

## 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).