

## EXTENSION OF THE AVONDALE PARK CONSERVATION AREA

### HISTORY OF THE AREA



*O/S MAP 1870*

At the same time as houses were springing up all over Kensington for the comfortable middle class, one corner of the borough was developing into a slum whose notoriety was probably unsurpassed throughout London

It lay at the foot of the hill on which the Ladbroke estate was laid out, directly north of Pottery Lane, on badly draining clay soil between the Norland Estate and Notting Barns Farm

Its first occupants were to give it two infamous names: the brick makers, who seemed to have arrived in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the pig-keepers, who moved there in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

To make bricks and tiles involved large excavations, which soon filled with stagnant water. The keeping of pigs entailed collecting refuse and offal from the kitchens of hotels and private houses, feeding most of it to pigs and boiling down the fat.

The combination of both bricks and pigs spelt disaster for the area.

Samuel Lake of Tottenham Court Road, a scavenger and chimney sweep by occupation was the first to keep pigs here and he was soon joined by the pig keepers of Tyburn who had been forced out of their area by building development. The colony was at first sufficiently isolated to be able to go about their business unfettered; and by the time streets were being built nearby, the piggeries were so well established that developers simply steered clear.



Shacks sprang up wherever convenient for there was no building control in London at that time, and inevitably they were jumbled together with the pigs and the ponds: indeed often the three were combined, with humans sharing their roofs with animals and living directly over stagnant water: the animals at one stage outnumbered people by three to one.

There were no building restrictions, no sanitary regulations, and no drainage.hovels, sheds and huts were the main dwellings of this squalid area, which stank of pigs and pigswill.



By 1840 the colony consisted mainly of two streets and side alleys bounded by Darnley Terrace and Treadgold Street. In the middle of this acreage was a pool of fetid water known as the 'Ocean'

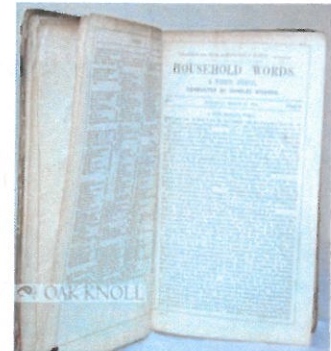




The area's decline was swift and it soon became a refuge for a variety of dubious characters. Later when the Hammersmith and City Line was built across the area in the 1860's navvies moved into poorer boarding houses in the neighbourhood and gypsies often camped in the area.

The sewage authorities were unable to cope with the scale of the problem so when cholera struck in 1849 its toll was high. The mortality rate reached 60 per 1000 living, compared with an average for London 1846 -50, of 25.4 per 1000, and 45 deaths out of every 50 were of children under the age of 5. Life expectancy in this area was a shocking 11 years 7 months compared with the metropolitan average of 37 years.

The area's unsanitary conditions had become so notorious that Charles Dickens ran a special feature on it in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition issue of his magazine "Household Words".



The Piggeries and Brickyards were far from the sight and concern of the Vestry and its duties were taken up by charities, both religious and secular. But it was Kensington's first Medical Officer of Health, Dr Francis Goodrich, who was given the formidable task of cleaning up the area. Goodrich stated 'it was one of the most deplorable spots not only in Kensington but in the whole of the metropolis'

First the Brickyards: rather than manufacturing bricks, they now concentrated more on the making of pottery, mostly drainpipes, tiles and flower pots to supply the local building boom. This trade, however, gradually declined and business ceased by 1863, the same time as when the stagnant 'Ocean' was filled in.

As far as the Piggeries were concerned strong opposition to a clean up came from the pig keepers themselves, as that was their only livelihood. And perversely the Vestry did not want them to lose the pigs because the families then could become a charge on the poor rate.



Wall of the old workhouse

By 1878 Goodrich's successor Dr Dudfield managed, however, to gradually reduce the number of pigs (by making it Hammersmith's problem) but it was not until the 1890's that the last pig was banished.

The area nevertheless remained notorious. Instead of pig keeping the men turned to living off what their women could earn as laundresses, initially at home (especially in the Stoneleigh Street area) and later in small laundries. A local saying in this area declared that 'to marry an ironer is as good as a fortune'



But change was coming: the 1860's at last witnessed the opening of schools, (such as one in Sirdar Road), the paving of streets and the construction of proper sewers. But it was not until 1888 were public baths and washhouses provided at the junction of Silchester and Lancaster Roads.



The Old School House  
Whitchurch Road

In 1889 the Rev C E Roberts of St Clements Church and the Rev Dr Thornton of St Johns appealed in a letter to the Times for an open space for the children of this area. As a result the old brickfield and the area of the Ocean became the start of Avondale Park opened in 1892 and named in memory of the recently deceased Duke of Clarence and Avondale.



St Clements Church



But even then, a year after the park was opened that the Daily News described the area adjacent to the park as 'Avernus' (the fabled gateway to hell!). The article identified Wilsham Street, Kenley Street, another two streets now replaced by Henry Dickens Court and part of Sirdar Road as 'hopelessly degraded and abandoned'.



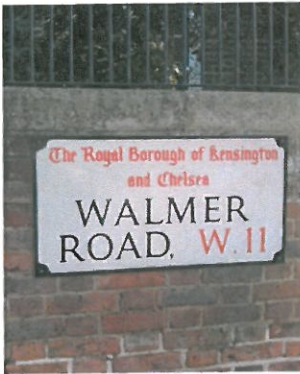
Sirdar Road, Grenfell Road, Treadgold Street, 2011

The dense rows of artisan houses in these streets were massively over occupied or else were the most primitive lodging houses in which a bed on the floor cost a few pennies per night. Local residents made a living as best they could but it was a close knit community who seemed to scrape together enough money to pay for visits to the music hall and for summer day trips.

When Kensington Vestry was superseded by Kensington Borough Council it rapidly appointed four extra inspectors and bought up dwellings for improvement. In 1896 – 8 the death rate for the Notting Dale Special Area stood at 50.4 per 1000. By 1907 it had been cut to 30.2

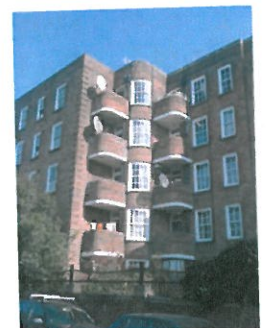


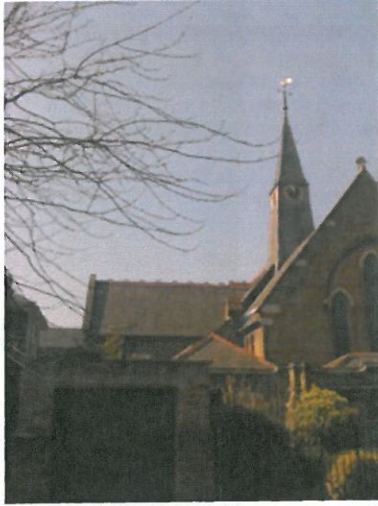
By 1904 new low cost tenements were built and the Improved Tenements Association bought 64 year leases of four houses in Walmer Road in 1900, and these were modernised and divided into two room tenements to accommodate 13 families for rents of 5 shillings a week. Other housing associations followed such as the Wilsham Trust formed by Ladies in waiting at Kensington Palace.



Treadgold House

Since then the area has been largely improved and re-developed: Kenley Street has been rebuilt and Henry Dickens (grandson of Charles) Court went up after the Second World War as did Treadgold House, Bomore Road and other solid examples of public housing.





Today, this part of Kensington, however, is still somewhat of a hidden secret, strangely cut off, tucked behind the façade of the Norland estate and bordered by the railway.

The poverty and hardship of the Potteries and Piggeries is very much a thing of the past. Now the neighbourhood is an attractive, leafy, peaceful backwater made up of rows of well kept two and three storey Victorian brick terraced houses and cottages, in the shadow of the graceful golden weather vane and clock of St Clements Church.

**The area has come a long way and deserves to be conserved.**



Treadgold Street 2011



Sirdar Road 2011



Grenfell Road 2011





Stoneleigh Street 2011

## **Bibliography**

History compiled from the following:

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