

ARUNDEL & LADBROKE GARDENS: THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

Why?

History slips away or gets lost before we realise it. This came home to me when I was rummaging through our archive searching for the information we will need to register our freehold. Here, if one cared to look and explore further in libraries, were the germs of the story of our gardens. I decided to write it while my interest was running high. Here's what I have made of the first hundred years. **Your unanswered questions, your views about my conclusions really matter. Please send them in.** For the last forty years of the story, it will be over to you. **The archive provides the narrative, but your memories will bring it alive.**

ORIGINS

“At one in the afternoon of 5th January, 1863”, in the offices of Taylor, Stileman and Underwood, of 15 Furnival’s Inn, EC ” the memorial is registered of the “Deed of Conveyance of the Ornamental Pleasure Ground called “Ladbroke Garden”, Notting Hill, in the Parish of St Mary Abbotts Kensington to Trustees for the Management and Grant Assignment of yearly rents for maintaining the same.”

The rent to be paid by the freeholders or leaseholders of the houses backing on was £1/1/0 (worth £58.86 in 2002 values), with strict penalties for late payers or non-payers.

Twenty one days in arrears and the trustees can enter and “distrain” (dispose of) goods found there to make up the rent; sixty days and without any warning the trustees may take what is due plus “incidental costs and expenses” from “profits and rents thereof”

Part of the Ladbroke Estate

The meeting at Furnival’s Inn on that January afternoon, marking the beginning of the official existence of our garden, is no isolated event, but one of the last developments of the Ladbroke Estate.

This had started on the north side of Notting Hill in the 1820s and moved down the hill in squares, streets and crescents enclosing “ornamental pleasure grounds” at the pace dictated by property transfers, legal disputes, boom and bust in the London economy, the rise and fall of the Hippodrome race course experiment, bankruptcies of developers and building contractors. (Possible sentence about architects)

1852 land for the garden purchased

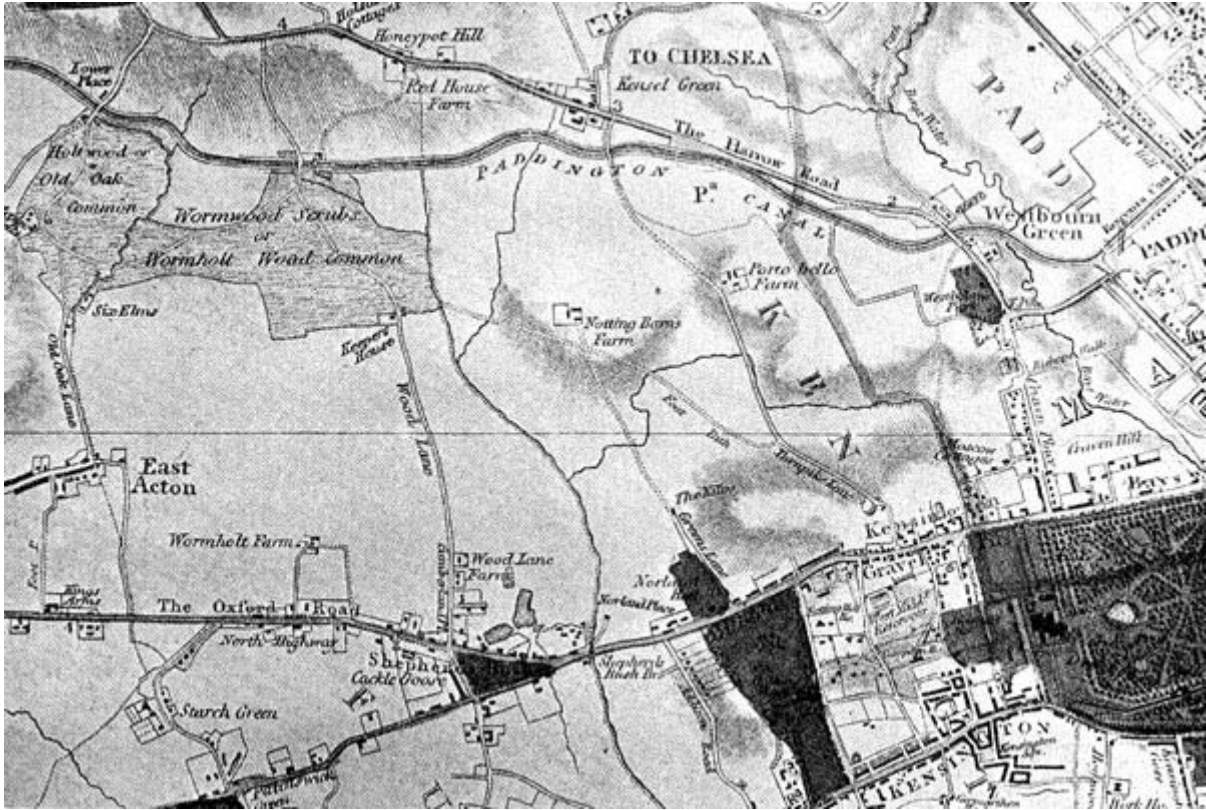
The land on which our gardens are laid out and the houses backing on built is acquired in 1852 by one Richard Roy.

Richard Roy has already developed other parts of the estate, laid out “pleasure grounds”, sometimes called “paddocks”, and set up similar trusts for their management. He has already leased building plots in Ladbroke Gardens and sold the freehold of plots in Arundel Gardens, south side, then known as Lansdowne Road Terrace, to William Wheeler, a building contractor responsible for much of the building on the Ladbroke Estate.

First mention of the garden

In 1858 Richard Roy covenants with the freeholders and leaseholders of building plots and “houses in carcase” in Ladbroke Gardens and Lansdowne Road Terrace (Arundel Gardens) to preserve in good order and according to the rules of good gardening the pleasure ground known as Ladbroke Garden” in return for annual rents.

Talk of a pleasure ground is an expression of aspiration rather than reality.



James Wyld's 1833 map of the “country in the vicinity of London”

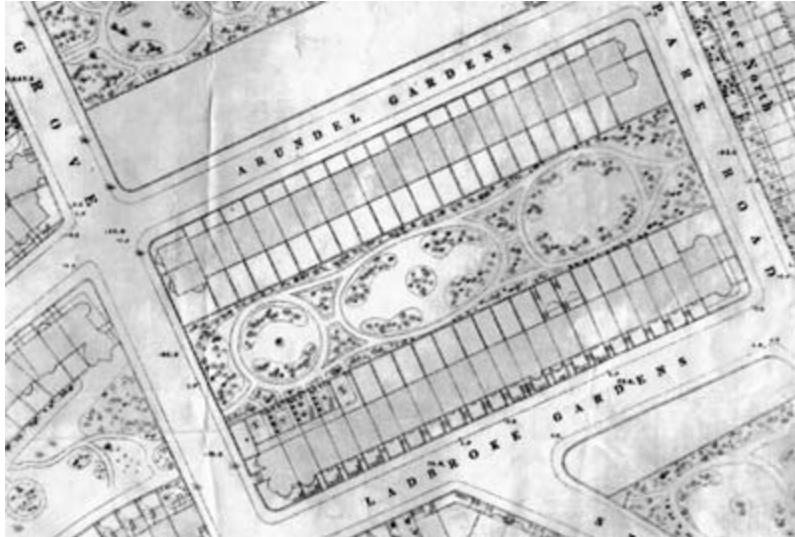
In James Wyld's 1833 map of the “country in the vicinity of London” the piece of land soon to be our garden appears as wooded pasture. By 1858, it is a wedge, churned up by the passage of horses and carts, with dumps of building supplies and builders' debris between the building plots and houses in “carcase” (just the four walls, gaping black holes for windows, with luck, a roof), between Ladbroke Gardens and the separate development of Elgin Crescent, south side. The legacy is the horrible chunks of yellow clay subsoil one finds when digging in previously undug areas. The number of “carcase” houses has earned Ladbroke Gardens the nickname “coffin row”. It is also a haunt for drunken vagrants, as recalled by old inhabitants of the area in 1922. Nevertheless, four houses in Ladbroke Gardens, 2-5, are occupied by respectable families in 1861, and all are occupied by 1871. The Victorians seem to have as robust an attitude to builders' chaos and lurking danger as they are known to have to smells and sickness

THE VICTORIAN GARDEN

What did it look like?

A “Gardenesque” Layout:

The 1867 Ordnance Survey Map shows the garden laid out much as now but with some significant differences in detail. The style is the fashionable “gardenesque”. The planting is probably predominantly evergreen brightened by the bedding plants in the round beds in the middle of the small and centre lawns.



There are extra two extra island beds between the centre and east lawns, a round bed in the middle of the centre lawn and a small round bed on the small lawn. The exit to Ladbrooke Grove is by 1 Ladbrooke Gardens. Otherwise the layout is exactly as now. The two rows of dotted lines round some of the beds probably indicate protective fencing, which can be bought by the yard from nurserymen's catalogues. Elsewhere the edging may be the rope twist tiles of which some still survive.

The mapmakers are only required to include all permanent structures, but not the precise position of trees and shrubs. The markings in the beds and at the ends by the garden gates suggest curving lines of shrubs. These shrubs are most likely to be evergreens, happy to grow on clay and undamaged by the coal smoke from 230 chimneys. The aucubas (spotted laurels) on the small lawn, the hollies and viburnums (laurestinus) in the compost area may well be survivors or self-seeded descendents of the original shrubs. If the shrubs perform as intended, by the 1870s each lawn will have its green screen at the corners, higher in the middle and sweeping down to the edges. Colour will come from the round beds in the middle, which are almost certainly “bedded out” with pelargoniums, calceolarias and other, brightly coloured bedding plants. These will show up well against the evergreen background and there is as yet no tree canopy to hinder their growth. Altogether, there is a more structured feel than now.

The Trees: Only four of our trees in the original pleasure ground.

A rudimentary way of estimating the age of trees suggests that, of the large trees now in the garden, only four, all plane trees predate 1863.

The 1867 map has no obvious indication of trees, as later maps do. However, using the rule of thumb of one inch of girth of trunk measured at chest height = one year's growth, the plane opposite 9 Arundel Gardens dates from the 1850s, outside 33 Arundel Gardens from the 1820s, and outside no.4 Ladbrooke Gardens from the early 1800s, and the plane on the centre lawn from the 1780s. The mystery is how and why the planes get there. My guess is that, when Richard Roy plans the garden, the huge plane on the centre lawn is already there, originally a stray seedling that unusually survived in pasture, since planes are not native trees. It is quite common, and, indeed, recommended, for relatively modest gardens and parks to have well-grown trees brought on carts from nurseries. This may well be what Richard Roy does with the two of the planes, planting the youngest as a sapling.

The plane opposite the Ladbroke Grove gate seems to date from the 1860s when the garden is being laid out, with hindsight planted too close to the plane outside 4 Ladbroke Gardens. Other plane trees may be planted but for whatever reason they do not survive. I doubt whether there are many other deliberately planted trees in the initial layout. At this period noteworthy trees tend to be planted together in a small arboretum or "wilderness, as separate compartments of larger and grander gardens than ours. There may be some pre-existing ash and other native trees, often found in pasture, if they survived the builders. Judging by girth measurements, the robinia at the Arundel Court corner, and probably the robinia at the Kensington Park Road end, felled in 2000, are added fairly soon in the 1880s.

The Houses and their Residents

There is no multi-occupation. Arundel and Ladbroke Gardens are providing homes for a solid bourgeoisie, but are not "smart" addresses. There are enough young people to keep the garden well used.

The most obvious difference between now and then is that the houses backing on are, with one exception, occupied by one family, or one person, and his or her servants. The exception is 21 Ladbroke Gardens, which is a school for young ladies, with eight to twelve pupils aged 12 to 17, two governesses, one sometimes German, besides the head. Some families are settled here for two decades or more, and two are still around in the 1930s The Parkers, people of independent means from Boston, MA, at are living at 3 Ladbroke Gardens in 1861 and their six year old daughter Mary goes on living there till 1931. William Graham, An Art Furnisher by trade, and his family have moved into 12 Ladbroke Gardens by 1891. His daughter, Rose, is still active on the garden committee on the eve of the Second World War.

The residents are solid, middle class professionals, not people in "society", to judge by the number of servants, which averages three, with very few menservants, and their titles, which rarely include a "footman" or "lady's maid". The fathers are in the middle ranks of commerce or the law, with a smattering of retired "Old India hands". There is also a contingent of widows. The respectable mass is leavened by a slightly "raffish or bohemian" element. In 1881, Samuel Bennett, "editor and leader writer" lives at 13 Arundel Gardens". He is still there in 1891, now author/journalist with his family and brother-in-law, a sculptor and cattle painter. In 1871, Anthony Montalba, artist, is living at 19 Arundel Gardens with one daughter, an historical painter, and three other daughters, describing themselves as artists. There are always a number of European nationals, such as the Serenas, shipping brokers from Venice, who live for two decades at number 20 Ladbroke Gardens, and the German families that frequently occupy number 19 Ladbroke Gardens.

With usually about thirty eight children under ten, of whom half are under five, and their nursemaids, the gardens are pretty busy on fine days – possibly too busy for the widows. Apart from the schoolgirls at 21 Ladbroke Gardens, there are also a number of unmarried grown up daughters, who can stroll un-chaperoned in the garden and perhaps start a mild flirtation with one of the young clerks or university students still living at home. The garden must be a welcome green refuge from the incessant building activity to the north.

THE LATE VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN GARDEN

1893 Rent rise

The garden rents rise by around 50%. Costs were falling dramatically so the reason may be rising aspirations.

In 1893 the residents declare, "*The said yearly rents of one pound one shilling each were found insufficient for the proper upkeep of the said ornamental pleasure ground*". They agree to a rise in the garden rent per house from £1/1/0 (worth £71.16 at 2002 prices) to £1/11/6/- (£101.66), a rise of around 50%. This brings the regular annual income up from £49/7/- (£3,273.4) to £74/0/6 (£4,910.05).

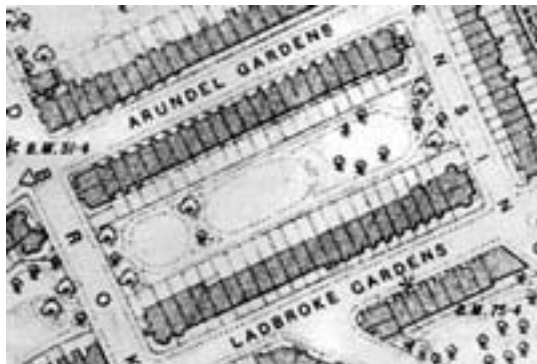
Why? It can't be rising prices – the decade 1883-93 sees a dramatic fall in prices by about 23%. This is reflected in the price of garden tools: the 1870 price of a four-pronged digging fork from the garden sundries section of Carter, the nurseryman's catalogue, has fallen from 0/5/6 to 0/3/- by 1895.

Could the reason be a dramatic rise in wages, which usually make up between 60-70% of garden outgoings? Wage rates have been rising by about 10% over the three decades, 1863-93, since the rent was originally set. This may mean only two to two and a half man days can now be afforded, rather than the three days a week, with some help from a garden boy, which, without any powered tools, is probably needed to keep the garden in good order and make some improvements.

That still leaves 30-40% more unaccounted for. I think the majority of residents had decided they wanted a not only a better maintained, but also a more interesting, garden.

A Simpler Layout.

The O/S map of 1895 shows a modified garden plan with two of the island beds and, apparently, the mid-lawn round beds removed.



same places as in 1867 on

The layout shown on the 1895 O/S map has been simplified since 1867. Perhaps the aim is to reduce the heavy maintenance work, freeing time for more cosmetic maintenance. The triangular island beds between the centre and east lawns have gone. The mapmakers are no longer required to plot flowerbeds and none are shown. However, the larger scale map of 1916 once again plots flowerbeds so perhaps they never disappear. The beds now run all round the north and east edge of the east lawn, and are in the

the centre lawn. The small lawn now has a flowerbed covering the south and west side, and a smaller bed where the rhododendrons and magnolia now are. The round beds in the middle of the centre and Ladbrooke Grove end lawns have not reappeared, - it must have been a nightmare to maintain these beds, vulnerable as they were to dogs, cricket balls and unsupervised children, even with fencing round them.

A major tree-planting programme:

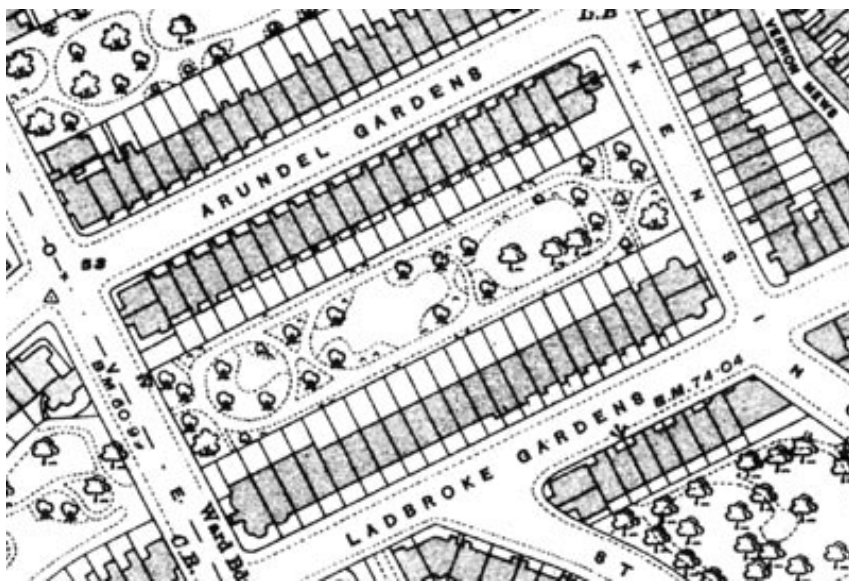
Sometime in the course of the last two decades of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth centuries the garden acquires many of the trees we know and (mostly) love, and also the shade and the cascades of autumn leaves. There is some conflict between the dating evidence from girth measurements and the evidence of the maps.

Tree girth measurements suggest that the garden committees embarked on a tree-planting programme in the early 1890s, using the extra funds or the expectation of extra funds. They start with the plane opposite 19/20 Ladbrooke Gardens, follow this with the lime opposite 16

Ladbroke gardens and progressively complete the ring of planes on the east lawn over the 1890s. It is equally possible that the whole ring of trees was planted at one go, and that slight variations in conditions of growth account for the differences in girth measurements. At the same time they plant the three turkey oaks (one felled in 2002) at the Ladbroke Grove end. This planting is followed in the 1910s, by the silver lime on the play area, and around 1918, by the catalpa on the centre lawn, which, I like to think, is to celebrate the Armistice.

In 1954 the first Tree Preservation Order for our garden includes all these trees, and also four hawthornes. I suspect that two of these are the ones on either side of the muddy path at the west end of the centre lawn. These, and the slower growing almond, now leaning over and making an excellent climbing frame, and the magnolia, probably get planted as an ensemble just before or just after the First World War. Another hawthorne is outside 25 Arundel Gardens and clearly visible in a photo of 1952. The Tree Preservation Order also mentions an elm and two trees of heaven; one of which collapsed in the 1990s and the other must have disappeared sometime within living memory. Almost certainly there are some ash trees, including the ash by Arundel Court felled in 2002 and at least two, probably, small, chestnuts, mentioned in the accounts for the 1920s and 30s.

The maps of 1895 and 1916 confuse this chronology. The 1895 map has some trees on the east lawn, which, according to their measurements, are not there, but doesn't show the old planes, which, we know, are there. The 1916 map shows a ring of trees on the east lawn but by then trees will have grown sufficiently to merit marking. It also shows trees in the general area of the old planes and two of the oaks and the robinias. The mapmakers are under no obligation to plot trees exactly, if at all, so I prefer to go by the measurements, however crude. I do believe in the trees marked in the island beds: I am constantly coming across tree roots when digging in the north island bed, and a plan for landscaping the garden in the 1980s refers to trees in the south island bed.



The Gardens as shown on the OS Map of 1916.

A Woodland Garden?

The 1916 map marks more trees in our garden than in neighbouring gardens of similar size, twenty-nine compared to the twenty marked in Arundel and Elgin gardens. I don't think this means the garden is yet conceived as a "woodland" garden. As the next section will show, the committees in the 1920s and 30s had a fairly cavalier attitude to trees and wanted as good a display of flowers, as could be afforded, and those flowers planted in the Victorian manner.

THE GARDENS BETWEEN THE WARS: 1926-38

More First Hand Evidence

This is the period for which we have meticulous accounts, itemising every purchase and its date, down to raffia and plant sticks, so that if something isn't mentioned it isn't bought. We also have the names of the rent payers for each of the houses and how prompt (or not) they are to pay.

A garden striving to remain true to the idea of an ornamental pleasure ground

The picture we get is of a garden struggling, more or less successfully, to keep its head above water – respectable but not distinguished. The Report of the Royal Commission on London Squares in 1928, in a way says it all: our garden is a “well kept and attractive open space”. There is no mention of the “well kept lawns, shrubs, flower beds, well grown trees”, a common addition to descriptions of squares in more affluent parts of the borough.

Inadequate Funds:

Wage rises and reluctant rent payers mean less labour

While the garden rent remains the same, wages have risen by around 70% since the war. The budget will only run to a one or one and a half man-day's labour compared to three before the war. Occasionally the garden has to go without plants because of some rent defaulters.

One major problem is money. The gardener's wages are £45 per annum or approximately 17/6 per week in 1926, and have risen to £52 per annum or £1 per week by 1937 (same in 1948), roughly a 7% rise over 12 years, less than the rises our gardeners have latterly enjoyed, but the thirties are a period of deflation. With the annual Christmas box of 10/- and extra time, worth on average £8-9 per annum, a lot of which goes on repairs to benches and fences, wages absorb about 67% of the budget. Yet, taking into account the going rate in the Borough, this 67% only buys one to one and a half gardening days compared to three to three and a half before the war. Furthermore, for some of this period, the annual rents are worth a third less than in 1914, only approaching the 1914 value in 1937. What makes budgeting even more difficult is that rent payers are dragging their feet. In the 1920s the notices “name and shame” only a small number of late payers, all non-resident freeholders. By 1935 the AGM notice complains that rents have been coming in so slowly that in November there was not enough money to buy bulbs. In 1936 the money intended for bulbs has gone to legal fees for the recovery of rent.

Byelaws and Rules and Regulations ignored.

Another major headache, worse then than now, is the general carelessness of residents who seem to ignore most of the byelaws. The 1920s are not so bad, but the 1930s seem to be dominated by the destructive behaviour of rampaging children, which, in turn, diverts funds from planting and cosmetic maintenance

The AGM notices list matters of concern to the Committee. In the 1920s, the tone is moderate, – residents are asked not to hang their washing in their private gardens, (a sign that a laundry service was unaffordable), dogs are running into private gardens and over flowerbeds and fouling the paths, though not, apparently, the lawns. Litter, particularly cigarette packets and newspapers, is dropped at random. We don't hear about firing small firearms and cannons or games of football, quoits, cricket or bows and arrows, or of prams and bikes on the lawns. If these rules are broken, the Committee turns a blind eye. In 1939 the Byelaws are re-certified. The rule about prams and bikes goes out and a new rule forbidding meals in the garden comes in.

Of greatest concern is the children's behaviour. The children are damaging fencing (probably round flowerbeds) and running into private gardens. By the 1930s the tone becomes desperate. In 1932 the paths are railed off at each end to prevent strangers and dogs entering. The children are pulling up bulbs, trampling on the flowerbeds, breaking shrubs, climbing over gates into private gardens, and by 1937, "damaging everything". This year a new complaint appears: "singing and shouting noisily". In May 1930 the Management Committee buys "a game for the children", possibly clock golf. Nothing more is heard of the "game" or of further constructive moves to make the children better behaved. Probably the case is considered hopeless and the fairly middle-aged Committee are looking back to the days of their youth when the children had nursemaids to supervise them or take them for walks in Kensington Gardens.

This behaviour has a price. Repairs to benches and notice boards are absorbing about 3% and repair and renewals to fencing round flowerbeds around 7% of the budget on average – at least double the percentage we now spend on repairs to equipment and the gates.

Increasing Multi-occupation and de-gentrification

A feature of the interwar period is professional families deserting the inner city in droves, in favour of one of the three million new and easier to run houses in the suburbs, and the houses they abandon being "made down" into flats or rooming houses. This trend is bound to show up sharply in the tall narrow houses of Arundel and Ladbroke Gardens and so it proves. The trend may also partly explain the children's destructive behaviour.

The Bye-Laws, as certified in 1922, still envisage the residents as families with servants: Bye-Law 2 states, "No servant of any house nor any child of such servant shall use the said Pleasure Grounds except in attendance upon some person having a right to use the Grounds". The Electoral Registers show that in the 1920s the solid, respectable element of the last century is still there. In 1927 both Arundel and Ladbroke Gardens have ten houses (nearly half) in single-family occupation, all freeholders or leaseholders. In both streets only no. 47 Arundel Gardens is in serious multi-occupation. The tenants of The Women's Pioneer Trust, which purchases nos. 11, 13, 14 and 15 Ladbroke Gardens in 1926 or 27, for single "women of slender means", unable to obtain mortgages, will not destabilize the gardens. The Trust also regularly donates £4 a year to the Committee. With one or two exceptions, the business freeholders, too, are not likely to seriously lower the tone.

By 1938 multi-occupation and de-gentrification have made serious inroads: only four houses in Arundel gardens are in single-family occupation. One of the trustees, Major Frisby is holding out in 31, but another, Mr Bloxham, has succumbed to dividing 35 into 2 maisonettes, 15, 23, and 33 are rooming houses, as well as 47. No. 25 is listed as apartments. In Ladbroke Gardens only 8, the home of the Mavrogordatos, 12, with Miss Graham, and 17, where Dr Collins has succeeded Dr Dwyer as both Trustee and general practitioner, are definitely in single occupation. Nos. 18, 9 and 10 are multi occupied. Nos. 1 and 2, listed as a private hotel in the Post Office Directory, has 22 voters living in it so it must be a fairly crowded residential hotel, unless, of course, it is a front for something else. No 16 is listed in the Post Office Directory as a nursing home and no. 3 is a boarding house, since the American, Miss Parker, left or died. Nos. 21 and 22 are called "Ladbroke Court" and are divided into six flats.

The occupants of the few houses still in single occupation are unmarried, (Major Frisby) or too old to have young children, (the Evans's at 1 Arundel Gardens). As a result, most of the children are cooped up in a one or two-floor flats. They are going to need to let off steam in the gardens. Their mothers have no room for and probably cannot afford nannies, and have no time themselves to supervise them.

THERE IS SOME GOOD NEWS

Core of long standing residents prepared to give time to garden matters.

Membership of the Management Committee is remarkably stable throughout these years

Mr. Bloxham, of 35, and Major Frisbee of 31, Arundel Gardens, Mr Mavrogordato of 8, Miss Rose Graham of 12, Ladbroke Gardens, and the local G.P. (first Dr Dwyer and then Dr. Collins) at 17 Ladbroke Gardens, all serve from 1926 till records stop in 1938.

A long-serving Gardener

In 1948 the accounts record a memorial wreath for the funeral of "our gardener for 35 years, Mr. R.J. Hall".

Mr Hall puts up with the children and either supplies his own tools, or uses ones from another garden. No purchases of garden tools or repairs to garden equipment, even a lawnmower, are recorded in the accounts. When a new gardener is hired in 1948, £5 is spent on tools and a wheelbarrow. The lawnmower still remains a mystery. Nothing under that head appears until a motor mower is bought in 1953.

What does the garden look like under Mr. Hall's care?

More flowering shrubs

Judging by the record of purchases the 1920s and 30s are when the garden becomes altogether more floriferous and colourful. A list will probably include the philadelphuses, now so dense that a few have recently been removed, the older lilacs, some of the forsythia, pyracantha, berberis, and, most spectacularly, the woody rhododendrons by the play area and on the small lawn. At least one flowerbed and possibly a shrub border in need of livening up, is planted in spring with bulbs, and in summer with familiar bedding plants and flowers Mr Hall raises from seed.

I think our garden is reflecting the general reaction against evergreens in favour of deciduous flowering shrubs and that this is when some familiar ones are acquired. In 1926 £15 is contributed to a "garden improvement fund" and there are smaller contributions in most subsequent years. Some of this money is spent on shrubs, about 23 in 1926 and 27, probably most of the huge philadelphus, some forsythia, pyracantha and the quince and rampant, purple berberis by the litter bin on the centre lawn. In 1929 seven or eight lilacs are planted. One survivor is by the Kensington Park Road railings. Others may be the recently felled pair outside 39 Arundel Gardens and the lilac in the bed opposite 31/29 Arundel Gardens. Six of the rhododendrons we have now, all woody but still flowering well, date from the mid 1930s, and replace others that succumb to the dry summers of 1933 and 34. One of these rhododendrons is by the play area and another is at the back of the north island bed and the rest are on the small lawn. There were others, which die in the 1976 drought and are in turn replaced. We also get seven or eight roses, possibly including the old fashioned ramblers on the centre lawn and by the Kensington Park Road railings. This is probably a first for the garden. Until the First World War gardeners believe that roses have to be planted separately to survive.

Mr Hall perseveres against all odds to provide colour, first from spring bulbs, mainly hyacinths and tulips, and for summer by raising annuals or biennials from seed. My guess is that these are wallflowers for late spring and antirrhinums and phloxes, so popular as to be almost de rigueur. I occasionally find a scraggy antirrhium in the compost area. In the mid 1930s he is able to add geraniums, delphiniums and red salvias to the display. It is not a massive display, however. The quantities bought will only fill one bed and a few edges of borders that need livening up. Spread them out more and maintenance becomes too onerous

Organic Gardening but stern control of trees

As far as I can see from the accounts Mr Hall gardens organically, perhaps not so much from principle as because chemical products would eat into his budget for plants or because he hasn't the time to use properly. Let him up a ladder with a good axe and trees are kept in their place or, if necessary, felled.

Mr Hall uses no weed killers or pesticides and fertilizes with occasional loads of hop manure, peat, and "mould", (he must have burned the leaves, though there are fewer of them). However, the one-off purchase a load of the much-recommended "basic slag", a by-product of steel manufacture, slightly spoils the picture.

In 1926 Mr Hall fells a chestnut and spends about eleven days, with a hired ladder and ropes, but no chainsaw, "cutting down" trees. "Cutting down" means pruning almost amounting to the pollarding of trees. In eleven days he can probably deal with all the trees, many of which are no more than a third of their present height. Two years later the Royal Commission on Garden Squares (see earlier) does not consider our trees noteworthy, so Mr Hall may have been over-enthusiastic with his axe. He also occasionally trims – probably cutting out deadwood and overhanging branches - and in 1932 "cuts down" another chestnut.

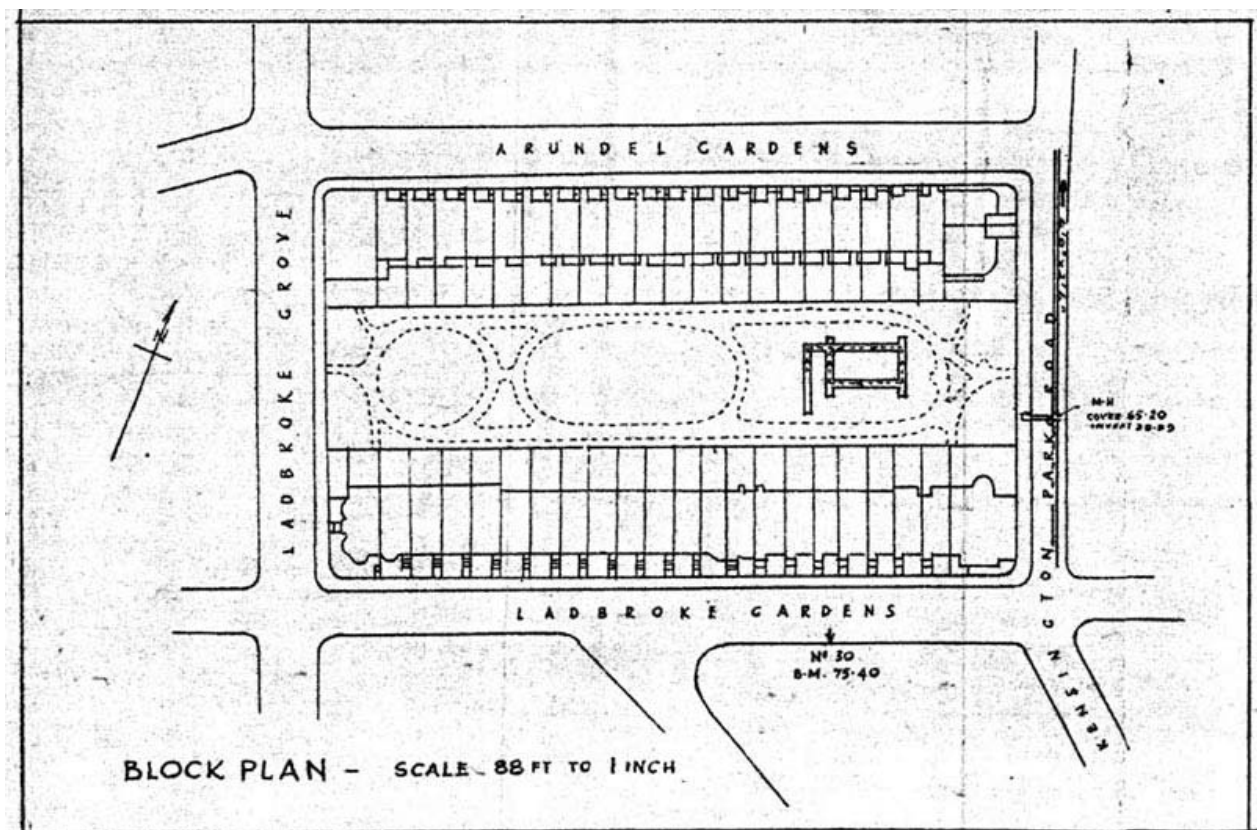
The notice for 1938 is the last we have until 1949. In 1939 the gardens are already being put on a war footing.

WAR

Trench site no 13

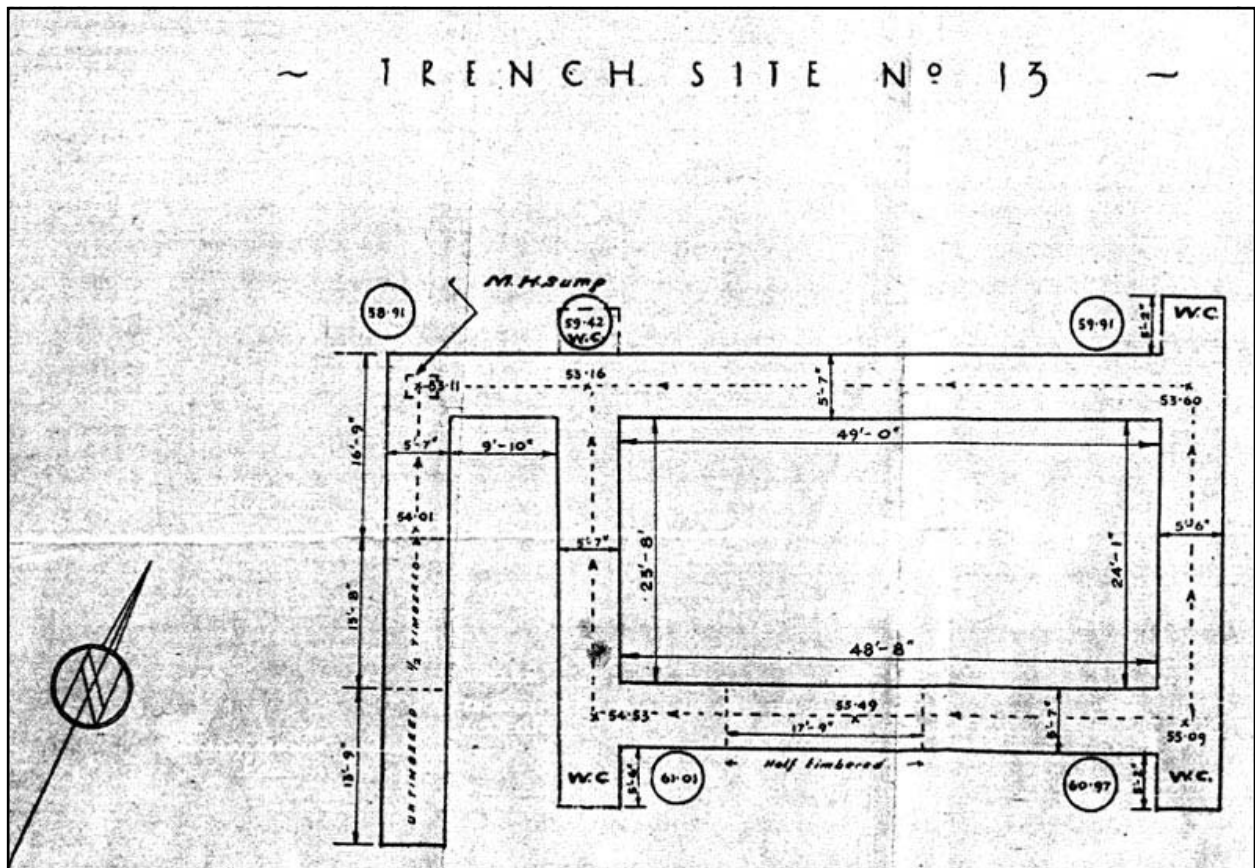
Ours is one of the gardens chosen for a trench shelter for people caught on the streets during an air raid. The accompanying plan shows that it takes up about a quarter to one third of the east lawn. It is ready to shelter people by 31st October, 1939, nearly two months since war has been declared, but in time for the Blitz which comes to North Kensington in September, 1940, and to our garden on September, 26th, between 1 and 1.15 pm. In March, 1943, the shelter is closed, its short term legacy a demoralizing eyesore and open access from Kensington Park Road, the long term legacy, a lawn that will not flourish, spades and rakes hitting solid concrete, and the occasional iron hoop or other piece of metal in the bank down to the Arundel Gardens path.

At the beginning of September 1938 the Home Office instructs the Borough Council to dig exploratory trenches for shelters for the 12,000 people the police estimate as likely to be on the borough's streets at any one time. Excavations are begun in our gardens as well as in Kensington Gardens, and other places. Work is suspended on 30th September, presumably in response to the Munich agreement. The council evidently has little confidence in "peace in our time", as the minutes of 24th September record the resumption of work. On 23rd February 1939, it is decided to line the trenches to a depth of 4' with pre-cast concrete, which has been tested on trial lengths the previous autumn at other sites. By 31st October 1939, the shelters are ready and direction notices are up.



The plans show the location and design of the shelter. It is to accommodate 153 people. The trenches are 5'7" wide and 6'10" deep, with bench seating, which seems to be on one side only. The entrance is by a ramp, somewhere near the middle of the East Lawn, and it appears from post war correspondence with the council the Kensington Park Road gate is always left open. There are two emergency exits at the Kensington Park Road end and one opposite 17 Ladbrooke Gardens. The council also concretes part of the path and the grass on the Ladbrooke Gardens side of the trench. This isn't shown on the plan but anyone sweeping aside the gravel or trying to fork over that part of the east lawn encounters it. Inside the

shelter the four W.C's are latrines, with two buckets apiece. According to the Local War Instructions of 28th July 1939, the shelter is to be supplied with eight hurricane lamps with four spare and one barrel of paraffin. Provision is similar in the other squares, but Kensington Gardens shelter gets 96 latrine buckets. Nothing is said about emptying the buckets.



These shelters are only for people caught on the streets during an air raid, not for the residents, who are supposed to use their basements. Other public shelters nearby are a public surface shelter at 14 Arundel Gardens, and public basement shelters at 92 Ladbrooke Grove, 138 Portobello Rd and 2a Stanley Crescent. The nearest A.R.P. Warden and First Aid Post is on the corner of Elgin Crescent and Ladbrooke Grove, west side.

Bombed

On 26th September 1940, between 1 and 1.15 am. an incendiary bomb falls in the garden somewhere near 2,3, or 4 Ladbrooke Gardens. Unfortunately, the bomb incident map is on too small a scale to locate the exact spot. No casualties and no damage are reported. We are luckier than some others in nearby streets.

On 5th March 1943 Trench Site no.13 is officially closed. From time to time one's foot hits something hard or bits of something surface, especially during digging on the bank down to the Arundel Gardens path. In the late 1980s an iron hoop is exposed there. The site of the shelter coincides with the part of the lawn where the grass seems reluctant to flourish.

The Post War Years, the end of an era

The war and the trench shelter are the “coup de grace” for the concept of an “ornamental pleasure ground”

Everything that was dragging the garden down before the war gets worse. More residents are reluctant to pay, more houses are multi-occupied and taken over by institutions, children are more unmanageable and faithful Mr Hall is dead. On top of that the shelter has destroyed the east end of the garden, and the compensation paid by the council is not enough to restore it to an “ornamental” condition. A photograph taken in 1952 shows jungle taking over. Worst of all, intruders have no difficulty in entering. By 1952 it is being described as “slummy”. In 1953 a desperate Mr Greene, the secretary, gets agreement to adopt the Kensington Improvement Act of 1851. This means that the rents, hitherto paid to the Trustees, become rates collected by the council and repaid to the committee as now.

When Minutes resume in 1949, only Dr Collins survives from the pre-war committee. C.R. Greene has become the Secretary. In mid 1948, Mr R.H. Hall, the gardener with 35 years' service to the garden, dies. Sadly, only eleven residents contribute to the £5 wreath.

The remains of the trench must be an eyesore and the whole surrounding area trampled on or destroyed: that includes, at the very least, the East lawn, and all its corner beds, and the island bed opposite the KPR gate. The council has requisitioned 31 Arundel Gardens, formerly the home of Major Frisby, and has installed rowdy tenants. In May 1948 the new secretary, Mr Greene, complains to the council about “*the children playing football everywhere and riding bicycles all over the beds*”.

There seems to be open access to the public from Kensington Park Road. Either the lock on the Kensington Park Road gate is broken or has been taken off and not replaced. In January, 1949, Mr Cook, the elderly freeholder of 23 Arundel Gardens, writes to the Council:

Before the large shelter was removed I can assure you a most undue advantage was taken by the people using the gardens, owing to our being unable to lock the gate. I was burgled, as was no.19. The children use the flowerbeds as lavatories and jump on them. There has been no peace since the shelter was erected. Now there is a rumour going around that the Council will take over the Gardens. That will only make the situation worse....The children say when the gardens belong to the Council they (the children) can do what they like. I have lived here over 20 years. PS Most of these people are not even English or rather British”

Nevertheless something is being done to restore the garden. In December, 1948, the C.R. Green, writes to the council that “*regarding the recently demolished shelter for 250 persons work, for the reconstruction of the lawn and other work amounting to £300 is being put in hand.*”

The AGM Notice for 1949 records that the council has compensated the Committee to the tune of £226/10/-. They sell £24/13/4 worth of War Stock and £24/10/10 of 3% Defence Bonds, presumably to make up the £74 shortfall in funding. Mysteriously, there is nothing about mending the lock on the Kensington Park Road gate. Instead, in September 1948, £60/16/- is spent with a firm specialising in chain-link fencing, Peerless Fencing Products. This sum will buy a lot of fencing, but has not stopped children getting onto the flowerbeds near Mr Cook, at 23 Arundel Gardens.



A “slummy” neglected area

The compensation money does not seem to stop the rot. Opposite is a photo of houses in Arundel Gardens and also one taken from a rear window on the second floor of 25 Arundel Gardens by a woman who lives in a bed-sit. there in 1952/53. The house fronts look grim and the garden a jungle.

“It was slummy,” she remembers, “full of studenty types like me. I never went in the garden, but I loved the big plane tree I could see from my window. Inside the house was dark with dirty paintwork. I don’t remember a bathroom. My room had a gas ring and a basin. I wasn’t there much. The landlady insisted on opening the front door to make sure no unauthorised men were getting in”.

Inevitably, perhaps, in the context of severe post-war overcrowding and the continuing exodus to the suburbs, house get more packed with lodgers and further sub-divided and more institutions buy out the former freeholders.

When the Council is finally asked to take over the gardens, the secretary has to get the consent of all the freeholders and leaseholders. To help with this exhausting task, he is supplied with a list of ratepayers and rated occupiers, which can also be compared with the Electoral Register. These show that the recollections above are not far out. Although there are resident freeholders or leaseholders in eleven of the 47 houses, only two in Arundel, 1 and 13, and two in Ladbroke Gardens, 8 and 17 are occupied by one family or one person. The rest are rooming houses that may well house more than the seven to nine people recorded in the Electoral Register. More houses are run by businesses or institutions. The Women’s Pioneer have added Miss Graham’s old home, 12 Ladbroke Gardens to 11, 13,14 and 15. Three estate agents, including Townends, manage 21 –23, 7 and 20 Ladbroke Gardens, 1 and 2 Ladbroke Gardens is a hostel run by the Victoria League, 5 Arundel Gardens is a Club run by the Mutual Aid Association, 33 Arundel Gardens is a Y.W.C.A. hostel, and 31 Arundel Gardens is full of council tenants. The remaining eleven houses have one flat on each floor.



Three houses in Arundel Gardens and one in Ladbroke Gardens combine basement and ground floor in one residence. There are usually two or three more registered electors than rated occupiers in the houses divided into flats and there may well be more unrecorded persons.

There is also a major problem collecting back rents, and, in 1949, the Committee has to employ professional rent collectors, spending £3/15/9. The problem does not go away.

It is hardly surprising that in September, 1952, the secretary, Mr Greene, writes to the freeholders and leaseholders, whose consent is needed, recommending the adoption of the Kensington Improvement Act of 1851 (whereby a garden rate will be collected by the Council.) *"The Trustees and Garden Committee are unanimous in their opinion that Householders should avail themselves of this Act"* (as the original trust entitled them to do).

At a meeting of trustees and one garden representative with the council in October 1952, it transpires that there are now four trustees and that income and outgoings have risen. The garden rent per house has been raised to £2/10/-, keys now cost 10/- (previously 3/-), and the gardener is paid £6/12/6 per month, almost double the 1949 monthly wage of about £3./16/6.

In March 1953, the Housing and Town Planning Committee report that *"under the Kensington Improvement Act of 1851, the Metropolis Management Act of 1855 and the London Government Act of 1899, the Royal Borough of Kensington do as from the first day of April 1953, take under their control and management the garden square known as Arundel & Ladbroke Garden Enclosure"*

Not all residents are happy: In June 1953, one of the Women's Pioneer tenants writes to the council complaining about the rate. *"What do you find here? A lot of screaming children, radios and gramophones, and on a hot day, practically naked people with most unbeautiful shapes"*

The council takeover seems a good point at which to conclude the story of the first hundred years. The next instalment will show whether the story of the forty or so years till now is the story of success or failure to revive the aspirations of the original Trust Deed to *"maintain the garden as a pleasure ground in proper ornamental condition"*.

For the next instalment it is YOUR MEMORIES of the residents, the pets, the gardeners, what your house and the other the houses were like when you first moved here – anything that seems significant to you, that are needed to bring the story to life.

Please send them in

Susan Lynn (Hon. Sec. Management Committee)