

# Ruskin on the Suburb

To me, John Ruskin was a Victorian poet and writer whose works were not easy to appreciate. Having lived in Ruskin Close for a quarter of a century, it took a visit to the Ruskin home overlooking Coniston Water in the Lake District to awaken my enthusiasm.

Born in 1819, he died in 1900 - just before the Suburb was created. At his peak, between 1865 and 1875, he was a renowned figure. Yet the Suburb Close was not named after him for his poetry, prose or painting, significant as they were, but rather for his later foray into writing and lecturing on social problems.

His social views - in which he criticised the dehumanising of the workers in an industrial society, their appalling living conditions, and proposed the need for a welfare service - were considered outrageous in his time. Today, we believe that Ruskin not only foretold the Welfare State, but helped to initiate it.

Architecture was another area of his expertise. 'Design and construction must give joy to the creator, the beholder and the user.' He was strongly against the destruction of old buildings that had merit: 'Stones and stanzas must both give delight'.

These were almost certainly the reasons for the naming of a Suburb Close after him. It was appropriate that Turner Close should be opposite, because Ruskin defended Turner's rural scenes in strong language. In 1908 both were remembered as famous men. Today Ruskin is little read and little known. Perhaps it is because he was so prolific (39 large volumes). Much of it is tough reading, with little gems appearing when least expected. Perhaps it was that sometimes he appeared to find it difficult to concentrate on his subject, and wandered. The fact that he suffered from mental problems (today often diagnosed as manic depression) stopped him from writing or painting for



long periods. It was his mental condition that prevented his appointment as Poet Laureate, for which the prime minister, Gladstone, generously recommended him. Generously, because Ruskin had ridiculed him.

He was the only child of a successful sherry importer and a deeply religious Protestant mother, who was 38 when he was born. She dedicated his life to God. Her ambition was that he should become a bishop. His education was undertaken at home until he was 12 and he lived under a strict, toyless, regime. He travelled in Italy and Switzerland with his parents and his first poem was published when he was 6.

Ruskin led a disciplined life. He usually walked from 6.30 to 8.30, enjoying nature, breakfasted and then wrote till lunchtime. His painting and writing both created analytical or word paintings. He was essentially an Observer and Commentator. Around him he gathered artists, writers and thinkers, who included Turner, Millais and Wordsworth. Whistler sued him for libel and won a farthing in damages.

His gradual move into economics and social problems was a logical progression, for he believed that art, beauty and their appreciation belonged as much

to the general population as to their creator. 'One knows by seeing or experiencing.'

Questioning of the first Socialist MPs revealed that they were more influenced by Ruskin than by Marx. Gandhi, Tennyson, Tolstoy, William Morris and George Bernard Shaw all admitted that they were inspired by Ruskin's writings.

He was not shy about himself, and wrote: 'I don't believe myself a great genius but believe I have genius.'

His writings covered geology, nature, architecture and philosophy. Perhaps his eloquence was that of a rabble-rouser; which may also account for his falling out of favour.

His appeal on England's greatness talked of her brave men fighting and her cowards thinking, and urged us not to forget that our greatness was built upon cheap coal - even if it has meant the destruction of our green fields. He looked forward to the end of coal in England. Perhaps here again he was forecasting.

John Ruskin's memory lives outside this country. At the entrance to the Jewish Museum in New York is his quotation: 'Great Nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts: the book of their deeds, the book of their words and the book of their art.' *John M. Davis*



The Rev Jeremy Bunting is retiring after seven years as vicar of St Jude's. The occasion was marked by an impromptu party in the church following the Easter Communion service on 3 April.

Reader Geoffrey Britain, shown here (right) with Father Jeremy spoke and the church wardens made a presentation of a pair of silver wine coasters. Rev Ralph Baldry will be taking services until a new vicar is appointed.

*Richard J. Wakefield*

# RA AGM cont

## Membership

Sally Murrell, who was thanked by the chairman on her relinquishing the chair of Membership, said that she had 'relied heavily on the guidance of Anne Lawson', and presented her with a bouquet. Sally reported that collecting of subscriptions had started well with many envelopes coming back earlier. Jean Dyson thanked the RA for collecting for Fellowship.

## Publications

An appeal for more letters and contributions from residents to *Suburb News* was made by the acting chairman.

## Roads and Traffic

David Rapson said how much his committee would miss Bill Bailey and his wife Tina, who were leaving the Suburb. His work on traffic-calming and help with the heavy work-load of this committee had been invaluable.

He mentioned that the North Circular Road works were already causing problems in the north of the Suburb, particularly at the Ossulton Way entrance, but that English Heritage and LB Barnet were working on traffic-calming measures for Ossulton Way and Temple Fortune.

In answer to Dorothy Unwin, he said that proposals for humps in Brim Hill and Deansway were a separate initiative of the Department of Transport and would not help. Red routes, David Rapson continued, were a threat to Falloden Way in confirming the road as a trunk route which, once established, we may well have to fight.

The traffic committee had made numerous proposals to LB Barnet for traffic-calming, which the Council have been reluctant to put forward. The Central Square one-way proposal was being deferred pending calming measures, and the Brookland school crossing situation had been greatly helped by the new lollipop man.

Daphne Price had done much to try to improve congestion in Wellgarth Road from the parking of coaches.

In answer to Alison Chessyre, he said that Barnet were unlikely to fund a better alignment of the Willifield/Asmunds roundabout.

## Trees and Open Spaces

Léonie Stephen reported that the tree of heaven so unnecessarily cut down in Meadway had been replaced with a sapling and that the Rotherwick Road entrance would be planted with hornbeams soon. Alan Lawson complained about the Council's use of heavy vehicles in

## The Department of Dirty Tricks Again

Some years ago many residents holding long leases and/or with mortgages received letters indicating that it was mandatory to insure their houses through a specified insurance company. In the case of leaseholders, these letters came direct from one of the insurance companies, whereas, in the case of those with mortgages, the letters came from the building society that had a financial arrangement with a specified insurance company.

In the vast majority of cases, each of these letters was little short of a massive confidence trick! In fact, there is nothing to stop an individual householder taking out buildings insurance with whatever insurance company offers the best terms.

The only exception may be where a rented property is owned by a subsidiary of a large insurance company and a condition of letting is that the tenant must insure with the company and pay whatever premium is demanded.

*Peter Loyd*

Bigwood and of uncleared ditches leading to flooding of adjacent gardens.

## Finance

John Boulter had nothing to add to his statement, and Peter Blackstaffe was thanked for auditing the accounts.

## Neighbourhood Watch and Litter

Peter Loyd reported that the trap vehicles scheme, those green signs, had worked and that the scheme, and the signs, would soon move to Cricklewood.

He reported on CCTV and the Pavilion (see elsewhere).

## Election of Officers

Eileen Whelan introduced Léonie Stephen, who was standing as the new chairman. There being no other nominations, other officers were elected en bloc, as were council members retiring by rotation. New council members were welcomed.

Simon Brenner who had first lived on the Suburb in 1948, had now moved back and was delighted to help the RA.

Hugh Hamilton, an ex-Trust Council member, had been a resident for 23 years.

Lilian Wick has lived here for more than half a century. 'It's

about time I put something back,' she said.

Mervyn Mandell, a chartered surveyor, has been a co-opted member of Consam for the past five years.

## Award

Peter Loyd was presented with the Queen Mother's Birthday Award by Alan Woods from Keep Britain Tidy.

## Life Members

The Rev. Ralph and Doris Baldry were made honorary life members. Ralph Baldry said they were very proud, but surprised, as they had moved to the Suburb only ten years ago, but they had lived into the deep end of Suburb life straight away.

## Brigid Grafton Green

In reply to Camilla Raab, Barbara Anderson said that the Institute had refused to allow a memorial plaque to be placed on their wall, but that other plans were being considered.

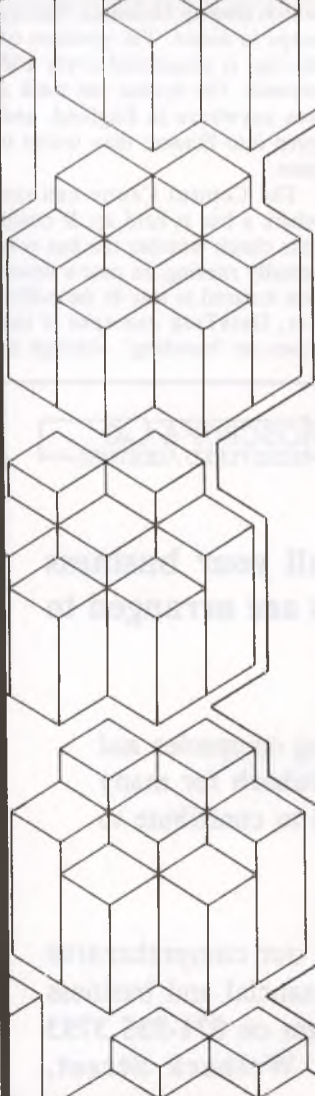
## Retiring chairman

Léonie Stephen called for a vote of thanks to Eileen Whelan for her six years as chairman, and presented a rhododendron on behalf of the Residents Association.

*Richard J. Wakefield*



*Peter Loyd receives his certificate from Alan Woods*



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JANE COLLINS  
ARCHITECT  
33 ATLAS  
BUSINESS CENTRE  
OXGATE LANE  
LONDON NW2 7HU  
TEL: 081 208 3870  
FAX: 081 208 3802