

overlap. The original garden plan was slightly amended in the execution, but John Medhurst's basic design was fulfilled, and his detailed planting plans survive.

Three friends for whom Lanning Roper had built gardens, Lady Sainsbury, Lord Palumbo and Lord Normanby, launched an appeal to build *The Lanning Roper Memorial Garden*, with appeal letters sent to Roper's friends and clients to ensure that funds were not diverted from patient care. Work began on the hard landscaping of the garden in September 1983 and the gardens were completed by May 1984. A further appeal was launched to raise money to maintain the garden, which was to be run as economically as possible, with only one gardener and a team of volunteers. Anne Woods, the gardener who took over the new garden, watched it develop over nearly 20 years, moving on only shortly before the next redesign. In 1993 a new day care centre and offices were built on the western boundary of the site. A new brick terrace was linked to the lawn below by a water sculpture, *Cascade and Pool*, by the sculptor William Pye, who lived locally.

By 2003 more new health care regulations meant that the original eighteenth-century buildings could no longer be used for in-patients, and even the block built in 1951 was out-of-date. This wing was demolished and replaced by a new in-patient centre on the same footprint. However, the new centre was built lower than the existing garden in order to comply with planning permission, which allowed for a two-storey building provided it did not exceed the height of the former single-storey building. This entailed a redesign of the garden, and much of the original garden became a building site while the new wing was built.

The new garden by the architects of the building, TP Bennett, was designed to be seen from both levels of the new building, with steep slopes of shrubs and herbaceous planting falling towards the building. The rooms on the lower level open directly onto individual paved spaces with their own small gardens (*fig. 26*). The new in-patient centre and gardens were officially opened in July 2009 by the patron of the Hospice, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, and a weeping cherry tree was planted in one of the new lawns in her honour.

New regulations about accessibility meant that much of the 1983 garden design was sacrificed to incorporate ramps and sloping paths. A few trees survive from the nineteenth century, in particular, one mulberry and a venerable London plane, now with a new bench around it (*fig. 27*). A paved corner from the 1983 garden (*fig. 28*) and several quiet, shady areas with seats provide havens of peace and solace for patients and visitors.

The garden is still maintained by one gardener with the assistance of a team of volunteers. It is open to the public several times a year under the *Yellow Book Garden Scheme*, and it is also used regularly for local fund-raising events.

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LANDSCAPING LILLINGTON GARDENS

By Ed Harbottle

This year marks the 49TH anniversary of the commencement of the first phase of Lillington Gardens in Pimlico – the great red brick Babylonian housing estate that wraps around the High Victorian church of St James the Less. Much has been written about this remarkable ensemble. And for good reason: it is a model of humane and attractive urban housing (*fig. 29*). As Graham Towers remarks in *Building Democracy: Community Architecture in the Inner Cities* (1995):

... it marked a new departure in mass housing. The facilities of the new estate were a distant echo of the Viennese model: not just housing, but shops, pubs, a library, a home for the elderly. There was a new emphasis on the quality of outdoor space – attractive landscaped courts, high-level walkways softened with shrubs and small trees, generous private balconies. Visually there was a new synthesis of vernacular traditions. In place of flat, repetitive facades of the Modern movement, the planning of the units was



28. Trinity Hospice: A paved corner of the garden in 2010, a survival from the 1983 Medhurst design
(PHOTOGRAPH ALYSON WILSON)



29. Internal landscape, undulating wildflower meadow, 2010
(PHOTOGRAPH ANONYMOUS)

30. Demolition of Moreton Street, c.1962
(PHOTOGRAPH JEREMY LEVER)

articulated to create variety, interest and a semblance of individuality. In place of concrete facing and metal windows was the warmth of stained timber and traditional red brick.¹

When Westminster City Council commissioned the building of the Lillington Street Housing Estate it did so with a view to redeveloping comprehensively a 12-acre 'island' site in Pimlico, adjacent to Vauxhall Bridge Road. The area, formerly one of the 'slums of Westminster' – in whose midst in 1860–61 was raised the large and elaborate red brick church of St James the Less ('a lily amongst the weeds') – was then still scarred with the devastation wrought by German airstrikes of March 1941, which had reduced part of Lillington Street and its environs to a confusion of rubble dotted with sporadic craters (*fig. 30*).²

The designers of the 1960s scheme were John Darbourne and Geoffrey Darke, who collaborated to create one of the largest and most comprehensive developments of its time, housing more than 2,000 people at a density of about 150 dwellings per hectare. The design was novel in many regards, and particularly in its rejection of the prevalent high-rise planning typologies and its generous and imaginative use of landscape: the red brick housing blocks that line the perimeter of the site project into a series of capacious landscaped areas laid out on boldly undulating planes linked by steps and ramps, creating a variety of intimate interconnected gardens and play spaces (*figs. 31 & 32*).³ Every dwelling, moreover, has access to private outdoor space in the form of cantilevered balconies, gardens or roof terraces. The landscape, in a nutshell, possesses the intricacy and complexity of an Italian hill town.

It is – as an aside – fitting that one of London's most celebrated and successful 'garden' estates should have been raised on land that was once cultivated by the Royal

Gardener Henry Wise (1653 – 1738). Lillington in fact takes its name from the eponymous Warwickshire manor where in 1727 Wise, who served variously as deputy ranger of Hyde Park and superintendent of the royal gardens at Hampton Court and Kensington, and who left his mark on some of the grandest gardens in England, retired to live the life of a country squire. Wise's tenure and his family estates are in fact commemorated in a number of local landmarks, including Henry Wise House (the first building to be completed in the new development) and Tachbrook, Moreton and Charlwood Streets.⁴ Nor do the gardening references end there: other housing blocks are named in honour of a famous nurseryman (Thomas Fairchild), a herbalist (John Parkinson), a botanist *cum* plant hunter (William Forsyth), a landscape improver (Humphry Repton) and a country estate (Stourhead).⁵

The landscape of Lillington Gardens was in Darbourne & Darke's own estimation, a 'very important and dominant part of the scheme' and was designed to 'converse with the architecture', and to 'reinforce the developing spaces, with selected views and openings to the Church' (*figs. 33 & 34*). The estate's external spaces were intended to 'flow and produce a feeling of "going around" rather than being static "immediately comprehended" volumes'.⁶ Their approach was at the time highly original.⁷ Landscape design, they insisted, was a skill that demanded 'both scientific and artistic skills', and they were outspoken in their condemnation of those professionals who treated the design of external spaces 'as a cosmetic afterthought, involving the capricious planting of trees, placing plant boxes'.⁸ Darbourne & Darke employed John Allen as a horticultural adviser, had numerous landscape architects on staff, and took a very hands-on approach

4. Tachbrook and Moreton in Warwickshire, and Charlwood in Surrey.

5. Housing blocks on the neighbouring Longmore Estate also bear the names of some famous gardens, including Wisley, Exbury and Longleat.

6. 'The Architecture of Darbourne & Darke: Lillington Gardens Housing', *Architect and Builder*, February 1980, p.27; and interview with Jeremy and Jill Lever, 18 December 2012.

7. Darbourne & Darke were influenced by Eric Lyons and SPAN, who had in turn been influenced by Walter Gropius's spatial philosophy of the early 1930s.

8. *The Architecture of Darbourne & Darke: A Handbook to an Exhibition at the Royal Institute of British Architects*, Heinz Gallery, 17 May – 27 July 1977, RIBA Publications, 1977, p.19.

1. Graham Towers, *Building Democracy: Community Architecture in the Inner Cities* (1995), p.47.

2. Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (2012), p.133; and author's interview with Jeremy and Jill Lever, 18 December 2012. Jeremy worked with Darbourne & Darke, and played a part in the development of the first phase of the estate.

3. The rolling topography was created through the provision of underground parking. It should also be noted that although the site was formerly flat, the roads were built above the general ground level and thus the outer wall of the area, with the cellar walls, became a retaining wall to the road.

to planting.⁹

The means by which they landscaped the courts was simple and straightforward: they were planted with lawns dotted with groups of low evergreen shrubs and a generous scattering of trees – many of which were of a substantial size. The scale, texture and positioning of the trees were carefully considered with a view to complementing the architecture and catering to the comfort and convenience of the residents. No less important was the provision of enclosure and privacy, which likewise had to be balanced as to openness and surveillance. For instance, trees planted near to the houses were selected for their open growth and light foliage, which would allow reasonable day-lighting standards to the ground floor rooms. However, such trees were also desirable at another level: they filtered but did not disrupt or occlude views across the landscape.

Particular attention was also paid to the collection of rainwater and its distribution to balcony gardens. Water was harvested off the roofs – some of which also doubled as gardens – of various housing blocks and distributed through downpipes to the aerial gardens and courts. The roofscape of the estate is now largely given over to wildflower meadows.

Darbourne & Darke's approach to the landscape was, in fact, consistent with their approach to the layout of interior architectural space. Matthew Hollow in *The Age of Affluence: Council Estates and Consumer Society* (2010) remarked that Lillington Gardens Estate visibly demonstrates that in the early 1960s:

...ideas about the sorts of homes that council estate tenants needed were undergoing some fairly major transformations [...] Instead of just being seen as a place in which to rest and eat, the emphasis was more and more coming to be placed upon providing individuals with domestic spaces in which they would be able to realise and display their individuality. Adjustable and adaptable internal designs seemed to provide one means through which to satisfy these emerging consumer-orientated desires,

providing as they did spaces that could be altered and remade according to the personal whims of the client. The result was that "flexibility" came to be the keyword in the planning of council estates [...] as local authority architects struggled to cope with the twin pressures of satisfying the rising expectations of an increasingly affluent client base whilst simultaneously still providing well-designed mass housing at an affordable rate.¹⁰

This inherent flexibility was no less important outdoors, and the success of this aim can be clearly demonstrated by the remarkable way in which the estate's original landscape has undergone a thorough tenant-driven transformation that has enriched rather than diminished the character of the estate.

Since 1996 the residents have made considerable and largely *ad hoc* changes to the original landscape through the addition of tree and shrub planting, and the introduction of sub-tropical and Mediterranean planting. The palette of trees has been expanded to include a broader range of non-native species; shrub beds have created new intimate sub-spaces within the whole, and relieved the monotony of the former open grassy expanses; and robust and drought-resistant subtropical planting has in places conferred a rank exoticism on the buildings' many hanging, rooftop and communal gardens. Echiums, mahonias, euphorbias and cypress trees, for example, mark the intersection of several paths, the summits of steps and meeting places.

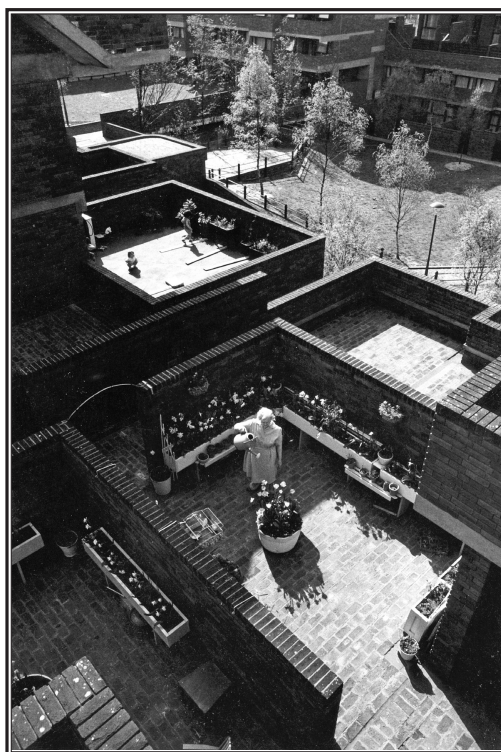
Among the new garden areas that have been carved out of the communal spaces are the Wildflower Bank, a sensory garden, ornamental grass beds, a wildlife pond, an 'Acer garden', a perennial meadow, a children's growing area, and a bee border (fig. 35). Piles of boulders, too, have found their way into the roadside gardens at Henry Wise House. Catherine Miller commended the gardens when they were opened to public scrutiny in *Open Garden Squares Weekend* in 2005. She found:

a group of volunteers staffing a table on the street, distributing plans with hand-drawn routes through the nearby estate.

9. John Allen and Jeremy Lever personally sourced the trees from nurseries in Kent and oversaw their positioning and planting on the estate.

10. Matthew Hollow, *The Age of Affluence: Council Estates and Consumer Society*, History Department, Durham University, 4 July 2010.

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31. Photograph of the south-facing facade of Stourhead House from Tachbrook Street, 2013
(PHOTOGRAPH TODD LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN)

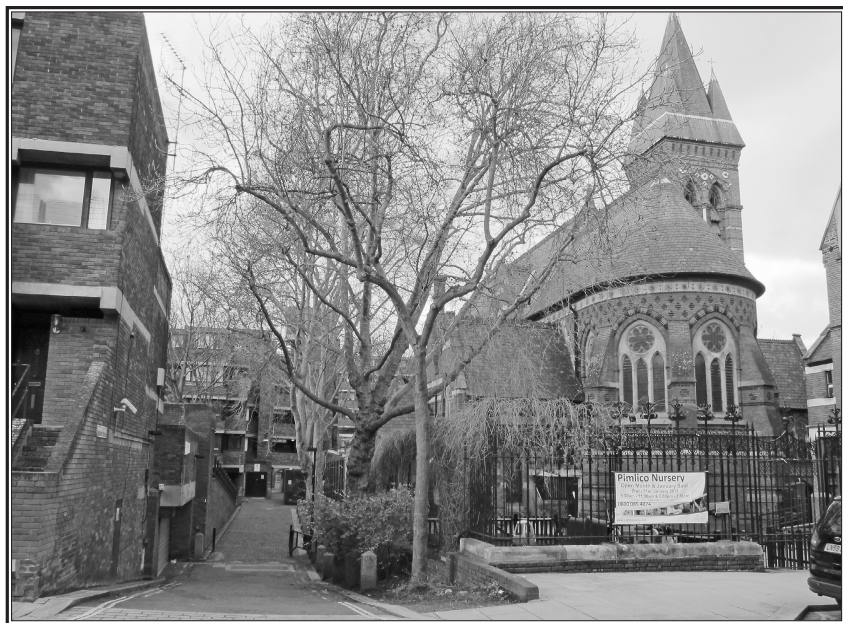
32. Lillington Gardens Estate, Pimlico, London, 1970
(COURTESY TONY RAY-JONES/RIBA LIBRARY PHOTOGRAPHS COLLECTION)



33. Extensive internal landscape, 1968
(COURTESY SHIMMER, SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY COLLECTION)

34. View looking south-east between Henry Wise (left) and Fairchild House (right) to the spire of St James the Less, 2013
(PHOTOGRAPH TODD LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN)

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35. Mediterranean plantings within the central landscaped courts, 2013
(PHOTOGRAPH TODD LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN)

36. The church of St James the Less embedded in the Lillington Garden Estate, 2013
(PHOTOGRAPH TODD LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN)

This trail led to various areas planted up within a low-rise estate, including a sensory garden with raised beds of herbs, myrtles, and Mexican daisy, then Mediterranean planting of stachys, phlomis, and huge Spanish broom in full bloom. The highlight for me was an "Exotic Dry Garden" with exuberant planting of giant echiums, verbenas bonariensis, nigella in great swathes, lychnis coronaria, Russian sage, and yuccas. The head gardener said she didn't grow anything that needed too much attention, and was helped by a local resident who grew exotics from seed. The standard of planting is terrific.¹¹

This praise is corroborated by the fact that the gardens have in recent years regularly won the *Best Garden for Wildlife* category of the Westminster in Bloom competition, and they have been awarded a Green Flag for excellent management and maintenance for two years running, the first in the country to win this award.¹²

Of course, Lillington Gardens also has its detractors: some have compared it to a 'hit-and-miss picturesque anti-plan that disorients one even more than Chesterton's 'rolling English road', a 'caveman's troglodyte world, full of dark passageways and tunnels leading round unknowable corners' or a 'dense, cloistered development that [...] resonates with the quasi-mythical landscape of the Western Front of 50 years previously'.¹³ Kenneth Allinson takes a more measured view. In *Architects and Architecture of London* (2008) he remarks that whilst Lillington Gardens remains an impressive and attractive place:

discussions with residents quickly reveal a host of problems common to estates and dense urban life. This is underscored by the police, who see the place as a 'fortress' – in other words, a place whose labyrinthine physicality intrinsically protects the antisocial element they seek to combat. Design gets blamed. However,

to pursue this line of argumentation perhaps leads down a broad 'via negativa' of paranoia that acknowledges none of the pleasantries nevertheless enjoyed by the residents. Nevertheless, good design has a limited capacity to deal with bad neighbours, junkies, arsonists, and 'me' generation values compounded by poor estate management, maintenance issues and the imperatives of privatisation that merely exacerbate the difficulties. It is for such reasons that social housing remains one of the more perennially difficult of design challenges. However, D&D's Lillington Gardens has admirably withstood damage infliction for nearly forty years. The potted flower and shrubs nurtured by some residents are visible witness to a balance of satisfaction with a mode of provision that will never be repeated.¹⁴ (figs. 36 & 37)

What is indisputable is that the planting and the continuous care given to the Lillington Gardens landscape have for over four decades made the estate a very congenial and desirable place to live, and from the 1990s – at least – have helped raised the estate in the esteem of the architectural press to a 'sought-after design classic' and to urban landscape enthusiasts as a 'must see'. Few post-war London estates I know can boast such credentials.

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11. <http://www.opensquares.org/history/ogsw2005.html>.

12. See Claire Phipps, 'Space: LIVING QUARTERS: Pimlico: The facts: You won't find many places as cheap in central London', *The Guardian*, 5 October 2000; and Tom Dyckhoff, 'Weekend: LETS MOVE TO: Pimlico, central London', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2003. The estate had been celebrated in an RIBA exhibition on twentieth-century British Housing held at the RIBA Architecture Gallery, 66 Portland Place, W1, 22 May - 26 June 1999.

13. http://www.willofmemory.com/?page_id=174.

14. Kenneth Allinson, *Architects and Architecture of London* (2008), p.363.



37. Lillington Gardens Estate (left) juxtaposed with the existing stucco and London stock brick terraces of Tachbrook Street, 2013
(PHOTOGRAPH TODD LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN)