

# LOLLARD ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

The Lollard Adventure Playground Association is a voluntary association of local residents and others. The Worshipful the Mayor of Lambeth is its president and the Right Honourable G. R. Strauss, Member of Parliament for the Vauxhall Division of Lambeth, is vice-president. The honorary officers of the association's elected committee are:—

## Chairman.

Lady Allen of Hurtwood, F.I.L.A., 22 Lawrence Street, S.W.3.  
FLAXman 8795

## Vice-chairmen.

Mr. G. Maynard, 96 Lollard Street, S.E.11. RELiance 2785  
Councillor T. Robinson, 24 Kennington Palace Court, S.E.11.  
RELiance 3419

## Treasurer.

Captain T. L. Bratt, D.S.C., R.N. (Rtd.), 38 Denison House,  
Vauxhall Bridge Road, S.W.1. victoria 0656

## Secretary.

Lady (Kythe) Hendy, 24 Abercorn Place, N.W.8.  
CUNningham 8989

## Meetings Secretary.

Miss J. Hewitt, Lady Margaret Hall Settlement, 131 Kennington  
Road, S.E.11

The playground has a permanent staff of four. Everyone else who works for it gives their time voluntarily. The address of the playground is:—

The Lollard Adventure Playground, Lollard Street, London, S.E.11  
RELiance 3575

Visitors (by appointment) are welcome. Members of the committee, staff and children are glad to help anyone who wants to know more about what they are doing. If the visitors, on their side, wish to give something in return they have a wide choice. The playground needs money, materials of all sorts and volunteers who can come regularly to help. Students, in particular, are urged to give some personal service. It will be of use to the playground and to their own studies.

If you wish to make further enquiries or visits, or would like to receive the annual report and balance sheet and attend and vote at the annual general meeting, join the Lollard Adventure Playground Association. The annual subscription is 2/6.

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# LOLLARD ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

The Lollard Adventure Playground lies just across the river from the Houses of Parliament, between the Lambeth Walk and the Kennington Road. It is surrounded by small streets of old houses, many of them condemned before the war, where a large proportion of the wage-earners are manual workers. At a little distance, modern blocks of flats have replaced the old property and the whole of the immediate area, including the playground site of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  acres, will make way for a new school within the next few years. Then the experiment on this site will come to an end.

Meanwhile, it is still growing and changing, as it has done in the past. This spring, 1959, it will be four years old. At first, it was regarded as a wild-cat scheme, unlikely to live. "It's just one of those things," said a neighbour, "a flash in the pan". Now it is an established feature of the neighbourhood and a centre where visitors from all over the world find something to learn. In the informal, outdoor setting, with a resourceful, sympathetic warden, and equipment and materials that lend themselves to endless adaptation, the children are enjoying a unique range of pleasures and interests and responsibilities.

The recorded voices of some of the children are transcribed in the account that follows. It is presented to the growing circle of friends and supporters so that they can judge the achievement for themselves.

## PAST AND PRESENT

In the autumn of 1954, the London County Council asked the present Chairman, and the founder members of the Lollard Adventure Playground Association to initiate an Adventure Playground on the site of the bombed school in Lollard Street. This was a bold decision, since at that time, in spite of a few pilot experiments and a three-year propaganda campaign, public opinion still favoured the hard-surface, swing-and-see-saw playgrounds which had been a standard feature, all over the country, as long as anyone could remember. "What more can the children want?" was a question that was asked in all seriousness.

The sponsors of the Lollard scheme took a different view. The well-equipped playgrounds were attracting some of the children, some of the time; but what was being done for the children who preferred to go off and play on the bomb-sites? A playground which would give them a comparable sense of adventure did not need expensive fixtures. It must provide opportunities—tools, materials, rough ground and the friendship and backing of a friendly, skilful supervisor.

On this basis, the Lollard Adventure Playground Association was formed; and the first committee, composed of local residents and others with some special interest in the place and the project, set to work. Money was raised from various sources and special credit is due to the

grant-giving bodies who showed their faith in the experiment, at this early stage, by guaranteeing the essentials:—

The London County Council leased the site at a nominal rent and gave the surround fencing. Since 1956 they have given an annual grant corresponding to the warden's salary.

The Borough of Lambeth surfaced the ball-games area and undertook to maintain it. Later, an annual grant was voted, now standing at £200.

The National Playing Fields Association gave £800 to cover the warden's salary for the first 18 months, and have since given more help on a number of critical occasions.

The London and Greater London Playing Fields Association gave £800 towards capital cost—lavatories, water supply, shelters etc.

From these sources, too, the committee received much wise counsel on the general conduct of affairs, legal and technical advice and secretarial services. The value of such support can hardly be over-estimated. A successful voluntary committee represents, in any case, a great deal of hard work done by individual members in their spare time; and much energy and good-will is wasted if the business is not conducted with speed and efficiency.

The committee appointed a warden and opened the playground in the Easter holidays of 1955. It still looked like a bomb-site, with old foundations outcropping through the dusty earth and a top-dressing of rubbish. The surround fence was not yet up. The warden's only shelter, for bad days, was a roadman's hut. The materials provided for the children's use disappeared mysteriously, on bonfires and elsewhere; and the neighbours had not got out of the habit of dumping rubbish as soon as one lot was cleared up.

But children of all ages came in—sometimes, if Mum was busy, bringing "their babies" too. There were no formalities, nothing to pay, no restrictions about wandering in and out. It was a place where they could dream or potter, or let off steam in their own way, with full adult approval. "In the streets," says one girl, "you were *always* in trouble—for making a noise, waking the baby, things like that." Here there was nothing, within the limits of safety, that was not allowed. Bonfires, for instance, were so popular that the number alight at one time had to be limited to six; and later, for the sake of the neighbours, Monday wash-day was declared a close season.

The reaction of the neighbourhood was mixed. "Look at them, teaching the children to destroy things," said one passer-by. But her friend took a broader view. "Well, it's an *adventure* playground. We ought to be thankful that there *is* a place where they *can* destroy things".

Some parents, meanwhile, were pleased that something had been done for their children, but they did wish they didn't get so dirty. The older people didn't care for it. "We didn't have it, why should they have

it? This sort of thing we never had, it can't do any good". In general, the place was regarded as "an eyesore". It was called "The Ruins", "The Junk Heap", "Crazy Court" and other names which are not printable.

Heavy rains that year made things particularly difficult: yet gradually the playground improved. The hard-surface area was ready for the children to play on when the main playground was closed. The fencing was completed. A large hut, acquired at a cut rate, was erected at considerable cost; and a corner was marked out alongside for the younger children, with a sandpit designed and built by the older ones. Other additions were books for a library, more building materials, a grounded lifeboat and an old van which turned out to be mobile. Money was always needed, and was raised from many sources—ranging from half-crown subscriptions to £650 from The Variety Club of Great Britain.

The playground still qualified as an eyesore but the children themselves brought into it life and colour—some of them playing explorers on the boat, some digging, some reading, some building camps for themselves and some helping with clearance or mixing and laying cement.

There were a few disappointments. The first planting, by a garden contractor, was a failure; and the free-and-easy outdoor style of the summer months was not suited to the winter. Painting and modelling sessions were a success with some children but unorganised groups were apt to interfere with each other inside the hut while the warden was trying, vainly, to keep an eye on those who had stayed outside.

This was a mistake which could be, and has been, corrected. Another mistake was made the following summer when the committee, planning to make the flat site more interesting, accepted an offer of 'topsoil' to make an artificial mountain. The children seized the opportunity for "terrific games, inspired probably by current films, with rushes of movement across the place, all ages, with others tagging on behind". But their pleasure was brief. The promised topsoil turned out to be London clay and there was an outcry from parents who found it trodden all over their well-kept homes. All efforts to control it by retaining walls, or planting, proved futile; and it finally had to be carted away, at great expense.

This is an episode that is vividly remembered. "When the mountain was brought in, people were standing there jeering. 'What do they think they are doing?' Then more jeering when it was taken away".

Throughout this period, local committee members were continually waylaid by destructive critics and the warden, a visible target, was under almost constant fire. Even when nothing was said, he sensed disapproval. "I feel them looking at me out of all those little houses". He had worked nobly through the first heat of the day, with no deputy warden and only a sketchy team of voluntary helpers; but at this point he resigned.

The Committee, after a few weeks of doubt and difficulty, appointed the present warden. Later, the staff was increased. The Halley Stewart Trust gave a grant for the salary of an assistant, and the Save the Children Fund sponsored an under-fives group, with experienced staff paid directly by them.

These were big improvements. The playground has been used since, during school hours, by the under-fives; and the warden's task has become less lonely and exacting. He has more time free from general supervision for collecting material, initiating new products, making local contacts and enlisting voluntary help. Attendances have gone up. In the summer of 1958, there were occasions when 250 children were on the playground at one time. All age-groups are still well represented and a new one has been added—the boys and young men who "join the workshop". The oldest is 23, and most of those who are over 16 are at work.

A number of the current activities are described in detail later. The workshop, the Old Age Pensioners' scheme and the magazine are permanent, year-round interests. In the summer, camping, hut-building and gardening are obvious attractions, varied by bursts of enthusiasm for cricket, bumble-puppy, target tennis and the interesting new games taught by a Swedish visitor. While winter activities include painting, modelling, jiving and "beauty" sessions for the girls.

The programme, in any case informal, is varied by parties, treats and money-raising efforts in which the children play a part. Among the special occasions of 1958 were a Christmas party given to the Old Age Pensioners, a Jumble Sale which raised £24 and a puppet show given by post-graduate students from Maria Grey College. This is now an annual event and the students feel that their "efforts are richly rewarded by the radiant attention of the children".

Outside contacts also contribute to the variety and vigour of the playground. Visitors come often and the children are now seasoned hosts, very ready with a friendly greeting and any help that is wanted; and equally capable of keeping on, undisturbed, at their own affairs. Students, and others concerned with children, have appreciated this opportunity; and the press, radio and television have made good use of the material that has been given them. Articles, letters and comment have appeared in the local and the national press; the chairman, the warden, and a number of children have appeared on T.V.; and paintings done by the children were shown in the B.B.C. "Monitor" programme "The Innocent Eye".

This represents a real contribution to public understanding of adventure playgrounds. In addition, local good will, already responsive to the sight of a good garden, and to the knowledge that the children

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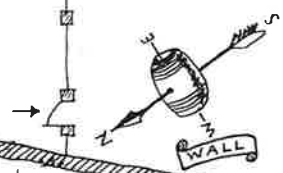
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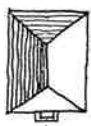
HARD SURFACE  
FOR  
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HOLES  
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WALL

WORKSHOP



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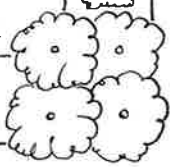
WATER

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are working hard to do something for the Old Age Pensioners, is strengthened by the appearance of "our playground" on television.

In spite of all this publicity, a legend still persists that the playground is provided, out of public money, by THEM, and it is worth emphasising again that the Association is a voluntary body, depending on the efforts of private people. The treasurer comments "The major part of our initial experiment and the whole cost of salaries is met by generous grants from the sources already named. But the routine administration and maintenance charges are rarely less than £400 a year, £200 of which is generously donated by the Lambeth Borough Council. The remainder has to be met by donations, subscriptions and special activities. Necessary improvements to the playground are not covered by the routine charges. Some represent extra expenditure; others are the result of generous gifts of materials".

This brief account of the first four years gives the bare bones of the story. The following pages show more of the living picture. Throughout, readers will see the benign influence of the warden, a man well fitted for his difficult, and often harrassing, task. The children's appreciation is manifest and this is the place to add a formal tribute to theirs. Warm thanks are due also to the many volunteers who have helped him, in particular to one friend and neighbour, the late Mr. Tom Ledson, whose vigilant and affectionate interest has been a blessing to the playground throughout its history.

## HUTS, CAMPS AND CAVES

Throughout the summer, groups of children band together to make themselves headquarters—a camp or a hut. Tents, with outdoor campfires, and buildings of all sorts, each one typical of the age and skill of its owners, spring up all over the playground. A neighbour comments, "All ages take to these building opportunities. You see them using materials that are around and making their own places—obviously enjoying having somewhere they can retreat to. I suppose there must have been half a dozen".

In the holidays the opportunity to cook is of great practical value to children whose mothers are not home to give them mid-day dinner. The warden calls them the Key children, the Shilling children and the Nothingsers. "The Key children," he says, "have the front door key round their necks and have access to a cold lunch left by Mum before she goes to work. The Shilling children have no key and no access to their homes while Mum and Dad are working; and the shilling given them to buy pie is often spent on sweets. The Nothingsers are pathetic, though fortunately small in number. After breakfast time they have

nowhere to go and nothing to eat until either Mum or Dad return from work. Those unfortunates are often fed with chips and sausages by other children”.

Besides feeding the hungry, these children take a special delight in entertaining guests of their own. Many visitors to the playground have been invited to stoop through a low door and enjoy a banquet of sausage and potato, served by candlelight, on a table spread with a white cloth. They would agree with the proud comment of one host—“You won't taste anything like this in a pub”.

The communal houses may last for days or weeks; it seems to depend on the cohesion of the group. If the members are disposed to stick together, there is no difficulty about repairing or improving the hut; but once the hut is abandoned, it vanishes. Groups of boys predominate.





and one passer-by, observing the mixed adolescent group, noted "it seemed to me that the girls had been brought in for domestic purposes".

Many of the girls prefer to keep house on their own, in rather more formal surroundings and for them the caravan has been a boon. It is allotted each day to four girls and has been in continuous use for two summers. Loving care has been lavished on it—paint, new curtains, and a little garden outside. But it is showing signs of wear and the new caravan that has been promised is eagerly awaited.

A new movement, to retire underground, has developed since the discovery that the old foundations, under the playground, are accessible. They combine the beauties of a hide-out, the fascination of a labyrinth and the stimulus of a dramatic setting for games with a plot. Rival gangs, and seekers for hidden treasure, act out their fantasies here; and the same themes have reappeared in the most recent operetta.

The adventure of exploring underground could, of course, be dangerous. At an earlier stage, when few of the children had learned the difference between freedom and folly, it might well have been too dangerous to allow. But now, after a period of wild individualism, the children are able to accept realistic standards of care and consideration. They have developed what might be described as a kind of corporate common sense.

## THE UNDER-FIVES

"The babies" have always had a corner for themselves but at first it was only spasmodically used. The change came when regular sessions were instituted, under experienced staff. This has enormously extended the usefulness of the playground. Formerly, it was closed during school hours. Now it is a bright spot in the lives of these little children who are not yet at school. There is nowhere else near at hand where they can play safely out of doors, and the big space of the playground hut is a welcome change, on wet days, from a small home. Above all, there are interesting things to play with and a serene, affectionate atmosphere.

Mrs. Jordan, who runs the group, says "When we first started we didn't have many children at all. They just came in ones and twos. Gradually, the mothers began to realise that their children could come to the playground with someone to look after them, and the numbers got up to about 25. The children are mostly between 3 and 5, though we do have one or two under 3".

The mothers—this is human nature—are not particularly brisk about showing their appreciation, but the interest Mrs. Jordan takes in them and their children is having its effect. She was greatly missed during a few days' illness and several mothers were able to express what they felt; "We didn't realise what a boon this has been to us".

## THE WORKSHOP

In 1957 a second hut was acquired and erected, with some difficulty, by the end of the summer. Members of the International Voluntary Service came in force to help; but at first very few of the children rallied round. Even the bigger boys, who were very eager to have a workshop of their own, hung back. "We think it would be better," they said, "to pay some builders".

The task was certainly formidable but there was no prospect of finding that much money. Staff, voluntary helpers and a handful of boys worked with incredible persistence and, after many weeks, got to the last stage of putting the roof on.

"It was at this point," says the warden, "that the Man from the Ministry appeared and instructed us to dismantle the whole thing—as we had not had proper permission to erect it! He gave us a list of minimum requirements—a concrete base, asbestos roofing, air bricks, damp courses etc.

"The reaction to this disaster was interesting. Some boys gave up at once. But a few were angry and determined. We set to work once more, often continuing by the light of a convenient street lamp till 10 p.m. and, four months later, the work was completed. The Man from the Ministry was very impressed and co-operative, and passed the building as safe".

Looking back, it is not surprising that many of the boys lost heart over this project; and now that it has achieved success the self-confident, helpful spirit of the few has spread through the group of big boys and young men. They run their workshop extremely well, and largely for the benefit of other people.

On the playground itself, there are no written rules and no formalities about admission, but the workshop group have expressed, in their own way, the Englishman's inborn instinct to form a Club. No one under 12 years old is admitted. Boys at school pay 6d. a week and boys at work 1/-, but those who do not attend the weekly meeting are let off paying and irregular attendance is regarded tolerantly. "They get these spasms. They do come . . . and then they don't come".

The warden is chairman of the workshop committee, and four young men between 17 and 22 are officers—Secretary and Treasurer, Shop Steward, Store Keeper and Leader of the Heavy Squad. These appointments were made with great formality but there are times, because of an exacting girl-friend or a load of home-work for a grammar school boy, when the actual work devolves upon the warden. By and large, however, members of the workshop committee take a great deal of responsibility. An indication of it is that they can safely be put in charge of the playground when the warden is busy, in the workshop, for instance, or ferrying a voluntary worker from the station.

Since the formation of the workshop group, a vast number of useful

jobs have been done. The boys have made a lot of things (lamps, stools, wall-plaques) for themselves and their parents; they have interested themselves in the maintenance and improvement of the playground; given help to other adventure playgrounds; and have developed a scheme for doing work for the Old Age Pensioners in the district.

This last scheme is their pride and joy, and has probably been one of the biggest single factors in enlisting local good-will. The pensioners are touched that someone is taking an interest, amazed that the boys pay for everything out of their subscriptions, and enormously relieved when some problem of maintenance or decoration, which has usually been troubling them for months, is taken out of their hands.

A boy of 14 says succinctly; "They like it very much. And we like doing them". The old people express their feelings more lavishly. "Two young boys came to the door and said they were from the playground and they'd been told of some work they could do for me. So I said, I wanted the line put up there and I showed them where. And I said, will you tell me what I've got to get for you? but they said, that's quite unnecessary, we will get that. Well, I said, then how much do you think it will cost? They said, nothing. But I said, you can't possibly do it for NOTHING. They said, that is one of the things we are doing. We are doing everything we can to help the Old Age Pensioners, and we are pleased to do it. So the boys came along and they put the plugs in the wall and they did it and there it is. It must have been a good job because it's still surviving".

The range of jobs undertaken is wide—from regular deliveries of firewood to the redecoration of a room. These entries from logbook for June 1958 are typical:—

Plugging outside walls and fitting clothes line over pulley, done by one boy of 16.

Redecorating room, done by four boys (22, 21, 14, 13).

Clearing off large heap of soil against damp wall, done by the assistant warden and two boys (14, 13).

Redecorating kitchen, done by five boys (23, 22, 21, 14, 13).

The number of jobs completed by the end of 1958 was over 60. The boys are generous with their money as well as with their time. When a big estimate comes in there is quite likely to be a whip-round to cover the cost.

The Lollard Football Team has held its meetings on the playground for some seasons. This season's record has been good, and several members of the team have asked to join the workshop group. The workshop is also used now by some of the younger fathers, who have undertaken to keep all tools sharp and do various other jobs for the playground, as well as for themselves. This again represents an improvement in local contacts. There have always been individuals who have taken an interest, from time to time, but it is new to have a stable group whose interest and help can be relied upon.



## GRASS AND GARDENS

The mountain, of evil memory, had at least broken up the dead-level scene. Once it was removed, the problem of how to coax some colour out of the ground became urgent and in 1957 the committee decided to turf the whole of the area to the right of the entrance. One week-end, several members of the International Voluntary Service came down and, with the help of children and adults, laid 3,000 turfs—paid for by the proceeds of a special jumble sale. Fencing was donated and the children, with fairly constant reminders from the warden, did succeed in keeping off the grass while it was taking root. The result was that a pleasant stretch of turf was well-established later in the summer.

This was the great year for camping and the first year when cooking was done in earnest. In less energetic moments, too, the children appreciate a pleasant place to lounge and idle and chat. Occasionally, there are opportunities for sunbathing. "An exotic scene," comments one neighbour, describing "the sheer languor of it all, in the full heat of the sun. Adolescents, mostly boys, stripped down to their waists . . . one or two girls, wearing just their ordinary clothes, not bathing costumes, but very conscious of a lot of attention circling round them".

The success of the grass was an encouragement to have another try at making a garden. Mr. Jack Bentley, the warden's father-in-law, gave the project its start, undeterred by the many critics who said it was

impossible to make a garden on a blitzed site. His sympathy for growing things—both plants and children—triumphed, and he sums up, "The children's efforts at creating an oasis of beauty and colour were rewarded and the critics were confounded, and agreeably surprised".

The older boys, after discussion with Mr. Bentley, cleared the brick and rubble off an area of 60 feet by 20 and laid it out with a circular bed in the middle and borders down the side. A few loads of compost, provided by Lambeth Borough Council, were spread over the beds and dug in; and gifts of all sorts were used to stock the ground.

Meanwhile, a group of boys who wished to grow vegetables sifted the rubble on a second plot at right angles to the first. Then they made their own compost out of vegetable refuse collected from the Lambeth Walk Street market.

In the spring, the bulbs made a very brave show and passers-by began to take an interest in the children's efforts. "The place was really beginning to look like something". The children made their own selection of varieties for summer planting. The result was a rich and colourful scene, with individual taste evident in 11 private gardens and the bed alongside the caravan which is the especial care of the girls.

These were some of the flowers that grew well during the summer: marigolds, love-in-the-mist, godetias, nasturtiums, gallardias, sunflowers, geraniums, roses, michaelmas daises, golden rod, lupins, irises, gladioli.

The vegetables were an even greater triumph. Successful crops were grown of potatoes, broad beans, runner beans, lettuce, radishes, tomatoes and cabbages. Most of the vegetables were used for dinners camp-cooked on the playground but potatoes, as well as some bouquets of flowers, were given to the Old Age Pensioners.

It is a tribute to the work done that these vegetables were remarkable for quality as well as for quantity. "The potatoes taste better than my own", said one capable country gardener.

## WORDS AND MUSIC

Like other playground projects, the Magazine started modestly. A volunteer, Miss Margaret Post, spent one evening a week on the playground with a group of children who drew pictures and wrote poems and stories, which they afterwards mounted and put up in a corner of the hut for all to enjoy. The idea caught on and the children decided to collect the best contributions and make a proper magazine of their own. Vol. 1 No. 1 came out in April 1957 and Vol. 1 No. 2 in May 1958.

The hut is the children's press-room. An 11-year-old describes it, "Margaret comes in and we sit down and she gives us pencils and papers and she says to us, well, do a poem or a drawing whichever you like. But she likes poems best, yes, she definitely prefers poems or stories. So we just sit down and, well, just carry on with it".

This uninhibited method, which professional writers may well envy, gives rich results. A new edition of the wall-sheet goes up each week and it is no easy task to sift through them for the magazine. The current number has 60 contributions, including poems, stories, pictures, reviews, comment and reports on playground activities.

The creative work is done by the Magazine Staff—16 girls and 15 boys between 5 and 16—and four Special Contributors among the older boys. "I only did the putting together" says Miss Post. But this hardly does justice to her contribution. The fact that the children see their work treated with respect and elegantly displayed to a wider public, has been of incalculable value in keeping alive their pleasure and interest. This has been one of the most vigorous and persistent groups the playground has known. Not all the Magazine Staff attend every session but a nucleus come regularly. They have developed a special interest in serials—story-serials, picture-serials, and co-operative serials where one child leaves the plot in some sticky knot for another to disentangle.

It is this group which wrote and produced the two operettas. The first was performed in July 1957 with music based on themes from the *Eroica*. A credit to the composer was incorporated in the title—Captain Beethoven Blood. His theme-song is:—

I am Captain Blood—very fierce and tough

The sea is very rough at times and I commit a lot of crimes.

The next production, "Secret Tunnel" was performed at the Annual General Meeting of the Association in July 1958, and gave enormous pleasure to a large audience of fathers, mothers and friends. The setting—the Witch's cave—was obviously influenced by the children's own explorations under ground, while the first operetta gave them their hero. Captain Blood, with the help of *Ivanhoe*, rescues the children from their prison in the cave and slays the witch.

The second operetta was much more of an achievement than the first. They know from television that a performance "in front of people" must be at least visible and audible, but the idea that this takes a lot of preparation was strange. "In the first one," says Miss Post, "they didn't really know what they were doing. During rehearsal, they'd say, well, we done this last time, can't we do something different. But when it came to the second one they were aware right from the beginning that this was something they were working to produce".

Experience was a help to composition, as well as production and acting. Miss Post goes on "Before, I took poems they'd already written and we fitted the situation to the words. This time, they wrote words to fit the situation; and, having been inspired by the first one, they helped me in writing the music. The spell, for example—Ha-ha, Hee-hee. When they started saying that, I said, do you think it would make a song. O yes, they said, it would make a good sort-of horrid song. So we made it into a horrid song and then followed it on with the witch's dance".

## OTHER ARTS

The magazine staff do a lot of drawing and many of them come also to the painting sessions held by Mrs. Morley. Here the numbers have had to be limited to 30, painting is so popular especially with the younger children. Whether their subjects are taken from dreams or stories, or from their own daily life, they produce vigorous works of imagination. At 12 or 13 they begin to get self-conscious. They no longer have a child's freedom of expression and are easily daunted by their own lack of accomplishment. Some drift away and others begin to be embarrassed by the fact that they are older than most of the group. "Well, we think it's babyish," is a comment that sums up the situation.

Modelling, with Mrs. Greenfield, is particularly favoured by the boys. Many of their works were on display in the art exhibition held in the playground in 1958, described by a member of the Workshop committee. "In a glass case, it looked very nice. It looked like an ordinary art show. When you've got everything set out, it sets the work off, you know, it shows the best side of the work. There was one of a boy thinking with his arm on his knee; and there was a bowl, a flower bowl, in the shape of a duck, and numerous little animals the boys have made".

The care of personal appearance—an art all on its own—is something that all teenage girls have to learn. Most of those who come to the playground are only just reaching this stage but some already show, very visibly, a leaning towards stage make-up. Miss Jean McAllister, who has lately started a weekly session on beauty, is a help to them all. "She made us make ourselves up, using the things she told us. She told us make-up should look natural. Then she didn't say much. She just said, the eye-shadow, you put a bit too much on, you're not supposed to have it showing, and not to put on too much lipstick. Some of them had it going outside the outline, she told them not to, just keep the natural curve, with a brush".

The preliminaries were even more impressive. "She gave us all hot water and made us get our faces clean. To get rid of spots and black-heads, things like that, you need to wash your skin regular and quite a lot. You have to keep on washing it. Get it really clean, with soap and water. That's all you really need. It's just the grease gets in and the soap and water gets it out."

## NEW FRIENDS

"With me," says a girl of 13, "when I first came over here, I only had one friend. Now I've got a lot of friends around here. You know, I've met people and learned to talk to them and, well, I've just got pally with them".

Children are always very sensitive to atmosphere and the fact that they are liked, played with and listened to, means a great deal. Their

own social contacts, too, are influenced by the fact that they can recognise and imitate good manners. The warden's manifest dislike for bad manners, including bad language, is of course a constant reminder while a more positive incentive is the glamour of his easy, unselfish style. "He's very nice to you and everything, he makes you want to have good manners. It's as though you just fall naturally into having them".

This is a girl. The rougher side is given by a boy "Some of the kids have improved their manners because Mr. Turner jumps on them every time they're rude. Another time, the kids just couldn't care less, because they've not been brought up to respect manners". But this is denied by another boy. "Lots of people are naturally good-mannered, but a lot of people don't like to show it. If a person's naturally good-mannered, he's very shy to show it, you see. But when they're talking to Mr. Turner, they naturally put on their best manners".

No doubt they take them off again, on other occasions. Meanwhile, they are learning to show consideration for each other and for older people, without feeling they are losing face. The warden has "commanded respect in the quietest possible manner. They see that it's not cissy to be quietly spoken and well-mannered".

The immediate reward is that "Well you are pleasing someone," but many of the older boys, already at work in an adult world where many people "speak better", see some practical advantages too. "You stand and look at Mr. Turner when he's got visitors . . . you know, talking people, professional talking people. When the boys see Mr. Turner talking they think to themselves, by gosh, he's getting round these people, perhaps it's his manners, which it is. And I think myself its largely manners gets you on. If people say, that's a good-mannered person, you get further up".

Affection goes with admiration and it is evident that many of the children regard the warden as a very close friend. Meanwhile, the children are also finding friends of their own age. The boys, it seems, are happiest with a group following some common interest—football, billiards or the workshop—but the girls often like to have, within the larger group, the support of some one girl they can call "my friend".

## BOY MEETS GIRL

In any large group of children, there are usually some whose affections are naturally constant and others who always want to experiment with whatever is going. In either case, the natural instinct to keep their private lives private must be respected, and this section deals only with some aspects of their developing sexual interest.

Signs of it are obvious. The sunbathing days produced "ragging, getting very near to necking" and spasmodic bursts of knockabout ragging crop up often. It is all very open and seems to be what sociologists designate "group courtship", where the boys and girls feel a need



for the protection of their own group. The adolescents arrange most of their activities in this way, but they still keep quite a good eye on each other and know a good deal about what their opposite numbers are doing.

It happens fairly often that a boy and a girl decide to go steady. Then, though they often want the advice and support of the warden, they are seen less often joining in playground activities. The boys, like all boys, do not admit that they value the opportunity for meeting and doing things with girls. But the girls think it useful. "Before I came to the playground I was scared of boys," says one. Most of them think it a good idea to have at least a nodding acquaintance with a number of boys before settling down to go steady. One girl insisted that going steady should be staved off as long as possible, otherwise you might find yourself married too young. "That takes the enjoyment out of life and you might meet another boy friend who's a lot better than the one you've got".

This girl was not at the playground the following week. She was going steady. Her friends reported "He seems a nice boy and he is improved now. He used to go about any old how. Now he's smartened himself up".

The young men take trouble to please, up to a point, but they are apt to rebel when the discipline becomes too severe. "She isn't interested in anything," says one, whose girl is reluctant to give him an evening off, to come to the playground or to evening classes. This sort of thing may well be a frequent cause of a friendship's breaking up.

Another difficulty is lack of sympathy at home. The warden says "The parents of these kids often deal with these romantic ideas in a most summary fashion. You know, they'll clout the boy on the ear, or tell him he's a fool or worse. The whole romance of the thing, the whole beauty of the thing in their young minds is ruined".

It is very difficult for parents to keep calm when they see their half-grown children trying, perhaps clumsily, to behave like adults. But that is what the children need. "They go wandering round the streets," says the warden, "with all these queer notions, these half-cocked ideas. They can't go to their parents, they've left school, they're in a world they don't understand . . . a world of emotions, violent emotions they can't really comprehend, and Lollard Street's a place where they can go, where they can talk freely, they can test out their ideas, see what sort of thing happens when they say them. And perhaps listen to what I have to say and get a new slant on the whole thing".

In the first verse of a poem written by a girl of twelve, romance and realism meet:—

What a wonderful thing to be in love  
Like the song of a cuckoo, the voice of a dove  
Sometimes it's happy, sometimes it's sad  
As you will see if you watch Mum and Dad.

## THE COMMUNITY

A member of the workshop committee, who has lately started training for film production, made his own film of the playground. But he was not satisfied with it. "I missed something," he says, "I think I missed the community".

This is good comment. The playground is an entity, with a spirit that runs through the extraordinary mixture of ages, characters and occupations. "It's peculiar," says the warden, "the place stands for far more than a mere playground".

The Chairman sums up: "This playground is different because it's a place where the children have an infinite choice of opportunities. They can handle basic things—earth, water, plants, timber—and work with real tools; and they have an adult friend, a person they trust and respect. Here every child can develop a healthy sense of self-esteem, because there is always something at which they can excel. The wide age range, from two years to twenty, is perhaps unique on any playground. There can be progressive development through rich play opportunities, to a growing sense of responsibility to the playground, to the younger children and, finally, to others outside the playground. Their willingness to help others is, to my mind, the sign of real maturity which is the object of all who work with young people".