



# *The Dulwich Society*

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TO FOSTER AND SAFEGUARD THE AMENITIES OF DULWICH

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## *Newsletter 61*

July 1983

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#### HISTORICAL NOTES

##### Lapse Wood - History and Topography

Lapse Wood is a small part of Dulwich Wood which in earlier years was itself a small part of the Great North Wood stretching uninterrupted from Honor Oak to Norwood, this being in even earlier times the Northern part of a great mediaeval forest stretching as far as Croydon. Of the small portions remaining of this forest such as Grange Wood to the west of South Norwood Hill, the woods of Beulah Heights and Convent Wood south of Central Hill in Upper Norwood, Dulwich Wood is the largest remaining section. The Great North Wood was described as "A wild and lawless place intersected by many paths and

tracks infested by highwaymen and gipsies". Eighteenth Century maps such as Roque's give the names of the various coppices within Dulwich Wood some of which survive today, and show the four main public footpaths which still exist under the same names. To the south, Rock Hill path cutting through King's coppice, Low Cross Wood walk dividing first and second Low Cross coppices at the bottom of the hill and East and West Peckerman's coppices at the top. East Peckerman's coppice joined Fifty Acre Coppice which started down the northern slope of Sydenham Hill across much of the Golf Course almost to Dulwich Common Lane. Cox's walk divided Fifty Acre Coppice from Ambrook Hill which, before the railway was cut through it, stretched uninterrupted up the eastern slope of Sydenham Hill to join with Lapse Wood coppice to the top of the hill. Lapse Wood walk or "The Lapse" cut through this coppice. Incidentally, Lordship Lane was shown as terminating at the foot of Sydenham Hill and the continuing road past Horniman's Museum was known as "Lapse Lane".

In 1859, Mr. Charles Barry who succeeded his Father the famous Sir Charles Barry as Surveyor and Architect to the College Estate, built Lapsewood House on Sydenham Hill for his own occupation, much of Lapse Wood coppice becoming his back garden. With the coming of the railway in 1866, he designed and built the wooden footbridge across the new railway cutting which had severed Cox's walk from Lapsewood walk. Lapsewood House was subsequently occupied by Marshall Hall the celebrated Criminal Advocate connected with many famous murder cases, and was recently demolished by Southwark Council on taking over the lease of Lapse Wood.

Today, this public section of the Wood is administered by the London Wildlife Trust on behalf of the Council who has leased it to them. The Trust is now engaged in clearing up the area and, incidentally, would welcome any volunteer helpers. They have also erected a stile by the footbridge as the main access point and have

created a new pond.

When their plans are completed it is hoped that this historic piece of woodland will become South London's own Nature Reserve and provide a rural area to be enjoyed by all for many years to come.

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#### Dr. Webster's Memorial Fountain, Dulwich Village

In 1977 the Dulwich Society History Committee put forward the idea of having the gas lantern restored and the disused troughs converted to flowerbeds to commemorate the centenary of the fountain's erection and approached Southwark Council as its custodian. The Council suggested a full restoration job as a Silver Jubilee commemoration project and this was finally brought about by the joint efforts of the Dulwich Society, the Civic Trust Jubilee Fund and the Borough Council.

But, for those who ask "Who was George Webster?" it is hoped that the following will shed some light on the qualities and public record of this once revered and distinguished resident of the Village.

Born in Forfarshire, Scotland in 1797, George Webster became a Doctor of Medicine at the age of 18 and was on the Army Medical Staff in Belgium at the time of Waterloo. In 1815 he became assistant, and later partner, of a Dulwich G.P. taking up residence in a former alehouse "The Bell" on the site of the present lodge within the Old College Gates of Dulwich Park. During his sixty-one years of practice in and around Dulwich he became so well regarded for his good works in the causes of the poor and the Board Schools that he became known as "The Patriarch of Dulwich" partly, no doubt, because of his tall figure and bushy white beard.

As well as being a prolific contributor to medical and literary journals he was the instigator of the first British Medical Association of which he was President for fourteen years, a Guardian of the Poor, and a J.P.

So much was he thought of throughout the Hamlet that a Committee of residents was set up to consider a memorial in his honour. On being asked what form he would like the memorial to take he requested that it should be of benefit to his fellow-men. Thus the idea of a public fountain was born and Charles Barry, then Architect and Surveyor to the College Estate, designed the imposing column we know today, built of red "Balmoral" granite from Italy and topped by a magnificent gas lantern.

Unfortunately, by the time all Public Subscriptions had been gathered in and the final plans drawn up the good Doctor had died, at the age of seventy-nine, and it was not until one year later that the fountain was finally erected on land granted by the Estate at the apex of the old Village Green where after 100 years, although perhaps not admired by everyone, it has become not only part of the Village scene but part of Dulwich history.

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#### Dulwich Waters

This year the first national water strike has brought home to many of use just how dependent we are on a regular water supply requiring no greater effort than the turn of a tap. Spare a thought, then, for our forebears who had to rely on more rudimentary methods of supplying the water that was so necessary for all aspects of daily life. Of course a river or stream was normally a prerequisite for the founding of a village community. Normally, but not always; and with due respect to those who fervently believe that the river Effra or one of its tributaries once flowed through our village, there is no real evidence to support this. A

Mr. James, appointed to survey the whole Dulwich estate in 1806, reported: "From the range of alluvial hills dividing Surrey from Kent, the rains form an intermittent stream, the course of which divides this Estate from Lambeth and Streatham; and this is the only stream. Indeed, a want of water appears the only inconvenience the Estate is subject to."

Writing of this watercourse, which ran behind the back gardens in South Croxted and Croxted Road, as he had known it in the 1830's John Ruskin referred to it in his memoirs as "a slender rivulet, boasting little of its brightness - for there are no springs in Dulwich - yet fed purely enough by the rain and morning dew". In days of yore it was known, not very flatteringly as 'the great slough', to distinguish it from 'the Common Sewer' or 'Shore' (a phonetic variation of the same word), which was the name usually given to another watercourse, which flowed diagonally across the estate (from near Cox's Walk to Herne Hill, crossing College and Gallery Roads just behind the Old College), but this too had no natural spring supplying it, and therefore cannot be correctly described as a stream, let alone a river. This is confirmed by the oldest maps of the estate, which show short stretches of this watercourse twisting and turning as a stream might be expected to do, but other sections of it are straight, and were obviously created artificially. Sometimes, just to confuse us, the term "Common Sewer" was applied indiscriminately to any substantial stretch of ditch on the estate. In addition to the many orders for scouring this 'Common Sewer', there are occasional references to actual digging of new (or renewed) sections of ditch, up to 4' wide by 3' deep. "But", those of you who are still not convinced may be asking, "what about Belair lake, the Mill Pond, and the lake at the foot of Sunray Avenue? What are

these if not Effra tributaries?" Well, there are other explanations for each of them, which you may find persuasive if not conclusive.

Taken chronologically, the Mill Pond must come first. Oddly enough, this was considerably larger a century ago than today, a fact which again is borne out by the old maps. The probable reason was the landscaping early this century of the south and east sides, which now slope gently down to the water's edge. 'The Mill Pond' is actually a misnomer, since the Mill which used to stand on Dulwich Common (on the site of the North Block of the College) was a windmill, not a water-mill, and the pond had no connection with it, other than proximity. An inspection of the surrounding landscape, reinforced by study of the contours on a large-scale Ordnance Survey map - an exercise which, it may be said in passing, disposes of several of the alleged lost streams of Dulwich, since water doesn't flow uphill! - leaves one in no doubt that the Mill Pond is not a natural formation. Water, other than precipitation, has never flowed into nor out of it, except through man-made channels. What, then, was its original purpose? The answer seems to be that until the mid-18th century it was not a pond at all, but a pit from which clay to supply the Tile Kiln (now Pond Cottages, a few yards away) was dug. It is likely that it had been worked out and water-logged by 1758, when William Levens took over the Tile Kiln, and isn't mentioned in his lease. A mere three years later, however, we find Mr Edward Russell being given permission to lease 'the shapeless pond' (the first reference to it as such), so that he and his friends could fish in it, on his undertaking to fence it off, give it a regular rectangular shape, and dig it deeper 'thereby becoming more useful to supply the Public with Water'. One property which later obtained its water supply in this way was Bell House, since we know from Ann Wright's lease of 1811 that she was permitted to channel water from the Mill Pond "through the Pipe or Plug already in the same".

The lake in 'Belair' is more persistently claimed as being a spur of the Effra, but again there are other practical reasons for its existence. There may well have been a pond of sorts there for centuries, although it isn't mentioned in any lease of the property, and certainly did not have its present elongated shape. The man responsible for that must have been John Willes, who started building 'Belair' in 1781, and although we cannot be sure that he carried out his plan, he certainly intended to use the clay excavated from the site to make bricks for use in the building, as suggested to him by William Oxlade, who by then ran the Tile Kiln. If he did, then the present ornamental lake is probably no more than the site of those excavations, suitably landscaped. In 1806 it was referred to as "the Sheet of Water".

The same explanation may well apply to the lake at the foot of Sunray Avenue, although here the man responsible was Richard Shawe, the solicitor who defended Warren Hastings and who used his fee in building the mansion called 'Casino' and laying out an estate for it at the very end of the eighteenth century. Again, there is no mention, prior to Shawe, of there ever having been any lake or pond on the property. Shawe referred to it as a 'Canal', and in August 1800 wrote to the Master of the College, Thomas Allen, requesting fish for his canal "if any can be spared from any of the College ponds".

These are the largest ponds in the area of any antiquity, but there were (and are, as our Wildlife Sub-Committee will testify) many smaller ponds dotted about the locality, in some cases serving individual properties, in others lying at the conjunction of two or more fields, for watering cattle presumably. The positions of these ponds are clearly shown on the 1806 estate map. The largest of them lay in the centre of the village, on the east side of the High Street, and was known (for the very good reason that it was about 450 ft. long) as the Long Pond. According to tradition, it was dug as a reservoir on the orders of James Allen, Master of the College from 1721 to 1746 and founder of what is now J.A.G.S. Although Allen may perhaps have been responsible

for enlarging it, and for planting a screen of chestnut trees, the evidence indicates that there had been a pond there for many centuries before he came on the scene. It is referred to as 'Lane's Pond' ('Launnes ponnde' is one version of this) in 1559, and the Lane family's connections with Dulwich went back to the end of the fourteenth century. It probably supplied a large number of nearby properties with domestic water, so one can understand the concern of the manor court jury when, in 1610, it enjoined Robert Starkey to enclose the footway by his house with a hedge or fence, to prevent the effluent from his barn issuing into Lane's Pond. Indeed, appalling though it is for us to contemplate such matters, the lack of any clear distinction between watercourses and drainage channels, and the fact that the latter often flowed into the same ponds which fed the former, must have constituted a considerable health hazard for our ancestors, had they but known it. By the 1830's the numerous outbreaks of cholera in urban areas had alerted local residents to the risks. One of these, a Mr. Hopkins, wrote in September 1827 suggesting that the state of the Long Pond probably accounted "for the fever heard of at this time of year", and in 1829 he appealed to the College not to supply the hamlet with water taken from the Pond. In 1834 Mr. Aylwin of Lake House wrote to the College complaining of "attacks in the Head and Stomach, of a strange and unusual kind", caused, as he supposed, by the "miasmatic effluvia" arising from the Long Pond. Eventually the hints were taken, and in 1859 the Pond was cleaned out, drained of its water (200,000 gallons, sold to the Lambeth Water Company for £10), filled up with spoil from the Southern High Level Metropolitan Sewer, and turfed over. Mains drainage had arrived, and not before time.

In addition to the many ponds, we can assume that a number of Dulwich houses had wells for

their domestic water supply. We know of one sunk by William Kay in the grounds of Hall Place (in Park Hall Road), as it is referred to in correspondence between him and the College in 1789. Kay also had an elongated pond on the south side of Hall Place, which may at one time have extended around the house, or at least part of the way. It is referred to in seventeenth century leases as a moat, but is likely to have been purely ornamental, as is the T-shaped pond in the grounds of Oakfield House, opposite the Mill Pond.

There was, however, at least one well in Dulwich worthy of note, as it was a major factor in the success of the public house known as 'the Green Man' (now 'the Grove Tavern') in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1739 the lessee of the Green Man was William Cox, whose father John had run it before him, and who was later to be succeeded by his own son Francis and grandson William. So-called 'Dulwich Waters' had been sold on the streets of London for about a hundred years - a pamphlet dated 1678 in the Guildhall Library relates "Strange and Lamentable News from Dulledeg Wells" about a street-vendor of such water who had battered his own son to death - but the well which produced them was in fact on the other side of the hill, in Sydenham. According to a contemporary account (by Prof. John Martyn, F.R.S., who was present when it was dug), Cox required the well "for the service of his house, there being no spring of good water near it". He dug down to a depth of 60 feet, but as no water appeared covered up the well and left it. On re-opening it the following Spring, 1740, he and Prof. Martyn found 25' of water "of a sulphureous smell and taste" although these qualities fortunately disappeared after a few days' exposure. The water from these (properly-called) 'Dulwich Wells', Blanch informs us, had "brisk purgative and diuretic" properties. The Green Man closed its doors in the 1790's, and in about 1825 the building itself was demolished, but the well was still there, and the famous Dr. Webster tested its waters, which he found "decidedly chalybeate". Webster, possibly the last person to have drunk from the Dulwich Wells before they dried up,

might have been amused by the irony that the fountain in the village which was erected to his memory in 1877 has now suffered the same fate.

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#### WILD LIFE SUB-COMMITTEE

##### Dragonflies in Dulwich

A member writes:-

We have always had plenty of frogs and frog-spawn in our little pond ever since we made it five years ago, but last July were delighted to discover that we had dragonflies too. One morning there were two nymph cases clinging to reeds and nearby the dragonflies drying their wings before flying away. Each morning there would be one or two more and over a period of about two weeks nineteen had emerged. Unfortunately we were never able to watch the adult dragonfly actually emerging. The nymph cases were identified by the British Museum as *Aeshna Cyanea*. We are hoping to see some more this summer.

Notes from members:

One of our members has reported an unusual conflict, witnessed by him, from only a few yards distance, in May last.

His attention was drawn by hearing an unusual "barking" sound, quite unlike any normal cry of a magpie; but almost at once a very distressed magpie fled out of the adjacent end of a close-grown woodland pathway, only about four to five feet above the ground. As it left that cover there was a hawk close above its tail. The hawk performed some magnificent aerobatics round the magpie in a swooping attack and then banked away and back into the woodland as soon as it saw a human observer. The hawk gave the impression of conspicuously barred plumage. The magpie

flew onto the house roof some distance away, to recover, before leaving altogether.

Our ornithologists suggest this was probably a sparrow hawk, which has not been recently reported in Dulwich. We know that we have kestrels here. The sub-committee will be glad to hear of any other possible sightings of sparrow hawks in Dulwich. The above incident took place near the Golf Course.

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### Frogs

Many years ago when we came to live in College Road, our small pond attracted a few mating frogs. Frogs have now disappeared and we have an increasing population of common newts. Although frog tadpoles have been introduced from time to time, no adult frogs appear. This may not be surprising, as newts eat tadpoles. This situation is confirmed by another member who lives on the other side of Dulwich.

In view of this, perhaps a general change was taking place over a larger area. An expert, Mr. Keith Corbett, was consulted. He, however, did not agree that newts were supplanting the frogs because he has found that over the last two years, the frog population has increased, since the wholesale filling-in of ponds has been halted. Frogs can now be found in more and more small ponds. It would be interesting to have other members' views on this subject.

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We hope that such short reports as these will be of interest to other Newsletter readers. The Wild Life Sub-Committee will be delighted to receive similar reports on local happenings from members of the Society, with a view to possible publication in future copies of our Newsletter, if and when space is available.

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### PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS AT HERNE HILL

An improved version of the scheme to provide pedestrian crossing facilities at Herne Hill was approved by the Public Services Committee of Lambeth on 12th April, and it is hoped that the new signals will be installed towards the end of 1983. The scheme is essentially as outlined in the April Newsletter (page 6), with the addition of a protected "green man" pedestrian phase to cross Milkwood Road.

The pedestrian facilities have been ingeniously devised to minimise delay to road traffic so that there should be little if any effect on traffic using other roads in the area, while those of our members who visit Herne Hill as pedestrians can look forward to finding it much easier and safer to cross the road at this dangerous intersection.

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### THE DULWICH RIDING SCHOOL CELEBRATES ITS 21st ANNIVERSARY

Founded in 1962 by Mr. James Bellman, the Dulwich Riding School organised an Open Day on May 2nd. Over 200 people were entertained by a Condition and Turnout Competition judged by Mr. and Mrs. H.S. Gates. The championship was won by Dulwich resident, Miss Christine Tims, riding Mitcheltroy Prince.

Highlight of the Open Day was a freestyle dressage display to music given by one of the school's former pupils, Mr. Dane Rawlins, riding his horse, Idle Gossip. Mr. Rawlins lived in Dulwich for many years until moving to Hartfield, Sussex to found his own training establishment.

Those present were able to view the school's unique collection of horse drawn vehicles and harness. A photographic display depicted the history of the school from 1962-1983. From humble beginnings, the school has grown into a showpiece amongst London riding schools and has proudly taken its place in the rural charm that is Dulwich.

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## THE HORTICULTURAL SUB-COMMITTEE

### The Tradescant Trust Plants and Gardens Spring Fair.

On Sunday May 8th the horticultural sub-committee exhibited at St. Mary's-at-Lambeth, home of the Tradescant Trust.

The event was the Trust's Plant and Garden Spring Fair, held to raise funds for the MUSEUM OF GARDEN HISTORY, to be developed in the church, and to encourage interest in the different societies participating on the day.

An enormous number of remarkably diverse plants were to be seen on every stand. Most of them were for sale. The Dulwich horticultural sub-committee was in company with other horticultural groups from Lambeth, Chelsea and the Barbican. Plants from Lady Salisbury's garden at Hatfield House (where the Tradescants had been gardeners in the seventeenth century) and Chelsea Physic Garden were displayed and sold, as they were from nationally known societies such as the Alpine Garden Society, the Royal National Rose Society, the British Iris Society, the British Naturalist Association, N.A.F.A.S. and the N.C.C.P.G.

The Dulwich stand was designed to give height to the display. The shrub and perennial plant section showed a blending of restrained and gentle tones of copper, purple, pink and silver foliage gathered under the large fern-like leaves of *lomatia ferruginea*. Rhododendrons, azaleas, conifers and the bronze, pink and cream sword leaves of *Phormium tenax* 'Sundowner' were there, the unusual startling silver and white *cyathodes colensoi* added more interest and epimediums, ferns, hostas, sedums and astilbes filled the stand with contrasting leaf shapes and colour.

On the other side of the table stood a superb display of velvet-petalled auriculas and an array of geraniums, chosen for their beautifully marbled and scented foliage.

The enthusiasm and team work that produced the Dulwich Stand was rewarded when Hugh Johnson, who opened the Fair, presented "the best display" prize and certificate to Dulwich Society for its outstanding exhibit.

Over 1,600 visitors came to the church and by lunch time most plants had been sold. It was one of the most successful events ever held at St. Mary's.

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### Prolonging the Life of Cut Flowers

Research by The Glasshouse Crops Research Institute has shown that the vase life of carnations can be greatly increased by immersing the bottom inch of the freshly cut stems in diluted used hypo for half an hour before transferring to water.

The hypo, used in the fixing of photographic film, leaches silver salts from the unexposed portions of the film and it is these salts which are absorbed by the carnations to retard the wilting process. It was found that too strong a solution can discolour the petals and that commercial spent hypo should be diluted by adding twenty-four parts of water to the stock solution. It is reasonable to assume that the amateur would discard his hypo before it was exhausted and that rather less dilution might be required. In controlled experiments the vase life of carnations was doubled and investigations continue to find what other cut flowers are amenable to this treatment.

In correspondence, Dr. Nichols of The Glasshouse Crops Research Institute has recommended the following cocktail for other varieties of cut flowers. To one pint of tap water add three rounded teaspoons of granulated sugar and a salt spoon of citric acid, available cheaply from any home brewing shop. If citric acid

is not to had, a drop or two of vinegar may be substituted.

It may be that these methods work by an antiseptic action, because, as mentioned in a recent article in 'The Lancet', a drop or two of 'Hibitane' has the same effect. Our own observations have confirmed that this is indeed beneficial. Samples of Hibitane will be available to members at future garden openings.

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#### Friend and Foe in the Garden

Before reaching for his chemical spray, the gardener should attempt to identify his target. There are friends as well as foes in the garden, many insects and small animals are very useful indeed. Most gardeners' friends will be carnivores eating slugs, snails and insects. The foes will be herbivores browsing on roots, stems and leaves. A useful rule of thumb is to remember that carnivores must move quickly in order to catch their prey, the herbivores can move more slowly since their food supply remains in the same place.

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#### Foliar Feed

I hope that the azaleas and rhododendrons will be in flower and will prove the advantages of foliar feeding. I am writing this to support the use of foliar feed, which is not generally used as much as it could be. Many gardeners do not know that plants take up fertilisers through their leaves. The time of absorption can be selected more carefully than by applying chemicals to the root system. Fertiliser can be added to the spray if one has to use one anyhow. For example, if you spray roses to fight mildew or aphids, you add the fertiliser without additional work. It is important to add a small quantity of washing up liquid so

that the spray is supplied to the leaves as a mist and not in large drops.

Three to six weeks after shrubs, such as azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias, have finished flowering, new shoots are developing; they can be next year's flower shoots or leaf. This is the right period to support formation of future flower buds by a high-potash fertiliser. I use Phostrogene for the feed but any other high potash fertiliser will do. The feed should continue for about six weeks at weekly intervals.

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#### NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE CONSERVATION OF PLANTS AND GARDENS

Following the very interesting lecture on the work of the N.C.C.P.G. given to us last autumn by the Director of Wisley Gardens, Mr. Chris Brickell, the London Group of that Council has received permission to hold a Garden Opening in the garden of The Grange, Grange Lane, Dulwich on Saturday, 23rd July 1983 for the purpose of raising funds for their work. The garden will be opened from 2 pm. to 6 pm. and refreshments will be available. There will be a small entrance fee of 25p.

Although this is mainly a party for the members of the N.C.C.P.G., all members of the Dulwich Society will be very welcome.

It is hoped that a supply of plants from N.C.C.P.G. members will be on sale in the garden that afternoon.

In view of the dangerous bend in Grange Lane, on which this garden is situated, cars should be left in College Road, or confined to one side only of Grange Lane and none should be parked between the two AA triangular signs marking that bend.

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Readers of the Newsletter may like to know that there are now 956 members of the Dulwich Society. New members are, of course, very welcome.

#### BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK - FACELIFT PROGRAMME

The Dulwich Society has been sent a leaflet from the Borough Planner's Department of the Borough of Southwark inviting us to suggest projects to form part of a programme initiated by the Borough and called 'Facelift'. Appropriately the programme is designed to mobilise the joint forces of Southwark Council and the local community to attack 'wasteland, corrugated iron and other signs of dereliction and decay'.

The Society has welcomed the announcement of the programme and we invite proposals from any members for projects that could usefully be put forward under the 'facelift' scheme, to attack signs of dereliction and decay in our area.

We have offered to co-ordinate the scheme for the Dulwich Society and suggest the following minimum criteria for any project put forward for consideration:

It should be for the benefit of the area and community generally.

The proposer should be prepared to help with any administrative work associated with the project.

If any member would like to contribute to the improvement of our area within the framework of this scheme, we would be delighted to hear from you and supply further information, if required.

Please send your ideas to, either:

R.D. Still,  
138 Burbage Road, S.E.21.

OR

S. Connor,  
23 Winterbrook Road, S.E.24.

## THE QUEEN'S JUBILEE TREES WALK

Every year the Trees Sub committee of the Dulwich Society organise a walk on a summer evening around one of our local parks or other areas notable for fine trees. This year the walk is on Thursday, 7 July at 7.30 pm starting from the war memorial in front of the College Chapel and will take us round the Jubilee Trees Walk in the centre of Dulwich.

Since this magazine will probably be published too late to serve as a reminder for the walk, I thought members, whether or not they joined us on the walk, might appreciate a map of the walk and details of some of the very fine trees that it encompasses.

The centrefold of this magazine, therefore, is a copy of the map and notes that were carefully researched and written by Rosa Davis and Esther Blackburn, members of the Trees Sub committee, as a local commemoration of the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977. The leaflets are usually available at meetings of the Trees Sub committee, but I am sure the many readers of our magazine, who never come to these meetings, will be interested to know more about the extraordinarily fine and interesting trees in an area of Dulwich we all know well, but have probably always taken for granted.

R.D.S.