The triple line of ancient elms on **Ealing Common** which gave the house its name, have given way to splendid chestnut trees (planted by Charles Jones) which today provide Ealing school boys with thousands of conkers every autumn. The Common was the scene of the public reception to celebrate the granting of Ealing's Charter of Incorporation as a Borough on the 10th July, 1901 — the same day that the Shepherd's Bush to Southall Tramway opened. Crowds gathered to hear the Town Clerk read the unique charter which was the first this century, the first to be signed by Edward VII, and the first to be granted to any district in Middlesex. Over on the south-eastern side of the Common, a large grass-covered depression serves as a reminder of less pleasant historic events — bombing raids in 1940. Forty-two years later, this corner of the Common and houses in Elm Avenue are once again threated with extinction — this time by the Department of Transport who plan to widen the North Circular to four lanes from the Uxbridge Road to Gunnersbury Lane.

Fine houses began to line the west side of the Common after **Ealing Common Station** opened in 1879, and many survive today — although several large blocks of flats appeared on some of the prime sites in the between-war building boom. The **Grange Hotel,** on the corner of Warwick Road, took over the licence from an earlier inn called The Cricketer in 1873. Recently redecorated in the elegant style of an Edwardian gentlemen's club (complete with potted palms and comfy armchairs), the pub has a delightful atmosphere which is further enhanced by the absence of any juke-boxes or dreadful 'space-invader' machines. A good selection of hot or cold meals is always available and you'll find a large paved beer garden through the side entrance in Warwick Road, where food is served in a splendid wrought-iron-and-glass conservatory.

From the windows of the Grange, you can look across the Common to the site of another home of the famous, **Fordhook,** which used to stand on the north side of the Uxbridge Road, almost opposite the station. *Henry Fielding* bought the house as a country cottage in 1752 — perhaps with the profits from his novel 'Tom Jones', which had been published several years earlier and was not, as is popularly believed, written at Fordhook. He, too, had been attracted to Ealing because 'the air was the finest in Middlesex', but only stayed here for short periods — the last just a month before setting sail for Lisbon, where he died from dropsy a few weeks later. (The efficacious effects of Ealing's air were obviously not infallible, although, as made clear by the writer of a 19th century guide-book, the renowned improvement in general health was only assured if visitors were 'in good condition — and not absolutely ill before coming'!)

Fielding had also been a magistrate on the Middlesex bench — a position he took very seriously. A strict disciplinarian, he tried for many years to get a County poor-house erected at Acton Vale, which was to include a House of Correction for vagrants, with dungeons and fasting-rooms. Fortunately for the poor vagrants, this scheme never materialised. After his death, Henry's work was continued by his blind half-brother, *Sir John Fielding* (popularly known as the 'Blind Beak of Bow Street'), who was responsible for enrolling the first Bow Street Runners — the predecessors of our modern police force.

Fordhook later became the home of **Lady Noel Byron,** the founder of Ealing Grove School, but better known as the wife of the poet, Lord Byron. Their marriage only lasted a year as they separated soon after the birth of their daughter, Ada, whose own wedding took place at Fordhook in 1835. Lady Byron moved away from Ealing a few years later, but the gardens she had planted on the estate continued to attract attention until the old house was abolished c.1910.

You could end your walk on the Common, or make your way up to the **Uxbridge Road.** A ramble through Ealing's main shopping centre may not be your idea of recreation, but I should like to round off this chapter by telling you about some of the buildings in the Mall and Broadway — perhaps the information will come in useful the next time you're stuck in a queue for a cash-dispensing machine, or waiting for a bus.

A little over a century ago, shops lined the High Street and The Grove but this section of the Uxbridge Road was almost empty except for inns like the Bell and the Feathers, which served the carriage trade. Brickfields and a market garden covered most of the south side of the Broadway and, on the opposite side, a large rosery extended from North Common Road as far as the Bell. But, within a year of the Local Board taking over from the ineffectual Highway Board, new residences had sprung up along the newly kerbed and macadamised Uxbridge Road and, by the 1880's, many of these had already given way to promenades of shops and business premises. Today, the busy shopping centre on along the Mall and Broadway has the biggest turnover in the borough, and will no doubt become even more popular once the new Town Centre is completed in 1984.

The *Wood* family must have made a fortune as Ealing expanded and property values rose. They owned all the land north of the Uxbridge Road from the present Town Hall to the eastern boundary; but, like the Rothschilds, they were generous with their wealth and played a large part in Ealing's early development. **St. Matthew's Church** in North Common Road was built between the large detached houses on land donated by *Edward Wood* in 1883, after the small iron church in Grange Park had become too cramped for this fast-growing part of the parish.

Most of the large Victorian houses on the south side of **The Mall** have been converted into flats or offices and are beginning to show their age but, further along, two early-19th century houses (Nos. 42 - 3) have been well preserved and give a better idea of how smart this area must have been in the days when the alleyways between the houses led to their private stables, rather than the present series of small industrial firms.