

ISLINGTON *news*

The Journal of the Islington Society incorporating FOIL folio

Mayor's office says affordable target is unaffordable

Argent secured planning permission from Camden after a two-day meeting of its planning committee in March. This was followed by an endorsement from the Mayor, who eschewed his power to call in the scheme despite its failure to meet the 50% target for affordable homes. The report accepted the developers view that to provide 50% of homes in the affordable sector would not be financially sustainable.

Proportion of affordable homes

The 50% target is higher than that set by the last Liberal administration in Islington. One of the Labour party pledges was to increase the Islington target, currently 35%, to that set by the Mayor. It has been argued that smaller developments find it difficult to meet the target, but they don't come much bigger than the 59 acres of King's Cross. If the target is unaffordable here, the chances of attaining it anywhere must be slim. However, it is not the proportion that is important to the Islington Society, so much as the quantity and the quality. The number of homes in the total scheme has been welcomed by the Society, which has argued for a more even distribution of them: some in the southern part of the site, fewer crammed on to the triangle site. The Society therefore welcomed the decision of the West Area Committee, at its last meeting before the election, to reduce the number planned for the triangle site from 246 to 200.

Quality of affordable homes

Other Societies in the London Forum have expressed concern about the high densities that result from insistence on the 50% proportion. However, in evidence to the Forum, the Islington Society referred to the quality issues that arise from an insufficient provision of larger family homes, and from use of the least attractive areas for the affordable homes. Examples include the housing associated with the Arsenal development (close to the railway, or the refuse department) as well as the triangle site at King's Cross.

Election changes

The local elections brought changes in both Islington and Camden. Since the outgoing council leaders were in favour of the King's Cross scheme and the opposition parties against, the results are highly significant for King's Cross. It was a bad night for leaders: the Labour leader of Camden and Steve Hitchins in Islington both lost their seats, as did the Deputy leader in Islington and the leader of the Conservatives in Camden.

Devil in the detail

Although Camden has approved the King's Cross outline planning permission, the detail of the associated section 106 agreement has to come back to committee. Until this is agreed and signed, the permission is incomplete. Moreover, since it is an outline permission there will be many more matters of detail before anything is built. The Green Party, successful in winning seats on both councils, is reportedly pursuing other legal routes to delay or have amended the permission in place. Finally, the amendments insisted upon by Islington's West Area Committee have to be squared with the decision of Camden council. The borough boundary remains unchanged for the time being, and thus follows the line of the former York Way. Consequently the site is in both Boroughs and requires the approval of both. The main site requires only that Camden consider the observations of the neighbouring borough before reaching its decision.

Camden is to be run by a Tory-LibDem coalition. The Islington election results are reported on page two.

Liberal Democrat majority now dependent on Mayor's casting vote

The Council elections brought changes in Islington that appeared to buck the National trend. Labour won the largest share of the popular vote, but the ruling Liberal Democrats retained half the seats and, like Labour in 1998, control with the support of the Mayor's casting vote. The Leader and Deputy lost their seats in St. Peter's and Barnsbury; the new leader scraped in by only 34 votes and Labour's deputy leader was also third in a ward split between two parties.

However, the result did match a pattern found elsewhere in London. Where Councils had relatively recently changed hands, there was a noticeable restoration of the *status quo ante*. So Labour returned in Lambeth, the Tories in Croydon, and the Liberals in Richmond. It was in the inner London area - Islington South rather than North, that Labour recovered lost ground. Labour now has a majority in West Area, made gains in North and South but lost out in the East where the Greens are represented in Islington for the first time.

Inevitably there will be debate about which issues influenced voters most. The ruling party sought to make much of Labour's national difficulties and the perception of sleaze at the very top, but this may have back-fired in the wake of the inconclusive Standards Board investigation into the way the Chief Executive appointment was conducted, or payment of the highest councillors' allowances in the country in what is the second smallest London Borough.

Local issues included parking, planning

issues around Arsenal and King's Cross, and the perception of youth crime and policy on Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). This Society has eschewed the more Populist line on parking because we recognise that the shortage of space means some regulation is inevitable. Better to achieve this with permits and parking zones that bring income to the Borough than wastefully through the costs of congestion. However, the draconian way in which enforcement has been carried out, with car owners denied the time to purchase and display their permit, has brought the regime into disrepute.

Similarly, the Society is not opposed to higher density development. The Borough's formal policy documents include welcome caveats to protect quality. Unfortunately, there has been an over-eagerness to ignore those caveats whenever a big developer has appeared. When the pro-development line met irresistible local opposition and a happy compromise resulted, on the P & O site at King's Cross, the Leader missed a trick in not accepting the outcome with better grace.

OFFICERS OF THE ISLINGTON SOCIETY

President (2006-): Lord Smith of Finsbury

Vice Presidents: Mary Cosh, Harley Sherlock

Chairman: Andrew Bosi,
The Croft, Wall Street, London, N.1 000

☎ 020 7-354 8514

e✉ AndrewBosi@aol.com

Vice-chairman: Alan Turner,
62, Northchurch Road, London, N.1 3NY

☎ 020 7-226 2053

e✉ alanturner@waitrose.com

Secretary: Stan Westwood,
262, Upper Street, London, N.1 2NY

☎ 020 7-226 4166

e✉ preppres@aol.com

Treasurer: Donald Mitchell,
63, Cloudesley Road, London, N.1 0EL

☎ 020 7-278 6573

e✉ donald.mitchell6@btinternet.com

Membership Secretary: Bob O'Dell,
35, Britannia Row, London, N.1 8QH

☎ 020 7-434 2494

e✉ bobodell57@hotmail.com

Opportunity missed

With unrest about parking at Arsenal's new stadium in the community, and Transport for London critical of Islington's approach to regenerating Finsbury Park, Andrew Bosi looks at what might have been at Drayton Park.

As the new Arsenal stadium opens its doors, amid criticism of over-development to pay for it, visitors to the stadium might be puzzled by the sight that greets them as they walk across the new bridge to the ground. To the south they may notice a huge swathe of derelict land. Looking more closely, they may detect a small railway platform, probably unoccupied, but just occasionally they might see a train stop, people alighting and heading off in the opposite direction.

This derelict land is the site of the former Drayton Park depot. Landlocked by a railway to the east, and Bryantwood Road to the south (some twenty feet up), it is not ideal development land, but it could and should have been used to widen the platform or create a second platform, which would then offer a direct link to the stadium bridge. That it did not was down to naïvety on the part of Arsenal, unhelpful competition between different public transport operators, and a lack of competition for transport planning skills due to decline in the level of demand over decades.

The Great Northern & City line, from Finsbury Park to Moorgate, was proposed in 1892 and opened in 1904. It was then isolated from the rest of the network, with an independent operator, and so its depot had to be self-sufficient. Drayton Park depot was designed in 1902 and built by S. Pearson & Son. In September 1913, the whole operation was taken over by the Metropolitan Railway, but its relative physical isolation ensured that all but major overhaul work continued to be undertaken from Drayton Park.

The depot continued to operate in this way until the 1960s. The first tube map shows the line as part of the Met., but by the end of the thirties tube stock was replacing its underground trains. A new signal-box was built to the north, roughly where the new bridge is now constructed. The line was now the Northern City branch and there were plans to extend along the LNER through its stations at Stroud Green and Crouch End, joining the Northern line at Highgate from whence it would run to East Finchley or branch off through Cranleigh Gardens and Muswell Hill to Alexandra

Palace. Although the war curtailed work on the Ally Pally line, which subsequently closed in 1954, the option of extending to East Finchley was still under active consideration in 1963.

By this time the future of the line was subject to two major projects. One was the electrification of suburban services to Hertfordshire; the other the Victoria line. The Victoria line required use of one of the Northern city tunnels and platforms at Highbury, and its Finsbury Park terminus. As well as considerable disruption during construction, the need to cut back the Northern city to Drayton Park seriously undermined its value. In the event this is what happened because the Victoria line opened in 1969 whereas it was not until 1975 that the BR take-over took effect, with through trains from Hertford and Welwyn Garden City from 1976.

During this prolonged period of doubt, dithering and obfuscation, the future of the Drayton Park depot and replacement of its ancient rolling stock and outdated signalling were subject to the same delay. Any newer carriages cascaded from other tube lines extended the length of the train and Drayton Park depot, the only part of the line open to the elements, was cramped for space. The Great Northern electrics sealed its fate and after use for storage during construction it closed in 1976 and was demolished in 1979. The land has been derelict ever since.

By the time Arsenal settled on the Ashburton Grove site, the Great Northern electrics were in the hands of a bus company and very much the poor relation of its GNER neighbour. Transport for London had just been created and quickly established a monopoly on transport planning expertise in London. Its interest in the Piccadilly line, and lack of control over heavy rail services, ensured that Arsenal's money went on to upgrading Holloway Road, a much needed measure which added nothing to capacity of the railways apart from one individual station, while the spare capacity at Drayton Park is such that it is always closed by the time the final whistle blows.

First Capital Connect took over the GN electrics on April 3rd this year.

The Decline and rise of London Buses

In the second article in this series, begun in our Winter 2005/6 issue, Andrew Bosi turns his attention to the changes in bus design.

London Transport spent four years perfecting the Routemaster bus after it first appeared at the Commercial Motor Show in 1954. That appearance was itself three years after thoughts had first turned to the need for a replacement for the RT bus, although after extensive trials on four selected routes it initially replaced the trolleybuses. Many of the refinements concerned ease of maintenance, but appearance (the red bus was a tourist icon even then) and comfort were specified in the confidential document detailing the new bus. Comfort was seen as essential to counter the growing ownership of private cars.

The RM remains popular with users and has stood the test of time because of its high proportion of comfortable seats, which are accessible to the significant group of users who suffer a mild form of physical disability which falls short of formal registration (the "ambulant but frail"). It is well-appointed with grab rails, particularly at the one point where there is a significant step; there is the ease of boarding and alighting; the vehicles are relatively cool in hot weather; the ride is generally relatively smooth; the bell is easily located (in the lower saloon) and of course there is a conductor who if he or she is competent and interested in the job provides physical assistance and reassurance to those who need them.

Nonetheless, it would be surprising if in fifty years improvements in design had not been developed. It is disappointing that, in making such developments, many of the design features that made the RM so attractive were lost.

Extended length - discussed in greater detail below. The effect was to provide eight additional seats, and a further 2' 6" of standing room. One oddity is that the four vertical grab rails were not increased to five.

Lighting - tungsten bulbs replaced by fluorescent tubes - generally well received, though traditionalists disagree.

More powerful engines - these have increased maximum speed and reduced emissions but at some cost to smoothness of journey

Replacement of quarter-drop windows on a minority of vehicles - the replacements allow less fresh air into the bus.

Lighter colours and tactile grab rails - these have

improved provision for partially sighted users particularly

It will be seen from the foregoing that the main areas of concern in more recent bus design are the lack of accessible seats; poor ventilation; inadequate or poorly sited bell-pushes and the lack of assistance where required. Older people in particular like the cross benches over the wheelbase of a RM: it is easier to access than to leave! Modern buses vary in the provision between the two doors, but it is here that seats would be most welcome. Tall people like seats behind other seats, wherein feet can be accommodated out of other people's way. Seats facing one another are not popular, but are far worse when there is no grab rail within reach or where the seat slopes down rather than up, so that a sudden jolt throws the passenger into a neighbour's lap rather than back into her or his own seat. The biggest disaster is Transport for London's insistence on a straight staircase. Not only does this severely reduce the scope for seats downstairs; it is easier to limit one's fall on a spiral staircase than a straight one. The ventilation is a real problem with global warming and hotter summers than in the past. Presumably safety considerations limit the aperture of windows but it is a sorry day when the irresponsibility of a few leads to the discomfort of the many.

The problem of the bell-pushes is exacerbated by the plethora of different buses now in use. The issue of the continuous bell was reviewed prior to the 1990s RM refurbishment programme. There is no reason why it should not be perpetuated on modern buses. At one time buses had a strip bell to push which looked neater but had poor contact. The ability to ring the bell audibly, just once, is more important than aesthetic considerations.

The lack of someone to conduct passengers leads to frustrating increases in dwell times as well as inconvenience to passengers trying to reach a seat. People who are being encouraged to use a bus since the 1960s seem to need education about consideration for others, perhaps because most of them are male. In particular the problem of bunching around the doors persists and there is little a driver can do on his or her own.

It follows from this that the capacity of the bus is influential on the passenger perception of the quality of the ride. In the 1960s LT was adamant that the 64-seat bus represented the optimal capacity in London, for all that higher capacity buses were in use elsewhere. (There has been some rewriting of history, suggesting that this was a Trade Union position designed to protect jobs, but it was a view widely held within the management of LT.) Later, as described above, the production of Routemasters was switched to 72-seat buses, and the refurbishment programme of the 1990s was largely confined to the 72-seaters. More recently, 64-seaters have been refurbished as 72-seaters have been withdrawn. The benefits of the articulated bus, possibly overstated, have led to capacity over 140 spread between three points of access or egress with no clear analysis of the degree of equality of use of the three. Moreover, there are fewer seats than on a Routemaster and if the increased capacity brings a reduction in off-peak frequency this would be serious issue for older people whose main use of buses is between the peaks.

Clearly the optimum capacity is a finite number, since a bus of infinite capacity would require infinite dwell times to load and unload. Given the long-established belief that conditions in London differ from those elsewhere to a significant degree, and the extent of vehicle trials in the past, it would be sensible for Transport for London to carry

out some qualitative research into optimal capacity before further changes in design are made.

When Ken Livingstone increased the fleet of Routemasters and brought back conductors on Sundays, work resumed on designing the "Son of Routemaster". Capital Transport Campaign had proposed this as long ago as 1987, as part of its then successful campaign against One Person Operation. After an apparent attempt by London Transport to resume the attack on conductors in 1995/6, support for the "Son of Routemaster" spread to the Minister for Transport in London, the Shadow Minister, and one of the major bus manufacturers. The idea was then dropped without explanation with the *volte face* of late 2002. Nonetheless, calls for such a bus continue to be made, most recently by Transport 2000.

Such a vehicle should provide step-free access to all seats in the lower saloon. It would probably have two points of entry, that at the rear predominantly for the upper saloon. The second entrance might be locked off outside the peaks to provide space for a second wheelchair or additional seating. The open platform is essential but safety could be improved by a door half-way up the stairs which can be pushed open on ascent but would arrest a fall on the way down.

The third and final part of this series will appear in a future issue.



In 2004 Blake Cotterill, a student at Coventry University, won a \$5,000 prize in an international competition for his concept of a 21st Century Routemaster. The illustration above (©Blake Cotterill) shows how it combined a futuristic appearance with the traditional look of a half-cab, front engine and rounded body.

*Book Review***Time Out: London for Londoners**

Time Out has produced "the ultimate handbook to living in the city", a comprehensive guide to shops pubs restaurants schools and crime in public transport zones 1-3.

Attractively illustrated, each area (generally Borough based) commences with a good local map. Opinions are expressed not only by the editorial team but by individual citizens. Inevitably there will be dispute about the pubs or shops listed and those not. The authors have not limited themselves to the main thoroughfares, so that for example the *Mucky Pup* gets a deserved mention. On the other hand, it is disappointing that the *Duke of Wellington* has missed out (strictly it belongs in the Hackney section, where there is less to write about).

The usual prejudices against our secondary schools are reinforced, with Ofsted failures not contrasted with those schools in the top hundred for value added or most improved. And Islington's youth gets a particularly bad press too. However, there are pleasant surprises as well: we emerge as one of the most bike-friendly Boroughs.

Further afield, devotees of Romford market will be disappointed by the omission of Havering from the book's coverage. Croydon also misses out. However, within the defined area, coverage is comprehensive and the local maps are supplemented by the full public transport map for zones 1 to 6. The book is bang up-to-date as well, with Council Tax levels for 2006/7 even though advance copies were released in March.

Available from bookshops. ISBN 1-904978-52-5. £12.99

Books with an Islington Society connection

The recent publication of a book jointly written by our President Chris Smith reminds us that a number of worthy tomes written by Officers of the Society or published by us are currently on sale.

Suicide of the West, by Richard Koch and Chris Smith published by Continuum at £14.99 and available on Amazon.

A History of Islington, by Mary Cosh, published by Historical publications at £18.95, ISBN 0-948667-974

Villagers Five Shillings, by Harley Sherlock, published by the Bourne Society at £4.50, ISBN 0-900992-54-9

Cities are Good for Us, by Harley Sherlock, published by Paladin at £6.99, ISBN 0-586-09054-1

[both of Harley's books are available from the author]

Twentieth Century Buildings in Islington, by Alec Forshaw, published by the Islington Society at £14.95, ISBN 0-9541490-0-9

The Story of Day Flats in and around Islington, by Andrew Bosi, published by the Islington Society at £5, ISBN 0-9541490-1-7

[both of the Society's publications are available from the Society at 35, Britannia Row, London, N.1]

George Baxter, 1804-67

In this issue, we resume our series on the Blue Plaques of Islington, compiled by our vice-chairman Alan Turner.

As some readers will recall, this series of articles deals with the lesser-known people commemorated by Blue Plaques, rather than the likes of Benjamin Britten, Joseph Chamberlain, Anton Bruckner and Michael Faraday who also lived in Islington. I had never heard of George Baxter until I started this article but it seems that he was a very significant figure in his day. I could find little about him in the usual places, but the British Library (on-line) had one reference to him under the heading of 'Victorian Book Illustration'. However, I eventually found that the Victoria University Library, Toronto has a lot of information about him in one of their Special Collections and this provided a useful source material for this article.

He lived at 11 Northampton Square which was demolished in 1967 to allow for the expansion of the City University. The plaque is situated to the left of the entrance to the university in Northampton Square. From 1844 to 1860, while living at this address, he developed a new process to produce colour prints from oil-based inks. His aim was to produce good quality prints that could be sold at prices that ordinary people could afford, so that art was not restricted to those who lived in 'palaces'. His process involved block printing to apply colour to engravings and etchings. He said the results were "...far superior in appearance to those which are coloured by hand". Some of the prints required over thirty blocks which would have called for great skill to keep them in register. This was even more remarkable given that the machines he used were already 30 years out-of-date. In addition to his prints Baxter was a successful portrait painter with 11 works in the National Portrait Gallery, including those of Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington. This aspect of his work is not usually mentioned in references; his fame resting entirely on his prints.

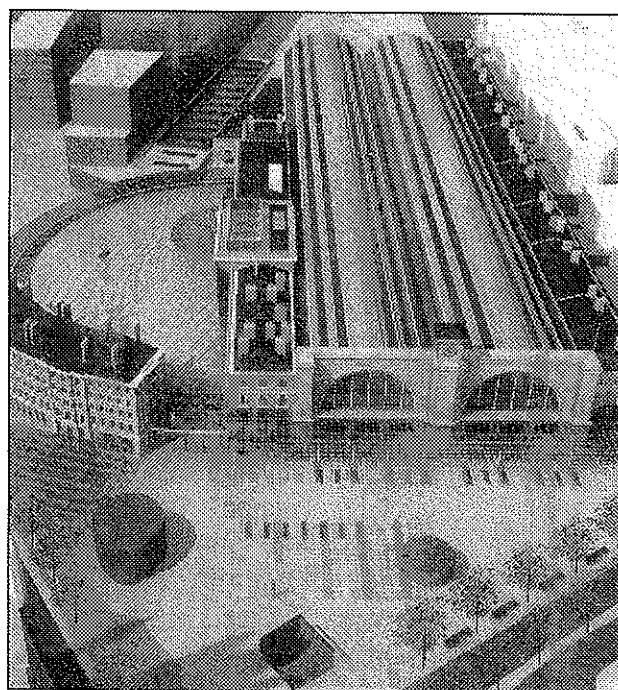
Baxter was obviously a gifted innovator but it seems that his talents did not include a highly developed business sense and he was constantly in debt. He applied to have his patents extended and the judge (Lord Brougham) was very sympathetic and saw Baxter's efforts as a useful contribution to the common good - he called the printing process a 'public utility'. It is interesting to read the somewhat paternalistic views of the judge who clearly wished to improve the minds and morals of the working class. Referring to Baxter's process he said:

It is acheap pleasure and....far more innocent than many other pleasures to which

they have recourse. It is of an improving nature to their minds and whatever works tend to give taste of a refined and intellectual nature to the working people are of very great benefit....to their morals and their good conduct in society. Therefore, their Lordships are of the opinion that it is a valuable invention in every sense. It has not, however, been valuable to the patentee.

Baxter became bankrupt in 1865 and died two years later from injuries received in an omnibus accident. Although his name is little remembered today, he was clearly one of those sincere Victorians who tried to combine commerce with a contribution to society in general. He failed in the first, but his legacy is in his innovative work in printing processes, no doubt to the advantage of today's printmakers.

AT



The above photograph is of the planned entrance to King's Cross. Unlike the plans for the Railway Lands themselves (see front page), the new entrance has received widespread acclaim. Not only is the carbuncle removed, revealing once again the magnificent 1854 station frontage; the Great Northern Hotel is incorporated into the plan which reflects the need to accommodate large numbers of people interchanging between King's Cross mainline, St. Pancras International and the new tube station ticket halls. The Western ticket hall opened at the end of May. The final construction project is the Northern ticket hall, which will provide a gateway to the new Railway Lands development.

Meek inherit Holloway Road

In the 1950's and 1960's the name on the shop fascia at 304 Holloway Road was W.H.SHENTON with 'travel goods, handbags, leather and grindery'.

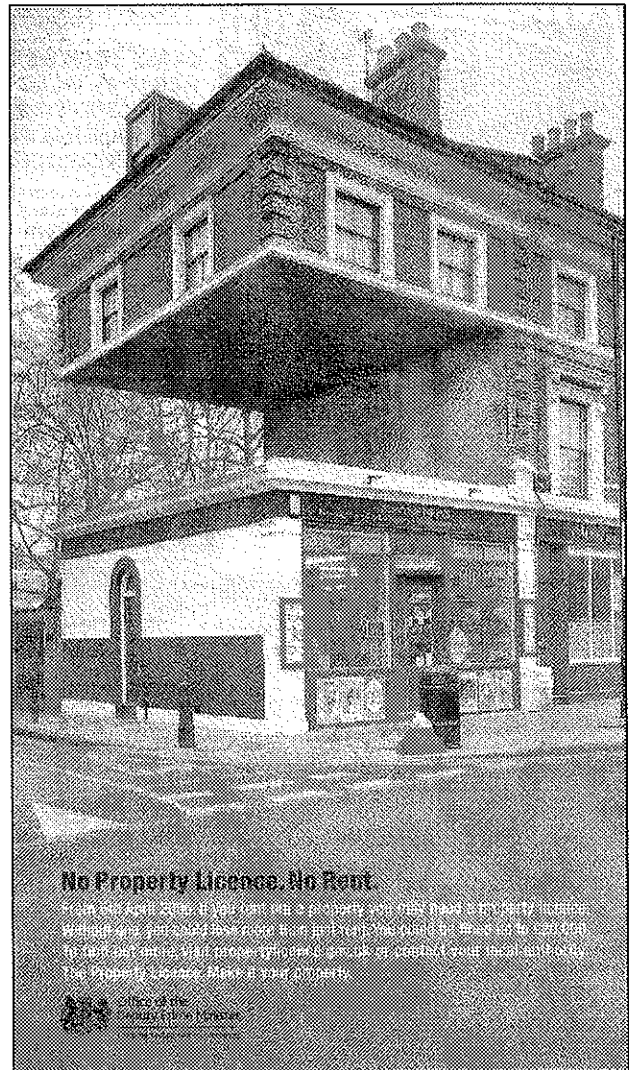
An unremarkable shop and an address which would have no particular significance had it not been for a young ambitious sound engineer persuading Mrs. Shenton in 1957 to rent out the three-storey residential part above the shop.

The sound engineer was Joe Meek who was to become Britain's first independent record producer and who saw the premises above the shop as a potential recording studio. He wanted to create a new sound for a new era and as his reputation as a gifted and inventive record producer quickly grew so did the queue of teenage musicians flocking to No.304 in the hope of an audition. However, he had a reputation for being hard to please and most left disappointed.

By far his most successful record with which his name will always be associated is Telstar which was released in August 1962. Inspired by the launch of the first telecommunications satellite which made it possible to send T.V images across the Atlantic, Meek wrote and recorded Telstar with Billy Fury's backing group The Tornados. He purposely distorted the sound using secret sound devices which he had invented in order to create the haunting new sound he had set out to achieve.

Telstar was enormously successful selling 5 million records worldwide and was a No.1 hit in both Britain and America. However a French composer sued him for plagiarism. During the resultant court case all royalties were frozen leading to severe financial problems.

Joe Meek never managed to repeat the success of Telstar. As some of the teenagers that he had turned down at those early auditions become International Stars (David Bowie, Rod Stewart and The Beatles amongst them), his own career went into sharp decline. On 3rd February 1967 after a heated row with his landlady two gunshots were heard at 304, Holloway Road. Mrs. Shenton was found dead at the bottom of the stairs and Joe Meek was found dead in his Studio. It happened on the 8th anniversary of the death in a plane crash of his idol Buddy Holly. S.W.



Although this is not what we think Norman Beddington has in mind in his article on the opposite page, it provides an illustration of the threat to local shops. This well known local shop made an unexpected appearance in the National press at the end of March 2005. We do not know if the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, as it then was, paid any royalties to the Alwyne News; or indeed how a Victorian terrace came into our Vice President's garden.

The editors welcome letters and contributions from members. The next edition of the newsletter is planned for the late autumn and the copy deadline is November 1st. But there is no need to wait to the last minute: copy sent electronically to the chairman at the e-mail address on page two can be stored until required.

Our Local Shops - Essential to Urban Life, or Irrelevant in a supermarket dominated age?

Norman Beddington outlines the case for the next Islington Society campaign

Keen observers of the Islington scene over the past few decades will have noted the ongoing decline of the local shop. I have been a resident of the borough for the past 26 years, but seem only to have really noticed how many of our local shops have vanished in the past year or two. Perhaps the reasons were that the sheer number of corner shops and small parades in existence in the 1980's meant that it didn't seem to matter that some of them closed, and that in the larger parades most shops kept the ground floor in use, albeit non-retail uses such as estate agents and solicitors.

However recent events now make a very good case for us to campaign to retain the remaining local shops in the borough (and throughout the UK). It is becoming apparent that many of our remaining neighbourhood and local parades, and corner shops, are in crisis; many small parades have lost all or most of their retailers, while corner shops continue to close throughout the borough. Neighbourhood centres such as Caledonian Road and Whitecross Street have lost many convenience shops in the past few years; smaller parades such as St Peters Street and Hornsey Road (near Marlborough Rd.) have lost almost all their essential shops. Even my own local centre, Amwell Street, is on the verge of viability, having lost its baker, Post Office, greengrocer and small grocer in recent years. Of 14 neighbourhood or local centres, only Archway, Finsbury Park, Newington Green and especially Highbury Barn are really vital.

We should ask whether or not this seemingly inexorable process matters in an age of high car ownership and shopping patterns focused on the supermarket. There are several reasons why we should be concerned. Local shops have been part of the community fabric since Islington was built in Georgian and Victorian times, and for many people they provide essential human contact as well as goods and services; in regeneration terms they can act as important suppliers of fresh food for low-income groups, and for elderly and disabled people who may not find it easy to use public transport to access a super-market; local shops usually provide a personal service and knowledge rarely encountered in a supermarket or chain shop. They are also particularly important to many ethnic minority communities. Locally there is a low rate of local car ownership (below 50%), and a fine grain of local shopping provision, meaning that few residents need to walk more than 300-400 yards to access their local shops. Thus sustainable means of transport, and

reducing CO₂ emissions become eminently feasible.

What can be done to assist our local shopkeepers to remain in business? A good start would be for Islington Council to take notice of the crisis facing many local shopping centres. Currently all attention seems to be focused on the Town Centres at the Angel and the Nags Head, apart from foisting an unnecessary (and unwanted) supermarket on Archway. Away from the A1 Corridor, the retail strategy recently produced for the Local Development Process deals only with Caledonian Road, Newington Green and Whitecross Street, ignoring all other local centres. Appointing a retail specialist would enable the Council to prepare a strategy for all local centres in the borough. An alternative approach would be to extend the successful Town Centre Manager system in place at the Nag's Head and the Angel to cover local shopping parades, working with shopkeepers and residents. There are now some signs, indicated in a recent report by the Sustainability Strategy Committee, that the Council is thinking of developing a strategy to support retailers.

Although the Unitary Development Plan, now being replaced by the Local Development Framework, has strong-sounding policies on the protection of designated shopping parades and of key shops, in practice these are not much policed or enforced - partly because no-one is empowered to replace key retailers when one moves or goes out of business. A new approach across all relevant Council departments to supporting local shops is required, one which would identify why some centres such as Newington Green and Finsbury Park are relatively successful (probably due to their clear roles in servicing the local Turkish and Greek communities, and in retailing clothing). One approach, devised by Islington Transport Aware and local shopkeepers, and supported by local residents, aims to provide a range of environmental improvements to Highbury Barn to attract more residents to shop locally. In May this year a funding application to Transport for London was made by LBI.

For Islington Society members, and indeed all local residents, the message remains - Use Them or Lose Them! - as emphasised in last year's poster campaign supported by the Society. If we don't, many more Islington shops are likely to join the 2000 convenience stores and the 1000 or so newsagents which, according to the recent report of the Parliamentary All-Party Small Shops Group, went out of business in 2005.

N.B.

The Battle of the Alwynes, 1970-1971

While Norman Beddington proposes a future campaign, Harley Sherlock here reviews a past one which met with some success. It was the subject of a recent talk by our Vice-President to the Canonbury Society, to which this particular battle gave birth.

On February 4th 1970 the Islington Society wrote to the Council warning them that the Northampton Estate might have plans afoot which would involve demolishing most of the Victorian villas on the land bounded by Alwyne Villas, Alwyne Place and Alwyne Road, and replacing them with three-storey houses in Alwyne Villas and Alwyne Place and five-storey flats in Alwyne Road, where the ground falls away sharply. With the same letter the Society also enclosed the first part of its borough-wide survey of buildings worthy of inclusion in the statutory list of buildings of architectural and historic interest. The Society doubted whether the Canonbury villas would qualify for "listed" status but felt that ways should be found of preventing their demolition: an act which would completely undermine the *raison d'être* of the newly created Canonbury Conservation Area.

The project to rebuild the Alwynes, which was first made public in the autumn of 1970, was a very imaginative one designed by Anthony Blee of the Basil Spence partnership; and in normal circumstances, or a few years earlier, the Council, as the Planning Authority, would have had difficulty in refusing planning permission on grounds that would stand up to an appeal by the applicant. Fortunately, however, with strong support from the Islington Society and from local residents, the Council when it designated most of Canonbury as a Conservation Area under the terms of the 1967 Civic Amenities Act, included not just the Georgian terraces of Canonbury Square but also the Victorian villas making up most of the area to the west of it.

Also, by the time that the Northampton Estate's proposals were made public in the autumn of 1970, some of us had managed to get a few important people interested in the issues involved. One of my fellow students at the Architectural Association in the 1950s, Ashley Barker, was by now in charge of historic buildings at the Greater London Council; and very soon after I had briefed

him about the threat to a part of his empire, he and the talented, if eccentric, Lady Dartmouth - chairman of the GLC's Historic Buildings Board - were seen and heard around the Alwynes trying very publicly to outwit each other on the finer points of mid-Victorian detailing. Shortly after that, there appeared in the Guardian, on November 11th 1970, an impressive article on the subject by that still very active journalist Judy Hillman. Her article was given the headline "A Test for Civic Amenities" and it was accompanied by an attractive photograph of the houses in Alwyne Road whose demolition was clearly set to make a nonsense of the Civic Amenities Act: an Act which had very strong all-party support, having been conceived by Duncan Sandys - a former Conservative Minister - but enacted by the Labour Government of the day.

Nevertheless, in spite of the adverse publicity, the Northampton Estate continued with its plans, and it was left to a professor of pathology, Barrie Scott, who lived at 34 Alwyne Road (not one of the houses under threat) to carry on the fight for the Alwynes virtually single-handed. During this time he excused his almost daily visits to our house in Alwyne Place on the grounds that he, as a pathologist, needed help on Alwynes-related matters of architecture and planning in the same way that an architect like me would need help on pathology. But on one occasion, having opened the front door to Barrie for the umpteenth time in a week, our daughter, in exasperation exclaimed "We see you night and day". Unfortunately Barrie's beautifully intoned reply "You are the one" was lost on a 1970s six-year-old not very well versed at the time in popular songs.

The help I gave Barrie was mostly just moral support; but early in 1971 he established the Canonbury Society which, according to my records, held its inaugural meeting on February 1st. This brought in Roger Button, another architect, who lived at 1 Alwyne Place. He became a very active Secretary of the new [cont. over

society, who didn't allow the fact that his minutes were beautifully hand written to tempt him into brevity! And his handwritten newsletters not only looked attractive but were excellent at keeping us all informed about what Barrie and the rest of us were up to.

The result was that, by the time the Council received the Northampton Estate's planning application, it was receiving representations not only from the Islington Society but also from a powerful group of local people set up specifically to do battle on the Alwynes. The Council (Conservative controlled at the time) was sympathetic; and in June 1970 it had already acted on the apparent weakness of the Civic Amenities Act by asking Peter Walker, the Minister responsible for the Department of the Environment, to add Canonbury's Victorian villas, mentioned in the Islington Society survey, to the statutory list of historic buildings.

Alas, before the Estate's planning application was formally submitted, the D o E rejected statutory listing, as the Islington Society had feared; and all seemed lost -especially as a Private Member's Bill to strengthen the Civic Amenities Act had just failed. But John Grant, our MP at the time, had become actively involved; and, as a result of his representations, he obtained a written assurance from Peter Walker that the Government would introduce legislation to preserve buildings which contribute character to conservation areas but which, in themselves, are not of special architectural or historic merit. Better still, from our point of view, it had one immediate and unexpected effect. The Northampton Estate didn't like the idea of their affairs becoming the subject of very public Parliamentary exchanges; and, without waiting for the new legislation they withdrew their planning application for the rebuilding of the Alwynes.

Report from our 46th Annual General Meeting

Officers and committee members

The officers listed on page two were elected without a division. Tribute was paid to those standing down: David Gibson, former Vice-Chair, who remains our representative on the Conservation & Design Panel and on the Angel Town Centre Management Board; Diana Simpkins, who came to our Committee with a distinguished record of service to FOIL; and Frances Balfour, retiring as Secretary but remaining on the Committee.

President's address

Chris Smith - Lord Smith of Finsbury - marked his appointment as President of the Islington Society by reviewing the changes that Islington has enjoyed over the past thirty years.

Remarking that regeneration had been achieved in Bilbao and Barcelona in contrasting ways - Bilbao with a grand project from which regeneration trickled down, and Barcelona by attention to detail at the lowest level, notably street furniture - he felt, and his audience seemed to agree, that the Barcelonian approach was more appropriate to Islington.

Most of the change had been for the better, and Chris paid tribute to the past interventions of the Society that had had the effect of improving plans under consideration. However, he cited two areas where Islington could do better. One was that, while Upper Street had become far more vibrant, less attention had been given to the less affluent main streets: Essex Road, Caledonian Road, Holloway Road and Seven Sisters Road. The other was the widening gulf in housing. Increasingly residents are either very rich or very poor, and there is insufficient provision for those in between.

The housing conundrum, and the increasing pressure to redevelop without regard to quality, were the main focus of questions and comments afterwards.

Forthcoming Society events

Friday, June 30th, **Bill Manley Memorial Pub crawl**. This year commencing at a new venue, the *Nobody Inn* (originally Clarendon Hotel) on the corner of Mildmay Park and Mildmay Road. The route will include two former pubs on the way to *Old Henry's* (the former Railway Tavern) in St. Jude Street close to King Henry's Walk, then Kenneth Williams' favourite the (Duke of) *Wellington*, Balls Pond Road, the *Northgate* (previously visited as the Dog & Dumpings, and originally named the Jolly Farmers) at the junction of Northchurch and Southgate Roads, before ending at the current theatre pub, the *Rosemary Branch*, Shepperton Road, and finally the re-opened *Baring Arms* in Baring Street. We aim to reach each pub one hour on the hour from the last, starting as usual at 6 p.m.

Wednesday, July 12th, **Annual church crawl**. Having gone north and south, this year we crawl in the west including St. Andrew's, Thornhill Square opened in 1854, St. David's, St Mary Magdelene and the great Celestial home in Cloudesley Square, modelled on Christchurch Cambridge but sadly without the same space around it. Whereas the pubs have suffered a change of name only in recent years, St. Andrew's was renamed before it even opened! The crawl starts promptly at 6.30 in Cloudesley Square and reaches Thornhill Square by 7.0 p.m. This is because the Celestial Church of Christ can only be open to us until 7.0 p.m.

Officers of the Society continue to meet for an informal chat in the Marquess Tavern, at 9 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month. The Marquess is at the north end of Canonbury Street. All members are welcome to join us.

Architecture & Conservation Award

By the time you read this, the selection panel will have boiled down their considerations to a short list of six nominations for the Award relating to buildings completed in 2005.

What else do we do

- we support conservation planning work to preserve the borough's historic fabric and individual buildings of distinction
- we campaign for a high standard of design in new buildings
- we encourage best practice through awards for good architecture in new or refurbished buildings
- we organise a varied programme of events including talks, walks and site visits
- we campaign for better public transport and for priority for people travelling on foot or by bike
- we produce publications that celebrate Islington's architectural history and its social and cultural diversity
- we publish neighbourhood walking trails to foster exploration awareness and pride of place
- we build links between residents officials and councillors
- we publish a regular newsletter
- we send representatives to advise Council groups dealing with development, the environment and transport
- we are represented on the London Forum of Civic & Amenity Societies, which takes up cross-borough issues of concern and is a member of the Civic Trust

Contents of previous pages:

Affordable homes at King's Cross	1	Books	6
L. B. Islington election result	2	Blue Plaques of Islington	7
Officers of the Islington Society	2	304, Holloway Road	8
Arsenal F.C. and Drayton Park station	3	Local Shops Campaign	9
Decline & rise of London Buses, part II	4	Battle of the Alwynes	10
		Report from the A.G.M.	11
