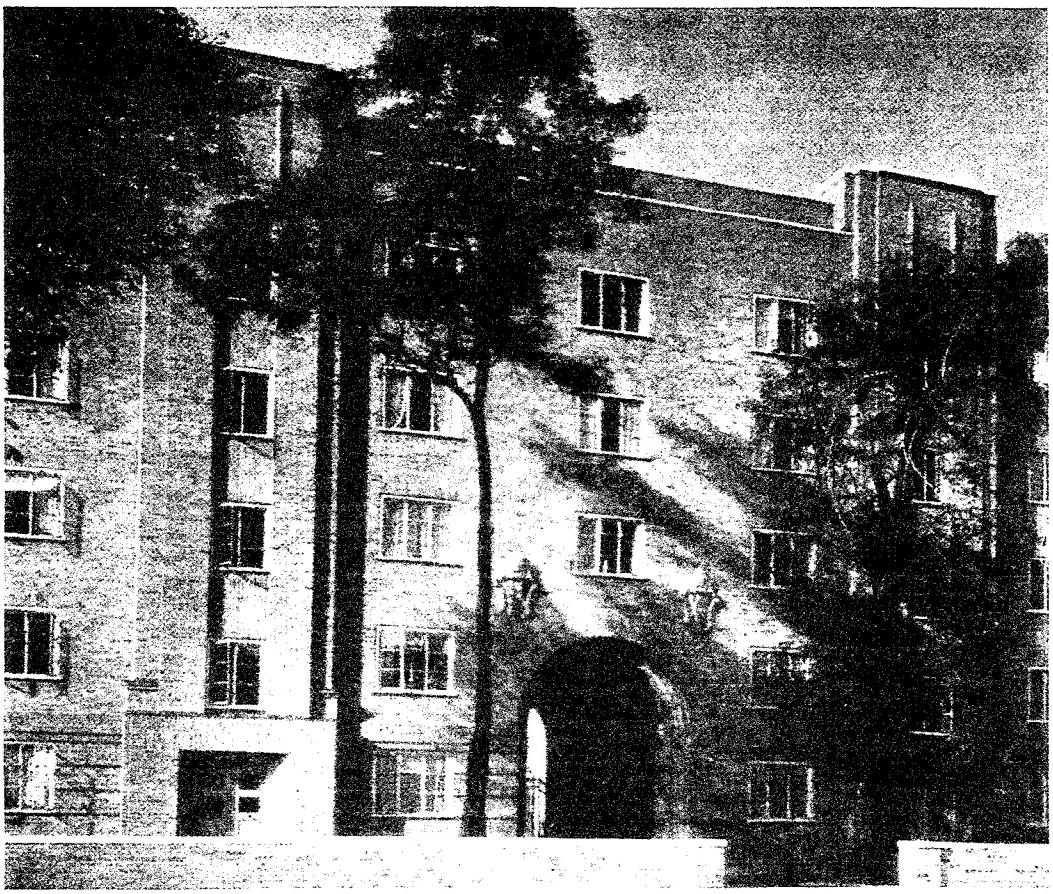
DIBDIN HOUSE



Courtesy of Architects Journal

— 50 YEARS —

by Anna Robinson

Source of Quotes

1	Souvenir programme of opening day.	Church Commissioners 1938
2	Letter,	Church Commissioners files 1934. Millbank
3	See 1.	
4	See 1.	
5	See 1.	
6	See 1.	
7	See 1.	
8	See 1.	
9	See 1.	
10	See 1.	
11	See 1.	
12	See 1.	
13	See 1.	
14	Club room rota	Church Commissioners files 1942. Millbank
15	See 1.	
16	See 1.	
17	See 1.	
18	See 1.	

Thanks to:-

Mrs. J. Shearman
Mr. F. Green
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Mr. D. McCarthy
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Imperial War Museum London for the bomb shelter photos

When Dibdin House was officially declared open on the 15th of October 1938, the souvenir programme had this to say about the site.

Dibdin House

The Site

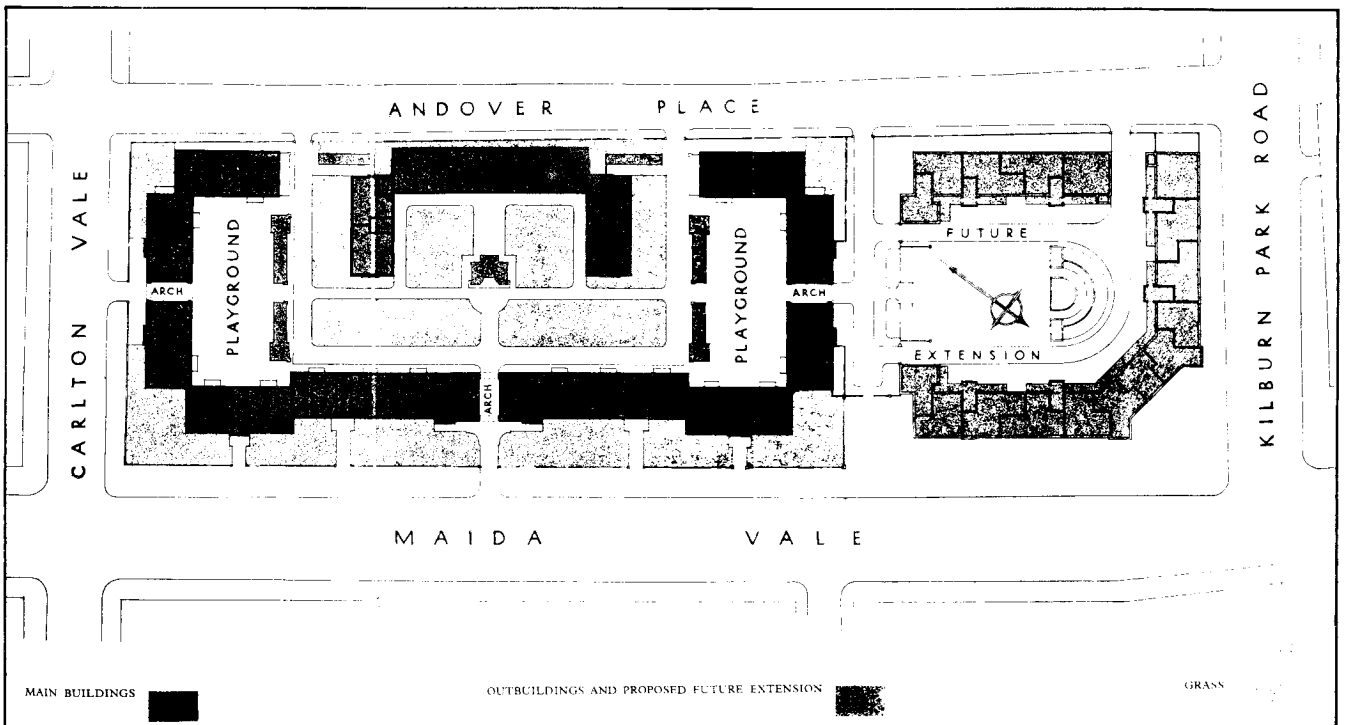
Dibdin House is erected on a part of an estate comprising some six hundred acres in the borough of Paddington, commonly known as the Paddington Estate, which forms part of the ancient endowments of the See of London and became vested in the Ecclesiastical Commissioners on the commutation of the Bishopric Estates in 1869.

The Estute has been connected with the church from very early times. King Edgar gave it to Westminster Abbey in the tenth century and after the dissolution of the religious houses it was assigned for the endowment of the See of London. The Estate has been in lease since the time of Henry VIII at least. The Lease was acquired in 1741 by Sir John Frederick, Bart., and the connection with his descendants has since then been continuous, the Lease now being vested, under various Acts of Parliament, in certain persons known as the Paddington Estate Trustees for a residue of a term of 2,000 years as from the 21st May 1895.

The Estate Trustees have agreed to lease the site back to the Commissioners for a term of 999 years at a low rent and the Commissioners have been greatly assisted in carrying out the scheme by the co-operation of the Trustees and their professional advisors.

The builders took possession of the site in July 1936, and it is hoped to complete the whole scheme early in 1940.

The entire scheme, accommodating some two hundred and thirty families, will take about three and three-quarter years to complete. The total cost will exceed £180,000."[1]



PLAN OF REHOUSING SCHEME, DIBDIN HOUSE, MAIDA VALE, PADDINGTON

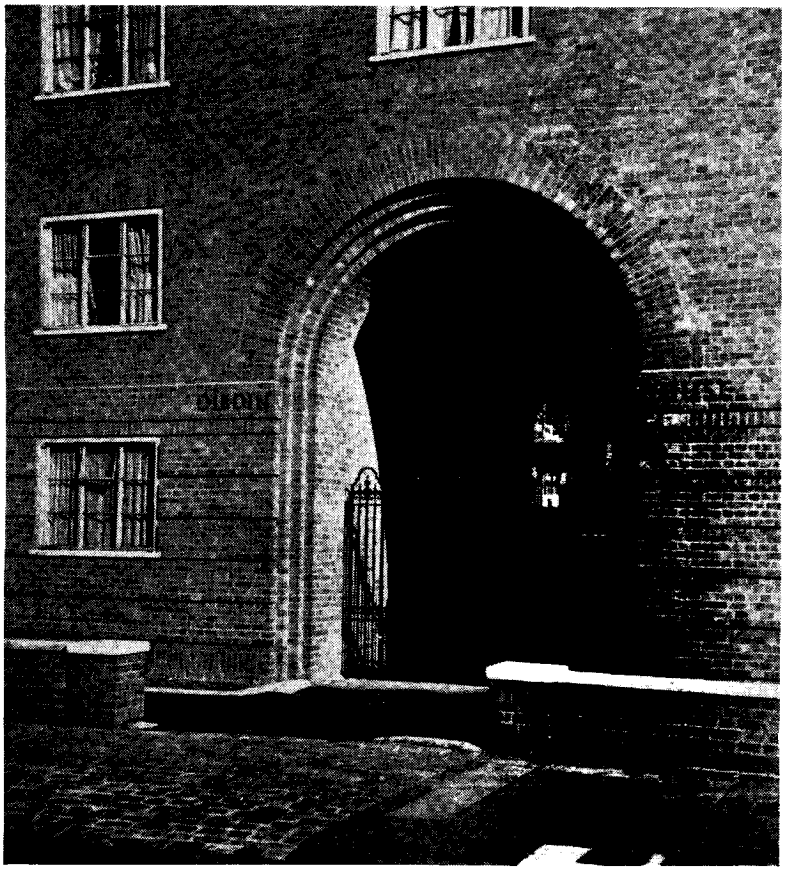
During the fifties, the Commissioners gradually took over the Paddington Estate Trustees and they now have full control of the site.

The second part of the scheme took longer than the Commissioners had anticipated because of the war. Just before the new block was due to be occupied, a bomb fell in Kilburn Park Road and caused a lot of damage to the new building.

The Building

The building of Dibdin House was first suggested in April 1934 and was immediately approved. By July the site had been chosen and the general shape of the blocks decided upon. The Commissioners went about getting a lease from the Paddington Estate Trustees and they agreed on an annual rent of £750.00 for the land. The Paddington Trustees, in a letter to the Commissioners, dated 16th July, 1934, say that ....

"The property (is) to continue to be, and always to be, treated as part of the Estate but to be under the management of your Commissioners and to be a site for the working classes."[2]



Courtesy of Architects Journal

Messrs. Caroe and Passmore were asked to be the Architects and they held a conference in December with the Lady Managers of the existing Commissioner's housing projects to get their views on how the flats should be built. The Architects spoke to many experts from a variety of fields. They even called in a vermin expert.

"The flats have been planned to ensure the maximum amount of light and air possible, and the building has been so constructed as to reduce the cost of maintenance to a minimum and to secure immunity from vermin. The architects have had the advantage on this latter question of the advice of Mr. A.W. McKenny Hughes, of the Department of Entomology, Natural History Museum, and the Secretary of the Infestation Committee of the Medical Research Council."[3]

Some of the tenants remember the vermin problems in their previous homes and they also remember the inspections they had to endure when they moved in.

Mrs. McDonald
Miss Lineham come to see us at 15 Harrow Street and turned up the beds for bugs. They were very strict then.

Mrs. Jaques
My goodness! we had beetles, mice and everything .... You couldn't bring anything with you, you had to put all your furniture in a big van where it was fumigated. Then you had to put all your stuff in one room and all you took out was a bag of cups and saucers, until the next day. I didn't want to bring anything from there anyway, which I didn't.

Mr. & Mrs. Mullins
Before we come up Miss Lineham came and inspected our furniture.

Miss McCarthy
November 11th '38 we all came up here. All the stuff had to go to the Bake to be fumigated. We had brand new beds but even they had to go. The furniture had to be left in a room for 24 hours to get the fumes out.

Mrs. W. Mitchell
We were lucky when we moved up here, we moved with our own transport but quite a few people from Marylebone had to go into one of the vans and have their furniture fumigated. We didn't have to do that.

"Woodwork has been eliminated as far as possible. The doors throughout are flush and hung in solid frames without architraves. Fireplaces and inner window sills are of tile. The window frames are of cast stone."[4]

Miss Hamilton (former Housing Manager)
They had metal conduit pipes up as picture rails, they didn't have wooden ones because it was felt that they encouraged vermin.

The Builders and What They Built

Dibdin House was built by Dove Brothers Ltd. and it was certainly built to last.

"The floors are of solid concrete laid with linoleum and with coved cement skirtings to the walls, and in order to reduce the passage of sound from one flat to another the floors have been insulated at the party walls. The flat roof is also of solid concrete construction covered with laminated roofing and insulating tiles."[5]

Many of the tenants commented on how strong their homes are.

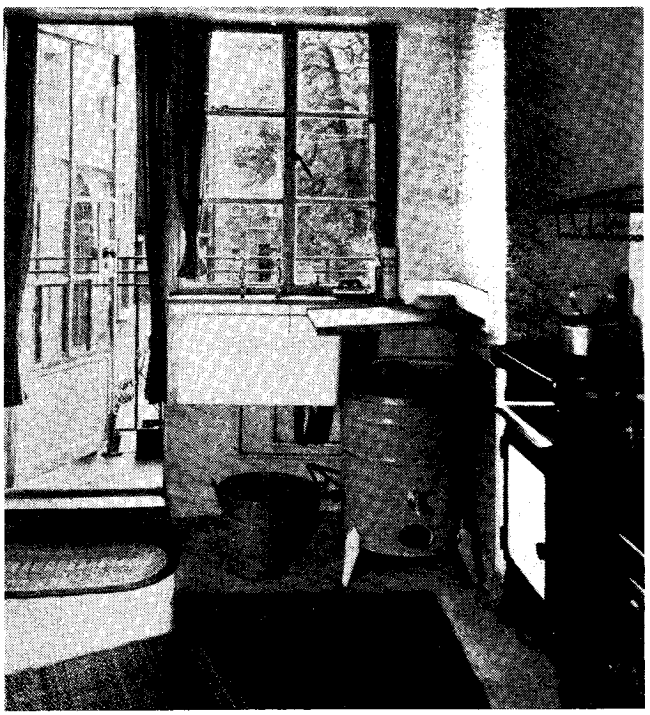
Miss Beauchamp
These flats were built out of pre war materials and they've stood up to a lot, they're very strong. They rebuilt the new block with the same kind of materials. The flats they build today are not as strong. Since then they've had all new outside window sills and then every so often they come and paint the window frames outside.

Mr. Cawfield
These flats were really well built. They had a fire up here on one occasion, it wasn't a bad one. I went up to have a look and my word! the thickness of the plaster on the brickwork!

The linoleum laid floors were an unknown luxury to many of the new tenants.

Mrs. McDonald
My mum was thrilled to think we had a lino covered floor.

Mrs. Jaques
I was thrilled when they let us come .... we had all polished lino throughout.



Courtesy of Architects Journal

The design incorporated a separate kitchen and bathroom for each flat, even the one room units. This was to comply with the L.C.C. standards to which all schemes they subsidised had to conform. These standards also governed the sizes of the rooms in the flats. To many of the tenants a bathroom was something they had never had before.

Mrs. W. Mitchell
We had a nice little house but of course, we were overcrowded and didn't have a bathroom.

Mrs. Wulbern
We came from the slums so you can imagine walking into a flat like this one, we had a bathroom which we never had before.

Mrs. McDonald
When we got a chance to come to Dibdin, we thought we was in heaven. Coming up to a bathroom.

Miss Beauchamp
It was such a treat to come home to a bathroom, we never had bathrooms before. We used to go to the Marylebone baths. We'd pay 6d. for a bath, they'd give you a towel, soap and plenty of hot water.

"Each bathroom contains a bath, lavatory basin and W.C., The plumbing is carried out on the "one-pipe" system, the pipes being carried in accessible, ventilated ducts, thus avoiding unsightly soil and waste pipes on the surface of the building.

Each kitchen contains a gas cooker, copper, sink and boiler for the hot water supply. The boiler is capable of consuming small refuse. Coal fires are provided in the living-rooms and the principle bedrooms."[6]

Today the tenants have immersion heaters in place of the old coal burning boilers. Mr. Mitchell, who is a retired plumber, kept his on though.

Mr. E. Mitchell
We've still got a coke boiler, deliberately on my part. That keeps the water hot, in the summer we use the immersion heater. I installed mine before they started putting them in. Galvanised cylinders used to be cheaper than copper, now its the other way round because there's not many know how to do galvanising now.

Mrs. Jaques
We had a nice little 'donkey' in the kitchen which you burnt coal on, that was the hot water. I wished I'd have kept mine but we was all for labour saving.

Miss Beauchamp
In the kitchen we had a coal fire boiler that used to heat the water, that's another thing that I'm not able to use.

Coal for the flats used to be delivered and many of the flats had coal bunkers fillable from the staircase landings. The coal bunkers had cupboard doors inside the flats which gave the tenants access to them without having to go outside.

"Where possible the coal bunkers in the flats are filled by means of iron hoppers on the staircase landings."[7]

Mrs. G. Mitchell
We had coal deliveries down here and carrying it up on their backs, they'd hit the walls. That's why the walls were painted, so's you could wipe if off again.

Miss Beauchamp
Years ago, we used to have a lovely coal fire in here but then coal wasn't allowed to be used (clean air act). I shared a shed downstairs, they weren't really allowed to be used for coal but people did. My sister upstairs and I shared it and her husband used to fetch it up. Well, when we weren't allowed to have coal we gave up the shed. In the first block by the doors to the flats there was a trap door where the Coal-man used to shoot the coal in. Inside there was a cupboard and you used to get the coal out of that. Now you see the Coal-man won't do stairs that's why my brother-in-law used to fetch it up for me, that's years ago. I have an electric fire now.

The New Arrivals

"The total number of flats in the portion of the scheme already completed is 160. This will be increased to a total of 233 flats and 11 shops in the entire scheme.

The completed portion has been erected in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Acts 1930-1936, under which subsidies from the Government and the London County Council are obtainable, and the nomination of the tenants has been made by the London County Council.

The remaining portion of the scheme in course of erection will be carried out without the assistance of the subsidy.

The accommodation provided by the completed portion of the scheme is as follows, each flat having in addition a bathroom and kitchen:-

48 4-roomed flats: 192 rooms
82 3-roomed flats: 246 rooms
18 2-roomed flats: 36 rooms
12 1-roomed flats: 12 rooms

A total of 160 flats (486 rooms), giving accommodation for about 729 persons."

The L.C.C. largely nominated tenants from the 'slum clearance' areas of Marylebone to come and live in Dibdin House. A few tenants also came from Paddington Green and from the local area.

Mrs. Duffy
We lived in Marylebone, Harrow Street. The Town Hall people came to see me and said that we was going to come here. You know the school, Christchurch school, we lived three doors down from it. My son used to go to the school there.

Miss Beauchamp
We came from Marylebone, but the houses were due to be demolished so we were given a flat up here. We lived in Harrow Street, right opposite the church, Christchurch, it's a beautiful church and in the war we used to hide underneath the church itself. That was the 1914 war.

Mrs. McDonald
I was 16 when we come up here. I was born in Marylebone, in 15 Harrow Street. We lived in three rooms and my mum had sixteen children.

Mr. O'Neil
My mother and father came here from Highworth Street, which used to be opposite Marylebone Magistrates Court. They came here as part of the slum clearances.

Miss Lea
I came here in 1939, in May, that was before the war started. I was 21 then. I lived in Marylebone before, in Sherringham Street, which was called Hereford Street before, it's not there now. We used to back on to a street called Mitcham Street. But now that's where the Marylebone fly-over is. The only thing left there now is the lamp post from ourside our house. They've still got the lamp post, I know exactly where I lived by the lamp post and the block of flats on the opposite side.

Mrs. Howlett
I lived in Hereford Street before, that was in Marylebone. When I got married I lived in Harrow Street, we had a little back room. It wasn't bad there 'cause I mean it wasn't a bad street. A lot of people who come here were from Harrow Street. 'Course a lot of them moved out or died, but most of them came from Marylebone.

Mrs. Jaques
I lived in Marylebone before, in Daventry Street, where they are building the flats now .... They were slums then.

Mrs Surety
We come here from Paddington Green, we enjoyed it there.

Mrs. W. Mitchell
I came from Paddington Green, there was only about four families from that street came here. Mrs. Jennings (Mrs. Surety and Mrs. Burns' mother), Miss Legg and some-one else. We were from Dudley Street. The majority of people from there moved to Acton or to White City but we four came here. The L.C.C. took these flats over for a few years for slum clearance.

Courtesy of Miss McCarthy

Family wedding in Paddington Green

Mr. Cawfield
Do you know St. John's Wood, Frampton Street, which used to be North Street, we come from there. The actual spot we come from is 100 yards from Lords Cricket Ground.

Maida Vale was always a wealthy neighbourhood and some of the tenants expressed the excitement of coming here for the first time.

Mrs. Wulbern
We walked up here when we moved and we thought we was moving into the country because all the way up Maida Vale there was trees and big houses, not flats.

Mrs Duffy
I remember this being built and I said to my husband "we'll never get a flat up there", but we did and they're very nice flats indeed.

Mrs. Duffy

Mr. Duffy

The feelings of the local population in Maida Vale, towards Dibdin House were very mixed. Some felt that a tenement block would lower the tone of the area. One man, Mr. C.J. Jones of Maida Vale wrote to the Commissioners to complain. All this however, was taken into account by the architects and they designed Dibdin House to blend in with its surroundings.

The Buildings

"In view of the situation, adjacent to the flats having a considerable rental value, the elevations to Maida Vale have been designed in such a manner as to avoid obvious appearance of tenements, with an unbroken front screening the courtyards. The kitchens, bathrooms and balconies are confined to the courtyards and to the Andover Place elevations at the back. All existing trees have been retained where possible, and new trees have been planted in suitable positions. The Maida Vale frontages are defined by dwarf walls, the intervening space between these and the buildings being turfed."[9]

Another complaint was that the new tenants coming in were not locals and many people had had to go elsewhere because of the scheme. Miss Smith, who lived in Andover Place before tells us about this.

Miss Smith
There was quite a bit of opposition to the flats because in the beginning they were meant to be for Paddington people and those that came here were from Marylebone, it wasn't all Westminster as it is today. A lot of people round here thought they would be coming in here and they didn't. There were only about four or five families that came here that actually lived in this area before. I don't know what happened to the people that lived in the places they pulled down, they were all dispersed. You see they had a slum clearance down in Marylebone, and they put them all in here on the understanding that they could all go back when they built flats down there if they wanted to, but that didn't happen either. I think there was a lot of upset that no-one carried out any promises. They'd said that when the Marylebone people went back the people from Andover Place could come in here.

In fact the Commissioners had no choice in the matter. In return for the subsidy the L.C.C. had sole nomination rights to Dibdin House and their policy was to give priority to families in the 'slum clearance' areas.

Miss Smith

There was a little mews where the newer flats are and lots of people dispersed 'cause they were hanging on the come into here but they never did. They were the loveliest little cottages with a front garden and a back and none of them was falling down. If you go to Andover Place you can see 17, 15, and 13 are still up and so if they were going to fall down they would have done so by now. There were lots of people round here but you could count on the fingers of one hand the ones that came in here. In those days you weren't obliged to find people accommodation. It was your bad luck if someone pulled the house down.

Not everyone felt as badly about Dibdin House however. The local church, Saint Augustines and the community groups attached to it, made the new tenants welcome immediately.

"The help thus given for the benefit of the newcomers to the Parish has been of great value to them, as they, no less than the Commissioners, recognise."[10]

Miss Smith and Mrs. Cohen both lived in this area before Dibdin House was built and they can remember what it was like then.

Miss Smith

Before these flats were built we lived in Andover Place. We lived at number 17. Well we lived there from about 1932. We moved round to the front where the shops are. There were shops there then too with tenaments above them. This area here was very large houses (Maida Vale) with large gardens (Andover Place) and down the end by the offices there used to be stables and later garages. The houses over the back were built for the Groomsmen but over the years they had gone over to being garages. From Andover Place down to the main road, was a right of way where they had little cottages. In late 1936 they started knocking them down and these houses here. We still lived on top of the shops until they literally started pulling them down. We didn't come into the flats until 1938 when most of the flats were occupied. Most of the people here came from Marylebone. The reason they put us in here, I think, was 'cause they were knocking the roof off so they could knock the places down and start building the rest. On the other side of the road there, there was all big houses but they are not owned by one family any more, they are all divided up into flats. They used to have one family in each with servants and everything. Irene Handl lived in one, her father was a Banker. After the war everything changed and the area came down anyway. This was an area that had money, it'd always had money.

There was about half a dozen houses down by the school where people from the church lived. The Organist lived down there and there was a very large building that stretched down past the church and that was the boy's school. They did some marvellous work there, they really turned out some good boys.

They opened the gardens (at the side of the church) only at Easter, Lady Day or Empire Day and everybody went in there.

Mrs. Cohen

I was born in Kilburn, I lived in Andover Place and then when these were built.... my mother had a big family and she was offered a flat here but she never took it 'cause she wanted a bigger place so we went to Willesden when these flats were opened.

The road between the blocks used to be a proper road, but now its not and they close the gates every Good Friday. (This is because if the road was left open all year round it would become a right of way once again). I didn't move in here till after the war but I moved in with my mother-in-law after we got married. My mother-in-law had a house in Maida Vale but she had to get out and live in Kilburn Park Road next to a fish shop until her flat was finished up the other end. She was one of the first in here.

Opening Day

Dibdin House was declared open and blessed by the Bishop of London in a ceremony on the 15th October 1938. By this time some of the tenants had been there for a year and the life of the estate was well underway.

Courtesy of Planet News Ltd

The opening ceremony was conducted on a Saturday afternoon and many people were invited, including the family of Sir L.T. Dibdin after whom the flats were named.

The Bishop of London, Dr. Winnington Ingram, made a speech, the Mayor of Paddington made a speech and so did Sir George Middleton, Sir Dibdin's successor as Chairman of the Commissioners.

Here are the days events as reported in the Kilburn Times.

ECCLESIASTICAL COMMISSIONERS' HOUSING SCHEME

DIBDIN HOUSE OPENED

160 FLATS (TO BE INCREASED TO 233) OCCUPIED

ONE of the finest contributions towards the better re-housing of the working classes in North-West London has been made by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who, on an island site bounded by Maida Vale, Carlton Vale, Andover Place, and Kilburn Park Road, have completed no less than 160 flats, totalling 486 rooms, and giving accommodation to 729. When the full scheme has been brought to fruition there will be 11 new shops and a total of 233 flats on the site, at a cost of £180,000.

BISHOP OPENS THE HOUSE.

The Rt. Rev. the Lord Bishop of London (Dr. Winnington Ingram) declared the building open on Saturday afternoon, in the presence of a large and distinguished company. The Mayor and Mayoress of Paddington (Alderman Lieutenant-Colonel and Mrs. Karslake), Sir George Middleton (First Church Estates Commissioner), and the Rev. W. P. Atkinson (Vicar of St. Augustine's, who acted as his lordship's Chaplain) received the Bishop, and a procession was formed, which was headed by the Cross and choir of St. Augustine's Church, and which proceeded to a marquee in the centre of the ground, where the ceremony took place.

Others present included Lady Middleton, Lord and Lady Daryngton, Lady Kenyon, Alderman and Mrs. Norris Kenyon, Hon. Thos. and Lady Bertha Egerton, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Bentley, Miss Dibdin, Mr. and Mrs. A Dibdin, Mrs. R J. Dibdin, Mr. L. G. Dibdin, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Silkin, Sir Edgar and Lady Bonham Carter, Alderman Sir George Wilkinson, Lieutenant-Colonel Dove, the Clergy of St. Augustine's, Alderman Miss Cowan, Mr. and Mrs. G. W. F. Sexton, Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler (Willesden), Councillor Haddon Parkes (Hampstead), Miss Perrin, Councillor and Mrs. Featherston, Councillors Miss MacLean, Urquhart and Turner (Paddington), Dr. Oates, Captain Nicholson, and many others.

The service opened with the hymn, "Glorious things of thee are spoken," which was followed by prayers, the Bishop's address, the hymn, "Praise my soul, the King of Heaven," and the Blessing.

The Croydon Church Army Silver Prize Band led the singing, and played selections.

BISHOP'S ADDRESS.

Dr. Winnington Ingram said that there were four things he wished to say. Firstly, to pay his tribute to his old friend, the late Sir Thomas Dibdin, whose name was given to those flats. He was one of the most faithful and hard-working Church servants, and was Chairman of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for many years. He had a very worthy successor in Sir George Middleton.

Secondly, they often heard criticism of the Commissioners, and of the Bishop of London Estate. He had nothing to do with their management, except that he had been one of the Commissioners for 38 years. They were only trustees for the poor clergy of London, and every penny they made they spent on new districts. But they felt that even the poor clergy could not make money at the expense of the poorest people. In several parts of London they were erecting those magnificent flats for the inhabitants and the completed scheme there would cost £180,000.

..... AS AN OLD SLUM DWELLER,

he appreciated those fine flats. Although many people did not want to leave their old homes, they should be made to move for their own health's sake, and when parents and five or six children lived in one or two rooms, they were a danger to the general health and happiness. By giving them new homes, the people had new lives and increased happiness. He was glad to see the children present, for they had a better chance of life in homes such as that House provided.

As Bishop of London he welcomed them all to that part of London. They had come into a very fine parish, with a very beautiful church, and a splendid Vicar, and he hoped that they would also give themselves a new chance, spiritually.

He hoped that their new homes would result in better health, and deeper happiness which consisted in the love of God, service to, and for, His church.

CIVIC WELCOME.

Various presentations of those engaged in the work, having been made to the Bishop, the Mayor (Alderman Lieut.-Col. Karslake) said it was a very great privilege and pleasure to him to greet Sir George Middleton, and his colleagues who had come to that ceremony, although as the Commissioners owned nearly half the total soil of Paddington, they really came to their own ground. On behalf of the borough he had to express their deep gratitude to the Lord Bishop for his presence, which they much appreciated. That occasion was important, and epoch making. The housing of the workers in decent homes, and amidst such surroundings as they saw that afternoon, was the great pre-occupation of the members of the borough council, who cordially welcomed that contribution to their housing schemes. They recognised it as an earnest co-operation of the Commissioners and the great landowners of Paddington, with the Borough Council, and they looked forward to continued collaboration between the two for the moral and physical welfare of the people, whose future they had so much at heart. (Applause).

PRAISE BY SIR GEORGE MIDDLETON

Sir George Midleton, Chairman of the Commissioners, said they were grateful to those who had attended the opening of that remarkable block of working-class flats. They were indeed glad to have the opportunity of co-operating with the borough council in trying to do something for housing in that particular area. Their opportunities had been limited by the desire to get the L.C.C. subsidy, therefore they had not been quite free agents so far as their tenants were concerned. They had completed 160 flats on the main plot, but they were going to erect 73 more, without the subsidy of the L.C.C., which would enable them to choose their own tenants.

There were a great many people who were under the impression that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners were rolling in money, and were very hard to move in the direction of providing accommodation for working people. It was an entirely mistaken view, for there were many conditions over which they had no control.

That block of flats would have been impossible, owing to leases, unless the Paddington Trustees had consented to lease the land back to the Commissioners.

He paid a tribute to Mr. Carol, the Architect, and Messrs. Dove, the builders. That was

THE 17th SCHEME

which the Commissioners had embarked upon in London, and it would be managed by Miss Lineham, under the Octavia Hill scheme, and it was the Commissioners who gave the late Miss Hill her chance of management. He outlined the social schemes which they had in view, and added that Rev. W. P. Atkinson would take a keen interest in the spiritual welfare of the people. He warmly praised Mr. J. E. Brown, the Secretary, who inspired the Commissioners to bring the scheme about.

TABLET UNVEILED.

The Bishop unveiled a commemoration tablet of his opening the flats, and the National Anthem brought the ceremony to a close.

Mrs Cawfield remembers the day very well.

Mrs. Cawfield
When the blocks was officially opened, the Vicar from the church came and read a sermon by the plaque there, facing the main gate and when they'd finished that the choir came round to each block, sang a hymn and the Vicar blessed each block. It was an open day and visitors from outside could come and look at the flats.

Bishop of London visits a tenant.

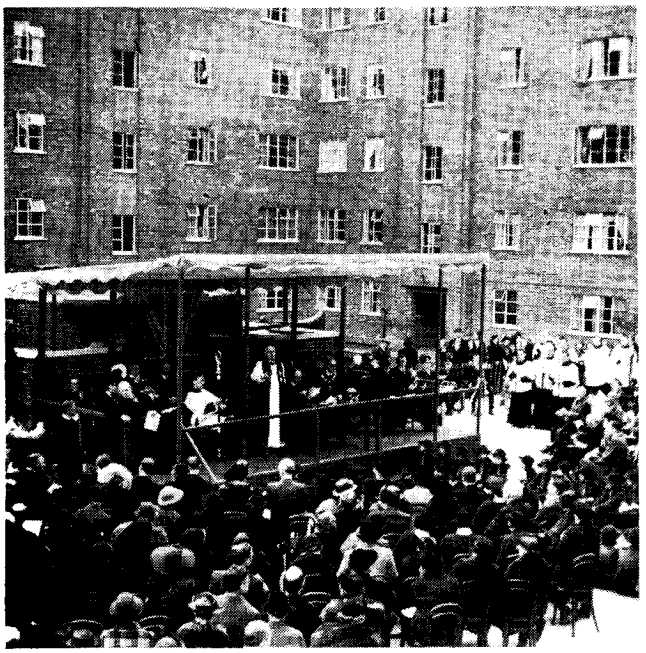
Ronnie Sullivan meets the Bishop.

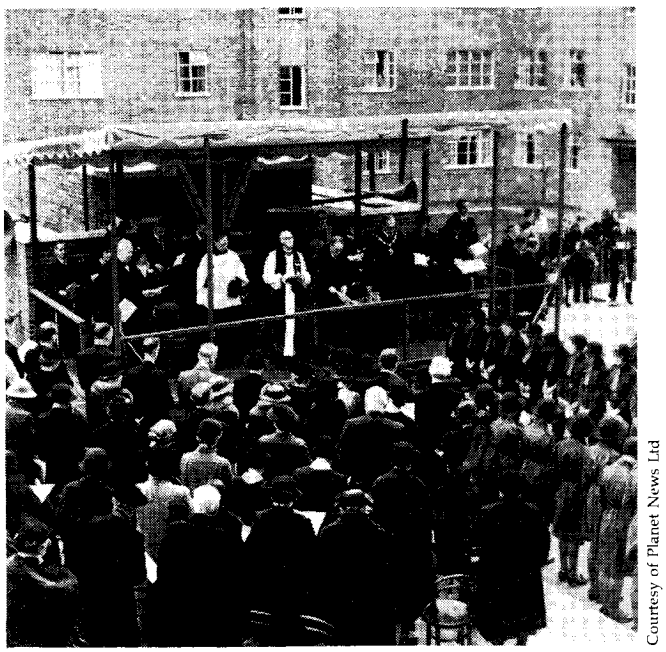
Courtesy of Planet News Ltd

Mrs. Wulburn
My brother Ronnie was the first baby to be born at Dibdin House. We have a photograph of him with our mother and the Bishop of London on opening day. The picture was in the Telegraph.

"A Company of Girl Guides has been formed for the children living in Dibdin House by Miss M. Tanner, and, together with the St. Augustine's Church Girl Guides, will form the Guard of Honour to the Bishop for the Opening Ceremony."[11]

Mrs. Wulbern and Mrs. Talbot (nee Sullivan and Surety) were Girl Guides here and Mrs. Wulbern was in the Guard of Honour for the Bishop.





Courtesy of Planet News Ltd

The Coats of Arms over the main gateway in Maida Vale are meant to be symbolic of the relationship between the Diocese of London and the Diocese of Canterbury.

"To commemmorate the connection of the Eccliastical Commissioners and the Bishopric of London with the scheme, shields executed in coloured faience have been placed over the main archway on the Maida Vale front. These show the arms of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury (Chairman of the Commissioners) impaled with the Diocese of Canterbury and of the Bishop of London, impaled with the arms of the Diocese of London."[12]

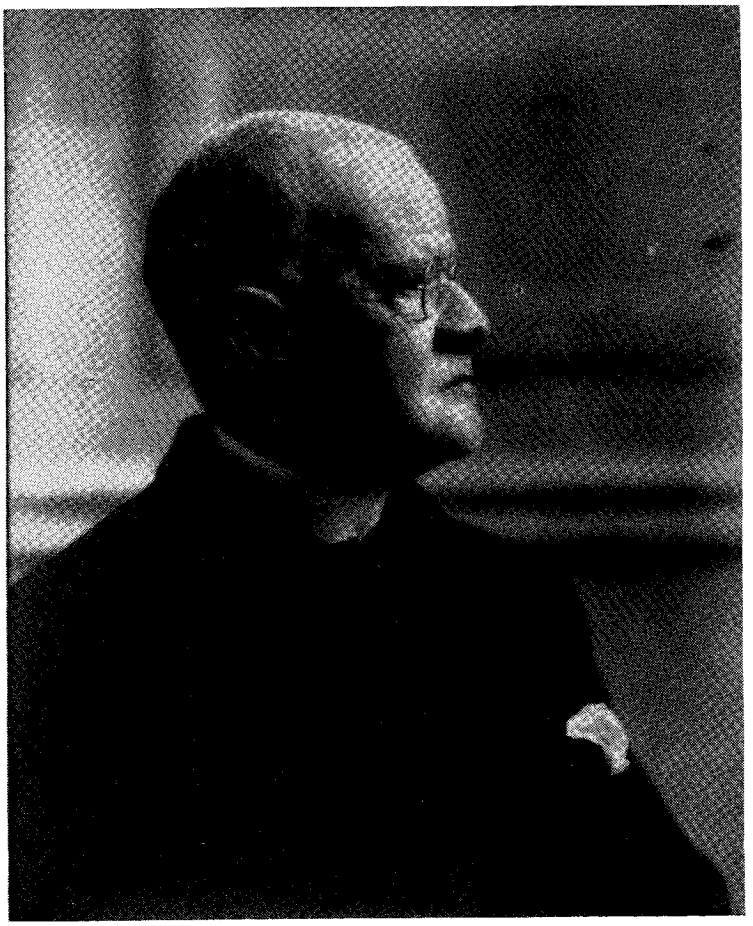
Who Was Sir Dibdin?

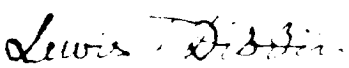
"The flats have been named 'Dibdin House', after the late Sir Lewis T. Dibdin, D.C.L., First Church Estates Commissioner from 1904 to 1930, and an Ecclesiastical Commissioner until his death earlier this year."[13]

Sir Dibdin was a Barrister and a J.P.. He had been Counsel to the Attorney General in Charity Matters, 1895-1903 and he was Chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester, 1886-1903; of Exeter, 1888-1903; and of Durham, 1891-1903.

Between 1903-34, he was the Dean of Arches, Auditor of the Chancery Court of York and Master of the Faculties.

Sir Dibdin also wrote several publications for the church including one on the 'History of the Ecclesiastical Commission' which was published in 1919.





The Clubs

As has already been said, Dibdin House had its own Girl Guide Company. Two former members of it spoke about it.

Mrs. Wulbern
We had our own Girl Guides here and there was a Brownies and a Girl's Club. Our meetings used to be in the rent office. When we sat for our badges, the cooking badges and that, we used to go to number 25. Of course they're both dead now, but there was two ladies that used to live there and they'd let us use their kitchen. We Girl Guides had our own colours and we went to church parade.

Mrs. Talbot
We used to go to the Girl Guides down here. In the winter we'd go in the office and in the summer we'd go on the roof and do our semaphores.

Courtesy of Mrs. Talbot.

Courtesy of Mrs. Wulbern.

Some of Dibdin's guides and brownies.

They also went to the Girl's Club.

Mrs. Wulbern
The lady that run the club had a big house over at Swiss Cottage and we used to go there at weekends. Up Carlton Hill we had a Barrage Balloon and stationed up there were some young soldiers. She used to get in touch with them and we would entertain them for an evening. Well I know that one of the girls married one of the soldiers.

Mrs. Talbot
There used to be a house in Swiss Cottage. It was ready for anyone from here who was made homeless in the war. There was clothes and things all prepared. We used to go for weekends.

Once a week we would hold a social and we would invite the Air Force from St. John's Wood or the Army from Swiss Cottage, just the young boys, and we'd have a social on Saturday night.

We did some sewing, making shorts for our keep fit class and that. We used to entertain in the air-raid shelters of a night, little shows.

There was also a Boy's Club at Dibdin, affiliated to the Federation of London Boy's Clubs. Mr. Mitchell was a member.

Mr. E. Mitchell
I was involved with the Boy's Club, we met two or three times a week. We played competitive sports through the London Federation of Boy's Clubs, we played football and cricket on Saturdays and Sundays. Many of the members were involved with St. Augustine's Church. The McCarthys, the O'Briens and the Roberts were involved as well. We collected subs off members and when the club closed we handed over the balance to the Caretaker and got the receipts. During the 50's the Estate Office asked us about the club and we gave them all the papers then. The Boy's Club opened soon after the flats were opened and it stopped during the war. Our name was on something, I can't remember what. It was a big silver shield, that would've been before the war.

After the war, Mrs. Croft (nee Brown) started another Girls Club that was a great success.

Mrs. Croft
We started the Girl's Club here after the war and of course some of the girls are grandmothers now. But we had a very nice time and the mothers were pleased with it. Before the cage was built there was just a play-ground and they used to just sit around here. I said "would you like to do something with yourselves" and they said "Oh! would you run us a club". I ran the club till I got married. I used to take them out to other clubs, there was a lot of clubs at the time, and other clubs used to visit us. We had days out and that. I stopped doing it when I got married.

In the Girl's Club we played Netball and we had netball posts, I don't know what became of them. We had Tennis also. I liked clubs myself as a youngster so I used to enjoy it. We had inter-club contests, Draughts, Dominoes and different games like that. We put on a play in the hall at Christmas time and they thoroughly enjoyed it. I was one of the first ones to use the hall. The club was affiliated to the Youth Club Association and I used to have about 20 girls. We had outsiders as well, if they went to St. Augustine's and one of our girls asked.

We had Committee meetings in the Estate Office. Father Wooley and Miss Lineham were members. Mrs. Gibbons helped, she used to live at 64 and my sister used to help as well. I worked for J. Lyons and they had an amateur dramatics class there so I was able to pass on what I learned there when we did plays at the club. They came from the age of seven until they left school. It would be good if the Boy's and Girl's clubs could be started again 'cause there's nothing for the children to do now.

When Miss Habgood was Lady Manager at Dibdin, she began, with Mrs. O'Brien and several others, a club for elderly residents which still runs today. They meet on Thursday afternoons.

The people that go to the club have tea and cake and they play bingo for small prizes.

Mrs. Duffy
I used to be a Bingo Caller down at the club house years ago.

Mrs. O'Brien
My mother-in-law used to run the old people's club and organise things for them.

Mrs. Wulbern
Mrs. O'Brien used to do the old people's functions, she died. She was marvellous, she used to organise outings for the pensioners and do all the cooking for their parties. She held jumble sales as well and used to get all the family in to help.

Mrs. O'Brien's OAP Club

There had been an earlier 'old people's club', it had been run by Miss White who had also been in charge of the war-time Girl's Club and the Brownies.

Miss Gorvin
Miss White used to run the old people's club and my sister was the secretary and I made the cakes and that, this was a long time ago. When my sister died I joined the club at St. Martins in the Fields and I've been going there 20 years, it's on Thursdays in the afternoons, so I can't to go this one here.

Today the club is still going strong. The present day club is presided over by Mrs. Noyes. They have occasional outings.

Miss Beauchamp
Once the Church Commissioners put up a coach trip for the pensioners to go to see Barnum at the Palladium.

Here is a **Club Room Rota** for a typical week during the war.
February 1942

Activity	Time	Leaders	Co-operating Body
Cookery demonstration	Mondays 2.30	Miss Hugandoof (Mrs Nayor and Miss White assist)	Ministry of food
Girl Guides	Tuesdays 6.30	Miss Nichols – Capt. Miss Twaite – Asst.	Girl Guides Assoc.
Knitting and prayer Guild	Wednesdays 2.30	Father Wooley	St. Augustines
Girls Club	Thursdays 7.00	Mrs. Nayor and Miss White	Paddington Youth Centre. Own Management Cmtee.
Brownies	Fridays 5.00	Miss White – Brown owl	Girl Guides Assoc.
Play centre	Every night 5.15 - 7.00 in shelter or Clubroom	Mrs Turner Mr. Thomas (caretaker)	L.C.C. Paddington B.C. Shelter Welfare
To be arranged			
Boys & Girls Mixed club	3 nights occ. Sats & Sundays	Mr. Henderson Miss White Mrs. Nayor	Paddington Youth Centre Nat. Union of Boys & Girls Clubs Own Management Cmttee.
Wolf Cubs	1 early evening	Rev. Randell	Boy Scouts Assoc.

14

The War

The most dramatic events in the history of Dibdin House and it's tenants occured during the years 1939-1945. During the second world war many things happened that affected the estate.

Some of the tenants were evacuated to places that were strange to them and some stayed behind and did war work. Several tenants experienced moments of real danger and a few were killed. All of the current tenants that lived in Dibdin during the war have strong memories of the time and here are some of their stories.

Mrs. McDonald
The day war was declared everybody was friendly and we all made sand bags together. It's a shame there's no photos of that day.

Mrs. Surety
At the beginning they give us sand bags and everybody had to help.

Mrs. W. Mitchell
On the Sunday morning that war was declared, where the shelters were built, that was all green grass. We were filling up the sand bags with the earth and we put them in the entrances of the blocks to reinforce them so that if there was any bombing we wouldn't get the blast into the blocks. We had a laugh that morning although people were miserable because of the war.

Mrs. Talbot
It was terrifying, but looking back, as everyone will tell you, there was a closeness, everybody was so close. We were evacuated to Northampton, with the school. Mum and Dad came to see us. The school was closed for about eight months.

Mrs. Surety
That was awful, no children around here.

Mrs. Cawfield
The war came and the children went away and things broke up.

Mr. Cawfield
A lot of boys here missed out on the early part of their lives 'cause of the war, they had to go away.

Mrs. Talbot
But then they started to drift back and then they opened the school in the morning and boys and girls used to go there together, there had been two seperate schools before.

Mrs. Howlett
My Mari and my Sylvie was evacuated but my Johnny was only 3 so I didn't want him to go. The other children were evacuated down Bourne End. The lady what looked after them wrote me a letter saying 'do you think you could come down 'cause I'm getting a bit worried about the planes when they come over'. So of course I went down. I give my job up but I worked in a lot of factories down there. I worked in a paper factory then I went into another job, doing war work and eventually I ended up in a factory making armatures.

Mrs. Bugg
We were evacuated to Bourne End, then I went to Devon and then High Wycombe. My mum came down to Bourne End and worked down there, then when my sister ran away she brought us away from there. We went to Devon 'cause my dad was in the army down there and then after that my sister stayed at home and I went away again.

Mrs. Wulbern
Then the war came and we had to be evacuated. We went to Buckinghamshire first and then Devon, when we came back the war was nearly over. We went to Saint Augustines school then. We used to have drill, getting taught how to help with incendary bombs. We had lessons but every now and again the bell would go and we would get sent up to the roof to deal with a fake incendary bomb. We used to go out and collect shrapnel.

Mrs. Talbot
At school they chose a Shrapnel King and Queen and all the kids used to go round with sacks for the class and collect all the shrapnel to be melted down.

Mrs. Surety
Well, they collected all the railings, for making guns and that.

Miss Beauchamp
As I say, two years after we came here the war started and they put up the shelters in the court yard.

Mrs. W. Mitchell
They had prefab shelters, one by the office, one by the playground and one down there in the middle. We had quite a laugh in the shelters, singing and that.

Courtesy of Imperial War Museum

Shelters similar to the ones at Dibdin House

Courtesy of Imperial War Museum

The Shelters at Trafalgar Square.

Mrs. Surety
They had bomb shelters down here in the war. We went in them. We went down the other end.

Mrs. Talbot
At the beginning there wasn't anything in there, we used to take our own things into the shelters, sleep on the floor. We'd go in at six o'clock at night and come out at six o'clock in the morning, night after night. Sometime after that they put bunk beds in so at least we were off the floor. They put sand bags all around the entrances.

Mrs. Cawfield
We'd go down the shelters and there'd be everyone down there, and there'd be this little child crying and my son'd go and sit next to him and he'd be quiet, he had such a way with kids.

Mrs. Surety
One boy round here got his leg off. He was helping take the shelters down and his leg got crushed.

Miss McCarthy
They had air raid shelters here, we were given bunk numbers for them. We went down to see them and my mother, she looked in there and said "if you think I'm going in there, well I'm not. If I've got to die I'll die in my own bed". So we didn't used to go down there.

Mrs. Wulburn
We used to go in the air raid shelters but after a while we used to go up on the roof and sit and watch the air craft fighting, the danger never entered your head. When they all used to be in the shelter we used to wander out and get on a bus or something, then all of a sudden – black out! and we couldn't see a thing.

Mrs. W. Mitchell
We didn't go out much 'cause by the time you got back from work it was the black out and you couldn't see.

Mrs. McDonald
During the war they put two hours on the clocks so that we'd have more daylight and we used to finish work about 4.30 so that everybody could get home. You used to look on the calendar for the full moons so we knew if we'd have light to see where we were going.

Miss Lea
I never went out a lot during the blackout 'cause I used to work until 7 o,clock at night. By the time I got home it was too late. I used to go to the pictures and I used to go to a club down in Marble Arch, an American place. We didn't go to dance or anything like that we just used to serve teas and wash up, things like that, it was a service man's club. I didn't go there all the time.

Mr. O'Brien
My mother did war work as an assembly worker at Solex in Marylebone Road.

Miss Lea
During the war I worked all day. I didn't pass medical to go in the forces because of a heart murmur so I did government work, office work. I stayed there for many years after the war.

Mrs. McDonald
I used to do shift work, one month nights and one month days. I worked in Acton making armatures for airplaines. Before that I used to work making army clothes. Most of my sisters were tailoresses, so naturally I was one. Where we used to work in Great Portland Street, they changed over to making army clothes, women's army clothes. My mother was afraid that I might get called up for the A.T.S. so I went to do war work.

Mrs. Howlett
I got a job down the Euston Road. It was in a factory doing war work. We was making feather covers and then we was doing tents, putting the ribbons on them, and marquees, putting the rings on them, one on either side. We was on piece work and I always got there first. A girl in the flats over there, she doesn't live there now, she used to look after him (Johnny) in the day while I was at work. She said 'I'll mind him Mrs. Howlett, while you're at work ....

Eventually we come back up and I started on the railway. I was on the railway for 27 years and all during the war I was Van Guard. One day we went to Farringdon Street to deliver a parcel and just as we left, a bomb dropped on the house we'd just been in and everyone inside was killed. If we'd have been a few minutes later we'd have been killed. They rang up from Paddington, where I was working to see if we was alright.

Mrs. Wulbern
We had our own Wardens here and our own Fire Watch.

Miss Beauchamp
It was in one of the local papers about the bombing of Maida Vale. One morning a sister of mine come for the day, her and her husband. There was this raid on and she had to stay the night, and her two little boys. We had to make a bed up in my bedroom over there in 141, they stayed all night. Next morning Kilburn was in a state, shocking! Oh it was terrible times. We could hear that whistling coming down and she was terrified. I was frightened but I wouldn't show my fright in front of her. "Oh that's alright" I said "we can hear them, if they were meant for us we wouldn't hear them" I said. Well we wouldn't because when you could hear them they was somewhere else, you couldn't hear them if they was being dropped on you, you wouldn't be here to tell the tale ....

and then in the war that got bombed (the second block), a beautiful coffee shop on that corner took a direct hit, it's all flats now. It was in that corner block there, that was bombed, it was most strange, all that was left was a stone staircase.

Photo of Bomb Damage – C.C. File 93272 – 1/2

Mrs. Talbot
There was a coffee shop which was bombed, along the side here. I used to get the Teacher's lunch there when I was at Saint Augustines.

Mrs. Wulbern
The Queen's Arms got bombed and quite a few men from here got killed.

Mrs. Surety
The pub on the corner got hit and a lot of men got killed, there was a darts match on at the time.

Mrs. Cawfield
The Queen's Arms, it was one of their competition nights and so it was packed and they all got killed.

Mrs. Talbot
And they laid out the bodies in the court yard here.

Mr. H. Mitchell
The bomb hit the corner of that (a shed by 51-60 block) and the bomb shelter was there and it caught it too. That wasn't the same bomb as the Queen's Arms got though.

Mrs. Mitchell
No, 'cause that was later in the war. We were upstairs when that one fell. It caught the new block as I call it, also it caught the pub. There was a couple of tenants got killed, Mr. Desmond and Mr. Evans.

Mrs. Surety
We used to have big Ack-Ack guns over head going all night ....
They used to send down what they called Chandeliers, they dropped one right in the court yard, it wasn't half frightening. They were lights to help them see where they (the German airforce) were going.

Mrs. Talbot
They said that this roof is white and they used to make this a route way.

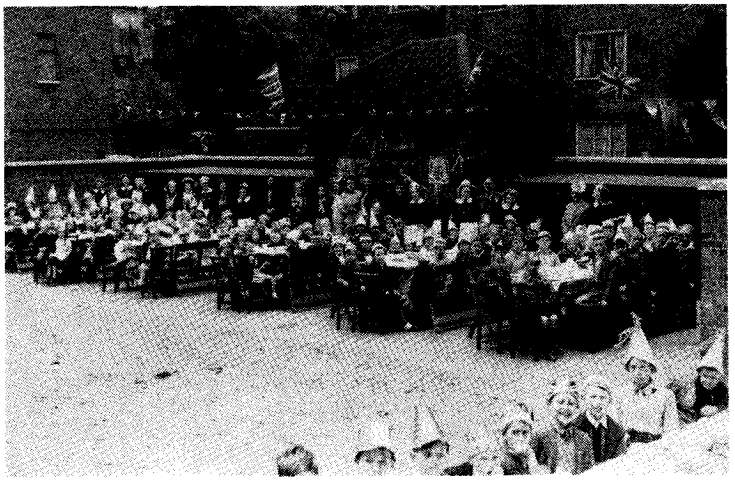
Mrs. Cawfield
The kids used to come round for sweets in the war, at first it was only one or two but then they used to come knocking on my door and I had to tell them about that.

Mrs. Wulbern
During the war you couldn't get many sweets and Mrs. Cawfield always had a jar of them. We used to hang around her door and try to get one, which we mostly did.

Mrs. Cawfield
When the war ended, Mr. Thomas, the Caretaker, went out onto the balcony and shouted "the war's ended now" and there was a couple having a row and he shouted "the war's ended now but it seems as though it's started somewhere else".

The war ended in 1945 and the tenants of Dibdin House, just like many other people all over the country, held a party to celebrate.

Mrs. Croft
Father was one of the organisers for the V.E. Day and the Coronation parties.



Courtesy of Norman F. Law

Management and Rents

"Management

In accordance with the Commissioners' usual practice, the Management of the flats is conducted on the principles established by Miss Octavia Hill.

At the request of the Commissioners, Miss M.K. Moor, the Commissioners' Manager on the Walworth Estate, undertook the Management of the flats during the initial period, pending the appointment of Miss H. Lineham, in whose charge they now are.

The Commissioners' Lady manager has received throughout support and guidance from the Vicar of the Parish, St. Augustine's, Kilburn, the Rev. W.P.T. Atkinson, in connection with the social welfare of the tenants and their families rehoused in the new property."[15]

The Lady Managers and rent collectors were originally paid a percentage of the money they collected and were regarded as Estate Agents rather then employees. They were required to get a set sum of money to the Commissioners and then, what was left was spent on the upkeep of the Estate.

The weekly rents are approximately as follows:-

	Rents		Rates		Total	
	From	To	From	To	From	To
1 room	5/-	6/-	1/9	1/11	6/9	7/11
2 rooms	7/6	8/6	2/7	3/-	10/1	11/6
3 rooms	9/6	10/6	3/8	3/11	13/2	14/5
4 rooms	11/-	12/-	4/4		15/4	16/7

[16]

Mrs. McDonald

My mother was in a panic because the rent was going to be 18s and something. Where we were it was 11s.1d and she was worried as to whether or not she could pay it, 'cause they were very strict about rents here. They used to come and collect it.

Miss Beauchamp

I remember Miss Lineham, I've got some old rent books (the first one from when she moved in) my first rent was 10s.5d.

Mr. and Mrs. Mullins

Mr. Thomas was the Caretaker when we come up and he was very strict.

Mrs. W. Mitchell

Miss Lineham was very strict, but you knew where you stood. The first Caretaker was Mr. Thomas, he lived in number 19. He had a chap called Jack who used to come in, he kept the yard spotless and put the clothes lines up and took them down every night. And when they built that new block there was a Caretaker down that end and he was Mr. Dorey.

Miss Hamilton (former Housing Manager)

The Estate Department were involved in major works, refurbishing the court yard, big jobs of that sort they wanted to be involved in. They would put them out to tender. We used little builders, local firms a lot and we used the Caretakers too. I always felt that made their jobs much more interesting. They used to do just sweeping and cleaning and other such caretaking work but it was more interesting for them to do maintenance and they started to get experience doing plumbing, carpentry, mending windows and mostly they preferred that sort of job. That's why they stay in the job such a long time.

Miss Habgood (former Housing Manager)
Good Caretakers are an enormous asset, they are very important.

Octavia Hill

Miss Hamilton
Octavia Hill started off when she was very young, 18 or 19. She managed the Ruskin's property, the families were friends. They couldn't get the rent money from their properties, she said "well, give them to me to manage and I'll guarantee you 5%. She took them over and by degrees she restored the properties and got him his 5%. Her philosophy was that you had got to build up a relationship between the landlord and tenant, you have got to have door to door rent collection.

Miss Habgood
The whole idea of Octavia Hill Management was having an office on the Estate itself. That management would be there and not removed miles away and that's why we have these small offices on all the Estates. The tenants are people not just numbers and they know thay can come into the office.

Miss Hamilton
First thing was they had to pay their rent, she would go round on a Friday night to the pubs in the area where she knew the tenants would go and she would get the money off them. She would stay in a flat with her back against the door and say "I'm not leaving until I get something towards the rent, I don't care if its only 7/6 or 2/6, I want something". But, as she said, you can't do that unless the landlord shows that he is prepared to do the improvements and maintain the property properly. She used to go round and there'd be a filthy old staircase, crumbling plaster and she'd get the menfolk and say "right, we'll make good the plaster and give you all the paint and between the lot of you, paint the staircase, we're trying to make this place nice for you but we can't do it all, you have to help".

Miss Habgood
Efficiency was one of Octavia Hill's main principles, if the landlord did their part then so must the tenant.

Miss Hamilton
We were always 'Lady Managers'. It was felt that women would be better because the job involved the things that women are good at. They're good at doing 17 things at once, you know, washing the baby, cleaning the house, paying the bills and so on. Well, housing management is like that, its not one set thing. Sometimes its outdoors, sometimes its indoors and it wasn't all social work, it was partly technical, some accounts etc.. It's a satisfying sort of job for a person whose interested in people.

Miss Habgood
I did my training in the war so it was a bit different from usual, as I was a graduate I only had to do just over 1½ years, they shortened it, of practical training. Then I took the diploma exam in 8 subjects, but it was the old exam set by the Chartered Surveyors that I took. I did 3 months with Abingdon Borough Council and 16 months with Rotherham, then I took the exam. It was a reserved occupation and I took the courses as a correspondence course because you couldn't go to college. There was no referral in any subject, if you failed one paper you had to take the lot again. They were in Building Inspection, Sanitation, Estate Records and Accounts, Social Services, Central and Local Government, Octavia Hill Management all that sort of thing. I think it was easier then than it is now, when I was training people I don't think I would have passed the exam I was training them for.

Miss Hamilton
They like to keep the family atmosphere by giving priority to the sons and daughters of the existing tenants. In this way the families can look after their own young and old. I'm sure it saved the Health Service and absolute fortune. 'Cause if someone was in trouble there was always someone there in the family to support them.

Miss Habgood
Dibdin House was run on the same lines as everywhere else (Church Commissioners Estates) and of course we did have a large proportion of older people and bedsitter flats. I personally was interested in older people. I found when I was there, that was the main scope of helping people. Often people living on their own needed the most help. Filling in forms can be very difficult and people get confused, they often need more help.

When I started at Walworth in 1944, the highest rent was 12/6. There was a long period before I went there when the Church Commissioners didn't put the rents up at all, but when the fair rents system came in they went up every year. In the old days we collected the rates with the rents, we always wrote it down in 3 columns (see rent columns) and always kept it seperate. It was another Octavia Hill principle that the tenants should know what they were paying in rent and rates.

I started working at Dibdin House in 1952 but I didn't become Manager until 1955. When I worked there Miss Cathrall was the Manager, then I was the Manager until 1965 when I went to the Lambeth Estate and I retired in 1975.

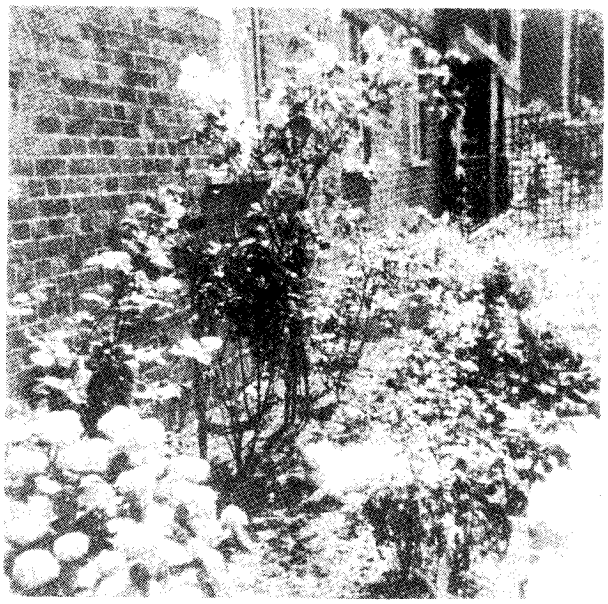
The Courtyards and Gardens

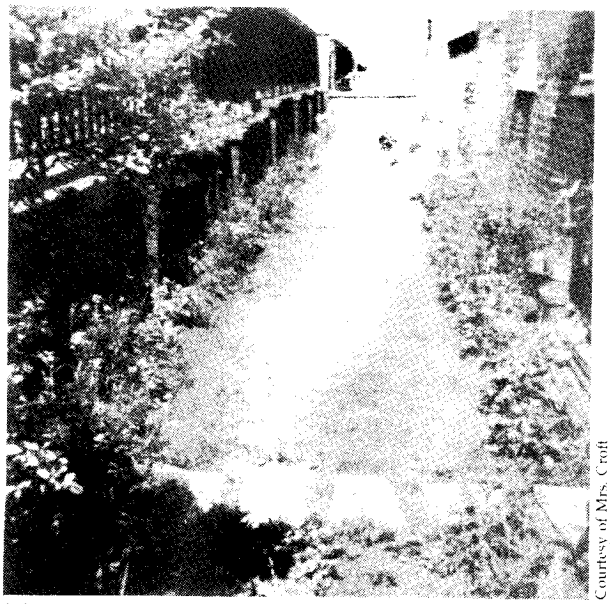
"The courtyard is laid out with grass and trees in the central portion and with playgrounds at either end, partially screened by lines of cycle and pram sheds, of which a liberal supply has been provided."[17]

As we have already seen, during the war the grass was taken up to make sand bags and since then the courtyards have been concrete with trees and the odd patch of green. The idea of having communal gardens where tenants could relax together was another of Octavia Hill's.

Miss Hamilton
She set up communal gardens. She was very interested in gardens, she was involved with setting up the National Trust. She got the children, and she'd get the piece of land and mark it out and the children would be allowed to have their own part and they'd have competitions. She'd put seats in the courtyard and by degrees she would get everybody involved. In the earlier days of Dibdin, the women used to have little tea parties on the grassed areas.

Many of the tenants have their own little window box or balcony gardens and these are beautifully kept.





Courtesy of Mrs. Croft

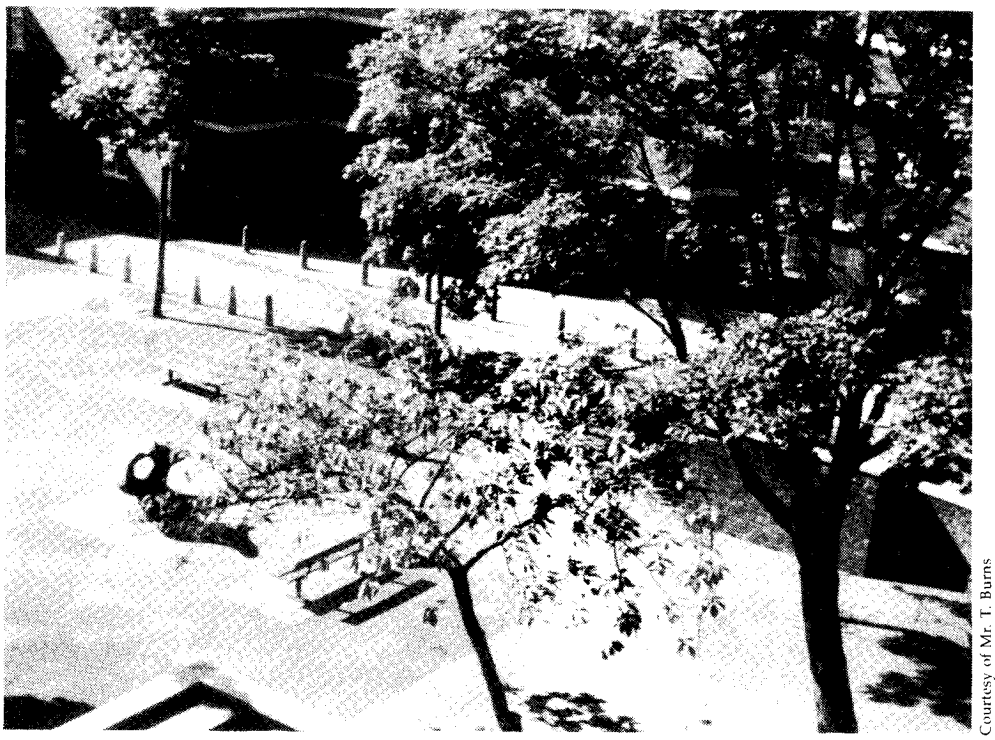
Gardens – Ground floor flats.

Some of the ground floor flats have gardens attached and these are also well kept.

Mrs. Croft
We have a gate on our (ground floor) balconies to get to the garden. When we was first here we used to have to climb over the balcony to get to the garden but one day the landlady came round with a gentleman and my husband was gardening. The man asked him how he got into the garden and he explained that you have to climb over. Well, the man said "that'll never do" and they put in gates, which is very good.

Since this happened however, Mrs. Croft has become increasingly disabled which had made gardening very difficult, especially as she now lives alone and has no-one to help her. This was solved a few years ago. Mrs. Croft's garden was concreted over and a special waist high garden installed.

Mrs. Croft
I have a nice garden here, Mrs. Shearman had it built for me. It's a disabled persons garden, a large trough on high legs.



Courtesy of Mr. T. Burns

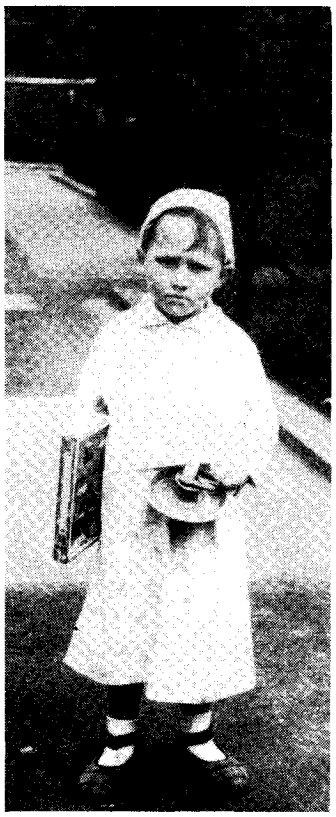
Dibdin courtyard trees

Mr. Cawfield
When we come in, there was all scaffold boards in the court yard, they hadn't finished the courtyard flooring.

Parties and Other Amusements

We have already looked at the party that the tenants had in the courtyard on V.E. day but there have been other occasions on which the tenants of Dibdin House have got together and celebrated in grand style.
The Queen's Coronation in 1953 was celebrated with a fancy dress party.

Mrs. Bugg
We went down the Mall for the Coronation and when we came back there was a big party here.



Photos courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. Mullens and Mr. O'Neil.

In 1977 the tenants celebrated the Queen's Silver Jubilee with another courtyard celebration.

Elizabeth II *1952-1977*

DIBDIN HOUSE JUBILEE PARTY COMMITTEE

request the pleasure of the company of

.....

at the

JUBILEE PARTY

on Monday, 6th June 1977 3.30 — 6.00 p.m.

There will be a Fancy Dress Parade — Prizes given

Please note: Fancy Dress Optional

The Clubhouse has always been used for small parties. It is available for private hire by the tenants but also parties were given there by some of the clubs and organisations that used it.

Miss Beauchamp
During the war there were parties round here for the children and in the clubhouse.

DIBDEN HOUSE
CORONATION PARTY COMMITTEE

request the pleasure of the company of

Mr & Mrs Mullins

at the

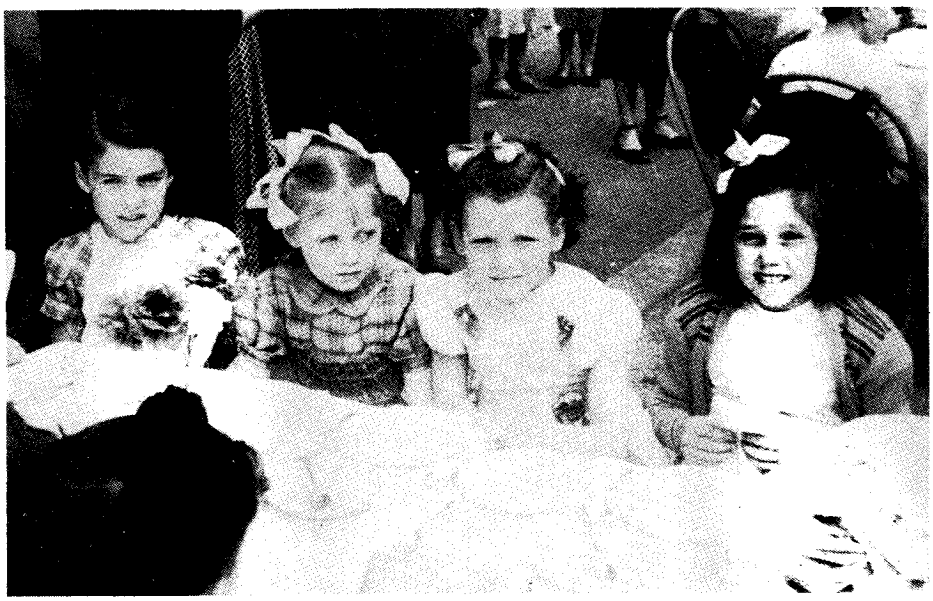
EVENINGS ENTERTAINMENT

on

SATURDAY, JUNE 6TH, 1953 at approx. 8.15 p.m.

Kindly reply to Collector if unable to attend this function

Refreshments Free



Courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. Mullins

Aside from the in-house activities, there was also a great deal of local entertainment in the area.

Miss McCarthy
The Kilburn Empire used to have variety acts and nice plays on and we used to go there when the air raids was on. Brian Rix took it over later and put plays on. The Grange was a nice place and the State. 'Course they're all bingo halls now. At the State they used to have a band on and variety acts and also they showed films. Not all on the same bill but at different times. We used to get some big stars there like Daisy Dormer, G.H. Elliot and Kate Carney. The Metropolitan used to be a variety house as well.

Mrs. Surety
There used to be an Essoldo over there, where the bingo hall is now. We had the State and the Grange in Kilburn. The Metropolitan was a variety house and the Kilburn Empire was as well. The Kilburn Empire became the Essoldo. We used to go and see all the old stars there. We saw that Stripper there, I can't remember her name.

Mrs. Talbot
Phillis Dixi.

Mrs. McDonald
We used to go out dancing, we went to the Cricklewood Palais on Mondays and Sunday afternoons we used to go to Covent Garden to a tea dance. That was somewhere near Drury Lane, it was only 6d to get in. We danced to the big bands, but not the famous ones. We used to go to the rec., they used to do quite a lot up there. My two nieces won a jitterbugging contest. Church Place, Harrow Road, had a threepenny hop on Wednesday night, just dancing to records. We weren't very grand in them days, we got our clothes on coupons so we couldn't be. We wore pencil-slim skirts and we had shoulder pads that kept slipping about.

Mrs. Bugg
We used to go to the Wood Green Jazz Club and YMCA in Shirland Road. Later we went to the Lyceum. All the clubs that were here were for young kids or older ones.

Over where St. George's school is, used to be a bomb site, we called it the Crater. We used to play there. This corner here (opposite school) was well known for being where Prostitutes picked up men. We used to go to the upstairs landing windows and watch them walk by, that was a laugh. We used to have bomb fire night over at the Crater.

Mrs. Howlett
We used to go hop picking and we were off hop picking the day war broke out. We used to go to Marden. It was a farm down there and they used to take three families. We used to go every year, it was our holiday. I mean we couldn't afford to go on holiday, so that was it.

Shops

"In the further block now in the course of erection there will be shops on the ground floor, facing Maida Vale and Kilburn Park Road."[18]

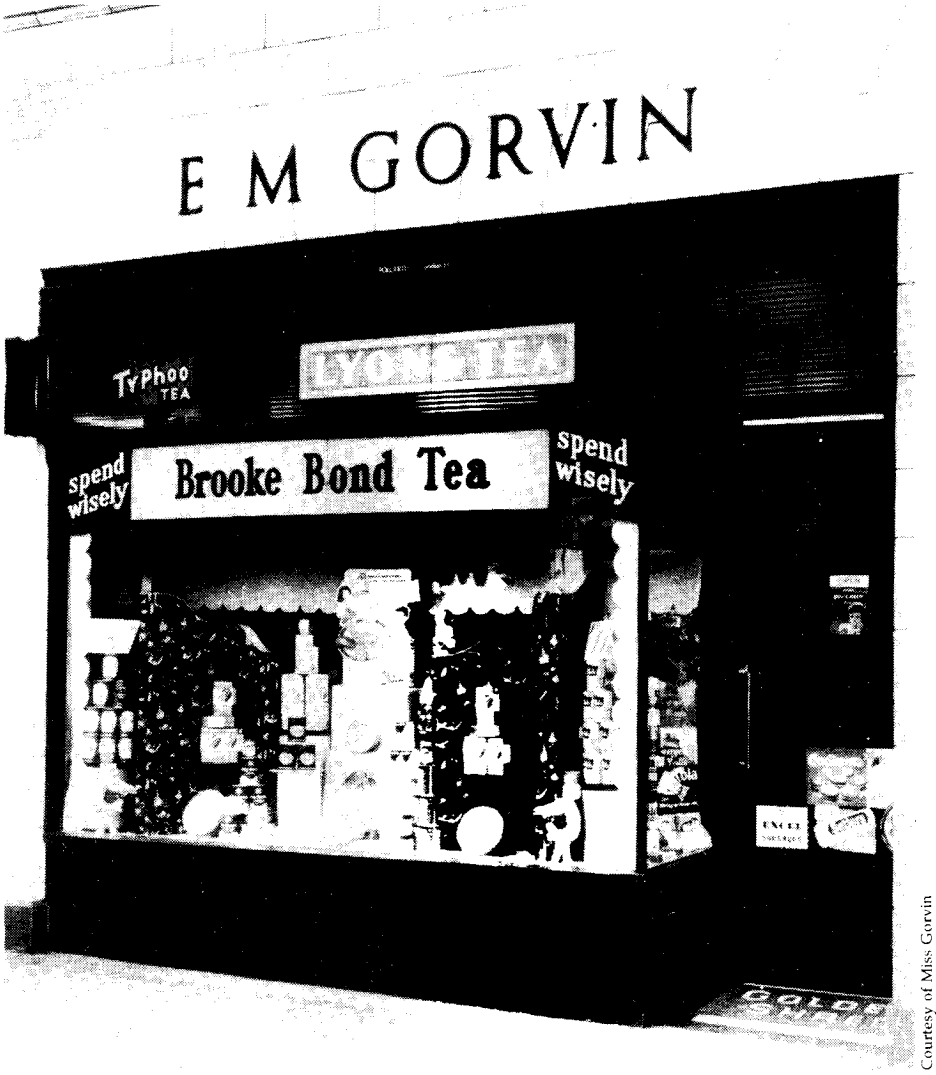
There has been shops on this site prior to the construction of the second part of Dibdin House. Here are some of the tenants recollections of the shops.

Mrs. Cohen
We had a row of shops at the bottom here and a Slaughterhouse, when I was a kid you used to see them bring the animals in. There was a high class Bakers on the corner with a hall for weddings and parties and next to that was the 'Depot' as we used to call it, they sold second hand clothes and that. There was a Greengrocers round there. My mother-in-law lived in Maida Vale and her mother had an umbrella shop and next to that there was an Estate Agents and then the Grocers. The smell when you went in these old fashioned Grocers! the bacon and the stuff they used to sell! (yumm!) and in there was the post office.

Miss Smith
On the other side, where Torrington House and the Synagogue are now, there used to be little shops. We had a Grocers shop and a boot makers. It was a community, you never went to Kilburn High Road, there was no need to. On the very corner of Andover Place, where the flats are now, there used to be several little shops and Miss Gorvin had one with her sister. They used to sell literally everything. They used to make their own chutneys and pickles.

Miss Gorvin
We had the Grocers Shop at 233 Maida Vale, where the supermarket is now. We went there in January '39, my sister Emma and me. My name is Margaret and we didn't like the sign for and-&, so we called ourselves E.M. Gorvin. We used to make chutney, I reckon it went all over England because people who had visitors staying would bring them to us and they'd take a jar home. We made pickled onions as well in 1lb jars. Our chutneys were made of apple and onion and sometimes tomato. We had a shop round the corner in Kilburn Park Road/Andover Place and we heard that it was going to be pulled down and we wrote to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners asking if we could have one of the new ones, we'd been there for about 7 years and they said as we'd been such good tenants we could come in there.

I managed a grocery and provisions business for my brother down the Edgware Road and my sister had a tobacconist and sweet shop. I left him and joined her, she sold it and we went into the Kilburn Park Road shop. We had a house above the shop with three rooms on the first and three on top. We had lodgers and they used to quarrel ever such a lot and expect us to sort it out. We were glad to move because of them. We opened at 8.30 and closed at 6.00 during the war but before then we'd closed at 8.00. I had to be at the shop at 7.30 a.m. to be there when the Baker came but I didn't open up till 8.30. We had the shop for 21 years then I was ill .... The next people who had the shop had it for 21 years as well and then they sold it to the Indians. We sold all provisions and when rationing was on we did all the rationed goods. I have a nephew who is a shop fitter, he's retired now, he did all the shop fittings for us and it looked really nice.



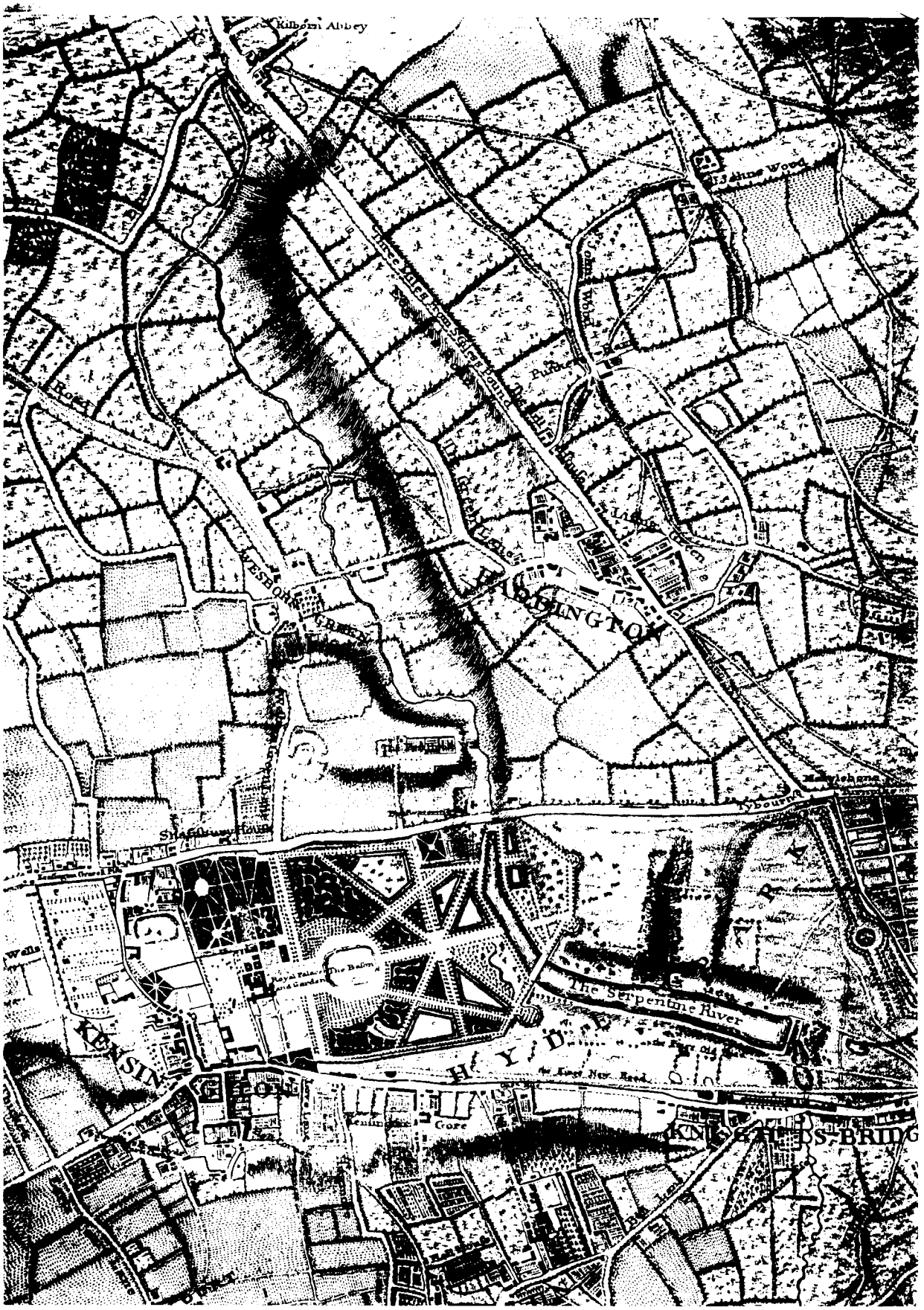
Courtesy of Miss Gorvin

Mrs. Surety
And at first there used to be steps down the front to the shops.

Mrs. Talbot
Yes, the shops had six little steps down from the roadway. There was a lovely little Greengrocers, a Grocers and the Hairdressers was a Builders

Mrs. G. Mitchell
Along the front where the shops are, they used to be lower and have steps down to them.

Mr. E. Mitchell
The reason for building the road up was the main sewers, the main sewers here have always been a problem. Because of the river, the Bourne, which is under here. There's three parts round here, there's this bit here, there's the Westbourne down Westbourne Grove and there's another bit that runs down the Harrow Road. They're all bits of the same river but this bit is the Kilburn.


Kilburn Abbey
Three Mile Stone
Bayswater
The Serpentine River
KENSINGTON
HYDE
PARK
Gore
KNIGHTSBRIDGE

Dibdin House Today

In many ways very little has changed at Dibdin House over the fifty years since it opened. Some of the older people feel that is is less friendly than it used to be.

Mrs. Cawfield
When it was Christmas time, all the people used to go out on their balconies and shout out "Merry Christmas everybody" and when it was New Year, the same, "Happy New Year". You don't get than now, it's a different generation. People don't join in like they used to.

This is a general pattern though, and not something unique about Dibdin. In fact Dibdin House is still a remarkably close community when compared to other modern housing estates.

Mrs. Bugg
I think life is better here than on other housing estates 'cause of the people. For instance there are some people who don't clean their staircases and we all have a moan, but if we didn't do it, that's when we'd start to go down. People on these bad estates shoud get together and complain or do something about it. We never had graffitti here till this year and I don't think it's our kids, I think it's outsiders kids coming through here.

New Tenants

As we have seen, a number of the tenants at Dibdin House have lived here since the place opened. Very few tenants ever move away. According to the rent office files, 24 of the current tenancies were taken up in 1986. This figure is very much higher than average. The average annual turnover rate for flats at Dibdin House is 5. When you examine the figure for 1986 however, you can see that of the 24, 10 were internal transfers, established tenants exchanging flats. 6 were daughters, sons and other close relatives either leaving home or returning to the estate. Of the remaining 8 new tenancies, some were taken by tenants of other Church Commissioners Estates like Walworth and Vauxhall. Very few of the 24 new tenancies in 1986 were new people coming in and by and large this is the picture.

The bedsitter and one bedroom flats tend to have a higher turnover of tenants as single people tend to be more mobile. Mrs. Mowle lived in Dibdin House as a child, when it first opened. After getting married she moved away and she came back here in 1986.

Mrs. Mowle
I moved in as a kid when I was 10, my sister still lives here, she's Miss Smith. I moved away in 1954, about June or July I think. I was married. I lived in Stonebridge, near Harlesden. It wasn't like it is now, it was a little village then, all little houses, two up, two down. It was very nice but they pulled them all down and we had a week to get out. I lived in Kilburn Square after. I waited 5 years for this place. I finally moved back 'cause I was sick. I've got Leukeamia. The estate hasn't really changed, the people haven't changed. It's very nice here. Kids might sound louder as you get older but they have to play somewhere. The kids here are nothing like as noisy as where I used to live.

Miss Lewis has only recently moved in and has no family connections with the estate.

Miss Lewis
I stayed with my sister for a year and there wasn't really enough room. I do work for a local church, the Fernhead Road Methodist Church. I applied to various church housing associations, like Paddington Churches and this one and then waited. I haven't met my neighbours yet as I'm still moving in.

Mrs. Goulding grew up on the estate and has recently moved back.

Mrs. Goulding
I was actually born in this flat where I'm living now. My mother is Mrs. Taylor who cleans the office. I left here when I got married and then came back here not long ago.

The flats haven't changed, the only thing that's different is the children. We used to play together, run outs and that, but they don't seem to anything much. Kim Gilbert and I used to go to school together and play together all the time but this lot are always arguing and not speaking to each other.

Dibdin House is still much the same as it was 50 years ago when it first opened. It still provides good quality housing at a rate affordable by working class people. As long as the changes made to the Housing Act this year (1988) are not exploited too vigorously by the Church Commissioners, then it should continue to do so for at least another 50 years.