

# *The Dulwich Society*

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TO FOSTER AND SAFEGUARD THE AMENITIES OF DULWICH

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## *Newsletter 46*

October 1979

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Chairman:	Roger V. Low, 41 College Road, SE21	693 2953
Vice Chairman:	Peter F.J. Lawson, 41 Village Way, SE21	733 2646
Secretary:	Lt. Col. R.M.S. Maude, 19 Oakfield Gardens, Dulwich Wood Avenue, SE19	670 7963
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SOME POINTS OF INTEREST

Lapse Wood

We mentioned in the last newsletter that a meeting had been arranged for 17th July with members of the Planning and Development and the Housing Committees of the London Borough of Southwark. This was an evening meeting on the Lapse Wood site at which we and the Residents Association were to have had the opportunity to put our case for preservation of the woodland. Unfortunately this meeting did not take place owing to other commitments in Southwark and no new date has yet been fixed. Since the evenings are getting darker it is unlikely that any meeting will now be possible before next year, so we are publishing in this newsletter a short paper which we had prepared for the meeting entitled "The Case for the preservation of the Woodland". We hope that you will find this interesting. See pages 5 to 12.

Gipsies

Some alarm has been occasioned by our report that the London Borough of Southwark were considering a site off Dulwich Common (the South Circular) for a gipsy encampment. Fortunately this proposal has been cancelled and the danger is now over.

Our drive for new Recruits

With this newsletter we shall also be circulating as many houses as possible with an autumn Broadsheet which invites residents of the Dulwich area to consider membership of our Society. We have done this with a certain amount of modest success in the past four or five years. The Broadsheet includes an invitation to those who are interested to come along to our meeting in St. Barnabas Hall on 6th December to meet members and to learn something about our activities (see below).

#### The Social Sub-Committee

With the winter season we continue to hold occasional meetings and social gatherings, some of which are mentioned in the next section. Our Social Sub-Committee who organise the refreshments and other entertainments are now somewhat reduced in numbers and would very much like to recruit new helpers. If this would interest you please contact the Chairman of the Sub-Committee, Leslie Sequeira on 693 7779.

#### MEMBERS MEETINGS

4 OCTOBER: Probably too late to mention it, but Mr. Wragg will be talking on the amenities and problems of Nunhead Cemetery: 8.00 pm in St. Barnabas Hall.

5 NOVEMBER: A combined meeting with the Dulwich Forum at 8.00 pm in St. Barnabas Hall. Mr. A.T. Milne, MA, FR Hist Soc, will be talking on "Dulwich in the early nineteenth Century; the diary of Joseph Romilly." Please note that this is on a Monday and not our usual Thursday.

6 DECEMBER: 8.00 pm St. Barnabas Hall

This will be a Social evening to welcome new members to the Society with light refreshments provided by the Social Sub-Committee and activities of our main Sub-Committees on display.

The main event will be an illustrated talk, organised by our new Horticultural Sub-Committee, by Mr. John Clayton, Public Relations Officer of the Royal Horticultural Society's Garden of Wisley entitled:

WISLEY'S GARDEN THROUGH THE YEAR.

Please note that there will be no meeting in January 1980.

#### The legibility of the Newsletter

Since nobody has contacted the Secretary to complain about the size of the print (you were invited to do so in the last edition) we are continuing with our normal style and format which we hope you will continue to find acceptable.

# *The Dulwich Society*

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LAPSE WOOD

THE CASE FOR PRESERVATION  
OF THE WOODLAND

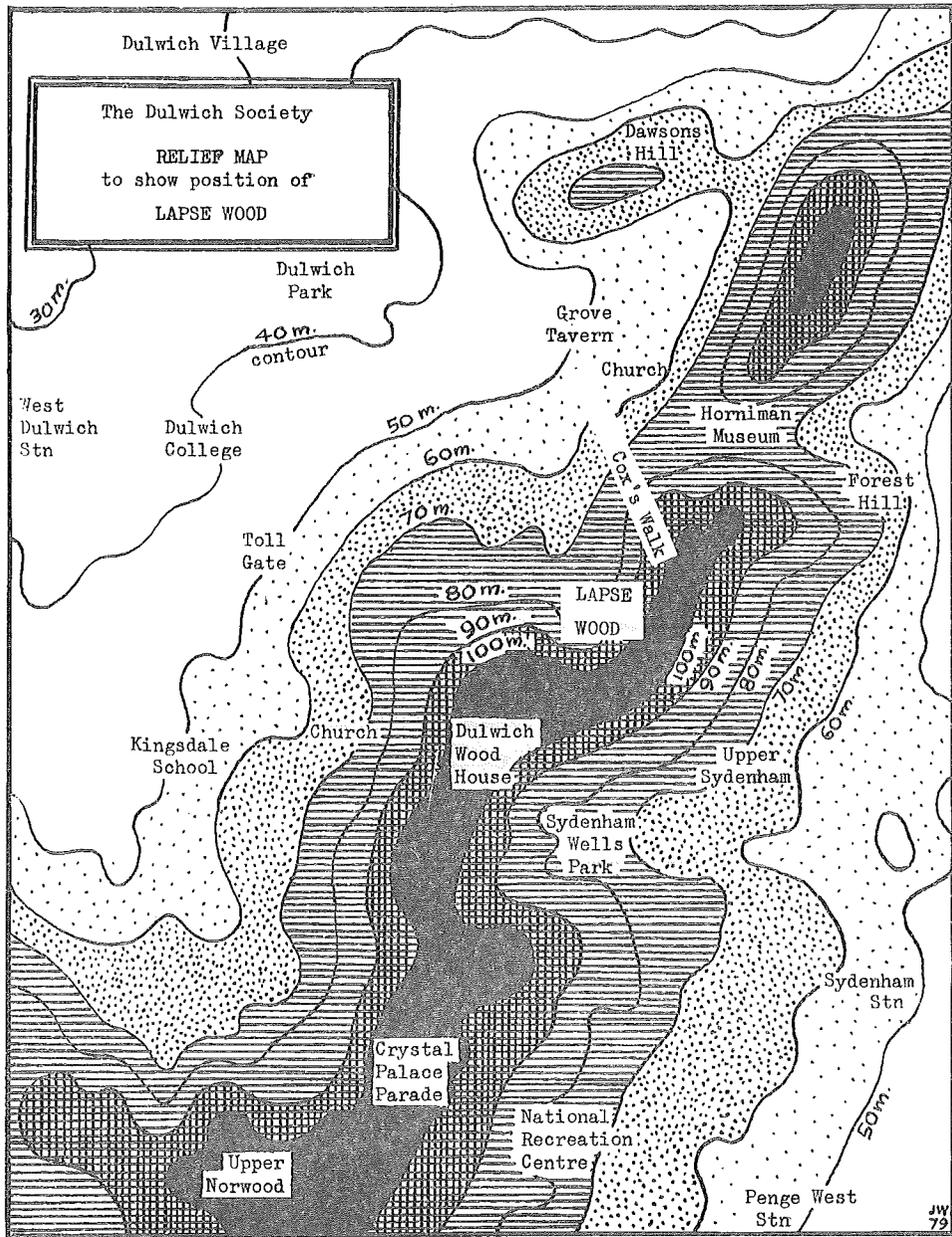


FIG. I

THE DULWICH SOCIETY

LAPSE WOOD

THE CASE FOR PRESERVATION OF THE WOODLAND

Foreword

From its position high on Sydenham Hill the sweep of natural woodland known as Lapse Wood dominates the landscape of South London. This paper is concerned with proposals by the London Borough of Southwark to develop part of the area (the 'Fern Bank' site) for housing. It is offered as the Dulwich Society's contribution to the debate on ways of reconciling such a development with the preservation and exploitation of this unique amenity for the pleasure and recreation of the people.

What is Lapse Wood?

Lapse Wood is the area of natural woodland covering some 15 acres extending from the Sydenham Hill ridge down to the bed of the disused railway line, the former Crystal Palace High Level line. As a remnant of the original woodland which once covered all the slopes of Sydenham Hill, it is the last remaining stretch of wild, natural, unspoiled woodland in South London and its wooded aspect dominates the view from Central London looking south. It is a base for an abundant wild-life and harbours a variety of unusually interesting and mature specimen trees. It also provides a valuable area for educational projects studying wild-life, horticulture, botany and the environment. As such it is unique in London. The Dulwich Society, aware of threats posed by development planning, carried out a detailed survey of the trees in 1978. This is shown in Figure II.

The Birds of Lapse Wood

The Lapse Woods are a very important breeding site for a number of birds which are rare to London, as well as a resting site for birds migrating through London. The reason for this is that the woods are natural, with plenty of ground cover, low bushes and sapling trees. These allow the breeding of caterpillars and other insects on which birds feed, and sites to build their nests. There are few birds which will build nests in the top of a mature tree, or in the open. Birds are generally secretive and like to be able to hide. It is for this reason that the bushy area of the woods, such as exists near the entrance to the railway tunnel is particularly favoured as nesting sites by the Willow Tit, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Firecrest, Goldfinch and Siskin etc.

During the last two years sixty-four different species of birds have been seen in Lapse Wood including, as well as the above, the Woodcock, Jack Snipe, Sandpiper, Tawny Owl, Green Woodpecker, the Greater Spotted and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Marsh Tit, Blackcap, Treecreeper, Nuthatch and many other more commonly known birds.

Migrant birds residing during the summer include Chiffchaff, Garden Warbler, and the Pied and Spotted Flycatchers.

During the 1930s the Cuckoo was heard all summer on the College Fields. It is no longer a summer resident but still uses Lapse Wood as a staging post. Every spring it rests for one day in the woods and makes its familiar call a number of times during the day, before continuing its flight north. In the same way many other migrants use Lapse Wood for a brief rest on their journeys.

#### The Threat To The Woodland

The area is zoned for housing, but only a narrow fringe at the top of the site has ever been used for that purpose. A small number of large Victorian houses once lined the road with large open gardens behind. These houses were demolished some years ago, but were never replaced and their gardens formed the greater part of what is known as "Dulwich Woods" - the last remnant of the original Great Northwood which stretched across Sydenham Hills to Norwood from where the name is derived.

Southwark now propose to develop the Fern Bank site with a housing scheme which will penetrate deep into the woodland from Sydenham Hill, absorbing some two-thirds of the total wooded area. See Figure III. However carefully this development is landscaped it will inevitably involve the loss of some fine old trees and most of the low-growing plant cover which shelters bird-life. The whole nature of the area will inevitably change from natural woodland to a semi-urban estate. Furthermore the removal of a number of trees on a strongly sloping site such as this will inevitably involve changes in the ground water levels with consequent threat to the stability of the soil.

#### Our Proposals

Some housing development on the site is probably unavoidable and could indeed contribute a barrier against vandalism. But if development extends deeply into the woods its character will be destroyed and with it the value of the site as an unrivalled amenity for the people of South London. We therefore propose that any development plan should meet the following requirements:-

- (a) A single line of housing along the Sydenham Hill edge of the site extending (with its service roads) no deeper into the wood than the line of the back wall of the surviving Victorian building known as Beechgrove. The housing should not be of such a height as to break the skyline.

- (b) The remainder of the site between the housing and the railway bed should be retained as natural woodland subject to a minimum of clearance of dead trees, etc. Controlled access to this area would be provided to local schools and organisations for educational, nature study and similar purposes.
- (c) The railway bed should be cleared and access provided to Sydenham Hill so that the public may enjoy a continuous 'country walk' from Cox's Walk to Sydenham Hill.

The outline of this proposal is shown in Figure IV.

#### Conclusion

We believe that this unique area of unspoiled woodland should be preserved as, once such an environmental asset has been destroyed, it can never be replaced. We also believe that a single line of housing along Sydenham Hill should be allowed, as this will actually tend to protect the woodland.

In presenting this case for presentation we are supported by:-

The Dulwich Residents Association  
The Peckarman's Wood Residents Association

Dulwich Village

August 1979

(Plates II, III and IV follow.)

THE DULWICH SOCIETY SURVEY OF TREES IN LAPSE WOOD, 1978

Size and boldness of any symbol shown is significant:  
K is a young oak; K is a large, mature oak.

- |            |               |            |             |
|------------|---------------|------------|-------------|
| ∇ Acacia   | J Juniper     | ⊙ Magnolia | K Oak       |
| ∇ Alder    | J Laburnum    | ∇ Maple    | 9 Pear      |
| ∇ Apple    | ∇ Laurel      | ⊙ Monkey   | ↑ Pine, Fir |
| ∇ Ash      | 7 Laurustinus | ⊙ Puzzle   | P Plane     |
| ∇ Azalea   | L Lime        | M Mountain | U Poplar    |
| 4 Bamboo   |               | Ash        | 6 Prunus    |
| ∇ Beech    |               |            |             |
| ∇ Cedar    |               |            |             |
| Z Cherry   |               |            |             |
| ⊙ Copper   |               |            |             |
| ⊙ Beech    |               |            |             |
| ⊙ Cypress  |               |            |             |
| - Elder    |               |            |             |
| E Elm      |               |            |             |
| H Hawthorn |               |            |             |
| h Hazel    |               |            |             |
| J Holly    |               |            |             |
| 2 Holm Oak |               |            |             |
| X Hornbeam |               |            |             |
| N Horse    |               |            |             |

- |           |             |
|-----------|-------------|
| ∇ Red     | ∇ Sweet     |
| Flowering | Chestnut    |
| Chestnut  | S Sycamore  |
| ∇ Red     | S Viburnum  |
| Hawthorn  | T Walnut    |
| Rhodo-    | 3 Whitebeam |
| dendron   | W Willow    |
| • Sapling | Y Yew       |
| ↑ Silver  | ∇ Fallen    |
| Birch     | Tree        |

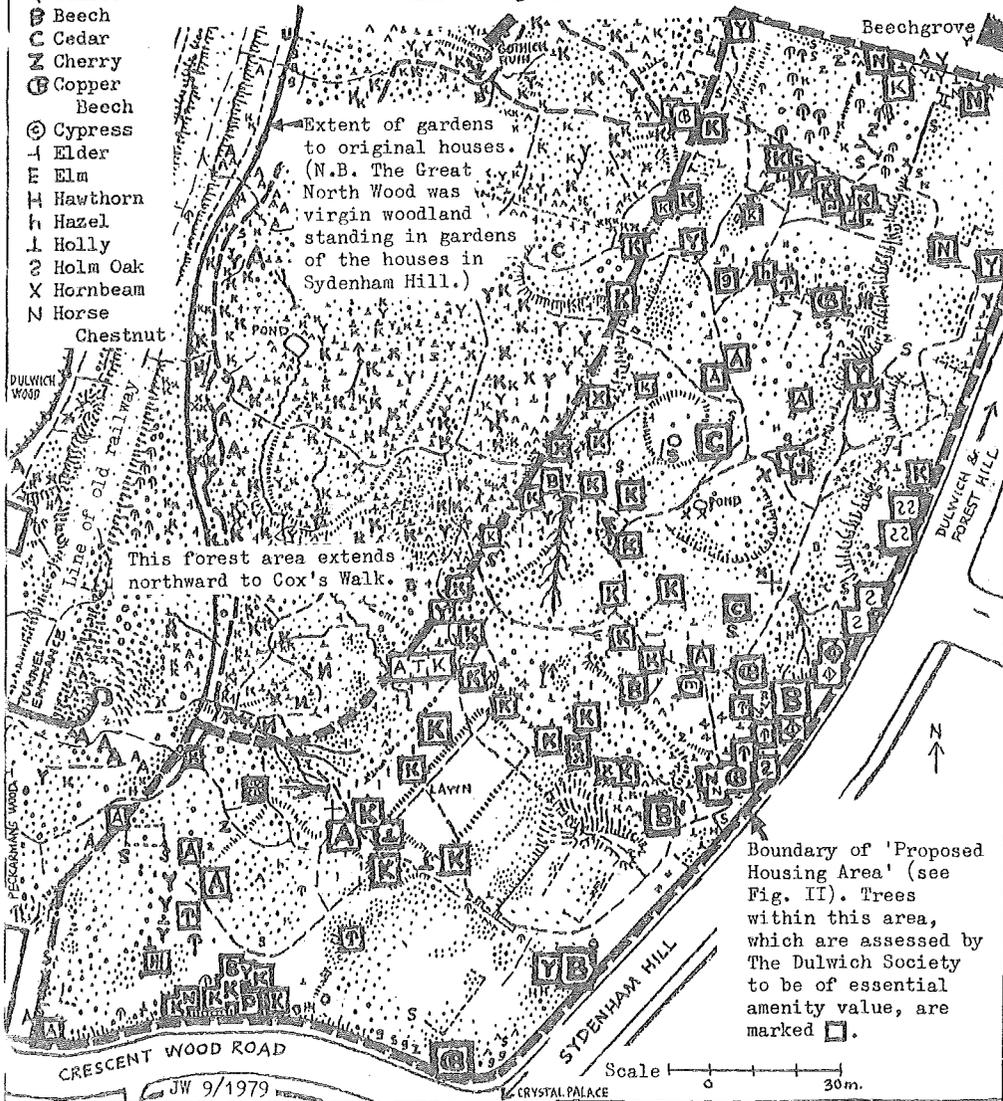


FIG. II

The Council's Scheme:

Briefing Plan

- Access points
- Access road
- Pedestrian routes
- Important new elevations
- Boundary of Housing Area
- Trees to be retained
- Play Area
- Location of shop and Tenants meeting room

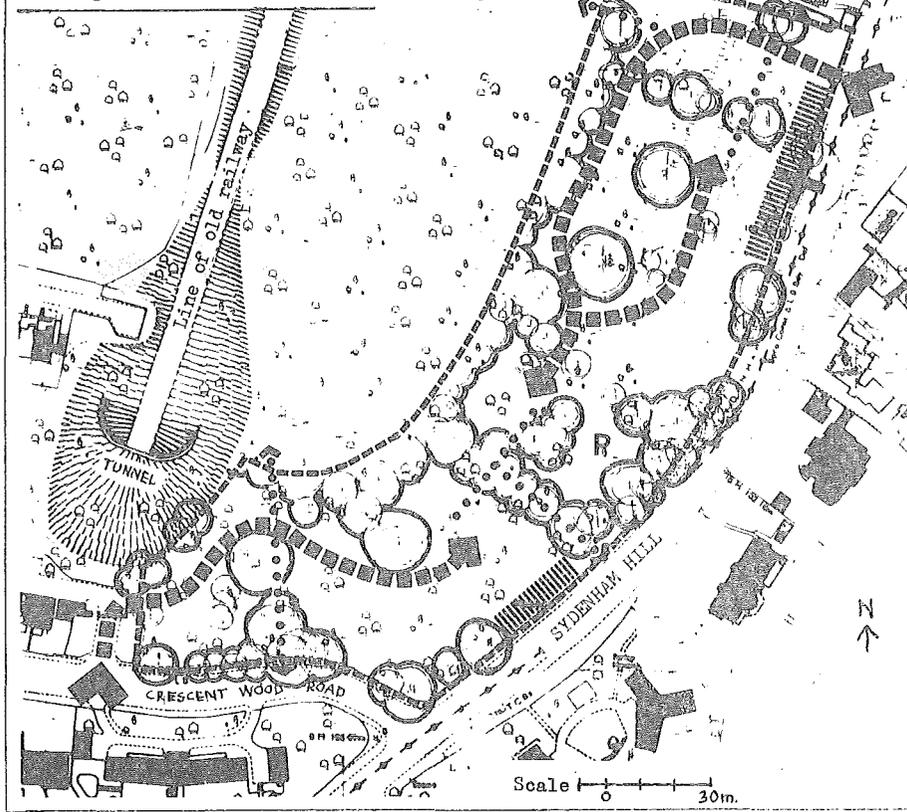


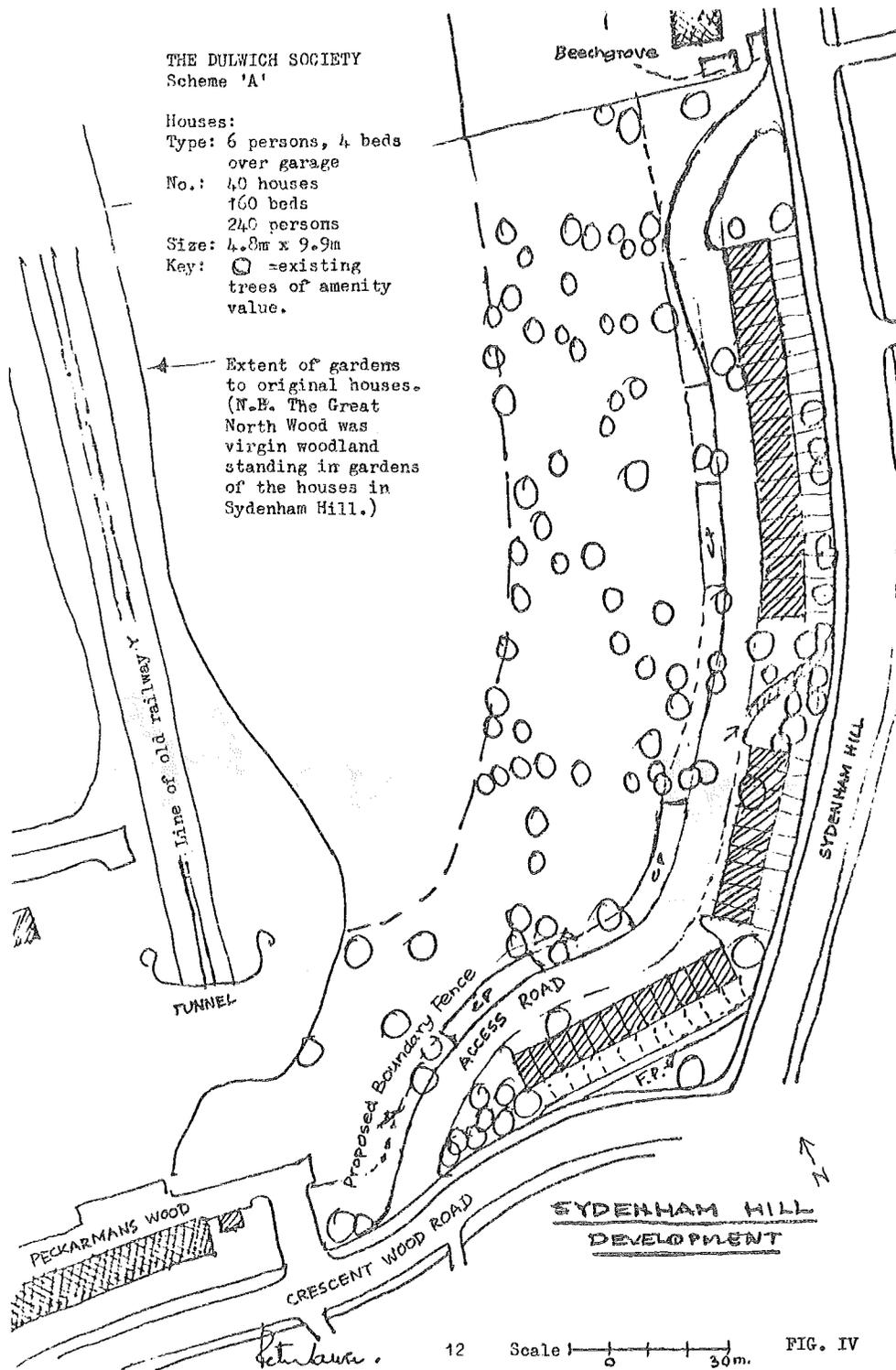
FIG. III

File No. TP-PSA-17 Drawing 5  
 Drawn by Date Feb 78 Scale 1:1250  
**London Borough of Southwark**  
 Borough Development Department  
 10-11, Peckham Road SE15 8DF

THE DULWICH SOCIETY  
Scheme 'A'

Houses:  
Type: 6 persons, 4 beds  
over garage  
No.: 40 houses  
160 beds  
240 persons  
Size: 4.8m x 9.9m  
Key:  -existing  
trees of amenity  
value.

Extent of gardens  
to original houses.  
(N.E. The Great  
North Wood was  
virgin woodland  
standing in gardens  
of the houses in  
Sydenham Hill.)



12

Scale 0 30m.

FIG. IV

HORTICULTURAL SUB-COMMITTEE

A few informal meetings have been held by individual members of the Horticultural Sub-Committee at their gardens, to which have been invited the rest of the sub-committee's "Council" of registered helpers. These have proved most interesting and enjoyable and we hope will form the basis of meetings for all Dulwich Society members registered with us to be arranged later in appropriate gardens. It has been decided that each host should nominate a charity, if any, in aid of which the garden in being opened.

An advisory panel has been formed, under Dr. F. Rackow, and any member who has a gardening problem upon which he seeks advice, e.g. what to plant, how to prune, etc. should approach Dr. Rackow or any member of the sub-committee; thereupon a member of the panel will arrange a suitable meeting.

The following fixtures have been arranged:

Saturday 6 October

Our Chairman, Dr. T.H. Frankel, will open his garden for all the Dulwich Society members registered with us at 108 College Road, SE21 from 3.00 to 5.00 p.m. in aid of Kings College Hospital Research.

Saturday 3 November (if fine)

Mr. G. Fairlie will be pruning shrubs in his garden at The Grange, Grange Lane, SE21 between 10.00 a.m. and 12.00 and 2.00 and 4.00 p.m. and will supply cuttings from these prunings. Members will be invited to bring cuttings from their own shrubs with them for exchange with other members. Dr. Frankel will show how he would propagate these cuttings. If 3 November is wet the distribution will be postponed until 10 November. A collection will be taken at these meetings in aid of the Home and Hospital for Incurables, Crown Lane, SW16.

Thursday 6 December, Members Evening, St. Barnabas Hall

We have been very fortunate in arranging for Mr. John Clayton, Public Relations Officer of the Royal Horticultural Society's Garden at Wisley to come and give an illustrated talk entitled "Wisley's Garden Through the Year".

## WILDLIFE

The Wildlife Sub-committee has recently arranged several successful informal occasions for studying local wildlife and plans are in hand for further 'walkabouts' for which arrangements will be notified via this newsletter or advertised by posters. Our request for information on the presence of frogs, toads and tadpoles in Dulwich has met with an encouraging response - our thanks must go to those who sent in records. As a result we plan to keep a register of 'sightings' as well as our usual recording of birds and butterflies and unusual wildflowers. These records can be consulted by anyone interested. Records are kept by birds (Mr. Toler), butterflies (Mr. Fairlie), flowering plants (Miss Pye-Smith) frogs and toads (Mrs. Howells). (Addresses and telephone numbers are in the April Newsletter).

### Another Visit to Beddington

There will be another visit to see the birds at Beddington Sewage Farm on Sunday 18th November. RV for those interested Belair Car Park at 0850 a.m.

### Dulwich Park - A Proposed New Sports Pavilion

Our Trees Sub-Committee have been keeping in close touch with the GLC Parks Department concerning plans to build a new pavilion on the existing cricket field in Dulwich Park (this was first mentioned in the January newsletter). We much appreciate the way in which the Parks Department have consulted us on this matter and we can now give some details of what is to happen. If all goes well work on the new pavilion will start in October this year and should be finished by July 1980 after which some rearrangement of the playing fields will be needed. The new building will be sited quite close to the existing wooden cricket pavilion and backing on to the staff yard. It will be of brick construction with a red-tiled roof and a timber verandah in front.

In order to ensure that the new building is well used the Parks Department plan to move the existing football pitches on to the cricket field which will be more convenient for both football and cricket players who will be playing right in front of the pavilion, and it will mean better facilities for maintenance of the playing fields since they will be much nearer to the staff and maintenance equipment yard. The present football fields will be released for more general recreational use. In addition Mr. Wood, the Park Superintendent, hopes to be able to provide a new junior football pitch close to the two new full-sized ones and two new all-weather surface cricket nets adjoining the new pavilion.

All in all this should result in a welcome improvement to the Park's amenities.

## Posters in the Village

We have received a letter from a Dulwich Village resident complaining about the unfortunate fashion of the moment of advertising forthcoming events by pinning large posters to the trees in the Village. This is not only unsightly and uneconomical as the posters blow away or get torn down, but is also bad for the trees which can be damaged by having nails driven into them. We hope all our members will do their best to discourage this bad habit.

### A Visit from Denmark

We recently received a letter from the Geographical Institute of the University of Aarhus in Denmark to say that a party of students of Geography and Town Planning (they go together in Denmark) were visiting London in August to study problems concerning town planning, housing and general amenity in the Borough of Southwark. It seems that they have in previous years paid similar visits to crowded urban areas in Glasgow and Liverpool. The purpose of their letter was to request an afternoon with the Dulwich Society so that they could learn about the work of an amenity society and its relationship with the local authority.

Our Chairman, Mr. Low, kindly agreed to meet the Danish party in his house in College Road and to provide them with tea and general information about our activities which was undoubtedly very much appreciated, particularly as it was a fine warm afternoon. Afterwards we asked them if they wished to ask any questions and the two most memorable ones were "Is this your English five o'clock tea?" in appreciation of the cucumber sandwiches and cakes kindly provided by some of our lady members, and "Does this house belong to the Society?" referring to 41 College Road. Unfortunately we have not been able to persuade the Chairman to donate his house to us, but nevertheless we would like to thank him for making it such a successful afternoon. We quote below a letter of thanks received from Aarhus.

"On behalf of the Geographical Institutes participants of the London-excursion I would like to thank you for the fine reception we received during our visit to Dulwich. On account of the great endeavour on your part, we all were able to perceive the special problems an area like Dulwich Village encounters and how the Dulwich Society hopes to solve these problems.

We thank all who participated in the delightful afternoon arrangement. Thank you too for your kind hospitality which we hope we can avail ourselves of in the future.

Yours sincerely, Leon Dueholm "