

The Kensington Kremlin

From 1976 to 1978 the Society fought one of its hardest battles - for the prevention of a vast tower block on the 1.75 acres (.70h) of the Kensington Barracks site in Kensington Church Street (now partly occupied by Lancer Square). To be built for the Soviet Embassy, it was to include 60 flats,



a school, a gym, a theatre, a cultural and international centre, car parking, and tennis courts, all at about one third the normal density for central London. It was to be surrounded by a secretive wall some 45 feet (13.75m) high, requiring a long windowless section of the wall along Kensington Church Street - 'ideal for demonstrations', as one percipient objector put it. Significantly, no plans were ever made available.

The Society mobilised the intense feelings of Kensingtonians in a large meeting of some 1500 residents in the new Town Hall on 18 April 1978. Those present will recall the resolute passion of the many distinguished residents who rose to speak. The campaign was supported by the Borough Council and by our then M.P. Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, who represented our case to the Foreign Secretary, Dr David Owen. It was supported too by Westminster City Council which regarded the proposal as 'preposterous and a major scandal'. In the face of such opposition the UK Government withdrew its support. In May 1978 the Soviet Government was requested to abandon its plans for the redevelopment of this sensitive site.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr. Nicholas Freeman, understandably declared this 'a notable victory for local democracy'. It was also a major victory for the Kensington Society, which had identified and focused local feeling.