Wimbledon Theatre celebrates its centenary this year. To mark the event, the Society’s Museum is preparing a display of memorabilia.

J B Mulholland, the first theatre owner (pictured right), opened the doors on Boxing Day, Saturday 26 December 1910 with a production of the pantomime ‘Jack and Jill or The Hill, the Well, and the Crown’. The scene above shows how the street looked then.

A cinema, the King’s Palace Theatre, had opened next door just two months earlier. However for all the difficulties that followed, neither the silver screen nor decades later - television would stop the special appeal of live musical entertainment, ballet, opera, drama and above all pantomime for audiences in Wimbledon.

The theatre was built in a Georgian renaissance style on the former site of a large house. It had 3000 seats (since reduced to 1670) and was dominated externally by its domed tower, topped by a balcony with columns, a crystal ball and the figure of an angel 100 feet up. The crystal ball was illuminated, its violet rays visible by night for ten miles around. A century later, the theatre and its angel are still town treasures. See Page 3.
Chairman’s Report

Since the last Newsletter we have submitted further responses to the Civic Society Initiative on principles, structure and governance. We had no concerns on the last of these but we did about the ambitions and the proposed budget. From exchanges on the website (http://www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk/) and comments from elsewhere, it is clear that the proposed charge of between £1 and £3 per member of each society would automatically exclude many small societies on financial grounds alone.

There has also been much debate on the real value the Civic Trust provided to societies in its final years and what the benefits of belonging to a new organisation would be. A number of regional bodies, including the London Forum (which we subscribe to) are already effective. We will certainly continue to support the London Forum but remain to be convinced of the need to pay a subscription at even the lower level £1 per head to a new national body.

During the last few months the Executive Committee has been reviewing the activities of the Society with a view to formulating a strategy for the future. We have now completed the review process and will be consolidating our ideas and setting out key objectives. These we will share with you in due course.

We are concerned that the Society keeps pace with what is relevant in today’s world and does not get stuck in the past. We have every right to be proud of our past achievements but while the principles on which the Society was established in 1903 are still valid today, the world has rather changed! I would welcome your view as a member, whether you prefer to put pen to paper or digit to keyboard. Please do write in.

We have also been discussing the Society’s logo. This was changed seven years ago but it was recently discovered that the design presented to the Society at the time was not exclusive. Since then it has been identified in various places, including I understand, a restaurant in Torquay!

Last year we decided to change it and to carry out the process first of selecting preferred designers, and then of choosing a new design especially created for the Society. I am glad to say this process has now been completed and a new logo has been selected. A certain amount of finishing work remains to be done but we hope to launch the new logo at this year’s AGM on 15 May.

Iain Simpson
Looking ahead with pride and confidence

Today’s New Wimbledon Theatre, run by the Ambassador Group since 2004, has quite a heritage to live up to. From 1910, J.B. Mulholland ran the theatre to packed houses for 15 years as one of the country’s top venues for touring productions. His family later retained control as Wimbledon hosted repertory, opera, ballet and pantomime year after year in direct competition with the West End and stars the calibre of Gracie Fields, Noel Coward, Sybil Thorndike and Ivor Novello took the stage.

It stayed open during both world wars, narrowly escaping bombs the second time round and presenting fund-raising gala shows in aid of refugees with stars like Flanagan and Allen keeping up spirits. The angel, representing the Goddess of Gaiety, Laetitia, proved to be a directional landmark for enemy bombers and was removed but a copy was restored 50 years later in 1991 after public appeal. Marlene Dietrich made her last public performance at the theatre in 1973.

Managements came and went. The Wimbledon Civic Theatre Trust, which ran the place for Merton Council before 2004, has been reborn as a charity, promoting education and outreach work in the community. It works extensively with young people of senior school age, offering opportunities to visit the theatre and using the building and theatre-based skills as a resource via special projects to aid learning and development.

The Ambassador Group has transformed the theatre into a receiving house for prestige productions which generally run for a week or longer. Wimbledon is the second London base for Matthew Bourne’s hugely successful ballet company and the management plans a similar relationship with Glyndebourne Touring Opera. Ambassador’s position as Britain's biggest theatre group means it can attract major touring productions. The size of the house also tempts producers who receive the lion’s share of ticket sale profits while the theatre thrives from bar and refreshment proceeds plus ticket percentages.

It strives to offer a varied, exciting and inclusive programme of productions. Its pantomimes appeal to London-wide audiences, most recently with stars such as Pamela Anderson and Paul O’Grady. Block-busting family musicals include ‘Chitty Chitty Bang Bang’ this month (March). It will also host the excellent amateur group, Wimbledon Light Opera, in June with ‘My Fair Lady’.

High spots of the centenary celebration:
- Open Day, Wednesday, 14 April
- Centenary Schools Showcase, 24-25 June
- Gala Variety Show, 26 September
- Pantomime, including 100th birthday, 26th December itself.

Stalls after the most recent refurbishment (above left) and a scene from ‘West Side Story’ (above right), the most successful show in the past six years, running for three weeks and breaking box office records.
Activities Programme 2010-11

The programme includes a good selection of free lectures and local walks, two full-day excursions by coach and some shorter local outings. All dates and times can be found on your blue membership card and details of all excursions are given here. The walks and lectures are listed on the card and a flyer describing the walks is enclosed with this mailing. Another with details of the autumn and winter lectures will be enclosed with the September mailing.

Thursday, 22 April: Visit to Vintners’ Hall
Meet outside the hall in Upper Thames St at 10.50am for 11am start. Cost is £12 per person (donations to charity), excluding transport. Form enclosed.

The Vintners’ Company with its first Charter in 1363 is one of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of the City of London.

With its origins steeped in the City’s history and the import, regulation and sale of wine, the Company continues to maintain strong links with the UK Wine Trade. Vintners’ Hall is known as the Trade's spiritual home.

The livery company has had a hall on this site since 1446 but the original building burned down in the Great Fire of London. The replacement (and present) building was opened in 1671, although the current facade and entrance date from 1910 due to road widening. The visit will finish about 12.30pm. For those interested, our guide will then take us across the road for a 15-minute visit to the 17th century St James Garlickhythe Church. This is known as ‘Wren’s Lantern’ because he designed it to be full of light.

Wednesday, 19 May: Excursion to the Geffrye Museum, Shoreditch (picture bottom, left)
Meet at the Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Road, Shoreditch at 10.30am. Cost, excl transport, £6. Application form enclosed.

The Geffrye is one of London's best-loved museums. It shows the changing style of the English domestic interior in a series of period rooms from 1600 to the present day. At the time of our visit, there will be a special exhibition, ‘A Garden within Doors: Plants and Flowers in the Home.’

There are also a herb garden and garden rooms showing the history of town gardens. We will have a 20-minute introductory talk on arrival. After this, we can visit the museum and we have arranged almshouse visits at 11am, 12 midday and 2pm. Maximum number is 36.

Thursday, 17 June: Coach excursion to Hughenden Manor and Chenies Manor (pictured above)
Meet at the corner of Southside Common and The Grange at 8.45 for a 9am departure. Cost £27 for NT members and £33.90 for non-NT members. This includes a sandwich lunch.

Chenies is an enchanting Tudor manor house set in a charming estate village. Pevsner described it as ‘beautifully mellow under the trees by the church and archaeologically a fascinating puzzle’.

On arrival we will be served coffee and biscuits before our guided tour of the house. We will then have some time to explore the gardens. Created by
the current owners, Alistair and Elizabeth MacLeod Matthews, these are divided into a series of compartments, with various colour themes and structural forms, combining imaginative plantings and beautiful plant associations.

After a sandwich lunch, we will travel the short distance to Hughenden Manor (shown below) which offers a vivid insight into the personality and private life of Benjamin Disraeli who lived there 1848-81. The formal gardens have been recreated using the original designs of Mary Anne Disraeli. On arrival, we will be given a 20-minute introductory talk and will then be free to explore the house and gardens. Back in Wimbledon by 7pm.

Thursday, 15 July: Coach excursion to Restoration House, Rochester (pictured below) and boat trip from Chatham Dockyards
Meet at the corner of Southside Common and The Grange at 8.45 for a 9am departure. Cost £32.

‘There is no finer pre-Civil War town house in England than this,’ writes Simon Jenkins. Restoration House is a unique survival of a city mansion. Situated in the heart of historic Rochester, it takes its name from the stay of King Charles II on the eve of the Restoration. It is also Satis House, the home of Miss Havisham in Dickens’ novel ‘Great Expectations’.

We will be divided into two groups for the tour, lasting about 90 minutes. We will then have some time to explore Dickens’ Rochester, the Cathedral and buy some lunch. The coach will then take us to Chatham Dockyards where we will take a 90-minute cruise on the historic paddle steamer Kingswear Castle. Leaving Chatham around 5.15pm to return by coach to Wimbledon by about 7.15pm.

Wednesday, 4 August: Visit to the Stanley Picker Trust, Kingston
Meet at Southside/The Grange at 1.45pm for a departure by shared cars by 2pm. Expected return 4.30pm. This excursion is free but numbers are limited so you must pre-book. The booking form will come with the June newsletter.

As numbers for this visit are restricted to 12, we expect that there are still members who will want to visit this local gallery of 20th century sculpture and painting. Tea will be offered when we visit the house which is a superb example of 1960s architecture and furnishings. Parking is limited so we need to travel in shared cars. Please indicate on the form whether you need, or can offer, a lift for this 5-10 minute journey.

Saturday, 9 October: Second visit to Whitechapel Bell Foundry
All places have already been allocated to those who applied unsuccessfully for places in 2009.

Wednesday, 20 October: Excursion to the Old Palace, Croydon
Meet at the palace at 1.30pm for our tour. Cost £8 including tea and cakes but without transport. Travel by Tramlink is suggested.

This charming and historic old building was a home of the Archbishops of Canterbury for over five centuries and a regular haunt of monarchs such as King Henry III and Queen Elizabeth I. Our guided tour will cover the history of the building and most of the main rooms before we are served tea in the Banqueting Hall. Croydon Parish Church, associated with the Old Palace for centuries, is close by and worth a visit.

Continued on Page 12
Group Notes

When shops and homes went their separate ways

At one time shopkeepers lived over the shop, and even bank managers lived over the bank. Similarly, Wimbledon Library was designed with spacious accommodation on three floors for the Borough Librarian, which is perhaps why the front of the building looks more like a house than a library.

We asked when this changed, and shops were built with flats above with separate entrances, let to tenants who had no connection with the businesses below. We don’t know the answer.

We did, though, get an answer to our search for a picture of the original Marks & Spencer Penny Bazaar in the Broadway. Philip Newill, a Society member, told us there was a photo showing part of the shop in a book on local railways. We were inspired to contact the Archivist of M&S, who provided the shop-front picture above right. It turns out that this is the centenary of Marks & Spencer in Wimbledon as the shop opened in 1910 and operated until 29 September 1932. At the time the address was 7 The Broadway, later renumbered as 15. It stood on the site of today’s Game shop.

Tales of Booth and Stead

We were pleased to see that the Museum has revived the practice of recording the memories of older inhabitants (December Newsletter, Page 9), where Eddie Hanson (not Hansen as printed) had a story about General William Booth of the Salvation Army living in Denmark Avenue.

Booth’s son, William Bramwell Booth, was a friend of the spiritualist W.T. Stead and may have visited him at his house in Church Road. They were jointly concerned in Stead’s exposure of child prostitution. Another Wimbledon resident, the social reformer Josephine Butler of 8 North View, was also involved. Sadly, Stead was among the 1500 people who died on the Titanic in 1912.

Departed but not forgotten

Among deaths reported at the last meeting of the Group were those of Brian Turner and Denys Tucker, both well-known figures in Wimbledon.

Brian ran a longstanding hairdressing business at 49 High Street. It had originally been established in 1900 and his father bought it during the Second World War. It finally closed in 1996.

Denys Tucker was a zoologist at the Natural History Museum who hit the headlines when he was sacked in 1960 for contrarian opinions. He lived in Belvedere Grove. So did his boss, the leading ichthyologist Dr Ethelyn Trewavas, who died in 1993 and has had fish named after her.

Mosaics, not tiles

A correction to the Group’s report in the last Newsletter. I drew attention to the ‘tiles’ in Grosvenor House whose shop entrance is next door to the Museum in the Ridgway. This should have read ‘mosaics’. Either way, have you seen them?

Date of next meeting

As the first Friday in April falls on Good Friday, the Local History Group will meet instead on Friday, 9 April.

No stage in those days

This Newsletter also marks the centenary of Wimbledon Theatre but it is interesting to note what the scene looked like before it was built. The photo above from 1907 shows a tram passing in front of the big house that once stood on the site in the Broadway.

Charles Toase
Dr Dave Dawson (right), one of Wimbledon’s best known authorities on plants and bird species, has been appointed Curator of Ecology and Natural History at the Museum, the first post-holder since the death of Dr Helen Rapson in December 2007. This is a post that goes far beyond the care of our last remaining stuffed specimens of creatures that once roamed locally.

Formerly a leading light of the London Ecology Unit and head of its successor organization within the London Mayor’s office, Dave has been giving lectures and leading wildlife walks in the area for many years. His priority now is to make the Museum’s natural history directories and records more accessible for practical scientific use in future.

He explained: ‘The records were compiled in the early days of the John Evelyn Club, predecessor of today’s Wimbledon Society. They stop around the start of the Second World War. In those years 1903-39 there were two successive natural history bodies within the organisation. Each died out with the departure of the personnel involved. Making these records more available will help us to understand the history of our natural environment.

‘That was the age of collecting insects, birds’ eggs and plant specimens for retention in drawers and glass cases. Taxidermy was the usual way of showing species to the general public. It meant killing individuals and removing them from nature. Individual collectors competed with each other for specimens. The practical effect of doing this on susceptible species was simply not appreciated and, to make things worse, proper records of the exact timings and locations of finding specimens were often not even kept.’

As it happens, most species losses over time have been the result of other kinds of over-exploitation through hunting, fishing and harvesting as well as through habitat change and loss, plus the effects of introduced competitors and diseases. Climate change is now a major additional problem. Nevertheless, these old collecting practices would clearly be unacceptable today.

He continued: ‘Today of course natural history does not operate like this. Photography is now the standard way of documenting sightings and species are left in situ. The taking of specimens for scientific research often requires an official permit. The true value of nature studies is now their ability to quantify the contribution each makes to its environment. Through organized counts by volunteers over clearly marked areas, we learn about numbers of individuals and assess how the species’ range is changing - often shrinking but sometimes expanding.

‘To be of real conservation value to science, information is collated by the London-wide Natural History Society, Greenspace Information for Greater London, and other conservationist bodies which gather input both from private gardens and public locations like Wimbledon Common, Wandle Meadow and Wimbledon Park. Private gardens are an essential source of information, as they cover a much greater area of London than all the public open spaces together. For example, south-west London is of international importance for the abundance of the Stag beetle and most breed in the rotting remains of old trees in our private gardens. The Museum has copies of unpublished studies on the status of local wildlife.’

As a volunteer at the Museum, Dave will be present on occasions to answer questions from visitors on natural history. But, as well as using referrals to reports, books, journals and catalogues, he hopes the Museum web site can be linked to the major information sources. This way, users will themselves be able to contribute to knowledge of the wildlife species and vegetation found in Wimbledon and further afield.
Local residents may face a new ‘winkling season’ by property developers

A resident of a small road between Queensmere and Bathgate Roads called me as chairman of the Society’s Planning Committee, expressing concern about ‘winkling’. It was a term I had not heard before and referred to the way developers are trying to get older residents out of smaller properties on large sites in Wimbledon. If this rings any bells with you, do please let us know about it.

Despite the slowdown in the property market, there is still plenty of activity in the Wimbledon area. As the local civic society, our Planning Committee monitors planning applications in the Society’s area of benefit, the pre-1965 Borough of Wimbledon. It stretches from the boundary with Kingston in the west to the River Wandle in the east (and two areas beyond), and from Wandsworth in the north to Kingston Road. It excludes Merton Park and the rest of the present Borough of Merton.

In more detail, it covers the six council wards of Village, Hillside, Wimbledon Park, Raynes Park, Trinity and Dundonald, together with the part of Abbey north of Kingston Road/Merton High Street between Gladstone Rd and the River Wandle. Significant parts of Wimbledon Park and Trinity Wards lie east of the Wandle. These are the area around the Stadium, including the large electricity station due for redevelopment, and the area to the south as far as the Thameslink line. Also included is the area of recent housing accessed from Haydons Road via North Road which was developed due to changes in the river course.

Dundonald ward includes the Apostles, formerly outside Wimbledon. It excludes streets north of Kingston Road opposite the Nelson Hospital, which are in Merton Park. Raynes Park includes a substantial area south of Coombe Lane as far as Shannon Corner, also outside pre-1965 Wimbledon.

Our focus is not to replicate Merton Planning Department’s area of responsibility. Rather, it is to point out to the planners those application features that affect the public realm, harming aspects of the built environment that we are keen to preserve for the good of current and future residents.

Our concerns are the loss of gaps between buildings, over-intensive development of a site, retention of groups of buildings of character in a particular area and the preservation of as much visible and accessible green space as possible - back gardens, parks, open land and school playing fields for example.

In this issue we cover risks to our conservation areas. Bathgate Road is a fine example of how designation is failing to protect the Brocklesby houses threatened by demolition. Similarly the King of Denmark pub, already earmarked for demolition and potentially liable to replacement by a much larger building to the detriment of neighbours.

This question of demolition also affects our commercial centres. We are concerned that the Council has approved demolition of 85-86 High Street in Wimbledon Village. Low rise retail outlets on the east side are to be replaced by four-storey buildings with retail at ground floor and flats above them. We fear that future tenants will turn out to be yet more chain stores, reducing still further the traditional village charm of the High Street, something longstanding residents who remember the locality 20 or 30 years ago will have noted.

The December Newsletter covered this matter, and local residents have contacted the Society with a view to starting a campaign against this relentless onslaught on the traditional identity of Wimbledon Village.

Another food supermarket

But the Planning Committee covers other issues too. Among these is the former B&Q site in Alexandra Road, empty for a year and still under discussion about permission for change of use as a new food supermarket. The latest Government guidance, London Plan, and Unitary Development Plan all argue that the proposed change is unacceptable and that Merton should be looking at better uses for the site. Many residents are in favour (although not necessarily those who live close by, in Parkwood Road for example). We understand both views but oppose the change because we accept that a successful supermarket on this site could have a detrimental effect on the economic/social viability of Wimbledon town centre and local shops.

On a happier note, there is some progress on improving Wimbledon town centre following several public meetings. Merton Council is working on a Wimbledon Town Centre Creative Plan which we hope will be part of the forthcoming Local Development Framework.

Mark Leclercq

For the latest on planning applications go to http://planning.merton.gov.uk or the Society’s own website at www.wimbledonsociety.org.uk To join the Planning Committee yourself call Mark on 020 8946 0105 or email him at marlc@talktalk.net
How safe are our Conservation Areas?

Merton Council was among the three-quarters of local authorities that co-operated with last year’s first English Heritage survey of Conservation Areas at Risk. Indeed, Merton had completed its own survey by December 2008. According to the published English Heritage Register, only two conservation areas in this borough - Leopold Road and Merton Hall Road - were designated as being at risk. In the entire London Region, 81 of the 486 sampled conservation areas were designated at risk or 17% of the total.

The report received wide media coverage and inspired debate in Parliament. English Heritage has since held meetings with regional local authority heads of planning and conservation officers in conjunction with the Historic Towns Forum. Seminars are planned to persuade both elected members and policy makers of the social and economic benefits of caring for conservation areas. A second annual survey is also under way, whose results will be published at the Heritage at Risk 2010 launch on 1 July.

Conservation areas project a positive image to both visitors and inward investors and most enjoy strong community support through special advisory committees, residents groups or local business groups. London as a whole has some 955 of them, the largest percentage of suburban designations of any region.

So are they any safer following the initiative by English Heritage? More to the point, how is it possible for this Newsletter to identify at least two Wimbledon conservation areas that appear seriously threatened by what most observers believe to be inappropriate new developments, yet neither is listed in the Register as being at risk? These are Bathgate Road and Wimbledon West, including the Ridgway. Nor are they alone. Pressures from new development, both residential and commercial, make other conservation areas vulnerable to the small-scale, incremental loss of historic detail that leads to erosion of special character.

Conservation areas were introduced by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act as ‘areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’. Their designation is about recognising the special significance of an area and managing its future. Designation is not intended to prevent change or adaptation but simply to ensure that any proposals for change are properly considered.

While many conservation areas are healthy, ill-considered changes in others really are putting their special architectural or historic interest at serious risk. To some extent this is because of the recent government relaxation of criteria for Permitted Development by householders in conservation areas. In Wimbledon this has led to replacement of windows without following the original character or materials, changed roof materials, loss of front fences, the introduction of front garden parking, and so on.

In Denmark Road, for example, one of the most attractive small scale roads in the immediate conservation area has lost distinctive timber sash windows and picket fences, while hard standings have intruded into front gardens, transforming not just one property but the general appearance of the area as a whole.

Last summer when the English Heritage Register was published, the Society’s planning Committee chairman, Mark Leclercq, wrote to Merton’s Councillor Bowcott, proposing that the Council should seriously consider introducing Article 4 Directions for a number of borough conservation areas in order to bring Permitted Development works under planning control. This followed an earlier letter to the Planning Office in 2007 without result.

English Heritage has clear evidence that a conservation area is more likely to improve if the local authority has a dedicated conservation officer or an elected member appointed as a heritage champion to promote the historic environment within the council. New conservation officers have been appointed in Merton, and we hope that their advice will carry weight if and when future applications are made for unwelcome developments in conservation areas.

Meanwhile English Heritage and its regional partners now aim to direct resources and investment towards those conservation areas identified as being at greatest risk and still having the greatest potential to improve the quality of life for local residents. How much that can affect Merton’s conservation areas not currently registered as being at risk remains to be seen.

Tony Matthews
Planning

Bathgate Road, one of Wimbledon’s most desirable residential streets, was first developed in the classic Arts and Crafts style by the highly respected local architect, John Sydney Brocklesby. Nos 30-60 were all designed and built from 1926-28 on land he purchased especially and laid out in plots. They have formed a specific group ever since, winning the road its own conservation area status. All reflect Brockleby’s philosophy of spaciousness with rooms flowing into each other and folding doors. Common features include broad iron hinges, heavy iron and wooden latches, polished posts, beams and flooring, hand-made nails used both structurally and as decoration, and externally warm red pantiles and bricks.

Brocklesby lived much of his life in Merton and although he designed houses and churches in many parts of the country, is best known locally for his crucial role in the original development of Merton Park as a garden suburb.

Demolition disaster

The Bathgate Road Conservation Area includes some houses that were not designed by him but still reflect the Arts and Crafts style of his period. Until comparatively recently the road remained intact despite some additional developments of a more modern style. However a major problem arose some 18 months ago with the partial demolition of number 10, designed by F A Powell, creator of Monmouth Town Hall.

Number 10 had appeared in Merton Council’s own Bathgate Road Conservation Area Design Guide as one of two particularly significant contributors to the area’s status. Despite this, the council allowed through a plan for partial demolition with retention of the façade. In the event, the demolition went too far and the developer then claimed the façade was dangerous. This was discounted by the council planning department’s surveyor who served a Section 205 notice for its protection. As a result, the façade remains in place but the whole site is now boarded up and derelict, a longstanding environmental eyesore.

The developer Cherwell next applied to build two houses on the plot of no 7. Unprecedented in the conservation area, this was first rejected by the planning committee but allowed on appeal by the government planning inspector. Cherwell (Bathgate) Ltd has since applied to demolish and rebuild no 9 and Brocklesby’s nos 36 and 38. Although some houses could do with refurbishment, this hardly justifies demolition!

The Society wrote to Merton objecting to a development application for no 36 on grounds that it would demolish an existing house in a conservation area in a row of similar properties associated with a distinctive architect. In its place would be a much larger seven-bedroom detached building, failing to comply with the Unitary Development Plan. There would be a loss of gaps between the buildings, negative impact on neighbouring properties, and large obtrusive side dormers with an overly steep roof pitch. The scheme would neither preserve nor enhance the character or style of the area.

The application for no 36 failed and Cherwell withdrew its first replacement plan for no 38, although it has since been resubmitted. Local campaigners are hoping this will also be rejected. English Heritage and the Twentieth Century Society have both urged the council to oppose all further attempts to destroy the conservation area’s architectural integrity.

Let’s not throw out Brocklesby’s babes with the Bathgate water!

No 38 - saved for the time being but still a target

No 10 - wrecked and left as an empty facade
Does the King of Denmark still face replacement by a huge restaurant block?

The saga of the King of Denmark pub in the Ridgway (right) has taken another turn. Developer Andrew Pinchin plans to demolish it and then double the gastro pub space with a new building on site to include nine flats right above. Local residents have campaigned for over two years to save the pub rather than see it replaced by another building incompatible with the Wimbledon West Conservation Area like Mr Pinchin’s development at 87 Ridgway next door. That went ahead because he appealed to the government inspectorate against Merton’s rejection. He could do the same again this time.

The current plan, being considered by Merton’s Planning Committee, is very similar to one Mr Pinchin deferred in February. He had successfully appealed against rejection of an earlier version. The only change from that had been the replacement of offices by the flats above the bar/restaurant.

The new building is to have gastro pub activities at ground and basement level, the nine flats at first, second and third floors, a crowned roof, and a courtyard and service area at the rear, right next to the small cottages of Corbiere Court whose residents will have the bar’s smokers and garbage collection right outside their homes.

By comparison, the existing pub building has just two storeys with basement below and pitched roof above, set back from the street and side alley. To one side are shops with a two-storey eaves/gutter line and dormers in a tiled roof. To the other side is no 87.

The Society’s Planning Committee has protested to Merton about the proposal, pointing out that the building will be out of scale for the conservation area with eaves/gutter line significantly higher than the adjoining buildings. The large front gable will dominate the street scene. The new flats will be a mere 13m from Corbiere Court, overlooking the cottages from four storeys rather than the existing two and significantly reducing their privacy and outlook. The smokers’ gazebo and garbage areas will significantly harm their amenity with attendant smells, noise and fumes.

Campaigners have worked continuously to stop Merton accepting the planning application. Peter Levelle of the Murray Road (North) Residents Association pointed out recent shifts in government approaches to pub licensing and the abuse of alcohol as well as the effects on residents’ parking of such a building. He added: ‘This is a real kick in the teeth to the local community. Residents don’t oppose re-development but have a right to expect the Planning Department to insist any new building following demolition in a conservation area must be an improvement.’ The application was a real test of their resolve and determination to protect residents.

A colleague, Suzanne Davies, added: ‘Residents who live in this village are not town planners and architects, so we struggle to write with the appropriate language. Most write from the heart and want good quality development which sits comfortably with its surroundings and complies with conservation area considerations.

‘They do not want dominant buildings designed by property developers who want to force their fussy architectural signature with lots of different coloured bricks into a village area. This aspect of the building is never apparent on the plans. We are not against new development, we just want a building that is sympathetic to its surroundings and one that we can enjoy visually and will be appreciated by future generations.’ For the latest information, see http://kodag.wordpress.com
President and Vice-Presidents

President: John Oldham
Vice-Presidents: Margaret Mottershead, John Rutter, John Telfer

Activities continued from Page 5

Wednesday, 23 March 2011: Excursion to Strawberry Hill
Meet at the house on Waldegrave Road, Twickenham for the 90-minute tour at 11am. We will need to use public transport or shared cars. Please see the booking form with your December 2010 newsletter, for details. Tour cost is £10.

Horace Walpole was destined for a career in politics but after his Grand Tour he decided to devote his life to art. This Gothic fantasy was his major project and is regarded by many as Britain’s finest example of the Georgian Gothic Revival. Some members will have visited the house in October 2007. Since then, a massive restoration costing over £8m has been undertaken, returning the house as much as possible to Walpole’s original fantasy. The restored house and grounds will open to the public in early summer 2010. From 6 March to 4 July 2010 there will be an exhibition about Horace Walpole and his collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Linda Defriez

Will you photograph your street?

The Society’s photographic collection is a living survey of Wimbledon over the past century. Buildings are being replaced at an alarming rate and we need to record them before they disappear. Would you be willing to take digital or hard copy photographs of those in your road to add to our collection? If so, please contact Simon Joseph, Curator of Photographs, on 07768 388 488 or email him at simon-joseph@doctors.org.uk

Urgently required - a new Treasurer

We need a new Treasurer to manage the financial affairs of the Society. If you have the experience or can recommend someone you know who would be interested, please contact the Chairman, Iain Simpson on 020 8947 1301 or email: iainsimpson@imi-consulting.com

Olympics talk at AGM

This year’s Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held at the Village Hall on Saturday, 15 May at 5pm. The guest speaker will be Diana Sterck, Chief Executive Officer of Merton Chamber of Commerce who will be talking on ‘Wimbledon Going for Gold 2012’.

The Wimbledon Society was founded in 1903 and has had its present name since 1982. (Originally the John Evelyn Club, it was known as the John Evelyn Society 1949-82.) A Registered Charity (No 269478), its main objectives are to preserve Wimbledon’s amenities and natural beauty, study its history, and ascertain that urban development is sympathetic and orderly. Annual subscriptions are at the following rates: Individuals £10.00; Families £15.00; Organisations: Non-commercial £25; commercial £50. Please send membership applications to the Membership Secretary.
The Museum and Bookshop (020 8296 9914), 22 Ridgway, near Lingfield Road, are open from 2.30 to 5.00pm Saturday and Sunday. Admission free.

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