

A Short History of the Sydney Buildings Householders' Association by Peter Hubbard

The First Ten Years

The Sydney Buildings Householders' Association was founded in July 1970 when Geoffrey Fane (number 54) was concerned about the increasing number of planning applications and wrote to all residents suggesting a meeting to consider how their interests could be best protected. According to the files (which may be incomplete) no replies were received from Nos. 1 to 10 but there was a positive response from the remainder of the road. Among the signatories who are happily still with us were Joan Mordaunt (51) and Evelyn Jubbie (58). The association was officially launched at a meeting at St. Mary's Church Hall on 18th August 1970, attended by 26 residents. John Hunt (37) became the first Chairman with Geoffrey Fane as Secretary and Joanne Dixon (24) as Treasurer. Other members of the original committee were Doris Heard (50) and Ian Gordon (48).

In November an invitation was extended to residents of Horseshoe Walk to join but this does not seem to have been pursued.

The decision to incorporate the Association as 'Householders' rather than 'Residents' is of some interest. It is believed that all the remaining similar bodies in Bath (certainly all those which belong to the current Federation) are called 'Residents' Associations'. The reasons for the departure from normality are obscure. Presumably the idea was that only 'householders' and not 'tenants' or other occupiers would be entitled to membership. The Committee has in recent years considered making a change but this would involve reprinting letter-heading, changing the name of bank accounts, etc. and it was decided to leave things as they are. It is of little practical significance. For many years membership has in practice been open to all who live in the road.

Sydney Buildings and the Canal have always lived side by side and have had an eventful relationship, mostly harmonious but not always so. In the early 1970s a Mr. Stride wanted to develop a market garden on the canal alongside Abbey View Lock where he already had a hut. (The land at that time was classified as agricultural.) His proposals to erect other buildings for use as a restaurant, tea garden, and, it seems, to provide bed and breakfast accommodation were vigorously contested by the Committee and were not ultimately pursued. There was an outbreak of radio-controlled speed boats on the Pond above lock 11 in 1971 and objection raised to the 'penetrating and distressing noise'. Representations to British Waterways and the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust soon put a stop to this practice. In 1972 the same Pool was in danger of silting up due to the growth of weeds and rank grass. British Waterways were encouraged to

provide more water. There were further garden/mooring problems in 1974 with proposals to develop the strip of land below numbers 30 – 45 for this purpose. It is difficult to envisage this today but as recently as 1975 cars were being driven along the towpath from Widcombe and parked there. In November 1975 an iron bedstead was found dumped on the towpath. Over the years there were problems of trespass. Dr Beale (38) found interlopers picking apples and flowers in his garden. Another mini-battle with British Waterways occurred in 1978 when evidence was found of pollution by the waterbus which also allowed for passenger embarkation on the residents side of the canal. A 45 gallon drum of diesel oil was found dumped. British Waterways denied responsibility for this and no evidence was available.

The matter of most concern in the 1970s was the purchase by Mr. Applegate of the Old Dairy at the foot of the steps leading up to Darlington Place and its conversion to a dwelling house. The response of residents is perhaps best captured by the following quotations from letters written to the Council at the time: “a scene of widespread devastation Looks as if an earthquake has taken place Heaps of rubble in a chaotic mess Most unsightly.” This matter rumbled on for years as an irritant. In 1973 Mr Applegate applied for planning permission to build a flat over his garage. This was refused. In due course an Enforcement Notice was served by the Council. In 1978 further concern was expressed at the state of the premises; in 1979 brambles were found to be overgrowing and blocking the path and (a further quote from a letter written at the time) “the area fronting the road has the appearance of a scrapyard”. Happily all these problems were overcome long ago, and Bathwick Cottage, now well hidden by trees, is an accepted part of our environment.

Other matters which merited attention in the 1970s and may be recorded briefly, included concern about the future of the Malthouse following the death of the owner and possible redevelopment. At one stage planning permission was sought by the new owners Hugh Baird and Sons Ltd to erect 9 flats and 13 garages. As it is a Grade 2 listed building the application was, fortunately, refused but permission given to allow conversion into residential accommodation. Other proposals for the Malthouse were to convert it into a restaurant or alternatively a cultural centre. The Committee was not successful in opposing an application for a garage and showrooms on Bathwick Hill by the canal, though strict conditions governing the scheme were imposed by the planners. In 1973 a planning application to convert No 23 (then premises belonging to a builder) into a shop supplying boating material for canal users was rejected. In 1975 permission was refused for the erection of a garage opposite No 46 and a further application for a similar purpose opposite No 41 was also refused. The message here, as so often over the years, is

constant vigilance to protect the integrity of our road. In 1977 the Association persuaded the Council to erect handrails alongside the path down to Lime Grove School – previously a considerable hazard to older residents.

It is impossible to record in this short history the names of all the residents who served on the Committee and played a part in the achievements – and failures. But mention must be made of Bishop Gough (21?) who retired from his work in Africa and was, briefly, Chairman of the Association in 1973. Lady Luce (also 21) was Chairperson in 1979. In fact church dignitaries and titled ladies have been rather prone to making their homes in Sydney Buildings, as subsequent chapters will reveal.

The Eighties

There was a curious hiatus in the history of the Association between 1980 and 1983, when it seems to have lapsed – at any rate there is no record of any meetings.

The Association re-emerged strongly in late 1983 when the celebrated and colourful retired Bishop of Southwark, the Rt.Rev. Mervyn Stockwood (15) was appointed Chairman. It was the bishop's practice to go right to the top of on all matters, even those which might have seemed superficially trivial. He would write to the Member of Parliament, Mayor and Chief Constable. This tactic was in fact often successful.

In 1984 the Malthouse was in trouble again when an application was made to demolish a wall and erect a fire-escape. This was the issue which prompted Bishop Stockwood to protest to Chris Patten (Bath's M.P. at the time) over 'creeping commercialisation' and a resolution was passed at the Associations' A.G.M. "that this Association is opposed to all applications which seek to establish any kind of manufacturing or commercial workshops ..." There was strong opposition when No.23 wanted to erect buildings in the garden to construct furniture and craft products, described as "light industrial use". In 1986 there was concern about longterm mooring on the canal. Unfortunately the bishop was in an invidious position on this issue as his was one of the boats. An interesting article appeared in the Chronicle in which he was referred to as "the controversial former Bishop of Southwark". The result of this was a classic ruling from British Waterways: "Craft shall be moored only at such places where mooring is permitted". The bishop resigned in 1988 and Brian Blyth (28) became the next Chairman. Ruth Richardson (29) took over from Tony Heaton (Malthouse) as Secretary. Tony, a successful and talented artist and designer, was another colourful character whose relationship with the Chairman and indeed with residents generally can best be described as 'tempestuous'.

Life was by no means dull under Brian's chairmanship, which lasted

seven years. 1988/9 were particularly busy years, both in and out of the canal. British Waterways tried to erect 'giant motorway signs' along the towpath, six of them and all four feet high; there were mooring problems and references in the minutes to "vandalism, drunkenness and abusive behaviour"; a resident who had better be nameless set the dogs on an intruder in the garden at midnight; foul language was reported from teenagers at 4 p.m.; a trumpet was being played on the towpath; men were seen running around naked and drunk at canalside parties; campers were sleeping in tents on the grass verges; exhaust smoke was reported to be polluting the garden at No.9; an elderly woman fell into the canal from a boat carrying revellers; a 'blonde' was seen having a shower on a narrowboat (this breach of decorum clearly required careful and sustained observation and reflects great credit on the Chairman's devotion to duty!). None of this is made up. Not surprisingly there was concern at the risks to wildlife – the dragonflies, mayflies, and water beetles as well as ducks, moorhens and swans. On perhaps a more serious level, a planning application to convert the Old Coalhouse (23A) into flats and a maisonette was successfully contested, and discussions were started with British Waterways and the Trust on a proposed planning strategy for the canal. Domestically the first Neighbourhood Watch scheme was introduced. Its first convenor was committee-member David O'Sullivan (40), who played a significant part in running the Association in the 80s and 90s.

Joanne Dixon, the first Treasurer, ran a pre-prep school in her house, to which David and Gillian O'Sullivan sent their son. It was, David says, "too respectable to be overtly commercial". Joanne, incidentally, was the mother of Penelope, equally well known in the road, who later became Mrs Jimmy Kerr, and at one time was Secretary of the Association. Penelope had a reputation as a 'scourge of bad behaviour', particularly on the canal, and it is reported that new residents were told they would have to behave themselves in Sydney Buildings and "certainly never hang washing out on Sundays".

The Orchard

The Orchard is the triangle of land between the upper part of Sydney Buildings, Horseshoe Walk, and The Pond. The first sign of trouble occurred in 1995 when Alec Ritchie (54), a member of the committee, noticed two men prowling about in the Orchard carrying clipboards and tape measures. By this time Terry Jones (2) had taken over as Chairman. The Committee quickly unearthed the disturbing news that the Council was considering the future of this piece of land and had decided to remove the designation 'recreational land', leaving the area in a sort of planning limbo. The lead role in resisting any development proposals was taken by

Richard and Joanne Lander of 4 Horseshoe Walk.

By 1996 it appeared that it was the intention of British Waterways to sell the land by auction which would clearly have paved the way to housing development. The Landers and their growing team of helpers, including a high proportion of Sydney Buildings' residents, swung into action and soon enlisted the help and support of a wide range of interested parties including: the Bath Environment Centre, the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust, Avon Wildlife Trust, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, English Nature, the Bath Preservation Trust, Friends of the Earth, the National Trust, the Avon Badger Group, the Countryside Commission, Don Foster M.P., the Widcombe Association plus local and planning councillors. A formidable list. It emerged, which was something of a setback, that in 1993 the Council had offered to sell the land to residents, but this offer had not been taken up. It was stated that any development would be "well designed and low key" and would "sit attractively by the canal". British Waterways' main concern appeared to be to "maximise income". Residents were not convinced. At this stage Beaufort Houses was revealed as the proposed developer. A public protest meeting was held and attended by 40 residents.

In March 1997 the threat became a reality. Beaufort Houses submitted a planning application to build three large houses on the Orchard site alongside the canal. The Association immediately sent off a formal letter of objection and alerted Bath's M.P., Don Foster. The Waterside Action Group was founded with Richard Lander as the Chairman and a campaign started which included posters, leaflets delivered to all residents, and a petition was signed which in two weeks collected over 700 signatures including from members of the public who enjoyed walking along the towpath. It has to be said that British Waterways took a very adversarial stance. It was suggested that if planning permission was turned down, the issue would be taken to Appeal, and there was even an implicit threat that the land would be sold to any builder, who might choose to erect up to sixteen houses on the site. Undeterred, the Group fought on.

From the beginning, the Council showed signs of being on the side of the residents. A government inspector under the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 considered that the site did not satisfy the criteria for open spaces, but that any buildings might conflict with policies to protect conservation areas, policies which had the strong support of the Council. The Wildlife Trust and the Council ecologists for both Bath and Bristol waded in to protest at the potential disturbance to wildlife. The Action Group also suggested that the proposed access to the site was neither safe nor convenient. There were articles in the Chronicle and an excellent photograph showing Pete and Anne Claydon (14) on a boat with a poster "Save Our Waterside", with a large supporting crowd of residents on the towpath behind.

It might be worth recording (should any similar problems arise in the future) the main points of objection to the development programme put forward by the Action Group:

Access to the site adjacent to Abbey Lock is very dangerous, taking into consideration the volume of traffic and pedestrians using the road at this point and the lack of visibility in both directions.

The site forms part of an important wildlife corridor which links the canal with Smallcombe Woods and provides shelter and food for a variety of birds and mammals (including badgers, which are a protected species). It is the undisturbed nature of the site which makes it particularly important. The proposed development will cut off this wildlife corridor from the canal.

The site lies within the conservation area of this World Heritage City. The particular attraction of this area of the canal lies in its rural characteristic which brings the countryside to this area of the city which itself lies so close to the centre. The proposed development would severely detract from this. From the public canal towpath at present both tourists and local people enjoy the uninterrupted views up to Smallcombe Woods. The proposed development would completely destroy this for ever.

We would also wish to question the suitability of the design, layout and materials of the proposed development.

The application was in the event turned down unanimously by the Council, with many residents attending the meeting. The Action Group was actually congratulated on the quality and professionalism of its submissions. So far so good, but the struggle was not yet over. Beaufort Houses duly lodged an Appeal to be determined by an inspector from the Department of the Environment. With remarkable resilience the Action Group went into action again. The revised application had been slightly changed but not significantly. Strong views were expressed in correspondence and publicly ... "the proposed developed is akin to raping our heritage ... this is a blatant exploitation of a natural habitat for undisguised commercial gain ..." But understandably people were getting more than a little exasperated by this time.

At a meeting of the Council on 4th February 1998 it was announced that Beaufort Houses had withdrawn the application and the proposed enquiry was cancelled. It was a famous victory, and showed that the power of the people, if properly directed and organised, can prevail.

As an interesting footnote, the Bath City Council Local Plan, published in 2002, confirmed that the Orchard and the strip of land by the canal had been designated respectively a "Visually Important Open Space" and a "Nature Conservation Site". We hope we are now safe from further attempts to build on this site which is so important a part of our

environment.

Parking

The Orchard was a major concern but the permanent headache has, of course, been parking. The problem was first mentioned in the records in 1985 when residents were troubled by non-resident parking particularly at the Bathwick Hill end of the road, and there were complaints that cars parked on the hill were blocking access to the road. By 1990 parking was a significant issue, and Residents' Parking Schemes were introduced for much of Widcombe and the area up to the canal, which seems to have been regarded by the council as a sensible boundary. Strenuous efforts were made to get Sydney Buildings included, with a petition signed by nearly all residents, but to no avail. Anger was caused by the statement by the council that "there was no statistical evidence to support residents' claims of an increase in commercial parking". Diana Cooke (13) wrote in a letter to the Council "Parking in Sydney Buildings is a disaster". Which just about sums it up for the next thirteen years. Brian Blyth made a presentation to Avon Council, supported by a petition in 1993, and the Committee "really thought it was getting somewhere". All we could get from the Council however was that Sydney Buildings would be considered in the "next revision of parking restrictions". Numerous petitions, it was reported, had been received and Sydney Buildings would be "considered". A new authority (Bath and North East Somerset) took over in April 1996. The earlier petition was dug up (the Council had 'lost' the original), dusted down and re-submitted. Unfortunately the minutes of a Council meeting in February had recorded "the new Council has no policy in the matter", which stirred up a further hornets' nest of protest. By September 1998 the Council was "working on a parking strategy for Bath" and we received an undertaking that Sydney Buildings would be included in the review. By this time Jane Wheeler-Carmichael (33) was Secretary and beginning to emerge as the scourge of the City Council, a role which she fulfilled with relentless determination over the next five years. Rab Smith who was the Transport Policy and Programme Manager at the time got off to a bad start by writing to Jane that "many schemes were under consideration and it was a matter of prioritising these schemes". It was, he said, necessary to establish whether residents wanted a scheme, in spite of our petition, which seems to have been conveniently overlooked. Jane pointed out that the footpath over the canal and into town made Sydney Buildings a perfect location for commuter parking, a good point which seems to have been previously overlooked, but regrettably Rab had the last word: "It is unlikely a scheme for Sydney Buildings will be considered next year."

Over the next few years the Council was busy "formulating a

medium/long term parking strategy.” The Chairman not surprisingly had lost patience by then and replied “No doubt your letter will prove to be the basis for a further seven years delay.” He was not far out. He continued “Perhaps one day Councillors will wake up to the fact that what the people of this city want is action and not involved excuses as to why nothing can be done; while Bath cogitates other towns have implemented schemes years ago”. Rab Smith’s irritating habit of ending all his letters “I trust this is to your satisfaction” did not help.

In 1999 there was progress. It was announced that there would be “a consultation exercise”! This would take 12 – 18 months. In December a bit of a fly in the ointment emerged when it was recorded that “some residents were opposed to a parking scheme” but it was irrefutable that a petition in favour had been signed in 1995 by 63 residents. The next step was a series of public workshops convened by the Council to discuss what should be done. Those from Sydney Buildings who attended reported that “they were conducted like some kind of T.V. show where those who made the most noise secured the most notice.” The Chairman was heard to use the word “fatuous”. Early in the year 2000, when the present writer Peter Hubbard (46) took over from Terry Jones a Chairman, it was recorded that the Association had a file on parking issues inches thick and containing, inter alia, 72 letters written between 1989 and the current year.

One of the workshops was attended by Michael Davis (1), who wrote a powerfully argued letter drawing attention to the illogicalities of the proposed zoning arrangements. He also pointed out that hotels in Pulteney Street were known to advise guests to park in Sydney Buildings. In some ways the workshops were a good idea, giving people a chance to air their views. They were attended by representatives of over 50 groups but suffered from the usual ‘overkill’. ‘Toolkits’ were supplied listing possible solutions, implications, timescale and costs. An independent facilitation company (BDOR Ltd) was hired to organise the workshops, at what expense we were never told. What we were told was that it was “simply a preliminary straw poll” and “further consultations would be more comprehensive”.

BDOR did their work well and eventually produced a 40 page report, which was all to no avail for us as Sydney Buildings was excluded but “would be monitored to study any possible knock-on effects”. June Ward (7) was impelled to write to the Council “If Sydney Buildings is to continue to be designated an unofficial, free car park with all the misery that inflicts on the residents, shouldn’t our Council Tax be reduced?”.

Perhaps the mention of money would help. As the new Chairman I urged that Sydney Buildings should be included in a review which had been promised of parking in Widcombe. But this was rejected. The review was simply tinkering with the existing schemes. Sydney Buildings “had to be

treated as part of the review process overall". June Ward had another go and put a note on the windscreen of a persistent offender "appealing to your finer feelings". There is no evidence that he had any, or that it did any good. And of course with the introduction of a scheme in Widcombe and Lime Grove the problem became even worse.

In May 2001 Chris Morrissey (12), who had recently joined the committee, proposed and organised a survey of parking pressures and patterns. Of the 39 replies received 30 were in favour, 6 in favour with reservations, and 3 against. The Chairman pointed out that the Association had been in correspondence for ten years on this matter – "nobody reading the huge volume of correspondence on our files could possibly fail to agree that we have made a convincing and unanswerable case". On 30th May I wrote to the Council as follows:

"We are unique in having a footpath direct to the city centre encouraging commuters to park outside our houses and walk to their offices. We have several businesses in the road which take up more than their share of parking spaces and appear to be unregulated. The adjoining parking schemes have simply driven cars out to park in Sydney Buildings, which is just outside the restricted area. The problem simply gets worse. Does anybody at the Council take any notice of our representations? What do we do to get some action? This is a highly regarded residential area and we pay top or nearly top rates of Council Tax. There is at the moment a strong and highly vocal resentment that we are not getting a fair return for our money, and that our long and sustained campaign is simply ignored. Please take our representations seriously and give us some tangible evidence that the problem of excessive parking in Sydney Buildings will receive early attention."

In July we were advised of a further consultation exercise which would include Sydney Buildings.

In December our Secretary, Jane, made a break-through. Steve Howell, the Head of Transport on the Council, responded to her invitation to come and inspect the problem at first hand. He subsequently wrote "Having walked

back into the city myself I was amazed at how quickly one can get to the centre, just over 5 minutes in my case." Things were beginning to look promising when the Council was totally reorganised. Committees and sub-committees were abolished and replaced by an executive of 9. Peter Metcalfe, a councillor for Widcombe, received the Transport portfolio. Once again the Association went into action and Peter Metcalfe was given a full briefing to which he was receptive. Our own councillor, John Bailey, also gave support and at last Sydney Buildings was identified as needing a parking scheme. There was a recommendation that a new zone (Zone 8) should be introduced and the old Widcombe zone (Zone 2) extended, which together would cover Sydney Buildings. Even then Rab

Smith was fighting a rearguard action, pointing out that the parking needs of residents must not override those of commuters, but in August 2002 he confirmed that Sydney Buildings was likely to be included in the new 'Outer Area Residents Parking Scheme'. In November just to underline our case Steve Osgood (42) sent a set of photographs showing the parking congestion to Dorothy Miley, the Council's new Parking Team Leader. We were beginning to see the finishing tape! 2003 was a year of great activity spearheaded by Chris Morrissey (12), who became Chairman in September. All residents received a letter from the Council notifying that a scheme was going forward and explaining the two zones – the extension of Zone 2 down to the Gap, and the new Zone 8 beyond into Bathwick Hill. The Council elections in May resulted in a new transport chief, the Conservative Sir Elgar Jenkins, but this seemed to accelerate rather than retard matters. Perhaps it helped that Sir Elgar is one of the Councillors for our ward. I was slightly disconcerted when he told me on the phone that he had "no idea" how and when his positive decision would be implemented! But I need not have worried. The new parking scheme was introduced on 1st March 2004, and through it did not satisfy everybody most residents felt that it was a great improvement – worth the long battle.

More about the Nineties

While the Eighties were pre-occupied by the story of Bathwick Cottage already recorded, the focus in the Nineties switched to the other side of the steps with the application to build a house on the vacant land at 20 Darlington Place. This had been originally mooted in 1986 but there was objection on grounds of period unity, etc, and the application was not pursued at that time. It was reviewed in 1991 and was approved provided the house was "of modest size and of a design compatible with the historic surroundings and built in natural materials". Peter Carey (31) and twenty other residents wrote to the Council suggesting the proposed development was not in keeping with the area, and raising many points of detail. This story too has a happy ending in that the design proved to be sensitive, and the conception and materials of high quality. The development was approved by the Bath Preservation Trust on the grounds that it "was not assertive and was respectful of the landscape". It was agreed that the variety of trees should be retained or replaced if diseased or damaged. 20 Darlington Place is now an accepted part of our environment and residents are free to make their own judgement. Under the vigilant eye of the Secretary, Ruth Richardson, canal news continued to feature prominently in the early nineties. In a ceremony at Devizes on August 8th 1990, Her Majesty the Queen opened the canal to navigation from Bristol to Reading, which led to a big increase in the

volume of traffic. Relations with the Canal Trust certainly improved from 1993 when Michael Goodenough was appointed Waterways Manager. Emphasis was put on education and improving the behaviour of boaters, many of whom were inexperienced, and this policy proved successful. In May 1994 a Bath Canal Day was organised by the Trust on the towpath and well supported by residents. That year marked the bi-centenary of the Kennet and Avon Canal Act of 1794, which had authorised the raising of funds to build the canal by the issue of £120 shares. A Canal Warden was appointed – not without ‘hostility’ from some residents (it is hard to believe this but there were even accusations that stones had been thrown) – and later a Lock Keeper. The level of maintenance was improved and the pumping station on the Widcombe Lock Flights (at Thimble Mill and Abbey View Lock, where the chimney is still a prominent feature) with the attractive former Lock Keeper’s Cottage with its historic Bath Humane Society Lifebuoy, all attracted growing interest from tourists and industrial historians. In 1998 there commenced major engineering work on the canal, made possible by a substantial National Lottery grant, and this continued for three years. Over the winter of 1999/2000 the whole site appeared from our gardens very like the Battle of the Somme attended by much mud, noise, dust and disruption. But it would I think be generally agreed that the Canal is looking much better than it ever did and is a facility much enjoyed and appreciated by residents. Which is not to say that there are not still occasional skirmishes with the authorities. Throughout this period there was a campaign led by Chairman Terry Jones, to limit and control overnight mooring. The heat was to some extent taken off this problem with the opening of the Darlington Wharf Marina, but a number of boats disregarded the 48 hour restriction, and one stayed all winter. In the early 1990s as already recorded, Canal Wardens were appointed though, as Ruth, the Committee’s Secretary, recorded: “We have not yet seen one.” There were incidents of swans being trapped and on more than one occasion the RSPCA had to be called. Cycling on the towpath and the danger to pedestrians was another bone of contention. There was a period of mink infestation of the bank between the Pool and the Inlet, which devastated the frog, toad and newt population. A 5 year old girl fell into Top Lock and was rescued by two men and a lifebelt. A resident’s dog was knocked down and injured by a cyclist; sewage and other rubbish continued from time to time to be dumped in the canal by boaters; a woman who fell off her bicycle (in 1995) was “given a cup of tea”. But the best story, also concerning a dog, can best be told in Ruth’s own words, from a letter to the Canal Trust in 1999:

“I noticed a man digging a hole below my garden wall by Top Lock accompanied by a lady holding a wrapped up bundle. I inquired as to what he was doing and he replied that we was about to bury a dog.

I was horrified at this and told him that I did not like the idea and had he had permission and if so from whom. He said he had, and that it was from British Waterways. I said I still did not like this area being treated as a dog's cemetery and queried as to whether it was a dog. The woman unwrapped the bundle to prove that it was a dog. I told him he should have contacted the PDSA who would no doubt have given him some advice. I asked him what the dog had died of and the woman said of old age. However I did not think it looked a particularly old dog, though I did not say so. He then started gesticulating and told me to go away. I said nothing but stood my ground. He then became very abusive and started to use the most obscene language. I still said nothing, but Mr. Blyth, my next door neighbour, who also did not approve of what was going on told him that if he continued in this fashion he would call the police. At this the man started filling in the hole he had dug swearing all the time, and they both went away."

Needless to say, permission for dog burial had not been given.

During the nineties Sydney Buildings found brief fame as the location for a number of films. In 1995 the road was used to film an episode of 'The Hollow Road' for Channel 4. The donation of £200 was given to charity. In 2000 part of Joanna Trollope's 'Other People's Children' was filmed in David and Gill O'Sullivan's house. This time the donation was paid into the Association's funds. The same year a TV company wanted to film for the series 'Style Street' and, although we qualified, after seeing a video the Committee turned this one down on the grounds of poor quality and superficial content.

The Annual Garden Party has been a regular and popular feature of the social life of the road for many years. Among those who have offered their delightful gardens for this event are: Leonard and Ruth Richardson (29), Adrian Pilbeam (49), Joanna and Alec Ritchie (54), Nick and Hermione Nicholls (50). Rachel Hill and Martin Brennan (also 54), and Sheila Mundle (60). Jennie Neubauer (41) took on the role of Entertainments Officer on the Committee and found a variety of street performers, buskers and students to liven up the garden party, and in recent years we have branched out into more music with jazz from Mel Henry (Malthouse) and colleague.

The Committee also had to deal with complaints about smoke from bonfires on the Lime Grove Allotments and from the gardens of Darlington Place. Some of their bonfires it was alleged 'lasted not only for hours but all night'; with the proliferation of valerian on the High Pavement walls; reinstatement of cracked and potentially dangerous paving stones; and some over-diligent residents who put out rubbish for collection several days early and were alleged to attract rats and other vermin. Life for the Chairman and Committee was never easy.

Into The New Century

The opening years of the new century were dominated by the parking saga, the story of which has already been told. Some other events have been the improvement to the crossing at the bottom of Bathwick Hill on which the Association had significant input; the monitoring of the condition of the Top Lock rubbish compound, culminating in the opening of a refreshment kiosk in 2003 (which in spite of some initial apprehension most of us rather like); removal of graffiti which appeared on the walls of the houses adjoining the Gap; and the revision of the Association's Constitution (it was drafted at a time when we were all 'ratepayers' and it was unusual for women to be property owners so the pronoun 'he' was universally used).

In 2002 a party was held on the High Pavement to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee, and a successful boat trip, well supported by residents, was held in May to celebrate the 50th birthday of the Canal Trust. To bring this history right up to date a Christmas Drinks Party was held at the invitation of Judy and James John (23), a pleasant innovation by the new Committee. With Chris Morrissey as Chairman, Sarah Pooley (21 – a house which has often featured in this story) as Secretary, and Adrian Pilbeam as Treasurer I believe we have a strong team to take us forward.

I can do no better than conclude with a quotation from the Chronicle Property Weekly for 15th December 2003: "When it comes to working out where is the best place to live in the city, Sydney Buildings is right up there with the select few at the top of the list." If any further tribute is required to Sydney Buildings and the Association, it is in a statement made by Jane when she retired as Secretary in 2001: "I moved into Sydney Buildings knowing nobody and ended up with a host of friends."

Peter Hubbard

December 2003 (updated August 2004)