

Fences, walls and gates

By Carol Woolner RIBA

The fences and walls of Bedford Park are a vital ingredient in the character of the area. When renewing them, the appropriateness and detailing of a particular design must be carefully considered.

This guidance note is concerned with fences and walls which define the boundary between a property and the street, where they greatly influence the appearance of Bedford Park. Those between neighbours are only considered when they are visually important to the street. Gates are seen as an integral part of the fence.

Many people refer to palisade fences as “Bedford Park fences”, believing this design – with its distinctive curved ends and angled spindles – to be the only authentic, original style, and therefore to be preferred when restoring the houses and the street scene. This view has been reinforced by contemporary drawings to publicise an ideal garden suburb street by architect and resident Maurice B Adams. In fact, when first built the estate had a variety of fence types. Where there is evidence of their existence, the Society hopes to encourage reinstatement of original designs.

Historical background

The idea of variety rather than uniformity can be understood in

the historical context of Bedford Park. The garden suburb grew out of the Aesthetic Movement of the 1870s which was a reaction against earlier Victorian design values including the monotony of stucco-fronted terraces and the stuffiness of Victorian classicism. The character of such developments and their Georgian progenitors (eg Bath, Bedford Square and Belgravia, which were also developed as architectural entities) is defined by the subjugation of the individual house to a minor role; the terrace, the crescent, the circus and the square become the architecturally dominant forms.

Bedford Park aspired to an altogether more informal appearance, based on early English architecture rather than continental Renaissance design. The idea was to create a “romantic” suburb with the characteristics of a village, incorporating its own church, inn, school and club.

The important architectural elements are the houses themselves, predominantly detached or semi-detached, occasionally as short terraces. The fences are an intrinsic part of the individual house, pair or group; the variety expresses their individuality in contrast to the unity of the classical approach.

Early lithographs and photographs show the original



Brick pillar topped with ball finial

variety of fences. These may be referred to in the Bedford Park Society archive, and in *Bedford Park – the first garden suburb* by T Affleck Greeves (available from the Bedford Park Society).

The one common factor to designs later than those of E W Godwin, regardless of the type of fence or its height, is the use of a brick pier with a terracotta ball finial. These are used at boundary corners and sometimes as gate posts.

Although some houses currently have hedges, the original intention was certainly to have a wall or fence. Depending on its position in the street, the fence or wall would be high to give privacy, or low or “transparent” to display the garden.

The first houses were designed by Godwin and Coe & Robinson in The Avenue. These had close-boarded front fences with crenelated tops, along with distinctive gates and gate posts whose designs are in keeping with the cottage quality of the houses. (See fig 1.)

Subsequent architects tended to design houses of a grander style and therefore proposed higher – though not always more elaborate – fences, and sometimes gates with more substantial posts and hoops.

It is important to know that architects prepared designs for the houses but generally did not supervise the execution and, consequently, had little control over the type of fence built, as the illustrations on the next page shows.

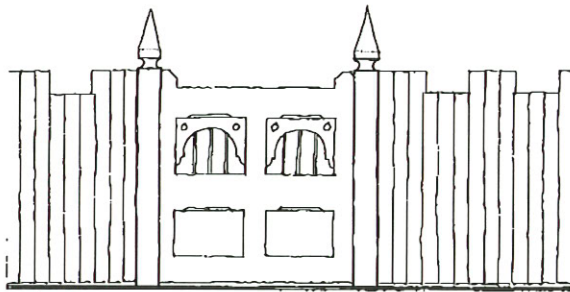


Fig 1: “Godwin” gate (type A[†]) and posts used at 1 to 18 The Avenue; fence and posts were used with a simpler gate at numbers 19 and 21, whose architect was Norman Shaw

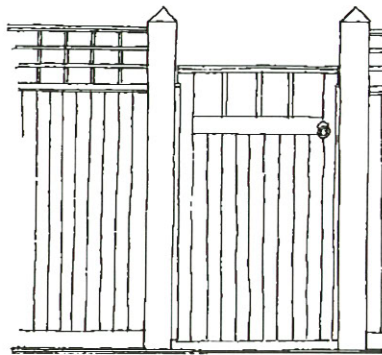


Fig 2: High, close-boarded fence and gate (type B[†])

Fence styles

In the past, there were far more varieties than the palisade. These included:

- High, close boarded fences, some with square perforated tops or trellis, with oak posts at approximately 2.5m centres also gave privacy and are often found marking street corners. (See fig 2.)
- Low, close-boarded fences perforated and with simple, horizontal capping or shaped tops radiused at their junction with oak posts, and incorporating simple gates. (See figs 3, 4, 5.)
- Palisade fence with white painted posts and spindles, cills sitting on low brick walls and top rails which join posts and brick piers either horizontally or with “swan necks”. (See fig. 6.) The detailing of these fences is critical to their appearance. See specification notes which follow. In *Bedford Park – the first garden suburb* a 1904 photograph shows a palisade gate with hoop used with a close boarded fence and plain oak posts. (See fig 7.)
- Posts and chains were used along the South Parade boundary of Acton Green, in front of The Bedford Park Club and the Chiswick School of Art, and around the green triangle outside the Parish Hall. (See fig 8.)

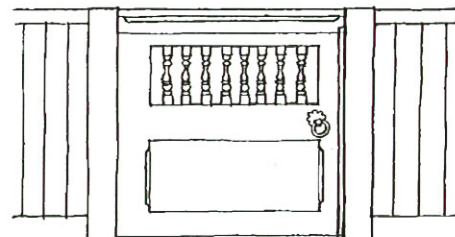


Fig 3: This low close-boarded fence and gate with turned posts (type C[†]) was found in Bath Road, Priory Avenue and The Avenue

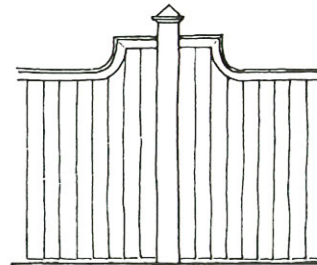
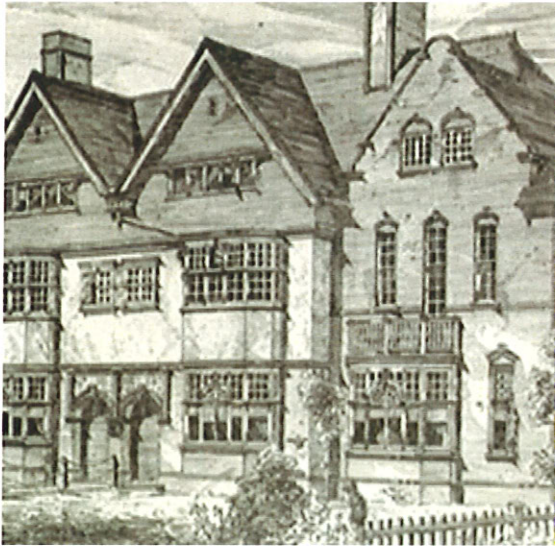


Fig 4: Low close-boarded fence with radiused junctions at base posts

[†] These refer to the TAG descriptions in the section on “Your House”.



Fences were not always completed as the architect envisaged. These houses in Queen Anne's Grove were designed with very different gardens (above left) to those actually built (above right)

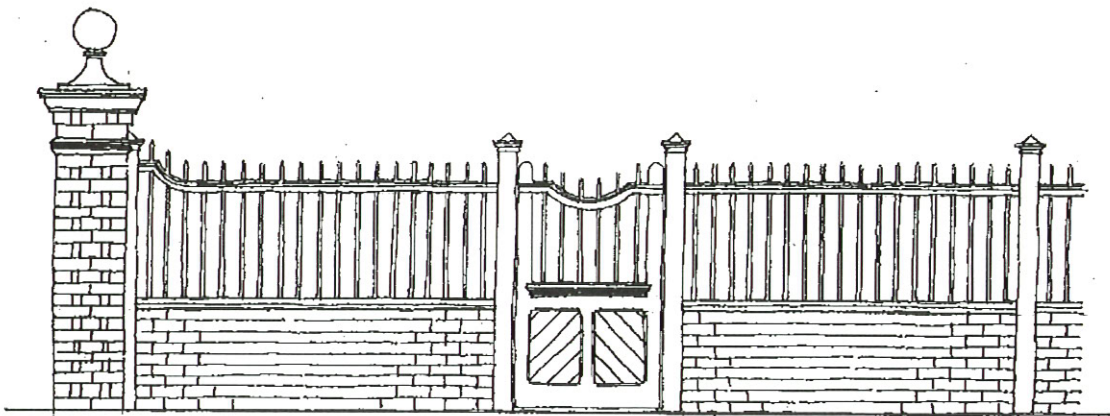


Fig 6: Palisade fence and gate (type E[†]) with brick pier and terracotta ball finial

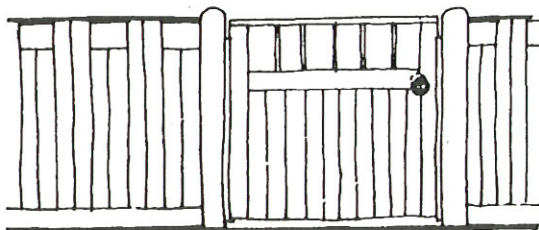


Fig 5: Low, close-boarded fence with perforations and simple gate with square section posts (type D[†])

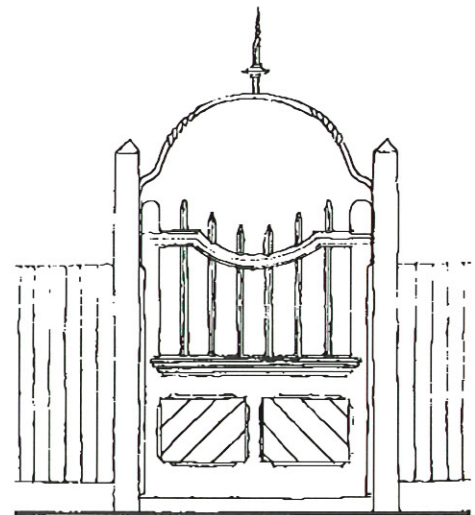


Fig 7: Close-boarded fence with simple oak posts, and palisade gate (type E[†])

Piers and finials

These are used as boundary markers or gate posts. (See illustration on previous page.) They should consist of 450mm (2 bricks) square brick piers, with ornamental capping in terracotta, surmounted by ball finials.

There are variations in the type of ball finial. E J May designed and used stone cappings with small stone balls at 8 and 10 Newton Grove, The Vicarage and The Orchard Stables.

Walls

Brick walls, one brick thick, and approximately 2m high, with piers, creasing tile or plinth bricks and half-round coping, were used mainly at the side or corner of a property to give privacy (eg The Vicarage).

Specification notes

Any new brickwork introduced must, as far as is possible, match that of the house, as must the pointing both in colour and style.

Where a wall is the only boundary it must be 225mm, (1 brick) thick with a plinth brick or creasing tile and half-round brick coping. When the brickwork is part of a palisade fence it should be 112mm thick (half brick) and in stretcher bond. (See technical notes on brickwork.)

All timber posts for high fences should be 6in square finished dimension, and 4in square for fences below

900mm, treated and set in concrete bases. They should be of unpainted oak if in a close-boarded fence, or painted white when part of a palisade fence.

All other timber in a palisade fence should be painted white. The spindles must be 1in square finished, be set at 45° to the line of the fence and have tapered tops. They should project 6in above the rail.

“Swan-necks” may be located at the extreme ends of the frontage, or at the intermediate posts, rarely both, but never at a gate post. It is true that many incorrect replacements can be found, but these should not be used as a pattern. Listed building consent should be obtained for both removal and replacement of fences. (See planning legislation section.)

Traditionally, close-boarded fences are made from oak. They should have gravel boards at the base, and any capping should also be in oak.

The detail design of the gate will vary with the type of fence. The overall height will be determined by that of the horizontal rail of the fence, and the height of the lower panel by its relationship with the brick, if in a palisade fence, or the overall proportion if in a close boarded fence. Gates should be sited in line with the front door or porch, except where there is an exceptional distance between them, as at 9 Queen Anne’s Gardens and 13 Marlborough Crescent.

Note: it is currently good practice to specify hardwood from sustainable forest supplies.

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Fig 8: Early lithographs and photographs like this one of Bath Road show an interesting mix of close-boarded and palisade fences, with close-boarded dominating, while on the left the School of Art has a post and chain link boundary marker