

THE HISTORY OF SGCARA

1970s

In the 1970s Wandsworth Council was enthusiastically buying up private housing within the borough, ostensibly to provide social housing. Some properties were knocked down to make way for flats; some were let, but many (the impression at the time was most), including a number in our area, simply remained boarded up.

A number of residents in Sutherland Grove and Combemartin Road became increasingly alarmed by this. Inspired by the recently established London-wide London Association for Saving Homes, they held a public meeting. 200 residents of local roads turned up, and on the 7th of March 1975 the 'Sutherland Grove and Area Residents' Association' ('SG&ARA') was duly formed.

In 1978 the threat the Association had been formed to oppose subsided when, in large part due to concerns over the official housing policy, control of the Council changed. Despite this, there was no question of dissolving the Association: it was clear that its task of maintaining the area's character was to be an ongoing one regardless of who was in command at the Town Hall.

1980s

The 1980s saw the Association achieve two major results. Developers had begun demolishing houses in nearby areas in order to build flats. SG&ARA realised that if our area were recognised as an official Conservation Area, it would be much more difficult for developers to alter its character. A significant argument employed was the integrity of the 1920s and 1930s architecture, unique in Wandsworth and surviving almost intact. This, together with the mature trees and large gardens here, convinced the Council, and the Sutherland Grove Conservation Area was established.

Meanwhile the large derelict site in Sutherland Grove of the former Wandsworth Boys School was due for redevelopment. Proposals included supermarkets and other retail outlets as well as housing. The Association pointed out that despite there being a number of Church of England primary schools in the area, there was no C of E secondary school. They suggested using the site for one, and to their delight both Council and Church agreed.

After much debate the original 1920s school building was retained as the focal point of new housing, and the new school built on the old school's playground. Pleasingly the architects of what is now Arcadian Place and Artemis Place listened to SG&ARA's concerns, and designed buildings sympathetic to and blending with the rest of the area.

1990s

The major event of the 1990s was that the grounds of Whitelands College at the western end of Sutherland Grove - and within the Conservation Area - were sold for housing. This time our arguments for consistency of architectural style were not successful and the Whitelands Park estate was developed in a fully contemporary style. The main college building and chapel, the works of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, were however preserved and incorporated as the estate's central feature.

2000s

The major task and challenge by this time was to monitor the rapidly increasing applications by residents to alter and extend their properties, in an effort to ensure that what was done blended rather than conflicted with what already existed. We were largely successful in our efforts, despite the Council's planning department's seeming reluctance to enforce planning laws rather than simply advise granting 'retrospective permission' when developments that broke them were constructed.

2010s

From about 1975 until about 2010 or so, then the Association had concentrated almost exclusively on the task of maintaining the essential character of the area. In practice this chiefly involved commenting on or at times officially objecting to those planning applications, both described above and more modest, that would have had an adverse effect on it, whether architecturally or as regards the gardens and trees within it.

This of course continued into the 2010s and remains today our prime purpose. But in the early 2010s we began to broaden our remit by expanding the ways we kept the community informed not only of our own activities but also of anything of specific local interest and importance. We also began to run social events of different kinds.