
THE ISLINGTON SOCIETY

Incorporating **FOIL** FRIENDS OF ISLINGTON LIBRARIES

From the Editor, 7 Barnsbury Square, London N1 1JL

Unfortunately there is not a Summer issue of the Society's journal, but we bring you the President's thoughts on the future of planning in Islington in the light of recent changes, and a number of other items on matters of concern in our borough.

June 2002

WHITHER ISLINGTON'S PLANNING?

The Society's President, Harley Sherlock, regrets recent changes to the borough's planning procedures, but sees ways to make the best of the new system.

At the end of April I was one of about a dozen "users" of Islington's planning services who were interviewed by Audit Commission inspectors as part of their "Best Value" review of the planning department's performance. We included a very wide range of people, from local environmental activists such as Lisa Pontecorvo to well-known developers' architects such as Bryan Green; but there was a remarkable consensus among us as to the effect that the planning committee's decisions were usually sound, and that both developers and local residents living nearby generally got a fair hearing. We also took the view that the planning service's biggest shortcoming - poor enforcement of planning decisions - was caused mainly by the increasing shortfall in resources brought about by successive national governments which had given planning authorities more and more statutory responsibilities without the funding to match.

Against this background of general satisfaction with

Islington's planning service, the political decision to split the planning committee into four area committees (covering the geographical quadrants of the borough) and to abolish the Conservation Advisory Committee (CAC) altogether, seems surprising, to say the least. It also puts the Islington Society in a difficult position. We would be poor environmental watchdogs if we did not draw attention to what we regard as the Council's mistakes; but we have to recognise that, with the election results still ringing in its ears, the Liberal Democrat majority is in a very strong position.

The majority party's very strength, however, may allow it on occasion to modify its position (without being accused of weakness) if it is presented with arguments that it finds convincing.

I understand that the Council's indefatigable conservation officer, Alec Forshaw, is already working on ways of keeping going the CAC's panels for specific projects even if there is no longer a parent committee to

oversee them: thus retaining the voluntary expertise provided by the CAC in a manner consistent with the Council's policy of devolving decision-making on planning to the new local committees. If the remit of the former CAC panels could be widened to include all major planning applications - not just those that raise conservation issues - it may be possible to include on them the planning committee's advisory members. This would have the added advantage of retaining the voluntary expertise of the advisory members which might otherwise be lost when the present committee is broken up.

One of the Planning Committee's recent successes, admittedly not just in Islington but outside as well, was its rejection of the original proposals for the P&O site at King's Cross: which it is now generally acknowledged were very inferior to the proposals finally approved

after P&O had been shamed into changing its architect. I fear that a "local" planning committee, without the help of advisory members, might not have been able to stand up to the pressures that were brought to bear: not just by the developers but also by the Council's own officers.

The fact is, however, that whether we like it or not the Council has decided, in the name of democracy and with a democratic mandate, to decentralise the planning committee; and, as I see it, it is the Islington Society's duty to express its concern about the new system but, at the same time, help to make it work as well as possible. If the Council recognises that such constructive criticism is our aim, then we have a better chance of being listened to when we think that things are going wrong.

DAY FLATS by Alec Forshaw

The Day flats have not hitherto featured highly in accounts of Islington's architectural heritage or social history; until, that is, this excellent new monograph by Andrew Bosi. *The Story of Day Flats in and around Islington* is a tale of an unglamorous but significant aspect of the post-war re-building of Islington - one hundred or so infill blocks of residential flats, often mid-terrace, which replaced individual bomb sites peppered around the borough.

The introductory text explains, with a penchant for quirky detail, how the private enterprise of Day (Contractors) ran alongside the public endeavour of Islington Council in re-building the war-damaged streets, improving housing conditions, and providing new opportunities for home ownership. The main part of the text is an invaluable listing where, with typical thoroughness, the author provides vignette descriptions of each and every Day block.

Despite the whimsically idyllic names of many of the Day blocks - Meadhurst, Hermitage, Woodbank, Maycroft - these are generally unremarkable buildings architecturally which often go quite unnoticed. As the black and white photographs show, the designs and materials are mundane and unadventurous, and occasionally insensitive. It is

highly unlikely that any of these blocks will ever be statutorily listed. Yet it is also true that Day (Contractors) are in many ways the unsung heroes of post-war reconstruction in Islington, and an unforeseen influence on thousands of Islington residents: hence the value of this admirable and concise booklet.

The Story of Day Flats in and around Islington by Andrew Bosi
£5 from the Islington Society, 35 Britannia Row, N1 8HQ

CONTACT THE ELDERLY

Contact the Elderly is a long established charity which offers isolated elderly people the chance to go out to tea once a month.

The Islington group is in need of more volunteers as both drivers and hosts.

Drivers are asked to use their own cars to take two elderly people to the tea party each month.

Hosts are asked to provide a warm welcome and a simple tea once or twice a year. There are usually eight elderly people and four drivers. All that is required of the host's house is enough chairs in the sitting room and a downstairs lavatory.

If you are able to help please telephone Linda Roberts on 8464 7994.

THE THEATRE ON ISLINGTON GREEN

Planning permission was given in October 2000 for Piers Gough's *Midsummer Night's Dream* themed design for flats and a theatre on Islington Green: the final detailed planning agreement came through this April.

The theatre is to be funded by the sale of the flats and by revenue from restaurants on the site. The development is being undertaken by Fairbriar, the company of the site owner, Robert Bourne: his wife, Sally Greene is the founder of the Sam Collins Theatre Trust which will run the theatre.

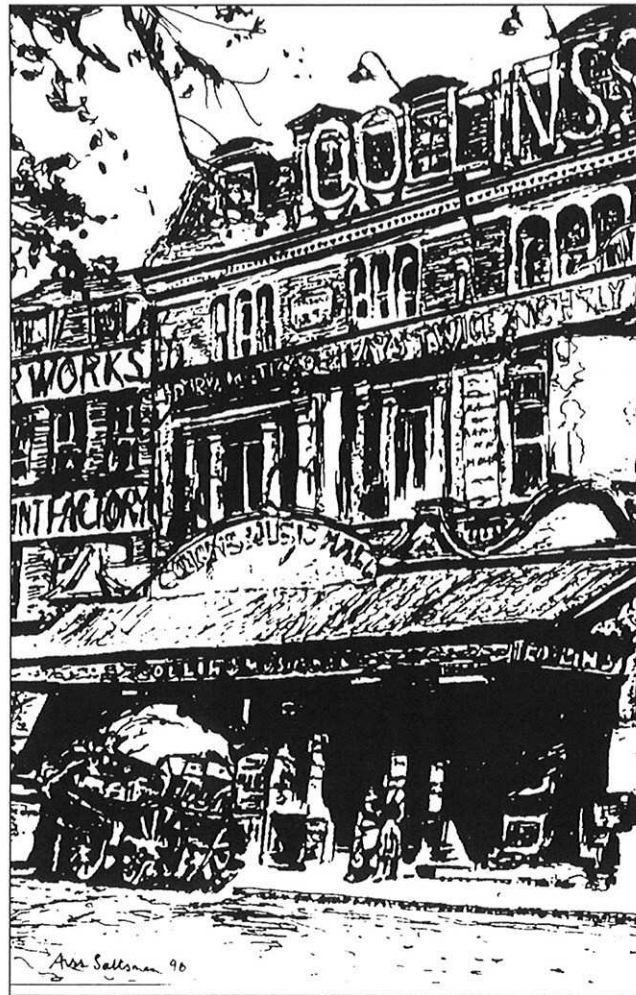
Avis Baldry, a tireless campaigner for the project and former chair of the Anderson's Yard Campaign Group, writes

It is now legally binding that a theatre must be built, that it must be run as a theatre, and that productions must take place before the last fifteen flats are occupied. Proof must be given that £2.17 million has been spent on the theatre; if it has not, the shortfall from this sum must be given to the public housing fund.

Fairbriar will work with the Council to seek local contractors and will make every effort to recruit workers from the borough.

Links will be made with Islington schools, colleges and universities to provide work experience placements, and to help to develop curricula and provide labour market information for teachers and lecturers.

When the theatre is running young people



The former Collins Music Hall on Islington Green. It was more correctly called Collins's as can be seen at the top of the building.

in Islington will be offered ten free performances, ten free drama lessons and ten free technical lessons annually.

Initially Fairbriar offered Islington Council £55,000 towards Islington Green refurbishment, but an extra £84,000 is now being spent by the company for traffic safety measures, for upgrading of the pavement to York stone, and to build a decorative lighting column

The construction work is due to begin around mid-July; and the theatre is expected to be operating by 2004.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Islington Society is at 7.30pm on **Wednesday 19 June** at the Town Hall. The speakers are Canon Dr Graham Kings of St Mary's, Upper Street, the Revd Dr Janet Wootton of Union Chapel, and Father Antony Conlon formerly of St Andrew's, Bunhill Row.

Two days later on **21 June at 6pm** the Bill Manley memorial pub crawl will begin at the Crown, Clerkenwell Green.

On **Wednesday 17 September** Alec Forshaw will speak on his book, *20th Century Buildings in Islington*. This is a joint meeting with Islington Archaeology and History Society and will begin at **8pm**.

LIVING STREETS - ISLINGTON

Christine Mabey, chair of the lively Islington branch of Living Streets, otherwise known as the Pedestrians Association, updates us on its activities.

WALKING AUDITS

Walking Audits rate high among the Living Streets current projects. A walking audit is what it says: walking a route and auditing its quality from the pedestrian perspective. There is now more emphasis on walking from both government and the GLA: the late DETR published *Encouraging walking: advice to local authorities*, and funds have come from the Mayor's office to improve conditions for pedestrians.

Islington Council commissioned Living Streets nationally to carry out an audit of the area from the Angel tube to Canonbury station. This was walked on a number of occasions and twice with local members and representatives of community groups; Andrew Bosi came from the Islington Society.

The report highlights the horrors of the sheep pen at the Angel, the dangers of trying to cross by Islington Green, the poor street maintenance, and makes many good recommendations.

George Allan, now one of the eight members of Islington Council cabinet, pledged his party to implement the report's recommendations.

The next audit, commissioned by the council, is from King's Cross to the Angel. Anyone who has ever travelled to King's Cross Thameslink, perhaps from Gatwick with a heavy case, and then tried to cross the road to catch a bus will know that the pedestrian's needs at this point are totally disregarded.

We look forward to that audit.

PEDESTRIANS' HUSTINGS

Just before the municipal elections Islington Living Streets scored a first - a council election hustings meeting entirely devoted to environmental matters. All four parties expressed their commitment to improving conditions for walking.

The concerns of members present were litter and dirt on main roads, parking on dropped kerbs, the hazards of street furniture, and the old bugbear of cyclists on the pavement.

Parents of young children were keen to get more of the young to



Puppets from the threatened **Little Angel Theatre** which has been part of Islington's cultural identity ever since it was set up by the late John Wright and his wife, Lyndie Wright, more than 40 years ago.

The theatre is now closed. It can re-open in the autumn only if the vigorous efforts of high-profile supporters are successful and adequate funding is assured.

CHANGES TO THE LIBRARY SERVICE

HEAD OF SERVICE

A change that has taken many people by surprise is that after 14 years with Islington libraries, twelve of them as head of the service, Liz Roberts is leaving us at the end of July. We wish her well. She will surely appear elsewhere on the London library scene.

Since Liz was appointed Borough Librarian she has had a number of different titles as the library service has been buffeted from one short-lived department to another. It has now come to rest in the new department of regeneration and education: this seems entirely satisfactory as libraries undoubtedly have an important role to play in the regeneration of inner city Islington.

As has happened in so many other boroughs the departure of the head of the library service has brought the downgrading of the post before the next incumbent is appointed, which is regrettable.

The new head of the library service will



report to an assistant director of regeneration and education who will have responsibility for early years, youth inclusion, and library services: one of two newly created assistant director posts.

The new assistant director is expected to have knowledge and experience in only one of the three areas of responsibility. If he/she does not come from the library world it will mean that the most senior officer with library expertise will not be senior enough to carry a great deal of weight; probably not enough to secure the best decisions for the library service, or an appropriate share of the budget.

This is a matter of concern to all Islington library users.

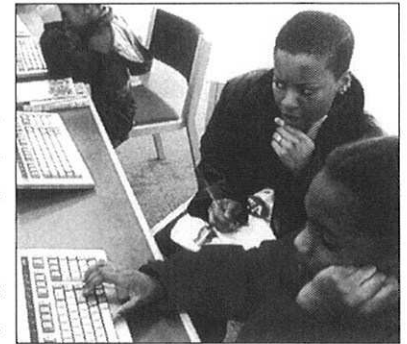
SOME NEW INVESTMENT

A more welcome change is the recent injection of some capital expenditure into our public libraries. This year it has paid for the refurbishment of Central Lending, making it lighter and brighter, and providing more space for computers.

Archway Library has also been refurbished and re-designed.

Next year the investment will be in Finsbury and South Libraries. At Finsbury a single local history library for the

whole borough will be opened on the ground floor. This will be formed by the amalgamation of the Finsbury



collection now on the first floor at St John Street and the Islington collection now at Central. Producing a single catalogue will be a mammoth task: the two collections are classified by very different schemes.

The refurbishment at South Library will provide accommodation for a number of computers and the introduction of a community learning project.

The year after, money will be put into the new larger Lewis Carroll Children's Library which is being built as planning gain from the Naish Court development. The new library will also be able to provide some service for adults.

The major focus, however, will be the new library at Finsbury Park which will open as part of City and Islington College's Lifelong Learning Centre. Because it is a unique joint project many aspects of the service have yet to be planned, and many decisions yet to be made.

What is promised at present is that it will be open long hours including evenings and Sundays; there will be excellent reference resources and study space, a good supply of

computers, and at least 50% more lending stock than in Arthur Simpson Library which it replaces.

Arthur Simpson Library will not close until the new library is open, even if it is delayed – a fate often suffered by large building projects.

LONDONWIDE

The London Libraries Development Agency has taken very much less time than expected to introduce its scheme to allow public library users to have access to the reference resources of academic and other higher education libraries throughout London.

Forms of recommendation can be obtained from public libraries for visits to the libraries of specified institutions.

LLDA is also well on the way to bringing in a single library ticket for all London public library users which will be accepted throughout the capital.

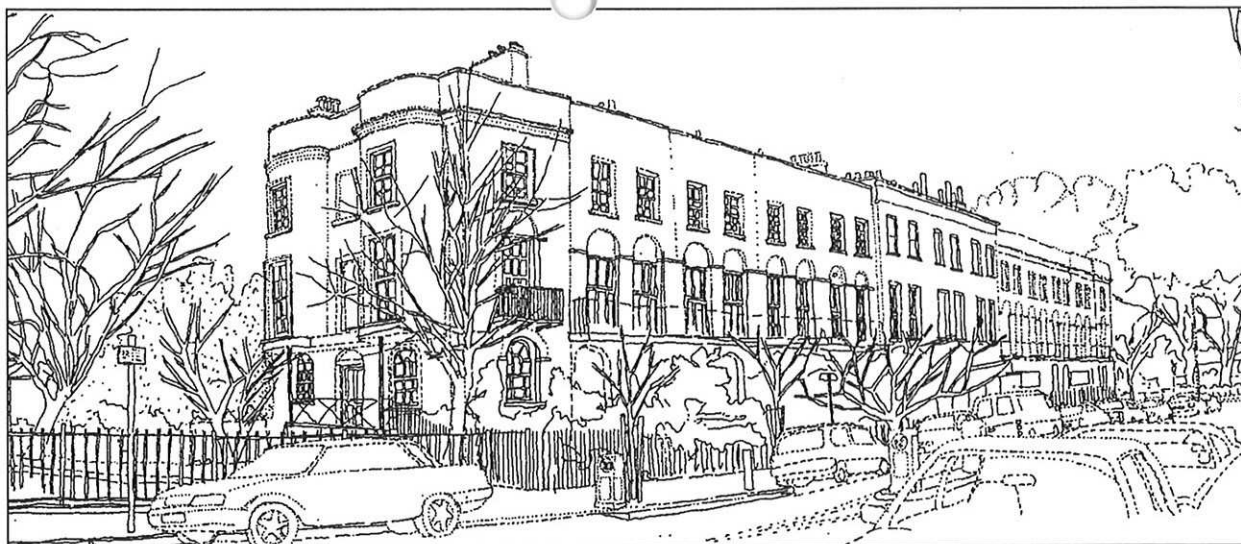
NATIONWIDE

The Minister for the Arts, Tessa Blackstone, has set out to develop a new strategic framework for the public library service.

To this end there is a process of consultation with library professionals and other key stakeholders, beginning with a series of workshops at the DCMS in June.

The Society's editor and FOIL co-ordinator, Kathleen Frenchman, has been invited to participate in one of the workshops.

Lady Blackstone is planning to publish a public library policy document in the autumn. KF



The terrace as it would be if restored with the rebuilt 161 looking over Barnard Park

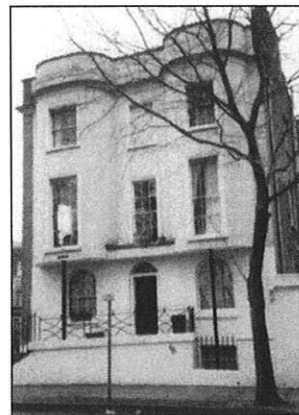
BRUNSWICK TERRACE

In days gone by 161 to 185 Barnsbury Road constituted an elegant early 19th century terrace completed by a pavilion at either end with double bows supported on stilts.

It was built in 1820 as Brunswick Terrace (1-13) and retained the name until 1864. Since the demolition in the 1960s of war damaged streets and the creation of Barnard Park (much needed green space) 161 has been missing, leaving a rough end wall.



The rough end wall of number 163



The north end pavilion looking over Thornhill Gardens

Islington architect James Dunnett is conducting a one-man campaign to rebuild the end house to restore the symmetry of the terrace and to provide a stylish elevation to face Barnard Park.

Rebuilding 161 would require the sacrifice of 87.5 square metres of green space, about 0.02% of the park's 4.5 hectares.