

Your **Westbourne Neighbourhood Association** *Newsletter 5*

Advice

to Landlords

People are becoming increasingly frightened of letting rooms or flats in their houses because they feel uncertain of their rights under the Housing Act of 1974. This new law says that from August 14th 1974 - unless the building was purposely built (which none of the houses round here were) and provided that the landlord actually lives on the premises, he can let rooms or flats - furnished or unfurnished - in his own house, and the tenants' only security is that granted by the Rent Tribunal. This is almost the same as the preceding act, with the important exception that furnished and unfurnished lettings are now treated identically. We have heard of people who are nervous about letting rooms or flats in their own houses because of groundless fears about their legal position. It would be a great pity if the Housing Act 1974 were to have the effect of decreasing the number of rooms and flats that are available in London, especially in our area, where so many houses have provided lodgings. We advise you to get clarification from your solicitor or from the Paddington Neighbourhood Advice Bureau before deciding not to let, because any anxieties you have may be completely unfounded.

to Tenants

If you have lived for a long time in your flat and your landlord does not live in the building you are probably a PROTECTED tenant, whether your flat is unfurnished or furnished. Find out if you are a protected tenant (leaflets available from Miss Whiting, 21 Sutherland Place), and then, if you think that your rent is too high, you should apply to the Rent Officer for the registration of a fair rent.

Whether you are a protected tenant or not you may be eligible for a weekly rent rebate - Westminster City Council have recently issued revised figures for rent and rate rebates which are much more generous than formerly.

Don't sign a new agreement or agree to any changes in your tenancy before taking advice from the Paddington Neighbourhood Advice Bureau and Law Centre at 465 Harrow Road. They will always help you over any problem.

Chairman's Report

As we approach our second Annual General Meeting some of you may be wondering if there is still really a driving need for our Neighbourhood Association - is it playing a practical and useful part in the community? Every month the Committee spends a great deal of time discussing local issues and then pressing action - either through personal contact or through correspondence - sometimes to Westminster Council to ensure why the redevelopment of the St. Stephen's site is taking so long; sometimes to various authorities asking them what is happening about the new school building; sometimes to the Paddington Churches Housing Association chivvyng them on behalf of their tenants; sometimes to the Area Rating Officer for negotiation about rates etc. The slowness of progress on all these issues is, at times, discouraging. I think, however, that the very fact that we go on pressuring the authorities, keep on reminding them that a body of people in this neighbourhood are acting as an Association, is absolutely essential, for only in this way can the needs of our small community be felt by the larger more impersonal structure of the big city.

I hope that members whose individual problems are not immediately relevant to committee discussions have found the Newsletter useful for putting them in touch with specialised sources of help. I know members have greatly benefited from advice given by the Paddington Neighbourhood Advice Bureau and Law Centre. We are fortunate to be able to use one of the very few centres where legal advice is available without charges, as well as more general help and information.

Housing is one of the key issues: householders are worried about the increase in rates; tenants are worried about rents; landlords, increasingly, are simply not letting

Second AGM!

Second ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of WNA includes election of new committee and anything you want to discuss AT THE BAPTIST CHURCH HALL (CORNER WESTBOURNE GROVE AND LEDBURY ROAD) TUESDAY 14 JANUARY AT 8PM. PLEASE BE PROMPT.

any flats or rooms because they are so uncertain of their legal position. In this newsletter we have tried to make some of these situations clearer, but remember that there are plenty of professional advisers - see the posters in the local library in Porchester Road, or obtain help from the Neighbourhood Advice Bureau and Law Centre.

(For further information about the PNAB & LC, see our report on their Annual Meeting).

St Mary of the Angels

Our local representative on the GLC and ILEA, Mrs. Jean Merriton, has found out for us that the site for rebuilding the school has now been agreed. (Westminster City Council proposed part of the 'Road Site' in the St. Stephen's development area and the ILEA has agreed to this). Joint usage of the open-space or playground has been agreed in principle (this means that most of the school playground will not be closed out of school hours). Both the ILEA and the Church regard the school as very high priority. It is very much hoped to start building the school in time for it to be finished with the housing development on the St. Stephen's site.

PCHA

Members of your committee have been observers at all the meetings between the Paddington Churches Housing Association and their tenants in Moorhouse Road. Some of the difficulties seem to have been caused by incomplete communications and misunderstanding of the facts; it is hoped that the pattern of decanting tenants while repairs and modernisation are carried out will soon become clearer. It is also suggested that those tenants who would be willing to remain in their flats while damp proofing and vital works are carried out around them, in spite of the disruption this would cause them, should be given a chance to say so, then the PCHA can consider the possibilities for them. The WNA committee sympathises with the tenants' problems. It is hoped that the meetings help everyone concerned to understand the difficulties on both sides and to realise that the whole exercise is necessarily a complex one.

It is suggested that people should find out the details of rent and rate allowances to which they may be entitled, since the income thresholds are much higher than they may anticipate.

PNAB&LC

Representatives of the WNA Committee also went to the Annual Meeting of the Paddington Neighbourhood Advice Bureau and Law Centre at Porchester Hall on the 7th November 1974. The Lord Mayor of Westminster was in the chair and the guest speaker was the Lord Chancellor, Lord Elwyn Jones.

It was emphasised that the PNAB & LC should be completely independent and only be responsible to the local community.

During 1973 the Advice Bureau dealt with 8,620 problems. Of these 30% were concerned with housing and 25% with family and personal problems. In the same period, the Law Centre

acted for 1,707 clients and in addition gave advice to a further 403. Almost half of the caseload was concerned with housing, the bulk of which was related to tenants, and occasionally to landlords. The remaining half of their work was taken up with a miscellany of cases, of which criminal cases (18%) were the biggest single category.

From the Annual Report, one could conclude that the PNAB & LC is tenant-orientated and out of sympathy with landlords. However, there are good and bad tenants as well as there are good and bad landlords. Landlords as well as tenants have every right to seek help from the PNAB & LC. The PNAB & LC is largely financed by the Westminster Council and it is there to serve, without bias, all sections of the community. It is undoubtedly doing a very good job and helping a great number of people in trouble, in spite of being cramped into inadequate premises.

When you have a legal problem, we suggest that you seek their advice.

Paddington Neighbourhood Advice Bureau and Law Centre is at 465 Harrow Road. A 31 or 28 bus goes to "The Fiveways" at Harrow Road, from where an 18 bus going West will speed what is otherwise a long walk down Harrow Road. (The Bureau is situated just before the Library, but on the opposite side of the road.) Opening hours are:-

| | |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Monday | 10 - 4 |
| Tuesday | 10 - 4 & 6.30 - 8 |
| Wednesday | 10 - 4 & 6.30 - 8 |
| Thursday | 10 - 1 & 6.30 - 8 |
| Friday | 10 - 4 |
| Saturday | 10 - 12 |

There is also a 24-hour telephone answering service with professional advice always available - Tel. No 969 9425.

Demolition

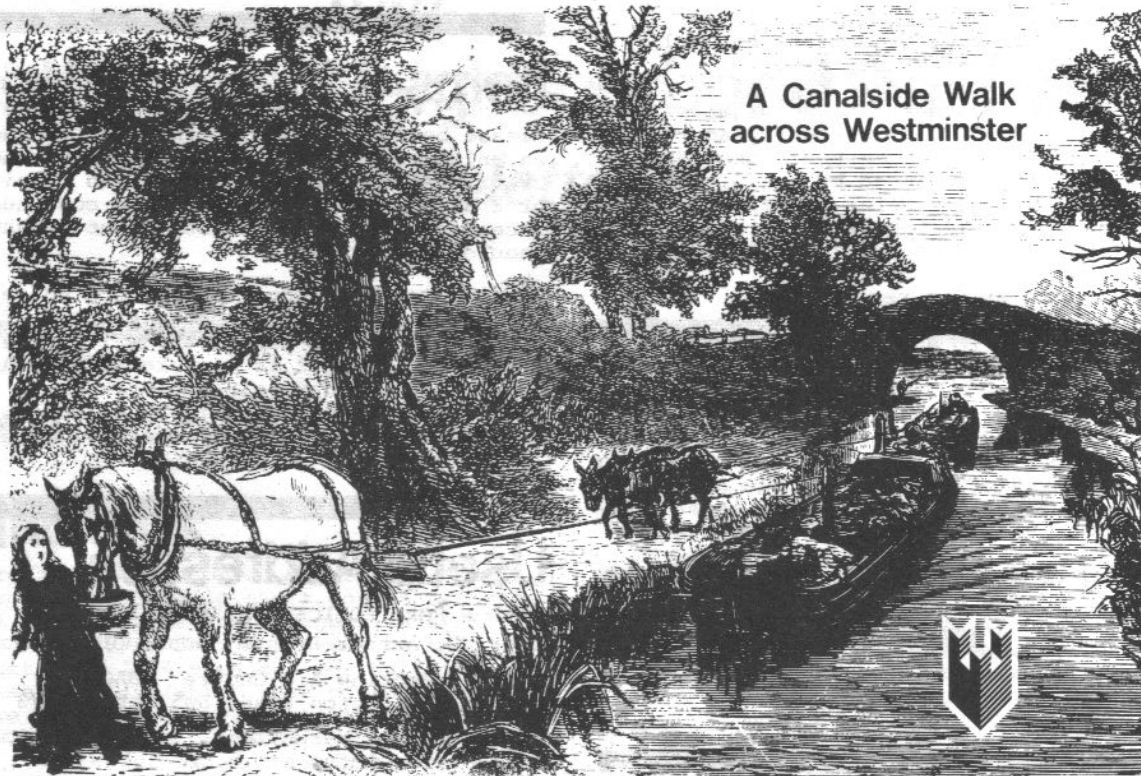
Concerned with the slow progress of demolition and construction on the St. Stephen's Gardens site, we wrote to the Director of the Department of Architecture and Planning at City Hall. Here is his reply:

'My ability to proceed with the work of demolition is dependent upon problems associated with acquisition, rehousing and the legal processes of obtaining possession from squatters and others, which are not under my direct control. Nevertheless, all possible steps are taken to expedite these processes.

'As you are probably aware, properties are gutted as soon as possession is obtained but demolition cannot proceed without due economy and safety until there is a reasonable consecutive run of property available. I am advised by the City Valuer and the Director of Housing that all the remaining property on the site should be available for demolition by early 1975 and subject to that the demolition should be completed by about June 1975.

'May I, on behalf of the Council, again express regret at the apparent slowness in the clearing of this area but would assure you that all aspects of the work involved are proceeding as quickly as possible.'

We hope to publish in the next Newsletter an extensive analysis and description of the proposals regarding the St. Stephen's Gardens Redevelopment site.



A Canalside Walk across Westminster

Reproduced above is the cover of a fascinating booklet - published by the Westminster City Council - that will help you to enjoy the canal side walks, from Primrose Hill to Ladbrooke Grove. Write to the City Engineer's Department, Westminster City Hall, Victoria Street, SW1, for your copy.

All Change

What a remarkable change has occurred in the thinking of city planners at Westminster City Hall! Members who attended the fourth (of 20) of Westminster's public meetings at Porchester Hall on 21 November were in at the start of a breathtaking new concept in planning - the creation of working parties, members of which will be mainly from tenants and residents associations such as the WNA-which will consider in detail and in depth problems, issues, and priorities involved in planning for London's future.

Here is how it works: The working party will meet in the evenings at two-week intervals over a period of about six months. For the Bayswater area there will be two working parties - one for the east, one for the west (our area). Each group will elect its own chairman, and the meeting place will be provided by Westminster. Two planning officers and several of our Councillors will be present, the officers on an advisory basis only.

The working party will discuss topics (traffic, shopping, schools, open spaces, etc.) rather than areas. At the same time other, specialist, panels will be meeting to discuss important items such as entertainment, public transport, hotels.

All the working parties will report back to City Hall by July 1975. Their plans will be integrated and further public meetings will be held to discuss the new integrated plan.

Remember the days when we were told a new road was heading our way? Full marks to Westminster for their new approach to planning London's future!

Warning

We hope all of you have received the following warning from the Thames Water Board.

'There have been recent incidents of thefts having been committed by persons who have wrongfully gained access to property by falsely representing themselves to be "Water Officials".

'The following information is provided in order to help the public protect themselves against such misrepresentation.

'Certain staff (inspectors, meter readers etc.) of the Metropolitan Water Division of the Thames Water Authority are authorised to enter premises in the course of their duties. They carry a PINK identity card WITH PHOTOGRAPH and wear a blue serge jacket and trousers with a peaked cap bearing a badge.

'Turncocks and Assistant Turncocks may enter premises on invitation only to check on leaks or give specialised advice re pipe noises etc. They carry a BLUE identity card WITH PHOTOGRAPH. Their official uniform is similar to that of an Inspector, with peaked cap and badge. N.B. Metropolitan Water Division employees who do not possess a PINK identity card have no authority to enter premises.

'If you are worried phone the Divisional Headquarters on 837 3300 at any time and the operator will check the authority of any person wanting to enter your home.

'It is suggested that whenever an unknown person is allowed to enter premises for whatever reason, then the movements of that person should be CAREFULLY OBSERVED AT ALL TIMES'.

We asked both the London Electricity Board and North Thames Gas to issue their own

advice about making sure that any alleged representatives of these organizations really are who and what they say they are.

The London Electricity Board replied:

'All Electricity Board staff who require access to a consumer's premises carry an Orange Identity Pass with the man's photograph inside and the Pass is signed by the District Manager. Quite obviously Meter Readers and Collectors have to call regularly each quarter and their identity can be checked by asking for their pass.'

While North Thames Gas reminded us:

'Employees of North Thames Region whose duties require them to enter peoples homes are provided with identity cards which show the departments to which they are attached, their photographs and signatures.

'Should you or any of the neighbours wish to verify the bone fide of one of our employees this may be done by telephoning to the Area Office which for the Westbourne Area is at Vincent Street, Westminster, S.W.1. Telephone number 828 3434.'

So do be careful about whom you allow to enter your home. The old saying is only too true in this kind of situation.. "Better to be sure than sorry!" Much much better, particularly when it only takes a few moments to check up on proper identification...so do it!

Rates

Your Chairman and Peter Adams have had a second meeting with the Westminster 2 area Inland Revenue Valuation Officer, Mr. Rogers at 140 Gower Street. Mr. Rogers is now visiting the houses from which he has received objections to the rate proposals he made and after he has seen the houses he will make suggestions for new figures. Anyone who feels that their valuation is wrong should discuss their case with Mr. Rogers (The telephone number of the Valuation Office is 387 9251-6.)

and Rebates

If you pay rates you may be eligible for a weekly rate rebate. As rates are a form of local tax don't pay more than you need to! There are posters in the Westminster Public Library in Porchester Road or the Paddington Neighbourhood Advice Bureau which give you advice on how to apply for rebates. The new allowances are generous - (They need to be since rates have gone up so much!).

WNA Membership

Your Association now has nearly 500 members, but we would like many more. It is numbers that will make your Association effective and it is in the interests of everyone to join.

The main role of the Association is to know about all developments in the Westbourne district and to communicate and to consult with the people living and working here.

If you are already a member, please persuade others to join. We ask for no more than 10p. fee but larger contributions are welcome.

Now is the time to renew your WNA Membership if you have not already done so.

Items

Please be considerate to those of us who enjoy an uninterrupted sleep! When you've had a party, or friends to dinner, don't stand outside at 1 or 2 a.m. shouting goodbyes. We continue to receive numerous complaints about neighbours who should know better.

If you live next door to an empty house, do write and complain to the Westminster City Council. The more people who write, the more likely the Council is to take action. As an Association we have already written to the Council, but this is an issue on which your individual letters are of overwhelming importance.

Useful Addresses

HARROW ROAD POLICE STATION: 725 4191

Your MP: Arthur Latham, House of Commons

Shelter Housing Aid Centre SHAC
189a Old Brompton Road, SW5 (phone 373 7276)

For advice on harassment, implementation of the Housing Acts, etc.:

City Solicitor
Solicitor's Department
Westminster City Hall
Victoria Street, SW1

For advice on social services:

Westminster Social Services Department
Area 4
71 Queensway, W2 (phone: 727 6464)

Old Peoples Welfare Association
313 Harrow Road, W2 (phone 828 8070 ext. 3074)

Councillors' Advice Bureaux:

First Friday in the month,
6.30-7.30 pm. at:
Beauchamp Lodge
Warwick Crescent, W2

In addition,
all Paddington's Labour Councillors
take it in turns to be at:
39 Chippenham Road, W9
every Tuesday from 7.00-8.00pm.

Home addresses
of Councillors for Westbourne Ward:

Alfred Dubs, 56 Westbourne Park Villas, W2
Colin Brown, 12a Westbourne Terrace Road, W2
Anthea Masey, 136a Queensway, W2
Jean Merriton, 17 Cunningham Place, NW8

Other Councillors living in our area:

John Whatmore, 6 Northumberland Place, W2
Simon Ashton, 27 Newton Road, W2
Reg Watts, 37 Talbot Road, W2

Send your news and views on matters of local interest to:

The Secretary
Westbourne Neighbourhood Association
35 Northumberland Place W2

Printed and published
by the Westbourne Neighbourhood Association
December 1974
Designed by Gerald Cinamon