

# LOOK BACK IN PEMBRIDGE

HAVING BEING SPARED by bombs and V.I.s, Chenstow Villas presented a less devastated appearance than many of the neighbouring streets, though the bombs and so-called block-busters that had fallen in Chepstow Crescent, Denbigh Terrace and Westbourne Grove had thoroughly shaken the houses, broken many of the windows and cracked the stucco details of the facades.

John Hayward, the art historian and secretary of the Pembridge Association, has lived in the Pembridge area since 1945. He looks back to what life was like when he first moved here and tells how things have improved and what has got worse.

The values of the houses were correspondingly reduced and those who have recently purchased a freehold in the street will be impressed by the thought that for a few thousand pounds one could acquire the freehold with the right to whatever compensation a War Damage claim would bring.

This covered reglazing and any structural work but not, of course, redecoration. Unfortunately, as the houses were gradually repaired, only too often was the stucco ornamentation cut back to the brick in the interest of economy — with most damaging effects upon the uniformity and

elegance of the streets.

Gardens had become wildernesses of weeds, except in those few cases where the patriotic owners had taken up vegetable growing, but the spaces in front of the houses were at any rate inviolate, the sacrifice to off-street parking not yet perpetrated.

There were many advantages of a negative character: little traffic, no parked cars on the kerb and no collisions at the corner of Chepstow Crescent and Chepstow Villas. On the positive side the east end of Ledbury Road was like a village street, with an unbroken row of shops that provided everything needed to feed and supply a family. Over the years they have all given way to antique shops, until the only useful service available to local residents is that of the undertaker.

When I first moved in, I was informed by a source whose credibility I had no reason to doubt that the north end of Chepstow Villas offered another service in the form of a house of ill-fame, but unfortunately I neglected to obtain confirmation of this statement.

There was a distinct class difference between Ledbury Road and Chepstow Villas and it was not unusual to hear police cars speeding westwards along it to deal with some incident, or to read in the local paper of its residents being arraigned for petty crime.

The population was vastly smaller; many of the residents had not moved back from their war-time retreat or did not wish to do so. "For Sale" boards proliferated.

## BLACK MARKET

Those who came fresh to the neighbourhood had the disadvantage that, being unknown in the shops, they could not readily gain admission to the Black Market trade that flourished alongside the system of rationing. The desirable goods were always under the counter and available only to old customers.

In particularly short supply was coal, which formed the main source of heating in every house; the rattle of Derby nuts down the coal-holes in the front gardens was the most welcome sound, to be envied by all the neighbours. In times of less stringency the street cries of the itinerant

coal vendors with their horse and cart were familiar sounds.

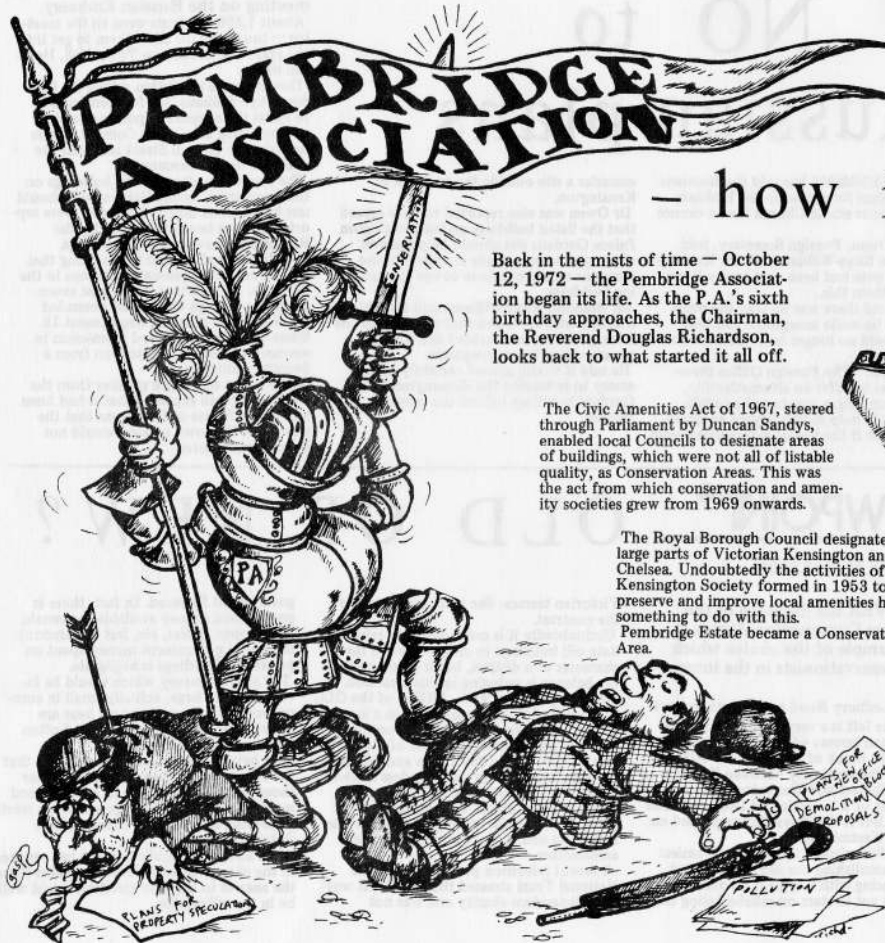
While coloured faces were confined to the American Occupation Forces, foreign voices were not unusual, for the happy age of the au pair girl came soon after the war and myriads of French, German, Austrian and even mirabile dictu those aristocrats of the 1970s. Swiss girls came to tend the babies, break the china and tempt the husbands. Those who employed them were well-advised to know the telephone number of the local abortion clinic.

London still suffered from that major inconvenience which every foreigner still expects to encounter as soon as he crosses the Channel or arrives at Heathrow — the pea-soup fog. I certainly recall following the kerb of the pavement to avoid straying out into the road or getting a friend to walk in front of the car when trying to re-gain my house when driving.

With the fog went dirt, greasy dirt inside the house as well as outside.

The 1970s have rescued us from the dirt and from the extreme cold in the houses, from the labour of carrying loads of coal up four or six flights of stairs.

But the changes are not all to the good — who needed a burglar-alarm in 1945?



## — how it all began

Back in the mists of time — October 12, 1972 — the Pembridge Association began its life. As the P.A.'s sixth birthday approaches, the Chairman, the Reverend Douglas Richardson, looks back to what started it all off.

The Civic Amenities Act of 1967, steered through Parliament by Duncan Sandys, enabled local Councils to designate areas of buildings, which were not all of listable quality, as Conservation Areas. This was the act from which conservation and amenity societies grew from 1969 onwards.

The Royal Borough Council designated large parts of Victorian Kensington and Chelsea. Undoubtedly the activities of the Kensington Society formed in 1953 to preserve and improve local amenities had something to do with this. Pembridge Estate became a Conservation Area.



It was a matter of time before an association was formed to hold a watching brief on the council's use of its powers under the 1967 Civic Amenities Act and the 1971 Town and Country Planning Act. And so it appeared to a number of local residents. One of these was architect Peter Pilkington whose road had, for some reason, been omitted from the Conservation Area.

Meanwhile, high above the Pembridge Estate, the clock of St Peter's Church, Kensington Park Road, erected to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and serving the area faithfully ever since, was in trouble.

The same firm as kept Big Ben up to scratch also wound St Peter's clock weekly. But in this sophisticated age no-one wanted to wind clocks any more and the firm cancelled its contract. Mind you, I learn from one who took on the winding for a while, it was really a job for a horse.

The church authorities were embarrassed by the representations of local people who depended upon the one remaining ticker north of Notting Hill Gate. They heard of a person living on the outskirts of the parish who had no clocks in his home but instead kept a pair of binoculars on the window sill of his top bedroom and when he wanted to know the time would climb upstairs to focus his glasses on St Peter's tower!

Something had to be done to restore the district's time-keeper.

I was told that I was welcome to get the winding mechanism electrified so long as I could raise the necessary £520. The GLC (Historic Buildings Dept.) supplied £225, the Royal Borough £100, Miss Joan Hassall, the artist, raised £136 and then people living in striking distance were approached for the balance. Amongst these contributors was Peter Pilkington and in February 1972 he and I met.

The Pembridge Estate it was discovered was wholly within the parish of St Peter's. The idea of doing something to preserve what was worth preserving was mooted. That summer the clock got its electrified winding mechanism (and hasn't been right since) and the area got a promise of a conservation association.

By July Peter had interested a near neighbour in Denbigh Terrace, Simon Linton, who would be secretary of the new association. The inaugural meeting was in St Peter's Hall on Thursday, October 12, 1972, under my chairmanship. Peter Pilkington was elected treasurer and Alan Greengross (now of the GLC) the first chairman.

Amongst the speakers was Alderman Peter Methuen, then chairman of the Town Planning Committee and last year's Mayor. One hundred and twenty five residents attended that inaugural meeting. The time had come — Pembridge Association was in being.

## PIONEER BILL

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The original Bill sought to extend the Stop Notice power to uses. However, this clause was withdrawn when the same change was introduced generally throughout the country by a Private Members' Bill with Government support.

Now for the failures.

The clauses in the original Bill were wide-ranging. There were provisions to require dogs to be kept on leads; to give licensing Justices power to refuse liquor licences on the grounds of noise nuisance or parking congestion; to give parking attendants the same power as traffic wardens to issue fixed penalty notices and to provide for parking penalties to be paid to the Council instead of the Court.

A clause of particular interest to this area was one designed to control the replacement of food and other neighbourhood shops by antique dealers and boutiques. These changes are at present outside control because they are all treated as "shop" uses. The Bill sought to make such changes subject to planning permission.

Other proposed changes in the planning law were to impose a requirement for planning permission for demolition of buildings; and to remove the anomalous provisions whereby a person who is refused permission to extend a building by 10% is entitled to compensation.

All these provisions were disallowed. Generally the reasons for the Borough's concern were recognised but it was felt that the proposed changes had implications which would not satisfactorily be dealt with in a Private Bill.

However, the promotion of the Bill drew attention to many problems which are of more than purely local interest, and it is to be hoped that Government action will follow.