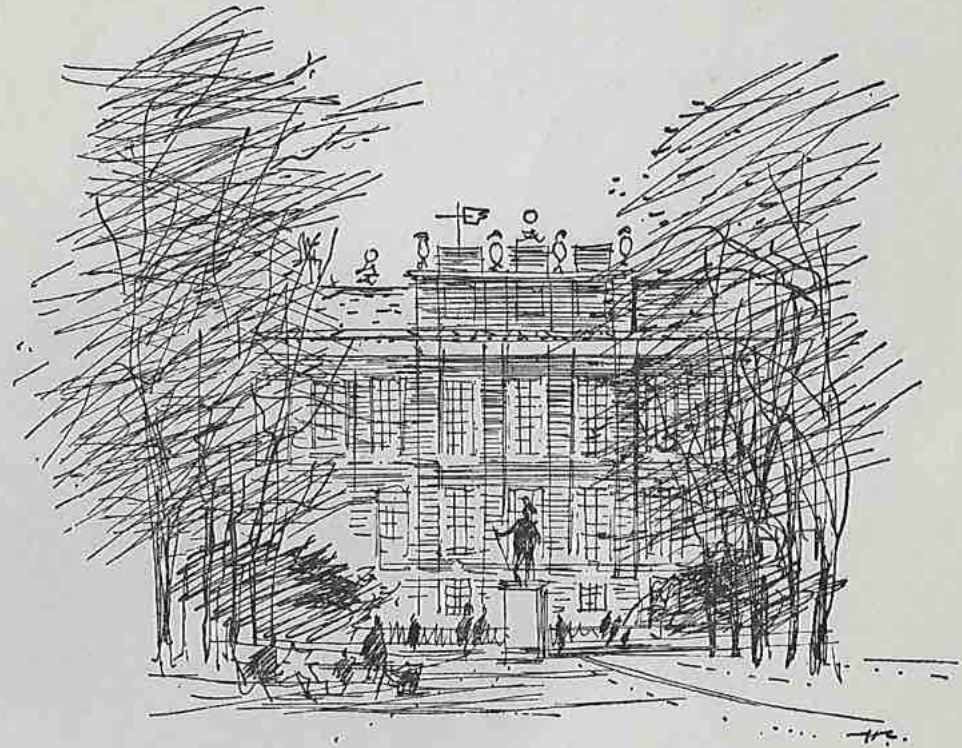


THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY

18, KENSINGTON SQUARE,

LONDON, W.8



MARCH, 1954

REPORT No. 1

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MANY London Boroughs have their Antiquarian Societies, and it is perhaps strange that Kensington, so rich in the historic and picturesque, should have lacked a society embracing the whole of Kensington until the present Society was founded last year. Membership now stands at 438.

The objects of the Kensington Society are to preserve and improve the amenities of Kensington by stimulating interest in its history and records, by protecting its buildings of beauty and historic interest, by preserving its open spaces from disfigurement and encroachment, and by encouraging good architecture in its future development.

The inaugural meeting was held on Tuesday, 13th October, 1953, in the Town Hall. Dr. Stephen Pasmore, the Chairman of the Executive Committee, gave a lecture entitled "The History of Kensington." Lord Gorell, C.B.A., M.C., President of the Society, was in the Chair. About 600 people attended this lecture.

OTHER EVENTS

THURSDAY, 22ND OCTOBER: Miss Irene Scharrer, a member of the Council of the Kensington Society, gave a piano recital to a very appreciative audience at Leighton House. Dr. Pasmore was in the Chair.

THURSDAY, 29TH OCTOBER: Mr. C. H. Gibbs-Smith, a member of the Executive Committee, gave an amusing lantern-lecture on "The Great Exhibition of 1851." This was held at Leighton House. Sir Harold Kenyon, M.B.E., J.P., Vice-President of the Society, was in the Chair.

THURSDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER: Sir Hugh Casson, Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee, gave a lecture on "New Buildings in Old Places." This lecture was also given in Leighton House. The Rt. Hon. the Viscount Esher was in the Chair.

MONDAY, 9TH NOVEMBER: Mr. Ashley Dukes, member of the Council, gave a lecture entitled "The Theatre of Old Kensington." Dr. Orlo Williams, C.B., M.C., D.C.L., also a member of the Council, was in the Chair. This lecture was held at the Mercury Theatre by kind permission of Mr. Ashley Dukes.

All these lectures were well attended, but do not represent the whole of the activities of the Society. Other matters which have drawn the attention of the Society have been Earls Terrace, Sir John Soane Monument, Elm Trees in the Broad Walk, Panelling at No. 1 Palace Green, and lastly, and by far the most important, Holland House.

EARLS TERRACE

The Kensington Society has co-operated with the Edwardes Square Garden Committee in effecting alterations in the plans for the new flats being built to fill the gap in the Terrace caused by bomb damage. As a result the front and back elevations have been brought into harmony with the rest of the Terrace.

MONUMENT BY SIR JOHN SOANE

This unique monument, designed by Sir John Soane, was erected to the memory of Miss Elizabeth Johnstone, "the amiable and beloved eldest daughter of the late Mr. Robert Johnstone of Brompton, Gentleman," in the churchyard of Mary Abbots in 1784. There are only one or two of Sir John Soane's monuments still in existence, and this particular work of the sarcophagus type is of especial artistic value.

Mr. H. Clifford Smith reported the condition of this monument to the Society in September. Time and exposure had worn away the base, the sides had fallen apart, and the monument was in such a bad state of repair that it was liable to collapse at any time. The matter was discussed by the Committee and it was decided that the Society should be responsible for first-aid repair work. This was completed on 8th October, 1953.

BROAD WALK ELM TREES

The felling of the great elm trees in the Broad Walk and the bareness of this once gracious avenue caused many a pang for lovers of London's beauty. The Society was very concerned about the felling of these trees and immediately approached the Chief Officer of Parks, Ministry of Works, and Mr. Lane of the Tree Preservation Order. In each case the Society was told that the trees were coming down after much thought and advice by tree experts, that most of the trees were diseased and liable to fall without warning.

The Society felt that it was unable to contest this statement.

A letter has recently been sent to the Ministry of Works asking for a reprieve for the remaining HEALTHY elm trees, and at the same time suggesting that the Broad Walk should be replanted with partially grown trees. The Society understands that trees up to 30 ft. in height were planted with success on the South Bank site for the Festival of Britain.

The trees to replace the elms were stated by Sir David Eccles, Minister of Works, in a written reply to a Parliamentary Question, to be "an inner line of scarlet oak (*Quercus coccinea*), and an outer line of common beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), with the light shaded

variety of copper beech (*Fagus sylvatica cuprea*) at the ends of the rows and wherever there are breaks in the lines."

The Society would like to take this opportunity of making known its interest in the preservation of trees in Kensington.

No. 1, PALACE GREEN

This house was designed by Phillip Webb and built for the Earl of Carlisle in 1863. The interior contains a certain amount of William Morris and Burne-Jones decoration. A member of the Society feared the removal and possible destruction of some of the panelling and tiles.

Representatives of the Society were shown over the house, and they were able to ascertain from Mr. Baker of Messrs. Clutton (agent for the Commissioners of Crown Lands) that nothing would be removed without a previous consultation with the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Kensington Society.

HOLLAND HOUSE

Holland House was built in 1607 by Sir Walter Cope and then called Cope Castle. The property later came into the possession of Sir Henry Rich (Lord Kensington, in 1624 created Earl of Holland). The house was then called Holland House. In Cromwell's time the Commonwealth Generals Fairfax and Lambert lived here. At the Restoration it reverted to the rightful owners. Joseph Addison, who in 1716 married the widow of the 6th Earl of Holland and Warwick, lived for a brief time at the house. Later the estate came into the possession of the Edwardes family, who, after a brief period, sold it to Henry Fox, created Baron Holland in 1763. Henry Fox's elder brother was created Earl of Ilchester.

The house was designed by John Thorpe, and later additions made by Inigo Jones. In the early mid-nineteenth century Holland House and its circle loom largely in English social life. Frequent visitors were Prince Metternich, Talleyrand, Humboldt, Ugo, Foscolo, Canova, Gladstone, Brougham, Henry Greville, Byron, Samuel Rogers, Sidney Smith, Macaulay, Panizzi, Watts, and others too numerous to mention.

In October, 1940, the house was bombed severely and the central block was virtually gutted, the west wing being badly burnt, while the east wing was largely untouched.

In the hope of saving the east wing of this famous and remarkable mansion with so brilliant a history, the Kensington Society sent a deputation to the London County Council. **It was urged that demolition should be delayed in the hope that a**

use might be found for the east wing. After hearing the views of the Society on architectural, historical and financial aspects, Mr. Fisk and Mr. Hayward said the Council had already considered the possibilities.

Following the letter in the *Times* denoting the concern of the Society for the future of Holland House, Messrs. John Edgington & Co., Ltd., Manufacturers and Contractors, approached the Society with a suggestion for the use of the east wing. This firm, established in 1604, at their own expense, are prepared to take over the east wing from the L.C.C. for use as a Reception Centre, and in the words of Mr. Flin, a Director of the Company, "recapture some of the glory of the 19th century, redecorating and furnishing it in that style."

Mr. Flin visited the Holland House Exhibition arranged at Leighton House by the Public Library. He then inspected Holland House with two members of the Society. He was impressed by the possibilities Holland House presented. Mr. Flin informed the Society that he would get in touch with the L.C.C. and discuss his proposals with them. The Society understands that he is now negotiating with the L.C.C., and we wish him every success.

We are happy to record, on the winding up of the Campden Hill Preservation Society, that we have not only gained the support of Mr. W. G. Corfield on the Executive Committee, but the remaining funds have been transferred to the funds of the Kensington Society.

Just as we are going to print we have received a communication from Major O'Donovan, Treasurer of the Campden Hill Residents Fund. Major O'Donovan says in the winding up of the Society it was agreed that the remaining funds should be transferred to the Kensington Society with good wishes.

We are very grateful for the support from these two Societies and we hope the Kensington Society will follow their good examples and serve a real purpose in the Royal Borough.

SUMMARY OF LECTURES given during the autumn, 1953

1. DR. STEPHEN PASMORE: *The History of Kensington.*

Dr. Pasmore surveyed the history of Kensington from the days of the Celts to the present day. He mentioned the Saxon origin of the word "Kensington" from the "tun" or hamlet of the family of Kensing, and the association of St. Mary Abbots Church with the Abbot or Abingdon. He referred to the expansion of Kensington from 1600 onwards when Sir Walter Cope built Holland House, Sir Baptist Hicks Campden House, and Sir George Coppin the house that was later purchased by William III and made into Kensington Palace in 1689.

Many incidents of this period were mentioned, including Samuel Pepys' wonderful day in 1659. Then followed the history of Kensington Palace and Kensington Square, with emphasis on the fact that they were the two most important historic sites left apart from Holland House and Aubrey House. After more stories of Dean Swift, Sir Isaac Newton, Lady Mary Coke, and other Kensington residents, there followed the history of Edwardes Square and a description of the famous salon of Lord and Lady Holland at Holland House in the 19th century.

Finally, after describing further incidents from Talleyrand's exclamations at Faraday's experiment in electro-magnetism at a soiree at Kensington Palace to Mrs. Patrick Campbell's reaction on hearing Bernard Shaw read one of his plays to her in Kensington Square, Dr. Pasmore gave a vivid eye-witness account of the air-raid in 1944 when St. Mary Abbots Church caught fire.

Dr. Pasmore ended by saying that Kensington had a past, and that one could not feel an affection for the Borough or help to plan its future with wisdom, unless one had a sense of its history, a knowledge of its beautiful gardens and buildings, and an awareness of the debt one owed to those who had gone before.

2. RECITAL BY MISS IRENE SCHARRER.

Miss Irene Scharrer delighted her audience with her piano recital on 22nd October at Leighton House, where the intimate atmosphere and perfect acoustics added to the pleasure of the evening.

Miss Scharrer's recital included two of Bach's Choral Preludes, Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata," the Chopin Ballade in F. Minor, and a Schubert Impromptu. The programme ended with some charming pieces by Scarlatti, which proved a pleasant contrast to the other works. In spite of her long programme, Miss Scharrer generously gave several encores which were much appreciated.

3. C. H. GIBBS-SMITH: *The Great Exhibition of 1851.*

In his lecture, Mr. Gibbs-Smith dealt with the Great Exhibition of 1851 as if the audience were actually paying it a visit. An imaginary journey was taken to Hyde Park, the Crystal Palace was seen for the first time in the distance, and then the visitor was taken inside and given a tour through the building. As an interlude the lecturer showed some of the memorable scenes connected with the opening, and briefly outlined the beginning of the great undertaking, and the parts played by such men as the Prince Consort, Paxton and Henry Cole.

The whole history of the Great Exhibition was a brilliant success story. The vast building was completed in record time (between August, 1850, and January, 1851) and was 1,848 ft. long. It lay in the open space between the present bowling green and the barracks—not on the north side of the Serpentine. Over 13,900 exhibitors showed their products and a total of 6,039,195 visitors saw the exhibition in 141 days.

When all was over, the Commission—which still exists to administer a large income for educational purposes—could boast of a clear profit of £186,437, an achievement never exceeded or even equalled by any exhibition before or since.

4. SIR HUGH CASSON: *New Buildings in Old Places.*

Sir Hugh Casson, in considering the problems of new building in old towns, stressed that a new building is not always something to be dreaded, nor is an old town always the worse for receiving it. There are of course special difficulties in building in towns of historical or architectural interest, but new building anywhere demands the highest degree of imagination and skill on the part of those concerned.

The lecturer pointed out that the first essential in building in an old town is to study carefully the architecture of the street in which it is to go and to make quite sure that a new building at all is really needed. Many buildings which look rickety or dilapidated, through lack of maintenance and repair, can be reconditioned and often provide more ample space, a better standard of construction and sounder materials than equivalent money will buy in present conditions.

An alternative to preserving complete buildings—which is sometimes uneconomic—is to preserve the facades, which can often be kept with only minor inconvenience to planning new accommodation behind them. But whether in a new or a converted building, standardisation of the facade above fascia level should at all costs be avoided.

Sir Hugh said the important thing is to respect the scale, texture and rhythm of the street, to watch cornice lines and roof silhouettes. Preserve what is healthy, but don't try to prop up a building that has passed its proper life, unless there is some very special reason for doing so. Don't try to cling to some elderly fragment merely because of its age, if it is the last survivor in a street that has changed.

Old buildings are not always, merely because of their age, deserving of protection, nor does change inevitably mean progress. On the other hand, old and otherwise habitable buildings are sometimes condemned merely because their ceilings are a few inches below the statutory height, or new building designs rejected because the pitch of the roof is thought to be unorthodox.

To judge each case on its merits is obviously difficult, slow, unfair and demands a great faith in the visual judgment of the authority concerned. The policy of "picturesque planning" is seldom practicable, but its two principles—first to observe with the painter's eye, and second to "improve" the scene (in the best meaning of the word) remain the soundest advice for all of us.

5. ASHLEY DUKES: *Theatres of Old Kensington.*

In his lecture to the Society in November, 1953, Mr. Ashley Dukes described the beginnings of professional theatre in Kensington, at Holland House under the Commonwealth; the successive ventures of the Royal Kensington and Royal Kent theatres in what is now Old Court Place, between 1831 and 1846; the balloon ascents and occasional disturbances that marked the performances; the entertainments at the Assembly Rooms later in the nineteenth century, where the Food Office has taken the place of the Royal Palace Hotel; the brief history of the Hippodrome in North Kensington between the early 1830's and 1841 when it was closed; Batty's Hippodrome, south of the Park, which was established as a side-show to the Great Exhibition of 1851; the successive building of the Century Theatre in Westbourne Grove and the Coronet at Notting Hill Gate; the uses of the Mercury Theatre for Ballet and plays by poets in the 1930's and onwards; and the return of independent theatrical production to Kensington through the very numerous theatre clubs that have flourished in Western London in recent years.

FUTURE EVENTS

APSLEY HOUSE, HYDE PARK CORNER.

Mr. C. H. Gibbs-Smith, Keeper in Charge of the Wellington Museum, has kindly consented to conduct members round the house on Friday, May 21st, at 2.30 p.m. Admission 1/-.

HATFIELD HOUSE, HERTS.

Arrangements are being made for a small party to visit Hatfield House on June 15th. The coach will leave Kensington Square at 11.30 a.m. The cost (with lunch, gratuities, etc.) will be 16/-.

AUBREY HOUSE, AUBREY WALK, W. 8.

The House and garden will be open on July 3rd from 3.0 p.m. to 7.0 p.m., by kind permission of the Misses Alexander.

On this occasion the Society will make an entrance charge of 2/6 per head for members and their friends, the proceeds of which will be paid into the Society's funds. Tea available.

ABINGDON ABBEY, OXON.

To visit what remains of the former "mother church" of St. Mary Abbots, Kensington. Abingdon has many other treasures, architectural and otherwise, of great interest to visitors.

The visit is being arranged to take place on August 24th. The coach will leave Kensington Square at 11.0 a.m. The cost (including lunch, gratuities, etc.) will be £1 : 1 : 0.

GARDEN PARTY, LEIGHTON HOUSE, 12, HOLLAND PARK ROAD, W. 14.

A Garden Party will be given at Leighton House on September 4th, from 3.30 to 6.0 p.m.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

The Annual General Meeting will be held on October 5th, at the Town Hall, Kensington High Street, W. 8, at 6.30 p.m.

Would members wishing to take advantage of the visits to Hatfield House and Abingdon Abbey, please notify the Hon. Secretary with remittance by June 1st for Hatfield House and August 1st for Abingdon Abbey.