

**EALING**  
**QUEEN OF THE SUBURBS**

A guided walk  
by  
**John Foster White**

Saturday, 3 May 1986

## Preface to the 2009 edition

These walking notes around the centre of Ealing were originally compiled by John Foster White in 1970 (based partly on the research notes of the late HGD Holt held in Ealing Library). In 1976 he updated his notes to reflect the rapidly changing face of Ealing as it entered the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and again in 1986, the date of the guided walk. Originally typed (and from appearances, reproduced using many sheets of carbon paper) Ealing Civic Society has now decided to make the notes available to a wider audience via the very 21<sup>st</sup> century medium of its website.

John Foster White had long standing connections with Ealing and the Civic Society. He was remembered by Joy Anthony – herself one of the original members of the Society’s Executive Committee – as someone “who seemed to know every church in the country, and its history”. She also remembers him as being “very witty”. He was well known in the literary world as a director of the publishers MacDonald & Co. and was, for example, closely associated with the success of the work of the author Catherine Cookson. He contributed an epilogue to her 1986 pictorial memoir *Catherine Cookson Country*, a quote from which was used in an obituary for the author in the Independent when she died in 1998.

The notes start with a brief history of Ealing, from Saxon times through to the Victorian railway age and onwards to its current status as the London Borough of Ealing. The walk itself starts at Haven Green, moving northwards up Haven Lane and eventually to the top of Castlebar Hill via Brentham Garden Estate. Additional notes on St Peter’s Church, on the corner of Mount Park Road, are provided by the Reverend Richard Hayes, vicar of St Peter’s from 1982 to 1991. The walk then takes participants south again, past Ealing Abbey to the Town Hall and Christ the Saviour Church on New Broadway, before heading down through Walpole Park, onto Ealing Green and finally to St Mary’s Church in South Ealing.

John Foster White included a number of footnotes and references at the end of his walking notes. Inevitably, there has been further change since they were first published, and in some places we have appended additional footnotes where there are modern points of contrast. We have also added a number of illustrations of buildings of interest along the route.

The author ends with a fitting quote from John Betjeman, with the hope that...  
“....some of you have been able in the course of our progress through the Queen of the Suburbs to:

...Regain your boyhood feeling  
Of uninvaded calm:  
For there the leafy avenues  
Of lime and chestnut mix’d  
Do widely wind, by art designed,  
The costly houses ‘twixt.”

Ealing Civic Society in its turn hopes that these notes will once again be of interest to Ealing residents, whether those who recognise the Ealing of 30 or 40 years ago, or as newer arrivals who would like to know more about our local history and heritage.

## EALING, QUEEN OF THE SUBURBS

Ealing is one of the ancient parishes of Middlesex and its origins Saxon or even earlier. Considering its “genteel” image during the past century, there is some irony in the most likely derivation of its name being from the people of Gilla (one with a loud voice) with Yelling as one of its recorded medieval spellings. For a long time it was called Great Ealing, as distinct from the nearby hamlet of Little Ealing (still identifiable south of the present Northfields Station). The modern centre is the stretch of the London-Uxbridge road known successively as The Mall, The Broadway, New Broadway and more recently the award winning Ealing Broadway Centre, designed by Keith Scott of Building Design Partnership. The old village (conservation area) lies to the south and extends approximately from Ealing Green to the Parish Church, on the road to Middlesex’s somewhat woebegone county town of Brentford.

Ealing, like many another Middlesex parish, was already developing by the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a centre for market gardening and dairy produce to supply the needs of an expanding metropolis 6 miles to the east. In the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries it became increasingly a place of fashionable residence: agreeably rural but conveniently near to town. Amongst the worthies who lived here at various times were the Princess Amelia (at Gunnersbury, later a Rothschild property, now a museum); Queen Victoria’s father, the Duke of Kent (at Castle Hill Lodge: we pass the site on Castle Bar Hill); Henry Fielding and, later, Lady Byron (at Fordhook, which stood NW of Ealing Common Station); Spencer Perceval, the Prime Minister assassinated in 1812 (at Elm Grove – its site, SW of Ealing Common marked approximately by the Perceval Memorial Church, All Saints, by WA Pite 1903-5).

Successful private schools were established, the most famous being Great Ealing School (1698-1908) whose famous pupils included Cardinal Newman, WM Thackeray, Captain Marryat, R. Westmacott and WS Gilbert. Both the future King Louis Philippe of France and TH Huxley’s father were assistant masters there; and Huxley himself was born in Ealing in 1825. And so indeed, on 8 August 1876, was Charles Hamilton, better remembered as “Frank Richards” and the creator of Billy Bunter.

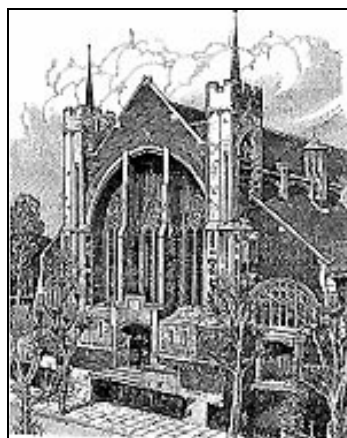
The suburban growth of Ealing really began, however, after the coming of Brunel’s Great Western Railway in 1833. The old village spread northwards to meet the trains. From the 1870s (and especially after the arrival on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1879, of the District Railway with a commuter line right through to the City) growth was even more rapid, and Ealing swarmed affluently up to the northern ridge of Castle Bar and Hanger Hill. In 1801 the population was 2,500, but when Ealing became an Urban District in 1894 it was 30,000. In 1901 Ealing was the first Middlesex town to be incorporated as a Borough. By 1911 the population was 61,000 and by 1965 it had reached 183,000. At this point the Middlesex Borough became a London Borough, and as this brought within its boundaries the former neighbouring Boroughs of Acton and Southall, the total population of Municipal Ealing is now around 300,000.

It was during those last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that Ealing came to be known as the "Queen of the Suburbs", a description still used on the Official Guide in the 1940s and on which Robbins<sup>1</sup> comments: "it is, in fact, the Queen Victoria". With two World Wars and a changing social scene, it has gradually ceased to be the retreat of retired ICS and other colonial administrators. Their children and grandchildren have followed the usual pattern of moving further out (or in), but it remains inherently respectable and is still possessed of considerable charm and a creditable degree of local awareness as reflected in the work of the Ealing Civic Society and many other local associations. At the present time property values are reckoned among the highest throughout suburban London.

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We start opposite the station on HAVEN GREEN, formerly The Haven which was also the name of a house replaced by the dominant flats (N) Haven Green Court (1937-8). Adjoining these, some altered early 19<sup>th</sup> C survivals (Nos.20-4) with recessed bays. This is an old open space. Many of the fine trees here and throughout the town we owe to a remarkable man, Charles Jones (1830-1913), architect, Local Surveyor for 50 years, whose memorial we shall visit in Walpole Park. Now up HAVEN LANE with reconstructed Victorian cottages, The Haven Arms, The Wheatsheaf (one of many still extant Ealing pubs listed in Mason's 1853 Directory), Avenue Cottages (1873). Turning into WOODVILLE ROAD we enter a residential area developed in the 1880s (Kelly<sup>2</sup>), extending well to the N and still retaining a lot of its original character. At junction of ASTON ROAD, iron ELB Transformer (1895), preserved and converted to a light standard. On corner of MOUNT PARK ROAD, St Andrew's United Reform Church (1886-7; enlarged 1892).

ST PETER'S CHURCH (begun 1892) by Sedding and Wilson. Sedding prepared the plans in 1889, but died before Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein laid the foundation stone on May 31<sup>st</sup> 1892. The work was therefore implemented by his pupil and successor in practice, H Wilson.



*The West Front of St Peter's Church*

St Peter's is a striking, highly original Perpendicular design of Box Ground stone and cream coloured brick. The roof slopes up from the aisle walls, broken only by arcaded turrets, the latter an extension of the bulky nave piers. Its greatest feature is the huge recessed West Window, and to get its full effect you should walk to the chancel steps before looking back. Stained glass by Kempe in the south aisle and south chapel and in the S transept. Animal carvings in the choir include an elephant, giraffe and lion. S chapel altar reredos and wings by Leonard Shuffrey, a local resident who we shall meet again. 1898 painting in S transept (Jesus before Pilate) hung in memory of the artist Edward Fellows Prynne (1854-1921). Twin spirelets at W end, but E tower never built; the recent erection of flats (St Peter's Way) would seem to make this, all other factors apart, a finally lost dream. Patronal symbols, keys and fisherman, on porch of adjoining vicarage (see also Pevsner<sup>3</sup> and Robbins<sup>4</sup>).

Across to MONTPELIER PARK on the site of the Princess Helena College. (Founded in 1820, it moved here from Regents Park in 1832, and then again to Hertfordshire in the 1930s). So into MOUNT AVENUE. Nos 33-37 a pleasant reminder that Mount Avenue was a pre-suburban country lane linking Castle Bar and Hanger Hill. "Devon Cottage" (no 33) of 1796 once used as officers' quarters when the Duke of Kent held Castle Hill. Its neighbours basically the same, but altered over the years. There used to be a block of wooden barracks to the rear.

We pass the top of WOODFIELD ROAD, which has one pleasant group (nos 2-14) suggesting the early 1900s and leads down to the BRENTHAM GARDEN ESTATE (conservation area).



*The Brentham Institute (1911)*

This co-partnership venture of 1901-13 contains over 500 houses, mostly of the "cottage" type, and the latter part of the estate laid out by Parker and Unwin who designed nos 1-7 Winscombe Crescent. We, however, continue along upper Mount Avenue, now with houses on the left suggesting the 1860s and 1870s (Can it be Dante who gazes down from a medallion on nos 18-20?). So to the road junction at the summit of....

CASTLEBAR HILL, which we follow W past the site of the Castle Hill Lodge estate where Edward, Duke of Kent, lived for some time before his marriage (and in succession to Mrs Fitzherbert). Later he tried unsuccessfully to promote a bill in Parliament for its disposal

by lottery, and then died (January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1820) the day after it was finally offered for sale by more orthodox means. The actual house, by Wyatt according to a contemporary writer, stood where St David's Home for disabled ex servicemen is now. Opposite, Wyke House (probably late 1880s) is faced with York stone, and has a balconied, cone capped, octagonal turret to make one think of Mr Charles Addam's well known family in *The New Yorker*. KENT GARDENS (NW) marks a boundary of the "high class residential area" planned by Henry de Bruno Austin, in 1860. Only twenty houses were built before he went bankrupt in 1872. All have gone now. We turn left up....

EDGEHILL ROAD where "Thorncote", surely the most attractive Victorian house in North Ealing, suggests a flight from Bedford Park while TA Greeves wasn't looking! It was built in 1888 by Leonard Shuffrey, sometime President of the Incorporated Institute of British Decorators and an early member of the Architectural Association (in 1871 he was a fellow student there of Aston Webb). Shuffrey lived at "Thorncote" till his death in 1926, and the house stayed in the family till the 1950s. "Ingleside" next door (much altered) and The Coach House opposite are also by Shuffrey, the latter converted into a private house.

ST STEPHEN'S ROAD. We look W to St Stephen's Church<sup>a</sup> (J Ashdown, 1875, with prominent spire by Sir A Blomfield, 1891) but turn E past the "Lakeside" development by Messrs Wates, largely on the site and grounds of "The Grange", which was itself the successor to an earlier house once lived in by General Elliott (later Lord Heathfield) the hero of the Siege of Gibraltar, 1779-1783.

We cross CASTLEBAR ROAD into CHARLBURY GROVE, with Edwardian houses, and so approach EALING ABBEY. The Benedictines came here from Downside in 1896 and purchased Castle Hill House (now demolished), a property earlier associated with the military Wetherall family and Scott's publisher, Archibald Constable. The new monastery also served as a parish. In 1916 it was made into a Priory, and in 1955 it became the first Abbey in Greater London since the Reformation. The church (St Benedict) begun in 1897 by FA Walters, architect of Buckfast Abbey (Little<sup>5</sup>). Work continued until 1935 but never included the "five-bay choir with flanking towers as at Exeter" shown in Walters' plans. Turreted W front added by his son EJ Walters. The E part of the nave bombed during the Second World War; then rebuilt, lengthened, a crossing, transepts, central tower base added by Stanley Kerr Bate who had succeeded to the Walters practice.

The style is Perpendicular with an East Anglian flavour. The tower and choir have yet to be built<sup>b</sup>. Inside, the nave is agreeably spacious with lofty arcades but no clerestory. W window by Burlison and Grylls; war memorial window by Bucknall and Comper. (Further details in Abbey Guide). In 1902 the Benedictines founded the adjoining St Benedict's School for boys, now an independent day school with some 800 pupils, its variegated buildings extending N and E.

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<sup>a</sup> Now converted into flats

<sup>b</sup> Now built

BLAKESLEY AVENUE takes us to the foot of Castle Bar and a grass triangle, formerly called Tortoise Green, with a nice group of the 1850s and all too many flats on the site of sadly lost (1964-5) Castle Bar House and its pleached lime walk. Now down LONGFIELD WALK and LONGFIELD AVENUE into the heart of Victorian Municipal Ealing. The old Fire Station (1888, enlarged 1900-01) and, facing NEW BROADWAY, the Town Hall (Charles Jones, 1888), blended Gothic extension by Prynne and Johnstone, 1931; more recent and separate brick extension largely and mercifully concealed from view.

We now cross New Broadway to where the facade of the ABC Cinema (1934)<sup>c</sup> makes plain why it was originally named The Forum....



*The Forum Cinema in 1934*

....and look E towards Ealing's central landmark, the church of the first new parish to be created here since ancient times and today a stronghold of the Anglo-Catholic tradition....

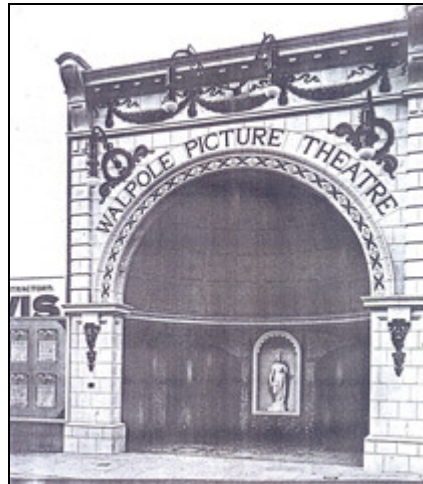
CHRIST THE SAVIOUR (GG Scott 1852) of Kentish Rag Stone with Bath stone facing and pinnacles, built (as Christ Church) at the expense of Miss Rosa Lewis (who died at Castle Hill House in 1862), daughter of William Thomas - "gentleman" - Lewis, the actor, for long associated with Covent Garden Theatre. Pevsner calls it "ambitious and dull, of correct late EE style", but local writers are understandably more enthusiastic. (Scott is said to have found his inspiration in Adderbury, Oxon). In 1903-8 the interior reconstituted and decorated by GF Bodley. A 1944 flying bomb caused serious blast damage, but restoration began in 1948, and in 1951 came reunion with the daughter parish of St Saviour (church in the Grove by Fellows Prynne, and a war casualty) when the present dedication was adopted. Bodley's work includes a fine organ case as well as screens and the pulpit. E and Lady Chapel windows by Hugh Easton (1952). In the churchyard, memorial cross to a former vicar by Oldrid Scott (c 1895).

From here one may appropriately contemplate the contribution made to Ealing's Victorian "townscape" by the lofty Christ Church steeple, the town hall spirelet, and further to the E the spire of the former Methodist Church (John Tarring and Chas Jones 1868-9); this last lately acquired and now in the final stages of handsome restoration by

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<sup>c</sup> Demolished 2009, leaving façade

Ealing's large Polish Catholic community. Note also to the E in New Broadway the glass canopied parade of shops by Frederick Hall Jones (c 1905), son of the redoubtable Charles Jones. More work by him on the E side of BOND STREET, into which we now turn, but here the canopies are long gone. At the top of EALING GREEN - the old village green - R into pleasant tree lined MATTOCK LANE where the fascia of the demolished Walpole Picture Theatre (formerly Bond Street) has been somewhat bleakly reassembled and fixed to the side wall of the first house as a now rare specimen of Early Cinema (1912).



*Walpole Cinema, Bond Street (1912)*

Then on to the Questors Theatre (Norman Bransom 1963-4, with later additions to the foyer etc) much of it built by the members of this celebrated amateur theatre club under professional supervision.

Now into WALPOLE PARK whose preservation we again owe largely to Charles Jones and here his memorial plaque has been fittingly re-erected. Born in Beccles, the son of a leather merchant, he trained as an architect, came to Ealing in 1856, built up a considerable private practice, and then in 1863 became surveyor to the newly formed Local Board. He immediately provided Ealing with the first proper drainage system in the Thames Valley, despite protests over the expense, and so he went on through the decades with lighting, roads, public buildings, open spaces et al, becoming known as "The Man at the Wheel" and with an extraordinary capacity for getting his way with the Council. He even found time to write a book about Ealing, which strongly reflects his exuberant and even overwhelming personality.

In 1913 he was still hard at it when the by now Borough Council designated him as the next mayor, but then he died before he could take office. The whole town went into mourning and hundreds followed his funeral procession to Hanwell Cemetery. The inscription on his memorial may be borrowed from the tomb of a far greater architect, but still richly deserved in terms of much that is best - seventy years on - in the Ealing he loved and served so well. *Si monumentum requirere, circumspice.*



The great feature of Walpole Park, and Ealing's most noted secular building, is the house often misleadingly known as Pitzhanger Manor. The main block is by Sir John Soane, unmistakably so, who lived here intermittently c1802-11, but the S wing survives from an earlier house 1770 by George Dance the younger. Last occupied as a private residence by the youngest daughter of Spencer Perceval who died in 1900 at the great age of 95, and provided in her will for the building of All Saints church as a memorial to her assassinated father, the house then served as Ealing's Central Public Library until 1985 when the library moved to its present home in the new town centre precinct. At present it is being restored as a heritage museum, including a permanent exhibition of Martinware pottery (largely a bequest of the Hull-Grundy family) with the principal rooms brought back to their original Soane splendour. The less historic parts of the building (N Wing built for the lending library, 1940) will continue to house the public library's administration<sup>d</sup>.

Back to EALING GREEN which tapers into ST MARY'S ROAD, following the line of the old village from which a variety of Georgian early 19<sup>th</sup> C houses happily survive. Congregational Church and manse (Chas Jones, 1859). To the E, THE PARK, laid out by S Smirke in 1846. To the W, the utilitarian frontage of the famous Ealing Studios conceals an older house. E again, the large College of Higher Education (Stillman, 1953) follows the old vicarage wall which now fronts a new YMCA hostel. The vista is closed by....

EALING PARISH CHURCH (St Mary). Old Ealing church collapsed in 1725 and was replaced by a Georgian "brick box". This was not nearly grand enough for burgeoning Victorian Ealing, and in 1866 SS Teulon set about transforming it into what Archbishop Tait described as "a Constantinopolitan basilica". He did so with gusto, retaining the nave walls but adding a chancel and then a W tower (1874).



*St Mary's Church interior (1909)*

The galleried interior was restored and considerably brightened by HS Goodhart-Rendel in 1955<sup>e</sup>. There are several older monuments inside, and John Horne Tooke - politician and philologist (1736-1812) - is buried in the churchyard.

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<sup>d</sup> Now the PM Gallery

<sup>e</sup> Restored again in 2003

In the words of John Betjeman I hope that some of you have been able in the course of our progress through the Queen of the Suburbs to:

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As in 1970 and 1976 my most grateful thanks are due to the staff of the reference department and local history section of Ealing Public Library, the research notes of the late HGD Holt Esq MA now preserved there, and to numerous local residents who have taken time and trouble in providing me with additional information.

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<sup>1</sup>Robbins, Michael *Middlesex* (New survey of England) Collins, 1953

<sup>2</sup>*Kelly's Directory* (various editions)

<sup>3</sup>Pevsner, Nikolaus *Middlesex* (The buildings of England), Penguin, 1951

<sup>4</sup>Robbins op cit

<sup>5</sup>Little, Bryan *Catholic churches since 1623*, Robert Hale, 1966

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Bryant, Kenneth M *May I show you around? A short history and guide to the Perceval Memorial Church of All Saints, Ealing*, British Publishing Co, 1961

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