Dalmatians", in which they included a very short scene where Cruella De Vil's chauffeur falls from a window of a white, Victorian house in London whilst stealing puppies. The house selected was 40 Brunswick Gardens, and on the 23rd of February 2000 the scene was shot. The script called for an empty, wet evening street with snow flurries in the air. Whilst the Disney crew had no problem fixing the wet street and the snow flurries,

removing all the cars from Brunswick Gardens and Vicarage Gardens required the cooperation of the CTRAA members. Disney offered 500 car owners £50 each to park at Queen Elizabeth College for a day, and in addition the film company gave the CTRAA £2,000 as a good-will gesture for any inconvenience the filming caused the residents. The association decided that this money should be used for the children in the area, so since then this "puppy fund" finances our annual children's parties – all thanks to Dodie Smith.

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A newsletter for the Cherry Trees Residents' Amenities Association 1/2003

Nursing home sold to luxury flat developer

Two years after unnecessarily having emptied Vicarage Gate House and moved the 50 residents to temporary accommodation in the Gainsborough Nursing Home in Lambeth, the Elizabeth Finn Trust has finally sold "our" nursing home. As we have feared, the buyer intends to demolish the building and replace it with "a substantial prime residential development", according to their press release, i.e. luxury flats.



Vicarage Gate House has been sold to a developer of luxury flats.

If their planning application is successful - which requires that a change of use is approved - it will not only mean that our area will be inconvenienced by a major building project for at least a year, followed by increased competition over an already insufficient number of resident parking spaces, but that Kensington loses one of its last nursing homes for older residents.

The purchase was announced in the middle of May, and the buyer is a company called Vicarage Gate Limited. This is a joint venture between First Islamic Investment Bank (90%) and Northacre PLC (10%). According to Northacre's press release, they have made an initial payment of £7 million to Elizabeth Finn Trust, with more monies being promised if they are successful in their planning application and subsequent sales of flats. The bank acts mainly as financier, with Northacre being the active partner.

Financially troubled

Northacre is a fairly small company with less than 50 employees. Financially, it has been doing poorly since 1999. Growing losses and liabilities have led to a share price drop from 70 pence in 2000 to 9 pence in 2003.

Northacre is one of the two companies behind the 68 luxury flats Phillimore development in Campden Hill Road (previously Queen Elizabeth College). In order to fund its share in the Vicarage Gate House development the company recently sold its interest in Phillimore for £5.4 million to its partner in that project, Westcity Properties.

First Islamic Investment Bank is based in Bahrain and has so far mainly been active in the Middle East and the USA. On its web site the bank presents itself as the

only truly Islamic investment bank, where all activities conform to Shari'ah (Islamic law). This means that its activities must follow Islamic ethical principles, which prohibit paying or charging interest, and prevent investment in unethical sectors and industries. As Islamic banks can't charge interest, they instead often enter into joint ventures, sharing the profits with the borrower.

Rejected BUPA offer

CTRAA has learned that the Elizabeth Finn Trust recently rejected a cash offer of £6 million from a BUPA backed group who planned to continue the site as a nursing home. The group is said to have even hinted that a higher offer could be contemplated if the trust was willing to participate with them in the planning, but apparently the trust wasn't interested in seeing the site continued as a nursing home.

The knowledge that someone is willing to buy Vicarage Gate House and continue it as a nursing home could, perhaps, put First Islamic's Shari'ah Advisory Board in a difficult predicament: is it in line with Islamic ethical principles to deprive an area and its vulnerable elderly of a much needed nursing home in order to make money on unnecessary luxury flats for the affluent?

The CTRAA intends to do its utmost to ensure that the site continues as a nursing home, and expects full support from the

Council. Contrary to what Northacre claims in their press release, the building is very sound. Vicarage Gate House was closed only because it needed upgrading in line with new Government health and safety regulations for care homes.

At first Elizabeth Finn Trust intended to refurbish, in order to meet the new regulations, and notified the residents that they would be temporarily relocated during the refurbishment. But one month before the move was due, the trust suddenly announced that they had changed their mind, and instead intended to sell the site and build a new nursing home outside London. Although many felt that the move should have been postponed until the new home was built, the trust still went ahead with it.

No need to demolish

Two years on, the surviving residents have been moved again, this time to The Wakefield Centre in Hammersmith, and the trust hasn't even announced a location for the new home, let alone started to build one – in spite of the fact that the trust's anticipated cost for a new home equalled the amount set aside for the refurbishment that never happened.

The irony of it all is that the new regulations have now been withdrawn, and the Vicarage Gate Nursing Home could, in fact, be reactivated after only some minor refurbishments. Although this

won't help the poor former residents in Hammersmith, it is very good news for Kensington as well as for our area: for a fraction of the originally anticipated cost, and without forcing some of our members to live close to a big noisy building site for a long time, Vicarage Gate House could once again become a much needed nursing home – provided that local and governmental authorities reject the plans to replace it with luxury flats.

Nursing homes needed

In the report "Royal Borough Review of Older People's Services" from September 2002, it is noted that several studies underline the importance of nursing homes near residents' home areas, and that the Borough has a dire need for nursing homes. Although the need for nursing home beds in the Borough will increase by several hundred over the next 30 years, the Borough has in fact lost 100 beds during the past two years, due to the closure of Delves House and Vicarage Gate House.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Social Services, Health and Housing (OSC) has begun to investigate the rapid loss of nursing home beds in the Borough. As part of this investigation, OSC has asked the Elizabeth Finn Trust and Northacre to "submit views and comments" (read "explain themselves") at an OSC meeting on the 8th of July. This is an unprecedented move, as OSC never before has called non-council parties to one of its hearings.

Government may fine

One reason for this rather sudden interest among our local politicians for nursing homes could be that the Government recently has threatened to fine local authorities that fail to provide beds for old people within their own boroughs – an indication that the Government also regards this as an extremely important issue.

That both the Borough and the Government want more local nursing homes unfortunately doesn't mean that there isn't any risk that Northacre's will be approved – so a strong local opinion against such plans is needed to give the politicians the courage to be true to their words. Let's save our nursing home!

The recently started congestion charge scheme may be a marvel of high technology, with CCTV cameras recording licence plates, and computers comparing these against the payment records, but charging motorists for road usage is nothing new. From the 1720s until 1864 there were tollgates all around London, collecting money from the road users.

At that time, the intention was to use the money for road upkeep. However, most of the money went to paying off the loans required for building the tollgates and tollhouses, the high cost of management, and salaries for the staff manning the tolls.

At this time, the intention is to cut traffic and use the income for public transport improvements. However, how much money will be left for public transport, after having paid off the loans for the equipment and having paid management and staff, remains to be seen.

The congestion charge is seen as a part way of solving the big road problem of our time, traffic congestion, just like the road tolls were seen as a smart way of solving the big old problem of the late seventeenth century, poor roads. And those roads weren't just bad, they were horrendous.

In feudal England the incentive was that roads could be maintained by those who lived along them. Local boundaries within the boundaries of manors were kept repaired by the villeins (serfs) belonging to the manor as day's work, and the duty of maintaining communication between market towns rested on the inhabitants of the parishes through which roads passed. Road repair was so regarded as a religious duty, travellers were classed with the sick and poor as objects of Christian charity, and the courts often looked favourably on offenders who offered their money or their labour for the instruction or repair of roads and bridges.

The Black Death

his system worked reasonably well until 1348, when the Black Death in 13 months reduced the population from around four million to two and a half. Whole villages were suddenly empty, as well as many of the dead bodies were let on lease to sheep farmers by their surviving relatives, and the lack of labourers across the country quickly enabled the villains who were kept in servitude to become free labourers (yeomen) who demanded money for their work. And those survivors who were reasonably well off were faced with increased taxes, to make up for all



The main Kensington tollgate in 1820. Behind the wall are the old cavalry barracks in Kensington Gardens.



The inn "Halfway House" was next to the Kensington tollgate.

The previous road charge experiment lasted for 150 years...

the taxpayers who had died (the Hundred Year's War, which had started in 1337, continued until 1453, in spite of the fact that nearly half of the population had died). In addition, there were hardly any travellers on the roads any more. Consequently, road upkeep had suddenly become a very low priority. Highways fell into decay, and their neglect was increased by the cessation of voluntary efforts, when services previously regarded as religious duties came to be seen only as civil burdens.

Roman roads neglected

There were a few attempts during the Tudor period to improve the roads, but these were largely ineffective, and by the mid 1600's the situation was dire. Even the solid old Roman roads, which were the only properly built roads (so well built that they had held up for a thousand years) had, after several hundred years of neglect, become very poor. At the same time road travel had become more common, with stagecoach networks being established



Notting Hill's tollgate in 1835, the second of three between 1769 and 1864.

from 1645, so there was an increasing need for better roads. Travel by road was in those days quite an ordeal – and dangerous. The stagecoach plying between Oxford and London took two days, and the once monthly stagecoach between Edinburgh and London (a very good measure of how few long-distance travellers there were) took 12 to 14 days.

20 miles a day

Family coaches, lumbering and jolting over the uneven roads (steel springs were not applied to carriages before the middle of the eighteenth century), made twenty miles a day. They set out provisioned and armed as if for a siege. When Sir Francis Headpiece travelled to London, he carried with him in his coach "the family basket-hilt-sword, the Turkish scimitar, the old blunderbuss, a good bag of bullets, and a great horn of powder." Such precautions were not always effective, though, against a well-mounted highwayman; and the slow pace at which vehicles travelled made them easy targets. It was obvious that the parishes

couldn't be expected to improve the roads for the increasing traffic without some help. During the first ten years of the reign of Charles II it looked as if this would be provided by the development of highway rates, which had been introduced in 1656; but instead a system of road usage charging was devised, which prolonged the life of the old system by a century and a half.

Road charges for upkeep

The idea was that a road would have a series of gates along its length and tolls would be charged to pass the gates. Local companies, so called turnpike trusts, would be responsible for the road upkeep. They would be empowered by Parliament to raise loans for road repairs, build tollhouses, erect gates and milestones, and each trust would often consist of a local lawyer (as clerk), a treasurer and a surveyor, together with many of the landowners through whose land the road passed. Each trust was to have a life of 21 years, after which it would have to renew its permission to manage the road. A trust was seen as an effective way of rebuilding Britain's busiest roads.

In 1663 the first turnpike trust act was passed by Parliament, enabling the creation of a turnpike trust for part of the Great North Road. The inhabitants of the adjoining parishes were too poor to maintain the highway; and though the creation of the trust didn't relieve them from their liability, the tolls raised a fund towards the maintenance of the road. Soon other areas in the country wanted similar solutions.

The process of creating turnpike trusts was, however, very slow, as each one needed an Act of

Parliament and the bureaucracy was very elaborate. Still, the years 1706 to 1790 saw the creation of hundreds of trusts across England. In many places the roads created or developed by trusts came to form the basis of Britain's 'A' road system. It is important to remember, however, that only the busiest and most important roads were ever "turnpiked". 80% of Britain's roads were left untouched. The creation of turnpike trusts was unpopular, however. Riots broke out and tollgates were



Notting Hill's last tollhouse, removed in 1864 "amid much rejoicing". Frequently pulled down and burned. Eventually (in 1728) a law had to be passed which mandated the destruction of tollgates a felony.

Mud roads along Hyde Park

The roads in and out of London were just as bad as in the rest of the country. The two big roads from the west into London on either side of Hyde Park were often almost impassable with mud; and streams crossed the surface. Not until 1675 did the North Highway (Bayswater Road) get a bridge across the Westbourne, the largest of the streams (also known as Bays Water, and today only visible as the Serpentine in Hyde Park), so before then horses and carriages had to wade across - and after heavy rainfall this was often impossible.

In October 1736, Queen Caroline was advised to move temporarily from Kensington Palace to St James's, as Kensington Road was so "infamously bad" that it separated her from her official engagements by "an impassable gulf of mud". The roads were sometimes so full of water that travellers risked drowning. In 1788, a newspaper reported that, "Mr Salmon of Bond Street, in attempting to cross the hollow near Kensington Gravel Pits (Notting Hill) in a single horse chaise on his way to Acton, narrowly escaped drowning, so large a body of water being collected as to bear up the horse and carriage, and it was with extreme difficulty that he was rescued from pending danger".

Night time robberies

But road maintenance wasn't the only problem in our area. A report to Parliament about the North Highway stretch between Tyburn (Marble Arch) and Kensington Gravel Pits stated that it was, "frequently infested in the night-time with Robbers and other wicked and evil-disposed Persons, and Robberies, Outrages, and Violences are committed thereon, which might in a great Measure be prevented if the said Highway was properly lighted and watched." And further west it was even worse; Shepherds Bush was notorious for its highwaymen.

The Kensington Turnpike Trust was formed in 1726 to maintain the road from Hyde Park Corner to Addison Bridge (by Olympia). The tollgates were situated at junctions almost impossible to avoid. The main Kensington tollgate, mentioned both in Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* and Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, was situated by the cavalry barracks opposite

the junction of Kensington Road and Gloucester Road (the upper part of Gloucester Road wasn't renamed Palace Gate until much later). The trust had another tollgate at the southern end of Church Lane (as Church Street was then known), as well as one by Holland House (today's Holland Park). The turnpike trust responsible for the maintenance of the North Highway or Uxbridge Road, as it was also known, was set up in 1769, and one of their first tollgates was built in Notting Hill, at the junction with the road to Portobello Farm (now Pembridge Road), and it is from this tollgate Notting Hill Gate gets its name.

Pay dodgers impounded

The trustees of the Uxbridge Turnpike Trust met four times a year at the George Inn in Acton. They built tollgates and tollhouses, they had lamps erected along dark parts of the road, and they hired "fit and able-bodied" watchmen in an attempt to make the road safer from robbers. Fines and imprisonment were to be inflicted if lamps were broken, and if anyone refused to pay the toll, the toll-keeper could seize his beasts or goods and sell them, giving the owner the balance of the profits, after "reasonable" charges had been deducted.

Toll fees were first based on size of carriage or number of animals in a herd, but later also on weight. There was no toll on election days, and you were exempted from the toll when going to and from church on Sundays.

One ticket per trust area

A ticket was provided on payment of the toll, and allowed you free passage for the day through all other tollgates belonging to the same trust. However, if your journey took you through different trust areas, you had to pay the toll in each. By the mid 1850's the toll for a cart was fourpence halfpenny, and a gentleman writing to the Kensington Gazette complained bitterly over having to pay this amount twice when travelling from Queens Road in Bayswater to Gloucester Place in Kensington.

The tollgates in Kensington were



The end of the Hyde Park Corner tollgate came in the form of an auction.

just as unpopular as elsewhere in the country. The traders complained that they discouraged potential customers, and the customers complained that the toll led to higher prices on all goods.

Moved the main entrance

Henry Fox (the Whig Paymaster General who lived in Holland House from 1726 until his death in 1774, and who became the first Baron Holland, taking his title from the house) went so far as to move the Holland House entrance to the east of that tollgate, to avoid having to stop and pay just outside his home each time he went to London. He still had to do it a bit further down the road, though, at the main tollgate.

But it wasn't just inconvenience and costs that made the tollgates unpopular. The turnpike trusts were notorious for their crooked dealings, and they often went bankrupt, due to mismanagement and high interest on the loans they had taken out. So when many of the London tollgates eventually were abolished in 1864, there was general rejoicing.

Rail killed off the toll roads

Two independent developments ended the system of toll roads. One was the arrival of the railways, which robbed the turnpike trusts of much of their revenue, especially the heavy goods traffic. Another was the introduction of the Highway Act in 1835, which established that road upkeep should be paid through special local rates, just like the poor rate, instead of a levy on the users.

As it was evident that many parishes couldn't afford this, the parishes were first grouped into Highway Districts, which meant that the costs could be spread more evenly. It was, however, soon apparent that further relief to local ratepayers was required, which led to the Highways and Locomotives Acts Amendment Act of 1878 and the Local Government Act of 1888. These two laws turned the former turnpike roads into main roads, paid for by the county authority instead of the local parishes.

So, the last time toll roads were introduced it took 150 years to get rid of them. How long will Ken Livingstone's scheme last...?