



## No. 26 Spring 2012

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. It starts with the first report from our new chairman, Dr Marie-Louise Jennings. Marie-Lou was elected at our last annual meeting in place of retiring founding chairman Angela Dixon, to whom she pays tribute later in the newsletter. Other articles include the history of the water industry in Hammersmith (topical given the current simultaneous drought and record-breaking wet spring), the movement to restore Greenside Primary School's 1950s mural and – as our contribution to the Charles Dickens bicentenary – an account of the author's Urania Cottage project in Shepherd's Bush.

### *Chairman's Update*

I took over as chair of the Hammersmith & Fulham Historic Buildings Group from Angela Dixon after the last annual meeting in October 2011. Everyone I met both there and afterwards said: 'She's a hard act to follow' and indeed she is. Her knowledge both of the borough and of planning legislation is formidable.

I was immediately deluged with paper and emails about developments both known to me and unknown. The first and most important issue in October last year was, of course, the King Street development. The size of it and its dominance over the little 18th century houses along the river was horrifying. Nonetheless, the council seemed bent on it, and at the planning applications committee meeting – held in Latymer School great hall to accommodate the vast numbers of concerned people – the proposal was predictably passed and sent to the mayor for his ratification. A number of us went to City Hall and demonstrated against the scheme, together with that formidable demonstrator and fortunately a long-standing nearby resident, Vanessa Redgrave. Boris Johnson expressed his concern about the effect of this proposed mass of buildings on the historic riverside. A few days later, much to our relief, we heard that the council had withdrawn the proposal. However, the scheme is by no means dead. We merely have a pause to see what will happen next.

A great deal of development is proposed along the boundary between Hammersmith & Fulham and

Kensington & Chelsea. From Imperial Wharf on the river going north, there are large developments planned for Earls Court, West Kensington, the Westfield site, the former Dairy Crest north of Westfield and Imperial [College] West north of the Westway. These proposals will be high density and the effect of them on local amenities will be great. The challenge for the Group in part is that each one has been put forward separately without due thought being given to the effect of the whole on the surrounding area.



*A photograph of Charles Dickens taken two or three years before his death in 1870. Our contribution to the bicentennial celebrations of his birth is an account of his Urania Cottage project for fallen women in Shepherd's Bush, launched with Angela Burdett-Coutts in 1847 – see page 7.*

The Group was invited to briefing meetings with the council's agents administering the bidding process for Fulham town hall. Out of a final shortlist of two, the developer eventually chosen was one that we do not think is ideal, mainly because the public use of the building – which has been so important to local residents over the years – will be very limited.



*A splendid view of the medieval tower of All Saints Church, Fulham, taken in 1874, showing the palace moat in the foreground. The tower is threatened by the heavy church bells knocking against it when rung – see update right.*

There are further possible developments along the river, notably Fulham Football Club and Queens Wharf. If implemented, the FFC proposals for the river end stand would, by its height and profile, have a considerable impact on the surrounding streets. Furthermore, the proposal to extend the stand over the river would affect all river users, whether for trade, tourism, sailing or rowing and the river views. The plans seen would also adversely affect Bishop's Park by the proposal to use it as an exit from the grounds after matches.

There have been changes at the town hall, with the new tri-borough arrangements with Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster councils. These changes will no doubt save

money, though at present it is a bit difficult to find out just who is in charge of what. One change affects libraries and archives. The Group has been very concerned indeed about the future of our archives, which were abruptly closed last year and then re-opened on a minimal basis of two days a month. The new director of libraries and archives, David Ruse, has come from Westminster and initial discussions with him sound promising. Though there will be no extra money, we hope that our archives will be open more frequently.

Among others, I have had meetings with council planning officers responsible for conservation and listed buildings both to talk over mutual problems and, for me, to find out just what could and could not be done. One issue which does concern me is the streetscapes of King Street and Shepherd's Bush Green alongside the common. They have become rather tired and tatty. Action has been taken elsewhere – for example in Waltham Forest – to improve their high streets in conservation areas. With the help of grant aid from English Heritage, they have been able to revive historic high streets by improving shop fronts, signage and street furniture. One of the fortunate outcomes has been greater footfall and increased trade – a good result considering the competition from large shopping centres. This is a type of project with which I think that the Group could be selectively involved, not least because we have both Westfield at one end of the scale and local shopping parades at the other.

The last few months have been a bit of a baptism of fire for me, but I am lucky in having such an excellent, knowledgeable and supportive committee for which I am extremely grateful. Many of our members have, I know, particular interests and ideas. We would always be very glad to hear them. Contact details are on the back page.

Marie-Joise Jennings

#### **BRIEF UPDATES**

##### **All Saints Church, Fulham**

All Saints Church is listed Grade II\*. Designed by Sir Arthur Blomfield and built in 1880-81, its retained tower is 14th or early 15th century and is one of the oldest buildings in the borough. We have a wonderful 19th century photograph of it on this page. The vicar tells us that they have a serious problem regarding the tower: 'The fine peal of ten bells (tuned to Eb) causes the tower to move when rung. This is meant to happen, but not as much as it does now! The heavy bells, set on their ancient oak bell frame and together weighing over 4 tons, knock against the structure of the tower so that the mortar is loosening, the corners of the tower pulling apart and the four walls splitting. A new, metal, bell frame is needed, to brace the tower, tie it in, and provide a hanging for the bells'. The cost is estimated at £470,000. English Heritage has made a grant of £89,000. The church has just launched a 'Campaign to save our Tower and Bells'. The Group wishes the church well with its fundraising. More in the next newsletter.

## ‘Preservation by Record’

With pressure for ‘regeneration’ and high land values, the borough is losing many of its historic buildings with large footprints – often former industrial buildings – that can be redeveloped to a much larger density. In such cases the Group argues for ‘Preservation by Record’. When demolition is proposed for an historic building the Group always asks for a photographic record to be made of the interior as well as the exterior, for a commemorative plaque and where appropriate for an archaeological investigation. We are grateful that the council is supporting this approach.

## Hammersmith Palais

At the time of writing sadly the Palais is being demolished. As a result of the Group’s requests, a photographic record has been made of the Palais for the borough archives. We shall be watching carefully to see that the replacement music venue is ‘fit for purpose’.



*An old Hammersmith Palais advert. Sadly the Palais is no more – demolished this year.*

archaeological investigation and commemorative plaque as part of the redevelopment.

## Planning Policy

The Government’s National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 27 March 2012 with immediate effect. The document states that it reduces ‘over a thousand pages of national policy to about 50’. As we reported in the last newsletter, the Group had been concerned about the draft NPPF downgrading the historic environment with its ‘presumption in favour of development’. The final version is more sympathetic to the historic environment and now its presumption is ‘in favour of **sustainable** development’. Its definition of ‘sustainable development’ includes ‘protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment’ The brief section on the historic environment is based on the approach in Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5) which it supersedes. As we currently understand it, the council now has to review its own policy documents to see if they comply with this overarching document and to include detail no longer included in national guidance.

The Group will be working to achieve detailed support for the historic environment in the council’s own policy guidance.

## Conservation Area profiles

No news yet as to when there will be a start on the promised conservation area profile for the canal in the north of the borough (the Group provided a draft for the council some time ago), nor when other profiles will be updated.

## Shepherd’s Bush Market

We continue to be concerned about the effect this over-large development will have on the historic market and the conservation areas around it. We deplore the proposed loss of the delightful row consisting of 30-52 Goldhawk Road. This dates from 1850 and includes the much-loved Cooke’s Eel and Pie shop. The scheme is approved, but we still hope that it may be reconsidered and replaced by a more sensitive scheme that retains the historic row of shops, which are such an important part of the local street scene.

## Parson’s Green Club

The present proposals for redevelopment of the Parson’s Green Sports Club would significantly harm the historic character of Broomhouse Lane, first by causing the demolition of the listed 18th century Ivy and Sycamore cottages and second, by damaging the setting of the listed ‘Elizabethan Schools’, now a private house known as ‘Hurlingham Castle’. In 1900 Feret wrote in his *History of Fulham*: ‘In 1517 Broomhouse Lane and drawdock with its ferry to Wandsworth bank was found to be a way which had existed from time beyond memory of man...Broomhouse Lane with its arching trees, its rustic cottages, its sylvan quietude and its old dock is perhaps the most picturesque spot now to be found in Fulham’. Broomhouse Lane still retains much of this character. We look for any proposal for this site to retain the listed cottages, to avoid damaging the setting of ‘Hurlingham Castle’ and to preserve the semi-rustic nature of Broomhouse Lane.

*Angela Dixon, Historic Buildings Group*

## LIQUID HISTORY

The West Middlesex Water Works was set up in 1806. Originally the company had planned to extract water in Fulham, but in the end they plumped for a site on Hammersmith Mall next to The Ship pub. From the new pumping works here, water from the Thames was pumped up to a reservoir high on Campden Hill for gravity distribution via iron pipes. Thames water quality at this time was reasonable as the river at Hammersmith was not badly polluted. Even so, to improve water quality, the company constructed a large reservoir and filter beds across the river in Barnes. These allowed for the settling of sediment and produced some reduction in bacteria. This reservoir, familiarly known as the Leg o’ Mutton from its shape, survives as a nature reserve in Barnes. An iron pipe sometimes visible at low tide on the Hammersmith side probably connected the reservoirs to the Hammersmith works.

In the 1850s new legislation banned abstraction from the tidal Thames and required all water to be filtered. The West London combined with several other companies and moved to Hampton, just above Moseley Lock, but it continued to store and filter water in an extended network of reservoirs and filter beds in Barnes and to pump it from Hammersmith. In 1903 the West London was combined with all other London water companies to form the Metropolitan Water Board (MWB). The MWB built new pumping stations to assist in distribution. One of these was in Hammersmith, on the old West London site. The MWB was wound up as part of the formation of the Greater London Council in 1965. On privatisation, the facilities and services passed to Thames Water.

The construction of the Thames Water Ring Main (1988-1993) rendered local pumping stations obsolete. Hammersmith was decommissioned in 1997 and the reservoirs across the river converted into the London Wetlands Centre. The London ring main also gave Shepherd's Bush the Thames Water Tower sculpture. Unfortunately the blue fluid has gone from the structure so it is not as striking as when first erected. The concept was drawn up in 1993 by Daniel O'Sullivan and Tania Doufa, students at the Royal College of Art, and constructed by Brookes Stacy Randell Fursden, technology consultants.



*The Group's latest heritage plaque, installed on the old Thames Water pumping station in the Great West Road, near The Ship pub, in January this year.*

What remains of the pumping station site at Hammersmith? Well, the wall by the children's play area next to The Ship is a survivor from the West London's building. It bears a plaque on the landward side to William Tierney Clark, the company's notable resident engineer. Clark built the first Hammersmith Bridge (and the Chain Bridge over the Danube in Budapest) and is buried in St Paul's Church, Hammersmith. Between this wall and the Great West Road stands the MWB pumping station of 1909. After decommissioning into 1997, this was converted into apartments. A smart HBG blue plaque was installed on the building on 5 January this year.

One last relic of the site's history is the lattice beam. Before conversion to more modern power sources, the pumping station used a beam engine of the Boulton & Watt type. The beam of this engine was constructed of a lattice of metal parts rather than the usual solid structure. Lattice beams are more fuel efficient, but they can be more trouble to maintain. In fact the one at Hammersmith had to have strengthening bars added at some point. Initially the lattice beam was preserved outside the Hammersmith pumping station. Later it was moved to the Kempton Great Engines Trust and latterly to the Kew Bridge Steam Museum in Brentford. Both these museums also have preserved steam engines which can regularly be seen in action.

There are two other Thames Water buildings in Hammersmith still in use, both in Chancellor's Road. The *ca* 1900 Depot is of brick with stone dressing and a fine main entrance. The pumping station adjacent is a Brutalist building constructed in concrete slabs with a black bonded aggregate surface. It is an unusual building and almost certainly dates from the 1960s. Plans for the Thames Tunnel indicate that this building will remain and the overflow sewers will be redirected. Once the underground work is completed, it appears from the plans that there will be a small predominantly glass building next to the pumping station. Water supply is often taken for granted, but in Hammersmith there is much both old and new to remind us of it.

*John Goodier, Historic Buildings Group*

#### **THE GROUP'S ANNUAL MEETING**

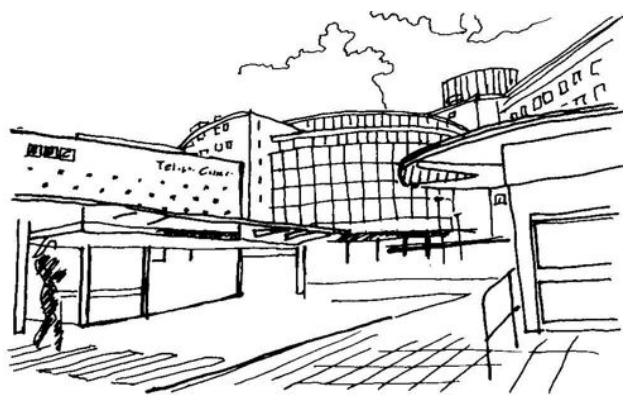
The Group's annual meeting was held on 22 October 2011 at the newly completed St Paul's Centre in Queen Caroline Street. We were honoured to be the first community group to hold an event there. St Paul's has been extensively restored over recent years and the centre is a major new-build development. It connects directly to the west end of the nave and has coffee and book shops, a library and spaces for receptions, meetings and outreach activities, all above ground. The large basement has yet more meeting rooms, of which the largest is the well-equipped conference room in which our meeting was held. During the reception before the meeting Barrie Stead and Becca Wright led well received tours of both church and centre respectively.

The chairman, Angela Dixon, welcomed over 80 Group members, representatives of other groups, council officers, professional friends and councillors, including the mayor, Councillor Frances Stainton. She explained that this would be her last annual meeting as chairman since, after 24 years, she was standing down from both the chair and the committee.

Our visiting speaker was David Score, Oxford Archaeology's senior project manager for the extensive dig in the graveyard before and during construction of the St Paul's Centre. Using fascinating 'photos' of the work, he described how desk research and a trial pit had suggested that some 750 sets of remains could be expected. In the event 649 sets were recovered from 313

separate graves dating from around 1818 to 1853. We heard how these remains had been recovered, recorded, cleaned on site and analyzed. 405 adults and 244 juveniles were identified, with females predominating. Unexpectedly, the mortality profile revealed a predominance of deaths in juveniles and prime to mature adults. There were few babes, infants and old people. David described other findings, from causes of death to injuries and objets trouvés including personal items and lead coffin plates. Very unusually the human remains had not been taken away for reburial but, after bagging and tagging, securely stored in the church tower pending future investigation.

In her keynote address, the chairman referred to her newsletter report describing the past year's work and updated the meeting on current developments and issues. These included the King Street redevelopment scheme, Hammersmith Embankment, the proposed Thames Tunnel at Carnwath Road and the omission of tall buildings from the current Core Strategy. She went on to summarise some of the Group's key achievements since its foundation in 1987. As chairman she was particularly proud of: the *Local List*; the continuing photographic record of buildings; the *Sculpture Survey*; the recording of important sites before redevelopment; the foundation of the West London River Group; the Group's blue plaque scheme; maintaining excellent and impartial relations with council officers and successive administrations, and making positive and constructive contributions to local planning policy.



*BBC Television Centre in Wood Lane, one of several buildings for which the Group achieved or helped to achieve statutory listing under Angela Dixon's chairmanship – see right.*

Other business items on the agenda being completed, the outgoing chairman welcomed Dr Marie-Louise Jennings who was willing to stand for the chairmanship. She was duly elected, together with the other officers and committee members who were standing for re-election.

Taking the chair, Marie-Lou Jennings paid tribute to Angela Dixon for her massive contribution not only to Hammersmith & Fulham but also to wider London. Thanking Angela on behalf of the committee, Dr Andy Duncan presented her with a rare 19th century print of the boat race course and *Lost London*, the outstanding English Heritage book by Phillip Davies.

Thanks and appreciation were also enthusiastically expressed by Barbara Woda, lately conservation officer, and by Miranda Poliakov, curator of the Museum of Fulham Palace. The mayor celebrated Angela's chairmanship and recollected many of their successes in years of working together. On behalf of all involved in safeguarding the borough's heritage, she thanked Angela for all she had achieved and for the way she had done it – with foresight, enthusiasm, determination and impartiality. Hoping that Angela's 'path would be strewn with flowers', and to sustained applause, the mayor presented a large bouquet. In reply, our outgoing chairman wished the Group well for the future and urged members to 'keep the faith – never give up'.

Closing the meeting, the new chairman, Marie-Lou Jennings, thanked all who had arranged the meeting, with special mention of the vicar, churchwardens and staff of St Paul's, together with the tour leaders.

*Richard Scott, Historic Buildings Group*

### **TRIBUTE TO ANGELA DIXON**

Angela Dixon founded the Hammersmith & Fulham Historic Buildings Group in 1987 at the suggestion of local activist Charles Tylee. Charles was an artist from New Zealand who loved the borough's heritage and saw the need for a voluntary organisation to preserve it. Charles and Angela had worked together on what was then the community forum for the borough. This was a channel for consultation between voluntary groups and the council at a time when consultation was in its infancy. Little did she know that she would go on to chair the Group set up at that time for the next 24 years.

Angela's mission from the start was to promote, preserve and enhance the historic buildings of the borough. Assisted by the Group's committee and members, she has succeeded brilliantly.

Her achievements during her long chairmanship were many. She started the *Local List*, the first edition of which came out in 1987. (This lists buildings of historic, architectural and townscape merit and is now in its fourth edition.) She started a photographic record of the buildings in the borough, now deposited in the borough archives. She also presided over a borough-wide sculpture survey – also in the archives and available online via the council's website – and initiated an ongoing series of commemorative history plaques.

Under her chairmanship the Group achieved or helped to achieve, through statutory listing, national recognition of Bradmore House, the Royal Masonic Hospital, BBC Television Centre and Wormholt Library. Through Angela, the Group successfully worked to persuade the council to fully recognise the importance and significance of Fulham Palace as the borough's most important historic asset.

With the Hammersmith Society, the Group under Angela was a founder member of the West London River Group. This is a collection of societies and community groups

along the river from Kew to Chelsea which promotes a coherent strategy embracing all matters relating to the river along this stretch. The formation of the WLRG led to the publication of the *Thames Strategy – Kew to Chelsea* and to the funding of work to put it into practice.

Throughout her chairmanship she has maintained the Group's strictly non-political stance. The Group has to work with all parties in the council so this is crucially important. Over her time councillors of both parties have been members of the Group, which says a lot.

She has always advocated a positive approach, in other words not to be always against proposals made by developers and the council. Her aim, sometimes in very difficult circumstances, has been to achieve an outcome which will enhance, protect and respect an historic building in its setting.

As the Group under Angela's chairmanship established itself over the years, the council has increasingly asked for its views on new proposals. The Group has contributed to many draft conservation area profiles in the borough and to the *StreetSmart* and *Riverside Walk Enhancement* reports. Throughout this process, Angela's view and that of the Group has always been that proposals for regeneration areas should be heritage-led.

Speaking at public planning hearings never deterred her: she could hold her own effectively in the face of forensic questioning by notable planning barristers. Angela has contributed hugely to the planning policy debates within the borough, particularly as they affected listed buildings and conservation areas, and represented the Group in many public meetings and hearings. Her expertise in planning matters was recognised when the Royal Town Planning Institute made her an honorary member.

Angela's motto has always been 'keep the faith'. The appearance of Hammersmith would have been much the poorer if she had not founded the Group. Buildings, skylines and streetscapes in the borough would have been lost without her work.

We all wish Angela a restful and happy retirement with her family, while wondering whether she really will be able sit back and take it easy!

*Marie-Louise Jennings, Historic Buildings Group*

## OUT AND ABOUT

In 2011 the Group arranged two visits to local listed buildings. The first was a guided tour of the Grade II\* Holy Trinity Church, Brook Green, on Saturday 7 May. The visit was arranged following the Group's 2010 annual meeting in the adjacent parish centre. Introducing the church, our guide, Father Terry Tastard, described the events leading to its conception, design, construction and consecration in 1851. He impressed visitors with his detailed knowledge, not only of the building itself, but also of its fittings, monuments, sculptures, glass and furnishings. At the end of a most interesting tour, Father Terry invited us to the presbytery to share a 'surprise'.

This turned out to be a loop from the 1954 film *Father Brown* in which Alec Guinness (a long-time resident of St Peter's Square in Hammersmith) is shown 'preaching' from the very pulpit which we had been examining only a few minutes earlier! Our thanks go to Father Terry for his enthusiastic welcome and for a delightful visit.

The second outing, on Saturday 28 May 2011, was to the Grade II Ashlar Court in Ravenscourt Gardens, built 1935-37 by Burnet, Tait and Lorne as a nurses' home for the Royal Masonic Hospital. Until recently Ashlar Court has been used as a students' tourist hostel. Now empty, it has planning consent for conversion to residential use. The building, designed in the Dudokian style to complement that of the hospital, still retains many key elements of its original interior, for example fireplaces in travertine and bronze, wood block floors, walnut veneer panelling, stone dados and wooden fenestration. Of particular interest was the large Elford Room, used as a games room and notable as the venue for nurses' balls. Barrie Stead organised and led this pre-conversion visit, facilitated through the owners' agents, Jones Lang Lasalle, to whom thanks are due.

*Richard Scott, Historic Buildings Group*



*The recently 'rediscovered' mural in Greenside Primary School, installed when the school was built in 1951-52.*

## MURAL MAGIC

In a backwater in Shepherd's Bush, not far from the Askew Road, lies an architectural gem with another gem inside it distinctly in need of some love.

Greenside Primary School was designed by architect Erno Goldfinger using an ingenious reinforced concrete frame which allowed new schools to be built at speed to educate post-war Britain. Built as one of a pair in 1951-52 (the sister school is in Putney), Greenside Primary (then called Westville) has the distinction of being on show in the V&A Architecture Gallery in the form of a delightful model showing the construction process. This year the building celebrates its Diamond Jubilee along with the Queen.

Within the building lies another noteworthy example of post-war optimism – an exceptional mural by Gordon Cullen, urban designer and artist to the *Architectural*

*Review.* The mural was installed in the school as part of the movement to bring art into schools, most famously seen in the School Prints project with artists such as Julian Trevelyan, Henry Moore and John Nash, but also in the creation of some stunning murals. As part of Goldfinger's vision, he commissioned Gordon Cullen to paint a mural in the entrance hall of Greenside School.

The mural – which earns Greenside Primary the star on its Grade II\* listing – is very much in mid-century style,



*Gordon Cullen, painter of the early 1950s' mural in Greenside Primary School.*

with a rich variety of imagery inspired by school subjects and feeling very like the opened-out pages of a Picture Puffin. The images include the first commercial jet – the de Havilland Comet, first flown in 1951 – and the first standard steam locomotive – the Britannia 70000, commissioned by the Railways Board and rolled out in 1951. However, for the last 20 years – because it went 'out of fashion' – it has been covering unloved behind a red curtain in the school entrance hall.

Now a movement has been started to bring the mural back to life. The curtain has been removed and the children have been using it for reference and inspiration in their lessons and projects. And a Friends group composed of parents, staff and governors has been formed to widen awareness of the mural and also to raise funds to restore it. Although not over-painted and actually surprisingly undamaged, the artwork is in need of considerable restoration to clean it up and to mend cracks, wear and surface damage.

On November 2011 the new Friends kicked off their campaign with a lecture on the Greenside Mural by Alan Powers, chair of the Twentieth Century Society and professor in architecture and cultural history at Greenwich University. The evening was a great success, drawing attendees from across the whole community – parents, staff, local residents and interest groups, members of the Cullen family, educationalists, mural restorers, architects and art galleries. [*We are extremely fortunate to have Alan Powers speaking at our next Historic Building Group annual meeting in October this year – Ed.*]

On 28 February 2012 the Friends celebrated both the Diamond Jubilee of Greenside Primary School and the official opening of our new Learning Garden. The event was an opportunity to see the Goldfinger school and the Gordon Cullen mural in daylight, and to watch the 'première' of *The Story of the Greenside Mural*, a film inspired by the evening we had had at the school in November and featuring an interview with Alan Powers. Since then, taking up a suggestion made after our launch

event, we have established the Greenside Arts Lectures series based around post-war art and architecture. The first lecture – on Eric Ravilious – was held at Greenside School on 24 April 2012.

Our next step is to set up a charity for restoration fundraising. We hope to keep you up to date with progress in future HBG newsletters, but if you would like more information before then, search for Greenside mural on Facebook.

*Kate Fishenden, Friends of Greenside Mural*

## WHAT THE DICKENS!

This year we are celebrating the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Dickens, way back in 1812. It so happens that our borough was the scene of one of the great novelist and campaigner's most interesting projects – Urania Cottage. This social experiment in Shepherd's Bush involved another famous Victorian campaigner, wealthy philanthropist Angela, later Baroness, Burdett-Coutts. She was a friend of Dickens and two years his junior.

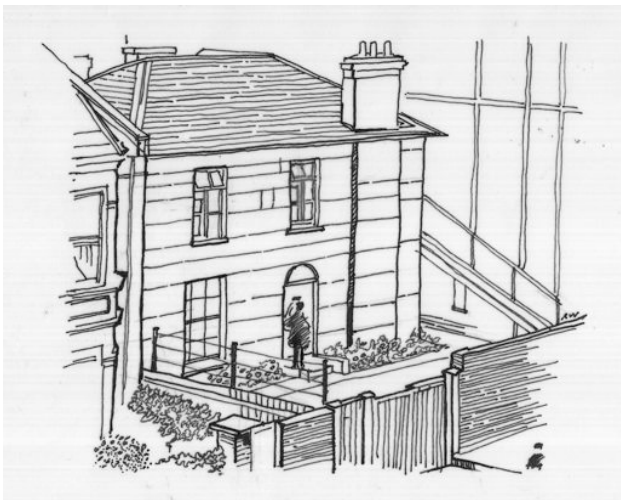
In the 1840s, with prostitutes soliciting from the steps of her Mayfair home, Angela Burdett-Coutts became concerned about the problem of prostitution. She came up with the idea of a home where 'fallen women' could be 'reclaimed' and then helped to start new lives in the colonies. Having known Dickens for some years and worked with him on schools for the poor, she consulted him about her new scheme. At first he tried to dissuade her, fearing that association with prostitutes would damage her reputation. But when she persisted, he eventually agreed to help, telling her he would 'enter on such a task with my whole heart and soul'. From that moment on, Dickens became the prime mover in Angela's fallen women project.

His first task was to find a home for the asylum. What they wanted was somewhere far removed from the places whence the inmates were likely to come, yet at the same time easily accessible from central London. The problem was solved in May 1847 when a house in Shepherd's Bush came up for rent. It was in Lime Grove – then a country lane – half way down on the east side and surrounded by fields. 'It is retired but cheerful', Dickens wrote, adding that it had a little garden and that the taxes were low. He took a 21-year lease and set about making it ready for its first residents. Whether the house was already called Urania Cottage or was now given the name by Dickens and Angela, we do not know. Either way it was a strange choice, Urania being the Roman muse of astronomy, and 'Uranian' a Victorian euphemism for homosexual love.

Urania Cottage opened for business in November 1847. The first girls were prostitutes just released from prison, the initial aim being to try to break the endless cycle of prostitution and prison in which many women spent their whole lives. Dickens recruited the girls both by getting the governors of such prisons as Coldbath Fields and Tothill Fields – both of whom sat on Urania's management committee – to recommend suitable

candidates, and by circulating an appeal inside prisons inviting girls to put themselves forward for consideration. Later the net was widened to include starving needlewomen, poor girls from Ragged Schools and destitute girls who had applied at police stations for relief – in other words girls who were not necessarily prostitutes and who had not fallen foul of the law.

The regime in the home was strict but friendly, the idea being to try to restore pride and self-respect by kindness rather than by endless lectures and scoldings. The girls – of whom there were 10 or 11 in the home at any one time, aged on average about 20 – rose at 6 am and had morning prayers and scripture followed by school. Then came the main business of the day, training in household duties such as washing, bread-making and needlework to fit them for domestic service and hopefully marriage in the colonies. After lunch there was a recreation period during which suitable books were read aloud. Music lessons were given by Dickens's friend, the composer John Hullah. Outside, those girls who wanted them could have little flower gardens to tend. There was no school on Saturday, it being a great cleaning, polishing and bath day. On Sunday, of course, everybody went to church. Good behaviour was encouraged by a system of marks. Girls scoring high marks were rewarded with money. The cash was given to them when they were ready to emigrate to the colonies.



*Urania Cottage, the little villa in bucolic Shepherd's Bush rented by Charles Dickens and Angela Burdett-Coutts in 1847 to house and train reformed prostitutes and other young women prior to their emigration to the colonies.*

Looking back, the great question is, how many girls responded to the way of life at Urania Cottage and succeeded in breaking out of the poverty/prostitution trap? Unfortunately this is something we do not know for certain, but if the success rate after five and a half years is anything to go by (which Dickens published in his periodical *Household Words*) slightly more than 50% made it to the colonies and settled down there. Since 150 girls all told passed through Urania's doors, that means some 80 redeemed lives. If this figure is correct, Dickens and Angela would have seen it as a great success because

they set out believing that if only one third or one half of their girls reformed, they were doing well.

Urania Cottage closed down in 1862, six years before the lease on the house expired. We do not know why it shut, though since Dickens always referred to it as an experiment perhaps it was always meant to be temporary. In 1912 it became the manager's house for Gaumont film studios next door. Some time after this it was demolished. Today, its site is marked by the building immediately adjacent to the new Gaumont Terrace housing development which replaced the old studios in the 1990s.

*Andrew Duncan, Historic Buildings Group*

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### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

*Wed 24 Oct:* **HBG annual meeting** at Stoll in Fulham Road. Dr Alan Powers, chairman of the Twentieth Century Society, will be our visiting speaker. Full details will follow with the autumn newsletter.

*9-10 Jun:* Open Garden Squares

*23 Jun-8 Jul:* London Festival of Architecture

*22-23 Sep:* Open House London

### **HBG PUBLICATIONS**

*Local List* £17 members, £20 non-members. *Bradmore House* illustrated booklet, £5. Tel: 07884 434631.

### **OFFICERS**

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